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The Road To Justice: Incarcerated Students' View On Education Behind Bars

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THE ROAD TO JUSTICE: INCARCERATED STUDENTS' VIEW ON EDUCATION BEHIND BARS

BY

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THE ROAD TO JUSTICE: INCARCERATED STUDENTS' VIEW ON EDUCATION

BEHIND BARS

BY

MARGARET BAKER PRICE

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

For those incarcerated and their families. Know that there is someone cheering for you

and your future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The experience of students that are incarcerated is largely unknown. This qualitative phenomenological research study allowed four college students that are incarcerated to share their experiences. Research shows individuals who are incarcerated are less likely to reoffend this study upon release. This study will show how these individuals view their educational experience during incarceration.

Interviews were conducted with each participant and data was coded and organized into themes. By utilizing a phenomenological stance, observations were made of events that led to the placement of participants in the prison system and how education has impacted their time spent incarcerated. Themes discovered included the importance of knowledge, personal benefits of correctional education, support on the inside, and a need for diversified programs. Findings from this study will help local colleges prepare education programs for prisons as federal financial aid becomes available to those who are incarcerated in July 2023.

Each participant shared their educational experiences, ideas of how to move the program forward, a desire to help their peers see the opportunities even if they are behind bars, and a desire to make their families proud. Along with these experiences, the participants were open about how the education program changed their day-to-day lives. Each spoke of the importance of routine and staying busy to keep a strong mind and emphasized learning a new subject or trade helped them do this.

"The most powerful weapon one can use to change the world is education" – Nelson Mandela

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 2012, I was asked to meet with the administration at a local prison to discuss offering college classes. The first time I visited the medium-security facility of approximately 2,000 justice-involved individuals, I was terrified. I fretted the whole drive and then tried to stay calm as I walked through the doors that slammed and locked behind me. I sat in front of the group of men staring at me and tried to remember everything they would need to know to enroll in community college classes offered at the prison. The more I talked and they asked questions, the more comfortable we became. It turns out, they were nervous too; I was a new person invading their home.

Fast forward nine years. They know me now. They ask to set up meetings to discuss goals and ask for new classes, and sometimes they ask to change the college's processes. Those processes were not set up with justice-involved students in mind and can make their educational goals more difficult to achieve.

In the past, justice-involved individuals were disregarded as potential college students because of a common misconception, they were not going anywhere, and recidivism rates indicated if they were released, they were likely to return (Scott, 2016). Incarcerated students have the same goal as any college student – to make a better life through education. When that goal is understood, it also becomes clear that incarcerated college students have many of the same requirements as students in the traditional classroom. Just as every other student, incarcerated students are required to follow an academic calendar, attend meeting dates with college employees, and earn a C or higher in coursework to continue enrollment in the college program.

As with traditional students, they are also required to have good behavior. Of course, that means something different for incarcerated students. If they are in a fight with another inmate, stop attending class, or are put in solitary confinement, the student is forced to take a failing grade of a W or an E for the course and will have to return the funds invested in their education by the prison.

Incarcerated students do not have the same experience as traditional college students, but just as we aim to see each traditional college student as unique, our justice-involved students deserve consideration as the individual they are and wish to be. By studying how the lives of inmates changed after their involvement in educational programs, a more thorough understanding of how to better serve justice-involved students will be seen.

Definition of Terms

- Incarcerate: "To shut up in prison; to put in confinement; to imprison" (Incarcerate, 2021)

- Student: "A person engaged in or dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge, esp. in a particular subject area; (later in weakened sense) a person who takes an interest in a particular subject or field. Frequently with of or in (a subject), or with the subject of study as a preceding distinguishing word" (Student, 2021)

- Phenomenological stance: the study of how we experience. Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, the way it is directed through its content or meaning toward a certain object in the world. (Smith, 2018)

- Recidivism: "The action of relapsing into crime, or reoffending, esp. habitually; the tendency to behave in this way" (Recidivism, 2021)

- Social Learning Theory: we learn from those we watch. (Bandura, 1977)

- Justice-Involved Individuals: a term used to humanize people that have been incarcerated. Used in place of felon, convict, delinquent, etc. (Language of incarceration, 2022)

- Educate: "To teach (a child) a program of various academic and non-academic subjects, typically at a school; to provide with formal education. Also: to provide (an adult) with instruction, esp. in a chosen subject or subjects at a college, university, or other institution of higher education" (Educate, 2021)

Background of the Problem

Recidivism is the likelihood a criminal will re-offend. According to a study completed by the Pew Center on the States, more than 4 in 10 people released from state prisons were reincarcerated within 3 years of their release (NRRC Facts & Trends, 2019). According to a 2022 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), nearly 1.7 million adults were in America's prisons and jails at the end of 2020 (Kluckow & Zeng, 2022), but *Forbes Magazine* published findings when people who are incarcerated are offered an educational opportunity, they are 46% less likely to reoffend than non-participants (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013).

Scott (2016) found that when individuals who are incarcerated are educated during their sentence, they are less likely to reoffend. Education has a positive impact on those who have the opportunity to have the experience. When people are incarcerated and have opportunities to become educated, they start to change as a person and see that a

different life is possible for them. "This reduction in recidivism is due, in part, to the individual inmate's development of positive social skills and self-value. Research consistently demonstrates that quality education is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention" (Brock, 2017, p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

Social identities help people decide who they are as individuals and where they belong within society. There are several types of social identity theories including racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual. Some may even identify with multiple identity theories. It is important for inmates to feel they have somewhere or someone else to identify with, so they do not feel alone (Cooper et al, 2018). One of the questions of this study was to show when students are enrolled in classes to earn a degree or technical training, they can set goals for their future while they are incarcerated and begin to develop an identity not centered on their current circumstances.

This study was completed by following a phenomenological stance to share the experiences of people incarcerated and enrolled in a college program at their prison. This study is important to engage those in educational and correctional facilities in communication about opportunities and the role they can play in changing the lives of the incarcerated population.

A phenomenological stance with a Hermeneutic lens was utilized to analyze the interview data. This design was chosen to allow the research to focus on the experience of the participants to discover the essence of the educational experience for each participant. The researcher did have a pre-understanding of the definition of education

and incarceration which helped to determine how the incarcerated educational experience may be different than that in the free world.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is defined as a qualitative research method that allows researchers to study how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices. This method elicits stories from participants as a source of understanding (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Hermeneutic phenomenology was applied through this research through a collection of stories and experiences and then through the analysis of the information. This type of study allows the researcher to explain experiences. Other terms are more appropriate in phenomenological research, for example, explication: "investigations of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole" (Hycner, 1999, p. 161). The intended outcome of using hermeneutic phenomenology was to focus on showing the lived experiences due to the fact each of the participants had a unique story to tell.

Purpose of the Study

While the link between education and reduced recidivism has been studied, research is sparse on the incarcerated student experience (Esperian, 2010). Knowing what the incarcerated student thinks about the experience of earning their education or technical credential could help to create more educational programs in prison systems thus creating an environment in which recidivism becomes less likely.

This study aimed to rectify that research shortcoming by focusing on a group of student inmates from a prison in the state of Kentucky. The students have the opportunity to take classes at a lower cost to earn their Associate of Arts or Science degree. In

addition to general education courses, they can complete technical training in heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, small engine repair, and construction.

My interest in this topic developed as I worked with incarcerated students. I heard their stories and saw their pride as they shared the way college and training helped them see a future, they never thought possible. This qualitative research study aims to add additional evidence to better represent these students and what they have to say.

Research Question

When someone is incarcerated and makes the decision to take on the opportunity to further their education, there is a likelihood these people will not return to prison when they are released (Scott, 2016). The educational environment needs to be designed with provisions in mind for this to occur. While some of those elements are obvious, knowledge of the firsthand experiences of incarcerated students will better inform educational programs. This study sought to answer the question, how do students who are incarcerated view their educational experience during incarceration?

This study uses stories from students incarcerated to understand their experience of education during incarceration and how the program and classes impacted their lives.

Rationale of the Study

Knowing the experiences of incarcerated students and using that knowledge to improve their educational environment can benefit prison administration, higher education administration, and governmental bodies as well as current and potential students. Successful incarcerated students benefit the prison administration through their desire to follow behavioral requirements to continue their classes. They help perpetuate

prison-based educational programs by attracting new students, and this allows community colleges to reach a new population.

Likewise, knowing the design needed for a successful prison-based educational program may induce other colleges to offer such programs. In both cases, it will help higher education institutions better serve students who come to school after being incarcerated. It will foster an institutional environment focused on the needs of each student. There is also the added benefit from the additional revenue justice-involved students bring. Offering educational opportunities in prison settings can bring together education, prison, and government systems and save resources for the state while producing hard-working citizens that can contribute to society upon release.

Knowing the stories of incarcerated students highlights what educational processes work and which do not. This allows for modification of the educational environment to better meet the needs of incarcerated students and, thereby, to show there is hope and something to work for while incarcerated.

Nature of the Study

When I am in the prison education wing, I meet with students who are incarcerated and potential students. During my time with these students, I listen and help them talk through their future; I cheer for them when they succeed. As I have not been incarcerated, I try to be empathetic to their situations. I feel by reminding these people they are more than an inmate; I can gain their trust. As a researcher relying on individuals to share firsthand experiences, I may not be generating truthful information if the students do not trust me.

Because I had already had the opportunity to build trust with the participants, a phenomenological stance was taken. The research involved qualitative data collection through in-depth one-on-one interviews, transcription of those interviews, and coding to determine themes.

A memo was posted in the public areas and on the informational televisions of the prison regarding the study. Interested participants signed up through the education department. Each participant was required to have successfully completed four or more college-level classes during incarceration. Success in this program is considered a B or higher. Students are permitted a maximum of two classes per semester so any student with this criterion will already be eligible.

Thirty minutes to an hour was set aside for each participant and it was an adequate amount of time to receive rich information for research. This also allowed enough time for the participants to feel it was a positive experience. In Chapter 3, a step-by-step data collection and process of analysis are provided to ensure the quality of the research. In Chapter 4, in-depth descriptions have been provided to create direct connections between the findings and data collected through research. In Chapter 5, a summary of the study will be presented along with conclusions and recommendations for the future based on knowledge gained.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

As a relationship had already been established between the researcher and the students, and the students were looking forward to sharing their stories, it is assumed interview participants in this study were not deceptive with their answers and answered questions honestly and to the best of their ability. In addition, the interviews were

voluntary, and participants received an example of questions that may be asked during the interview to remove the element of surprise.

Another general assumption that affected this study was the perceptions or multiple realities of those involved, including the researcher, the participants, and the person reading or interpreting the study. The participants are incarcerated, so there may be preconceived notions from the reader. The researcher and participant live in different worlds, so even though connections were made, their lives were still different from one another. Furthermore, from different perspectives of the reader and researcher, there were four different participants, each with a unique experience and voice. Although the participants had diverse backgrounds, education did bring them together throughout the research process.

In addition to these assumptions, uncovering patterns or theories that would help explain the educational phenomenon was the goal of the research. While I listened to the participants, I was constantly listening for themes and ways to connect their stories. In the same context, I understood how important the research and interviews were to the phenomenon of education, so I was able to tailor the questions and conversations to learn more.

Limitations were also addressed for this study. Limitations are what the researcher has no control over. COVID restrictions limited the study through access, changes, and lack of staffing. COVID restrictions limited the study because the prison had been closed to visitors for over two years and the students had not been in class so when they first came in to begin their interviews, they were most concerned about when classes would begin. There was also a lack of access, typically, I can meet with students and speak with

them through the semesters but due to restrictions from COVID, I had to rely on the education department to disperse information regarding the study. Some of the program participants had been moved to different facilities and I was unable to reach them to see if they would be interested in participating. Although there were limitations to this study, I could still tell the stories of students who are incarcerated.

Delimitations are things over which the researcher has control, typically this includes the location of the study. Due to the nature of the facility and the participants, I had to follow guidelines in place by the prison administration. The guidelines included wearing a mask, staying six feet apart, and working with the student one on one instead of with an officer. I was able to control the research question and the population I chose to study.

Summary

I work with justice-involved students, but I am not on campus daily; I do not get to spend as much time with them as I would like. This assignment is an additional duty to my full-time position of success coach. Due to this lack of time, we do not spend time discussing the opportunities their degree or credential can bring them after incarceration or the changes it could bring for their family. This study provided justice-involved students a way to share their experiences about taking college classes while incarcerated. In addition, through these stories, prisons and colleges can build educational programs to serve the prison population.

