2024-08-31

An Autoethnography of a Social Justice-Minded Teacher in Corrections

Graciela Rubalcaba-Munoz
University of San Diego, gmunoz@sandiego.edu

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A SOCIAL JUSTICE-MINDED TEACHER IN CORRECTIONS

by

Graciela Rubalcaba-Muñoz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2024

Dissertation Committee

Suzanne Stolz, EdD, Chair
Emily Nusbaum, PhD, Member

University of San Diego

University of San Diego
School of Leadership and Education Sciences

CANDIDATE'S NAME: Graciela Rubalcaba-Muñoz

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A SOCIAL JUSTICE-MINDED TEACHER IN CORRECTIONS

APPROVAL:

_____, Chair

Suzanne Stolz, EdD

_____, Member

Emily Nusbaum, PhD

DATE:

ABSTRACT

The incarceration of women has increased 93% in the last fifty years. This impacts marginalized communities at disproportionate rates. Although the provision of education in corrections became federal law in 1952 as a means to rehabilitate inmates, women's facilities currently do not receive equitable resources to support education, which puts additional pressure on the educational staff. The legal requirement for education includes county jails, the transitory facilities that house inmates while they await court or transfer to prison. The jail educational system is volatile, making it difficult to engage students when there are constant interruptions, unexpected incidents, lockdowns, and releases. Teachers in county jails have limited time to gain the trust of students and to engage them for in-depth learning about topics relevant to their reentry. Without proper training teachers are left to learn through experience.

Although a growing body of literature addresses correctional education, there is little capturing the experience of teachers who work in county jails. With autoethnography, a method in which the researcher examines the meanings derived from a cultural experience, this study highlights the challenges and opportunities that can arise for a teacher who wants to provide students with an equitable opportunity for transformative learning. With this study, I examined academic literature about correctional education as well as my journals, notes, poetry, and stories written while working in corrections. My analysis highlights the experience of teaching in this volatile environment, emotional strains, realizations about resources, and the unique needs of incarcerated women.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to God for giving me the strength and determination to continue through illnesses, a pandemic, and constant changes. I am grateful to be of service to Him, always.

Thank you, Mami Antonia Silva Rubalcaba, for sharing your remarkable spirit and determination, and Papi Miguel Rodriguez Rubalcaba, for sharing your love and compassion for your beautiful spirit. I miss you both every day.

Thank you, DDV, for your presence during this academic journey. You were always appreciated.

I want to thank my children, Sally, Mark, Matt, Chris, and Stephanie for the years of support and love they have showered me with during this time. I love and cherish you always.

I want to thank my grandchildren for their patience and pampering of their grandma. I love you so much, and you are always in my heart.

My sisters Ana, Alicia, Laura, brother-in-law David for being my rock during this time and I am forever grateful to them for their love and patience. I am thankful for my little brother Michael and his beautiful wife, Rosie, my sister Bertha and brother-in-law Darryl for their love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I cannot complete this document without thanking my committee Dr. Suzanne Stolz, for the amazing and precious support she has provided me over these few years, and Dr. Emily Nusbaum for her support and kindnesses and for giving me the clarity and sharing her expertise in writing this autoethnography.

I want to thank my fellow cohort members for their love and support from start to finish: Dr.Hannah Mesouani, Dr. Tommy Royston, Dr. Adan Escobedo Sanchez, Dr. Karla Sanchez Gamez, Dr. Zulema Reynoso, Dr. Mario Echeverria, Dr. Tiffany Cunningham, Juan Carlos Marques, Myeshia Whigam, Dr. Sobeida Velazquez, Dr. Gabriel Nuñez-Soria,Norma, Jennifer, and the rest of the amazing Cohort 1 members. You have answered my questions, soothed my fears, calmed my worries, and encouraged me with your presence and kindness throughout the whole process. You are inspirational. Much love to you, my friends. Success and strength to you all.

Special thanks to Dr. Reyes Quezada, who encouraged me to become something I had never imagined I could be—Dr. Rubalcaba-Muñoz. Thank you for believing in me.

Last, but definitely not least, I want to acknowledge the gratitude and admiration I feel for Rising Scholars Unique M., Grizelda M., Ruben R., and Mariah M. Every day since we met you reinforce my belief that formerly incarcerated students are worth every moment and opportunity available now and always. You are super stars!

ORDER OF PAGES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This qualitative autoethnography is a first-hand experience of teaching in a county detention facility. The stories I share are first-hand observations of women's educational experiences in corrections. Every person has a story. Sometimes, the entertaining stories of fake jail experiences have little to do with the real jail environment. Stories depicted in TV series are not the norm for women in custody. For the sake of entertainment, these media satirize or make light of the environment. This study will share my story as an observer and teacher in correctional education. In this chapter, I begin by describing the new educator's experience when arriving at the facility where they will teach and the elements that make up the corrections environment. In addition, I provide my perspective of the events that prompted the stories and observations contained in these pages.

What Incarcerated Women Need

There is no overt drama in a typical county jail because the deputies are strict and keep a tight schedule, although the inmate machinations were not imagined—they happen often. The kiting of messages, the secretive sending of contraband messages, is real, as is the power struggle between inmates in the social structure that is strictly adhered to by the women and is relative only to the jail. Much of the eccentric and mercurial behavior can be attributed to the often-undiagnosed mental health issues in jails. For example, the Prison Policy Initiative (n.d.) reported the following key statistics:

- Percent of people in state prisons who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder: 43%+
- In locally run jails: 44%

- Number of people experiencing “serious psychological distress” in jails: 1 in 4+
- Percent of people in federal prisons who reported not receiving any mental health care while incarcerated: 66%+

These statistics provide only a snapshot of the inmate population. There are many inmates who are mentally stable but made decidedly erroneous decisions that brought them to the facility. There are some who mistakenly followed the lead of someone, sometimes a spouse or significant other, and are awaiting arraignment for that loyalty. The judicial system is set up to contain the marginalized population by imposing bail until their court dates, which sometimes means mothers are detained and their innocent children are traumatized by being put into foster care if no family is available to take care of them. Sherman (2017) stated, “A little over 800,000 of the more than 1.5 million prisoners held in U.S. prisons were parents of minor children in 2007” (p. 8). These numbers have since grown, which means more children are affected.

The reality is inmates are people and inmates in the women’s detention facilities are not just statistics, they are students in our classes who we must assess and determine how to provide them the best education possible given the environment they are in. These women are mothers, sisters, and daughters who will one day influence the next generation of citizens. Female inmates make up approximately 12% of the incarcerated population, up 40% since 1990, but they are the most underserved in the criminal justice system (Green et al., 2005). This study is focused on the experiences I was part of and observed while teaching in the women’s detention center. The women’s population is underserved in society, prisons, and jails and notably incarcerated women do not receive the same services in jails as men. Green et al. (2005) stated, “Jail services have been developed for, and are mostly geared toward, male inmates” (p. 135). Incarcerated women need more teachers in every jail facility who have been trained to understand the volatile

environments of the incarcerated student population and can instruct them in skills that provide emotional and social tools to propel them forward into a better life outside of the judicial system.

Divestment of Women's Services

Incarcerated women have a strong incentive for change. Bedard (2021) stated, "[The women] know they need to rehabilitate if they want to see their children again. This is a motivator for change" (p. 2). The women are, more frequently than not, family oriented and create surrogate families in jails. Although women are defined as more emotional and they question what they are told to do, they will listen if treated humanely and with patience. Bedard (2021) further stated, "In the end, Warden Arnold's advice is simple: treat them as you wish to be treated and, for the most part, inmates will do as you ask" (p. 3). Women's needs are often overlooked and frequently the services provided to them are lacking in relevance to the women's personal goals. They take the offered courses in the jails not because of specific interest in their choices, but because there is nothing else for them. There have been several studies over the years that reiterate the lack of resources and services to incarcerated women. Mangan (2023) stated, "Perhaps not surprisingly, the vast majority of the more than 400 prison-education programs across the country serve men, according to the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison" (para 13). This divestment of services applies to county jails even more than state and federal prisons. The necessity of better educational services for women is demonstrated by the few studies available about correctional education in jails, one of which stated, "Studies have shown that those who participated in higher-education programs in prison are significantly less likely to reoffend — a benefit available to a small proportion of women" (Mangan, 2023, para 15).

Enlightening Educators

The first day I entered the facility was interesting but not intimidating or frightening. I had been hired for this particular facility while I was working at a different facility for a special yard that housed male inmates who needed to be kept away from other prisoners because of special circumstances. The inmates at that facility were former officers, sex offenders, violent offenders, and others charged with felonies and who were due to be released in less than 5 years. They were well-behaved and had lobbied for entrepreneurial training for several months prior to my hire. While at that first facility, I became aware of the possibility that something dangerous could happen when a special training team comprised of former prison captains, guards, and lieutenants came to train the staff. The training in that facility was definitely scary but was extremely useful when I came to the current facility. I had no prior experience working for prisons or jails. The state prison facility did not have a designated classroom for my courses. I am, however, quite organized, and I enjoy problem-solving, so I set up the prison's newly implemented GED stations, networking the computers, and completing the administrator profiles to begin the program. Because I taught only one class in the morning, I received consistent training and acclimated to the prison environment over the course of 3 months.

Perhaps the most unnerving thing I had to get used to when I began working at the jail was hearing the sallyport doors close behind me when I entered the facility. I went through one huge moving door into the space in front of the reception area. Once the first door closed behind me, the next steel door slid slowly open to release me into the facility. Both doors made a loud clanking sound when they closed, which always made me wince. I am a bit claustrophobic, and it took some time to stop getting affected by the sound. The offer to work in the women's detention facility came while I was working at that special yard. I was offered to teach at a women's

detention center for the local sheriff's department, which sounded quite interesting. I let my students at the current facility where I was working know I was leaving and told them my next students would be women, and they began warning me to beware. "Women are tougher, teacher!" exclaimed one young man. I did not tell them where I was going or what I would be teaching. I just said my goodbyes. Then I was off to teach at the women's facility south of where we were. I felt confident I was now prepared to work in a correctional institution after the intense training I received at this facility.

What Teachers Need

There are so many issues with how correctional education is organized and how the results of the courses are measured. There are reentry issues, facility security issues, and an array of political issues that influence the type of education our students receive. The first need in the teacher's experience is training on facility policies, temperament, possible traumatic events, and theories that explore the best pedagogical experiences for the inmate–students. Teachers are already well trained in public policies that govern public schools but are unaware of the intricacies of correctional education (Green et al., 2005).

We, the instructors, must become acquainted with our students to determine which students will need more assistance than others, and then develop the curriculum to meet those needs. We must be discreet and neutral to the point of seeming emotionless while working in the modules but also be empathetic, compassionate, encouraging, and engaging, and reward them without giving them anything tangible. Security is the primary focus of the facility and education is the main focus of the educator. The deputies in the modules frown on movement by the student–inmates and are particular about the materials we use to teach. Anything teachers provide for their course must go through the facility's deputies and we must be careful to adhere

to the approved topics and materials because they can hear us in the open spaces where we teach and will object loudly if we say something they did not approve.

Security is implacable, and education must accommodate whatever the facility decides. The particular facility I worked in was fortunate to have younger women who were progressive enough to allow us to try new things in reason. These deputies were our first contact for everything that happened in the modules. They were moderators, facilitators, and mentors/coaches for the incoming teachers. They advised and/or admonished the teachers when needed and provided support while we taught. Unfortunately, because they are deputies first, any type of orientation or training becomes a lower priority when they are needed in their official capacity as law officers. For this reason, teacher instruction should be made available to all instructors at the university level who are interested in teaching in corrections. At present, I found only one such program at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB), but it caters to prison programs, not county jails.

Providing Socially Just Learning Environments to Women

For incarcerated women, the term social justice is not relevant to their daily routines. These women are detained for breaking the law or their probation/parole. It does not matter if the crime was recent or not, the women are on equal standing once they are processed. When they are assigned a module, which is the dorm-like living area with a top and bottom row of cells that house two inmates in each, a social hierarchy slowly develops. When observing the women, it was evident by watching how they interact with each other which inmates would rise through the ranks of the module's social structure. Stronger personalities dominate the weak, and favors are granted for some form of payment or another. There does not seem to be a racial component to the hierarchy, but there are definite levels of authority among the women. During my 1st year

teaching there, I realized their social structure emulates that of society in some respects. The concept of social justice does not mesh with incarceration's residents. Social justice is defined in numerous ways, but Hytten and Bettez (2011) outlined seven actionable steps to promote equity in education, which include critical thinking skills and facilitating conversations about the unequal power, privilege, and oppressive structure of society. Hytten and Bettez's (2011) description includes compassion for the student, which is particularly beneficial to the incarcerated students who are not typically shown empathy by correctional officers.

Society has perpetuated a skewed perspective of incarceration. The largest portion of the incarcerated population has been subjected to bias, marginalization, lifelong oppression, and the lack of opportunities afforded to their more affluent peers in their social environments at home. In addition, the women's county jail facilities are understaffed, underfunded, and lack a cohesive educational tracking system for students. The underfunding leads to minimal rehabilitative courses and programs that could provide women with skills to reenter society as self-sufficient individuals. Vocational courses offer courses that are stereotypical in nature such as beauty shop courses, dog training, or the life skills courses that should be included in every course as a supplemental topic, not just a separate course.

Cage (2019) stated education is important in reducing poverty and guiding students to become good citizens upon reentry, which is echoed in several studies and articles on correctional education. The teaching staff working on-site deal with the incoming inmates and the female inmates require the most consideration because they receive the fewest opportunities. County jails house short-term inmates while they are attending court and adjudication, pending bail and release, or receiving medical attention. This facility provided some insight into the need for change of educational practices in the women's jail because it exposed me to the ever-

changing population county jails and the difficulty of providing quality courses to help them reenter successfully. The educational system at the women's facility lacked focus and dedication of resources and funding that men in county jails received and there is little in academic research to address these needs (Belknap et al., 2015). The men's prison facility had a strong educational system that sent transcripts and documentation for the inmates if they were transferred out, which meant their educational file followed them. When I was hired specifically for the women's county jail facility, the move was quite informative. I went from a male inmates' well-oiled judicial machine to a semi structured short-term facility of women inmates.

The women's lack of opportunities and programming was not completely ignored, but what little attention their needs received was quickly overshadowed by the men's needs in various county jails. The growth in women's facilities is steady but services do not grow when the population does. Swavola et al. (2016) stated, "One trend has received little attention: the dramatic rise in the number of women being held in local county jails" (Swavola et al., 2016, pp. 6–7). For example, the facility could hold approximately 1500 women at any given time. This was a minimum number because the facility often held more. For these women, there were approximately 14 teachers from both schools contracted to teach. If half worked, approximately 750, that left the rest to try to enroll in classes because Title 15 dictates they must either work or study. The remaining 750 inmates divided by 14 teachers is a little over 53 students each. Public schools are considered overcrowded and understaffed when there are more than 30 students per teacher, yet in jails, this is considered a full staff. Teachers for correctional institutions are in high demand at the facility but funding for additional educators is not there. Good teachers often find themselves with an overflow of students, to whom they rarely deny enrollment.

Women in county jails have emotional and psychological needs that are difficult to address because of constant change with transfers to state prisons, detention times, personalities, and staff turnover. County jails were not intended to house inmates for long. County jails exist primarily as holding spaces while those in custody go through the intake process, are awaiting trial, or once adjudicated, are waiting for transfer to a prison facility. County jails were built for this process; however, as of a few decades ago, the trend has been that women, for reasons of hardship or illness, request the courts to allow them to do their prison time in jail facilities, which are ill-equipped to handle the length of time served. Among the prevalent needs for rehabilitation were emotional support, literacy, vocational training, curriculum, and reentry services. Teaching in corrections provided the understanding that the most basic need taking precedence is teacher training for better advocacy and support for the student–inmate.

Teachers are provided training for situations in public and private schools, in events and incidents that occur in that environment. In the few years of teaching in corrections, I have taught students with diagnosed schizophrenia, taught in the "hole" to students with mental disabilities who were extremely violent, and taught students in the general population. Teachers are many things to many students, but still need the type of orientation and training to enable them to adjust to the correctional environment. Providing this training can benefit not only teachers, but students as well since teacher turnover is often high at facilities, chiefly because these educators have not been informed enough on what to expect in a carceral environment.

Women's detention facilities require more than just regular public school curriculum and classrooms. These are women who have lived a life outside their childhood homes and have been entrenched in lifestyles that brought them into the judicial system through marginalization and oppression. They cannot be taught with methods intended for children (Eggleston, 1999). Many

have undiagnosed mental health issues that require medical attention. The Prison Policy Initiative (n.d.) website, a source of accurate data and well known for its immigration reform platform, stated, “Women were more likely than men to enter jail with a medical problem or a serious mental illness and while incarcerated, women were more likely to suffer from mental health problems and experience serious psychological distress” (Kajstura & Sawyer, 2023, para 10). Being locked up does not help; research shows incarceration can cause lasting damage to mental health (Gehring, 2018, p. 116). There were too many inmates and not enough professional clinicians and doctors to treat the population and see to their needs (Villa, 2017).

When collaborating with the women, some had noticeable undiagnosed mental disabilities, but because of their family obligations or poverty, they rarely received mental health diagnoses as needed. There are more mental health programs and staffing at the prison level but very limited opportunities in the jail system even though the women would inform staff that they needed attention. Emotional support can still be provided through the life skills courses and the ongoing support from staff and family members who visit. Literacy should be considered the prerequisite for all correctional education because society’s demands require higher levels of reading and writing skills throughout all industries, including global commerce. Many industries ask that their employees be able to work globally, and literacy is a key element for strong communication. (Kaado, 2023). An instructor might not learn that a student cannot read or write until they are enrolling that student into vocational courses that require reading and writing assignments consistent with California standards. This means the first task is teaching literacy simultaneously with the course requirements. In addition to learning how to maneuver the corrections environment, teachers need to be made aware of the lack of literacy some of their students will have in addition to the relevant topics this student needs.

Literacy

Many teachers teach in corrections for the same reasons public school teachers teach. Teachers have a strong desire to inform, educate, and shape the world. One of the instructors in the facility where I taught was an ordained pastor and entrepreneur. In the United States, only 46% of adults have this proficiency (Schmidt, 2022). In correctional facilities such as county jails, the level of illiteracy is higher than in the general population. That means that 80% do not read at an 8th-grade level, and illiteracy is the biggest deterrent to successfully reentering society (Hanson & Stipek, 2014).

The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (U.S. Department of Education, 2019) stated, "Adults classified as below level 1 may be considered functionally illiterate in English: i.e., unable to successfully determine the meaning of sentences, read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information, or complete simple forms" (para. 5). The study reports four in five adults have English literacy skills at or above Level 2; Mamedova and Pawlowski (2019) stated, "This translates into 43.0 million U.S. adults who possess low literacy skills: 26.5 million at Level 1 and 8.4 million below Level 1" (para. 4), which is interpreted as illiteracy. What makes this information pertinent to the teacher is one simple fact: for any program in corrections to work, literacy has to be a prerequisite of all programs.

Impact of Educators' Experience/Inexperience

Inexperienced teachers are frequently recruited to correctional education positions, and many are gone as quickly as they came. There are some who use these positions as temporary jobs until they find something better or less stressful. The student inmates can recognize novice teachers and frequently make the teacher's experience difficult. Seasoned teachers fare better when they enter the correctional education environment. Their experiences with classroom

management assist them in keeping order in the modules. The teaching experience in corrections is strenuous because teachers must haul their equipment and supplies with them into every space they teach. It is stressful because even though the deputies are adept at keeping order, there is always the possibility that there may be incidents of violence, which keeps the staff always alert. This stress is often the catalyst for the teaching staff's departure. Lack of support from the contracted school's administrators is another weak link in the chain of correctional education and another reason teachers leave. The constant change and uncertainty in personnel make the inmate–student hesitant to trust, which in turn makes teaching difficult for the novice (untrained) teacher. Newer teachers are also under duress when the student–inmates choose to create problems for teachers they do not like.

Training for Teachers New to Correctional Education

The Center for the Study of Correctional Education (CSCE) was founded in 1993 by three renowned professors, Dr. Thom Gehring, Dr. Carolyn Eggleston, and Dr. Randall Wright. They are well-known in correctional education circles and are affiliated with the Correctional Education Association (CEA). Although their work deals primarily with training for teachers who want to work in corrections, they are partnered with prisons; the program does not train county jail educators. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is currently recruiting prison teachers, but they do not offer specific training. The hands-on experiences in a volatile, often merciless environment in county jails creates an endless cycle of short-term teachers. They often leave because they are not provided with sufficient training and are not told what to expect while teaching in this environment. This constant staff turnover damages the programming, affects the inmate–students negatively just as turnover in public schools negatively impacts students, and impacts the educational staff as well. Teacher training in

correctional education environments would serve to remove the surprise of working in jails and provide relatable experiences from former corrections educators who could be recruited to teach the educators.

Curriculum

At the facility in which I worked, the academic portion of educational programming is conducted by teachers from a contracted high school. They do not offer GED classes, only courses that will lead to a high school diploma. The school is connected to the public school system that tracks student accomplishments and courses. Academic courses in correctional education are divided into subjects, much as the high schools do, with specific topics that meet the state standards for education. There is very little variation in topics and the instructors have a set system to follow, which they do. The facility determines vocational course content, but the academic is primarily focused on helping students obtain their high school diploma. Most jails have this type of curriculum and programming.

Vocational education courses follow the facility's requirements per the Title 15 Minimum Standards for Local Detention Facilities. The full description of the criteria of the Inmate Education Plan is:

> The facility administrator of any Type II or III facility shall plan and shall request of appropriate public officials an inmate education program. When such services are not made available by the appropriate public officials, then the facility administrator shall develop and implement an education program with available resources. Such a plan shall provide for the voluntary academic and/or vocational education of housed inmates. Reasonable criteria for program eligibility shall be established and an inmate may be excluded or removed based on sound security practices or failure to abide by facility rules

> and regulations. (State of California Board of State and Community Corrections, 2017, Article 6)

The purpose of citing this penal code section is to demonstrate the generality of the wording. There are no specifics about coursework, length of time for each course/topic, and the statement saying it is "voluntary" is opposite of what the Title 15 manual states, which is education or work is mandatory. Most educators in correctional institutions are required to know Title 15 as part of their orientation. We, the teachers where I worked, all knew what Title 15 meant and how we were expected to teach. This statement was among the first few pages of the handbook from which we were given to work.

Surveillance of Curriculum

Approval for the curriculum is given by the EBI department. All materials must be approved prior to distribution, including blank pages. Anything not accounted for is considered contraband by the deputies in the facility. Courses are outlined by EBI and the teachers are responsible for providing information and materials after approvals. Teachers submit a sample of materials to the administrators of the school for which they work, and then EBI must review the documents. The final review is by deputies, although once the deputies in a module know the teacher well, they trust them to present the proper materials to the students. In addition, because the courses are frequently in sight of the deputies, they are always aware of the content. In some instances, the sheriff's department provides a handbook to the teachers and trustees who facilitate courses. This book outlines the framework the sheriff's department wants teachers to use, the outlined topics to be used, and specific subjects that need to be included, particularly for the academic portion of the educational programming.

Rudiments of Topics

Normal courses in public schools and universities run for quarters (10 weeks) or semesters (15 weeks). Even in these environments, the length of time limits the depth of understanding. Courses in correctional education were running at 8 weeks when I left, and former coworkers inform me this has not changed. This means the course topics are limited, and the scope of the topic is narrow. These are survey courses where a student gets the most basic general information. True rehabilitation requires a deep understanding and knowledge of the topic to apply it to one's life experiences properly. Rehabilitation requires the most basic skills such as literacy and critical thinking to be the foundation for learning.

Little support for "empowering" lessons.

Empowerment is not a concern for most deputies and line staff in corrections. That is not the role that administrators assume. The main goal of education in corrections is to develop an individual's skillset to get them to be self-sufficient and employable; the teachers in the facility prepare them for this event. They provide reading instruction in academic courses and the manual skills needed to perform physically demanding jobs such as painting, facility maintenance, and culinary skills. The vocational teachers provide the conventional skills necessary to obtain employment, but this is not really empowerment. Empowerment is not complicated, but it is a multilayered endeavor to provide incarcerated women who have been subjected to oppression, abuse, disenfranchisement, neglect, poverty, negative educational experiences, and more, the skills to feel self-sufficient, successful, capable, assured, and valued, among other things. Incarceration adds to these traumatic events. Even if the women receive the assistance they need while incarcerated, when they are released, many will return to the same environment they left, even if they are offered reentry services (Barringer et al., 2017). Teachers

can provide skills to obtain and retain employment, but society's lack of support for former inmates limits the assistance they receive to reenter their environments and become self-sufficient and able to take care of themselves and family if they have one. Educators in corrections are severely limited in ways to support students who finish their courses and are reentering their environment through release from the judicial system. Inmates and teachers are not allowed to contact each other—the length of time varies between institutions—and contact information is not shared with students. Figure 1 provides statistics about the possibility of reincarceration and the obstacles when an inmate is released. The circumstances leading to their criminal activity have not changed and upon release, the former inmate is met with the same choices faced prior to incarceration. In addition, there are limited resources teachers can provide to students upon release, which exacerbates the potential to reenter detention.

