

Examining Academic and Social Needs of High School Incarcerated Youth from Teachers' Perspective

J. Brent Hanchey

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Boca Raton

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EXAMINING ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF HIGH SCHOOL
INCARCERATED YOUTH FROM TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation

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By

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DEDICATION

I would like to acknowledge all family members who were, and continue to be, my haven for inspiration and motivation in all that I do. I would especially like to acknowledge Mrs. Verta Mae Hanchey, my grandmother, whose legacy lives on as she is the motivating factor in my completion of this dissertation. Although she died in 1990, she perpetually instilled a rationale of persistence and dedication in my life at a tender age; she is someone that I strive to be like each and every day. This dissertation is dedicated to you, Mama Hanchey.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

In the United States alone, over 100,000 youth are incarcerated annually (Bullis, Yovanoff, and Havel, 2004, Summer). Statistics show that the majority of these youth are minority males. Most likely, criminal activity will continue to manifest itself throughout their adult lives, which will affect them professionally and socially. Upon their release from a juvenile correctional facility, a few will enroll in a traditional school setting, and the remainder will attempt to join the workforce. At least 50% of these juveniles will return to the correctional setting (Bullis, Yovanoff, and Havel). Unfortunately, the success rate for incarcerated juveniles functioning in social and employment settings is low. In order to reduce the recidivism rate, it is imperative that educational and social service values be provided to these individuals.

The research for this study was geographically based at a specific high school that is located within a specific Juvenile Detention Center. In order to preserve the anonymity of the chosen facilities and participants, the researcher fictitiously refers to these institutions as *XYZ High School* and *ABC Juvenile Detention Center*.

The ABC Juvenile Detention Center is located within a large urban city. Students are located within this facility because they have been charged with a crime. Their crimes may range from possession of drugs to murder. XYZ High School is located within the confines of the ABC Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. This high school is part of the large urban school system; state and national standards must be adhered to because this school is a part of the public educational sector. Students that attend XYZ High School are between the ages of 13 to 17 years old and are taught the following core

academic subjects: English, mathematics, science, and social studies for grades 9 through 11. The class sizes at XYZ High School range between 15 to 20 students, which make individualized instruction more feasible than at other traditional high schools in this urban city that may have up to 35 students per class. The school is a temporary holding facility for students who are awaiting court decisions for release, exoneration, or prison time. The law requires that all students at this detention center receive adequate and appropriate educational services.

Background of the Problem

When students first arrive at XYZ High School, they pose certain questions to their instructors. Most teachers state that their students ask if XYZ High School is a real high school and whether they can earn credits at this high school like they would in a traditional school. This research focused on school services available to the students at XYZ High School and whether the teachers perceived that the educational and social opportunities provided to students were adequate.

While in the ABC Juvenile Detention Center, students attend school between the hours of 7:45 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. They receive instruction in the core academic areas of English, mathematics, science and social studies each weekday. The majority of students at XYZ High School have limited academic skills; most students function at a lower intellectual ability as compared with their counterparts in a traditional setting. These limitations pose pedagogical challenges to the teachers.

Many juveniles entering an incarceration facility possess an intelligence quotient between 80 and 100. These scores are significantly lower than their non-delinquent counterparts (Foley, 2001). “These youth require efficient, well designed curricula and

instructional programs that are relevant, that result in academic success, and that facilitate educational opportunities” (Foley, 2001, p. 249). Foley argues that curriculum-based constructs of academic achievement would allow for cumulative academic examination of each student’s strength[s] and weakness[es] in core content areas by providing individualized instruction to meet their educational needs. This assessment would result in a higher quality educational program for incarcerated juveniles and could allow for grouping of students based upon academic ability.

Once a week, the XYZ High School facilitators instruct students on the social aspects of their life (i.e., respecting others, self-control, and anger management). These classes are taught in large groups (two or more classes combined) of approximately 50 students. The objective of this instruction is to teach students how to maintain their composure when presented with certain situations that would make them angry, sad, or scared after their successful completion of the course and release from the facility.

According to Stenhjem (2005), providing both educational and social services to incarcerated youth is a more effective approach than just incarceration. “Targeting only violence and delinquency of juveniles has done little to change adolescents’ crime rate in the United States” (p.1). A better approach, according to Stenhjem, is to provide community-based, family-focused, and prevention-targeted collaboration.

Purpose of the Study

Vacca (2004) stated that prisoners who are enrolled in educational programs are less likely to recidivate than inmates without an education. Osberg & Fraley (1993) conceded that more rigorous penal education programs have a substantial effect on the prisoner. The purpose of this research is to determine if penal education, from an

academic and social standpoint, is a deterrent to juveniles reverting to unlawful activity from a teacher's perspective.

