Research Articles

Transformative and Social Justice Dimensions of a Jail-based College Course

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Research consistently demonstrates the benefits associated with the provision of education in prisons and jails. These examinations typically focus on prison-based education, enhanced employability, and recidivism reduction. There is considerably less attention afforded to jail-based education and other benefits associated with correctional education opportunities. This single-case study focuses on a college-level criminal justice course taught using the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model at the Washoe County (Nevada) Detention Facility in the spring 2016 semester. A thematic content analysis of data collected through direct observations, student papers, and course evaluations identified changes to subject matter knowledge, individual changes, changes in perceptions of others, and changes to the class dynamics over time. The results highlight the transformative effects of a single college-level course taught in a jail that directly and indirectly contribute to the pursuit of social justice.

Keywords: post-secondary education, transformative education, social justice, jails, case study

Correctional education programs provide benefits to the inmates who participate in them as well as the communities to which they return, including improved employment outcomes (Davis et al., 2014; Lockwood, Nally, Ho, & Knutson, 2012; Nally, Lockwood, Knutson, & Ho, 2012) and reduced recidivism (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2007; Davis et al., 2014; MacKenzie, 2006; Nally et al., 2012; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000). Education has the potential to address social inequalities (Allen & Reich, 2013) and improve individual circumstances (Scott, 2016; Ubah, 2004), both of which support the process of reintegrating into the community. The United States has a history of providing various forms of

education to people who are incarcerated or detained in prisons and jails dating back to the late 1700s (Gehring & Wright, 2003). However, a series of events beginning in the 1970s resulted in reduced access to educational programs in prisons and jails.

Today, more educational programs are available in prisons than jails. Prisons and jails are also more likely to offer adult basic education and vocational training than post-secondary education, and these programs are focused on definite outcomes, such as improved employment prospects and recidivism reduction (Davis et al., 2014). The provision of correctional education has the potential to confer additional benefits to participants and to make significant contributions to the pursuit of social justice in addition to the associated employment and recidivism benefits.

The current study focuses on a college-level criminal justice course based upon the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model taught at the Washoe County (Nevada) Detention Facility (WCDF) in the spring 2016 semester. This course brought together inside students (i.e., incarcerated men) and outside students (i.e., traditional students from the University of Nevada, Reno [UNR]) for a weekly semester-long course in the jail. The students completed the same readings, engaged in small and large group discussions and activities, wrote on the same topics for papers, and completed a group project. The results highlight the transformative aspect of a single course that may generate the foundation for functional changes (e.g., improved employment and reduced recidivism) among people who are incarcerated, document the value of experiential education for college students who may work in the criminal justice system in the future, and make direct and indirect contributions to the pursuit of social justice.

Literature Review

Education has long been considered a tool to facilitate offender rehabilitation, tracing back to the Sabbath School period (1789-1875) in prisons and jails built on the Pennsylvania Model (Gehring & Wright, 2003). Access to education was extended until World War II when prison labor was used to support the war effort. Educational services resumed after World War II, but the Higher Education Act of 1965 significantly increased access to higher education by making federal student loans available to inmates. The highest level of education available in prisons and jails varies and included adult basic education, vocational education, and post-secondary education. The primary outcomes of interest were the effect of correctional education on employment and recidivism. Despite evidence of positive effects on employment and recidivism, access to education in prisons and jails has been reduced since the 1970s.

Impact of Education in Prisons and Jails

Currently, the most common types of education available in prisons and jails are adult basic education and vocational training (see Davis et al., 2014). There is a long history of education in American prisons and jails. The provision of such education is critical to achieving the desired correctional goals of improved ability to obtain and maintain sufficient employment and recidivism reduction. Vacca (2004) noted that prisons are full of people who

are poor or otherwise disadvantaged and who require additional education to address skill deficits. Research also indicates that education improves life circumstances in ways that increase the likelihood that offenders will be able to secure stable employment and not reoffend (Scott, 2016; Ubah, 2004).

Unemployment or underemployment are risk factors for recidivism (Caudy, Durso, & Taxman, 2013; LaVigne, Davies, Palmer, & Halberstadt, 2008; Makarios, Steiner, & Travis, 2010) and education influences the ability to secure stable employment (Carlson, Novak, McChesney, Green, & Hood, 2013; Mears & Cochran, 2015). The US Department of Labor (2016) reported higher levels of education result in higher weekly earnings and lower rates of unemployment. Therefore, prisons and jails have often focused on educational programs designed to improve employment prospects. Yet, research on the relationship between education and employment outcomes among the formerly incarcerated yielded mixed results. Nally et al. (2012) found that education did not increase the likelihood of employment but did result in a higher monthly income for those who were employed. The five-year follow-up study identified a relationship between education and employment—those with a college education and high school diplomas or GEDs were more likely to be employed compared to those without (Lockwood et al., 2012). Davis and colleagues (2014) also found a significant relationship between education and employment in a meta-analysis of 58 studies—those who participated in correctional education programs experienced a 13% increase in the likelihood of employment compared to those who did not participate in educational programs. The likelihood of employment increased to 48% when Davis and colleagues restricted their analysis to the most rigorous studies.