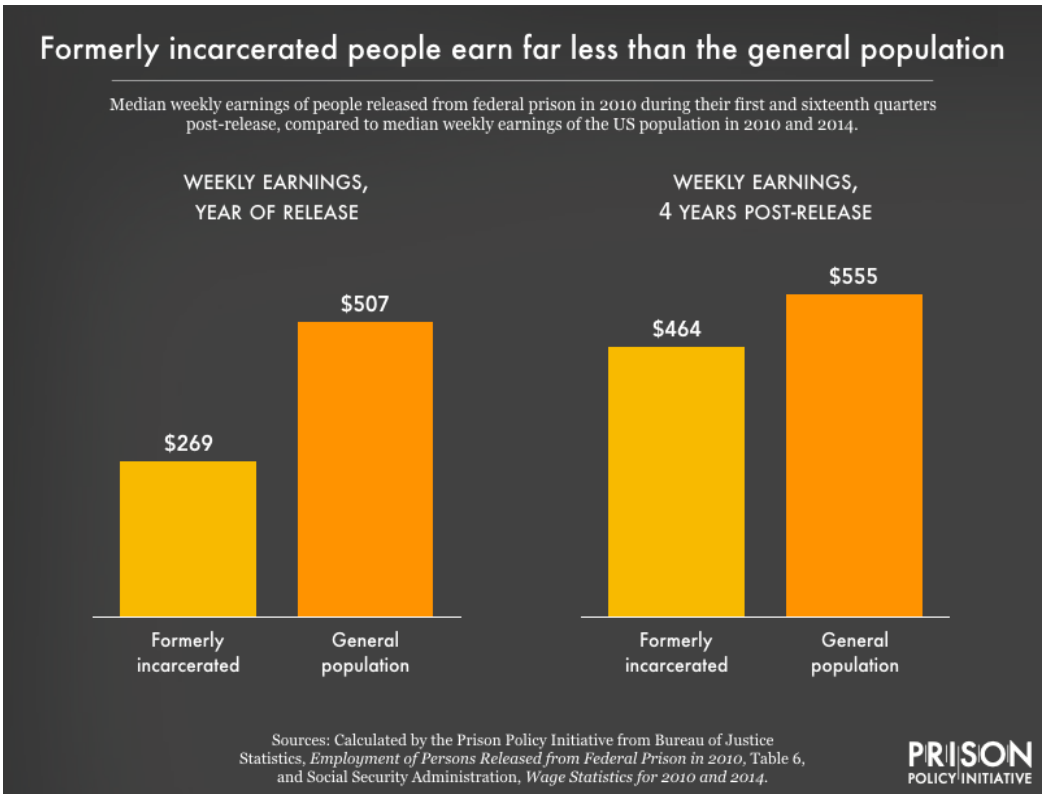

Figure 1. Formerly Incarcerated People Earn Far Less Than the General Population

Note: From *New Data on Formerly Incarcerated People's Employment Reveal Labor Market Injustices* by L. Wang & W. Bertram, 2022, Prison Policy Initiative (https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/02/08/employment/).

The Benefits of Correctional Education

Correctional education has been researched and studied for years and has been found useful in lowering recidivism, which is the reincarceration of a former inmate after release. Many inmates who have embraced the opportunity to educate themselves while in the prison system have (a) obtained degrees (one of our teachers was a former inmate who earned two master's degrees in prison), (b) gained excellent employment, and (c) reshaped their lives through hard work and focus. In the prison system, the educational system is coordinated and an inmate's

records follow them through the system if they are transferred to other facilities (Klein & Tolbert, 2007).

Problems in Correctional Education

Perhaps the biggest detriment to correctional education in the jails is the lack of data that are generated. There is no centralized method of determining an inmate's category in recidivism. The states conduct their own method to choose the crimes for which they are tracking numbers. Is the crime violent? Is it a substance abuse or drug dealing issue? What is tracked and how? Gehring (2000) stated, "Despite the recognized importance of recidivism for criminal justice policy and practice, it is difficult to measure because there is no uniformly accepted definition for the term" (p. 197). There are not enough classes to offer in the county jails; there are fewer services available to women—the focus is usually on incarcerated men. There are basic classes and academic courses offered, but GED classes should be offered along with adult basic education. These are grown women who have lives they need to return to. Many of them had negative experiences in public schools and have an aversion to taking any further classes; however, there are incentives for women to enroll. The facilities offer inmates 1 week of time off their sentence for every 8 weeks they study and finish the course. Some of the women have had violence in their home lives, or substance abuse, or domestic violence and need special services to help them gain the mental strength to change their lives. This requires patience and focus on the teacher's part, which is not always possible. In addition, the inmate's educational history is not logged into a program, there is very little connection to other facilities when a student has earned a certificate, and programs provide their own certification, but records are not saved (or are rarely saved) into the facility's database.

The problem studied for this research was initiating a social justice educational environment in corrections. Education in corrections requires teachers to have a specific set of skills to meet the needs of their students. The system has roadblocks, and a social justice-minded teacher is determined to empower students with curriculum, support, and opportunities to share experiences and thoughts. Instructors are not taught sufficiently how to introduce social justice theories and concepts in correctional settings. There are few colleges that offer this type of training. One well-known program is housed at CSUSB. The Center for the Study of Correctional Education (CSCE) was founded in 1993 by Dr. Gehring and Dr. Eggleston, two of the foremost authorities on correctional education; however, their studies were primarily focused on the prison environment, where there is a marked difference in the teaching methods used and the educational system in place at the county level. The county jails were and are a more transient and volatile population. The prison system has an educational programming that is cohesive, and the record of a student will follow them through the prison system when and if they transfer. The social justice component of correctional education is not something one teaches in the modules. It is something one models for the student inmates, deputies, and all participants in the programs.

County jails do not have in-house educators and rely on the schools they hire to maintain records for students, which are not always available once the student has been released. Because the current trend is to divert detainees to county facilities rather than prisons, correctional education has become a more urgent effort to, as one deputy stated directly to me, “keep them [inmates] busy so they stay out of trouble” and the deputies can maintain security. At the state level, the answer to the population growth in prisons is to transfer inmates, which The Center for

American Progress states is a “consequence of the rapidly expanding U.S. penal system that disproportionately punishes low-income people of color” (Bender, 2018, p. 2).

Punitive Versus Rehabilitation

Since the first prisons in the United States were built there has been an ongoing debate about the nature of corrections. Although some in society feel that incarceration should be punitive, there are others who feel rehabilitation would be a better answer to deter further crime. The suggestions for reform go back to the early 1800s. There are answers for every aspect of the justice process’s correctional education ills through extensive prison research, the legislative analyst’s office, and prison reform organizations, but those reports were praised in one moment and then ignored in the next because whichever political party in power decides recidivism is not important, nor is education necessary. Later, in 1967, the U.S. government commissioned a study on law enforcement and administration of justice that took corrections, both institutional and community, apart to analyze and suggest changes to correctional education and detention for improvements in process and policy (President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Admin of Justice, 1967). Incarceration has grown the last few decades, prompting one author (2011) to state, “The scale of imprisonment in the United States has grown in such a dramatic and sustained fashion over the past thirty years that it has become an obligation to begin articles with a comment on ‘mass’ incarceration” (Phelps, 2011, p. 1) Phelps further states that punitive measures have grown because of politics, “In place of rehabilitation, deterrence and incapacitation became the explicit goals of prison in political discourse” (Phelps, 2011, p. 2).

More recently, the Legislative Analyst’s Office submitted a report to the governor suggesting changes (see Figure 2) to the policies and processes in correctional education (Brown, 2008). Following that report a few years later came the same office’s audit of the correctional

education practices still in place (Howle, 2019). These reports indicate how the political landscape dictates which ideas and research will be listened to when it is convenient for that party. Each of these documents prevents ideas that would make correctional education programming a resource that would lower the recidivism percentages permanently. They have been ignored, perhaps because not long after these reports were released, the political landscape changed, and the work of the previous administration was forgotten.

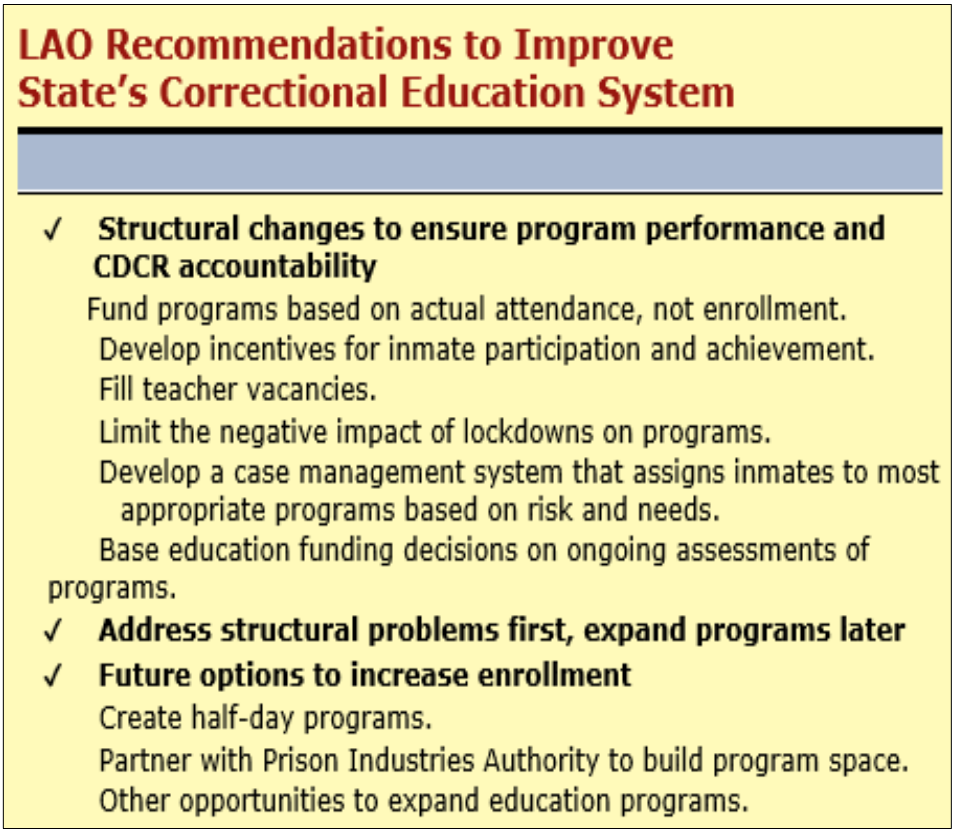

Figure 2. LAO Recommendations to Improve State's Correctional Educational System

Note: Adapted from *Governor's Criminal Justice Proposal* by M. Taylor, 2014, California Legislative Analyst's Office.

Positionality

My positionality is evident in this study. I believe in the rehabilitative effects education can bring an incarcerated female if they are willing to learn and are aware their mindset is important in their evolvement and growth as students and women. I learned these lessons while living in the same type of environment these women are from and learned that I wanted the same things they did—a home of my own, family, stability—but they were almost impossible to find in the turbulent environment in which we lived. As I listened to the stories the women shared, I felt the emotions come back and their stories resonated with me. I have learned not to ignore the oppressive environment we shared but to bypass it by choosing a different lifestyle and emulating those who lived it until it became my life, not just a goal but a fact. As an adult woman, I learned to think critically for myself and how to choose a better path by letting go of the old ways and friends. It was not easy. Change makes one lonely when the past that comforted and entertained you slowly disappears, even if the change is welcomed. Now I listen to the stories of others and try to help them navigate the frightening path of sobriety and maturity to reach their best version of themselves.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to critically explore my previous experiences as a teacher in correctional education to provide an insider's perspective of working in correctional facilities. This work seeks to illuminate cultural and structural barriers that can impede teachers who want to help incarcerated women transform their life trajectories. It also attempts to illustrate strategies for circumventing barriers. The findings may be useful for policymakers who can implement change and for educators who teach in corrections or other rigid systems.

Research Questions

"What happens when a social justice-minded teacher works within women's corrections?" The research question generated a series of related sub-questions:

a. What challenges do teachers encounter?

b. How are these challenges related to systemic divestment in girls and women?

c. What opportunities do teachers find to improve the lives of their students?

These second-tier questions will provide context for the researcher to answer the primary research question. The primary research question is derived from the lived experiences I had while working in correctional education, particularly in the women's county detention facility. Training was minimal and most of the knowledge garnered was from experiences while teaching at the detention center.

Rationale of the Study

There are many articles written for correctional education teachers, but few written by the teachers working in this environment. What are currently available are dated articles, which can still be useful but do not always speak to the current context. I chose autoethnography to detail the experiences I had as a teacher in corrections. I use grounded theory to review and explain the experiences. This is necessary because these personal experiences provide insights for policy makers and potential/prospective educators in correctional education. Autoethnography as a methodology is a useful tool for bringing the educator's perspective to the interested reader.

Significance of the Study

The study provides educators with analytical tools to understand the complexities of teaching in corrections with a social justice perspective. The study provides educators with tools to understand the correctional education dynamic as it is today; leaning toward rehabilitation,

hesitant to implement prerequisites as they would in actual universities, unwilling to use funding to answer the most basic needs incarcerated women working to transform themselves—self-empowerment. There is little written about correctional education in county jails, and much less through an educator's lens "Historically, jails have served a different function from prisons, which tend to receive more policy and research attention" (Grattet et al., 2016, p. 2). While teaching in the jails I researched them specifically but had to settle for academic articles that focused on prison education. They are different. Prison education is comprised of a long-standing method of teaching inmates and their work follows them through every facility the inmates transfer to. Prisons offer degree programs, jails do not. The prison population is more settled, less volatile, while the jails house a more transient population that is waiting—for transfers, releases, court appearances, medical issues—and they focus less on the mandatory educational component where they are housed.

Assumptions

Although I know my experience and perspective are unique to me, I assume many educators working in corrections experience many of the same barriers I experienced. I also assume that teachers statewide felt similar frustrations trying to teach a population that has limited freedoms and access to what most students are able to obtain. My assumptions arose after conversing with my peers and reading many articles on the topic of correctional education.

Limitations

The study's limitations include the singular view and experiences of one person and fluctuating circumstances in the political environment of the judicial system. Other limitations include the lack of supporting experiences of other teachers. Only one teacher's experiences will

be included, and only one school system will be referred to but not named. I encourage readers to understand that further studies by teachers in corrections should be encouraged and researched.

Delimitations

The study focused on the women's correctional education system in county jails, not prisons, specifically in one women's detention center. The study is one person's experiences as a teacher in the facility. The student/inmate names in all cited incidents and events are anonymous for their protection. As a researcher I mitigated the biases I may have by stepping out of the teacher role during review and analysis. Bias exists because I share similar childhood experiences, but everything is subject to interpretation and deep analysis for this study.

Summary

This study provides the researcher the opportunity to share the insider's perspective of correctional education. Analysis of the various documents and artifacts should provide the needed context to the operational functions of a detention facility. Pictures, artifacts, and writings should provide the more personal, lived experiences of both student and teachers. The research question and sub-questions evolved from the experiences and documents in an initial review. The study could prove its value through subsequent reading by teachers new to the experience of teaching in correctional education at a county facility.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This autoethnographic study intends to highlight the experience of teaching women within the confines of a county jail. With the literature review I focus on what social justice is, on ideologies about the purpose of incarceration, on inmate housing and experience, and on the perspectives of inmates and correctional staff. I also review literature about teaching within corrections, including a look at Adult Basic Education, Vocational Education, and literacy. I also consider how politics impact correctional education. My review demonstrates a gap in literature focused on the education of women incarcerated in county jails and those teaching them. This literature review describes insights gained while reviewing the various topics explored and researching ways to work with incarcerated women.

The section "Ideologies Behind Incarceration" describes how the perspectives between rehabilitation and retribution go back and forth depending on political powers. The section "Retribution" provides a look on the most negative aspect of corrections and the mindset of the correctional staff. "Inmate Housing" briefly explains why county jails are having to house inmates for longer periods of time. The heading "Incarcerated Inmates and Custody Staff Perspectives" provides additional context for the study by focusing on the inmates and custodial staff processes while in the educational programs. "Adult Basic Education" relates to some of the experiences while teaching in corrections. "Efficacy: How Does It Work in Corrections" discusses the usefulness of correctional education and the need for continued support and programming. "Recidivism: Why Does It Matter" explains the success or failure of programming, although it is an arbitrary system. The "Social Justice" section describes the term

as defined by the literature and what it means to my study. The final section will define the theories researched as an incoming educator teaching women in detention.

Overview

To identify relevant research, I generated a list of keywords to inform searches in databases such as Google Scholar, Sage Publications, JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCO, Taylor and Frances, and Academia. Keyword searches about the female inmates' perspectives were women in jails, student inmates, advocacy of women in jails, inmate literacy, inmate education, correctional education, inequality in jails, incarceration programs, intersectionality in jails, social justice in jails, oppression in corrections, professional development in jails, teacher training in jails, programming in correctional education, and many others. I included the impact of policies because both teachers and inmate–students are constantly affected by these dynamic policies. Teaching in corrections will include the literature of teachers in correctional education who have provided their perspectives on their experiences.

In a compilation of essays titled *In the Borderlands: Learning to Teach in Prisons and Alternative Settings*, edited by Wright (2006) who was the third founder of the California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) Center for the Study of Correctional Education, I found several strong works describing the issues in correctional education and suggestions for improvement. What these stories offer is meant for prisons. These essays, by well-known names in correctional education (e.g., Eggleston, Gehring, Geraci, Muth) contained valuable perspectives of correctional education teachers in diverse settings and at different times in their careers. Eggleston and Gehring were the other two founders of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education along with Wright. At the center, teachers interested in working in

correctional education are provided with the information they will need to work in and with the justice system successfully. There are so few journal articles by teachers who have worked jails.

There is a gap in correctional education literature that spans a few decades. Most of the studies conducted were articles dating back to the 1980s and 1990s. The gap that exists in the literature is most prominent in the 1990s. More relevant research studies starting appearing in 2000 to present, although few studies are from current instructors in correctional education. However, Aiello's (2013) dissertation shared a researcher's perspective of life in detention by studying a women's facility. Aiello's research serves as a summary of both the rehabilitation and the jail system. Aiello (2013) used the transient jail system as the site for her topic and stated, "Jails serve as an entrance point to the penal system and as detention facilities for those awaiting trial" (p. 298).

In recent years, jails have served as long-term housing for short-time prison sentences. Aiello also quoted Irwin (1985) as saying that he "argued jails are actually more important than prisons because, "When persons are arrested, the most critical decisions about their future freedom are made while they are either in jail or attached to it by a bail bond,'" which neatly summarizes the importance of the county jail in the judicial system hierarchy (Aiello, 2013, p. 298). Prisons, because they house inmates for longer periods of time, are prioritized and funded much better than county jails (Aiello, 2013, p. 298). The irony of this statement is that inmates at this facility are incarcerated by society for breaking laws, and the facility sees it as an opportunity for inmates to "free" themselves through rehabilitation, education, and reentry. Aiello pointed out the difficulty of researching in the facility because of the division between inmates and staff, and her experiences provide insight into the steps a researcher must take to

remain as neutral as possible without alienating the staff or inmates she needed to cooperate with the study.

Researchers and educators are looked on by some facility staff as unavoidable at times because although “civilians” are more work for them, they need the educators to keep the inmate–students occupied and better behaved. Educators require more than a simple 1-day orientation. Public school educators are given intense training prior to entering a classroom. Eggleston (1991) discussed this in her paper, *Correctional Education Professional Development.* Eggleston is affiliated with the Correctional Education Association (CEA) and is one of the founders of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education at CSUSB. Eggleston highlighted the need for professional development and continuous training for correctional education teachers. She discussed several organizations that were formed for the purpose of training educators in corrections and stated that it is an international effort. These programs dwindled over the years and interest waned, but the need is still present. Eggleston explained the failure of federally funded programs that lack budgeted money and the waning interest in university programs where correctional education courses are required in addition to instead of in lieu of teacher preparation courses. Teachers need training that focuses not specifically on curriculum but on the individual’s need to use personal skills and ethical values in the educator’s instructional style while working with inmates.

Social Justice

Of the many definitions used for social justice, the most applicable for my study is Grant’s (2012) description of cultivating students’ minds:

By becoming a “friend of their minds,” teachers hold high expectations

> for students, recognize the intellectual capacity of often marginalized students, provide curriculum content that is challenging and culturally responsive, and maintain ongoing reflective assessment of what they teach, how they teach, and why. It is not a paternalistic friendship of their minds, but rather a commitment to cultivating the intellect of every student—and particularly those who have too often been denied the right to become flourishing, intellectual students. (p. 915)

Social justice in education is not about equality. It is about equity—the opportunity to become the person you choose to be because you are given the same opportunities, and nurturing, that benefits others. To accomplish this, Zajda et al. (2006) stated the need to go beyond the "functionalist and vocationalist-oriented perspectives" (p. 10) about education so that students can be prepared to function in a global marketplace and engage with others who have had the same educational opportunities. Social justice in this study follows the Grant perspective in giving students the best possible education for them to achieve their goals; however, most social justice literature is focused on public education and a more general interpretation of social justice.

In a correctional setting, social justice is not a common theme with correctional staff, deputies, captains, political partners, therapists, or educational systems. This is not because social justice does not exist in their moral makeup, but because of the judicial system requirements pertaining to security measures and safety of inmates, which demands strict enforcement of policies and procedures mandated by the state system of corrections; however, the individual employee's empathy, compassion, and moral system comes through many times and the inmates are treated decently. Where education is concerned, most of the line staff feels

that education is important, not because of the student, but because of the maintenance of order in the modules (living quarters; Fitch, 2012).

Soken-Huberty (2022) wrote:

> Social justice means everyone's human rights are respected, protected, and promoted. Everyone has access to equal opportunities and the resources necessary to thrive. This does not guarantee a perfect society where everyone is always happy; however, everyone will have a fighting chance at the life they want. (para. 1)

They also said social justice cannot be achieved without the four pillars: (a) human rights, (b) access, (c) participation, and (d) equity. The term "social justice" was first used in 1840 by a Sicilian priest (Zajda et al., 2006). Haeffele and Storr (2019) described social justice succinctly as "the fair distribution of power and wealth in society" (p. 145). Soken-Huberty's (2022) four pillars of social justice are (a) human rights, (b) access, (c) participation, and (d) equity. These pillars are beneficial to all citizens, yet the justice system focuses on security and retribution rather than rehabilitation and social justice. Social justice and human rights are synonymous because they both focus on the equality and equity human beings deserve, yet this is not an easy concept in corrections. Soken-Huberty's (2022) description of each pillar provides the foundation for what all education, correctional education, and society should be. In correctional education, teachers are just as restricted as inmates, but they have options for how to present their materials.

Rehabilitation, in the form of restorative justice, is the focus of educators. It is not a difficult concept to embed social justice practices and ideology into curriculum and by implementing restorative justice, instructors intended on opening up dialogue for the eventual

forgiveness the student–inmates needed to move forward. Educators must be ready to provide a purpose of the lesson to the supervising custody staff, which is usually accepted (Soken-Huberty, 2022). Restorative justice does not equal social justice, which Haeffele and Storr (2019) interpreted the "fair distribution of power and wealth in society." The authors analyze this theory and relate it to the capitalist mentality where everyone has an equal chance to excel at 'the game' without reservation and the rules of the game are fair and equitable. This provides all 'players' the opportunity to excel (Haeffele & Storr, 2019, p. 145); however, the continuous analogy of capitalism and baseball used in this paper belies the seriousness of the topic. Haeffele and Storr (2019) referred frequently to the work of Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian economist and firm believer in the capitalist free market. Hayek denied that there is a need for social justice because to implement fair distribution of wealth would mean social injustice for everyone who has earned wealth through their own efforts. Haeffeled (2019) stated, "In this scenario there would be permanent winners and losers; the tallest, fastest, and most would consistently beat the rest of the players" (p. 151). Haeffele and Storr (2019) acknowledged there is still unfairness in this game analogy because not all referees are fair nor are the particular circumstances of each game the same. They also stated, "We have a political system that gives inordinate power to those, and they have used that power not only to limit the extent of redistribution shape the game in their favor" (p. 152). The premise these two authors keep comparing is ambivalent at times. The rules are made not by the players, but by the elites (i.e., owners) and powerful partners they have. This quote is an apt description of what is seen today in the correctional environment and society in general. The authors are implying that social justice is not possible because of the power structure that exists, both in the analogy and in baseball. The expectation of rehabilitation takes second place to the ideology of punishment, and of retribution for mistakes made. Social justice

is a difficult concept to embrace, particularly for anyone who has not been marginalized, oppressed, or racially profiled. Haeffele and Storr (2019) extended the game analogy, but it is disturbing at times. Life is not a game, nor is oppression, racism, marginalization, or any other form of "othering" that is offered (Haeffele & Storr, 2019).

