



Research Articles

Reentry: Advancing Social Justice While Forging New College Student Identities in Transitional Places of Incarceration

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While there has been a plethora of studies that consistently confirm the various social individual and social benefits of educational programs for incarcerated individual, few, if any, focus on the education of individuals who are at transitional places of incarceration. How does a short intensive college preparatory program at a transitional place of incarceration affect incarcerated men's perceptions of themselves as potential college students upon release? The findings from this study show a positive shift in students' attitude and motivation towards attending college and can help inform the development of college preparatory programs at transitional places of incarceration.

Keywords: College Preparatory Program, Transitional Places of Incarceration, Social Justice, Higher Education in Prison

The present study grew organically out of an educational program implemented in 2015 at a minimum security transitional place of incarceration (TPI) in New York City for parolees and incarcerated men transitioning from a prison to the community. Four college professors from the City University of New York (CUNY), representing diverse disciplines with previous experience teaching higher education courses in prison, approached the administration of the TPI, which focused on rehabilitation and reentry, with a proposal for a college readiness program, 'College with an Edge'. It turned out that our proposal filled a void in the prison's programming, which focused primarily on job training and a range of counseling services, thus began the program of delivering voluntary, intensive, three-week series of

workshops in reading, writing, math, and public speaking to incarcerated men who were mere weeks away from their release dates.

The initial excitement about the ‘College with an Edge’ program was soon confronted with the realization that college-related programming in TPIs, where the length of incarceration is usually no longer than 45 days, was a relatively unexplored pedagogical territory with few existing models to use for comparison.

The challenges resulting from the brevity of the workshop cycles led the authors to wonder just what kind of assistance could realistically be provided to the incarcerated men attending the workshop classes. We concluded that one measure of the program's effectiveness was the extent to which the education program could affect students' motivation to go to college upon release and, consequently, their self-perception as potential college students in the immediate future. Therefore, to capture such effectiveness, a study was designed to measure whether the exposure to classroom instruction across four disciplines over the course of three weeks could impact the incarcerated students' ability to see their academic potential in a new light and beliefs that college could be part of their reentry plan.

The students who chose to participate in the workshops ranged from those who never thought college was a viable option for them—because of a combination of socio-economic factors and their academic self-image—to those whose college paths were interrupted by incarceration. The researchers saw this program as a way of offering a counter-argument to these narratives of denied and missed chances and a way to provide a bridge to a realistic vision of college life after prison for incarcerated students. The researchers' understanding of the program's role in incarcerated students' reentry is grounded in both the egalitarian social justice principles of access to higher education for marginalized groups and in the proven benefits yielded by higher education in the lives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, as well as their families and communities.

Egalitarian social justice manifested by access to college education has been engraved in the mission of the City University of New York since 1847, when founder Townsend Harris called upon New York City to create a public academy of higher learning to “educate the whole people.” (<http://www2.cuny.edu/about/history>). “CUNY has a legislatively mandated mission to be “of vital importance as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the City of New York ... [to] remain responsive to the needs of its urban setting ... [while ensuring] equal access and opportunity” to students, faculty and staff “from all ethnic and racial groups” and without regard to gender.” (<http://www2.cuny.edu/about/>).

The college readiness program presented in this study serves as a vehicle to help incarcerated students see their inclusion in CUNY's mission to “reflect the diverse communities which comprise the people of the city and state of New York” (<http://www2.cuny.edu/about/>) and to fulfill their educational needs while forging an identity as prospective college students.

While there is a plethora of research that focuses on the effects of education on individuals who are incarcerated for more than one year, there are few, if any, that focus on the education of individuals who are in TPIs. The present study seeks to fill this void.

Rationale behind higher education in transitional places of incarceration

Much of the research done on the subject of higher education in prison, such as Chappell (2004), Erisman & Contardo (2005), Esperian (2010), Spycher, Shkodriani, and Lee (2012), and Taliaferro, Pham and Cielinski (2016) among many others, is based largely on the commonsensical arguments about reducing imprisonment costs and recidivism. These studies have consistently demonstrated that participation in educational programs while incarcerated reduced recidivism rates by increasing an individual's ability to successfully rejoin mainstream society upon release from prison. Such studies focus on certificate-based and vocational training as efficient ways of achieving these pragmatic goals of correctional schooling. However, more recently, Castro et al. (2015) argued for moving away from the recidivism-paradigm in thinking about college in prison toward an approach that focuses on envisioning incarcerated students as future degree completers as well as critical thinkers seeking liberation through education. They noted, "When the purposes of higher education in prison contexts are anchored in a rationale of recidivism, a vision for the educative possibilities within carceral spaces can become constrained" (p. 16). While certificate-based and vocational training can be valuable, limiting in-prison education to such training alone does not allow for full exploration of what in-prison education can do (p.16). According to Castro et al. , growth and transformation within prison education can be achieved through the creation of independently organized prison education programs whose primary goal is not necessarily to reduce recidivism but to explore and construct innovative pedagogical experiences aiming to enrich the intellectual life of incarcerated students.