Research Questions

This is an important topic of research because it explores whether education for incarcerated juveniles is having its intended effect: allowing incarcerated youth to give back to society and the immediate community as a direct result of being academically and socially educated. Furthermore, it explores whether education allows for better employment opportunities for these students while increasing their learning capacity and ability to work cooperatively with others throughout their entire life. Therefore, the research questions in relation to this topic are identified as:

1. From a teachers' perspective, are the academic services adequate for students located within the ABC Juvenile Temporary Detention Center?
2. From a teachers' perspective, are the social services adequate for students located within the ABC Juvenile Temporary Detention Center?

All students in the ABC Juvenile Detention Center are minors; therefore, it is necessary to formulate these research questions in this format. An effort was made to contact numerous parents or guardians of students at XYZ High School to perform a study involving the students. Many parents or guardians could not be contacted via the contact information that was provided, and of the parents who were contacted; many refused to allow their child to participate in the study. In order to study the breadth and depth of juvenile education, the researcher decided to perform a teacher evaluation to determine the quality of education that XYZ High School was providing.

Another premise for deciding on these research questions was to determine if high quality education and social skills programs are important aspects to help incarcerated students' transition to the traditional world. It is imperative to address these research questions because incarcerated students are entitled to receive the same education as their traditional counterparts with compliance of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). These two laws have had a significant impact on traditional educational services and should not have excluded incarcerated students.

The NCLB only specifies correctional education through Title I, Part D. Title I, Part D of the NCLB law provides funding through additional educational programs in incarceration educational environments. In order for correctional educational facilities to be eligible for Title I, Part D funds, the school must provide students in juvenile facilities a minimum of 20 hours of educational services per week in tandem with adequate home schooling and transitional assistance. In addition, the school must also provide appropriate educational services to those students that are deemed *special education* according to the ramifications of IDEA.

There are two types of social services relevant to this study: restorative justice and wrap-around services. Restorative justice accentuates a basic concept: Crime damages people, which in turn, distresses communities and relationships. The concept of restorative justice employs the needs of the victim, offender, and community to become enthusiastically active in the restorative process of criminals located within a correctional setting. Another social service strategy used to assist juvenile delinquents into a successful transition to mainstream society is wrap-around services. This strategy

opposes incarcerating youth for long periods. Instead, youth located within correctional facilities are given a plethora of community-based services that are comprehensive and collaborative.

Limitations/Delimitations

For the purpose of this study, limitations were identified as:

1. Unforeseen events during the personal interview (i.e., power failure, illness of the participant) may exclude the participant from completing this study.
2. Some participants may not be honest when responding to open-ended interview questions.
3. Some students may not be questioned due to the transient nature of the population and the problem of tracking parents or guardians for interview consent.
4. The majority of students are enrolled at XYZ High School for 1 to 3 months. The transient nature of the population may limit teachers in their evaluation of students' academic and social needs to those students that remain in the incarceration facility for longer periods.
5. There is a transient population of teachers located at XYZ High School. Teacher perception of students' academic and social needs may be restricted due to their short duration of teaching in an incarceration environment.
6. Teachers' perspectives at XYZ High School, within ABC Juvenile Detention Center, will not be represented as if this study was carried out amongst the entire population of prison teachers.

7. The researcher is employed at XYZ High School as a teacher; however, there are few social interactions among staff members. Due to the lack of social interactions between all staff members, the researcher hopes that his employment at the school will not cause bias.

Definition of Terms

1. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Goals that each state must develop and adhere to ensure that all students are achieving at a high academic level.
2. Culture shock: Feeling that one is in a foreign place, as in an incarcerated environment.
3. Evaluation research: Information used to make judgments about the quality of particular programs, procedures, and materials.
4. Incarcerated: To be in jail or a juvenile detention center
5. Incarcerated juvenile: A child, under the age of 18, who has been charged with committing a crime and held in a juvenile detention center.
6. Incarceration(ed) school: Type of school, located within jail, where students are not allowed to leave due because they are a resident of the Department of Corrections.
7. Individuals with Disabilities Educational Amendment Act (IDEA): In 1997, the name PL-142 was revised to IDEA and modified to include individuals up to age 21.
8. Input modality: The way students process information when they are learning.
9. Juvenile education: The academic and social skills taught to a person in a juvenile detention center.

10. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001: A federal mandate stipulating that high quality educational service must be provided for children and youth regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, disability, income, or background.
11. Normalization: The idea that incarcerated individuals has the same types of freedom during incarceration as they do in the traditional environment.
12. Novice teachers: New teachers with less than 1 year of experience teaching in prison.
13. Openness: A policy allowing incarcerated individuals to enter and leave at their own will within the incarcerated and traditional community.
14. Organizational countercultures: A culture that does not allow students to make their own choices; these students are told what to do and have no influence in their daily routine decision-making.
15. Organizational subculture: A culture that allows student freedom and their ability to make their own choices with some decision-making power.
16. Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142): This law stipulates that each state must develop and maintain policies that provide free and appropriate public education to all children under the age of 18.
17. Recidivism: The rate in which incarcerated individuals will return to an incarceration setting.
18. Resiliency: The possibility of overcoming a difficult situation, as in being incarcerated.
19. Responsibility: Tasks assigned to incarcerated individuals.

20. Sojourner: A teacher who plans to teach in the incarcerated setting for at least 6 months to 5 years.
21. Teacher as Exile: A teacher who realizes that prison culture is not a melting pot of high, average, and low performing academic students functioning mostly at grade level as opposed to a traditional school.
22. Teacher as Settler: A teacher who is accustomed to forecasting procedures and outcomes of others involved in the prison culture, which results in more control of their educational position.
23. Teacher as Stranger: A teacher who negotiates a distance between himself or herself and the culture.
24. Teacher as Tourist: A teacher who feels a sense of euphoria when beginning to teach in a prison school.
25. Teacher as Translator: A teacher who attempts to pull more resources from the outside in an attempt to make the prison education setting similar to a traditional education setting.
26. Temporary holding facility: An incarcerated environment where students await the results of court cases to find out whether they will be released or sent to a prison.
27. Tourist: A teacher who intends to teach more than 6 months in a prison environment.
28. Traditional School: Type of school in which students, many times, have a choice to attend.

Significance of the Study

This study is a relevant and important aspect of research due to the educational and psychosocial implications of teachers' effect on incarcerated students. This study will be reported to the administration at XYZ High School to improve the educational and social programs of the institution. The researcher hopes to improve the social and academic programs' effectiveness from a teacher's perspective to assist students at XYZ High School in realizing the importance of education in a traditional environment.

This study is also significant to the NCLB law that requires "all children, regardless of race, income, disability, or background, receive a high quality education; the law promotes high standards for the reading, mathematics, and science achievement of students across the nation. Provisions of NCLB address[es] teacher quality, testing, and accountability and assigns specific consequences for schools that do not perform at or above the high standards" (Leone, & Cutting, 2004, p.263).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a provision specific to NCLB that states that educators are accountable for student achievement. Each state mandates goals for student achievement. If student achievement meets or is above the state standards, the school is deemed as meeting the AYP. If the school does not meet the AYP for 2 consecutive years, the school is considered in need of improvement. At that time, students and parents have an option to enroll in other schools that meet AYP requirements. The NCLB Act states that AYP is measured on an academic calendar year where most incarcerated student test scores are not reported (Leone & Cutting, 2004). However, the instructive supervision of juvenile education differs extensively from state to state. Some

states may have correctional educational institutions that function as their own entity, while others are managed by an educational system.

Without reported test scores, the educational results seen in a juvenile setting are not justified. In addition, AYP is measured from one academic year to the next. Due to the transient nature of the incarcerated population, there is no base line to compare statistical academic progress. “Basing AYP on student groups with fragmented and negative educational experiences outside the facility is a questionable practice” (Leone & Cutting, 2004, p 263).

The NCLB Act also fails to acknowledge that school choice is not an option for incarcerated youth. Traditional students have the right to transfer to another school if the school they are attending does not meet NCLB requirements. Students that attend incarceration schools are not allowed to leave (Leone & Cutting, 2004). Based on this point, Gehring (2005) states that a national effort to overhaul this aspect of juvenile education is clearly long overdue.

Another problem with the NCLB Act (as it applies to juveniles) is grouping for instruction. Many correctional institutions have class assignments based on a correctional representative’s directive, with educators having no influence in the matter. Correctional administrators do not consult educational administrators regarding decisions on classroom assignments, which compromises student instruction because various academic abilities are present in the same classroom. Teachers in correctional settings are often forced to individualize instruction for each student, which results in a lack of peer interaction or group projects. Therefore, the incarcerated students are at a disadvantage by not having options to participate on a cognitive level with other students

of the same ability, as opposed to traditional schools where students are grouped by grade level and basic or advanced classes (Leone & Cutting, 2004).

Title I, Part D of NCLB offers the potential for supplement funding for educational programs located within incarceration settings. Furthermore, “before educational programs for incarcerated youth can meet the provisions of NCLB, issues related to governance, funding and staffing of correctional educational programs must be addressed on a federal and state level” (Leone & Cutting, 2004, p.265).