Through working with justice-involved students, this study showed the impact education had on the individual's time spent incarcerated. This study showed the reader

the perception of education behind bars through the eyes of the incarcerated students and the benefits to be gained by supporting those students.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

The areas used in the literature review include personal benefits of correctional education, programming in the prison, relationships developed during incarceration, the link between recidivism and education, and challenges facing prisons regarding resources and programming. In addition to these, it was important for the researcher to study the process of working with people incarcerated in a qualitative study. The researcher utilized peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and readings from qualitative research publications to learn about how prison experiences are perceived by those incarcerated, those that work in the system, and those in research.

Best Practices when Completing Research in a Prison

Due to the vulnerable nature of the participants and the type of institution the researcher was planning to complete interviews in, it was important for the researcher to understand how to properly interview people incarcerated. Inmates are considered a vulnerable population because they are detained involuntarily, detainment may affect their ability to give consent. Gomes and Duarte (2020) spoke of the ethical conflicts a researcher may face when working in a criminal justice facility. Participants are used to having someone control their time, so the researcher should be respectful of the time and of the types of questions they ask. Besides this, it is important to keep in mind the interviewees are facing a burden because they do not have freedom. The participants have limited privacy. Just because the researcher assures the participant they will have anonymity, some people may see the researcher and participant together (Gomes & Duarte, 2020).

Additionally, it is also important to remember qualitative methodologies are versatile strategies to answer exploratory research questions. Gabbidon and Chenneville (2021) stated although this community are vulnerable, it is important to "allow them to share their stories on their terms by creating space for marginalized voices to be heard" (p. 33). The researchers stated it is important to be aware of the researcher's reflexivity and positionality. The researcher's positionality can be seen as power and privilege and their reflexivity will help the researcher to self-examine to verify the quality of the research process and interpretation of their findings (Gabbidon & Chenneville, 2021).

Field et al. (2019) completed a research study to provide solutions to challenges that are encountered in prison-based research. The researchers used their years of experience and mistakes and lessons learned to publish six domains for researchers to pay attention to when they are planning prison-based research. The first problem researchers may face in prison is access due to lockdowns and confinement. It was determined the researcher needs to be flexible when planning and expect delays with data collection. The next problem researchers may face when working in a prison is communication.

Field et al. (2019) stated the researcher needs to have effective communication with the staff at the correctional facility and the leadership. Effective communication can develop positive relationships. These relationships are important because typically when someone is completing research in prison, the prison is using its resources to escort the researcher throughout the facility and keep them safe. The third issue that may arise is ethics. Inmates represent a vulnerable population, so the researcher needs to be transparent. The researcher needs to be certain that consent is informed, and the participant understands the requirements. The researcher needs to make certain

participants are volunteers and have not been bribed or coerced to participate. The researcher also needs to make the participant aware that although the researcher plans to keep all information confidential, if it is required by the court, the researcher may be required to surrender that information. Next, the researcher needs to be prepared. To be prepared the researcher needs to access existing data instead of relying on manual data collection. Another way the researcher can be prepared before data collection is to attend an orientation to prepare to be in the prison environment. Governance is also an important and key factor when considering research in prison. Field et al. (2019) advised, "that governance bodies should include, where possible and where such a body is deemed necessary, individuals who have influence within an organization and who are willing to enthusiastically champion the project" (p.144). Finally, the researcher needs to consider the needs of the participants. Lower levels of literacy and education might impact the participant's ability to understand and respond. Trust may also be an issue that researchers come up against. The researcher needs to treat the participant with respect; the researcher should introduce themself, explain why they are completing the research, be honest, and respect the participant's anonymity (Field et al., 2019).

Watson and van der Meulen (2019) looked at access barriers and potential issues in using people that are incarcerated as study participants. The researchers spoke of the importance of cooperating with the prison instead of challenging changes they were asked to make. The researchers were not allowed to hold focus groups or use the staff as participants for their research. Due to this rejection, the researchers had to change their inclusion criteria and ended up completing their research with 30 former inmates and ten expert stakeholders.

Watson and van der Meulen (2019) focused on opportunities and challenges with using former prisoners as study participants. They found there was value in using former prisoners because of their first-hand knowledge of their lived experiences. By utilizing focus groups, the researchers were able "to give them opportunities to hear and build on each other's perspectives in supportive, moderated group settings that can facilitate sharing of ideas and potentially sensitive information" (p. 8). Since the researchers had to use people that had been formerly incarcerated, the participants might have been out of prison for a long time and unable to recall information about their experiences. The researchers stated that with the lower number of participants, they did not feel limited with this information. They also had to consider issues that participants might have might be facing since they had been released from prison. They had to consider the participants may be unemployed at an economic disadvantage. They could be dealing with physical or mental health issues and the stigma associated with prison. Finally, the researchers focused on ethical considerations. These concerns included privacy, informed consent, and assuring volunteerism. There also can be fear of repercussions for disclosing information about personal history. To address these issues the researchers were mindful about asking certain questions (Watson & van der Meulen, 2019).

Abbott et al. (2018), the final study used, discussed the unique challenges of completing qualitative research with people that are incarcerated. The researchers looked at the processes that were reported in qualitative interviews and focus group research with people in prison as participants. They looked at ethical approval, participant sampling, participant recruitment, and data collection. The researchers chose 126 studies. They found the most common method of sampling was convenient sampling or sampling

of a group sharing characteristics of interest. Individual interviews and focus groups or group interviews with both male and female participants were the methods used for data collection.

In the 126 studies, the locations of the interviews were in various places: common room, education room, prison wing or cell, visitor room, office, or health clinic. The researchers determined it was important to know about research regulations and to have background knowledge of the local prison system. In addition, Abbott et al. (2018) stated "adequate detailing of recruitment and data collection processes is perhaps even more important for understanding the ethical conduct and credibility of the research with prisoners, given the challenges to access and rigorous sampling, the explicit and implicit coercion risk, and the heightened yet impeded need for privacy and confidentiality" (p. 8).

Personal Benefits of Correctional Education

Upon incarceration, people might think their life is over when they go from freedom to being in a prison cell. Smith (2017), a volunteer for Free Expression Authors, wrote about his time volunteering with a group of five men at a medium-security prison. Smith (2017) explains that using recidivism to measure educational programs or post-employment release does not share the experiences of thousands of people in prison. Smith (2017) goes on to say the free expression authors program "believes in the rehabilitative power of writing and that education in prisons is a human right. People in prison should have access to education not simply to reduce the likelihood of recidivism; they should have access to an education because having the opportunity to learn is fundamental to human dignity" (p. 86).

In this writing, Smith (2017) shares the stories the students share that make him feel like he is hanging out with old friends. Smith (2017) quotes the Massachusetts Department of Corrections and asks how putting people who committed crimes when they were children or young adults in prison for the rest of their lives helps to "promote public safety by managing offenders while providing care and appropriate programming in preparation for successful reentry into the community" (p. 91). Smith talks about how the men and his group find camaraderie while they meet and that they should be called scholars and intellectuals. Smith (2017) states the Free Expression Authors program allows participants to feel free and reclaim their dignity.

Pelletier & Evans (2019) interviewed a group of 18 formerly incarcerated males to determine if they had experienced positive outcomes from an educational program during incarceration that did not only include recidivism. The researchers first had the participants meet in focus groups. Once Pelletier & Evans (2019) determined themes from the focus groups, the researchers interviewed the participants one on one. The participants stated they felt like they had developed self-confidence and a positive self-image through their educational activities. The participants also reported earning an education provided confidence to look for employment opportunities even if there are challenges after incarceration. In addition to self-confidence, the participants stated improved relationships with famous family members. In conclusion, the participants stated they felt by being involved in the higher education program they felt like they were more respected within the prison and had additional opportunities that other people who are incarcerated would not have if they were not enrolled in an education program (Pelletier & Evans, 2019).

A dissertation completed by doctoral student Currier (2018) at Nova Southeastern University studied how those who teach in a prison setting view their role. One of the participants stated the most important part of prison education is the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum allows those students who are incarcerated to take on more roles.

This, according to this participant, is ultimately what is valuable about correctional education programming, since according to this participant such role-modeling is not possible through contact and communication with members of facility security. But the value, according to this participant, is most assuredly not in the acquisition of mathematical skill, nor in developing reading and writing proficiency" (Currier, 2018, p. 149).

Another participant in the aforementioned study explained she found the value of correctional education to be keeping the inmates busy. She said if those inmates had programming during their day, then there would be less chance for them to get into fights or cause trouble. She also said these programs usually were created to check off a box that was required from their state and not because they wanted to change the outcome of that student's life.

Not everyone feels like prison programming is a way to check a box, though. When asked about working with men facing a life sentence, Inderbitzin (2018) noted, "I have had the privilege of volunteering and working with prisoners and prisoner-led clubs over the past ten years, and I have witnessed how men incarcerated from young ages can discover their self-worth and choose to become strong and effective leaders, finding hope and meaning in the harsh environment of a maximum-security prison" (p. 1). When these men accept leadership roles, they become more involved in decision-making and can

work with the prison administration and staff. These justice-involved individuals turned leaders gave back to their prisons in different ways. For example, they build playgrounds available to children who are visiting a parent or loved one, and they host morning conversations with donuts to make sure the elderly inmates feel heard.

Programming in Prison

Providing meaningful programming options helps to ensure people who are incarcerated can find purpose and routine. Walden University student Bennett (2015) completed a study that looked at the offender's perspective of correctional education programs. The participants stated there were correctional educational programs that helped them to secure employment more quickly after they were incarcerated. They utilized services from the prison to aid in their soft skills as well. The researcher identified soft skills as personality traits, communication, language, and characteristics that might be picked up through interaction with others. The researcher also referenced the self-efficacy theory from Bandura's social learning theory. He said programming in prison encouraged those who are incarcerated to be self-efficient and that helped them to reach their personal goals (Bennett, 2015). The researcher did not reference specific program names, but the participants found them to be helpful.

Allred et al. (2020) studied an Inside-Out prison exchange program. This program brings together college students taking classes in the traditional sense and college students who are incarcerated. The researcher held nine think tanks with 114 people. In the think tanks, the Inside-Out participants were asked "what does this program mean to you?" The students stated they felt they were able to do their part in civic engagement. They felt they were a family because they had made relationships and human

connections. They felt the program provided a safe space where they could be real and know there was always someone there for them. Finally, they felt they were transforming into a better person. Providing students who are incarcerated and students not incarcerated the time to learn together provided them with meaningful experiences they felt changed their lives.

Quantitative studies have also been completed to show the changes programming can lead to for a person who is incarcerated. One facility chose to study the STEPS (Steps to Economic and Personal Success) curriculum and the effect it has on criminal thinking. Measuring criminal thinking is important because it helps to determine whether participants are ready for treatment and more open to other significant changes. The scale measures entitlement, justification, power orientation, cold-heartedness, criminal rationalization, and personal irresponsibility. One hundred twenty-eight incarcerated males completed the Texas Christian University Criminal Thinking Scale before and after they watched the 15 video-based course. The participants met in small groups with a trained facilitator and watched each video and worked through a manual provided with the STEPS course. When the participants completed the class, they had lower scores in most of the critical thinking domains (Warner et al, 2018). The researchers determined it was possible to change attitudes in a correctional setting.

Hanser et al. (2020) completed a study utilizing the Criminal Thinking Scale as well. This study included 203 male inmates from a medium-security prison in northeastern Louisiana. The participant's ages varied from 18 to 64. The researchers utilized a motivational psychoeducation program that was made up of seven lesson topics covering motivational lectures and goal setting with the intent to help participants change

criminal thoughts and behaviors. Psychoeducation programs use cognitive-behavior therapy, group therapy, and education. The researchers used four groups, groups one, two, and three lived in the same dorm and were enrolled in a substance abuse treatment program. The participants in group one received the motivational psychoeducation from two fellow inmate mentors, the participants in group two received the motivational psychoeducation from an inmate mentor and a staff member of the facility, the participants in group three received the motivational psychoeducation from two staff members of the facility. The final group, the control group, was housed in a separate dorm but also was enrolled in the substance abuse treatment program.

Hanser et al. (2020) found when the participants completed the criminal thinking scale, each group's post-test scores were lower than their pre-test scores. Group three had the lowest reduction in criminal thinking, this group was led by program staff. Group two had the best outcomes and the overall reduction of criminal thinking; this group was taught by an inmate mentor and a staff member. It was determined that this may be the best approach when completing programming with incarcerated populations.

McNeeley (2022) completed a quantitative study on prison victimization in Minnesota state prisons. The researcher used Cox regression models and negative binomial models to determine predictors of victimization. McNeely (2022) found that people who are incarcerated and have participated in rehabilitative programming and prison work were less likely to experience violence. She also went on to say programming can improve incarcerated people's behavior communication then can help reduce victimization by their peers.