The primary goal of correctional education is recidivism reduction. Research indicates that properly implemented education programs effectively reduce recidivism. Nally and colleagues (2012) found that participation in educational programs during incarceration results in reduced recidivism. They also found that less educated offenders are more likely to reoffend even if they participated in programs while in custody (Nally et al., 2012). Also, several meta-analyses reported that correctional education resulted in the reduced likelihood of recidivism (Aos et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2014; MacKenzie, 2006; Wilson et al., 2000). The magnitude of effects ranges from 7% to 43% recidivism reduction, depending on the definition of recidivism and the rigor of study designs.

Removal of Higher Education from Prisons and Jails

Reduced access to correctional education began in the late 1970s subsequent to the misinterpretation of Martinson's (1974) research on prison rehabilitation programs. Martinson's (1974) article was a summary of a larger piece of research analyzing 231 correctional program evaluations published between 1945 and 1967 (see Lipton, Martinson, & Wilks, 1975). The results were not promising, but Martinson (1974) acknowledged the possibility that the weak recidivism reduction effects could be attributable to improper program implementation or poorly designed evaluations. However, as Cullen and Gendreau (2000) explained, Martinson's (1974) question about what works to reduce recidivism was interpreted to mean that nothing works and "assumed the status of unquestioned truth" (p. 119). Lawmakers and correctional administrators focused on the finding that rehabilitation programs, including

education, were not resulting in reduced recidivism upon offender return to the community, but failed to consider the aforementioned possible explanations Martinson (1974) gave for this finding (Pratt, Gau, & Franklin, 2011). In other words, lawmakers and correctional administrators made policy decisions based on an incomplete interpretation of the study findings.

Martinson was not the first scholar to report the relatively poor recidivism reduction effects of contemporary correctional rehabilitation programs (see Bailey, 1966), but his article had a greater impact on practice due to the style in which it was written and the outlet in which it was published. Unlike other scholars, Martinson wrote in a style that was accessible to the general public. His research conclusions were published in *The Public Interest*, a publication with a much broader readership than academic journals where previous similar work was published (Pratt et al., 2011). Martinson's work was also more impactful than previous research that advanced the same conclusions due to a shifting socio-political climate. Lawmakers, correctional administrators, and the general public's distrust of government involvement in the rehabilitation of offenders, cleared the way for the misinterpretation of Martinson's work to influence practice (Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Cullen & Gilbert, 1982; Pratt et al., 2011).

This misinterpretation of Martinson's (1974) work was used as a justification to reduce access to education in prisons and jails. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Pub. L. No. 103-322) further reduced access to higher education in prisons and jails by barring inmates from receiving Pell Grants. As a result, Taylor (2005) found this loss of federal aid resulted in the shuttering of nearly half of all higher education programs in prisons and jails. The recession starting in 2008 exacerbated already strained funding, resulting in the additional closure of post-secondary education programs in prisons and jails (Davis et al., 2014). Davis and colleagues (2014) speculated that the reduction in educational opportunities, especially higher education, in prisons and jails may contribute to increased incarceration in the future.

Gaps in the Literature

There are several gaps in the literature exploring the influence of correctional education. First, most research on correctional education focuses on prisons rather than jails. State and federal prison populations (approximately 1.5 million) are larger than jail populations (approximately 630,000), but the turnover is much higher in jails (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). Approximately 641,000 people enter and leave prisons each year, while jails experience nearly 11 million entries and exits (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). Most people in jail are there for brief periods of time and for less than a year in most states. Therefore, it is easier to complete a curriculum in prisons. However, more people can be exposed to education in jails than prison each year, even if it is a single course. Second, post-secondary education is included in some studies, but a majority of correctional education programs and, thus, evaluations, focus on adult basic education. Finally, research on the effects of any type of correctional education tends to focus on a narrow range of outcomes, including employment and recidivism. This study addresses these gaps by evaluating a college-level course delivered in a jail and exploring the following research question: What beneficial effects can jail-based education produce beyond improving employment outcomes and reducing recidivism?