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the goals of examining academic and social needs of high school incarcerated youth from teachers’ perspectives at XYZ High School – an alternative high school in a large urban setting. The research explores the academic and social impact from prison teachers’ perspectives at XYZ High School and their suggested improvements for the program. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of literature associated with this topic. Chapter 3 portrays the methodology that was employed to gather data in relation to the research question. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study, and chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature compared traditional versus incarcerated schools, teacher perceptions on teaching in prison, recommendations for improving academic and social skills for incarcerated students, and the evolution and progression of juvenile education.

Traditional Schools vs. Incarceration Schools

Leone and Cutting (2004) stated that when incarcerated juveniles achieve an education the recidivism rate lowers. The achieved education helps prevent these juveniles from reverting to their previous criminal lifestyle. These students are in desperate need of basic academic skills. Research provides evidence that most incarcerated juveniles are lacking basic academic skills, but that these skills can be quickly developed with rigorous instruction in a short period of time.

White (2002) stated that traditional school practices within incarceration settings have proven to be unsuccessful. In order to meet the needs of incarcerated students, instruction must be individualized. Several methods that may be used to increase student success in this type of facility include: “intensifying direct instruction, offer[ing] one-on-one assistance, us[ing] a variety of instructional strategies, design[ing] lessons that emphasize cognitive skill development, and decrease[ing] drills and practice” (White, 2002, p.177).

White also stated that cooperative learning should be implemented to improve social and group skills. He stated that these approaches promote teaching to student’s strengths as opposed to their deficits. Many of these youths come from physically and emotionally disturbed environments that have psychologically detrimental effects –

creating despair, insecurities, and fear. White suggested that if these youths can build resiliency and the inner strength to overcome a difficult situation while they are still young, they would learn to cope with difficult situations that will mainstream them into adulthood. Henderson and Milstein (1996) stated six factors that build resiliency: “increase bonding, set clear and consistent boundaries, teach life skills, provide care and support, set and communicate high expectations, and provide opportunities for participation” (p.178).

Jackson (1968) stated there is a certain structure that exists between teachers and students in traditional schools. These behaviors include, but are not limited to, seat work, group discussion, and teacher demonstration. Wright (2005) believes that schools are social environments where identified values, attitudes, and inclinations are entrenched and replicated in classroom applications. These identified aspects are related to time, physical space, discipline and control, assessment and grading procedures, textbooks, connections to the exterior world, and interactions between teachers. This traditional educational environment does not reflect the culture that exists inside the confines of an incarceration school atmosphere. According to Wright (2005, p.23), prison teaching cultures are defined as “hybrid, syncretic cultures – a blend of home and host world behaviors, experiences, and identities,” and compares traditional pedagogy to an organizational subculture as opposed to organizational countercultures, as in the case with correctional education.

Teaching in prison

The majority of teachers that work in an incarcerated environment never aspired to do so. “For many novice teachers, prison teaching is a ‘totally different’ experience,

and prison is considered a foreign place” (Wright, 2005, p.19). The bleak prison walls and security measures of being searched and frisked every day are quite different than what any teacher expects when choosing a career in education. Current educational programs poorly prepare teachers for practices that must be fashioned for this peculiar landscape. “Given the uniqueness of prison schooling, a move towards academic recognition of correctional education” should be addressed at the collegiate level as a program of study (Wright, 2005, p. 24).

Many teachers become perplexed when they initially enter an incarcerated educational environment. However, once they are immersed into this environment, teachers become better adjusted to the culture. Unfortunately, this adjustment can overshadow educational priorities to the point of feeling like the student: no independence or creativity and a loss of inspiration. Wright (2005) stated that teachers experience a series of culture shocks when they begin teaching in prison. The five stages of culture shock are as follows: a) the teacher as tourist, b) the teacher as exile or marginal, c) the teacher as stranger, d) the teacher as settler, and e) the teacher as translator.

Teacher as Tourist

Jandt (2004) described the first stage that teachers experience as a *honeymoon phase* when they begin teaching in prison. A sense of euphoria resides within them while starting a new position. At this juncture of prison teaching, the teacher is inundated with impressions from the new surroundings and determines the culture to be interesting and captivating. Jandt classified teachers into one of two categories: a tourist or a sojourner. A tourist typically does not intend to remain in this environment for more than 6 months, while a sojourner remains in the setting from 6 months to 5 years. Sojourners, as opposed to tourists, are hoping to make an educational difference in the lives of incarcerated youth. Jandt also stated that some teachers remain forever tourists in their dedication to penal education while they wait for another employment opportunity.