In addition to rehabilitative programming, some prisons offer faith-based programming. This type of programming falls under the prison chaplain. The chaplain's duties include administrative tasks, organizing religious volunteers from diverse groups of faith, and supervising the faith-based programming at the prison. The researcher utilized one on one interviews with 19 chaplains. In the interviews, the participants discussed efficient prison programming characteristics. These characteristics included altering criminal thinking, strong social support, and emphasizing morality. In conclusion, the participants felt the faith-based programming provided moral accountability, a sense of community, and purpose (Denney, 2017).

To bring together parents that are incarcerated and children, the National Institute on Corrections created a guide for model practices for parents in prisons and jails. This guide provides information on how to partner with community organizations, how to train your staff and encourage their buy-in, the importance of family-centered practices, how to communicate the availability of resources, how to determine parental needs, and how to create and implement parent-focused classes and groups. This guide also discusses the importance of having a welcoming environment for children and why a family-focused reentry program should be developed. The parent classes help the family to learn how to communicate, deal with anger issues, work on conflict resolution, financial literacy, active parenting skills, and how to set goals before they return home. Through this program, parents who are incarcerated can focus on parenting techniques, building relationships with co-parents or caregivers, and child development. They can complete the classes with knowledge to improve their parenting skills so they can return home and help be a positive influence (Peterson et al., 2021).

Davis (2019) from the RAND Corporation evaluated North Carolina's Pathways program. The Pathways program gave students the option of earning a certificate, a diploma, or an associate of applied science degree. The participants in the program had to agree to be moved to a different facility for access to the program. Davis found the program did an exceptional job providing training and support for their staff. Davis also found that having the program embedded within the Department of Public Safety was essential to address concerns of correctional and educational staff. The researcher also determined that community support was vital. The Pathways program has been positive not only for the students but for the community and the prison. Davis (2019) stated "In recognition of the importance of technology in education, the department also developed its own intranet platform to support PSE (post-secondary education) in prison and provided limited internet access for these programs. Pathways also laid the groundwork for improved reentry planning, with education becoming a key tenet of reentry in North Carolina" (p. 8).

The Petey Greene Project (PGP) was established in 2008. This program brought volunteers in the prison setting to tutor students that are incarcerated. This project focuses on improving access to education for incarcerated people but also points out the importance of improving public education, job creation, and more equitable community investment and abolishing carceral systems altogether. If these issues are not addressed on the front end, then people are not prepared to succeed in higher education or living wage work. According to their website, "PGP believes that everyone deserves a chance, that we cannot discount anyone, and are responsible for each other—it is the central life-

long lesson our volunteers learn when they tutor students who are incarcerated or have been recently released" (Kim, 2019).

In August 2013, the Petey Greene Prisoner Assistance Program was evaluated by Kowalski, program analyst for the office of educational services of New Jersey Department of Corrections. Kowalski (2013) found that 17% of all tutored inmates achieved the GED within the period of study, tutored inmates account for 25% of GED achievement for participating facilities, contributing 36 out of 144 total GEDs and tutored inmates passed the GED with a 90% passing rate as compared to an average facility passing rate of 83%. In addition, The Petey Greene Program helped to decrease facility violence levels, motivate students, communicate individual inmate needs to education staff, and hold students and education staff accountable. The volunteers stated they gained pre-professional experience, particularly in the fields of criminal justice (~20% of volunteers), education (~10%), and public policy (~25%). 58% of tutored inmates would be released within two years of participating in tutoring and over one-third (36%) would leave within the same year of program participation. Through this project, the researchers determined the program increased awareness of prison life and education through community immersion in the prison environment (Kowalski, 2013).

Kyprianides and Easterbrook (2020) studied the effect of Finding Rhythms, a charity in the United Kingdom. Participants completed a six-week music project in UK prisons. The researchers, who developed the program, Finding Rhythms, wanted to determine if the program promoted social engagement and psychological well-being among inmates. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach. They interviewed participants and asked them to complete a questionnaire. Through these approaches, the

researchers were able to determine their program creates a shared identity, satisfies psychological needs, and benefits well-being. Kyprianides and Easterbrook (2020) also determined that "these positive wellbeing outcomes later permeate into prison life, making it easier and more manageable" (p. 550). Programs like Finding Rhythms help to add purpose to the typically mundane day-to-day lives of those incarcerated.

Relationships Developed in Prison

During incarceration, justice-involved individuals will meet many people – their roommates, correctional officers, staff who support programs, and other inmates. What impact do these relationships have? If these relationships were more sustained or otherwise nurtured, might their impact be even greater? These studies are organized by relationships with family, prison employees, chaplains, and instructors.

The image of a justice-involved individual being buoyed by the support of a loving family is a staple of television and movies; however, that oversimplified conception of this relationship still rests on a bedrock positive influence. As Mowen and Visher (2015) highlighted in a study of 122 newly released prisoners, "Families helped with deprisonization by celebrating the end of incarceration and by providing support to a population adjusting to the everyday complexity of free society" (p. 27). But what of the daily influences inside the prison walls?

McElligott (2007) states there are four main sections to the work of a correctional officer: being gatekeepers to institutional and social resources and mediators between "the state and its client/subject populations" (p. 79); using interpersonal skills for their daily interactions with their client group (i.e., prisoners); being "attuned to the tense dynamics of prison life" (p. 91), to their daily practices); and understanding the

importance of "personal presence," honesty, consistency, and "the deft use of formal and informal sanctions" (p. 91) in maintaining everyday order and control. McElligott highlights issues with inmates, fear of inmates, being overworked and underpaid as the negative side of being a correctional officer, and these issues can make it difficult to develop positive relationships.

Although it is not their job to be friends with inmates, Crewe et al. (2015) highlighted the role state correctional officers play in making the prison a safe environment by looking at values, practices, and quality of life in five private-sector and two public-sector prisons in England and Wales. Through this study, Crewe et al. (2015) was able to determine three realms of prison culture and quality: relationships between frontline staff and prisoners, levels of staff professionalism, and prisoners' experience of state authority. The study showed the importance of respect, for the guards from the inmates and the inmates from the guards. In the comparison of private versus non-private facilities in the United Kingdom, the study found

> while all four prisons were rated reasonably positively on the most superficial
> measures of staff courtesy and treatment…prisoners in Dovegate (the private-
> sector training prison) were significantly less positive than those in Garth (the
> public-sector training prison) about most aspects… showing the statistical
> significance of variations between the means of each of the two matched
> establishments (as evaluated by prisoners) of their relationships with staff and the
> humanity and respectfulness of their treatment" (Crewe et al., 2015, p. 322).

Beyond correctional officers, inmates may have the opportunity to connect with a minister inside the prison walls. This relationship offers the opportunity for inmates to

grow in a way that can help them adapt to the changes in their lives. In Louisiana, for example, inmates can complete a seminary program. Through this program, inmates can "create a new social identity to replace the label of the prisoner or criminal, imbue the experience of imprisonment with purpose and meaning, empower the largely powerless prisoner by turning him into an agent of God, provide the prisoner with a language and framework for forgiveness, and allow a sense of control over an unknown future" (Hallett, et al., 2017, p. 16).

This is also true of the relationship between the justice-involved student, their instructor, and those counseling them as they plan their educational program. As with the Louisiana seminary program, pursuit of education provides a label other than criminal, and through working with people outside the prison, the justice-involved student can find meaning. Despite their circumstances, these students have someone other than a family member, minister, or prison social worker who believes in them.

Komarraju et al. (2010) completed a study with 242 undergraduate students from a Midwestern public university. The researcher completed a correlation analysis to establish the relationships between different aspects of student-faculty interactions, academic self-concept, student motivation, and achievement. They also completed a regression analysis due to the number of significant correlations. Komarraju et al. (2010) stated "Students who perceive their faculty members as being approachable, respectful, and available for frequent interactions outside the classroom are more likely to report being confident of their academic skills and being motivated, both intrinsically and extrinsically" (p. 340). Students feel motivated when they are treated with respect by their instructors. In addition, students will be more likely to reach out to their instructors

when they see them as approachable and available to help which in turn will help the student be more successful. If a student that is incarcerated needs help, it is important they have an instructor that meets this criterion so they may be more successful in the course and feel motivated upon release.

Relationships are developed in the classroom and by studying teaching practices, the researcher can determine how teaching styles impact students. Hanson et al. (2016) looked at eight teaching practices that were considered good: non-classroom interactions with faculty, prompt feedback, frequency of interactions with faculty, teaching clarity and organization, challenging classes and high faculty expectations, frequency of higher-order exams and assignments, academic challenge and effort, and integrated ideas, information, and experiences to determine if faculty members had an influence on students' plans to enroll in graduate school. The researchers used secondary data from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education which included 17 colleges. Participants were first-year, full-time undergraduates and were surveyed three times, fall 2006 (4501 students), spring 2007 (3081 students), and spring 2010 (2212 students). Logistic regression was completed and showed that good teaching practices have a significant and positive effect on degree aspirations. Hanson et al. (2016) determined that faculty behavior in and out of the classroom will have an impact on their students and help to determine whether they will move further along in their educational career.

The Link Between Recidivism and Education

Passed with bipartisan support and signed into law on April 9, 2008, the Second Chance Act (SCA) is a federal grant that "supports state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations in their work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for

people returning from state and federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile facilities. SCA legislation authorizes federal grants for vital programs and systems reform aimed at improving the reentry process" (Second Chance Act Grant Program, 2019, 3).

According to the Council of State Governments Justice Center, since 2009, more than 840 Second Chance Act grant awards have been made to government agencies and nonprofit organizations from 49 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories for reentry programs serving adults and juveniles. As of December 2017, an estimated 164,000 people returning to their community after incarceration has participated in these programs. The grants provide vital services—including employment training and assistance, substance use treatment, education, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims support, and other services—to make a person's transition from prison or jail safer and more successful. The grants also support the improvement of corrections and supervision practices that aim to reduce recidivism. The Second Chance Act's grant programs are funded and administered by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. The grant lasts three years with the first year for planning and the next two spent on implementation (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014).

The Council of State Governments Justice Center followed the success of the Second Chance Act by showing the declining recidivism rates of Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. The contributing factors were investing in community-based treatment, promoting continuity of care from incarceration to the community, meeting individual needs, providing participation incentives, improved response to those reoffending, intensive supervision, and data collection (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014).

The National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) provided tables showing the data of the number of times a state has received the Second Chance Act grant as well as the percentage change in probation revocations to prison. According to a 2022 report from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), nearly 1.7 million adults were in America's prisons and jails at the end of 2020 (Kluckow & Zeng, 2022). The National Reentry Resource Center explains the Second Chance Act studied as a grant that was created to support state, local, and tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations in their work to reduce recidivism through reforms for programs meant to improve the reentry process. The act was passed with support from both parties and signed into law on April 9, 2008 (Second Chance Act Grant Program, 2019). Since 2009, more than 800 awards have been made to grantees across 49 states according to the site.

Nashe (2018) released an article entitled Inmate Education is the Key to Reducing Recidivism Rates Nationwide and Worth the Investment. Dr. Turner Nashe, Jr., Senior Vice President of Education Services at GTL states "studies have repeatedly shown that increasing education initiatives within prisons leads to lower recidivism rates, saving taxpayers millions of dollars. The RAND Corporation found for every dollar spent on education, between four and five dollars are saved because of lower reincarceration costs" (Nashe, 2018, p. 1). The article discusses the rate of housing an inmate versus the cost of rehabilitating them. Also, the author shares the initiatives completed by the prisons with success and explains the former inmates will give back to society as well.

Scott (2016) says a correlation is shown when incarcerated individuals are educated during their sentence, they are less likely to offend. If the participants of this study had been given these opportunities during their delinquency, they may have been

more successful as students. Brock states "This reduction in recidivism is due, in part, to the individual inmate's development of positive social skills and self-value. Research consistently demonstrates that quality education is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention."

There are positives to encouraging outside connections and educational opportunities for those incarcerated, but the educational policies within the prison system can cause obstacles for inmates looking to further their education. The three main obstacles preventing inmates from earning an education include cost, availability, and lack of knowledge or support (Evans, et al., 2018). In the United States, 63 of the 4,298 educational institutions are experimental sites for the Second Chance Pell grant, a grant that allows incarcerated individuals to use federal financial aid if their crime was not sexual, or they were not convicted while receiving federal financial aid (Federal Student Aid, 2019).

As of June 2022, only one higher education institution in Kentucky has been granted the chance to participate in the Second Chance PELL grant. Along with cost, students face a lack of resources, no books, no internet, no computer access, and limited time allowed in libraries due to security and routines in prison (Diseth et al., 2008). Finally, those incarcerated may not be prepared for the educational programs offered. Twenty-nine percent of 1,546 sampled inmates tested below a level two in literacy, 52% tested below a level two in numeracy (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2014).