Ideologies Behind Incarceration

Incarceration frequently undergoes transitional meanings, depending on who is defining it and in what capacity. In a government report written for the U.S. Department of Justice, Mackenzie (2001) described the commonly understood goals in corrections, which are labeled (a) retribution, (b) rehabilitation, (c) deterrence, and (d) incapacitation. The goals frequently change as power shifts, often in the form of political administration changes. There are two main corrections ideologies: (a) retribution (i.e., punitive), and (b) deterrent (i.e., rehabilitative; Lopes, 2002). Throughout history, the policies followed depended on the political ideology at that time (Esperian, 2010). Retribution deals primarily with the tough on crime policies that have replaced more humanitarian efforts toward rehabilitation. This shift from rehabilitative to punitive reflects citizens frightened by what they hear is out-of-control crime waves and coddled offenders by social and major news media.

Prisons are institutions that commonly house long-term or federal inmates. Jails were used to hold short-term inmates who were awaiting court appearances, sentencing, or transfers after adjudication. These facilities were not meant to be a permanent solution for crime, although they are used as a permanent solution. Some studies indicate harsher sentences do not necessarily hinder crime; it can be inferred that the lack of funding for rehabilitative service in jails and prisons indicates the popularity of retribution. One suggestion is that making offenders pay punitive damages to those they victimize will provide thought-provoking changes in behavior

and mentality. This suggestion is not feasible; most inmates are impoverished and, with their new charges, will find it difficult to find and retain employment. Gamo (2013) called incarceration counterproductive, and she is not alone in her thinking. Current thinking is that criminals are never going to change, and society is wasting time and energy trying to "fix" them (Cullen et al., 2014; Gamo, 2013, Sharkey, 2003).

In February 2008, the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) authored a report shared with the governor of California. The report made some earnest suggestions for improving correctional education by combatting recidivism. The LAO acknowledges the need for academic and vocational education for inmate–students and in this report discusses changes for improvement and the educational process in place in corrections. This report is informative and presents all the changes that could make the difference in recidivism, which is the primary goal of rehabilitation in corrections. Howle (2019) provided the financials related to corrections and outlines how this money could be better spent on procuring more teachers, improving the educational environment in facilities, and what the goal is if improvements are implemented (Howle, 2019).

Retribution

Restorative justice and rehabilitation are two concepts that are currently implemented in reentry programs and outreach programs related to incarceration. Restorative justice is the current phrase used in public schools and corrections. This concept allows the victims to get closure, although the person who broke the law will still be incarcerated. Rehabilitation is key to lowering recidivism numbers by providing inmates the skills they will need to remain in their home environment instead of returning to jail.

However, in detention facilities, the deputies are the gatekeepers for a retributive justice system. In corrections, the older deputies train the new deputies to look at education in

corrections as superfluous, not as a reformative measure but as something that will keep students busy and out of trouble. Security is the primary function of the facility and education is the lowest priority. Teachers are commonly referred to as civilians and are regarded as a necessary nuisance, but a practical one because they keep the students preoccupied from what one deputy described as their usual destructive natures. This is the lens with which they view education, as described by various deputies. Old-school deputies, those trained in the political process that defines the lens through which correctional education is viewed, are frequently of the retribution-minded era and they teach the younger deputies to see the inmates as "animals" who need constant watching, and there is nothing redeeming about inmates, even female ones. Retribution for social transgressions merits being locked up, sometimes indefinitely (Bedard, 2021).

Inmate Housing

Inmates in jails are housed while they are adjudicated, then they will be sent to prisons or released. Housing is an issue because there is a growing number of inmates who are housed in county jails instead of prisons. Harrison (2013) outlined the frustration felt by county sheriffs' departments across the state. The sheriffs explained county jails are not equipped to handle the long-term inmates that are housed there instead of at prisons. They are forced to keep more locally because of prison overcrowding. There have been funding improvements from the state to build or update existing facilities to accommodate the population with additional educational opportunities and living space, but it is a slow process (Harrison, 2013).

Incarcerated Inmates and Custody Staff Perspectives

Brock and Brekken's (2019) provided the context of incarcerated women's previous histories of abuse, oppression, and educational experiences. Brock and Brekken (2019) stated, "Approximately 56% of women incarcerated in state prison entered without a high school

diploma" (p. 31). Understanding these factors assisted the research for my study and provided a backdrop to some of the incidents that occurred and which I later detail and analyze. One point well documented by researches of both men and women is that high school attrition is used as a "predictor and causal factor of women's incarceration" (Brock & Brekken, 2019, p. 34).

In the judicial system, an inmate is given the option to work, go to school, or do nothing. Pro-active inmates choose to work in the facility or attend school. There are different types of programs offered to inmates. Volunteer-led programming includes any religious activities. The academic component is where students may earn credits through a credentialed teacher, for their high school diploma. The vocational program teaches students how to obtain, and retain, employment once they finish the various courses that are offered. Charter schools send in educational personnel to teach in jails once they are cleared by the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the facility. Once in place, the instructors, volunteers, and all educational personnel are supervised through the Education Based Incarceration Bureau (EBI). A handbook known simply as the "yellow book" describes the expectations EBI has of the teachers and school staff for conducting the educational program, including using the constructivist framework and required topics for students.

The EBI department pays the contracted school to teach and supply inmate–students with materials for their courses. The online article from Vera, a well-known anti-mass incarceration organization, demonstrated the cost of each state's expenditures on corrections, noting inmate populations have grown 700% since the 1970s. Links in this online article led to further data highlighting jails, not prisons, and the immense cost of maintaining the jail population (Swavola & Subramanian, 2016). The cost of mass incarceration is higher than the cost to improve public education would be if the funds were available in the public sector (Howle, 2019).

The academic literature for correctional education is growing but still sparse. There are some very good pieces that contain sensible, sustainable tips for navigating the detention center environment, perhaps not with ease because it is sometimes a volatile place to work, but at least provides an overview of what to look out for. For example, Gehring, Professor Emeritus and co-Founder of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education at CSUSB, wrote an effective paper titled *Five Principles of Correctional Education* that provides understanding for the dynamics of correctional education. Gehring's (1988) evaluation that "Correctional education is in a transitional period" (p. 165) is still correct. Correctional education has not changed enough to attain the goal of rehabilitation for inmates. He reiterated funding for correctional education is scarce, funding for special education (in corrections) is being appropriated, but there is no cohesiveness of programs and the entire educational system. Gehring identified five principles that correctional educators should adopt to provide a quality education to inmates. He also pointed out the detrimental effect on correctional education the justice system has perpetuated with their strict adherence to punishment as opposed to rehabilitative efforts. The justice system has a job to accomplish, and security is of utmost importance, but always at the expense of correctional education (Eggleston, 1991; Gehring, 1988).

To give women the skills for success, we need to look at (a) how they are studying, (b) what incentives they have, (c) what the programming goals are, (d) how they are supervised, (e) what the educational environment is like, and (f) whether is education feasible where the women study. In short, the policies of correctional education and how they affect the outcome for educators and students need to be considered. The need to adapt curriculum to meet incarcerated student needs has been apparent for over a century. Eggleston (1991) wrote about the Elmira Reformatory Board of Managers of 1892 that, at the turn of the century, said the curriculum

could not be like public school curriculum. Eggleston (1991) stated, “[T]hey are men in the practical experiences of life, they must be approached intellectually as men and not by nursery tales, by kindergarten methods, or juvenile textbooks” (p. 157). Haulard (2001) agreed curriculum was important but for a different reason, stating “Inmate educational programs not only reduce recidivism, but they also help in the management of the prisoners” (Haulard, p. 157, 2001). Curriculum in corrections needs to be adapted to the student. Eggleston (1991) stated, “Even the curriculum required adaptation, a reflection that teachers needed to learn new methods for teaching” (p. 16). Just as public schools drive their students to meet the average daily attendance (ADA) numbers, correctional education administrators are driven by political entities to provide accountability for student participation and success (i.e., recidivism numbers). From a fiscal point of view, these two numbers, the ADA and recidivism, are very similar. For both, the more students enrolled and attending, the higher the budget allotment will be, which in turn will allow more programs to be offered (California Department of Education, n.d.)

However, much like ADA in public schools, this method of recording attendance affects registration and funding. Enrollment is high at the beginning and dwindles as the course ends. In jails, there is limited space to use as classrooms so they are usually reserved for the academic courses, and vocational instructors will teach in any other available space such as the day room, the recreation room, or if in a facility that houses inmates in pods, they teach in the living quarters. The women come in for the first half of the class, go to their bathroom break, then do not come back sometimes. In earlier years when I was teaching in the modules, EBI vetted the students. They had to have good conduct and be willing to show up every day or they would be dropped, and they had to do all the work to get the certificate of completion given at the end of the course. This certificate, in addition to the 2 weeks of time off of their sentences, used to be a

great incentive for participation. Then, other political parties came into power, the prerequisites were dismissed, and the incentives shortened. What started as a 16-week, in-depth course that provided good discussion and encouraged participation grew shorter and shorter. It dwindled down to 12 weeks, then 8 weeks. The women knew they would only get 1 week off for their attendance and work and they did not want to go out of their way for just 1 week. Attendance was strong the first 2 weeks and then by the sixth or seventh week there were hardly any women there, because the faster the women got through the courses, more women could get in and the numbers would be higher. Just as in public school, it is the numbers that count.

Adult Basic Education

Adult basic education (ABE) is one of the topics researched because its necessity as a prerequisite for the vocational courses was required by most of the vocational teachers and was commented on throughout the time at the facility. ABE is a staple in most prisons, but rarely is it implemented in county jails. The "transient population" is the primary excuse for not providing basic education services to inmates in county jails, but that no longer applies when many of the people incarcerated in county facilities are long-term inmates and have been for over a decade (Harrison, 2013).

The premise of basic skills is to provide illiterate inmates with a foundational understanding of the English language. Many of the inmates enrolled in ABE courses are illiterate or non-English speaking individuals. ABE improves inmates' reading levels to where they can read. The National Adult Literacy Survey (2018) provided data that show the literacy levels for inmates are lower than adults outside of corrections. The most startling fact is that as many as 75% of inmates are considered illiterate because they fall below Grade 12 reading (Kolstad et al., 2002). Haulard's (2001) described the ongoing dependence of correctional

education on fluctuating budgets. He also described various obstacles dealt with by correctional education such as (a) inadequate learning environment, (b) insufficient school supplies, (c) staffing issues, (d) constant student turnover, (e) class scheduling, and (f) multi-agency involvement. Haulard's (2001) expertise lied in his position as an ABE instructor at Hunt Correctional Center in Louisiana. His statement that ABE is a necessity is proven each time an inmate approaches an instructor and asks for help reading simple instructions or admits his/her inability to fill out a resume (Haulard, 2001).

Jenkins et al. (2002) define Level 1 and 2 reading skills as very basic, which is an average in minorities. They also noted:

> African American and Latino adults were more likely than White adults to perform in the lowest literacy level and less likely to attain the two highest levels. Forty-one percent of the Latino adults in California were born in this country, and their average proficiencies were comparable to those of native-born African American adults. (Jenkins et al., 2002, p. 18)

This is for the average citizen—the reading and writing levels for inmates are lower. Literacy is the most basic academic component of adult educational courses in jails, second only to the Life Skills courses that many incarcerated women need to develop coping skills and critical thinking skills (Kolstad et al., 2002).

Vocational Education and Literacy

Vocational education is required in all jails and prisons for work preparedness upon release. I was one of seven teachers at the women's facility and taught various topics over 6 years. Vocational education in public schools was originally dismissive of student abilities, an attempt to separate race and class, and a way to placate the government mandate that decreed

education for all. The Regional Occupational Program (ROP) primarily consisted of training in the armed services. Cadet uniforms were admired and the list of failing students did not enable them to get into what was then (1960s and 1970s) a more exclusive activity. Slowly, vocational education turned into the dumping ground for students who failed in academic courses. Then student tracking, another oppressive movement, pushed out students who had ample skills and ROP was chosen to replace the high school diploma and college track for financially-challenged students. The premise was to be "work-ready" without the academic component. This certification told employers a student was trained to work in a particular industry. Vocational education became popular with students whose poverty and marginalized status denied them access to opportunities. ROP became Career and Technical Education, which is the current state program used in county jails for vocational education. This is and was my area of expertise when I first started teaching at the women's detention center.

Instructors are asked to teach the women basic job preparation skills (e.g., resume building, interviewing, job retention skills, applications), and many of the women do not know how to read or write but want to learn. Literacy is the tool they need to not just obtain employment, but to succeed in their careers. Stromquist (2009) related literacy to empowerment and makes the argument that literacy changes the futures of those given the skills necessary to improve themselves. Stromquist (2009) stated, "Literacy classes are often places that provide women legitimately sanctioned and valuable opportunities to learn of their history and rights, consciousness-raising, self-esteem, leadership, and organizing" (p. 7).

The Impact of Policies

Policies and procedures affect the teaching environment at any correctional facility. This impact determines the (a) length of time in class, (b) environment, and (c) process of schooling.

There are different policies and procedures not only for many of the schools in adult and juvenile detention facilities, but from facility to facility because each is run by local bureaucrats. The policies I am describing are for the police department in charge of the four county facilities where our charter school taught. According to Gehring (1988), to understand the process, it is important to look at the needs. Gehring (1988) stated:

> Correctional education systems traditionally address administrator-identified needs, but a new professionalization has led to teacher-identified needs, as well. Decision-makers often emphasize literacy and marketable skills, but classroom teachers often emphasize student attitudes and personal development. There are fewer Federal funds for education, and disbursement patterns are changing rapidly. Many states are adopting education reform legislation. Funding to implement special education for disabled offenders lags behind system requirements. There is no unifying philosophy of corrections, and many local public school systems face profound crises. (p. 164)

The contracted schools conducting classes in correctional detention centers face this profound crisis. There is no prior school file to look through to understand the individual student's needs, and there is no formal assessment that can be given to the student to gauge their grade level to provide challenging, yet still grade-appropriate, work for them to do.

The most disruptive and inconsistent policies that affect correctional education are the political policies that change administrations, laws, and ideologies implemented by the new, incoming political leadership (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2008). For example, Figure 3 is used to show various problems that plague the judicial system and grow mass incarceration. Most inmates do not enroll in courses because of program funding. Only one third of inmates enroll in

various programs offered, such as the academic, vocational, bridging, nontraditional academic programs, and other educational programs offered at that institution.

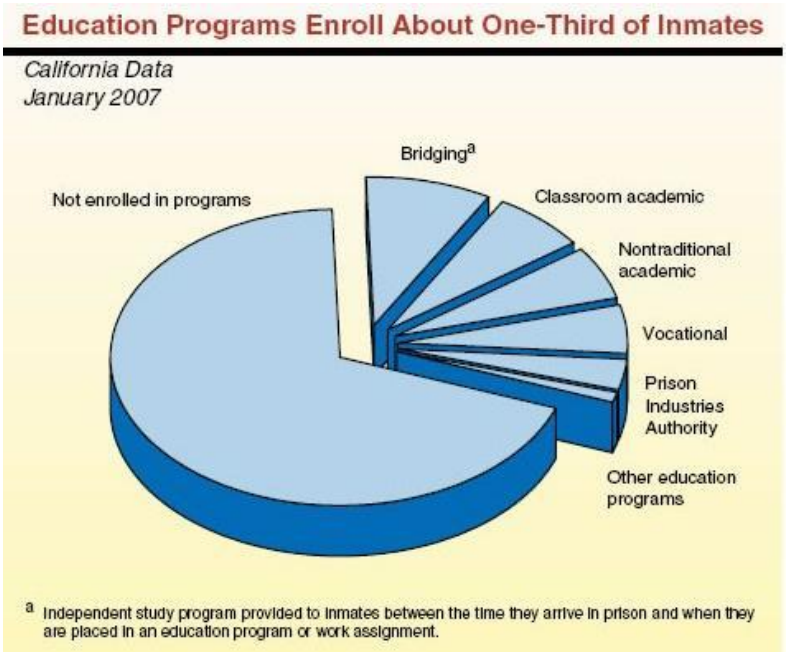

Figure 3. Education Programs Enroll About One Third of Inmates

Note. Adapted from "Literacy and Empowerment: A Contribution to the Debate," by N. P. Stromquist, 2009, *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, 1–13.

Each is problematic on its own but when there are more than two issues the entire system is weakened. These problems are constantly in place and analyzed but have yet to be resolved. Horvath (1982) listed additional reasons, as far back as in the 1980s, that these programs fail and stated the researchers have a "myopic" view of the programming, and research does not have any meta-analysis to gather data to form policy. The study provides a glimpse into what previous researchers have written and how things have not changed. One of the lists Horvath (1982) provided included:

> the conflict between administrators within prisons; (2) the low priority of education in prison setting; (3) the lack of adequate funding for educational programs; (4) the lack of comprehensive planning that characterizes most correctional education programs; (5) the conflict between custody, treatment, and educational philosophies; and (6) the hostility of security staff toward educational programs. (p. 9)

The same issues still exist in correctional education. Interacting with the module and educational staff deputies is challenging but achievable if effort is made to cooperate.

Teaching in Corrections

The CSUSB's Center for Correctional Education Studies has been a leader in encouraging teacher training to benefit educators in correctional settings. The credentialing program at the university aligns with Senate Bill 813's reauthorization requirements, and the program is still an ongoing project with CSUSB. Because of the nature of juveniles detained by the state, the certification trains in special education needs of the incarcerated youth. Many of the students have the types of behaviors children have and this effort to navigate those needs is important for corrections teachers. Gehring (1988), professor emeritus and cofounder of the CSUSB Center for Correctional Education Studies, compiled what he referred to nine program elements shared by various programs successfully that current correctional education teachers could implement. He stated these elements are functional for both students and adults and can incorporate various social justice elements such as inclusion, social education, and cultural education to model their pedagogy. The nine elements Gehring (1988) listed are (a) andragogy, (b) vocational education, (c) social education, (d) cultural education, (e) shared responsibility, (f) inclusion, (g) technology, (h) library, and (i) the configuration of administrative services.

Teachers in correctional education are as transient as the students they teach. Teaching staff are called “civilians” and told that security is the main issue in the jails. Civilians are not allowed to amend curriculum, distribute material that has not been approved by EBI staff, and even if approved, the deputies frequently review it and have the right to deny the inmates the materials, citing it as contraband. It is difficult for the incoming teacher to understand the dynamics of the facility without first obtaining some form of training. Experiencing the correctional environment is strenuous and unnerving for a first-time instructor in corrections. The educator should already have obtained that instruction at the college level while obtaining their teaching credential or degree (Eggleston, 1991). Scott’s (1980) study stated the need for teachers trained in correctional education had been requested for at least 15 years. This was in 1980, and the need still exists (Eggleston, 1991; Wright, 2006).

Efficacy: What It Means in Correctional Education

Gibbons and Ray (2022) advocated for higher education in corrections. They cited the reduction in recidivism numbers and promoted the various benefits of education in corrections. The authors provided links to studies that also advocated for education in corrections. They also stated the Pell grants taken from inmates were restored as of July 1, 2023, which should give universities the push needed to provide courses to inmates again. This is just one of many studies that indicated the efficacy of correctional education (Gibbons & Ray, 2022).

Research on the efficacy of correctional education is substantial. It is measured by recidivism in detention facilities and measured in crime by the public. Gehring (2000) presented studies showing recidivism is erroneously used to gauge the effectiveness of correctional education programs. The relevance of this research is the common measures the justice system uses to develops or keep programs for the inmate–students does not have a common definition

across state or federal detention centers. This lack of a cohesive system of evaluating such programs proves detrimental for correctional education across the state and across the country. The prison system preserves inmate educational information and transfers it prison to prison. The information can be accessed by former inmates without a problem because the federal government keeps and tracks the progress each inmate makes, wherever they go. This is not the case for jail education systems. This is important for tracking recidivism correctly and accurately. Although recidivism is not an effective way of gauging the success of inmate–students, keeping accurate educational records is. Students can feel that the work they did is useful and important.

There are negative reports for correctional education, like Martinson's *Nothing Works* study from 1974. Martinson's (1974) final summation is that, in terms of rehabilitation for correctional students, nothing works. It was this study that edged out rehabilitation for punitive incarceration. Current opinion includes the column written by Levy (2019) in The Pilot newsletter, where he stated social justice is an oxymoron, and an idea that should be discarded. His opinion of social justice and rehabilitation of inmates resonates with Martinson's (1974) words about education in corrections. This view is slowly changing back into a mindset that favors rehabilitation, although it is slow progress.

Recidivism: Why It Matters

Recidivism is complex and poorly defined. The judicial system needs to explain, discuss, and align not just the definition but the process and the goals (Gehring, 2000). Consider what the ADA signifies for public education; higher attendance numbers do not indicate student success, they provide verification for the political outliers that there are bodies sitting in a classroom, which means the reporting organization requires funding to teach that inmate–student. It is a

budgetary tool. It does not mean the inmate–student will be successful. It does not mean that there will be adequate funding for the inmate–student to receive the support and encouragement needed to graduate. It means the inmate–student will have a place to go and teachers to lead them each day. ADA is also used in correctional education. The numbers are important because they bring in money that will provide the funding for teachers and correctional education staffing. These are merely budgetary concerns and do not address the actual issue of inmate recidivism, as echoed by Delaney and Henrichson (2012), who stated, "Per-inmate cost is a measure of cost and cost alone. It reflects neither quality, as measured by, say, staff safety, nor outcomes, like the impact on recidivism" (p. 1). Although this is true, facilities in many states continue to push the number of student inmates who go through their educational programs to meet the numbers necessary to make their programs look successful to the administrators and politicians looking for talking points. (Delaney & Henrichson, 2012)

Correctional Education and Social Justice

There is a disconnect between correctional education and social justice; it is the dueling standard of security vs. education. The middle road is never completely compromised on and so the divide remains. Various writers, such as Eggleston, Gehring, and many others have detailed the need for corrections and education departments to work together and compromise, create better planning for courses, and respect the education that Title 15 provides students. My study provides the information and enthusiasm that correctional education needs to propel the rehabilitation component forward into a socially just educational environment in custody facilities. There are many who do not believe this is possible. Scott (1980) described the extremes that take place in correctional facilities when the frustration of custody staff affects the entire facility and particularly the inmates. When this happens, prison riots erupt, and chaos

happens (Scott, 1980). Prison riots can be lethal to the custodial staff and civilians (i.e., educators and volunteers). This happens in the county jail environment as well. This explains why the deputies and administrators who run the jail and oversee the inmates are sometimes hostile to the outsiders they must work with, the ones who bring in the volunteer programs and the educators.

Lessons Learned From Scholarly Literature

Each of the topics briefly explained in this paper has touched on the intricacies of correctional education. Knowing how to teach is not enough. Understanding the methods suggested is not enough. Neither is learning the history of corrections and the many topics. What is needed is actionable suggestions and a strong foundation to provide the students what they need so they can leave the facility without coming back (i.e.., recidivating). The ability to closely observe the events that happen in corrections is a gift for research. Coupled with previous educators' perspectives, what we have learned teaching in corrections can be useful to the novice corrections teacher. There is not one distinct answer to solve the intricate web of issues in correctional education, but there can be a cooperative between the judicial representative deputies and the educational staff. This cohesive effort can prove beneficial to the inmate–student so they can be given a realistic opportunity to reenter society with a firm understanding of who they are and how they can improve themselves without the criminal repercussions they currently have to live with. The students in the women's facility taught me much about life, humanity, and the very real desire to change their futures and final outcomes outside of corrections. The study I undertook is one that can assist teachers to provide the tenets of social justice into their praxis for the sake of the inmate–students we loved to teach in corrections.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ethnography is useful and informative and provides insights gathered from close proximity and observations of a specific culture or group. Ethnography takes careful notes, uses the researcher as an unbiased lens to look at the intricacies of a population and how it works on a daily basis. Autoethnography uses the same techniques and goes one step further. The researcher is not just watching the people involved but participating in the culture. Autoethnography allows me, as the researcher, to use my experiences as data, and to analyze what emerged from my time with the population I observed and worked with and for.

Methodology

Correctional education is frequently undertaken by teachers who fall into the position while seeking a job, or have decided they will teach in this volatile, quixotic environment. Either way, teachers have a different environment to work in when they enter corrections. Without realizing it, these teachers require skills that will direct the students to reach critical thinking skills when they problem solve, and that will give the students the support and empathy they need to overcome negative educational experiences while they were in public school systems. This study is relevant to understanding a teaching context in which social justice is particularly challenging and also crucial to educating and supporting detained women.

This chapter relays the details of the study's qualitative methodology. The primary research question reflects the considerations of an educator teaching in a very controlled detention facility, surrounded by judicial personnel who did not demonstrate concern for social justice. The pervading atmosphere throughout the organization, as it is in most carceral settings, was one of punishment, not rehabilitation. The study is driven by the research question "What

happens when a social justice-minded teacher works within women's corrections?" The research question generated a series of related sub-questions:

a. What challenges do teachers encounter?

b. How are these challenges related to systemic divestment in girls and women?

c. What opportunities do teachers find to improve the lives of their students?

The answers derived from the sub-questions may build understanding of correctional education to improve processes, curriculum, and training. Administrators of these facilities and the judicial system need to understand the feasibility of incorporating social justice strategies in courses for inmates with the cooperation and coordination of the Education Based Incarceration Bureau (EBI). The data are gathered from the corrections environment where I worked primarily in the women's detention facility. I first worked in a men's detention facility in the high desert, then spent the next 5 years working with female inmates in Southern California.