Theoretical Framework

Social justice operates at the societal and individual levels. Brown (2008) explained that social justice is both a goal and the processes by which the goal is pursued. Rawls (1971) developed a macro-level theory of social justice focused on the basic structure and behavior of social institutions and how they support justice or facilitate inequality. Theoretically, macro-level social justice is achieved when "each person…[has] an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others…[and] social and economic inequalities are…arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all" (Rawls, 1971, p. 60). Rawls (1971) asserted that equal justice is owed to all people based on their potential to act in accordance with the public understanding of justice, whether or not they actualize that potential. This conception of justice prohibits differential access to equal justice due to varying capacity or realization of the potential to act in a manner consistent with the public understanding of justice embodied in government institutions. Rawls acknowledged that deep inequalities, stemming from political systems and economic and social circumstances that are insufficiently explained by merit or desert, may exist in a society and unfairly affect people's opportunities in life. It is critical to address these inequalities because healthy communities are necessary for all people to survive and thrive. Rawls explained that no person can perform every task necessary to live a productive life, so people are dependent on a social union facilitated by a just society in which the strengths of all members are necessary and valued (Rawls, 1971). However, macro-level social justice is not likely to be achieved or maintained if people do not pursue social justice at the individual or micro level. It is possible to cultivate macro and micro level social justice in societies where inequalities exist through transformative learning opportunities.

According to Magro (2015), "[t]ransformative education within a context of social justice involves teaching [and learning] for personal, social, and global change" (p. 109). Transformative learning alters the way people perceive themselves, other people, and the world in which they live. The process "attempts to explain how their expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning they derive from their experiences" (Brown, 2008, p. 157) and the ways they engage with other people. Specifically, transformative education in the context of social justice requires that teachers and students acknowledge the role of power, privilege, and hierarchy in the classroom and society (Johnson-Bailey, 2002; Magro, 2015).

Mezirow (1991) proposed a micro-level transformative learning theory comprised of three components—acknowledging the importance of experience and perspective, critical reflection, and rational discourse. People have experiences that influence their perspectives. Mezirow (1991) explained that people's perspectives are "made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience" (pp. 5-6). A person might experience perspective transformation if he or she engages in critical reflection, the process by which a person explicitly evaluates the accuracy and utility of perspectives and revises them as necessary (Mezirow, 1998; see also Johnson-Bailey, 2002). Critical reflection also involves the "deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and effect of practices" (Brown, 2004, p. 89). The process of perspective transformation results in the development of more inclusive views and increased receptivity to the experiences and perspectives of other people. Lastly,

people may engage in rational discourse to test their new perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). Brown (2008) explained that:

> Rational discourse involves a commitment to extended and repeated conversations that evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and cautious openness to new perspectives, not shared understanding in the sense of consensus, but rather deeper and richer understandings of our own biases as well as where our colleagues are coming from on particular issues and how each of us differently constructs those issues. As such, participation in extended and repeated discourse about justice and equity can provide unique opportunities for learner growth, transformation, and empowerment. (pp. 157-158)

Transformative learning opportunities that involve repeated critical reflection and rational discourse serve a capacity-building function that prepares people for effective social justice leadership (Brown, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Fullan, 1993; Larrivee, 2000; Schön, 1987). According to Brown (2004), critical, transformative leaders "work for social change and social justice" (p. 96; see also Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Cochran-Smith, 1998; Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2013). Therefore, if people reflected critically on the sources and accuracy of their acquired and experiential knowledge along with the collective impact of that knowledge on their behavior, and engage in rational discourse about those reflections, then people are both participating in acts of social justice at the individual level, and are prepared and capable of modifying their behavior in ways that facilitate macro-level social justice. Hence, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model is intended to be a transformative learning model that requires students to acknowledge the importance of their experience and perspective plus it provides opportunities for critical reflection and rational discourse.

Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model

The course discussed in this study, titled Advanced Topics in Criminal Justice: Advanced Corrections, was taught using the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model. This model was developed by Lori Pompa and first used to teach a course in the Philadelphia Prison System in 1997 (Inside-Out Center, 2016). The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program facilitates partnerships between prisons, jails, and institutions of higher education. Courses based on this model bring together people who are incarcerated or detained (e.g., inside students) and university students (e.g., outside students) for semester-long courses held in prisons and jails. In these courses, students collectively learn the course material and each other's acquired and experiential knowledge. These courses create the space for open dialogue that allows students to situate their individual experiences in a broader context.

Inside-Out courses are a form of community-engaged learning. These learning opportunities are valuable because they help connect course content and real-world situations. They are associated with "complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development" (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001, p. 4). Moreover, civic engagement is also associated with improved cultural awareness, tolerance for diversity, sensitivity, and reasoning (Finley, 2011). According to the Inside-Out Center (2016), more than 100 partnerships between

prisons and jails and institutions of higher education have created opportunities for more than 22,000 students, inside and out, to experience this growth.

Class Structure and Curriculum

The class met once per week over 16 weeks. The first, third, and final meetings were held in each individual's respective location. The first meeting included an introduction, review of course rules, and a review of the syllabus. The third meeting was a debriefing session. This type of learning environment was new for everyone in the class and there was a possibility that people could have been uncomfortable, especially after the first combined meeting. The final meeting was the final debriefing session. Meetings two and four through 15 were a combination of inside and outside students. The standard class session involved micro lectures, small and large group discussions, critical-thinking and problem-solving activities, and individual reflections. The fifteenth session was a completion ceremony held at the WCDF. This session included remarks by invited guests, presentation of the group project, and distribution of completion certificates.