While Kentucky was forced to entirely halt prison education when the COVID-19 pandemic began, other states, with online learning options in place, continued. In Florida,

the Florida Prison Education Project, an initiative of the University of Central Florida, offered undergraduate education classes to people who are incarcerated in Central Florida in mixed modalities. The curriculum is aligned with the State of Florida's General Education Program (GEP) for easy transfer of up to 45 credits through the Prior Learning Assessment Program (Florida Prison Education Project, 2019).

In Texas, Lee College Huntsville Campus led the way for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and received approval for a pilot program in partnership with Blackboard and ATLO Software. A stand-alone instance of Blackboard Learn SaaS was set up through the Huntsville Campus in January 2021. Firewalls and IP restrictions were implemented and many of the tools and features of the robust system were turned off. A single sign-on server was established for each unit individually, reducing the risk of shared credentials or abuse of a public access (or even private) server. ATLO Software provided secure, simplified laptops and installed computer labs, as well. Enrollment has grown to 1200 incarcerated students at eight TDCJ units (Huntsville Center, 2022).

In addition to providing new ways to educate their students, the Huntsville Center showed pride in its program with the *Second Chance Magazine*. The latest issue published on their website was from 2019. Highlights from this issue include articles titled "Huntsville Center hosts first-ever TEDx event at a Texas prison," "Huntsville Center celebrates largest graduating class in program history," and "Employer's partnership helps students build new lives." In "Employer's partnership helps students build new lives," the reader learns of a local company utilizing the students in the prison to build cabinetry (Fleming, 2019). Wisenbaker Builder Services rely on the craftsmen who graduated from Lee College's cabinetmaking program to help with their detailed

work. The college worked with the company so they could develop courses to help prepare the students who were incarcerated to be a perfect fit for their business (Fleming, 2019).

Silver et al (2020) utilized data from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (ODRC) to determine if academic achievements moderated the association between recidivism-focused programs and behavioral change among incarcerated individuals. The researcher used a three-step process to determine which cases would be included in their study. The first step was looking at programs. The programs chosen were facilitated by ODRC in 28 prison facilities between January 2008 and June 2012. The next two steps determined which group would be treated as the control group and which would be used as the treatment group. The control group was defined as not having exposure to programming during their time in prison. The treatment group included participants that had completed one of these seven programs; Thinking for a Change, Responsible Family Life Skills, Inside Out Dad, Cage Your Rage, Victim Awareness, Personal Responsibility of Violence Elimination, and Money Smart. The study found lower academic achievement was associated with an increased likelihood of recidivism in the first year after release for one percentile. The study also found that academic achievement moderates the impact of recidivism-focused programs. In addition, individuals with lower verbal and math skills or more likely to recidivate. The researchers determined it was important to address barriers faced by those that are incarcerated when they first come to prison to determine their needs (Silver, et al., 2020).

On April 28, 2017, United States Penitentiary–Atlanta debate team spoke of the difficulties of reentry education in a debate. A panel format was used and there was not a

winner. The speakers each delivered a speech about reentry education programs. Southard (2019) attended the debate and then problematized the rhetoric of re-entry in three ways, the definition of reentry education, issues of agency about re-entry education programs, and how the debate they attended archive the discourse on re-entry education. The researcher found the word reentry to be persuasive, meaning it brought positive or negative feelings. Southard (2019) stated that the debaters had different definitions of the term, but all agreed "reentry education as a concept was much different than reentry education in action" (p. 41). The debaters said improvement through education benefits their future families. The researcher asked, "how does free society "hear" the voices of prisoners, and thus, better understand the obligations and anxieties associated with re-entry education and, more generally, prison life?" (p. 45).

The prison education project provided academic, life skills, and career development programming with the help of 800 university student and faculty volunteers. This project served 5000 inmates between the years of 2011 and 2019. In 2011, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) launched the prison education project. This project included five prison administrators. The researcher was the founder of the concept and coordinator of the first meeting. The goal of this program is to create a prison-to-school pipeline to provide tools for the students that are incarcerated to be productive citizens upon release. The researcher discussed the challenges faced. These challenges included working with administrators in two different systems, prison and university, support from administrators in corrections, correctional officers with a negative connotation of rehabilitation, the unpredictability of access, and liability.

The prison education program has two, seven-week semesters in the fall and spring. Volunteers complete an academic orientation course and then teach a career development course, an interdisciplinary course, and an enrichment course. To determine the impact of the course, program coordinators host a focus group with inmates and a focus group including correctional officers, the principal, and the community resource manager to see if they feel the program has had an impact on the behavior of the inmates. In addition, the volunteers submit a three-sentence report after each session. This report helps to determine what worked and what did not work in the program so they can adjust the content. By working with volunteers, students, and facility staff, a comprehensive understanding determines the program's effectiveness.

The prison education program doesn't forget about its students upon release. Participants can also attend a 10-week reintegration academy that is hosted on a college campus each spring. The participants learn about academic, life skills, and career development. They receive a meal card, transportation voucher, and a voucher to buy business casual clothes. Throughout the course, the participant receives a laptop and help to register at a community college. A job fair is hosted for the participants with 25 local employers and a graduation banquet is held at the end of the 10-week course.

The Prison Education Program (PEP) relies heavily on volunteers. The turnover rate is high because of the intensity of the program but each semester the program has 100 new student volunteers. Reese (2017) stated the ''reciprocal reflex'' is dynamic with PEP, because the volunteers get instant feedback on how much they are valued. The reciprocal reflex is between the volunteers and those incarcerated because the volunteers are learning and teaching and the participants that are incarcerated are teaching and

learning with the volunteers too which helps to incite the enthusiasm and appreciativeness of both volunteers and inmates in the program. "This is manifested in the intense attention given to the volunteers by the inmates during the volunteers' presentations. This can also be seen in the animated gratitude the inmates show towards the volunteers after each academic session" (p. 697). This program brings people together that may have never crossed paths to learn and experience each other. The volunteers and inmates are growing from the experience.

Throughout the PEP, Reese (2017) compared the United States prison system to that of Scotland, Norway, Singapore, and Uganda. The researcher found that Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world at 20% while the United States has one of the highest at 76.6% (Reese, 2017). Reese (2017) stated "All of these systems believe that individuals deserve second chances, and that rehabilitation is more rational than punishment. Progressive prison systems create aesthetically warm physical environments which enable inmates to reflect, learn and evolve" (p. 705). Reese (2017) determined the United States did not reflect the same system or environment where recidivism rates could be reduced.

The Petey Greene Project joined over 100 people and organizations in the field of prison education in signing a memo authored by the College and Community (CCF) and the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network (FICGN) that urges the Department of Education to support education in reentry by providing a regulatory framework for programs serving both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated learners. This memo was created to set standards for any entity that plan to collaborate with a prison to provide education to students that are incarcerated. The standards include

- Identify or provide or at a minimum link to providers who can address basic needs associated with the state's community supervision requirements such as housing and employment that can be barriers to education completion

- Financial aid counseling, digital literacy, accreditation support, transfer, and enrollment counseling, on-campus support, and counseling on all that is associated with education outside prison, as well as building a career.

- Identification of and information about educational institutions in the community that may be accessible to the student's place of release and provides educational programs aligned with the student's degree objectives.

- Soft skill-building like networking, problem-solving, project management, and self-advocacy.

- Creation of safe spaces and mentorship programs post-release.

The requirement of standards will ensure students are receiving the same educational programs as students not incarcerated. There are many factors to keep in mind when serving students that are incarcerated and this memo sets forth a precedent (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021).

Not only is it important to focus on education during incarceration, but also before when studying the cradle to prison pipeline. Delale-O'Connor et al. (2017) chose to focus on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy concerning teachers' classroom management practices. The researchers also posited it was imperative that teachers "learn about and build powerful relationships with students inside of school, learn about and develop an understanding of the outside of school context that students experience, and learn about and appropriately respond to trauma their students might experience" (p. 181). The

researchers stated that when these three things are done, there is more of a likelihood that the student won't follow in the cradle to prison pipeline.

Education and Programming Challenges in Prison

There are many challenges to be discussed regarding education and programming in prison. Challenges include lack of community engagement, funding, staff, and resources. The first resource to discuss is the prison library (Rosen, 2020). Libraries in the prison have the mission to meet the diverse information needs of their patrons. Prison libraries are like public libraries in the fact they both plan to promote information access as an essential human right. The Public Library association lists eight categories as the primary functions of public libraries. A prison library fits six of the eight categories, community activity center, community information center, formal education support center, independent learning center, popular materials library, and reference library. It is difficult to measure the impact of a library in a prison. One way to measure the success of a prison library includes circulation data the number of patrons, library program attendance, or ratios of library materials to inmates. Another challenge is the frequent change of the patrons' needs. Because it is difficult to measure the impact of a library in prison, the facilities are often inadequate and understaffed Some prisons utilize correctional employees who don't have training in library services (Rosen, 2020).

Prison libraries also lack computers and other technologies that are available in public libraries which complicates the collection of data. In conclusion, by improving prison library services a benefit will be made to people that are incarcerated, librarians, correctional staff, researchers, and administrators that are not aware of the value of a library (Rosen, 2020).

There are many different types of programs across prisons in the United States. The "what works" study looked at the results of correctional program assessments over the course of 14 years. The researcher looked at 563 Correctional Program Checklist (CPC) assessments across 26 states between January 2005 and December 2018. The CPC looks at two areas content and capacity content covers offender assessment and treatment characteristics. The capacity area is divided into three domains, program leadership and development, staff characteristics, and quality assurance. The researcher looked at programs that served adults, juveniles, and mixed ages. Farringer et al (2019) concluded that "fidelity to the "what works" literature – and more specifically the RNR model – across correctional programs, within the United States, over the past decade and a half, is modest and declining" (p. 280).

In addition to this study above, Lee (2019) studied programming in Iowa prisons. There are 16 categories of programs: anger management, cognitive treatment, domestic abuse treatment, education, employment services, family treatment, job training, life skills, mental health treatment, moderate-intensity family violence prevention program, sex offender treatment, substance abuse care, substance abuse treatment, and victim treatment. The data used by the researcher included individuals released from an Iowa prison during the time of January 1, 2009, and December 31, 2011, and whether that person was eligible for and participated in/successfully completed at least one of the programs in each category during incarceration. There were a total of 1604 observations for the study. Lee (2019) found that there were few cases where programming significantly reduced recidivism. The only program that consistently showed significance

was employment services. Lee (2019) discussed how implementation is not the same across prisons and it is time to focus on strategies to achieve tangible results.

One of the issues with lack of success regarding prison programming is access. Edwards (2021) completed a phenomenological, qualitative study with 49 male inmates that had not received rehabilitative programming or had been blocked access. The researcher asked participants what programs they participated in and why. Three and six months after release the researcher completed interviews regarding their post-release success or failure. Edwards (2021) stated "All the participants (N=49) had difficulties (e.g., substance abuse, gang membership, educational deficits, and unstable work histories) that warranted participation in beneficial prison programs" (p. 1135). The researcher determined the participants found there was too little time because they were required to be doing something else during the programming. They also stated there were limited opportunities and they felt powerless when they were denied the opportunity to attend a program.

When there is a problem, it is important to find a solution. Russo, (2020) in connection with The RAND Corporation Completed a study to see how jails can operate in a data-informed approach. A workgroup was put together by the National Institute of Justice. This group included jail administrators, correctional experts, and representatives of national associations. The workgroup determined there were five areas to improve upon: leadership and organizational issues, information sharing, data collection and analysis, applying the data, and procuring and implementing a jail management system. A two-day workshop was held to address the issues. During the workshop, the participants concluded that better education was needed to help leaders create a culture

that values data, staff needs to be trained in these practices, there needs to be a prioritization for information technology and analytical staff, an information-sharing system needs to be put into place and improved software is needed to allow data collection and analysis.

Summary

Research has shown that for people who are incarcerated, participating in college programs not only improves their lives and those of their families but also benefits entire communities. Ninety-five percent of people in prison eventually return home. With a college degree, they are better positioned to secure well-paying jobs, find stable housing, and provide for their families. People in prison who participate in postsecondary education are also 48% less likely to return to prison (Vera Institute of Justice, 2021).

The research is missing the importance of achievement during incarceration and the importance of relationships to encourage inmates to move forward with their lives during incarceration. In addition, the research lacks challenges prisons face now and in the future regarding programming, resources, staff, and funding.