The research findings are written through an autoethnographic lens while the data review and analysis are deliberated as an observer restraining bias to understand the data as independently as possible. Items were gathered prior to the study's inception in preparation for IRB approval. Once approval was provided the study's seven step process begins.

Positionality as Context

I begin with the my positionality to provide transparency of the perspective and potential biases that affect the data elicited from the study. My educational experience, just as the incarcerated women in this study, was unremarkable from the common experience of marginalized students in oppressive institutions that are driven by capitalist administrations. The violence and detrimental effects that were derived from those negative experiences were taken as everyday events although current consensus is that the environment was traumatic. As a child

and teen I experienced addictions and addictive behaviors in my family, with acquaintances, and with peers. I observed violence and death during those formative years, expecting that my own adulthood would be the same as the people with whom I was growing up. My parents were "old school" and very traditional Mexican parents—strict, aggressively protective, and with high expectations for their children. This is, perhaps, the factor that saved myself and my sisters and brother from having lower expectations than our neighbors and school friends. My mother's perspective was the most influential. She was quite progressive for a woman in her era, raised in poverty in Mexico and relocating to California as a young woman. She instilled in her children the obligation for service to our fellow human beings, our religious leanings, and outspoken personalities. Our father taught us to work hard and keep our word, saying that truthfulness and love of humanity were the two greatest virtues we could have. My father was a hard-working man, self-taught, and very determined that his children would not fall into the addictions surrounding us, although I did have a drug addiction for approximately 10 years and my siblings suffered from alcoholism. These addictions were more of an environmental influence based on the area we lived in and the accepted behaviors surrounding us as children. We escaped from addictions through hard work and determination in our adult years and have all been successful at breaking the chain of addiction in our generation.

This is the background of the growth-mindset that followed me throughout my lifetime. Public education was attempting to condition me to a life of tediousness and limited financial prospects, but my parents taught us that we were better than the life we were born into simply because we could work hard to achieve a more successful outcome.

Relevance to the Study

The experiences of coming from poverty in a socially ostracized environment whose inhabitants were mentally beaten and denied equity and emotional support from society gave me the experiences to relate to the incarcerated women, even though our decisions and outcomes were different. The childhood I had gave me the empathy needed to work with the incarcerated women I was teaching and to understand the negative impact their choices had on their lives. It is this empathy that made me realize that change was needed in correctional education to give the women the support and opportunities for transitional change.

Ethnography

Ethnography is included in this section because the process for this methodology is nearly identical to the process for autoethnography. The difference in the two is that in ethnography the researcher observes with as unbiased a lens as possible, attempting to detach themselves from the actions observed. These studies are lengthy so that the researcher can develop an in-depth understanding of the culture and its everyday experiences. The autoethnography method uses the same kind observances, notes, journals, artifacts and contacts but is more intertwined in the culture being studied. An autoethnographer's retelling of the observations and events contain the perspectives and opinions of the researcher to draw the reader into the study with the narrative produced.

Ethnography "focuses on a particular population, place, and time with the deliberate goal of describing it to others" (Sanjek, 2014, p. 60). The process of ethnography involves observing through an unbiased lens, setting aside personal bias and emotionally detaching what they observe. Ethnographers write descriptive field notes and conduct group and/or personal interviews with participants. The researcher observes a cultural environment and writes

extensively on what he/she sees, describing thoroughly so the scene is recreated when examined later. In addition, the researcher notes down epiphanies that occur as data, notes, and as artifacts are examined as described by Ellis et al. (2011),

> When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences. (para 8)

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is derived from ethnography and is also used to study a specific culture as observed. Although ethnography requires an unbiased observer, autoethnography employs a participant/observer of the culture being studied. The defining element that differentiates ethnography from autoethnography is that in the latter, the researcher includes him or herself into the culture being studied as both observer and participant. Roberson (2019) described, “An autobiographical detailing of cultural and life experiences, when written in a manner that allows for reflective insights, is autoethnography” (p. 67). Ellis (1999) illustrated the process:

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth, autoethnographer’s gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 673)

When I first considered sharing my thoughts, experiences, emotions, and mistakes while teaching incarcerated women, I hesitated. Autoethnography requires the researcher to inject him/herself into the study and share the intensity of that experience, with flaws and mistakes, for all to see. As in ethnography, the culture is the focal point. In autoethnography, it is not the researcher that is the subject, but the experiences the researcher went through and the connection and validation made through academic literature, thorough analysis of artifacts, documents, and additional media. What makes autoethnography different from any other story are the rich details and descriptions of the various observations and events combined with reflexive analysis. As a researcher, intertwining one's own thoughts and perspectives about events or observations becomes part of the culture.

Autoethnography includes the close observation of a culture's daily patterns and rituals, understanding their history, giving members a voice to describe their perspectives of their culture, and an in-depth description of their social-cultural environment. In this study, that culture is the one of incarcerated women and the environment in which they are living. The cultural context analyzed will be pertinent to those studying correctional education and the people teaching in it. Detailed events are noted in journals and memos are written and used as data. In this role, the researcher has the ability to state their observations in various ways to engage the readers with the detailed descriptions and dialogue, or with analytical discourse of events that were noted and analyzed in depth using (a) data peer review, (b) the process of coding and categorization, and (c) data saturation and analysis. Every step of this process is used to define the events and observations for the proposed study. The explanation of the process is

clear and assists a researcher new to the methodology with steps to consider and apply (Poulos, 2021).

Autoethnography allows me as the researcher to use the lived experiences of teaching in corrections in an analytical framework that can inform me of better ways of working with the women in detention on a personal and academic level. The methodology lets me review the experiences I remember clearly and scrutinize what lesson was learned, if any, and why a particular incident or event affected me personally. The stories of the events I experienced are part of the data and were written as memories that generated questions about teaching in corrections as an instructor. It is the reflexive thinking and analysis that will provide the findings. When experiencing these events first-hand, I merely reviewed what happened in a cursory way, as a step to improving my teaching pedagogy. As a teacher, I would reflect o n each day's events once I got home. There was no in-depth analysis of the day because there was only time for a quick mental rehash and then the process of getting ready for the next day's lessons, gathering materials, grading papers, or dealing with details. This study allowed me to revisit my experiences in correctional education to analyze those moments with reflexivity. Conversations I had with various deputies and line personnel provided the perspectives about custody that differed from the educator perspective I held, and I wrote down those conversations in the journal entries I reviewed. The use of autoethnography demands that retrospective reflection be analyzed carefully with reflexivity and truthfulness to the data it generates.

Reflexivity

As critically thinking individuals we reflect almost daily about the day's activities, events, topics we have discussed, and so on. Reflection is merely looking back on what has happened and subconsciously deciding how we will react given certain circumstances. Reaction

is commonly the mental outcome to specific moments we encounter as individuals. Reflexivity, however, means I deeply examined my own role in the education of incarcerated women. My reflections while I worked in corrections were what created the poetry, inspired the memories—in the form of stories—and guided the journal entries that I used in this study because these thoughts and writings chronicle what happened during my time as a teacher in corrections. With reflexivity, I analyzed those memories and converted them into data to examine what I learned, how I taught to give the women skills they could use on their own, and how my own identity came into play in my work. This reflexivity is crucial to deeply understanding teaching in corrections that may produce knowledge, and possibly change, to the productivity of correctional education (Melbourne Medical School, n.d.). This in-depth critical reflection of my experiences and how they relate to the women I was teaching provides the understanding that correctional education needs to be beneficial to both teacher and student. Education needs to be transformational not only to one, but to both. Salzman (2002) "identifies reflexivity as a process in the formation of each person's mind and self" (p. 805).

Protecting Privacy

As the researcher, I am the only participant of this study; however, the stories, memories, and notes contain real people. Anonymity of those spoken of or included in any experiences discussed is the primary method of preventing any undue stress or breach of privacy of those whose experiences crossed my own. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of those who are included in the autoethnographic stories. No names were used at any time other than my own. Facility names, organizations, and locations were represented but the real names of student inmates, instructors, administrators, and custody staff were not used to keep their privacy safe and give maximum protection to their identity. No details of any inmate's charges or details of

their incarceration were used. The same precautions were used for line staff, deputies, administrators, volunteers, and anyone mentioned in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for my study was drawn from a variety of sources gathered from the corrections environment throughout the 7 years I taught at several different facilities, including from my personal documentation (i.e., collection of photos, journal entries, and poetry) and from policy and practice documents related to correctional education. The following tables outline the individual sources. Table 1 describes the artifacts collected in relation to my teaching experience and interactions with the incarcerated women and a brief explanation of the artifacts' use in the study.

Table 1

Data Collected From Personal Documentation

Item name	Pages	Description summary
Pictures of detention facility	11	Photos taken between 2012 and 2016 of the various learning environments and special occasions. The dayroom, the recreation room, and the teacher's classroom are part of the 11 photos. The pictures were gathered for their pertinent reflection of the jail's learning environment and activities, and the teachers' environments throughout the buildings. The photos were used to generate descriptive accounting of the educational environment used by teachers, but were not given the module names or numbers used to describe them in the facility. The photos themselves were not used as this would not give the participants anonymity. They were used simply to provide the researcher the opportunity to use the descriptive language needed in the autoethnography

Item name	Pages	Description summary
Journal entries	16	Notes about interactions with deputies, changes in administration, new rules and policies, grading systems, collection of student materials, and union memo. This includes notes I took between 2022-2023 about my experiences. The journal entries vary in topics and are casually written pages that provide descriptive notations about facility activities. These journal entries were begun after the decision about the methodology of the study was made. These entries were made after collection of the various materials was made and questions were raised during collection of their usefulness in the study. Various entries were made that were consistent with the original observations when the handbook materials were implemented in class
Poetry	Three to five poems	Poetry written for the inmates while working with them between 2014-2019. These poems were inspired by the students during a classroom conversation and, once written, a copy was given to the inmate whose conversation with me inspired the text. The poetry does not mention the student by name, does not describe any characteristics of the student, and does not interfere with the anonymity of the inmate–student. I am using them to remind me of incidents and emotions that were effectively defused when writing the poetry. It was both a tribute to the student's emotional conversation and a tension release for me to let go of the moment in a positive way.

Table 2 lists the policy and practice documents—some that were provided during my employment and some that I researched while trying to learn more about inmate rights—expectations, and teacher responsibilities.

Table 2

Data Collected From Policy and Practice Documents

Policies	Pages	Description summary
Education based incarceration orientation manual	61	This handbook provides a descriptive introduction to correctional education that is basically a marketing piece for the sheriff's department partners. Using this handbook, which is available to employees and partners online for every county in California, gives the impression of alignment across the correctional education programming.

Policies	Pages	Description summary
Yellow book	Approx. 190 pages	The full civilians' manual provided by the sheriff's department that outlines the topics teachers and volunteers are facilitating in classes and how to approach the inmate–students with constructivist theory. This book was created specifically for the county and outlines specific agendas for lessons that the teachers and facility trustees can teach. The yellow book, not it's official name, is considered the facility's handbook for the educational staff. The entire manual was read, but only certain sections will be referred to such as the educational theory used, outlines of topics, final outcomes.
Reentry handbook	Approx. 90 pages	Handbook given to inmates for job preparation and reentry. This book is provided by the school I worked for as a reentry tool for the inmate–students. The book contained job preparation tips, reentry myths, and lists of organizations in the county that provide supportive services to newly reentering students (updated frequently). This handbook was analyzed and referred to in the study. The purpose of using it is to point out several items that are intended to assist the former inmate in reentry but fall short of the intended goal
Religious and volunteer services policy and procedure manual	89	This handbook describes the rigor with which the volunteers and teachers, often referred to as civilians, must go through to enter the facility.
California Department of Corrections Auditor's report, January 2019	65	This auditor's report reflects changes in the California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) that were first suggested in 2014 but detailed more fully in this report. Although the LAO's report suggested changes to correctional education that have still not been implemented, this auditor's report corroborates the LAO's data and focuses on the deficiencies that correctional education must change to improve inmate rehabilitation. This report is used to point out the need to make changes to the jail system and what has been suggested in previous years but has failed to be implemented statewide. Its use is primarily to give the reader an understanding of the policies teachers must adhere to while conducting their educational agendas
CA Code of Regulations, Title 15	277 (p. 113, pp. 26-32)	These pages define the parameters of correctional education and what the responsibilities of the educator are to be compliant to the Board of Education's mandates. All educators should know these regulations, just as in public schools. The code's mention is for purposes of comparison. The code is generic and a bit ambiguous, subject to interpretation by administrators, politicians, and students.

The physical documents used in this study were kept in my home office and will be stored after analysis. All study data will be locked into a room with no access without my permission. The precautions were set up prior to the conclusion of the study to maintain the integrity of the data.

Data Organization and Analysis

My process for data organization and analysis has 7 steps:

1. Creating a list of events/observations that I want to explore further.
2. Reviewing journal entries, photos, and poetry to create memos.
3. Reviewing policy and practice documents to create memos about how correctional education is conceptualized.
4. Drafting stories about the events/observation.
5. Coding stories and memos.
6. Using codes to generate categories and themes.
7. Returning to the stories to edit, including reflexive analysis.

Next, I provide details of each step in the process.

Step 1: Gather Data

While gathering all of these materials and reviewing my journal, I created a list of events/observations that quickly came to mind. I used the following list of events/observations to write stories that were included in the study. The following is a list with a brief summary of what the story contains:

- Students Challenge Teachers Often—One student repeatedly challenged what I was teaching, and I was drawn to correct the situation. This story is written to demonstrate

the diplomacy, patience, and strategy to diffuse potentially violent or disruptive situations.

- Observing Oppressiveness in Someone Who Was Supposed to Help—A volunteer running a program I was asked to observe was exhibiting microaggressive behavior with the student–inmates. When she left the room and I was on watch, the women complained about her tactics and their roles in the course.
- The Staff Meeting—We, the staff, were told we could not touch students or allow them to touch us. I challenged this because I was teaching in the mental health modules and the women there were either medicated, undergoing psychological evaluation, or traumatized and in need of patience.
- When a Student Does Not Respect or Empathize With Others—I had to learn how to deal with microaggressions from one student to another with negative outcomes.
- The Lost ID—I misplaced my identification badge and chaos followed. This event not only provided the understanding and appreciation of the law enforcement staff, but gave me comfort through my peers.
- Learning the Rules With the Women Who Lived Them—Students and teachers had to learn the rules to work together through collaboration with EBI. This story is a retrospective of collaboration between partners.
- No Hope for the Nonreaders—Literacy efforts were initiated to help students who could not read but wanted to attend classes. Because the programs are preapproved by facility administrators, we had to be creative to provide the literacy component to the women who enrolled but could not read.

These events and observations provided me, as the teacher, with opportunities to change my praxis and to develop better methods of reaching my students in a positive way.

Step 2: Reviewing Journal Entries and Poetry to Create Memos

This step took place after the documents and artifacts were collected. Each document was reviewed, and memos were created during review of each. Memos are described as "Through the use of memos, the qualitative researcher is able to engage with their research to a greater degree than would otherwise be the case. An intense relationship is established with the data, enabling the researcher to feel a heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein" (Birks et al., 2008, p. 69). My memos began to synthesize what I was feeling and doing during these moments. The photos were used as visual aids to describe what happened in the modules and to describe the environment accurately. The same process of review was used with the photographs and poetry as well. Memos assisted in the later coding. While I read the documents, I kept the research question and subquestions in mind using emotion coding as a guide during the memoing. I then reread and coded any emergent data in my memos. These memos were analyzed as well.

Step 3: Reviewing Policies and Practice Documents to Create Memos About How Correctional Education is Conceptualized

As I memoed in Step 2, I then reviewed policy and practice documents to help answer questions about what the state says correctional education must provide inmates and what specific curriculum is required for teachers to implement. As I wrote memos, I considered: What are the processes and procedures for correctional education and how are they interpreted by the individual facilities? These questions, and others, drove the review. Memos written during this process were analyzed and coded during the next phase of the study.

Step 4: Drafting Stories About the Events/Observation

Using the list developed in Step 1, I wrote stories to capture simple memories of events or observations gathered during my time teaching at the women's correctional facility. These stories were made memorable because of the circumstances, or the student's perspective, or the importance it made in my teaching and how I dealt with these situations. The stories I have written provide opportunity for deeper, reflexive analysis. I continued writing them as I reviewed the journal and other documents to capture the event or moment in text for later review and coding. In writing the stories, I wrote freehand to capture the moments as effectively and with as much detail as possible. These stories were reviewed and analyzed with reflexivity in Step 7. Again, the stories do not contain any descriptive information that would allow anyone to be recognized.

Step 5: Coding Stories and Memos

Having written memos in Steps 2 and 3, I used Delve, an application for sorting the codes gathered from the data as a method of analysis of the personal documents such as the journal, photos, poetry, and the memos I took in my earlier review. Coding methods used began with A Priori, or predetermined codes, including (a) barriers to introducing liberatory concepts in the curriculum and classroom, (b) opportunities for instructor growth, (c) support for women, (d) social justice, (e) advising, (f) processes, and (g) training for the teachers to work well in correctional education. Then, I used Emotion codes, an inductive process of coding, described as a method that "labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (Saldana, 2009, p. 86). For example, in my study, emotion codes might be feelings I get and feelings I imagine others have in our interactions. By coding

these emotions, I hoped to better understand how emotions impacted the responses to situations that arose in correctional education environments.

I developed a coding manual to track the ways I was thinking about the data. The coding manual contained A Priori codes as other codes emerged during the first review of transcripts and documents provided the data to connect during axial coding, the process of sorting codes into categories. Every piece of data will be reviewed, organized by theme, and noted carefully because, as Saldaña (2021) described, "Qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language and images, and deep reflection on the researcher-constructed patterns and meanings of human experience" (p. 15).

Step 6: Using Codes to Generate Categories

Once the cycles of coding were complete, the emergent categories further organized the data. I grouped like codes to uncover these categories, combined and pulled apart, and assessed whether any of the categories emerged as most significant.

Step 7: Returning to the Stories to Edit, Including Reflexive Analysis

Once categorization was complete, I returned to enhance the stories, completing the process of analysis. During this step, as I reviewed the categories and the codes that were sorted in each category, I connected the literature read during the literature review to specific situations that prompted the researched topic. The codes were derived from the data while using the research question and subquestions as the a priori codes, discussed in previous steps. As part of this final step, the categories were connected to the literature and artifacts. The questions that were engendered by the coding process were linked to the literature that aligns with the codes.

Summary

This autoethnographic study is relevant to correctional education, its students, and the staff that delivers the curriculum and information meant to shape the students into responsible, self-sufficient adults ready to go out into their social environment as capable citizens. The self-study and subsequent analysis of the materials allows for deep reflections that may provide answers to the research question and generating new questions for further study. The research question, “What happens when a social justice-minded teacher works in corrections?” is the first of many questions expected to be elicited from the review of all documents and artifacts. The use of autoethnography in this qualitative study allowed me to use my experiences as a teacher inside of corrections to form a qualitative analysis for the patterns and distinctive similarities to those in custody.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Education in prisons has gotten media attention, been the subject of academic research studies, and in recent years became a goal of political entities for a myriad of reasons; however, the studies correctional education have generated all pertain to prison education, not jails, which is the first stop when entering the judicial system and which must legally provide educational opportunities for inmates, as stated on page 37 of the most recent version of Title 15 of the California Minimum Standards:

> Such a plan shall provide for the voluntary academic or vocational, or both, education of housed people. Reasonable criteria for program eligibility shall be established. Modified academic or vocational opportunities may be provided based on sound security practices or a person's failure to abide by facility rules and regulations. (State of California Board of State and Community Corrections, 2017, Article 6)

Schools were contracted and teachers were hired to provide education to the incarcerated women. The study evolved from my experiences teaching in corrections for several years and the gap in literature discussing a teacher's experience in jails, not prisons. The prison experience has been given more focus, but the jail environment is lacking sufficient research and first-hand experiences of teachers. In the first chapter, I described the circumstances that prompted the research study. The second chapter is the literature review of the research I was able to find and which demonstrated the gap in the literature that this study addresses. Chapter three described the methodology of the study and provided the steps taken to produce the data for the study. This chapter and the next describe the results the data produced and the conclusions and suggestions they derived.

The purpose of the study was to find answers to the research question and the subquestions it produced: “What happens when a social justice-minded teacher works within women’s corrections?” The research question generated a series of related sub-questions:

a. What challenges do teachers encounter?

b. How are these challenges related to systemic divestment in girls and women?

c. What opportunities do teachers find to improve the lives of their students?

This study explored the intricacies of teaching in correctional environments. Although the jail system provides education, it is not as structured as the prison educational system. Education in jails could be used to eliminate or reduce recidivism by providing the inmates with an education that is relevant to their lives and futures; however, there is no denying education’s usefulness in the justice system, whether it is deputies saying they are glad I am there because I “keep them busy” or the women telling me they needed help learning how to change their mindset to improve their lives.

There are many barriers to correctional education including funding, teacher shortages, and political changes. This study focused on the lack of consistent professional development relevant to incarcerated women, and the meager training provided to teachers when first hired (Eggleston, 1991). The sparse journal articles, dissertations, and reports that document correctional education have even fewer that deal specifically with the jail population. The prisons garner most of the media’s attention. There needs to be much more research that deals specifically with the volatile jail systems and the insufficient funding that impacts correctional education in jails. Rose (2004) stated, “These increasing numbers of imprisoned women have put an increasing amount of pressure on services provided by women’s prisons that were already inadequate and substandard” (p. 85). The citations used in this study were primarily based on

prison research studies because there are so few studies related specifically to jail operations and correctional education in county facilities.

How I Use Theories to Support Teaching in Jail

Although the teacher, in this case me, is learning about the various theories that affect students and how to implement the theories in the classroom, the student–inmate is being taught with the theoretical framework as I learned each theory. Each of these theories is learned individually, meaning I studied one theory at a time. When I focus on learning new concepts, I tend to study in a linear fashion. I outline the theory's tenets/principles and imagine the possible outcomes of the lessons I plan on implementing in class. The last thing I do is plan the lesson, using the theory in a deliberate way. These theories were researched and then incorporated into the lessons I planned. I learned of these theories when I was working on my master's and searching for ways to improve my teaching skills. As the stories I shared here took place, I immediately reviewed these theories. The stories show how these theories were applied while I worked hard to understand the correctional education needs of my students. Following each story is a reflection based on the story, like the format used in a dissertation by Roberson (2019). Roberson demonstrated how the reflection, coming after his descriptive paragraphs, gave him further understanding of the interactions with his imprisoned students. The reflection is relevant to explain the emotions that emanate from the event so that I could understand, as a teacher, what I needed to learn about my students to educate them. These stories seem simple, but while writing them I relived the event and felt the same emotions. Those reflexive analyzations created the data that I used for the study.

The Stories Begin

The following stories were written by reviewing documents and pictures of the facility where I used to work at, which in turn evoked memories of incidents that taught me certain lessons and modified behaviors while I taught at the facility.

Students Challenge Teachers Often

This event took place about 5 or 6 months after I started teaching at the facility. Although I had been teaching for several years in public education, this was my first-time teaching in a custody setting. The first few months had been learning the rules of the facility and to which people I had to defer (e.g., deputies, correctional officers, line staff). Learning the rules and how to engage with my students in such an oppressive environment was difficult at best, but circumstances could make it dangerous if not diplomatically defused; the reality is most, except the most extreme, are much like anybody you would pass on the street, meet in a library, have lunch, with or enjoy a sports event with. Media fluctuates between depicting women in jails/prisons as likeable characters who made mistakes or making them seem like inhuman animals in need of permanent lockup. As Werner (1990) stated, “It is nothing like the colorful fantasies that media delivers” (p. 106).

Teachers are expected to remain calm; they should not get distracted or let their nerves be ruffled by loud, obnoxious temperaments regardless of students displaying this behavior or what may be going on in the module. Students will distract and/or challenge teachers every chance they get if proper classroom management is not implemented; however, classroom management has an entirely different meaning in corrections, where deputies, administrators, and students are watching the educator’s every move. It can be intimidating, but if done correctly, can be very rewarding for both student and teacher. I used teaching methods suggested in Werner’s (1990)

book, *Correctional Education: Theory and Practice* that I found when researching how to do my job. I had been in the facility a few months, but I was new to this module and had to let the women acclimate to my teaching. Werner's (1990) tips were to, "Be yourself, mean what you say, be supportive, encouraging, but also firm, respect your students, do not probe, accept your students, be patient, win respect for yourself, respect hostility, do not over-identify, do not expect thanks" (pp. 119–121). These tips provided the basis for how I could build trust with the women and encourage my students to engage in their studies and to self-motivate for their own futures. That morning I was going to teach in a general population module (gen pop). The environment is reminiscent of the old Elvis Presley movies with the double row cells (up and down) and wide pillars reaching up to the top, with the wide-open spaces between pillars. The paint was a morbid steel grey color with dashes of brighter colors from the drawings and lettering the women posted in the modules, with deputies' permission, to make it a bit cozier. There were 10 round tables with three attached seats circling the table that could hold up to two people and they were placed in two rows the length of the dayroom. This could allow up to 60 students to sit even if uncomfortably, and when the classes had more students enrolled in it than there were seats, the other students scooted over to fit in more by packing themselves in tightly. The seats were full most of the time, but often there were different women filling it because of court appearances, medical visits, transfers, and releases which kept the women's attendance inconsistent.