Subject matter. This model can be used to teach any subject. The course referenced in this study used the standard Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program curriculum. This curriculum covered theories of behavior, philosophies of punishment, the criminal justice system, punishment and rehabilitation, the purposes of prisons and jails, myths and realities of prison and jail life, victimization, and restorative justice. However, sociodemographic factors (e.g. race, gender) had an influence on the subject matter.

The relationship between instructor, inside and outside student race and gender creates the potential for a classroom dynamic that perpetuates unbalanced discussions of racism and white privilege in a way that further marginalizes and disadvantages students of color in the classroom and the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities both in society and in the criminal justice system. The issues of race and bias were also critical to balanced examinations of the criminal justice system. African American men are overrepresented in prisons and jails in the United States and this creates a disparity between the race of students and Caucasian educators in many prison and jail classrooms (Gaskew, 2015). Van Gundy, Bryant, and Starks (2013) evaluated Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programs and reported that instructors and outside students are disproportionately likely to be white women.

In order to address these issues, this course integrated activities throughout the semester that challenged students to 1) recognize their explicit and implicit biases, 2) identify how their biases influence their decision-making, 3) consider how the biases of other people collectively influence the design and operation of the criminal justice system, and 4) identify fair methods to solve these problems. The class operated with a set of community rules that included a mechanism decided upon by the students that allowed them to respectfully communicate to other students or the instructor that they wish to discuss a perspective or comment that they feel may be influenced by bias or privilege. The spring 2016 cohort identified the word, "magenta" as the signal that a conversation or activity should be paused for a discussion about bias or privilege.

Assigned reading. The students read several books throughout the semester. They began with Mauer and Chesney-Lind's (2002) *Invisible punishment: The collateral consequences of mass imprisonment*, continued with Stevenson's (2015) *Just mercy: A story of justice and redemption*, followed with Herman's (2010) *Parallel justice for victims of crime*, and completed the semester with Zehr's (2015) *The little book of restorative justice*. A lending library was developed with the support of the UNR bookstore so that inside students had the same access to the assigned books as the outside students. Students also read several additional documents relating to the subject matter.

Assessment. Students were assessed through several methods. First, students were graded on their level of class engagement. Second, students wrote seven papers. These papers included a focal question and required reference to observations from class discussion, integration of material from the assigned reading, and students' reactions to the material. Finally, students completed and presented a group project. The outside students were formally enrolled at UNR and earn three semester credit hours if they pass the course. Unfortunately, there was no mechanism in place that permitted inside students to earn college credit through UNR. Therefore, inside students were permitted to decide whether they wished to receive paper feedback and grades like the outside students or receive feedback only.

Methods

This course was held in the WCDF, which is operated by the Washoe County Sheriff's Office (WCSO). It is a direct-supervision facility in Northern Nevada. The WCDF accepts detainees from 30 local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. In 2016, the average daily population was 1,085 male and female adult pre-trial detainees and adults serving sentences of 364 days or less (WCSO, 2017). The study based on this course was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNR and it was determined that the study is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations and UNR policy.

Case Study Design

Case study designs are appropriate when seeking to answer descriptive or explanatory questions and when it may be important to study a phenomenon of interest in its real-world context (Yin, 2014). This study utilized an embedded, single-case study design. Single-case designs are appropriate under five circumstances, including situations in which the same case is examined at two or more intervals in an effort to identify how certain conditions change over time (Yin, 2014). The embedded design allows the researcher to both explore the phenomenon globally and to make comparisons within the case. The case in this study was one cohort of students (both inside and outside students). The embedded analysis separately examined inside and outside students to determine what effect a hybrid college course, held in a jail, had on the students, collectively, and separately by legal status.

Sample

This study reports findings from a criminal justice course taught in the spring 2016 semester. This was the first semester the course was offered, so enrollment was kept low. The class included seven inside students and seven outside students, for a total of 14 students. All inside students were males due to institutional requirements. Two outside students were males and five were females. One inside student was African American and one outside student was Native American; the other 12 students were Caucasian. The age distribution was similar among inside and outside students. One inside student was in his fifties, one was in his early thirties, and the other five inside students were between 19 and 22 years of age. One outside student was in her sixties and the other six outside students were between 19 and 22 years of age.