Research agrees that when an inmate works toward an educational goal while incarcerated, the inmate is less likely to re-offend (Aseltine & Cantora, 2020). Current literature lacks in sharing the perspective of the incarcerated student. Through this study, interviews shared what the researchers had not, how an educational achievement made justice-involved students feel, how it changed their outlook on the time they serve and how it affected the future they saw for themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Context

Chapter Three explains the research focus and purpose. Through working with justice-involved students, this study showed the impact education had on the individual's time spent incarcerated. This study showed the reader the perception of education behind bars through the eyes of the incarcerated students and the benefits gained by supporting those students.

According to Kentucky's Corrections website, "Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex is a medium-security institution located in the Appalachian Region of Morgan County in Eastern Kentucky. Construction began in January 1986 with the groundbreaking ceremony presided over by Governor Martha Layne Collins. To meet the growing need for inmate housing, the institution was designed to be completed in two phases. The first phase was completed and began receiving inmates in February 1990. Phase II was completed in December 1991. The cost of both phases was $72,979,200. A 50-bed minimum-security unit exists outside the fence. The institution sits on 157 acres of land. The design received the 1990 Kentucky Society of Architects of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) Hone Award of Design Excellence."

Warden James David Green has an operating budget of $29.5 million for 157 acres, 1938 inmates, and 359 staff members. The inmate population is 66% white and 34% black, there are no other races reported on their website as of February 3, 2022. The cost per day to take care of an inmate is $63.42 with the yearly cost being $23,146.98 (Commonwealth of Kentucky Department of Corrections).

Maysville Community and Technical College (MCTC) works with approximately 80 justice-involved students housed at Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex (EKCC). The justice-involved students work on classes toward their associate degree. They have the opportunity to take one-to-two classes a semester. If students are allowed to apply for financial aid, they could take more classes and earn their degrees quicker. Over the past five academic years, MCTC has awarded 38 total credentials (certificates, degrees, diplomas). The average grade point average (GPA) from 2015 to 2020 is 3.3816. Not only do MCTC and prison administration have high expectations, but the students have high expectations for themselves and one another.

The institution offers the following programs:

- Associate of arts (capacity to serve 40 students)

- Associate of science (capacity to serve 40 students)

- Small Engine Repair (capacity to serve 18 students)

- Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Technology (capacity to serve 18 students)

- Carpentry (capacity to serve 18 students)

Cyndi Heddleston, Office of Research & Legislative Services from the Kentucky Department of Corrections, stated there are potentially 20,000 people released from incarceration per year statewide. According to Steve Meadows, Corrections Regional Education Administrator of Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex, an average of 200 inmates per year through EKCC are released. They may be released to supervision or have served out their time. Either way, if they are released with some college credit or with a degree, they may have developed skills that could offer them a life-changing path.

Basic public speaking and writing skills may also serve to promote a degree of self-confidence for them to follow this path.

MCTC and EKCC have a strong working relationship. At a 2019 graduation ceremony in the prison, the student speaker said by earning his education, he was able to get out of his way and to see he can make changes in his life. The dedicated group of employees at MCTC are passionate about serving this population and look forward to any opportunity to learn more and expand the programs in the prisons. People who are incarcerated are our neighbors, coworkers, and community members and they will be again upon their release. Offering them the chance at an education will help them know a new kind of success.

In this section, I will first explain my theoretical framework and research question, followed by my methodology and design. Then I will explain the sources of data and validity, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Interviews were completed with four students who are incarcerated to show their views on education. The participants shared their past educational experiences, family dynamics and the community shared in a classroom, even in prison. The participants volunteered to participate in the study and were aware of the types of questions they would be asked.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher knew she wanted to show the importance of the education phenomenon through the stories of students she had worked with and found it most important to give the participants a space to tell their stories of education during incarceration. The researcher utilized peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and readings

from qualitative research publications to learn which theoretical framework would best suit the study and help to answer the research question. How do students who are incarcerated view their education experience while incarcerated?

Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher, and mathematician, is known as the father of phenomenological study (Byrne, 2001). Phenomenology is defined as a qualitative research method that allows researchers to study how experiences, traditions, and culture shape ordinary, everyday practices. This method elicits stories from participants as a source of understanding (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). Phenomenology was applied in this research by collecting stories and experiences and then analyzing the information. Through interviews, the researcher uses analysis of significant statements to develop a description of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2018). Husserl stated there was more to science than empirical science which Lichtman found important because it opened the door to research completed in ways other than scientific research (Lichtman, 2013).

Husserl felt the researcher should use bracketing to set aside what is known about the phenomenon in order to remain objective but a later phenomenologist, Heidegger, said that it was not possible for the researcher to set aside what they knew because they were the interpreters of the data set (Lichtman, 2013). Heidegger thought the lived experiences of the researcher (culture, gender, background) allowed them to have a genuine reflection of the information they received and found the researcher could use that information to help share the experiences of participants (Byrne, 2001).

Procedures followed in a phenomenological study should include topic determination, locating participants, data-gathering, data storing, translation of the data,

determining validity, and providing a synopsis of the data. Following these steps will allow the researcher to give their participants a place to share their experience of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). Gray (1997) looked at the steps of the phenomenological study more closely. Gray (1997) stated the steps as investigating phenomena, investigating general essences, apprehending essential relationships among essences, watching modes of appearing, watching the constitution of phenomena in consciousness, suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena, interpreting the meaning of phenomena. The addition of apprehending essential relationships among essences and suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena, the researcher will go beyond their familiarity of the topic and have an unbiased investigation.

Phenomenological research is different from other types of research in the fact that it goes deeper to learn about a phenomenon through perception and experiences of participants. In phenomenological research, popular methods of collecting data include focus groups, interviews, participant observation, conversations, and action research. The most common research project that uses phenomenology is the desire to uncover what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it (Smith, 2018).

By completing this research and comparing desired outcomes, it was determined the phenomenological stance would be the most effective in sharing the stories of those incarcerated and taking college classes. Through the phenomenological research stance, the researcher will give the students a space to share their lived experiences through in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be audio-recorded to guarantee

all information is available to the researcher for review. A case study approach could have been utilized but the focus of this research was on the phenomenon of education.

Research Question

The research design used for this study was qualitative. The research question, how do students who are incarcerated view their education experience while incarcerated, will be answered through a phenomenological approach. The population utilized was incarcerated students who had enrolled in college courses through the MCTC education program. Due to the type of institution, the researcher was aware there were rules to abide by and it was important to follow the schedule of the prison. The researcher felt confident students would be willing to share their stories for the reason they have worked with her in the past.

With the approval of the Kentucky Department of Corrections and a full-board Institutional Review process at a state university, a semi structured interview protocol took place with four justice-involved students. A semi-structured interview process was followed to allow interview questions relevant to the research as they came up so key aspects of the research study were sure to be covered while allowing for participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant to the student. This allowed students to keep a balance between focusing on the research topic and allowed for a disciplined naturalness in phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1985).

Research Methodology

A qualitative research design was chosen because the goal of the study was to give the students who are incarcerated a space to share why they think education behind bars is important and how it impacted their lives. This is important due to the lack of

research not related to recidivism. As stated in the literature review, a quantitative study is important since it shows when people are educated during incarceration, they are less likely to return to prison. But qualitative interviews reveal what the quantitative researchers have not, how an educational achievement makes justice-involved students feel, how it changes their outlook on the time they serve, and how it affects the future they see for themselves.

Aspers (2019) stated "understanding is an important condition for qualitative research. It is not enough to identify correlations, make distinctions, and work in a process in which one gets close to the field of phenomena. Understanding is accomplished when the elements are integrated in an iterative process" (2019). Since the students were encouraged to be open about their experiences, the qualitative research provided valuable data for potential use in the design and implementation of new college programs in prison or to update and improve current programs.

Research Positionality

The researcher has worked in education and the prison system for ten years and has developed ideas regarding the importance of providing education within the justice system. Prisons should be a place of reform and growth for those incarcerated.

Research Design

To recruit participants, a memo was posted in the public areas and on the informational televisions of the prison to explain who was eligible to participate, the purpose of the research, and most importantly, that they were not required to participate. Eligible participants were selected from the MCTC and EKCC education program. The participants had completed four or more classes during incarceration. In October of 2021,

the researcher and participants met one-on-one in the education wing of the prison in an accessible area. The door was closed but there were correctional officers available in the hallway in case of an emergency. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and only one interview was held with each participant.

Upon volunteering, each participant was given an informed consent form to read and sign. A time was scheduled to meet with each participant one on one. Their daily schedule and routine were considered when planning the meetings and completed interviews on the schedule of the participant and the prison. The participant and the researcher met in a safe space, as designated by prison personnel, with a guard. The total amount of time spent with participants was approximately four hours.

Four students volunteered to participate in the study. Of the four participants, three are serving a life sentence; one is scheduled for release later in the year. As for their educational background, one of the participants had completed a high school degree before incarceration, one had earned a GED before incarceration, and two earned their GED during incarceration. Each student had completed at least six college-level courses and had a GPA of above 3.0.

Due to the nature of the facility and to prevent the participants from divulging any information that could be potentially damaging to them, the researcher announced at the beginning of the interview to not share anything potentially damaging or illegal. The researcher made the participants aware that she was a mandatory reporter and had no input with the parole board whatsoever. COVID restrictions were followed; masks worn and 6 feet of social distance were adhered to. Approval to bring a laptop and audio

recording device was received prior to the start of the study to confirm the credibility of information shared in findings.

During the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked 18-20 questions (see appendix C) including how they decided to take classes, if they told their family they were enrolled in college classes, and what their favorite MCTC class has been. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the conversation to verify the information gathered was shared properly and no important non-verbal cues were left out. Once interviews were transcribed, the researcher read and annotated the information to find common codes among the interviews. To keep the codes organized, an excel spreadsheet was utilized. The researcher looked for common codes and determined which codes were different or specific to one or two people. Once codes were determined the researcher found patterns and then grouped those into themes. On top of themes in experiences, the researcher was able to pull commonalities of the students that offered to be a part of the interview process.

There were potential risks to this study, they included social, psychological, legal, and physical risks. Social risks included the possibility the prison population would see an inmate speaking to the researcher, an outsider, who does not live in their environment. Another social risk for the individual was that their conversation may be overheard by prison personnel. Psychological risks included informal coercion. Individuals have a rapport with the researcher as an MCTC/EKCC advisor and may have felt a need to participate. Also, individuals may have found questions personal. Legal risks included the use of technology. The computer could have been stolen, and the information shared. Also, although cautioned not to, the individual may have shared potentially damaging

information during the interview. Physical risks were faced by the researcher. If she was held captive or was in danger, prison personnel would not negotiate with the inmate for her release.

As a researcher, it was important to ensure each participant did not feel obligated to speak with them and it was important to keep any information about the research between myself and my committee. Names were not shared in the study to protect the opinions and experiences of those interviewed. The computer was password-protected so if for some reason it was stolen, it would have been difficult to break into. During the interviews, the computer was set on airplane mode, so it did not have access to the internet.

The risks faced by the participants and the researcher were reasonable concerning the importance of knowledge sharing. Although the participant was taking on the risk of others knowing they participated and the potential of a guard overhearing the conversation, the information and knowledge they shared during an interview could potentially help another prison to provide an educational program for their inmates. There was no benefit to the participant.

Sources of Data and Validity

The data collection instrument used was a semi-structured interview. This type of instrument was utilized to make sure the students had the opportunity to share their experiences and then elaborate if they felt the need to do so. The student and researcher met one-on-one in a classroom in the education wing of the prison. The interviews were scheduled for approximately 30-60 minutes. The interviews were set around the student's

day, so they did not feel the need to rush. Students were not required to stay the entire 60 minutes.

During the interview, the students were asked 18-20 questions. As the students answered questions the researcher changed the placement of questions to make certain the conversation flowed. If the student had something additional to add they could do so due to the semi-structured interview. Interviews were recorded and the researcher could go back and listen, transcribe, and then return to the audio recordings to listen as needed. Through this process, the researcher continued connecting with the participant after she left the prison. This also provides the ability to continuously return to the data and build themes.

Hyncer (1985) stated

doing this kind of phenomenological research for the most part requires that only a limited number of people be interviewed given the vast amount of data that emerges from even one interview. The focus is of course on qualitative issues, not quantitative ones (p.17).

With a focus on four participants, the researcher had the opportunity to spend more time on each of their stories and allow them the time and space to tell how earning their education during incarceration has shaped them and their lives.

Another way the researcher established validity was through paraphrasing answers so participants could confirm the researcher understood the answer. This was an important piece for the researcher to complete for two reasons, masks were worn by the participant and researcher due to COVID-19 pandemic protocols and the facility had been locked down due to COVID-19 and lack of staff, so if the researcher was unsure about

something in the interviews, they could not go back to meet with the participants right away. Besides these steps to confirm data validity, the researcher ensured the interview stayed on track and if the interview veered toward a different direction, she was able to bring the participant back to the question at hand, how did they view their education during incarceration.