Teachers usually set up their screens and equipment by the staircases leading to the upper cells because these pillars had the electrical outlets we needed. All teachers pushed heavy metal carts with a projector, speakers, reading material for students, supplies, and anything we thought we would need for the day's lecture. Every item must be counted at the start and end of each class. If anything is not accounted for, it can cause a lockdown in the module; or if it is

something more valuable than supplies such as a piece of equipment or teacher's badge, then the entire facility is locked down. Everyone, teachers and staff, work hard to avoid lockdowns.

Public school teachers are proactive and creative in producing a learning environment that provides students with a safe place to share ideas, show their talents, and grow as individuals while they are in class (see Figure 4). Some teachers are less conducive to giving students a place that encourages study and contemplation of topics and ideas. In most jails there is no delegated space in which teachers can produce a student-centered learning environment. Space is limited, security is the focus of all activities and movement.

Figure 4. The Learning Environment

Teaching in such a strict learning environment prompted me to incorporate the principles of self-determination theory: (a) competence, (b) autonomy, and (c) relatedness, although in later years Deci and Ryan's theory placed relatedness in a lower category (Vallerand, 2000). The theory proposed that teachers provide opportunities promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The lessons were created and delivered to specifically address student needs by promoting these three skills. The lessons we created allowed the women to work independently, to make decisions, and to explain what they did and what prompted the projects. The educators,

including myself, were determined to help the women use their critical thinking skills, which was a goal of self-determination theory.

I had over 50 students who had to be engaged and kept calm while they were under the direct eye of the module deputies sitting at the large, open desk by the module exit door. Most of the time things went quite well, but occasionally, like this particular day, there were extenuating circumstances that changed the mood in the module. This day, one of the newer students to the class was relentlessly challenging everything I said as I conducted the lecture portion of the day. I had to remain calm for both the students and the deputies. If I showed any emotion with the students, they would exploit my humanity in ways I cannot even imagine. I had been there long enough to see some of their antics and it was not pretty when someone showed what the inmate–students considered weakness. The women could be a bit harsh. The environment where the women lived in this module was a bit louder than other modules because this one housed the general population inmates. Modules that housed future trustees were nearby but the women came in and worked with the student–inmates in anticipation of their promotion to trustees.

That day's lesson was about job retention. We were discussing strategies to retain newly obtained jobs and the woman, who I will call Iris, kept making disparaging remarks like, "You don' know shit" and, "What you know about getting' a job? Get real!" Each time she spoke, the girls would laugh and look at me to see what I would do next. I could see them heating up and when another one of the women, who I will call Gina, tried to say something rude, I gave her what my kids call my "mom" look—staring at her without any expression, no anger or frustration, until she was quiet—she knew me from another module and that I was not trying to be cruel or intimidating. I returned to Iris and told her quietly that I needed to speak to her after class. She scowled at me and turned her back to me, but remained quiet the rest of the 3-hour

class. I used the time during their independent work to think quietly as I walked around to help students.

My mind was racing with thoughts of how I was going to handle this situation. I could not get mad at her—I was the teacher and role model, I could not go "ghetto" and scold her or pick on her. I grew up in neighborhoods like hers, surrounded by poverty and violence, and I knew that she might not take what I had to say quietly or peacefully. I was contemplating what her reaction would be. She was new to class and seemed to fit in well with the group she hung out with, many of whom had been in my courses for a while. I wondered if I should approach them for a bit of help in knowing how to deal with this? No. Not a good idea. They would talk, the network in the jail was one continuous string of gossip and no one was safe from it. What could I do? It is ridiculous to imagine that teachers' feelings cannot be hurt, or that we do not get angry. The self-containment can be difficult but has to be accomplished daily.

My timer buzzed, signaling the end of the class, and I told the women to put their things away, collected borrowed pencils and extra papers, collected finished assignments, counted supplies, and finally, the moment came to talk to Iris—who had disappeared. She left while I was busy and took off to her cell, knowing I could not go to it. Teachers are told not to approach inmate cells without permission. I was a little relieved, in a strange way, because I felt I had been given a reprieve. I decided not to ask the deputies for her to come down and packed my gear to exit. I would talk to her in the morning.

There is little preparation for this type of situation. The rules from public education for teachers are not the same for correctional education teachers. We are told by the correctional facility staff that we have to stay calm, diffuse any situations that may create a volatile environment, not interact too much with inmates because it breeds familiarity, watch what we

say, do not let anything get personal, and do not react when students push us mentally or emotionally. This is difficult. Incoming teachers to correctional education need more preparation and training because it is not like teaching in public schools, even if we are competent and determined (Nordé, 1977).

I tell people I come from the same background, but what I do not really talk about is the struggle I had with anger management, with drug addiction, and with poverty and surviving in a rough, poor neighborhood. Marginalized individuals know how to avoid attention. You have to survive the negative opinion of all the others who judge you when they see how you are dressed or listen to how you talk.

The experiences I had gave me an understanding of where I was now working, and an understanding of the women in custody. I just could not bring that survival instinct into my teaching. I understood that; I had worked very hard on anger management and substance abuse in my own life, and had succeeded in becoming a respected teacher and sensible, caring adult to my students. This would not be where I left it all just because I had to show authority to a student in custody . . . but how to approach it? I knew I had to rely on the theories I used to work in corrections, particularly the online article on humanistic learning theory in which Gandhi and Mukherji (2023) described, “Individuals function under needs that begin from those basic physiological needs of survival and culminate at self-actualization” (Gandhi & Mukherji, 2023, para 7). If I hoped to initiate any change at all, I needed to remember that the women were incarcerated and lived here in survival mode most of the time The next morning would be the test for me. Teachers had to arrive at least 10 minutes before class to set up our equipment; and while I did that, the students walked in and sat down, gabbing and laughing with each other. I ignored them for the most part because setting up required attention, but I listened to their

chatter. Finally, I was done with setup. Class could begin. I turned around to face the gathering women and pointed to my watch, tapping it as I told them, “Two minutes, women.” This was my signal to them that we were about to begin, when suddenly I spotted Iris near the back. She was trying to avoid looking at me as she kept leaning toward the nearby pillar, but I saw her glance at me.

This was it; it was time to act. At this moment, what I had learned about self-determination theory came into play. Vallerand (2000) described what psychologists, Ryan and Deci theorized--that self-motivation was intrinsic if it was to be more permanent than extrinsic motivation. They believed that self-determination is the outcome of three elements: (a) competence, (b) autonomy, and (c) relatedness. This simply means students need to feel they are in control of their own lives and make their own choices. Students need to feel that what they are learning relates to their own lives, that it is not just an empty concept they were forced to parrot (O’Hara, 2017).

I took a slow, deep breath, and prayed for the words to come to me that would help, not hurt, the situation. I walked over to her with a smile and asked her to move up to the front with me for a quick conversation, and she agreed. I could feel the women looking at us as we moved toward the front of my makeshift classroom, out of earshot for a bit of privacy. The walk up had given me the approach I was about to show Iris. I looked at her and asked her, “Are you okay? I’m not trying to pry, but yesterday was a bit different behavior for you and I wanted to make sure you were okay. Are you?” At this, Iris’s defiant look melted into one of surprise. I am fairly sure she was not expecting my words and did not know how to answer. She anticipated anger, especially because I am not that good at hiding how I feel and yesterday she had done her best to push my buttons. I had been told by several deputies that the women will try to get the teacher to

lose composure and say or do something for which they can get fired. The deputies in the module warn the teachers about this when we start working there.

Then it came. She started crying quietly at first, telling me about her court date, having her children taken away permanently, how much she missed them, and how she was sorry for what she did. I stopped her for just a moment and told her not to tell me the specifics of her case, then let her continue venting for another minute. She spoke for a minute or two, looking straight at me as she spoke, then started slowing down the pace of her talk. As she slowed down I nodded in agreement and understanding, realizing how hard this must be not just for me, but for the women who were learning new concepts with this type of pain and pressure on them. My perception of the incident mentally adjusted itself into one of comprehension and empathy (Werner, 1990).

Iris and I both looked at each other pensively, she waiting for my reaction, me looking at her with sadness for her pain. I told her I understood, that I am a mother, too, and I could not imagine being without my kids. I gave her a little leeway, thanked her for sharing such private thoughts and feelings, and then shifted it from her, to the classroom. I told her that, although I understood her pain and felt bad for her, I could not excuse her negativity and abuse because of where we were and what we were trying to accomplish. The words came to me simply by putting myself into her shoes and appealing to the person I understood was trying to establish her place in the jail. As I explained what I felt, she started nodding in agreement, and when I stopped explaining and looked at her expectantly, she smiled and put out her hand. Now, we are not supposed to touch the students, just like public school, but I knew if I did not shake this would be offensive to Iris and everyone was watching, so I took her outstretched hand and shook it, smiling back. I knew I was going to have to explain to the deputies at the end of the class, and I

did. They took it well and understood my reasoning because they worked in that dynamic environment.

The deputies who worked in the module were always respectful, pleasant, and definitely in charge. The environment's emotional state depended on which deputies were on duty at the time. The women knew which ones were a little more lax, which ones allowed certain behaviors and activities, and which ones did not tolerate anything. I learned that as well from my day-to-day visits to the module. I learned then that the deputies did not have to hear my talk with the student, in this case Iris, but they could still understand our body language and figure out what was going on. It was an interesting thought. I not only had to be careful of what I said, but also careful of what my body language implied. I made a mental note to myself.

Reflection: Students Challenge Teachers Often

How did I feel as a teacher? I felt frustration, knowing that many in this course would not get the support they needed when they went home. I felt anger because they deserved the chance to improve their lives but had no tools other than the 8-week session with me to make that change. I felt irritation because although I believed in the women, I had an issue with the probability of their finding a program to help them almost nonexistent. Teachers have a job to do. As Jurich et al. (2001) stated, "Traditional educators are expected to prepare their students for a productive life in society. So are correctional educators" (p. 26). I felt as if we could not always do that because of the needs the incarcerated students had that were not addressed.

This incident made me realize that advocating for the students was going to be part of my job, more than when I taught at public school. Iris, not her real name, had a conversation during this time and she shared her feelings with me, which I went home and wrote in poetry to her.

This was a method I used to interest them in writing their feelings and stories down. This was the poem:

On The Outside

Outside I'm just a color

A nobody who can't do nothin'

No dreams, no plans, no money

Just work and survive . . . sometimes.

Inside I'm just a number

No name, no rights, no future

Just walk like you're told, sleep on hold,

Make small talk to pass the time

Outside I'm lookin' for somethin'

Don't know what, don't know why

Don't even care . . . it's always the same

Rules are made, rules are broke—cheatin' sometimes works

Beginning tomorrow I'm livin' outside

I'm doin' it right this time

Don't matter what anyone says

Until . . . I'm back on the inside . . .

I took it back to her and she cried when she read it. She paid me an incredible compliment when she said that I had written exactly how she felt. Sharing her feelings with me gave me the insight I needed to understand that the incarcerated women had needs far different than public school students. Emotions seemed to be raw most days, and it was difficult

remaining calm when the tension was high in the modules. I learned to be calm and not take anything personally. This was something I had learned as a first-time public school teacher, but it was far more important in the correctional environment. If I remained calm, used a soft voice, and listened to the women, I could be useful both as a teacher and as an advocate for the student–inmates.

Observing Oppressiveness in Someone Who Was Supposed to Help

Just as in public schools where teachers are asked—expected—to participate in nonteaching activities related to students, the same is true in correctional education. In the special yard where I first taught inmates, I was asked to stand in the hallways when the student–inmates were escorted into their lunch area. In the women's jail, I was asked to escort one of the program leaders to her class to learn her routine so I could substitute teach it on days that my own course was in lockdown. I thought it was a great idea because I often got bored in the education office and spent my time cleaning (e.g., files, coffee machines, cupboards, my classroom cart, curriculum). I found it boring not to teach and I liked keeping busy.

The facility did not have much classroom space so there were areas that were used for teaching that were not very comfortable. This is a long-standing issue in county jails—not having adequate facilities for education (Bosma, 1987). This particular program was using what can only be described as a large closet—no windows, only one entrance/exit, and very plain. It was in the lower part of the facility which meant that it was colder there.

I was asked to shadow an instructor for a specialized program that was promoted by the facility on their website. The program was considered quite useful and successful by the jail, although several of the women who finished the program and were moved into general population complained about it. I watched the program instructor chat with the girls and noticed

that the women were a little tense. I stood quietly in the back on a chair and continued watching the instructor. After all, I was here to observe, not evaluate. It was a good lesson that the instructor was sharing with the women. I noticed she spoke a bit harshly with anyone who disagreed or, as she put it, challenged her opinion. She spoke to the person in an angry voice, slightly elevated and dismissive, and sharply ordered the student to return to her seat after having called her forward to share her thoughts with the class. The women looked down, quiet and strangely compliant. I sat back and kept watching as discreetly as possible.

My presence in that classroom was meant to be a contingency plan for the education department. I had no real role here other than as a "substitute" in training. As I watched the woman conduct the course and saw the continued microaggressions she imparted to her students, I felt a bit frustrated and bit my tongue. I kept a straight face and just smiled at the women when they looked over at me to see what my reaction would be when their teacher was doing something a bit concerning. I felt as if I was agreeing with the instructor's words when that happened, but I did not know what I should do at that point. I have made it a point never to contradict a teacher in his or her own classroom. I will, however, address it privately with the teacher when we are alone. At one point, the teacher asked me to cover the class lesson so she could go to her office. Although she was gone, I walked around the students at work and listened to their whispered comments to each other, and felt their side glances as they spoke. I feigned ignorance, kept smiling and walking, and when the alarm the teacher had set before she left went off, I thanked the women and dismissed them, then walked out and headed to the education offices.

My initial feeling of inadequacy did not stem from inexperienced teaching. It was from being a first-time corrections teacher and not yet understanding the hierarchy that existed among

the staff in the facility, both judicial and what the deputies called “civilians” who worked there. I am usually an up-front person who speaks openly and calmly after processing what is happening. Unfortunately, I had seen what happened when someone spoke up about an issue and the deputies disagreed. That person did not last long after reporting it to who I felt was the wrong person at the time. Although the EBI staff worked hard to be inclusive, not everyone in the correctional facility saw what teachers did as necessary or important. I had quickly learned to tread lightly as a guest in “their house.” Teaching in corrections is considered a privilege by the educators and as a nuisance to the rest of the nonsupervisory staff, at least from what I had seen while working there. Issues with the space needed for teaching have existed for decades, and along with inadequate facilities is the instability of the population, the focus on security first and last, inmate attitudes that, in my opinion, reflect that of the instructors provided by the facility (Bosma, 1987). Teachers in jails need to be aware of the particular needs of the inmate population they serve, or they will be ineffective.

I did not have to go back to the program after observing that first day, but the women’s unhappiness bothered me. I am a firm believer in the law’s necessity to secure inmates but I am equally a believer in giving every human being the dignity due them regardless of their circumstances. The issue here is that it is frowned on by educational staff to interfere with any program or course other than our own; however, I did not believe turning away from someone’s treatment of inmates would benefit the facility or our reputations as educators. I felt we are the role models, and ignoring negative behavior by a teacher did not help our goals of reintegrating inmates into society. The dehumanizing behavior I witnessed was one indicator of the need for teacher preparation for working in corrections (Eggleston, 1991).

Well, imagine you want to change your life. Maybe you have made wrong choices, maybe you have never had the right influences or knowledge about consequences to help you make informed and positive decisions. You start a personal change program but all you hear is how worthless you are, how your efforts are in vain because you will never be able to reach them. As a vocational education teacher, I frequently point out to students that self-talk is just as harmful to self-esteem as is believing the negative comments from others. How do you change that? Do you keep believing the people that, in your opinion, know more than you do? The teachers, administrators, and in this case the deputies, are the biggest influences in your life while you are incarcerated. They have a responsibility to negate that perspective of worthlessness and of insecurity and negative self-esteem through positive encounters and truthfulness. Inmate–students are told from the moment they get up until they wrap up their day that they are "property" of the judicial system and must adhere to any and all correctional staff, including the civilians—teachers, volunteers, administrators—and ignoring them will result in consequences.

The women are often resentful when they first begin classes, but with kind and fair treatment they learn to trust and value the teachers. This is a must for educators because students will not learn if they do not feel the teacher is connected to them. Public education teachers may take a couple of weeks to introduce themselves to students and outline their course in terms the students can relate to and understand, but educators in corrections do not have that extra time to connect with students, so it is important not to disrupt the relationship between teacher and student.

Having a conversation with EBI about another teacher's pedagogy is a bit unnerving because I know I am interfering in a sense. I did not know how to approach this with EBI, so I had a conversation with a fellow teacher. He was already working in the facility before I was

there and I thought he would be able to answer my questions. I explained what I had seen and he very kindly asked me if it was not my own feelings that were triggered by something the teacher said. I thought about it carefully then answered. No, I did not believe it was my feelings being triggered at all. I was just able to recognize microaggressions because of my personal experiences. He looked at me pensively as my answer reverberated in my head—definitely triggered, I just did not realize it. My coworker assured me just because I had this bias it did not mean that the situation was any less important to report. He just wanted me to realize I had invested my feelings in the situation.

I reflected on our conversation carefully, then went once more into the EBI offices. I was a steady visitor there, so everyone just waved and continued doing their business. I did not see our senior deputy but I found her next in command (at least, this was my impression) and relayed my thoughts to her. This deputy was always so self-assured, smiling through anything, and pragmatic in her solutions to incidents or behaviors, giving fair treatment and explaining in clear terms what her decisions were. I saw her smile get a bit smaller, but it never left her face. As usual, I was assured that the situation would be handled and not to worry about it, so I left.

Did anything get resolved? I do not know. Sometimes I would learn about the resulting outcomes, sometimes I would not. The program in question continued for 6 more months, then it was replaced with another program. It is hard to determine if the women had finally complained, or if the contract ran out, or they just found a better program for the women. I did not feel good about reporting the behavior, but I know I could not be at peace knowing I let someone belittle or mistreat another human being.

Reflection: Observing Oppressiveness in Someone Who Was Supposed to Help

For the second time in my short correctional education career, I had to report something. I was not proud of it. I did not regret it, but I felt very uncomfortable and realized it was my childhood rearing its ugly head. This feeling quickly dissipated when I thought about the women who I had seen that day. It served to make me feel peaceful that I had done something to help them, at least a little. I was slowly getting over the discomfort of being a mandated reporter. The mandated reporter training we received as teachers in the facility is not different from the training for public schools. Even now, conducting the study, I am cautious not to ignore the anonymity these women must have and respect their privacy. I was very open and honest with the women each time I conducted an orientation. They knew I was committed to their safety and security because I explained the details of my position as a mandated reporter. This assignment made me realize the value of being able to share concerns with other adults. I wrote a poem once in 1996 that was published in M.E.C.H.A. that describes the emotions I felt then, and during this episode, because those feelings of being insignificant follow me and I fight them all the time, I shared it with the students:

I saw myself
A part of the world
powerful with the strength
that the numbers of humankind
bestowed on me
one of many
precious children
The World saw me

A struggling entity

one of those that

must be put in its proper

place, nudged, chipped at,

until . . . I snuggly fit

where I am allowed. (GRM, 1991)

Reflection: Observing Oppressiveness in Someone Who Was Supposed to Help

Many years later, I could still understand feelings of being insignificant. During my first year as a PhD student, I experienced constant self-doubt. I admitted to my counselor that I felt so overwhelmed by the expertise and experiences my cohort friends brought into the program. I learned this feeling is known as "imposter syndrome" and is common in higher education students. The counselor advised me that I brought much into the program and that I was unique in my field and in my perspective. I shared this poem with the women in the module later that week and told them of my feelings of inadequacy and how, with all the experience and knowledge I have, I could still feel this way. My students understood very well what I felt and this opened up a discussion that stays with me even today. Shadowing an instructor who did not treat the women with respect, likely intensifying their feelings of insignificance, was difficult and I was uncomfortable. I knew I would report this, but I could not let the women know what I was feeling. Security was always the priority and relaying my intention to them would, in their eyes, make me their ally but might initiate liberties I would not give them. I kept my thoughts to myself.

What made it difficult was watching the looks on the women's faces when they were listening to the lecturer. Their faces held looks of sadness, frustration, and hopelessness. I

understood those feelings were not fleeting, but lived in them while they were held in the facility. I knew from experience that it could take years to let go of the emotional baggage that come with oppression. I used the poem as a way to release some of it, and used it to show the women they were not alone. We all feel alone and unimportant at times. We just had to learn to let go of the negativity our environments engendered. I carry this poem taped to my small notebook as a reminder of what I had to overcome and what the women who lived in this difficult environment felt. The imposter syndrome existed in them, as well.

The Staff Meeting

Teachers are told during the orientation that touching is completely out of the question. We all understood this. At one point, my supervisor asked if I would be comfortable working in the mental health modules and implementing the educational programs there. This would be the first time the facility would offer education in those modules and my supervisor knew I had been the general education teacher for the special needs students. I have always enjoyed working with disabled students so I jumped at the opportunity. I spent the first week recruiting students, explaining the goals of the courses, orienting them to the basic classroom rules and how the deputies would moderate the course, and lastly, who I was and what my experiences were. They asked questions about nearly everything I mentioned, including personal details that I did not answer. Incoming new teachers are told during orientation that personal details should not be shared. I understood this and was happy to comply. The students did not know my real name until my director accidentally called me by it during an observation. It spread through the inmate express and I was never known by anything but my name.

By the time the week was up, I had the required 30 students and a waiting list of about 20 more. This list would only be kept during the term of the course; I used the names that did not

make it in during this round to start the next course, which I explained to them. I tried to be as fair as humanly possible, and honest no matter what the circumstances. Students cannot trust if a teacher does not act trustworthy. Much of what I was using in the facility to guide my pedagogy came from the experiences I had had teaching in public school. When I researched correctional education, I struggled to find current literature. I found a few pieces that were decades old but still made sense. Gehring and Wright (2003) mentioned this lack of literature as lost, stating, "Since the literature on this subject [corrections] was quickly removed from general circulation, we call it 'the hidden heritage of correctional education'" (Gehring & Wright, 2003, p. 5).

I had good news to report at our first staff meeting of the term, 2 weeks after I started in the mental health module. The staff meeting was at one of the other facilities where we taught and I enjoyed hanging out with my peers when we gathered. I suppose teachers are like anyone else: we relax, we get silly, and we laugh. This was a great opportunity to learn new ways to work with our students so I listened intently when our lecturers, usually our administrators or the sheriff's department staff, spoke to us. The meeting is a lecture without participation, but still informative. Today was particularly interesting. The man from the sheriff's department was talking about the inmates and reiterating that we were not to touch the students and should not have one-to-one conversations. As he spoke, my face felt hot and I became a bit restless with his words. My coworker, who knew me well, giggled softly and knew what I was going to do. I could not help it. My hand shot up and I wiggled my fingers until the speaker noticed me. He stopped talking and gestured at me to speak, so I did.

My eyes never left the lecturer's as I asked him what I was supposed to do when one of my students, a young woman with diagnosed mental issues and who was basically harmless, frequently walked up behind me and hugged me. He shook his head and said move away or push

her away. That did not work for me and I told him so, and why. I pushed on, saying, “How can I push her away? She has mental issues that the facility is working with to help her remain out of jail. She is not combative, disruptive, or in any way confrontational. All she does is catch me off-guard and hug me from behind. How am I supposed to further traumatize her and reject her? Because that’s how she’s going to perceive my action—she will feel rejected. Then what happens to my credibility as a caring teacher? How will my other students look at my action?” I peppered him with these questions rapidly, trying to get it all in. He looked at me with annoyance, putting up his hand toward me with a “stop” gesture. I shut up, waiting. He glanced at me first and suggested that I talk to him further after the meeting, then continued admonishing us on the potential dangers to ourselves and our positions as teachers in corrections if we did not follow these directions.

My friend was smirking and she jiggled my arm, and she asked, “Did that answer your question?” She laughed. No, it did not. I was not angry, just determined to find the answer. The lecturer did not wait for me after the meeting, which I had a feeling would happen because he did not look too happy with me when we spoke. No matter. I had others I could turn to and rely on to reach out to. These connections are crucial to successfully teaching in corrections. My administrators frowned on the teachers turning to the supervising department in the facility, but they were the ones closest to us physically and they had the same goals—to help the women succeed and never return.

The next morning, I walked into the education office and found our lead teacher and my mentor already loading up his cart. He had been present at the meeting so I did not have to explain much to him. Because he was also aware of my past and had a perspective of teaching in corrections I admired, I asked him if I should do what the lecturer suggested and push the young

woman away. He asked if I felt it was sexual in nature—I said no—and he said then there is no problem. He mentioned that both EBI and the module deputies were always watching and if they had not said anything to me, I had nothing to worry about. He did suggest, however, that I talk to both and find out if I needed to take further precautions.