Inside and outside students differed in terms of previous education. One inside student previously earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and one inside student completed vocational education to become a certified mechanic. The other five inside students either earned a high school diploma or a high school equivalency credential. Inside students were not earning credit through UNR, so they were not required to have a certain educational background to enroll in the course. Instead, the researcher required participants be able to read at the 10th grade level in order to complete most of the assigned course reading. Roe and Burns' (2011) Informal Reading Inventory was used to assess reading level. One outside student previously earned a Master of Arts degree and returned to college to learn about things she found to be interesting. The other six outside students earned high school diplomas and were matriculated students at UNR pursuing Bachelor's degrees.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this study were collected through several sources. First, serving as the instructor afforded me an opportunity for direct observations of individual and group behavior. These observations were documented as a part of a daily practice of instructional reflection. Second, students were assigned seven reflection papers throughout the semester. The paper topics varied, but all papers included sections on observations from class discussion and activities, analysis and integration of material from the assigned reading, and a section on the writers' emotional reactions to the class discussion, assigned reading, and extended personal reflection. This paper structure provided an opportunity to observe students' evolving perceptions and reactions. Finally, students completed mid-semester and final course evaluations. These evaluations collected data on students' views of course structure, content, activities, assigned reading, assignments, concerns and whether or not students felt their initial concerns regarding the class were realized.

The data were entered into three datasets. The first dataset contained my observations, as the instructor, organized by week. The second dataset contained information from the seven papers; the student was the unit of analysis. After all of the data were entered into these datasets, each student was assigned a unique identifier (e.g., inside student 1, outside student 1) and these identifiers replaced all first names in the datasets, rendering the datasets anonymous. Information

from the mid-semester and final course evaluations were entered into the third dataset. The evaluations were different colors based on student status (e.g., yellow for inside students, pink for outside students), but were otherwise anonymous. Each survey was assigned a unique identifier (e.g., inside mid-semester A, outside final B) and entered into the third dataset.

These data were evaluated using thematic content analysis in NVivo version 11. Themes were identified inductively, allowing them to emerge from the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The basic thematic analysis process identified in Kuckartz (2014, p. 70) was used in this study, including the following steps:

(1) Identifying important information and composing memos,
(2) Developing main topic categories,
(3) First coding round using main topic categories,
(4) Compiling all information assigned to the main topics categories,
(5) Identifying sub-categories,
(6) Second coding round using the main and subordinate categories,
(7) Category-based analysis.

This process was conducted for each dataset, resulting in three thematic content analyses that yielded the same results across all three datasets.

Validity and Reliability

Steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. The validity of the results was ensured by way of triangulation and respondent validation. This study featured triangulation of methods that yield data over time, including direct observations each week, student papers in seven weeks throughout the semester, and course evaluations in the middle and end of the semester (Denzin, 1978; Torrance, 2012). The themes identified in the data were subject to respondent validation in focus groups (Klinger, 2005; see also Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). The final meeting was held in separate sessions for inside and outside students. This meeting format was ideal for focus groups. In these separate sessions, I asked the students if the themes identified in the direct observations, papers, and mid-semester evaluations accurately reflected their experiences or if they felt the themes should be modified and opened the floor for discussion. All students agreed the themes reflected their experiences in the class. Equally important, reliability in qualitative research is best conceived of as consistency (Leung, 2015; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this study, the coding process was consistently applied, there was no shift in the meaning of the codes during the coding process, and the coding process consistently yielded the same themes (Gibbs, 2007).

Positionality: Practitioner then Researcher

In this case, the instructor was also the researcher, which may have raised reasonable concerns regarding objectivity. As an instructor, I monitor student performance throughout the semester to determine if or when additional steps must be taken to assist or engage students for every class I teach. I also maintain a daily practice of instructional reflection to

critically evaluate my interactions in the classroom. The datasets that I maintain to monitor student and personal performance are kept separate. I maintained these practices when I taught my first course based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model.

First, I was a practitioner teaching a course with a distinct social justice perspective and goal of providing a transformative learning opportunity to all students in the class. To that end, I sought to strike a balance between facilitating rather than controlling the dialogue and ensuring that all students had an equal voice in this classroom. Ensuring all students had an equal voice in the classroom was critical to avoid reproducing power differentials and inequalities related to gender, race and ethnicity, legal status, and prior education among other characteristics (Muhammad et al., 2015; see also Merriam et al., 2001). Initially, achieving this balance required me to manage the classroom dynamic; this need to manage power dynamics in the classroom gradually subsided as more students engaged with more agency. My initial efforts to manage classroom dynamic to ensure that students had equal voice may have caused students to behave in ways different than they would have otherwise, but the purpose of the course was to create a space for students to learn and discuss as peers and my initial classroom management efforts were necessary to support that purpose. I noticed what seemed to be trends during a periodic review of both datasets in the third month of class, which was when I became the researcher. I sought to ensure the validity of the observed trends by subjecting the themes to respondent validation and inviting dialogue and criticism of themes in a focus group format.

Results

Four themes emerged from the data. Students reported changes to their knowledge regarding the subject matter covered in the course. They also reported individual changes and changes in their perceptions of other people. Finally, changes in group dynamic were evident.