To establish valid data, the researcher must be consistent (Creswell, 2003). Consistency was practiced in three ways, questions asked, treatment of participants, and treatment of the study. Before each interview, the participant and researcher confirmed they understood the informed consent form. During the interviews, participants were treated with respect by the researcher by making eye contact, active listening, letting the participant speak without interruption, and thanking them for their time. In addition, the participants were asked the same group of questions.

The information received in interviews also shows reliability from the connectedness of the information received. The participants each had similar experiences in the prison setting, each heard about the education program through a friend, and each stated the education program helped them expand their opportunities and think about life after incarceration.

Ethical Considerations

The population of interest is considered a vulnerable population, it was important the researcher was aware of ethical considerations. A full review was submitted to the Internal Review Board to protect the population. The participants were not forced to share their experiences. Each participant volunteered to meet with the researcher. The researcher provided a list of potential questions so the participants would be informed. In

addition, the researcher respected the participant's right to privacy in the study. No names are mentioned in recordings, transcriptions, or analyses. Each participant is listed with a pseudonym, Chuck, Frank, Ken, and Russ.

The risks faced by the participants and the researcher were reasonable concerning the importance of knowledge sharing because, although the participant is taking on the risk of others knowing they participated and the potential of a guard overhearing the conversation, the information and knowledge they shared during an interview could potentially help another prison to provide an educational program for their inmates. The participants were made aware there was no benefit for taking part in the interview.

Since inmates represent a vulnerable population, the researcher needs to be transparent. The researcher needs to be certain that consent is informed. In addition to being transparent and making sure the participant understands the informed consent requirements, the researcher needs to make certain participants are volunteers and have not been bribed or coerced to participate The researcher also needs to make the participant aware that although the researcher plans to keep all information confidential the researcher may be required to surrender that information if asked to by the court (Field et al., 2019).

To ensure the proper protocols were followed, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online training system and the Basic Course for Human Subjects Research. Once that was complete, the research was classified to determine the level of review. Due to the vulnerable population, a full review was required. An application for full review was submitted to the Institutional Review Board. In addition to the application, the researcher submitted CITI training completion

reports, an informed consent form, recruitment materials, interview questions to be used for data collection, and a letter of support from the warden. Upon submission of the application, the IRB reviewed the material and determined they needed additional information to protect the participants. The researcher clarified research procedures, risks, research objectives, and checked for consistency throughout the application and resubmitted. At this time, submission was approved, and the researcher was able to being data collection.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations in this study included the COVID-19 pandemic and the focus on recidivism and education. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions limited the study due to the fact the prison had been closed to visitors for over two years. The students had not been in class so when they first came in to begin their interviews, they were most concerned about when classes would resume.

An additional limitation of the study included the focus of recidivism and education due to three of the four participants serving life sentences. Someone with a life sentence should care about education during incarceration because even if a person earns their education and is never released from prison, they will still have the opportunity to learn skills in the classroom to help them find purpose as stated in the results in chapter four.

It is important to address what a life sentence means. Under Kentucky sentencing guidelines, a life sentence means one will be eligible for parole after serving a minimum of 85% of a 20-year sentence, which is about 17 years (Kentucky General Assembly, 2021). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported the following data from 2018: persons

released from state prison in 2018 served an average of 44% of their maximum sentence length before their initial release, state prisoners serving time for rape and initially released in 2018 served an average of 68% of their sentence, and those serving time for murder served an average of 58% of their sentence (Kaeble, 2021).

Another limitation present is the stigma associated with incarceration. Someone that is incarcerated may complete their sentence in prison and earn an education, but they will still have to disclose their past to potential employers. A study completed by the Journal of Labor Policy looked at an applicant pool for customer service positions of 1,144,575 people. They determined criminal record lowers the probability of being hired by about 4% from the 20% absolute probability of being hired in our sample (Minor, et al. 2018).

Although limitations were present, the participants and facility accommodated the researcher. The facility is remote, but the researcher was willing to travel and spend the day on the prison campus to meet with the participants in one day. COVID restrictions were in place, but the prison administration allowed the researcher to visit and meet with the students as long as each wore a mask and was socially distanced at six feet.

Summary

This study was completed by following a phenomenological stance to share the experiences of people who are incarcerated and enrolled in a college program at their prison. In this chapter the research question is reiterated through an explanation of the research method and research design used. In addition, validity and reliability precautions were outlined. In the upcoming chapter, the researcher will share the findings of the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

After more than two years of being on lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the prison allowed the researcher to meet with four participants. These participants signed up for the interview by their own choice. The four participants each met with the researcher on the same day but at staggered times. The participant was seated directly across from the researcher, and both were masked due to safety precautions. Being on campus for interviews from 8 AM until 4 PM the researcher had time to observe the environment. Over two years had passed since the researcher had been on the prison campus so she received surprised but happy greetings from the incarcerated students she had worked with.

Descriptive Findings

Of the four participants, three are serving a life sentence; one is scheduled for release in 2022. Although they are serving life sentences, two will be eligible for parole after serving 25 years. Each participant was given a pseudonym for the study. As for their educational background, one of the participants had completed a high school degree before incarceration, one had earned a GED before incarceration and two earned their GED during incarceration. Participant one (Chuck) has completed 45 college-level credit hours and holds a GPA of 4.0. Participant two (Frank) has completed 31 college level credit hours and holds a GPA of 4.0. Participant three (Ken) has completed 29 college-level credit hours and holds a GPA of 3.586. Participant four (Russ) has completed 158 credit hours and holds a GPA of 3.5. Russ holds five certificates, two associate degrees, and one diploma. A GPA above 3.5 is typical of the students enrolled in this education

program; the average GPA from the last five years is 3.8. Typically, in qualitative research, more information is given to introduce participants. Due to the vulnerable nature of the participants, only information needed to support the research has been shared. In table 1, the reader will see information about each participant.

Table 1 – Participant Information

	Pseudonym	Credit Hours	GPA	Incarceration Year	Release Year/Parole Eligibility
Participant 1	Chuck	45	4.0	2002	2027
Participant 2	Frank	31	4.0	2014	2022
Participant 3	Ken	29	3.586	2007	2031
Participant 4	Russ	158	3.5	1986	2026 (parole deferred 3 times)

Data Analysis Procedures

After each interview, the researcher had 30 minutes to one hour to make notes regarding observations and interesting ideas the participant shared. Recording of the interviews allowed the researcher to listen to the interviews later and transcribe them to reread and identify themes. After this was completed, the researcher began to label relevant information to code the data. Information was determined to be relevant when it was repeated by more than one participant, it surprised the researcher, or it was something the participant made a point to tell the researcher was important to them. Once the codes were determined, the researcher was able to narrow them down into themes. The researcher's goal was to be unbiased and open-minded while also keeping in mind what they already know about education in the free world. Once themes were determined, they were labeled (Löfgren, 2013).

To help determine themes, codes were paired down. Some of the codes included opportunity, relationships, new programs, role models/mentors, self-improvement, personal pride, motivation, and a willingness to look at others with respect. Themes discovered included the importance of knowledge, personal benefits of correctional education, support on the inside, and a need for diversified programs. No theme was determined to be more important than the others; each theme had meaning to the participants. In table 2, the reader will see themes identified and how those were coded.

Table 2 – Themes and Codes

Themes Identified	Codes
Importance of knowledge	Self-improvement, willingness to look at others in a respectful way, open-mindedness
Personal benefits of correctional education	Personal pride, motivation, self-awareness
Support on the inside	Relationships, role models, mentors
Need for diversified programs	New programs, computer literacy, HVAC, employability

The data analysis aligns with the research question: How do students who are incarcerated view their education experience while incarcerated? The data and findings were organized using the phenomenological stance by focusing on the participant's knowledge and experiences. Using a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to use the lived experiences of the participants to share they are more than a statistic

when thinking of education during incarceration. The phenomenon studied was education during incarceration. The researcher asked about the participants' experiences related to the phenomenon and what factors have influenced the experience of the phenomenon? By working with four participants, the researcher was able to highlight similarities in the experiences. Asking open-ended questions during interviews allowed the participants and researcher to have a conversation. The researcher was able to be friendly during interviews and empathetic which allowed the researcher to focus on the subject matter of the interview (Byrne, 2001).

Data collection consisted of interviewing people that are incarcerated and who have earned college credit during their incarceration. Interviews were recorded for transcription and analysis. Participants' narratives were used to provide helpful perspectives related to their experiences of education during incarceration. Upon transcribing the interviews, the researcher was able to analyze and identify themes through coding and categorizing the experiences. One or more methods would be used to ensure the credibility of the findings. Direct quotes from participants helped to ensure the validity of the findings and conclusions.

Results

Before recording began, each participant was asked if they had questions, and each asked how much longer it would be until classes resumed. In each instance, the researcher was unable to answer the question due to the Kentucky Department of Corrections' limitations that have not yet been lifted due to COVID. The researcher then thanked the participant for agreeing to be interviewed, confirmed they had read and understood the informed consent form, and reminded them they were not required to

participate. Each participant stated they were comfortable and the recording began. During the interview, participants were asked between 18 and 20 questions. The questions covered topics such as how they learned about the opportunity to enroll in college classes, why they chose to enroll, and other experiential questions related to the phenomenological nature of the study.

Themes discovered included the importance of knowledge, personal benefits of correctional education, support on the inside, and a need for diversified programs. These themes were determined by analyzing codes found throughout each transcribed interview.

Need for Diversified Programs

Each participant stated the need for different classes and programs, the ability to take more classes, more hands-on work, and technology support. The participants stated the need to educate people about technology. Computer literacy will be key to their success on the outside. The participants shared an interest in animal training, business, and technical programs, like welding, with college credit options. They expressed a need for realistic training opportunities for people who were formerly incarcerated. Some programs may include culinary arts, automotive and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. They see value in new programs because no one can take away their education. If people who are incarcerated have more educational and training options, they can plan for their future outside of prison. This will allow them to have a new means to provide for their families and be an integral part of their communities.

Chuck stated that he would change a lot of things in the educational programs offered. He would like to see projects added, more difficult exams, and the opportunity to build something. He said when students are handed an exam and told to complete it

before the next class, they do not study as hard as they would for a proctored exam in class. Regarding projects, Chuck stated he would like the opportunity to "Build something. Even if it was everybody just using Popsicle sticks. If you want to understand the structural strength of wood, you are doing the math on how load is transferred from a beam to the studs to the bottom. You could have something you can set up with a few little five-pound weights." He also explained access to a computer lab would open a lot for the students because concepts become visual.

Personal Benefits of Correctional Education

The participants agreed the routine and purpose provided by a college program makes the time easier. They shared that prison is a negative place but college makes the experience different. It changed their self-perception and helped them to walk with purpose. School was in the way when they were on the outside trying to provide for their families, but now they see what a difference it can make. The participants stated now they know it may take a little longer, but education has shown them there are other ways to build a life and provide for their families. In addition, Russ stated that going to classes removed those incarcerated from the hostile environment and animosity in the dorms.

Finally, the change in routine caused by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions has created stress since they were unable to attend class. One participant stated he went into a deep depression. He went from jogging three miles a day and taking two college classes on-campus as well as correspondence courses to being stuck in a room staring at a wall.

Support

Support on the inside may come from a family on the outside, teachers, peers, or other staff in the correctional facility. Two of the participants were supported by their

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family and spoke with them often; the other two felt they were on their own. Two students sent transcripts home to share their success. On the other hand, one participant's sister asked why the state was wasting money on educating inmates and asked if it was a Cracker Jack degree.

The participants spoke of the connections made in the classroom. They stated they knew the teachers were there to support them and they could tell they cared because they took a chance and came to the prison to work with criminals. Participants said they formed relationships with classmates they would not have formed if it were not for the education program. They were not necessarily friends outside of the classroom but could appreciate the other's point of view. They may not agree with their crime or how they spend their time elsewhere but being in class together shows them they want to change too. The participants could be seen as mentors in the prison. They have encouraged their peers to take classes and gain knowledge to take their minds to a different place.

When asked what advice they would give someone trying to decide if they should enroll in classes, each participant felt similar. Through the quotes below, you will see how important each participant felt education was to them.

Chuck: Do it. Even the ones who I think probably wouldn't take it seriously or wouldn't dedicate themselves to it, you never know because it might spark something in them. So, I always try to get as many people to come up as possible every time we have a college sign-up. Same thing for vocational. I'm a big advocate for just showing up and giving it a shot. You know a lot of people their responses would be like I only got two years; it takes 10 years to get a degree with what they're doing now. Yeah, I know but you have to try to just encourage them

and say okay yeah but those credits are still there. Regardless, you'd be surprised by what it can do for you.