Module deputy attitudes vary. Many of the younger deputies are friendlier, but still watchful. The facility shifts deputies often so that no relationships develop among inmates and staff. Teachers are moved from module to module periodically, as well. These changes conflict with the teacher–student relationship that is needed to establish trust and commitment to the student's learning. Some are doubtful of the usefulness of education for inmates and will make remarks much like the correctional officer who declared, "We ain't correctin' nothing" (Tracy, 2004, p. 510). Disparaging comments are not limited to the older deputies. A few of the younger ones repeat what their peers say, but most younger deputies tend to be more supportive of the educational staff.

I made my way into the EBI office and looked for the people to whom I usually spoke. I enjoyed going into the bustling, always hectic office because the staff was always smiling and joking, even in a crisis. Their unperturbed actions and attitudes were comforting in this volatile environment. I found our senior deputy talking to one of her staff members. She smiled at me, finished her conversation, then turned to me. "What can I do for you, Mrs. Muñoz?," she asked me patiently. I tend to get nervous talking to others and clam up a bit, but Senior, which is what we all called her, never made me feel this way. I explained, described, and asked what I could do in this particular situation. Senior listened carefully, asked me a couple of questions, and then smiled at me as I stopped talking and stood there watching her. She said, "I don't see a problem." I have never met anyone who can say so much with so few words. I smiled and excused myself

now that I had my answer. I would not even ask the deputies because Senior supervised the programs through them. If they had complained, she would have told me. I was safe from censure, for now at least. I smiled widely as I walked back to the office, relieved that another crisis, even though it was emotional, was again averted.

Reflection: The Staff Meeting

This incident gave me the incentive to change the perspectives of the correctional staff in the mental health module I was teaching. I carefully explained what I was doing with each lesson and what the outcome could be. The deputies understood what I was doing and in time encouraged the women to engage in the lessons. They slowly stopped telling the women they were wasting their time and refrained from engaging in negative talk, which I acknowledged and thanked them frequently for this change. Working with women in the mental health modules reawakened the passion for advocating for disabled students. This passion began with my high school students and has continued. Women were not able to state their issues in corrections. They were ignored or mistreated many times. I knew our department respected them and wanted them in the classes, which is why they opened up the module and placed me in there. I made it a point to meet with the psychologists and told them that if they contacted our department, our senior deputy would make sure their clients are enrolled. They were never told their patients had priority but our supervising department told us they did, so I shared that information. That is what I meant about not having a voice. They were silenced. When the women needed support, I offered it without reservation. I am cynical enough to know when to hold back, but I am open-minded enough to understand when someone needs a gentle push forward mentally to get where they need to be. This module opened my heart and mind to the women there who trusted me. It was difficult to leave them once the special education teachers that replaced me, 2 years after I

started advocating, were finally hired. I knew they needed more than I could give them as an instructor. Those two teachers kept me informed of the progress they were making and how they created and implemented curriculum that benefitted the women. Just as they had in my high school classes, the women worked hard to not only learn, but to encourage each other and help their peers succeed.

When a Student Does Not Respect or Empathize With Others.

When I first started working at the women's facility, I was quite pleased at the measures EBI took to ensure teachers' safety. The women who enrolled in the courses had to meet prerequisites regarding behavior, participation, and attendance. There were consequences for students who did not attend, did not participate, and misbehaved toward staff and students. This was reassuring to me because it meant the women had actively worked to achieve enrollment. Their incentive to succeed in the class was 1 week removed from their sentences when they finished the course and a certificate of completion demonstrating competency in the topic studied. The program was quite controlled and maintained the security of both the facility and the staff. Although I understood the need for a controlled environment to maintain security, on my first day, it took everything in me to not go running out of the building, mentally screaming, when the heavy, wide metal doors with their thick, bulletproof glass shut behind me. My own traumatic upbringing prompted this negative emotion and I imagine the incarcerated women felt it too.

Not long after I started working in the facility, the education policies were revised to ensure a more inclusionary environment. The vetting of students discontinued and there were no more requirements stipulated when enrolling. Although this opened up the courses to more women, the educational environment tended to fluctuate because of the varying mindsets of the

women in the class. This changing atmosphere was disturbing and occasionally volatile. As a teacher, I missed the vetting simply because I disliked telling students they had to keep up with the others and submit all assignments, particularly when approximately 15%–25% of every class was not literate. When I realized this, I began teaching literacy. Most of the students were willing to forgo the certificate and the week off in exchange for the literacy lessons I provided, so it worked out most of the time.

We had to conduct a supply audit daily. Unlike in a public-school setting, too much paper is considered contraband; so, we teachers were limited by the deputies as to how much paper (materials included) we could provide the women. Every sheet of paper we brought into the module had to be counted when we loaded up our supplies, then recounted when we left the module and were in the educators' office. I had many conversations during the first few months after arriving with several deputies, line staff, and other teachers about how I should approach the women and if there were any suggestions that would help me maintain order. The suggestions ranged from, "Just treat them like any student in public school" to "Don't expect anything from them because they're criminals and not worth the effort." This is just paraphrasing the comments that originally were much harsher and dehumanizing. The most important suggestions were the following:

- Do not let them act as if you're their friend—it creates the image of special favor.
- Do not do any favors or give special treatment to anyone—it gives them leverage for trying to "persuade" you to break rules for them.
- Avoid being alone with anyone—make sure there is always another adult in the room, preferably a deputy.

- Do not show emotions—some will see this as weakness and try to exploit you through manipulation.
- Make sure you clear everything through EBI—it keeps you safe as an instructor.

These suggestions were specific and I took them to heart, modeling them. When a student asked for special treatment, or tried any of the things I had been advised against, the first thing out of my mouth was "Let me ask EBI" and they quickly said never mind. Those who persisted in trying to wheedle things out of me laughed when I told them, "If it didn't work for my kids, it's not going to work for you!" A little humor always lightened the situations.

Reflection: When a Student Does Not Respect or Empathize With Others

One of the lessons I learned from interacting with incarcerated students is their social development was not at the same level their age would suggest. Often they were like regular school children in adult bodies. Their tactics were similar to those my high school students used to get out of their work of to bypass accountability when they did something wrong. Just as in public schools, the teachers in correctional education had to be parental in dealing with children who had little to no parental support at home, whether it was because the parents had to work or because there was only one there. The women were child-like at times, then extremely intelligent when they planned to circumvent or ignore rules in class or the module. It was difficult to be angry or frustrated with them for long because they were used to being in survival mode. It was where they felt comfortable and how they managed things they did not understand. Many of the women took several classes with me and I learned they wanted to mature and be the adults we encouraged them to be, but they would get angry and revert to those same survival tactics they knew. Critical thinking was not missing; it was just going in the wrong direction at times. We

worked on getting them to the point where they could reason for themselves and make changes they could live with comfortably.

When I got to the module, the deputy mentioned I had a new student. I smiled and said fine, then walked over to the pillar and got my equipment ready for the day. Whenever a new student entered the class, we greeted her and the standard question we asked was "What do you expect to get out of this course?" The purpose of the question was to start the students thinking about goals and to give them an opportunity to think of what they could gain in the course or what they ultimately want to achieve. It also helped the other women share ideas and experiences with each other. I acted as a facilitator in class, guiding the conversations, helping the women keep their focus, and establishing boundaries they all were required to uphold. I believed giving responsibilities to the women for maintaining their classroom functioning smoothly engaged them physically and emotionally, and they held each other accountable for creating an educational environment in which they could work comfortably. An article from Wichita State University (n.d.) suggested, "Planning a course of action" (para.10) would let the women take control and allowed them to imagine themselves in different roles than they had previously. We were in the third week of the class and the women in it had worked hard to establish their boundaries and discuss what they wanted as their classroom norms. They worked as a group and were quite pleased they all had input in the rules of the class. Transitional changes were taking place incrementally, but progress was steady.

I did not see anyone new sitting in the seats when I started the class. We were located in what is commonly referred to as the mental health module, which meant the women were diagnosed with mental illness and the facility was working with them and the clinical staff. About 20 minutes into the class time, a young woman sauntered in smiling at me and sat down. I

smiled back, stopped the lecture, and asked her how I could help her. She replied that she was a new student. I tend to set the tone of the class in the beginning to establish boundaries. I asked her why she was late to class. She mumbled something, shrugged her shoulders, and kept smiling at me. I knew better than to tease her or help her make excuses. I had once asked a new student why she was late and when she just stared at me, I asked if she had missed her bus to school. That did it. For the next 2 minutes, she was bombarded with inane excuses from her peers. I quickly settled that group down, apologized to the student, and explained my slightly warped sense of humor to her, making her laugh and she accepted my apology. I never made that mistake again. So, although my new student stared at me, I gently explained that tardiness was not allowed. We read the rules together as a group and she accepted them and promised not to break the tardiness rule again—she made it a point to mention that one.

Over the next 2 weeks, I observed the new student's behavior. It was hard to miss. Her particular personality was one of effervescence, bubbly and quite vocal whenever her opinion was asked for—or not at all, depending on her mood. Many of the other women had been in previous courses with me and knew my own preferences in class, and they were the ones who guided and supported the newcomers. We spent 1 day at the beginning of each orientation week talking about mandatory rules from EBI and how they wanted to proceed with consequences. It worked quite well; however, this time the women came to me about 2 weeks later and complained about the new student. There had been a very trivial incident during class the day before. One student, I will call her Clara, who was quite timid in sharing her feelings in class, had spoken up and shared her opinion. The new student, I will call her Anna, had scoffed at Clara's statement and made a ridiculous and inappropriate comment in an effort to mock the

young woman. I did not hesitate and shut down that conversation quickly. It was still fresh in my mind when the women approached me.

One of the women, I will call them S1 and S2, asked me. “Miss, you know what happened yesterday?” “Mmm . . . are you talking about Anna being rude to Clara?,” I asked. I watched them glance at each other silently. “Yeah,” S2 replied. “What about it?,” I asked. “Well, Anna got in Clara’s face after class. Tol’ her all kinds a sh**!,” S1 declared animatedly.

S1 proceeded to recount the interchange between Anna and Clara. It was not pretty. I let her go on for a minute before I interrupted them both and asked them to go sit down so we could begin class. I had to process everything before I replied to them later when they helped me pack my supplies and load my cart. Anna walked in without her usual effervescent demeanor. She watched me fervently, unusual for her social butterfly behavior during class most of the time. I felt that she was trying to gauge my feelings about what she may have guessed I already knew. Teachers in corrections are often thrown into roles we are not trained for, so we need to be cautious not to diagnose or judge.

I knew she had verbally abused Clara, and I knew Clara had mental illnesses and the deputies had been working closely with her psychiatrist to help her. I did not know the confrontation had caused Clara to self-harm. If I had known, I do not know if I could have maintained such a calm expression all day, or allowed Anna to remain in class because it was causing tension among the other women. I did everything I could not to show her any type of emotion, good or bad, and just kept the class moving forward. During the midmorning break when I went to give the deputies the attendance, one of them explained the circumstances to me. I told them I knew (I believed in transparency) and the deputy asked me how I was going to address it.

"Address what?" I asked. I was confused. I thought I was not supposed to address anything that did not happen in my class and told them so. "It started in your class," the deputy said, matter-of-factly. "But the confrontation happened after," I said. I did not want to overstep my boundaries with the deputies, but I also did not want to take ownership of what happened outside of my classroom.

The deputy said, "You need to say something about it. Anything. Don't just act like nothing happened." The deputy watched my face go through different arguments, then I sighed, and relented.

I said, "Okay. I'll talk to them about it right now." I walked briskly back to the front of my makeshift classroom, motioning to the women to get started with the remaining tasks we had discussed that morning. We were about 15 minutes into the class when I glanced at the deputies. One of them had her arms folded in front of her and the other deputy was writing something. I knew the deputy was waiting for me to speak so I asked the women to listen.

I said, "Women, I need your attention." They looked up from their work and watched me. I told them I had been informed by the deputies (who were watching) that there had been an incident after the initial one in class. Without naming anyone specifically, I talked about how the classroom needed to be a safe enough place for all students to share ideas and feel free to talk to each other without censure or negative criticism. I explained that we are the ones who drive the environment we work in and that it only takes one person to diminish or destroy the tone of the classroom. They listened seriously and we finished with a discussion on consequences that they developed themselves, one of which was that the person who committed the behavior(s) would be dismissed from the classroom by the deputies. The deputies, who listened to everything, nodded agreement without even looking at us.

Anna came up to me at the end of the class that day. Her questions gave me understanding that, although she was sincerely sorry for what happened to Clara, she did not feel responsible. In a strange way, she wanted to offer her support for the consequences we had outlined and approved. She truly did not believe they applied to her, and this caused me concern; however, with a plan now in place, I did not disagree with her or argue with her perception. It was left for the deputies to decide, and not long after they took Anna out of the class.

Reflection: When a Student Does Not Respect or Empathize With Others

This incident affected me greatly. I was a bit paranoid about what I could say and second-guessed myself the first few weeks after Anna was taken out of class. Speaking the truth to my students does not mean I tell them everything, but I do have to be truthful. For their protection and mine, I have to rely on the deputies to keep us safe. Security was drilled into my head from the first day; however, being timid in my approach brought more harm than good. I had to regain my confidence in serving this population without letting the women dismiss their accountability. This approach would serve them when they were released and it would encourage them to think of others. Anna was not the first student to deny her part in the resulting incident, but I would work on making it the last time.

The Lost ID.

Coming to work as a corrections teacher requires a great deal of thought. It is not your average 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. job. If your shift starts at 8 a.m. then you need to arrive at least a half hour early to check in, have the double-steel doors opened up for you, walk to the education office, and gather your 50- to 75-pound metal equipment cart, then slow walk to your classroom. This classroom could be either a regular classroom, or it could be the dayroom, or the recreation room. To do this requires an identification card provided by the facility. This ID is the entry into

the facility, and allows the wearer to walk freely throughout the buildings. It is a requirement to wear it at all times and losing it is considered a safety infraction that will shut the whole facility down (lock down).

I am a bit of an insomniac, so I tend to get to work pretty early. Added to that, I hate being rushed so I opt to get where I need to be extra early to prepare for the day, particularly because two schools shared all the office equipment and computers in the education office. As I walked into the office, I did my routine of making coffee, turning machines on, and getting my supply and equipment cart ready. The last thing I would do is make my copies because the copier was a bit old and temperamental and took a while to warm up properly. I was finishing stocking my cart in the long hallway adjacent to the education office and about to head in to make the copies as everyone began arriving. I went into the main education office and greeted everyone as I inched my way to the copier.

The teachers' office was a bustling, lively place and it was fun in the mornings as jokes, information, questions, answers, and ideas flowed freely. I tend to be a bit quiet but that suited everyone because I loved listening to them and they knew it. We were the vocational education teachers and the other school was the academic but you could not really tell the difference between staff members because we helped each other. It was a great environment for a correctional facility. While everyone was getting ready, Senior walked in, smiling and greeting everyone, and came to me. She said, "Grace, the module just called. They have something happening and asked that you stay here until it's cleared up." I smiled and nodded to her. This was common. At least class was not canceled. I kept making my copies as everyone dwindled out of the office. Our school's unofficial lead teacher remained, having had his class canceled for the morning. We were chatting as we worked, intent on our tasks, when he asked me where my

badge was. I said, “My badge?” I glanced down and sure enough, there was an empty space where I had pinned my badge that morning. I shook my head, exasperated. The badge had been given to me on a clip that I used to pin it to my chest daily, but it was always falling off. The good thing was I usually noticed it. Not today.

I backtracked my steps to look for the badge, going out into the hallway, checking inside the EBI office next door, going back into the teachers’ office and checking the desk where I had worked earlier that morning. Nothing. I did it again, still nothing. I started getting nervous. Would I get fired? Punished? Jailed?? I shook my head to clear the nonsense out and kept looking. By the third time, I had already checked every room and space in the office, hallway, bathroom, and even though I had not gone in there, the cafeteria. I decided to enlist Mr. C’s help. I approached him and he smiled as he glanced at me, but the smile disappeared quickly. He said, “What’s wrong, Grace?” He was quick to notice my nervousness.

I said, “I can’t find my badge, Mr. C!” I swallowed, feeling a bit afraid.

He said, “Where did you look?” He nodded as I told him where I had looked and how many times I had checked and rechecked. He said, “Let’s look again.” He got up and escorted me through every place I had looked, repeating the process just as I had. Almost an hour had gone by and still nothing. He said, “We’re going to have to report it at the sallyport.” I looked at him, ready to cry. This was not good. He said, “Come on. Don’t worry, I’ll go with you.” He walked toward the main entrance with me, assuring me that things would be okay. Some of the other teachers, knowing what was about to happen, made a quick exit out of the building as we approached.

Mr. C reported the loss with me standing there looking guilty. Immediately the deputy placed a call and the announcement was made—lockdown. All modules were to return the

inmates to their cells, no movement was allowed, and the special unit that oversaw these types of events was brought in. Mr. C and I returned to the teachers' office to wait for further instructions. During this time, the facility was undergoing a change in security measures. All entrances to the facility were stopped, the operations were suspended pending the outcome. A special task force was dispatched to investigate. One of the lieutenants walked into the teachers' office and asked who was the teacher who lost the ID. I raised my hand and he walked directly in front of me, towering over me with a serious face. I got up to face him, nervous and slightly shaky. He asked me several questions, interrogating me and, though he never said it explicitly, he made me feel as if I had deliberately lost the ID. His voice was strong and his questions short and to the point. After a few minutes, he dismissed me with a small wave of his hand as he gave the others who followed him orders. I sat down, a little weepy and still shaky. This was serious.

I did not know what to do, and the tension in the office was high, so I went and tried to regroup in the bathroom by the office. I could hear everyone coming in and out of the office and I knew it was just the deputies looking around so I ignored it. After a few long minutes, I threw cold water on my face, dried it, and walked back to the office in time to see Mr. C smiling widely at me, holding my badge toward me. I gasped and rushed over to him.

I asked, "Where did you find it?" I was weepy again, but this time with relief.

He said, "Well, the only place we didn't look was under the printer. You told me that you were printing early in the morning so I moved the whole machine. It was far back, too hard to see without moving the machine. I think it fell and you probably kicked it under there without realizing it." He was just as happy as I was. I patted his arm and asked him what I should do now. Mr. C had already called the main office by the sallyport (the main door) and reported

finding it. All was well. The lockdown took about an hour to release everyone from the cells because they had to count everyone. Crisis over, and the day went on.

As I think about the events of the day, I realized that I felt just a touch of what the women in custody feel. There was the instant fear when I realized the problem, whether it was my fault or accidental, it did not matter. Then there was the apprehension while searching for the lost ID. I felt fear again at being confronted by the irate lieutenant as he called out orders. It was an irrational fear because he was not directly confronting me or even asking accusatory questions. It was just the fear of my own experiences as a young person growing up in the neighborhood, with an aversion to law enforcement. I understood that losing my ID was considered a potential breach of security; it was that serious. The corrections staff is careful because of the diverse roles they each play at any given moment. The most important role is keeping the inmates secure. This facility housed approximately 2000. With so many inmates, the potential for attempted escapes required the lost ID to be taken very seriously. Tracy (2004) stated, “Understanding the work of correctional officers is especially pertinent given America’s ever increasing fondness for addressing social problems . . . through imprisonment” (p. 510). I understood security was paramount in an environment where the population grew constantly and the potential for dangerous incidents grew; however, as an instructor I felt the judicial system was attempting to educate because it was the law, not because they believed in the rehabilitation effort. This incident was reflective of the need for a gentler approach in detention facilities. The nervousness and fear I felt was as real as that felt by my students when they were arrested and detained.

Reflection: The Lost ID

Once I was over the shock at precipitating this incident accidently, I reflected on the event and appreciated the deputies’ precautions with security and safety. Tracy (2004) went on to

relay the image of the corrections officer as “hardened, cynical, stressed out, caustic, ritualistic, and alienated” (p. 511), but I did not see it that way. The lieutenant was calm, a bit intimidating, but he was, in retrospect, much kinder than I could have imagined in such a circumstance. From that moment on, I was extremely cautious and alert. I removed my ID from the clip and hung it from my neck where I could see it easily. I was not losing it again.

I reflected on this incident for many months after. I was trying to understand the underlying fear I felt when the officers were investigating what happened. I needed to understand why I felt such trepidation when I was questioned, not interrogated, by the officers. Fear is not a good way to operate, particularly in a correctional facility. I do not believe I showed that fear, but I knew it was there and it bothered me. Finally, I realized the fear was not for the treatment I was receiving. It was for the fear of being thought inferior because of my mistake. I worked hard to live a better life and grow as a person by thinking reflexively and responding, not reacting, to emotional moments. Not only did this bother me for myself, but how could I teach students to let go of their pasts and move forward, confidently and with strength, when I could not do it myself? I felt the people looking at me would think I was inadequate to teach in the facility. I realized it was irrational and foolish to think this way. My students lived with these feelings every day. From that day forward, I encouraged them to learn to let go of those feelings of inadequacy, of inferiority, and of fear. I knew instinctively not to share my story with them but I used the experience to teach them self-sufficiency and determination as often as I could. This incident served to keep me grounded on who I was in my past and how much I wanted others to have the same kind of personal growth in their own lives.

I spoke to the deputies and my administrators without discussing the incident and they reassured me I was not the only one it ever happened to. I felt validated by their kindness, and

confident with my students again. Teaching in a detention center heightened my emotions, but once I distanced myself from the moment, I was able to dismiss the negative feelings the memory evoked.

Learning the Rules With the Women Who Lived Them

Students and teachers had to learn the rules to work together and collaborate with EBI. This may sound strange, but the school I worked for had specific student rules that did not always coalesce with those of the facility. The school rules were focused primarily on student achievement, although the facility rules were all about security. I stared at my director trying not to show my irritation. I am a "by the book" instructor most of the time, but I need to understand the purpose and context of each thing I teach or do. I did not understand this. I had just asked my director if I could use the facility's set of rules as a guide for the class's rules so that I could avoid confusing the students. As it was right now, I had to go over the school's classroom rules, which sounded a bit trite because they were designed for a regular public school and these women were in custody, and then go over the facility's rules so that security could be maintained. It took quite some time to go over the two sets of rules because we discussed each one and why it was necessary. It was important for the women to participate in the rule-making dialogue (Gandhi & Mukherji, 2023).

Students respond better if they understand why they are asked to follow specific rules. It makes them willing participants in class. The request I had just made originated with one of the women in class who lamented "the waste of time" trying to learn so many rules. I agreed. My director did not. I thought about this at length and remembered that my school did say the rules of the detention center superseded any of our school's rules. I had learned early on who ran

things in the walls of this facility and I also learned to work with them for the good of our students.

I walked into the EBI office looking for our senior deputy. I found her at her desk, busy talking on the phone so I sat down to wait. Thankfully, it did not take long. Senior looked at me with her usual smile, which never changed even if told her something I found disturbing or negative. She was consistent in her approach to anyone who worked with her—a positive outlook at all times and a great support system, which is crucial in this environment. I explained my problem to her, making sure to provide plenty of detail and description but as little bias as possible. Senior had a negative perspective of the school I worked for but she never took it out on any of the teachers, which made me respect her more. She was fun to work with, and she understood my somewhat serious self and knew how to get me to lighten up my classroom demeanor to engage the students on a more personal level. I appreciated that very much. Senior told me to come back after class and we would work on the rules together, so I left and continued with my day.

After class, I put away my equipment and went to see our senior deputy. I explained the issues with her and we talked about what we needed to maintain classroom management at a secure level, because we were in a jail. We spent the better part of an hour combining rules and reworking both lists by incorporating them into one short, 10 rule list. By the time we were done, it was excellent. All security issues were addressed and a brief explanation of the rule, the purpose for having it, and the consequence for breaking it were included. This is precisely what the women needed. I have always maintained that in any relationship there has to be understanding and cooperation for rules or restrictions to work. I typed up the list after asking Senior if I could add a line for the women to sign. I have found an agreement has more impact if

there is a signature attached because this indicates both parties are mutually consenting to adhere to those rules. The women responded in a positive way when they signed the document, indicating they understood their responsibilities as students in the class.

The next day, I took a fresh copy to my students. Instead of telling them this was the finished product, I told them we would edit the rules together and discuss why we needed each rule as a group, change or delete text as needed, and send the edited version to EBI with me at the end of the class. We took the document apart one rule at a time in small groups. I had prepared myself by creating scenarios the women could relate to and categorize into the rules that we had so far. For example, one rule was worded broadly as "we would respect each other at all times." The scenario included the women role modeling rude behaviors, then demonstrating positive actions to replace the rude behaviors. We were so engaged with the scenarios that the women were acting them out. It was entertaining and at times a bit raucous, but we got the job done in 3 hours. Interestingly enough, very little changed in the rules we started with, other than some minor word changes. The women were satisfied and willing to sign the edited document.