Subject Matter Knowledge

Students reported changes to knowledge related to topics covered in the course. All 14 students reported learning more than they anticipated on the mid-semester evaluation. An inside student indicated, "I really learned a lot from this class. My eyes were opened to many things in the criminal justice world that I did not know." Similarly, an outside student reported, "I strongly feel like I have learned more in this class in the first six weeks than I have in any other class." Another outside student echoed this sentiment at the end of the semester, writing "I learned more about criminal justice in this class than I have in any regular college classroom." One outside student linked the degree of learning to the class structure and assignments:

> The class was eye opening and more beneficial than any other class I've ever taken. I think the structure and assignments were spot on for both the students inside and out. The curriculum was great for the inside-out setting as well. The way the class was designed is probably what helped me learn so much. We learned from discussing assigned reading and personal experiences, and doing problem-solving activities that required us to apply

things we learned from the reading. We also sometimes learned other things in these activities like recognizing our implicit biases or recognizing when we are making assumptions.

Most students highlighted certain topics about which they learned more than others or more than they expected. These topics differed between inside and outside students. Inside students indicated that they learned the most about harm and victimization. One inside student shared that, "An offender may not understand all the effects the offender's actions may have caused." Another inside student added, "This class helped me learn about things I didn't actually think of before. I didn't know about harm in crimes that aren't violent." A third inside student confessed that:

It was hard to hear that my crimes probably did cause harm even if I didn't know. My crime wasn't violent. I didn't have a weapon so I didn't think my crime caused harm but I did. It was hard to hear but I think I needed to hear that.

Conversely, outside students explicitly reported learning the most about corrections. Three students reported that they believe they learned more about corrections and people who are incarcerated or detained by being in a jail. One of these students shared, "Being in a jail helped me understand corrections in a way that textbooks on their own have not." Another outside student reported:

I definitely learned in this class! Mostly I learned how little I knew about the prison system. I really appreciated the ability to openly discuss subjects as opposed to a typical learning experience in university. Being in a jail drove the points home. It really broadened my knowledge about prisons.

Several outside students also reported learning about various aspects of punishment or rehabilitation and how they came to believe that their initial views were inaccurate. One outside student wrote that:

I realized that my own past ideas about limiting programs and benefits to people who have been incarcerated actually create such a negative chain reaction in our criminal justice system as well as our community. I discovered a new respect for programming and treatment services.

Another outside student commented, "I definitely view the invisible punishments as counterproductive and destructive. I was surprised about the additional penalties experienced by people after their release from prison. I had NO IDEA they existed!!"

Two students commented on the sources of their views. An inside student shared, "I realized that my thoughts are based mostly on my personal experience. That matters but I have to learn about facts and research too. I learned how my experiences are related to research." An outside student reported, "Although I consider myself open-minded, I hadn't realized how I let my opinions be formed, in some part, by media and those around me."

Individual Changes

S tudents reported several types of personal changes related to skewed or biased perceptions, self-confidence, motivation, and processing feelings. They reported 37 instances of personal growth in papers and evaluations. An inside student reported having previously narrow views on the harm caused by crime, "I realized that my crime hurt a lot more people and in a lot more ways than I originally thought." One outside student explained how difficult discussions highlighted her skewed perceptions:

> As someone who is personally interested in victim's rights, I tend to often forget how important it is that offenders are also granted rights and should be treated fairly. The past two weeks of discussion [victims and mercy] …have easily been the most uncomfortable and challenging, but simultaneously have been the weeks where I have grown the most.

Another outside student had similarly skewed views and recognized that the class format changed her perceptions:

> When coming into jail you automatically have this negative stigma about the institution and incarcerated people. However, this program not only made me change the way I label people, but it also allowed me to have conversations with people I would have never spoken to before.

Two outside students reported how biased they came to believe their perspectives were before they started class. One student shared, "My view points were incredibly biased and one-sided. I thought I was above people who commit crime. I cannot express how wrong I was. This class has given me a completely new way of viewing my world."

Inside students reported a unique set of experiences related to confidence, motivation, and feelings. An inside student indicated, "I felt so beat down in jail. My class mates and Dr. J encouraged me and I believe in myself more than I can remember since being a little kid." Another inside student echoed this sentiment:

> I got time for my first arrest at 18 last year. The judge went easy on me but it still felt terrible. The 3rd week of class was the first time I didn't feel like my life was over since I got arrested. I learned that I can do better things. I don't have to keep going to jail and prison forever because I did it one time. I was scared to be in this class when I started because I didn't think I was smart enough to be in class with college kids. We are the same age but I am in jail. I found out that I can hang in discussions with them, read books harder then anything else I ever read and write papers. Dr. J believed in me until I believed in myself. It will be really hard to get out of jail and stay out but these last months made me understand that I know how to work hard at something new to me. I have to apply myself just as hard on the outside as I did in this class.