Frank: The advice I'd give them first is I'd question them and see what they like and lead them off that way because that's what it's going to end up being anyway because what you like and what you love is what you want to learn. Most people can't deal with a variety of life. Do you know what I mean? One of the big goals, as you said, you used a nice word, mentor, be able to mentor and help guys with a criminal lifestyle and show them once I do it, then that'll be an example and they will be like aw he did do it. I can push him on towards and get away from this type of stuff.

Ken: I would encourage them and explain that it opened things for me and will enlighten them. Knowledge, you know anything you learn will help you. If you learn a little word today, that is knowledge gained to me.

Russ: I don't think it's a decision. Here, the only thing you can do is stay where you're at. We're already in a bad position so most of us know that we need to make some sort of change. Better yourself. Educating yourself is never going to hurt you. It's always going to be better.

When the participants were asked what the value was of providing academic education to individuals that have been impacted by the justice system? As you will see below, each participant sees the importance of education but each see a different impact.

Chuck: Well, the biggest benefit is to society. You know, this when we get out we're more likely not going to come back. Now I'm not saying that anybody that's ever been college-educated would never commit a crime that's just stupid

thinking. But you look at the type of people who come to prison, who didn't have an education? Just what were they doing? All right. More often than not. The majority of crime is motivated by money. Getting money. But you can make a lot of money the right way. But if you don't know, if you're never expressed exposed to it, you don't know you fall into what you see other people do but once you know, and you go out there and you're like, okay, it'll be a little bit harder and a little bit longer to get there this way. But you understand the smoothest slide, the furthest. You know, because If I do this and build a business, it can grow exponentially. If I do this crime. Yeah, get a lot of money right now. I'm just gonna go back to prison and I still have nothing. I'll have to go back to having nothing. I can't understand why reform isn't the number one focus in the prison.

Frank: Well, actually (inmate's name) did a study in his statistics class a couple of years ago to show you the difference of taking classes. Just by the numbers it showed you how much better people do in college while incarcerated.

Ken: I think the value is to help lead them away from the lifestyle of coming back (to prison), of staying in a criminal mind way of thinking, you know, it's giving them hope. It's giving them hope because education is everything. Once you take that away you don't have anything, like it's one of the main things throughout prison, even when you're incarcerated in the jail, the GED people come there. Education and counseling are major in life, really because we have to have a stable mind First and foremost. Before the first bad thought come to your mind you got to be stable.

Russ: The value I think would be a great value. Like Gold nuggets. If you got a

few that was able to gain the knowledge and contribute to society and realize the

mistakes they made and moved on because I think they're going to share it with

other people. I think they're going through with that knowledge.

Interview #1 - Chuck

Interview #1 allowed Chuck to offer his thoughts on the power of education.

Chuck started by sharing education took the fear out of the unknown, and he was not just

referring to his time while incarcerated. Growing up he made poor choices which put him

into what he referred to as the "bad kid" classes, but there were good teachers in those

classes that believed in him. When he got to high school, his grades were a reflection of

the influence from those good teachers, and as a result, he was told he could graduate

early. Unfortunately, his dad thought this meant it was time for him to move out and be

on his own. Away from home and any type of educational environment, he fell back into

making poor choices and eventually ended up in the prison system. Chuck latched on to

the idea of returning to the educational system through the program offered at the prison

and applied for admission. Due to the duration of his sentence, he was told he was

ineligible because there was no reason to educate him. Later, through a roommate, he

learned the rules had changed. He reapplied to the program and was accepted.

Being enrolled in classes encouraged Chuck to think more about consequences.

For example, if he made a poor choice that ended up sending him to solitary confinement,

he missed class; consequently, he fell behind in his classes. "College classes encouraged

me to set goals and start thinking long-term instead of just thinking my life is over," he

stated. "College classes gave me the bravery to keep going and the knowledge to not be

afraid." Throughout his educational experience, while he learned the information presented in his classes, he also gained critical thinking skills. This taught him how to view differently what others thought and said. Chuck shared an example in which he was initially frustrated with his sister because she acted like he did not exist. Later, he could see she felt like he abandoned her when he was incarcerated.

Chuck discussed his favorite classes, the role of teachers in effective education, and the role that students play. Chuck stated his favorite classes were history, math, and comparative religion. He said a teacher's role is to encourage their students. He stated "honestly, the biggest impediment we have to learning anything is ourselves. So, (the teachers) helping us move past that by making the course work more relatable, more understandable, less intimidating." He said it is on the student to show up, do their work and be sincere in their efforts. In a prison classroom setting, it is also up to the students to help with classroom management. He said the teachers want everyone to feel heard but some students may take advantage of that so it is up to the classmates to keep one another on track.

Chuck also talked about how difficult it was to view himself any other way than how the parole board viewed him. In his mind, the parole board was in control of his life. At this point in the interview, the participant teared up and said he did not blame his sister for her feelings or the parole board for their decision. He is where he is given the choices he made and he can never take away the pain from his victims' families. Chuck stated "And a part of me, I don't disagree with it. (Parole board's decisions) Because, what the hell could I say to those families? Oh, I'm better. Your son's still in the ground. You know. But I'm better." While Chuck might have reached this understanding on his own,

by his admission, his participation in the education program aided in this self-awareness. While he did not explicitly reference the comment originally made when he applied for the education program, this seems a compelling response to any argument there was no reason to educate him.

When Chuck was asked what he thought his life would look like after incarceration he said he felt like his life was over, and maybe at the time it was when he learned he was facing a life sentence. He said "education takes a lot of fear away. The more I learn, the more comfortable I am with my faith. Because I'm able to understand a lot of the things that are going on in my life like security, you know, when you start becoming educated, especially higher education, you start having an analytical approach to looking at things. And you stop seeing security as opposition, and you start seeing why they do it. You know, how it actually helps you."

Interview #2 - Frank

Interview #2 saw Frank focus on the opportunity to take college classes. He explained, although he was locked up, he did not want to waste his time. He felt like the college classes gave him something to look forward to and that was important to him as an incarcerated person. He explained he has a supportive family, but many people who are incarcerated do not. The classes were a positive experience; they gave him hope. Frank stated he was happy to share copies of his transcript with his family. He went on to say, "I hope they see something good is coming from here instead of the horror stories typically associated with prisons."

Frank felt strongly that greater importance should be placed on education in prisons since education is where individual reform will come from. When asked about the

role of students and teachers in ensuring effective education, he said the teachers were there to be a part of rehabilitation for the students. "A lot of these guys are drug addicts. A lot of these guys have problems at home. Other guys are separated from family. What is correcting them? This (education) would be one of the only things that actually potentially could correct you. That's why I think it should be a lot higher focus. Give you direction and that would be correction to me." He said the student's role is to be a role model to their peers. He said when someone that is not enrolled in classes sees how good and happy the people are that did choose to enroll in classes, which will rub off on them. He shared, based upon experience with other people who are incarcerated, being enrolled in college classes changed the way they viewed themselves. This helped them to see they can make a change for their future. Frank stated he wants people to know just because life is going by while he is incarcerated, he is still working to be a better person. Frank said prison allowed him to see he can succeed in college and be a different person.

When asked about his favorite classes and programs, Frank stated he enjoyed the HVAC program because he feels like that certification would give him potential opportunities in the future. He also enjoyed math and geology because the teachers were sharp, and he could tell they enjoyed the subject matter they taught. Frank stated when he was first incarcerated, he had never spent any time in jail and was scared at first but then he got used to it. He chose to enroll in classes because "you need something to do to be productive. You need something for self-esteem and self-worth. It really helps you when you have some way to spend time besides waiting in line. Yeah, it is definitely a good thing. I would hope that they would give us more opportunities in the future."

Interview #3 - Ken

Interview #3 was animated by Ken's love of learning. Ken began by sharing, as a black man incarcerated, he wanted to "reverse the odds and stack his knowledge" when he is released. His family embraced the fact he enrolled in classes. He has worked hard to show his son, who was one year old when he was incarcerated, the importance of being a good student and not following in his dad's footsteps. Being incarcerated is difficult but he credited his strong mind, instilled from his grandmothers, with helping him to look to the future. Common sense told him not to be inactive and "do dead time." Rather, he decided to take on every opportunity he could. One of those opportunities included sharing the importance of education with those with which he was incarcerated. He was proud to say he felt like he tricked his peers into making good decisions by helping them get enrolled in college classes.

While incarcerated Ken has taken classes in multiple areas. His favorite general education classes were geography, history, and the New and Old Testament courses. He said he really enjoyed his religion classes because it made him realize everyone is really praising the same thing, they just call them something different based on where they lived. Before his current educational program, he participated in a program where he learned to train animals. Upon release, he wants to open his own business to train dogs to assist veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, children with autism, and children with Down syndrome. He said he wished people would see past his color and his crime "and never judge nobody because you never know until you open the book."

Upon incarceration, Ken stated he decided he would do his time and not cause any trouble. He enrolled in the GED program and passed. When the researcher said she

knew that was hard to do, he said he had always been an A and B student but had to drop out of school in the tenth grade to provide for his family. He took classes because he wanted to have something waiting on the other side for him. In addition, he said the decision to enroll in classes has provided self-empowerment because in the past he felt like he had to impress people and make them feel good. Being enrolled in classes helped him to take care of himself and not to dwell on his mistakes.

Ken stated the teachers make learning a positive experience and just because they get paid, he knows they are teaching there out of the goodness of their hearts because they are coming to prison and must know they are taking a chance by entering that type of environment. He said the students need to come to class ready to learn, give attention, make observations and be productive. In addition to that, he said it is nice to see fellow students outside of the classroom and "we really don't have no communication besides being in here (classes). We get to understand and then you're like man that guy right there, he's really smart. So you might come and ask him a question now because he's your classmate."

Interview #4 - Russ

Interview #4 began with Russ sharing his views on the teacher's role in education. Russ has taken college courses in different facilities throughout the state and was open in his praise for the educators that helped him along the way. Russ also discussed the transformative power of education. This belief is so powerful, he thinks prisons should have post-secondary educational programs as part of their basic structure.

Upon incarceration, Russ took and passed his GED three times because he could not believe he passed it. The college instructor at the prison reached out to him and

suggested he move on to post-secondary classes. He enrolled in a typing class in 1989. Following the successful completion of the typing class, he took five and six classes a semester to learn more about the legal system and become a legal aid for his peers. He accomplished that goal.

A challenge he struggled with was working to unlearn what he had been told growing up: "You don't know anything and you won't be anything." Leading self-help programs in the prison spurred him to take classes that may have otherwise intimidated him. One such class was public speaking. That class, and others like it, allowed him to gain skills he never thought he could master. RUSS went on to say all prisons should be college campuses. He said, "It won't make criminals smarter, but it will give a choice to people that don't have an option. Then, if they commit a crime, it's their own fault."

Emotions took over when asked what the teacher's role was in education. He mentioned teachers who made him feel like he mattered. Russ recalled an English teacher who helped him get a spell checker in the early 1990s and encouraged him to continue writing which helped his self-confidence. He said it took encouragement to enroll in classes but, because of it, his life was so much brighter. He ended by saying continuing his education helped him realize his potential was unlimited, "but you don't know that, when you don't know."

Russ was incarcerated when financial aid was available to students. He said that opened more doors and allowed students to complete their degrees more quickly. During this time, he was motivated to get into the vocational programs because, at that time, they came with college credits, and he wanted to complete a General Occupational Technical Studies degree. He enjoyed those classes but his favorite class has been philosophy

because he liked thinking freely. He also said attending classes allowed him time with other open-minded individuals.

Russ also spoke of the student and teacher's role in education. He said the teacher should encourage the student and coddle them when needed. During this time, he became emotional as he thought back on a teacher that helped him see his potential. This teacher encouraged him to write and Russ developed a love of creative writing. He has authored poems and plans to copyright them. He said his poems are like children to him and he wants to know where they will end up. As for the student's role, Russ said students need to raise their hands and ask questions.

Summary

Each participant was open and willing to share their stories about education during incarceration. These interviews showed the importance of offering education in prisons. Each participant had a different experience that brought them to the prison, a different favorite class or teacher, and different family dynamics but all believed in the importance of taking college classes to improve their outlook and their future. Themes discovered included the importance of knowledge, personal benefits of correctional education, support on the inside, and a need for diversified programs.