I took it back to senior in EBI and explained what I did. She laughed when I told her I had to create possible scenarios that would validate the need for each rule, so the women could understand the reason for the rule to begin with. She approved and waved me off, and I left satisfied that the document was ready. This activity allowed the women to feel proactive in the class decisions because they chose the consequences for the first infraction (e.g., warnings) and they were satisfied with the outcome. Living with the justice system's rules daily was confining and dehumanizing. To counter this, at least in a small way, the women's discussions of the rules, why they were needed, what benefits the rules encouraged, and how they would be implemented gave the women a sense of control, which many of them had complained they lacked at home.

During the following weeks, we discussed rules, and from those talks evolved discussions about boundaries and how to set them for themselves and others. This lesson was useful and encouraging for the women and they frequently discussed how rules were boundaries and how we could evolve emotionally from fearing and resenting rules to thinking of them as guidelines for accepted behaviors and change.

Reflection: Learning the Rules With the Women Who Lived Them

Although I enjoyed this particular event, it served to bolster my belief in the theories I now taught with in mind. The act of including the women and sharing control by encouraging their engagement and participation correlated directly with self-determination, transformational learning, and humanistic theories. I realized the theories worked for me when I was undergoing the transformation into a self-sufficient individual even though I did not even know what theories were then. When I began working in the facility and decided to return to school, I learned these theories and embraced them because they resonated with me and taught me to understand the students with whom I was working. The theories gave my pedagogy validity because I instinctively knew what I needed to do as a teacher, even if I did not know the theories then. I treated the women the way I wanted to be treated when I was a student. I wanted a voice, and for this reason I made sure to give the women the opportunity to share their voices in class just as the process for transformational learning suggested because as Fisher-Yoshida et al. (2009) stated:

> Transformative learning is presented as a process through which adults critically reflect on assumptions underlying their frames of reference and resulting beliefs, values, and perspectives; engage in a reflective rational dialogue about those assumptions; and, as a result, transform their as. (p. 4)

Sharing the rule-making process was one more step in the process of transformation that we needed to be joined together in a mutual goal. Their growth as individuals relied on the process, and in turn the iterative cycle changed me, as well.

No Hope for the Nonreaders

The number of women wanting to get into academic and vocational courses far exceeds the number of openings for each course. There are not enough teachers to handle the interest, particularly after the program prerequisites (e.g., no write-ups, good behavior, positive participation in all activities) were removed. The result was that the overflow from academic programs came to the vocational courses. My personal policy was that I would not turn away students as long as there were openings available. The problem was that some of the women who wanted to join my courses were illiterate. With only 8 weeks in each term, there would not be enough time to get their skills strong enough to do the reading and writing assignments required in each course. I let the women know I would allow them into the course but explained their dilemma. I told the women that I had no problem teaching them reading and writing but they would not be eligible to earn the 1 week off their sentence that I knew most wanted. I was quite surprised when most of them said they did not care, they just wanted to learn how to read and write. Oh, and some wanted to learn English as well. I did what was now becoming a habit—I took it to our senior deputy.

The EBI consisted of deputies who were voluntarily, I assumed, assigned to oversee the educators and keep them safe. They were in the department to maintain security before anything else. We understood that because just as the women needed to understand the purpose of the rules, we educators needed to know what and why they existed. Our senior deputy was in a discussion with another deputy. Both turned to me and smiled, motioning me to come in and talk

to them both. I respected and liked the other deputy so I was comfortable sharing the problem with her as well. We talked about the class size limit due to the teachers' contracts, the numbers of successful certificate recipients that indicated the program was working, and how the women who could not keep up in class would be detrimental to those numbers. Continued funding depended on the number of students who finished each course successfully, in both academic and vocational programs. Senior was always thorough when she explained things to me. I listened, asked questions, and decided to make a suggestion. I asked, "Could we have a group of women learning to read and write in the class but be noncredit? I could provide materials to help them learn to read, and I will explain that it is a strictly voluntary option for them without benefit of a certificate or week off of their sentence. Is that a viable option?" Both Senior and the deputy looked at me pensively for a few minutes. When they both smiled at me, I knew we had done it. We had a reading group. Time to prepare.

The reason I advocated for a literacy component was the women had approached me separately, and each had explained their embarrassment at not being able to read to their children, not being able to help them with homework, fill out a job application, write notes, or any of the seemingly mundane writing tasks we take for granted. The Latinx women who were serving their sentences and facing deportation shared their frustration at trying to earn a living without knowing English while having to be the breadwinner in their families. These women were hoping literacy would open doors for them on their quest for a better life. I agreed with them wholeheartedly. Literacy was always one of my goals for all my students. I continued this group until I was transferred to the men's facilities a few years later.

Reflection: No Hope for the Nonreaders

I was told as a child my father taught me to read at 3 years of age. I did not believe it, even though my father read two newspapers daily, one in Spanish and one in English, cover to cover until the day he died. When I was a teenager, I mentioned this story to my mother's aunt, a formidable woman I was trying to entertain, and she confirmed the story. She said I would sit at my father's side and he would brag about it, and if anyone questioned it, he would have me read a page of one of my mother's novellas. I was later told that was probably why I was able to learn English so easily. Because I had mastered the specifics of one language, the second was easy to follow. All I knew was that reading made my life so much better. I read so quickly that I could finish a Danielle Steel novel in one night. I wanted everyone to share in my joy of reading. I tutored countless friends, sisters, cousins, then nieces and nephews in reading strategies and they became better readers.

This was why, when I found that there were so many women who could not read at the facility and who were too shy to enroll in the academic courses, I decided to provide them with the opportunity. Many of the women who took the classes were able to keep up with the work even though they, too, needed help with reading and writing. Every teacher I worked with, whether they were from the academic or vocational courses, said the same thing. The academics worried their students were not going to function well outside because of their lack of skills, and the vocational teachers worried about getting the students prepared because of their lack of reading and writing proficiency. This was another basic issue that was a constant worry for the educators.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The research question, “What happens when a social justice-minded teacher works within women’s corrections?” began the introspective and analytic review of the time spent teaching in a women’s correctional facility as a novice corrections educator, although I was a seasoned public school teacher. The question developed because there has been very little literature about teaching in county jails, which is the type of facility this study focused on. Literature about prisons, while there are gaps, has been researched more often and has highlighted men’s prison experiences extensively compared to women’s detention centers. Therefore, the jail experience is almost completely overshadowed by the prison experience.

What happens in prisons differs from what happens in county jails in many ways, including in correctional education. In county jails, teachers are not hired by the facilities, often they are employees of contracted schools and supervised by the facility’s education department. In addition, the student inmates often do not get the education needed to be self-sufficient when they are released (Howle, 2019). Howle (2019) is the Legislative Analyst Office’s auditor; her report highlighted the needs of the men’s correctional prison programs with little about the needs of female inmates. Many of the available reports focused on men’s prisons, and on the men in county jails. Divestment in county facilities that house female inmates is demonstrated by their lack of presence in this auditor’s report. All the facilities listed in the report were state prisons and only one of the 10 is a women’s prison (Howle, 2019). The county needs to invest better services to women reentering society with support systems that will continue the work begun during their incarceration.

My Perspective on Teaching Incarcerated Women

This study asked questions about the teacher's perspective, observances, pedagogy, and classroom management, but none of this was relevant to educators if the students' personalities, input, emotions, or perspectives were not mentioned, analyzed, or discussed throughout this paper. The student is the foremost reason for the teacher's presence in the facility. Without these women, teachers would not be there, and this paper would not have been written. I was asked by one of the deputies if I thought teaching women was easier or harder than men. He was surprised then laughed when I said easier. When he asked me why I told him women are nurturers by nature. They also respond more to common sense and kindness. He asked me if I liked teaching them. Yes. Definitely. I know where I stand with them. I talk to them and simply by asking questions generate new critical thinking skills. They are more appreciative when they realize they have broken past the mental boundaries they set for themselves. Every teacher hopes to elicit new, creative, critical, and sensitive thinking for their students. This study is about how I handled the new experiences and how I adjusted to the correctional education environment without the training and guidance from the academic literature that proved inadequate. The training I should have had would have simplified and accelerated the eventual process I implemented to promote this outcome.

Theorizing the Approach to Student Inmates

My approach to my students relied on the theories I researched previously: self-determination theory, transformational learning theory, and humanist theory. The three theories encourage teachers to entrust students with their own accountability for learning by providing opportunities for growth and transformation. Humanistic theory states the theory "should help them in constructing their identity in which they combine social-psychological elements and

social-political elements" (Veugelers, 2011, p. 28). Simply stated, Veugelers theorizes that students need to think for themselves and reach their own sound decisions logically and emotionally in both home and social environments.

Humanistic theory shares some characteristics of self-determination theory. Denney and Daviso (2012) described:

> Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting based on these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives assume the role of successful adults. (Denney & Daviso, 2012, pp. 43–44)

The third theory I employed is transformational learning theory, which indicates:

> Transformation is more than 'knowing more' through time; when a learner is transformed by education they undergo a shift in perspective, and after that shift, they cannot go back to see the world the way they once did, at least in some small way. (Wichita State University, n.d., para. 13)

The theory's founder, Mezirow, developed this theory while educating adult learners and believed, "Transformational learning develops autonomous thinking" (Mezirow, 1997, p.2). These theories were the drivers for the education I delivered to my students in custody.

Answering the Research Questions

The research question was broad enough to illicit speculation about the learning process I underwent as a seasoned public school teacher new to correctional education yet specific enough to generate introspective data for the findings in this study. What happens in corrections when a

teacher, whether social justice minded or not, enters the facility to teach the first time is as complex as the women held in detention. There are so many variables in the human mind and the emotional development of any person that predicting an outcome is difficult at best. Gehring (2018) described the pathway theory to explain these variables as "women's histories of abuse, relationship issues, mental health problems, and substance abuse" as the traumatic events that lead the women into incarceration (Gehring, 2018, p. 116).

One facility rule I first appreciated was the inability to inquire about an inmate's life outside of the facility. We were told if they say something about themselves to disregard it unless it needed to be reported. I later found that rule detrimental to education in that to teach well, an educator must engender trust from the student and get to know him/her to assess educational needs. The adult women I taught needed me to see beyond their legal judgement. I realized I did not want to know. I needed to see beyond their adjudication to the student living in their bodies. We both needed to set boundaries to be inclusive and equitable in their educational experience. This may sound oversimplified, but in reality, the change in perception of our students is necessary. Teachers, good teachers in marginalized communities, quickly learn to look beyond the gang attire, language, and poverty and concentrate on the students' needs and learning styles to engage and educate them.

Once confidence was achieved, I needed to reset boundaries because the women were a bit too open about themselves. I solved this issue by telling the women during our orientation that I was a mandated reporter who took her responsibility seriously and they should be careful of what they said because I was required to report any illegal activities or behavior, and I would. I explained that I loved my position and would not jeopardize it for anyone, no matter how much I liked them. The women believed me, respected my honesty, and some actually came up to me

and told me they appreciated the warning and would be careful. They knew what discretion meant and had learned about it in their neighborhoods because it is an unwritten but well-understood rule that no one "snitches" to authorities. Explaining my position and priority did not alienate me, it served to define our boundaries and encouraged them that I was sincere in my efforts as their teacher.

This story is just one example of the transformational learning theory in place. The women knew they just underwent a seriously traumatic event (i.e., incarceration) and most were willing to try something different—to learn how to let go of previous behaviors. They were mentally ready to relinquish their former habits and prove it when in class and with each other. The educators were then able to provide information that may be heard and discussed by the women.

The Student Inmate

When women entered the facility, they were treated equally. They were processed through intake, assigned living quarters, advised about the facility's specific rules, and then sent to their living quarters. They were told when to eat, when to sleep, when to program, and when they were being released. Next, they were phased into the module's environment (i.e., living quarters) by the trustees who ran it. These trustees ranged from being much loved and respected to being the equivalent of a tyrant. Each woman had her own methods. The other inmates understood this and did all they could not to antagonize others or the trustees in charge. This experience was the first complexity the inmate encountered upon arrival.

The student I just described was my student: the woman who was frightened at finding her freedom stripped away; and the woman forced to listen to deputies telling her almost daily how useless her educational endeavors were, how she was just a criminal who did not deserve

anything but punishment. My student was the angry one, arguing with everything I said not because she knew more, but because she did not trust me to tell her the truth about anything. I was one of "them" and therefore not worthy of her trust. My student was the one who had committed a violent crime simply because she loved the wrong person, or her situation at home required her to do something she would regret later when the solid metal door clanged shut behind her. My student was scared, angry, tired, fearful, doubtful, antagonistic, cynical, disbelieving, and at times a compilation of all of these. These were the women I was determined to help, not realizing they were helping me. Growth goes two ways. The teacher, if good at her craft, becomes the student as well.

Learning the Job

The introspective portion of this study was useful in letting me review the years I was teaching in the facility. Reviewing the past years let me think of the events I wrote about with a different lens. It made me realize that at some point I changed, and every change made my teaching that much better. Yes, I was determined to help them, but the truth was I needed their help, too. I needed to learn how to be strong in mind and spirit by admitting my own past to be a more effective teacher, without losing the humanity that teaching in corrections requires. I grew up in the same type of marginalized communities from which the women I taught came. I understood them, even if at first I tried to hide it. These women taught me that what I went through served them because it gave me a voice to advocate for their reentry into a society that has not adjusted to decriminalizing someone who has already paid the price for their mistakes. They gave me the drive to research on their behalf, to speak up not just for them, but to them when I saw something that required attention or change. This was how I, a social justice minded teacher, worked in the corrections environment. The teachers in both schools were using the

same methods because we met every day for lunch and discussed issues, student needs, modification of lessons to help students, and school issues we needed to work on together. Collaboration was necessary because the teachers who had been there longer mentored the newer teachers who received little guidance when starting their new position.

Challenges Teachers Encounter

The first challenge was acclimating to the imposing environment we were working in. This task was not as simple as moving into a new neighborhood or job. The mental adjustment of hearing the doors clang shut, metal on metal, was a bit nerve-wracking. The imposing presence of the deputies in uniform walking in and out created an authoritative image of the people who supervised us daily. Their descriptions of the facility, particularly when they said “our house” or stated, “You are a guest,” did not encourage familiarity or confidence. The deputies were strict, but they were also the first and daily connection to our students. I approached the module deputies carefully, making sure to be a presence to them. I treated them respectfully, conferred with them daily at the end of class, and made sure to restate my commitment to the safety precautions they advised me about constantly.

The challenge was to learn how to communicate effectively with the deputies, inmate students, trustees, school administrators, and the various volunteers who frequented the module. Teachers mitigated this challenge by maintaining the lines of communication open with all parties concerned and remembering that we were not in charge of anything. We were considered civilians, guests in this judicial facility. Teachers did not need to be obsequious, but they did need to respect the facility’s hierarchy and understand where they fit in to it. I observed what happened to teachers who defied the authority of the deputies and how quickly they disappeared from our schools. Their authorization to enter was removed and they were no longer allowed to

teach in any correctional facility. Whether the teacher obtained the job to help and advocate for students or because of the better-than-average paycheck, few wanted to lose this privilege.

The second challenge is the inmate student's acceptance. Teachers learn quickly that this is not a simple task. Just as there are in any public schools, there are differing personalities with the complication that they are being detained. They cannot be dismissed. They live in the teaching environment with bunkbeds in the dayroom when the facility is overcrowded, are loyal to a "bunkie" (i.e., cell mate) who will protect them, and by the time teachers arrive in the classroom these varied personalities have devised their own agenda. Again, this is no different than being in a public school. In addition, teachers are protected by the facility's deputies. For example, during one lesson, I had a hostile student. She arrived only a few days prior and was still angry at her circumstances. That day, I was teaching a parenting class and she argued several points in a loud voice while everyone watched silently. In custody, the women watch moments like these as if they were soap operas. The young lady grew even angrier when I asked her to sit down in a quiet voice. She took two steps forward as I motioned slowly for her to go back. I knew what would happen. The two deputies in this module were not hesitant to display their authority if needed. I saw her stop in her tracks at the same moment I heard the clicks behind me. I did not turn around at the sound because I knew it was the deputies unsnapping their holsters. The young lady's eyes opened wide, and she backed up slowly back to her seat. I never turned around to acknowledge the deputies, who were gone as soon as the woman sat down. I continued with the lesson.

I finished and dismissed the students and immediately walked over to the deputy station. I thanked them for looking out for me. I understood that they could not, and would not, allow an incident to escalate. It is not safe for anyone in the module. Did this action impede my student's

acceptance of me? Not at all. I spoke about the incident with the women the next day. The student who had been abrasive the day before was not there and the women were quick to tell me it was because of her actions. I excused myself for a couple of minutes to ask the deputies if they would allow her to join us. After a brief discussion about what I was trying to do, they opened her door; she came out hesitantly. I motioned for her to go sit down with the group.

I tried not to lecture too much because straight lecturing was not conducive to engaging students. However, this day needed at least a brief recounting of the situation. As I spoke about the value of being in the deputies' good graces as a teacher, I also described situations where we had to create our own change and take charge of ourselves. We discussed accountability as a group. Once the women understood what I was trying to accomplish, they all jumped in and helped our new student. This is what I meant; the women helped each other in ways my male student inmates did not. Their needs were different and teachers need to acknowledge it.

The third challenge was school administrators. At this facility, teachers did not work directly for the justice system. Schools were contracted and each brought in teachers who had been cleared by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the facility's own investigating team. Each school held their own staff meetings and professional development meetings, disciplinary actions, and was accountable for the teaching staff. During the time there, the school administration had shifted twice, with a third coming when this incident happened. Administrative changes affect all personnel. Horner (2003) explained:

> An administrative change is a change in a situation that touches every person who has an affiliation with the school in one-way or another. . . .Everyone in the school setting will

> need time to go through a transition process allowing them to absorb and adjust to the nuances of the change. (p. 47)

Change is difficult for everyone in the staff. In the case of corrections, the sheriffs, module deputies, teachers, and students must all become accustomed to a new experience because the administrator has his or her own preferences and biases. The inconsistency with administrators is no different for students than it is for teachers. We were all waiting to see what would happen. Our school was not well-liked by the education department, and for good reason. The administrators wanted teachers to contact them, offsite management, whenever anything happened, even before the deputies who were in EBI. I thought this did not make sense and said so. Why would I contact people who were miles away before I contact a person who is several feet away? This was an issue teachers at the facility fought long and hard about with our management team. The third supervisor was a teacher we all knew. They promoted him and he was an excellent conduit for the teachers and onsite deputy administrators. This frustrating time did influence our students. When teachers were unhappy the students knew. They were astute and could tell. This is something that teachers need—keep the program running forward peacefully. The challenge is keeping a positive, proactive working balance between the working groups involved in the care and education of the student inmates. Understanding the female student inmate requires patience and tact from the teacher.

The Systemic Divestment of Girls and Women

The incarcerated female has already encountered marginalization, oppression, and trauma prior to incarceration. Statistics claim this woman has often been poorly educated, likely has an undiagnosed mental disability, and has possibly lived in poverty most of her life. After intake, this woman will be housed and educated. The facility will have planned the academic and

vocational courses required by law, but for which the woman is sometimes ill equipped to proceed with. Even if she has literacy issues, she will be enrolled into either an academic or vocational program. There will be no real reentry plans for the women because there are few openings in the reentry process available after release. Funding for women's reentry is also siphoned in men's programs before it ever reaches women's reentry programs. No matter how well the facility treats the women, there is still trauma associated to incarceration. Vera, the prison watchdog, suggests that prisons "elevate(s) the concept of human dignity from one that merely prevents grossly unjust conduct to a cardinal principle that dictates how a prison system must organize itself from top to bottom—a standard to which the system must perform and a guide to set the contours of all prison policies and practices." (Vera, n.d., para. 6) This is life-changing and should be implemented throughout the nation. Funding for literacy and other basic skills is limited so the student and teacher must accommodate the lack of resources by functioning with the lower standard. This lack of resources includes programs that will benefit the former inmate. Reentry into society requires a change of perspective, adequate reentry programming, and subsequent monitoring through the woman's probation or parole officer. In 2020, the United States Commission on Civil Rights received a report that stated, "Evidence shows that women often enter prison with different offending histories and with life experiences distinct from their male counterparts, so they likely have different needs due to these differential factors" (Bair, 2020, p. 18). The report further stated both men and women share some of the factors, but women are impacted disproportionately compared to the men. Once these needs are met, the reentry process will be more effective and lasting.

Many who returned to jail or prison stated that they did not receive the support and assistance they needed to provide for their families, which in turn created desperation in them that they acted upon. The circle is complete when they return to detention. Reasons, or excuses, are that the women found supportive programs, but they were full; they had to return to work or find a job to support their families but they did not have the level of education necessary to get a good living wage, or they had significant others that mistakenly involved them in a crime and jail was the outcome of that relationship. The facility is blamed for the lack of real progress when state and federal economics and media attention fail the women's facility while the men's detention facilities fair significantly better because of the continued presence of media and government focusing on men's reentry. What this means to teachers is that they are fighting an emotional battle for and with these women. In addition to teaching them the mechanics of social expectations, teachers face the student's detachment from reality when trying to educate them. What the teacher is promoting is something that is not real to the student inmate. Many of the women have been lied to, misled, undereducated and traumatized over their lifetimes.

Teachers must get past this barrier, which takes time, dedication, and patience from the educator. The courses offered through the facility are in small increments that do not give the educator the opportunity to make a significant change in the women's perspective. The reason for this is that numbers matter to those in authority. Inmates are enrolled, quickly put through the program, and then the claim is that they passed and were successfully oriented to return to society. The divestment is life-long because the assistance the women need to successfully become a better version of themselves is limited and sporadic both in and out of incarceration. What opportunities do teachers find to improve the lives of their students?

Correctional education teachers find ways to assist students in ways that do not break the facility's rules. For example, many of the educators I worked with found organizations that would help their students upon release from the facility. Teachers were unable to give the students the information directly, so they went through the EBI officers. These officers checked the information, then passed it along to the students. Teachers, including me, provided students with information that went beyond what was required. Again, it went through EBI to avoid any legal issues. Our educators were fortunate that the correctional education department supervising both schools, all volunteers, and guests we brought in were supportive and very proactive in helping organize events that included the women. Our paint crew painted beautiful murals on the walls inside the modules from pictures the paint teacher brought in of beautiful landscapes. Our teachers assigned students to write plays they performed in the modules. Every teacher-initiated project brought women the transformational learning principles they needed to experience. Teachers shared endless possibilities by elaborating to students what they could accomplish once they decided what they wanted to do and helped them create goals and plans to implement them so that they could reach their goals.

As teachers shared lessons and encouraged students, they did so with the inmate reentry process in mind. Public school teachers are encouraged to prepare students for their future life in the social community—in the jails they are taught to navigate that society while living with the stigma of incarceration. This stigma is an incredible burden and obstacle. While social justice is currently a much-discussed topic and organizations are aware of the need, the public is constantly at odds with this social justice extending to former inmates. Steps are being taken to reeducate the public about the sensibility of educating and hiring formerly incarcerated men and women, but these steps are slow in producing results. Careers can be developed while

incarcerated, but employers are not easily convinced to provide the second chance to former inmates.

Social Justice in Women's Correctional Education

Social justice in the correctional education environments seems to be an oxymoron at first. Social justice is providing equitable experiences to the incarcerated students comparable to those out of custody (i.e., the same culturally responsive, accommodating and gender-sensitive education). Providing equitable, socially just education is a difficulty because even students getting public education are not all getting this. And still, public education is far ahead of correctional education in its implementation of culturally responsive theories and pedagogies. The current framework in correctional education is constructivism and basic life skills are the prominent study topic for all student inmates, mandated by the courts often. To provide equitable opportunities to incarcerated women, training must be offered to the teachers who have the skills necessary and the drive to push them forward in this quixotic environment. Training teachers to specifically educate in corrections was suggested decades ago. Engelhardt (1937) noted, "Teachers selected into this service should be selected with the same high qualifications that are required for teachers in any other branch of the educational profession" (p. 10). Suggestions such as this have been made throughout the history of correctional education, which was implemented to rehabilitate, not to punish, but has veered from its original goal into the punitive. Rehabilitation requires sincere efforts by the instructors, the correctional staff, and the students to accomplish the reformative status all participants anticipate and hope for. According to Engelhardt's (1937) article, the primary goal of the commission that was set up to establish corrections reform was "the protection of public interest" (p. 9) and the next goal was to reduce recidivism and integrate inmates into society.

With the interest in reform as far back as 1937, it is unacceptable that local governments have ignored the various suggestions that have come from these efforts and subsequent studies. Engelhardt (1937) stated, “Frequently the inmate has been imprisoned fully as much because of the failure of society to render service as because of the failure of the inmate to make adjustments to society” (p. 10). Sociopolitical, economic, and governmental positions change with each election cycle and the ones who feel it the most are the inmates whose education depends on society’s funding. Educators deal with the failures of the social structure the women come from. Incarceration adds new traumas that need to be dealt with daily by teaches and corrections staff. Training and understanding of the inmate’s environment are necessary to navigate corrections and provide the support of inmates’ needs and advocacy on an informed level.