Two inside students relayed an increase in motivation for life improvement upon completion of the course. One student reported, "I just want to thank you for helping me want to move forward in my life in a better way." Another student similarly indicated, "This experience meant a lot to

me. I got to learn from others and teach others. This class inspired me to go back after my dream." A third inside student explained that:

> The reflection section of the papers gave me the space to explore feelings that I don't usually have the time to think about. It is hard to talk about these feelings in jail. You don't have people you can talk to about these feelings. I had to do it in these papers. It was really hard at first, but then I found out that I liked it. I had a place to talk about the things I need to work through. I never did that before.

Changes to Perceptions of Others

Inside and outside students reported changes to their perceptions or assumptions about other people, but the primary changes varied by condition. Inside students reported starting the class with assumptions about outside students that changed over time. One inside student reported changes to assumptions about outside students' backgrounds:

> I was surprised by somethings I learned this semester. I started class thinking that the outside students would judge us. I learned that I was making assumptions about them. Some of them had similar backgrounds to some of us inside students but didn't make the same choices as us. I keep thinking about that. In jail it is easy to ignore that sometimes you had a choice. I made bad choices and it is hard to ignore that when someone like you doesn't do the same thing. We were the same but they worked hard to go to college and I used and sold drugs. I shouldn't judge others if I don't want people to assume bad things about me.

Another inside student reported changes to views about outside students' assessments of inside students:

> I assumed the outside students would judge the inside students, but I don't think they did. It seemed like they wanted to understand how we got here and what would help stop people committing crimes. We are in jail for punishment, but I learned that not every one thinks we are throw aways. Some people want to help people like us.

Outside students reported changes to how they view and engage other people, including people who are incarcerated or detained. All outside students reported at some point coming to think of the inside students as peers before their status as people convicted of crimes; they began focusing on the person before their behavior or legal status. One of the most common changes reported by outside students is that they learned by listening. An outside student shared, "I learned a lot about other people's lives by taking the time to speak with them and listen to them. I really learned the value of truly listening to people." Another commonly reported change is the degree of consideration afforded to the experiences of people who are involved in the criminal justice system. One student reported:

> People are complex and behavior can be complicated. My classmates taught me that it is important to apply that standard to everyone, including people in the system. I have to

evaluate their behavior by the same standards as other people. I hadn't previously recognized that I had double standards.

Changes to Class Dynamic

Students were aware of the changes in class dynamic over the course of the semester. They highlighted a shift from initial nervousness and awkwardness to an increase in group cohesiveness throughout the sixteen-week course, and some students speculated about the cause of the change in dynamic. One inside student reported, "I was nervous when class started. I am in jail in uniform. Some of us inside thought we might be judged. The ice breakers helped us to get to know each other and it got easier to talk to each other." Another inside student partially attributed the ease with which students interacted to the course structure:

> The class was able to talk about stuff because the topics were in a good order. The easier things were first & the touchy topics were later. I am glad that victimization was at the end. I don't think we could have good discussion about that in week 4.

A third inside student highlighted the importance of sustained interaction to improved dynamic: What I liked most is we all worked together as a whole not as separate students sitting in the same room. It was awkward at first, but we were in different groups every session and we just kept talking with different people. I think being required to talk all of the time made it easier to talk even to new people.

Outside students also identified the change in class dynamic, but did not speculate as to the causes of this change. Several outside students observed what one student described as an "us and them dynamic that could not have changed more as the weeks went on." One outside student shared, "At the beginning of class, students never made eye contact. By the end of the semester, the class communicated easily." Another outside student reported that, "The class seemed to become more comfortable with each passing week and, as a result much more willing to participate in discussion even when the topics became more difficult."

Limitations

This study features four limitations. First, the sample is small, so the results may not reflect the outcomes of all courses using the same or similar model. Second, I am a white, female instructor. It is possible that students may have behaved differently in the class or engaged in the validation process differently if I were a person of color or male. Third, the demographic composition of the class may have influenced the respondent validation of themes. A majority of the class was white. It is possible that a class featuring more racial and ethnic diversity would have evaluated the themes in a different way. A majority of the class was also male, and all of the inside students were male. It is possible that a class that was majority female or that included female inside students would have evaluated the themes in a different way. Finally, the data reflect changes in perceptions over the course of the semester, but the

study did not collect post-course data. Therefore, it is not possible to determine how the changes observed in students throughout the course influenced students after course completion.

Discussion

College courses offered in jail can facilitate personal transformation and support the pursuit of social justice. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model creates the space for sustained critical reflection and dialogue that results in transformation at the personal level, which influences the ways people perceive and interact with others. In this course model, students 1) learn the course content, 2) acknowledge their personal experiences and perspectives, 3) reflect on the relationship between facts, experiences, and perspectives, and 4) engage in dialogue. This iterative process of learning, reflection, and dialogue occurs over approximately four months.

Both groups of students reported significant learning relative to the course content. The inside students reported learning the most about harm and victimization while the outside students reported learning the most about the realities of incarceration, detention, and life upon return to the community. In both cases, students learned about the true impact of their behavior or the behaviors they support. They also learned important lessons beyond the course content, especially with respect to how their perspectives were developed and that these perspectives influence their behavior in potentially problematic ways.