Each participant gave a different story of how education has changed their lives. In addition to immediate change, the participants felt they could see a future even if it is in prison. Offering educational courses to those incarcerated impacts the lives of that person, their family, and their peers.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When this study began, the researcher was confident about the information that would be received during the interview process. As time went on and the education program was suspended due to COVID, the researcher became more unsure of what type of information would be shared. Although the students have not been in general education classes for over two years, they still shared positive information about the program and how not having it has been detrimental to their mental health and day-to-day routines. Interviews were completed with four people who are currently incarcerated and have taken college courses during their time incarcerated.

This study was completed by following a phenomenological stance to share the experiences of people that are incarcerated and enrolled in a college program at their prison. This study is important to engage those in educational and correctional facilities in communication about opportunities and how they can change the lives of the incarcerated population. In this chapter, conclusions, implications, and recommendations from the data will be presented.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Four hours of interviews were conducted with four participants. Each was on a different path, but they had one common goal - get a college education while incarcerated. The interviews brought up interesting stories and ideas, but most importantly, each participant shared how taking college classes changed the way they served their time. Themes discovered include the importance of knowledge, personal benefits of correctional education, support on the inside, and a need for diversified

programs. These themes were determined by analyzing codes found throughout each transcribed interview.

Each participant shared their educational experiences, ideas of how to move the program forward, a desire to help their peers see the opportunities even if they are behind bars, and a desire to make their families proud. Along with these experiences, the participants were open about how the education program changed their day-to-day lives. Each spoke of the importance of routine and staying busy to keep a strong mind and emphasized learning a new subject or trade helped them do this.

Not only were the participants willing to share the positive, but they also shared the negative side as well. They described the prison as a negative place. Leaving their dorm and going to the educational wing got them away from trouble and animosity in their living space. One participant explained the goal of the prison should be rehabilitation, but it feels like the goal is revenge. As the participants shared their thoughts on rehabilitative programs, one said the programs that can help people incarcerated should be removed from the control and supervision of the department of corrections. He observed when people are rehabilitated and are not being reincarcerated, it is bad for the business of incarceration, and he viewed incarceration as the business of the Department of Corrections.

The participants agreed the routine and purpose provided by a college program makes the time easier. They shared that prison is a negative place but college makes the experience different. It changed their self-perception and helped them to walk with purpose. School was in the way when they were on the outside trying to provide for their families, but now they see what a difference it can make. The participants stated now

they know it may take a little longer, but education has shown them there are other ways to build a life and provide for their families. In addition, RUSS stated that going to classes removed those incarcerated from the hostile environment and animosity in the dorms.

There is a strong need for diversified programs. Prison education is behind. There is not a focus on technology and some programs offered are obsolete to the student when they are released. Lockdown browsers have been created specifically for those incarcerated. These browsers allow students to take online classes or complete testing that may not have been completed otherwise. A stronger focus on realistic opportunities for people who are incarcerated and a link to someone who can help with employment upon reentry is necessary.

Chuck stated that he would change a lot of things in the educational programs offered. He would like to see projects added, more difficult exams, and the opportunity to build something. He said when students are handed an exam and told to complete it before the next class, they do not study as hard as they would for a proctored exam in class. Regarding projects, Chuck stated he would like the opportunity to "Build something. Even if it was everybody just using Popsicle sticks. If you want to understand the structural strength of wood, you are doing the math on how load is transferred from a beam to the studs to the bottom. You could have something you can set up with a few little five-pound weights." He also explained access to a computer lab would open a lot for the students because concepts become visual. When asked about his favorite classes and programs, Frank stated he enjoyed the HVAC program because he feels like that certification would give him potential opportunities in the future. Russ also discussed the

transformative power of education. This belief is so powerful, he thinks prisons should have post-secondary educational programs as part of their basic structure.

Each participant stated the need for different classes and programs, the ability to take more classes, more hands-on work, and technology support. The participants stated the need to educate people about technology. Computer literacy will be key to their success on the outside. The participants shared an interest in animal training, business, and technical programs, like welding, with college credit options. They expressed a need for realistic training opportunities for people who were formerly incarcerated. Some programs may include culinary arts, automotive and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning. They see value in new programs because no one can take away their education. If people who are incarcerated have more educational and training options, they can plan for their future outside of prison. This will allow them to have a new means to provide for their families and be an integral part of their communities.

Support on the inside may come from a family on the outside, teachers, peers, or other staff in the correctional facility. Each of the participants shared positive stories about their teachers and how being in a classroom with someone can change the way you look at them. The participants spoke of the connections made in the classroom. They stated they knew the teachers were there to support them and they could tell they cared because they took a chance and came to the prison to work with criminals. Participants said they formed relationships with classmates they would not have formed if it were not for the education program. They were not necessarily friends outside of the classroom but could appreciate the other's point of view. They may not agree with their crime or how they spend their time elsewhere but being in class together shows them they want to

change too. The participants could be seen as mentors in the prison. They have encouraged their peers to take classes and gain knowledge to take their minds to a different place.

Chuck stated his favorite classes were history, math, and comparative religion. He said a teacher's role is to encourage their students. He stated "honestly, the biggest impediment we have to learning anything is ourselves. So, (the teachers) helping us move past that by making the course work more relatable, more understandable, less intimidating." Frank felt strongly that greater importance should be placed on education in prisons since education is where individual reform will come from. When asked about the role of students and teachers in ensuring effective education, he said the teachers were there to be a part of rehabilitation for the students. "A lot of these guys are drug addicts. A lot of these guys have problems at home. Other guys are separated from family. What is correcting them? This (education) would be one of the only things that potentially could correct you. That is why I think it should be a lot higher focus. Give you direction and that would be correction to me." Ken stated the teachers make learning a positive experience and just because they get paid, he knows they are teaching there out of the goodness of their hearts because they are coming to prison and must know they are taking a chance by entering that type of environment. Emotions took over when asked what the teacher's role was in education. He mentioned teachers who made him feel like he mattered. Russ recalled an English teacher who helped him get a spell checker in the early 1990s and encouraged him to continue writing which helped his self-confidence. He said it took encouragement to enroll in classes but, because of it, his life was so much

brighter. He ended by saying continuing his education helped him realize his potential was unlimited, "but you don't know that, when you don't know."

When considering the importance of knowledge, Russ stated the department of corrections should make education a requirement. He said even if the person does not think they are interested, he thinks they will find something they enjoy learning about. To do this, federal funding for educational programs in prisons would need to be reinstated and earmarked for people who are incarcerated to take postsecondary classes. In July 2023, Pell grants will be reinstated for those incarcerated, so prisons will be one step closer to providing access to educational programs. However, although it is not a popular sentiment, people who are incarcerated remain a marginalized population. There is little interest on the part of the government to improve conditions for this population even though a legislative focus on prison reform would help those who are incarcerated find purpose in their lives. This would provide a net benefit to society because when you know better, you do better. Furthermore, fewer people in prison equates to potentially more people in the working population. Thus, an argument can be made that such an investment would pay for itself.

The limitations of this study are the number of participants and the COVID-19 pandemic. While their responses cannot create generalized data, they do show the positive aspects of offering education programs in prison that align with research already published. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions caused a delay in visitation privileges.

Each theme discovered, allowed for a recommendation or opportunity to change, add, or enhance the educational programs in prison, as indicated by data referenced in chapter one. If these slight changes were made, there would be a decreased recidivism

rate across the nation. Each participant stated they found out about classes being offered through a roommate or friend in the prison. Once made aware of classes, little information was available to those with a desire to enroll in classes until an employee from the college came to their campus. Adding support on the inside through education departments will provide an informed authority to let potential students know there are opportunities and classes available to them.

Implications

Since this research has been completed and coincides with previous information about positive recidivism rates from educational programs, more opportunities can be created to educate those who are incarcerated. More educational opportunities will mean more employment opportunities upon release. By offering educational programs and employment opportunities when released, stronger bonds can be made in communities. Community partnerships can be formed. For example, the local chamber of commerce offices can be involved in finding businesses willing to hire students/graduates who have been incarcerated.

There will also be positive implications for the economy. With a reduced recidivism rate, the state can save money by not housing people in prison. Instead, those formerly incarcerated will be working and bringing money into their communities. According to a study completed by the Department of Policy Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, "a $1 million investment in incarceration will prevent about 350 crimes, while that same investment in [prison] education will prevent more than 600 crimes. [Prison] education is almost twice as cost-effective as incarceration" (Bazos & Hausman, 2004, p.10).

While the economy and communities would benefit, families would too. As Ken stated, his son was proud of him and at 16 years old is on the honor roll because he knows his dad is in school, too. This provides anecdotal evidence to support the claim that educating people who are incarcerated breaks the cycle of generational prison sentences. "An estimated 684,500 state and federal prisoners were parents of at least one minor child in 2016—nearly half of the state prisoners (47%) and more than half of federal prisoners (58%)" (Maruschak et al., 2021). State and federal prisoners reported having an estimated 1,473,700 minor children in 2016 according to Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper (2021). Given these staggering numbers and the evidence from these interviews, investment in prison educational systems is also an investment in our society's future.

There will be a positive implication on the inside too, even for those with life sentences. Knowledge will provide students with self-confidence and self-empowerment. They will think about the consequences of their actions. Instead of getting in a fight, they may think twice because if they end up in solitary confinement, they miss class. As stated in the interviews, the students feel like they are mentors to their peers and they look up to them. Lahm (2009) found that when students in a Texas prison began vocational training programs, their behavior changed first; 147 inmates had 115 disciplinary infractions in the three months before they enrolled in vocational training programs. After they began the programs, they had only 13 rule infractions between them, an almost 90% decrease (Lahm, 2009).

Recommendations

There is space to grow this data and learn more about this specific population. Each semester, 70-100 students enroll in classes at this prison. In the future, the research could be focused on the group. A mixed-methods study can be conducted where a Likert scale would be used to ask students how satisfied they are with the current college program and then complete focus groups to determine what changes should be made and what is currently working well.

Continuing to focus on the population in this prison, a quantitative study could be completed to collect data to see how many people at this facility have taken college classes and if they reoffended upon release. An additional study could also be completed by choosing ten prisons across the state or country with a college program and ten prisons without. The researcher could inquire about the experiences of those incarcerated regarding prison climate. While this would not definitively state that educational programs improve the prison environment, the presence of such differences would provide grounds for further study. As found in this study, a correlation between experiences and programs offered in prisons could be determined through interviews of educational program participants. In the best-case scenario, such interviews could be conducted before a prison begins such an educational program, but this methodology would require far more time to complete the study.

Another qualitative option would be to interview the teachers in the prison to see how they chose this path, if they had a specific calling to teach in a prison, and how the students compare to their students who are not incarcerated. To lend support to the argument that such educational programs are an investment in the future, a study could

also be completed to look at the rate of incarceration among the children of those people currently in prison as compared to those statistics for the children of those in prison educational programs.

Conclusion

Previous researchers have determined by providing education during incarceration, recidivism rates have decreased. *Forbes* Magazine published findings that when people who are incarcerated participate in an educational program, they are 46% less likely to reoffend than non-participants (Skorton & Altschuler, 2013). Skorton & Altschuler (2013) found not only does education reduce recidivism, but it also changes the culture of the prison. It changes the way the people who are incarcerated feel about themselves and gives them purpose. The teachers and classmates the students met in the classroom helped to open their minds. This study was completed to give the students who are incarcerated a voice to share their stories. The research that has already been completed shows the importance of education statistically. This research shows how the participants feel education changed their life during incarceration.

Social justice theory tells us everyone deserves the same shot at an education (Soltan, 2017). Providing this opportunity to people who are incarcerated is not a handout but a hand-up. They are part of our future as a community, state, and nation; they are our neighbors. We want our neighbors to work, take care of their homes and families, but we also want them to have the same opportunity as everyone else.

MCTC and EKCC have a strong working relationship. At a 2019 graduation ceremony in the prison, the student speaker said by earning his education, he was able to get out of his way and to see he can make changes in his life. The dedicated group of

employees at MCTC are passionate about serving this population and look forward to any opportunity to learn more and expand the programs in the prisons. People who are incarcerated are our neighbors, coworkers, and community members and they will be again upon their release. Offering them the chance at education will help them know a new kind of success. Expanding college programs in prison will allow people that are incarcerated to find purpose and move forward from their mistakes.

Offering education in prison, changes the person who is incarcerated. It changes their mindset and gives them a purpose. By promoting mass education, mass incarceration will be reduced, healthier communities will be built, generational harm will be reduced, recidivism will be reduced, and additional chances for those that have been incarcerated will be provided.

Education changes the culture of prison and provides such an opportunity. As the evidence in this study has shown, being a part of something positive changes you. Expanding college education programs to people who are incarcerated is a positive change with benefits far beyond the acquisition of knowledge. It is, therefore, the conclusion of this study that all available resources be marshaled for that purpose.

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