Previous decades have journaled extensive shifts in both retribution and rehabilitation as goals. However, as I watched the women being escorted through the hallways and listened to the young, female deputy talking to them, I realized social justice was taking a different look in the lives of the women in custody. The facility I worked in rotated the deputies two or three times a year. Each rotation brought new deputies and it was interesting to observe the interchanges between the new deputies and student inmates. The younger female deputies escorting the student inmates to classes were vivacious and interested. I heard some of the deputies talking to the women as if they were big sisters and curious about events that brought the women into custody. The teachers from both schools interacted daily and the senior deputy came in to see them each morning with news or new issues they needed resolved or were interesting and informative. The staff in the education department who supervised the teachers were interactive, proactive, and culturally responsive to student needs. I discussed the environment with other

educators in different facilities and understand this type of teaching is not common at their facility, which speaks poorly of the cohesiveness that carceral school practices should have.

Artifacts and Documents Collected and Studied for Research

Chapter 4 contained notes and findings of the materials I wrote for the study, as well as the memos, journal entries, and photos. The photographs were used to refresh my memories of the interior environment of the jail facility in which I worked primarily. The artifacts contained a booklet that, upon review, contained no real information to the study. It was used as supplemental material for the teachers to share with the students. There was useful information but nothing the women could not have obtained by going to a library or researching on a website. It was useful in that the handbook demonstrated the frustration I felt as a teacher because our administrators lacked the real understanding of what would be useful to our released students (e.g., counseling services, rehabilitative services, reentry services). Their choice was to provide a booklet of interesting information that any sensible person could have thought of instead of reaching out to agencies who could provide the reentry services these women desperately needed, and still do.

The other document was what I first read when I arrived at the facility. During our orientation, we were given the website, handouts, and watched a video of an officer who broke the law and now lived in the very facility he once worked. This story was meant to be a warning to us to avoid situations that made us vulnerable to threats or blackmail from the inmates. This issue is a real concern to facility staff. Although care is taken to maintain anonymity, word travels fast in the jails and I learned, from the students talking among themselves, about approximately 3 or 4 educational staff members dismissed for interacting inappropriately with their students. This never happened at our facility during my time there, thankfully. Our teachers

were very aware of the misconceptions student inmates generate when one is too friendly or caring about the student. The orientation I received as an incoming teacher was more focused on what rules the facility wanted me to adhere to and how I should provide the education I was hired for. The trainer did not elaborate on the student inmate's needs, how to approach them, what to expect, how the facility worked. These would have been useful topics for a teacher new to the corrections facility.

Reflection of the Process

My initial research process consisted of seven steps: (1) gather data, (2) review journal entries and poetry to create memos, (3) review policies and practice documents to create memos about how correctional education is conceptualized, (4) draft stories about the events/observations, (5) code stories and memos, (6) use codes to review generate categories, and (7) return to the stories to edit and include reflexive analysis. The initial coding produced the first concepts of frustration and fear. The second review of the stories reinforced the initial perception of frustration and fear, but in the first review I interpreted the frustration to be more related to me as a teacher and the fear was more related to the students, and the more in-depth reflexive review I realized that students and teachers had similar feelings (e.g., fears) and frustrations for differing reasons. I felt frustration with the system, the detachment of the administrators who did not fully understand the needs of the teachers or students. The students felt frustrations with their living arrangements and with the deputies who supervised them.

Reflexive Analysis of Story Review

The Challenge—the student who challenged me when I was trying to teach was not angry at me. She was frustrated at her fate, charged up by the potential loss of her children. To stand there and try to teach this individual how to get and retain a job when this was the least of her

worries was insulting to her and she demonstrated that frustration and anger by attacking my topic and methods of teaching. In retrospect I was able to understand that hearing me talk about an uncertain future for her and her family frightened her and she directed that fear and anger at the only person she was able to challenge. My perspective of this event also contained elements of frustration. I thoroughly enjoy teaching adults on job preparation and retention, as well as other workplace related topics, but I had an underlying frustration because I knew many of the women, I was teaching were not prepared to work when they went home. The released inmate often had to report to authorities if they are put on probation, deal with children, family members, social acquaintances, etc. In addition, the former inmate had to apply to various organizations to get back on her feet, to return to her normal life. Once this is completed, the struggle to find a job/career that will overlook previous incarcerations without judgement begins. My frequent frustration is that I would teach the women to the best of my ability, but it ended there. The women had little to no support upon reentry and this often meant they would return to the facility once more.

The Program Protection—this event not only displayed the fear the women dealt with but angered me to the point where I felt it necessary to report the incident. During my shadowing of the teacher that day I watched carefully, as usual, so that I could be consistent with the way the other teacher shared information. As I watched the teacher and student interactions, I noticed the microaggressions she delivered and the women's facial reactions that displayed the emotions the words elicited. I saw distrust, fear, apprehension, confusion, and other emotions when the teacher directed them to perform an action but did not allow questions from the women that could clarify her expectations. She insisted on silence and asked me to keep them quiet when she left the room. When she exited the room, the women looked at me quietly. I'm certain they were

wondering what kind of teacher I would be. I smiled at them and gestured for them to continue with their task, walking among them slowly. I told them I was there to help them and would answer any questions they had. I helped them move forward with their work and dismissed them when the time came.

Educational pedagogy has evolved from this “banking” style of teaching (Freire, 1970). Lecturing students and giving assignments while making them unable to share conversations about concepts and receive feedback from peers is the poorest method of educating students because it does not allow interaction, engagement, or critical thinking. Many educators now refer to themselves as facilitators rather than teachers because good dialogue and interaction allows all involved to be engaged and to learn.

The Staff Meeting—this story was not about anger, but when I reflected on the energy and intensity of my actions in it and relived emotionally what I felt I realized I was angry as well as frustrated. My anger stemmed from the regulations that were not guidelines but felt like decrees from the judicial system when I just wanted to teach. My students were, I felt, a reflection of me as an individual and when they were denied the rights that humanity enjoyed it bothered me extremely. In this particular incident we were at a staff meeting when the correctional staff began talking to us about ‘fraternizing’ with inmates. They suggested that we teachers refrain from allowing the students too many liberties, such as touching us or getting too close. I understand the regulations and adhere to them always, but I am student centered and had to ask questions for my students’ sake. I worked in the mental health section of the jail and I had done quite a bit of reading on how to teach students with special needs effectively and rejection was not useful in creating engagement. I asked the deputies how I was supposed to treat students who required extra attention, such as the student who walked up behind me and hugged me. She

would lean her head on my back and give me a quick hug, and that would end the physical contact. Their responses angered me because it was not how we are taught to relate to our students. Even though our students are incarcerated and there were many rules to follow, I still felt they deserved a good education—anything less was unacceptable.

When I reflected on this event, I realized that my anger stemmed from the indifference of the deputies to the interactions with the inmates that teachers required. To be effective the instructor needs to develop a bond with his/her students. Engagement requires trust and communication. Trust requires time and energy on the part of the teacher, and communication is strictly controlled by the judicial staff. There are so many obstacles that prohibit too much interaction between teaching staff and student inmates. Seeing this reminded me of the educational systems I grew up in. The circumstances were oppressive, and teachers were often disengaged from the students. This was not what I wanted for my students. During the time I worked in the facility I stepped over the line many times for my students and often imagined I would be dismissed for it, but the support and communication from our EBI deputies was amazing and should be emulated by other county jails if they want a successful program.

The Suicide Attempt—it is difficult to explain the impact this event had on me. The incident was not generated by me, but the outcomes affected me mentally for weeks. When the student attempted suicide I felt guilt. Had I done enough? Did I chastise the student who had initiated the event correctly? Harshly? Weakly? Public school prepares you for traumatic emergencies and they have the clinical staff to assist the students in those events, but in the county jails the clinical staff is always not available. The trauma was not just because of the student behavior, it was being the person in charge of their well-being. The student inmate does not have the support staff a public school provides, nor does the untrained educator have the

tools to give the proper direction and support in these moments. In addition was the internal anger and upset I felt, as well as the confusion on how to react to this situation. The deputies were kind and tried to give me the support I needed, but additional training would have been useful in dealing with the circumstances. Dealing with guilt, anger, frustration, and trauma need to be included in any training made available to both teachers and students.

The Lost ID—there are few moments during the course of my teaching in the women's facility that triggered the emotions I felt the day I lost my identification badge. Our presence in the facility is infrequently treated as a nuisance, but occasionally something happens that upends the routine and disturbs the safety precautions of the facility so much that the officers struggle to maintain a positive face when it does. This event was such a day. I had a great deal of support, but I knew this would cause trouble. I felt guilty, as if I'd done something wrong even if it was an accident. I had knots in my stomach and my mouth was dry when I approached our lead teacher. Mr. C, as he was known, immediately started helping me and calmed me down, smiling and saying I was not the only one this had ever happened to. We combed through the office, the bathroom, the cafeteria, and still nothing showed up. It was time to confess. We walked to the main lobby sally-port and informed them that the ID could not be found. Immediately the lockdown was announced, and we were directed to go back to the education office to await the lieutenant in charge of the lockdown to arrive.

This time waiting for the investigative unit to arrive was one of apprehension and an inner fear I had thought I lost when I moved away from my past. It is the fear of the expected punishment for being less than perfect, of being one of 'them' and unable to manage simple tasks without being watched. This inner fear was one that lived in and grew up with someone from the old neighborhood, someone who, as the inmates said it, lived 'the life' and knew it never

changed. I shook off the mood but it clung lightly to me, like a shadow. I knew how the women, my students felt at times. The lieutenant showed up at the office door with 3 other deputies trailing him. He was tall and imposing, but he had kind eyes. I relaxed a bit and answered his questions.

I need to explain something here. My trepidation, my irrational bit of fear, did not stem from the correctional environment I was in. It came from the past, my past, and intruded in the present only in times of extreme uncertainty. The unknown was fearsome and avoided, not the same emotion as the anticipation and excitement I had learned to enjoy. Growing up in a neighborhood where a gang existed, living there and watching friends die or go to jail, created a distrust and bias against police. It was an unspoken understanding that you did not talk to 'cops' about anything. Doing so risked retribution from the "homies." I did not fear them. They were the known element in my life. It took years, and kind police who changed my perspective and allowed me t grow and accept the judicial system's employees without bias and fear. Working in the jail cemented that growing trust and I respected, and loved, working there. I realize that I am, unfortunately, one of a few exceptions. We found the badge, but I contemplated the emotional facets of the event carefully and understood that it was a relic of an old life that allowed me to understand and empathize with my students.

Learning the Rules

Each organization has specific rules that are expectations for the student inmate. When the rules were explained to the students, they were expected to know them, It did not take too long for the students to ask why so many rules? They lived on rules and were regulated daily; this was a fact they resented ad complained about frequently. The constant complaints led to collaboration with the education department and the deputies refining both lists into one short,

concise 10 rule list that could be easily explained because the rules were broad enough to encompass most negative behavioral issues using positive language. I introduced those rules with and gave the women the opportunity to explain what they thought about them. We went through them carefully and in the end they all agreed to the changes.

This day was etched in my memory for various reasons. Persuading a large group of women to follow different lists of rules is not a simple task. Any educator knows that students are rebellious if they feel forced to do something that makes no sense to them. Most adults feel this, they are not alone. My concern was that the rules our school administrators were insisting on implementing had no relevance to the women's incarceration. I tried to suggest to my administrators that a change needed to be made but was met with indifference. The rules issue was escalating, and I had been frustrated so long trying to change it that I finally went to our education department supervisors, the deputies, and collaborated on a mutually relevant list that I could give my students. We incorporated the women's ideas about language and redefined some of the rules to have them align with the facility's demand for security. It was most satisfying to me as a teacher to offer the women the rules they could follow and live with safely, and since they had a voice in them, they not only accepted them but taught the incoming women the rules as well.

No Hope for the Non-Readers

Literacy in jails is an issue when the women are asking to join classes when they do not have the reading skills necessary to keep up with the classwork and homework. Teachers are not allowed to enroll students who cannot complete the assignments because the success rates go down in their reports and this means budget cuts for education programming. It is not just a decision the administrators make lightly, but it is a necessary one because of the various agencies

they answer to. This exacerbates the literacy issues in that the women feel left out, ignored, and are often critical of the process that eliminates them from attending school.

When I first arrived at the facility, I was advised against enrolling illiterate women in the class. As a teacher this horrified me. In good conscious I could not stop the women from enrolling but doing so could jeopardize my position. I was anxious to find a solution and I finally went to our senior deputy again. I explained my position and my reticence in denying the women entry into class, and why this was a problem for me. She understood and we came up with an idea that suited us both. I went back to the module, relieved and grateful that I had such a supportive supervisor and that she took education as seriously as I did.

Working in an environment where your position depends on remaining in the good graces of the people who run it can be infuriating, frustrating, or even tiring, but we all understand that it has to be done. Humility was hard-wired into me while working in the jail because it was the only way I could succeed in giving the student inmates an opportunity to explore and decide what they wanted for themselves as individuals, not just formerly incarcerated.

Gathering Data and Thoughts

Collection of the data sources and artifacts was much simpler than the documentation that was collected, written, and read during the research process. I collected various items used for this study during the time I was teaching in corrections. For example, the poetry I used was already in my collected documents, as was the notes and journals I reviewed and revised by adding further detail to the notes. I wrote the stories based on verifiable events that occurred when I was teaching. By saying the events were verifiable it means that the memories were shared with my co-workers or discussed with our supervising deputies. Once all items were gathered and sorted the reviewing began. The initial review generated additional writing of

memos that were more detailed than the original entry. The review of documents, writing of memos and journals, and story-writing was intensely personal and enlightening. Analysis of the documents using a different lens provided a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the work environment and the student personalities we worked with. Each round of analysis provided further codes and categories different from the analysis of the artifacts. Emotion coding was used for the stories and upon several revisions for further details as they emerged, each story was completed with a reflection that occurred when an introspective lens was applied to the events in the stories. These reflections were the final review before moving on to analysis of the codes and notes made during the review process.

The analysis of the stories in chapter 4 provided two distinct categories based on the codes generated from the data analysis. The first was teacher emotions, the second was student emotions. The stories became chronicles of the emotions both teacher and students were feeling. The primary one was frustration, broken down to frustration with the education system, frustration with students, administration, and judicial staff. The student emotions included some fear which was projected with body language and comments shared, in addition to the other frequent frustrations. These codes are broken down by the most common theme of frustration, followed by the student-specific emotion of fear.

Teacher frustration with the education system was both physical and mental. The physical demands were daily pushing our equipment carts into the modules. Everything we would need for the students had to be replenished daily, and the weight of the cart left most with sore arms and backs at the end of the day. The mental frustrations were having to be silent when observing the correctional staff behaving in less than favorable ways with the students and being

unable to speak out against it. We were visitors, guests when we observed all rules and nuisances when security was breached.

These frustrations were reserved for discussions at the lunchroom between the teachers. At no time did any educator, whether from the academic or vocational side, voice these frustrations with anyone outside the education office except for the senior deputy and her assistant, a deputy who was a former teacher and supported the education staff fully without compromising security. There was the frustration of teaching in less-than-ideal educational areas such as the dayroom, the recreation room, or in one semester teaching in the hole, where the most disturbed inmates, prone to violence, were housed. Insufficient teacher training was again evident when working in these areas. Once again, the teacher had to improvise engaging lessons with minimal materials or space.

Physical Demands on Teachers

The physically demanding task of carting a heavy metal pushcart back and forth daily was daunting. At times, the carts could be loaded with equipment, papers, and student supplies. These carts frequently weighed over a hundred pounds during the 8-week courses. Teachers pushed the carts into any place designated as a teaching site. There were few actual classrooms dedicated to teaching in. During one particularly cold winter morning, the women brought their blankets into class and sat shivering in their seats. An educator in any grade knows that if the student is hungry or uncomfortable, less attention is given to the lessons the teacher provides. However, because of the cold, students stopped attending. The drop in numbers led to financial penalties. I was allowed to wear a coat, but the students were not given any. Watching the women suffer from the cold while I wore a warm coat was too much. I asked the senior deputy to dismiss class to prevent them from getting sick, which she agreed to more than once.

Frustration within the justice system is difficult to relieve because the politics within corrections frequently do not align. While one deputy may see the logic in dismissing a class because of their physical discomfort, there are others who would mock those decisions by demeaning the women as they walked by. Watching this happen was no less frustrating than seeing the same emotion in the eyes of the women hearing it. Both teacher and students were locked in this scene without a way to alleviate the feeling. Security demanded silence and obedience and not just from the incarcerated students. We, the teachers, were guests and to hold our place in the facility meant staying quiet through the episodes of dehumanization we witnessed.

There are methods that teachers use to change this environment. It is called by many names: enlightenment, manipulation, coercion, etc., depending on who is observing and commenting on the actions. I chose communication. I approached the deputies and was able to elicit understanding of the women's feelings by providing them scenarios using them as their own example. For instance, during one conversation I posed the question of rehabilitation with the deputy. I asked how we, as individuals, can rehabilitate anyone if the women were spoken to with criticism or dismissed as non-entities, while teachers were working to make them feel better about themselves and urging them to connect with positive influences in their communities. I used the same example but put different connotations on the words used, and the deputies understood. It took a few weeks, but the atmosphere became calmer, more conducive to learning for the women—at least, this is what they told me. Persuasion is sometimes the best method to fight indifference or negativity as long as both parties are determined to do what is best for the students. There is a misconception that all the deputies are alike. This is not true. The deputies' attitudes and perceptions are as diverse as anyone else's. I have seen young female deputies

walking the women from one end of the facility to another joking, teasing, and laughing with the women. I've seen deputies "mother" the women by giving them sage advice, scolding them gently about their choices and consequences.

Just as in every field, every occupation, there are heroes, there are also those with archaic mindsets that are devoid of logic and compassion for the inmates. My perception is that they look at them as sub-human, unable to make wise choices or real change. This stems from comments made to me occasionally, such as "Why bother? They don't learn s***, anyway," and "They're animals. Don't kid yourself." Luckily these comments were few and the deputies seemed to leave quickly from the facility. I believe they were weeded out and sent to patrol the streets because of those attitudes. That's just my personal belief. Most deputies I encountered during my time teaching in the jail were kind, considerate of the women they were escorting to classes, and doing their best to teach them about another kind of life. These are the deputies I reasoned with, persuaded to work with the women instead of against the women. I was not the only teacher that understood this. The two teachers who replaced me in the module where the women with disabilities were housed became the deputies' favorite and the teachers spoke positively about their deputies because of their support and compassion. I knew the deputies and they were the ones who protected me when I taught there, and I respected them immensely. They worked with teachers and protected them from any irate or irrational students.

I have long believed that frustration and fear work in tandem emotionally. Frustration for me stems from the understanding that I cannot do something to change the situation immediately. It is driven by the fear, however slight, that I will be ejected from my position for voicing what I perceive as injustice or other infraction. Most of the time, I dismiss the fear and/or frustration and barrel forward, going to the person I believe, and trust will hear me. Most of the

time, it was my senior deputy, a no-nonsense, rational, tough and fair individual whose dainty appearance belied her core of strength. She always smiled, throughout every incident and issue, which encouraged me to trust and value her opinion. I knew she loved her job and did it extremely well. Part of the reason the stories I wrote were memorable is because I shared what I saw or felt with my senior and she offered advice or took action to change it. She trusted me and I depended on her for justice and equity for our students. She did not fail me, ever. Space for teaching, inmate transport, and consequences mattered most to the correctional education Sheriff's team, and they rose to the challenges daily. Our students knew they were being encouraged by the education team daily and rose to the occasion most of the time. When they did not, the deputies kept things running smoothly. Educators are important to the facility, but supportive deputies and administrators are part of the package. Collaboration is necessary and crucial to student success.

Legislative Analyst's Office and Their Audit

Governor's Criminal Justice Proposals outlines the county jails grants and funding proposals from the governor's office. The proposal explains the 2011 realignment that shifted the responsibility for certain offenders, low-level offenders, to the county jails. These felons were released to the county facilities for housing under new judicial options such as a 'split sentence' where the offender would serve their entire felony sentence in the county jail or spend half of the sentence in jail and released to the community on parole. Felons who also violated parole were also shifted to the county jail instead of the prisons. The 2011 realignment created overcrowding at the county level. While negatively impacting the facilities the counties had available for educational purposes, this also increased the need for educators without providing funding for the purpose. This report provides several suggestions for alleviating the overcrowding situation

by shifting the responsibility to the judges and courts for adjudication, as well as providing 1.2 billion for building more jails (Taylor, 2014).

The creation of more jails will not create a better educational opportunity to the student inmate. Locking up more people without providing the federally mandated education for rehabilitative purposes creates an angrier population that returns to the community without having learned anything useful to ease them into reentry. Education in the jails is equally important to that of prisons. The environment at jails is definitely more volatile, but this does not detract from the necessity of rehabilitative opportunities.

Potential contribution to correctional education.

Research has done little to capture educator's experiences in the county jails. Some literature is focused on teaching experiences in prison, while the county jails receive little notice because of the misconception that the facilities house a more transient community than prisons. It is true that county jails are different—shorter sentenced felons now choosing to be housed in local jails, transfers between courts and prisons, and the realignment of 2011 that sent thousands of felons back to county facilities to do their shorter sentences. The data gathered in this study provided some insight into the complicated and fluctuating environment of county facilities. The events that were chronicled not only gave me the insight into what helped me become a better educator to the incarcerated students who not only accepted me but encouraged my own growth as a teacher. The study could inform a new teacher in the county jails to understand the environment and better understand the motivation and determination needed to effectively teach inside correctional education. I share what I learned in two or three years, providing a glimpse into the lived experiences. Each document I revisited and analyzed reminded me of the time I spent learning. There is no real explanation in Title 15 on how to facilitate the learning process

and provide a quality education within corrections. There is no guide on how to handle the diverse situations one encounters while educating inmates. Correctional education is part experience, part guesswork and part collaboration. The journals and literature I reviewed contained no answers that could provide a curious teacher's mind the ease of knowing how to offer the quality learning experiences the women were not afforded through the public school system.

Recommendations

I offer four recommendations for future work in correctional education. They include consistent training for new teachers and correctional staff, developing an educational tracking system, and prioritizing the learning environment. Change in any organization takes perseverance, continuous assessment, and proactive participants to make the difference in the shifting dynamic. These four recommendations are not the complete answer to correctional education's needs in jails, it is the beginning of positive change.

Training for New Teachers

Consistent training for new teachers, at any level, needs to be conducted whether it is through the facility or at the university level. There are possibilities to fill this gap within university teacher preparation programs by including one semester of methods to teach in correctional education. This would provide comprehensive information to help the novice teacher navigate the justice system's in-house education programs. Ideally the trainings should be a collaboration between the county judicial system and a local university to develop a permanent, consistent training program for educators in jails. However, it can be as simple as a well-thought out one day training that provides the new teachers with information that can assist them in navigating the rules while avoiding potential obstacles. Training could also be specific to

the facility and organized by the educational staff within that jail. There is more than one way to provide better teacher training.

Develop an Educational Tracking System

A cohesive educational tracking system specifically linked to the prison system so that incarcerated students' work can follow them to any other institution they may be transferred to. This will also assist teachers in keeping students engaged because it will reduce redundancy in topics covered by previous courses.

Train Correctional Staff

Corrections staff can work with the women in correctional education courses by encouraging the potential life-change they are working toward. Staff needs to understand that their interactions with the women and positive reinforcement of the educational system in that facility can impact recidivism and the effects of that change can and will prove positive for society. The women in the jails need the support and guidance that staff can give them daily while they are housed in the jail. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training would be useful to the corrections staff and deputies who oversee the daily operations of the facility.

Prioritize the Learning Environment

Improving the learning environment within correctional facilities can positively impact students and teachers. Improved conditions and stable educational opportunities for the student inmates will allow them space to develop skills that will support reentry. Education in the jails has existed for decades and still no permanent provision for space and staff has been implemented.

The first suggestion I make is to provide a real orientation into the workings of a county facility. This could be as a walk-through of the building, a description of the various areas of the

facility, introduction to staff and medical personnel who will be collaborating with us, and definitions of the various terms that confuse a first-time teacher but are common to the position.

The second suggestion is to train the educators along with correctional staff on how to work within the modules. This training should include the positive perspective to approach students during the courses they will provide. Mindset is crucial to the success of any educational program and it is doubly so in corrections. This training could diminish the negative connotation of inmates who deal with the correctional officers daily as they try to obtain their education. This training should be ongoing throughout the year for correctional staff and educators, as well as volunteers to the facility. Reinforcement of the educational process and the support educators and staff need to develop a successful academic plan should be a collaborative effort among all of the individuals involved. In the Title 15 manual there is a suggestion for a committee to be formed for the purpose of assigning work or school to inmates. This committee could also include the training necessary as a permanent requirement and members should have a representative from the schools, the students, and the staff.

The third collaborative effort should be between the facility's education department and the teachers. During their meetings they should discuss student needs and expected outcomes of the lessons provided to the students. While education administrators try to standardize the lessons teachers provide, there is no standardization that would work in corrections. The student inmate is not the everyday student one encounters in public and adult education. While it is necessary to understand that this student has suffered traumas, experienced marginalization most of her life, and dealt with oppression from society and sometimes their domestic partners, it is important not to empathize so much that the student self-victimizes herself. The goal is to develop their strengths through education and empower through dialogue and engagement.

Correctional education is a strong step toward providing the social justice opportunity that can open the mind and talents of the student inmates.

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