Universally, students experienced personal growth. The inside students primarily experienced growth related to confidence, motivation, and the ability to reflect on emotional reactions. Outside students experienced the most growth in terms of recognizing how narrow or biased their perspectives were prior to participation in the class. These personal changes influenced changes in their perceptions of and engagement with others. They learned to listen and learned when they listened, which stripped away the assumptions they made about each other. Collectively, these changes improved group cohesiveness over time that resulted in deep conversations about sensitive topics, reflecting the more inclusive views and increased receptivity to the experiences and perspectives of others highlighted by Brown (2008) and Mezirow (1991).

This course model and attendant personal transformations contribute to the pursuit of social justice. Deep inequalities that affect access to opportunities exist in American society. These inequalities have consequences for people beyond those directly affected by them. These inequalities affect society because they detract from the social union necessary for all people to survive and thrive. In other words, negative conditions that directly impact some people indirectly impact everyone else in the community. However, it is difficult to contribute to solutions to address inequality if people are unaware of inequalities and the consequences of those inequalities. This course provided a forum for inside and outside students to systematically examine the direct and indirect consequences of these inequalities and to start considering strategies to rectify inequalities and the associated injustice.

Participation in a course based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model is a micro-level act of social justice and supports the pursuit of macro-level social justice. The provision of higher education in prisons and jails is an act of social justice. Inequality that effects people's opportunities in life exists in the United States (see Rawls, 1971) and this inequality impacts access to a variety of resources, including post-secondary education. Higher education is considered an equalizing force that aids in improving one's circumstances and is viewed as a sign of upward social mobility (Scott, 2016; Ubah, 2004), so making it available in prisons and jails to people disproportionately affected by inequality represents one step toward addressing societal inequality.

This hybrid course model represents an experiential or community-engaged learning opportunity for traditional college students that improves their understanding of the costs associated with the approach to criminal justice adopted in the United States over the last 35 years. All students experienced 1) improved awareness of self and others, 2) awareness of assumptions and biases, 3) more nuanced understanding of behavior at the individual and system levels, 4) enhanced academic self-efficacy, and 5) a transformed view of oneself from passive learner to potential change agent, consistent with Allred, Belche, and Robinson's (2013) findings related to an Inside-Out course taught in a prison. Collectively, these individual and group experiences expand all participants' knowledge of the political, economic, and social circumstances that contribute to the deep inequalities in American society, and cultivate the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to the development of viable solutions. Furthermore, both inside and outside students began to *believe* they are capable of making such contributions.

Transformative education is one tool that can be used in pursuit of social justice. Participation in transformative education that involves critical reflection and rational discourse regarding power, privilege, hierarchy, and inequality, such as courses based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Model, is a micro-level act of social justice. This serves a capacity-building function for the pursuit of macro-level social justice by empowering participants to pursue solutions to injustice (Brown, 2004, 2008; Delpit, 1995; Fullan, 1993; Johnson-Bailey, 2002; Larrivee, 2000; Magro, 2015; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1987). The people who will work for social change and social justice know how to think critically about their experiences and biases, the experiences of other people, and the relationship of each to the larger social order and function of social institutions (Ayers et al., 1998; Brown, 2004; Oakes et al., 2013). This course and others like it support the pursuit of social justice by providing a training ground for people to develop the skills necessary to do this work. The results of this study demonstrate that it is possible to teach a college course in a jail, highlight the benefits of a hybrid course model that brings university students into prisons and jails, illustrate the benefits of correctional education beyond enhanced employment prospects and recidivism reduction, and suggest the importance of transformative learning opportunities in preparing people to pursue the goal of social justice.

Future Research

The results of this study indicate the need for future research in four areas. First, this study should be replicated using classes that feature instructors of varying race, ethnicity, and gender, feature more student racial and ethnic diversity, and include

female inside students. The validity of the results can be assessed through increased diversity of instructors or students. Second, most research on education in correctional settings focuses on employment and recidivism outcomes. However, the inside students experienced improved confidence and self-concept throughout a single course. Additional research should explore the effect of improved confidence and self-concept at one point (e.g., at the end of a course) on future employment and recidivism. This will assist in determining whether or not these psychological changes are precursors to the improved concrete outcomes of interest. Third, experiential learning opportunities are purported to result in improved learning outcomes. Many of the outside students who participate in Inside-Out courses, especially those offered in the criminal justice major, wish to pursue careers in or associated with the criminal justice system. Additional research should explore the relationship between the changes experienced by students who participate in at least one Inside-Out course and their work orientation and performance upon entering the field as criminal justice practitioners to determine the impact of their Inside-Out course participation. Finally, longitudinal research should explore the relationship between completion of an Inside-Out course and awareness of social justice issues along with involvement in social justice activities.

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