While recognizing the current centrality of the recidivism rationale, but also agreeing with Castro et al.'s (2015) perspective, the college readiness program presented in this study is an example of an innovative and independently organized educational program designed to fulfill the educational needs of a sector of the incarcerated population that traditionally is left out of any college enrichment program, given the short amount of time incarcerated men and women spend in TPIs. The pedagogical motivations behind the 'College with an Edge' program stemmed from the understanding of the role of higher education as a social good, as a path for realizing the liberatory potential of a rich intellectual life, and, foremost, as a realistic option for life after incarceration.

In agreement with O'Neil Green and Trent (2015), McMahon (2009), and Cunningham (2006), higher education—both within the context of incarceration and in general—is understood as a social good. As such, higher education positively affects individuals at psychological, socio-economic, and civic engagement levels, and such individual benefits result in social benefits for those individuals' communities and for society at large. McMahon , for instance, discussed both individual private benefits of higher education on the life of an individual, claiming that "non-market benefits ... positively affect each graduate's quality of life in ways other than just income" (p. 118), as well as its larger social benefits that "spill over to benefit others in the

society” (p. 118). Most importantly, McMahon showed the relationship between these two types of benefits, indicating that private benefits contribute to social benefits. When applied to the context of higher education in the lives of formerly incarcerated people, McMahon's economic theory of education showed that facilitating access to higher education increases the broadly understood social benefits for the families and communities of these people. Moreover, O’Neil Green and Trent claimed that higher education needs to be considered as a social and public good and that any higher education institution is obligated to offer educational opportunities to all individuals in the society. However, higher education can fulfill its role as a public good only when institutions also meet the educational needs of “groups that traditionally have been dismissed,” (p. 102) such as incarcerated students in TPIs.

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The ‘College with an Edge’ program also drew on research that addresses the more specific context of higher education in the lives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. The 2009 and 2013 reports from the Prisoner Reentry Institute of John Jay College of Criminal Justice written by Halkovic et al. (2013), and Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, and Lindahl (2009) focused on the experiences of formerly incarcerated people as they reentered the free society and tried to successfully navigate life and the higher education system post-incarceration. Brazzell et al. discussed the need to equip those who are affected by the criminal justice system with skills and knowledge necessary to make a successful transition from prison to freedom through enrolling in college programs. Halkovic et al. discussed the contributions that formerly incarcerated students can bring to traditional college classrooms, such as desire to learn, drive to excel, experience of marginalization, and the policy, structural, and programmatic obstacles they face in the process of entering college.

The present study shows that a college readiness program in a TPI can alleviate some of the difficulties formerly incarcerated students face in entering the college system, not only by providing students with an intensive college learning experience in a classroom setting, but also by showing them how their unique perspectives and strong academic motivations can benefit all of the other college students that they will meet in a traditional college classroom. Moreover, the study presented in this article demonstrates how, given the immediacy of reentering society of TPI students, the opportunity to establish a personal connection with CUNY college professors and to receive college instruction and information about CUNY college support programs for formerly incarcerated students changed the incarcerated students’ attitudes towards college education.

As stated above, in order to test the influence of the ‘College with an Edge’ program on students in correctional transitional facilities, the authors of this article designed a study to measure the effects of such a program on students’ self-perception about their college readiness and on their

attitudes and motivations towards enrolling in college upon release. In this article, after a brief description of the TPI and of the ‘College with an Edge’ program, the results of this study will be presented, followed by a discussion about the implications of the results for higher education pedagogy in prison programs.

Transitional places of incarceration

The TPI, where the ‘College with an Edge’ program took place, is a Residential Treatment Facility located in New York, New York. According to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (NYS DOCCS) website, a Residential Treatment Facility is a minimum security level institution that incarcerates individuals age 16 and older. The TPI functions as a treatment program for men and a small number of women who participate in a work release program. Altogether, this TPI interns close to 110 persons who voluntarily entered the facility for its comprehensive reentry services as an alternative to longer incarceration in other prisons. The Residential Treatment Facility offers reentry related programming to nearly 1,200 persons on parole yearly. Housing units at this TPI consist of multiple occupancy rooms. To be referred to a Residential Treatment Facility, the persons must already be under correctional supervision, violated parole, or diverted from New York City Department of Corrections Jail System. The NYS DOCCS refers to these persons as individuals being detained pending a determination of their possible re-incarceration. In order to address substance addiction problems prevalent among incarcerated people, individuals entering Residential Treatment Facility as parole detainees are expected to have a diagnosis of alcohol or substance addiction or abuse requiring intervention and treatment. Such individuals participate in substance abuse programming, ranging from ten days to 45 days consisting of individual, group, and educational workshops. Thus, the mission of Residential Treatment Facility is to prepare participants to live a substance-free lifestyle upon release and engage in community-based aftercare treatment consistent with their established treatment plans. Reentry planning at Residential Treatment Facility also includes linking persons to local higher education institutions when appropriate within, or in close proximity to, the communities to which they return to following release. Besides education programs, such as the college readiness program, the facility offers transitional services to eligible participants through its work release, such as day reporting, community residential treatment programming, and resource fairs. The facility is staffed by NYS DOCCS corrections officers, DOCCS Offender Rehabilitation counselors, and Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services certified treatment staff.

The college with an edge college preparatory program

The objective of the ‘College with an Edge’ program is to assist individuals incarcerated at the Residential Treatment Facility who have an interest in pursuing higher education at the City University of New York (CUNY) upon release. The ‘College with an Edge’ program provides a college level learning experience to students whose incarcerated status prevented them from attending college for personal, social, and financial reasons. The pedagogical goals of the program are to help incarcerated students consider college as a viable and sustainable option upon release and to provide a learning environment where students can test their intellectual abilities and experience firsthand what it’s like to be a college student. The

‘College with an Edge’ program consists of four workshops: writing, public speaking, reading, and mathematics. The workshops provide practical instruction and opportunities to utilize the acquired skills in a classroom setting, addressing both the specific sections of the CUNY Assessment Tests (CATs), as well as general skills that determine one’s academic success. General education objectives are based on CUNY’s Pathway common core standards, which include: (a) effective communication through reading, writing, listening, and speaking; (b) critical thinking; and (c) quantitative reasoning.

Pedagogically the ‘College with an Edge’ program was built following the guidelines and the assessment protocol of Phase 2 of the Transitional Services Program, in accordance with the DOCCS Transitional Services Directive #4780. Phase 2, the Core Phase, is designed to assist incarcerated students in developing the basic skills necessary to live a productive, crime-free life in society. The transitional service programs’ assessment protocol to measure students’ progress was adopted in this program, which includes: (a) attendance; (b) students’ pre and post meta-cognition reflections on their learning process; (c) students’ pre and post-surveys on their attitudes and expectations about college; (d) quantity and quality of student participation; and (e) collection and grading of artifacts.

The ‘College with an Edge’ program is organized in a series of workshop cycles that last three weeks each with students receiving 2 hrs of instruction in each of the four subject areas for a total of 8 hrs of weekly instruction. Approximately eight to ten teaching cycles are taught in an academic year. At the end of each cycle, all students participate in a graduation ceremony and receive a certificate of attendance.

For many of the TPI students, it has been a long time since they were involved in academic learning, and they often see themselves as academically inept. By providing these workshops, students are exposed to work that is the same or very similar to the work that is required in a course taught at CUNY. Although each workshop is of a much shorter duration than a semester-long CUNY course, students are exposed to a college-like experience that increases their confidence in their ability to attend and succeed in college. A brief discussion of each workshop and its pedagogical objectives follows.

Writing Workshop. The instruction involves a combination of lectures, reading, and discussion activities, as well as individual and group writing activities. At the end of the cycle, students will (a) read critically and analytically, identify an argument’s major assumptions and assertions and evaluate its supporting evidence, (b) formulate original ideas and relate them to the ideas of others, and (c) support a thesis with well-reasoned arguments.

Public Speaking Workshop. This workshop focuses on developing the student as a speaker in interpersonal communications and as a “public” speaker in various settings including school, home, work, and in the community at large. The pedagogical outcomes are: students will (a) apply fundamental principles of good communication in the creation and delivery of informative and persuasive speeches; (b) learn how to use verbal and nonverbal communication features such

as fluency, rate, volume, eye-contact, posture and gesture to become effective communicators in different communication contexts; and (c) learn how to overcome their communication apprehensions to become confident and effective speakers.

Reading Workshop. The goal of this workshop is to help students develop the reading skills necessary to attend CUNY. Through a combination of lectures, reading and discussion activities, as well as individual and group writing reading activities, students learn to effectively comprehend and determine the meaning of works through context. They learn the importance of reasoning to determine the implicit meanings, and to draw conclusions and make comparisons. Learning objectives are: students will learn how to (a) identify main ideas, details, and conclusions; (b) utilize skimming/scanning techniques to answer questions; and (c) pronounce and spell new vocabulary.

Mathematics Workshop. This workshop reviews some of the mathematical concepts that are in an elementary college algebra course. Topics include operations with integers, solving algebraic equations and setting up and solving word problems. At the end of the workshop, students will be able to: (a) use quantitative skills and mathematical reasoning to solve problems; (b) draw conclusions from algebraic solutions to problems; and (c) communicate the results in written and oral format.

The study

The present study was designed to test whether a short but intensive educational intervention had an effect on incarcerated men's perceptions of themselves as potential college students upon release. More specifically, the purpose was to determine whether an educational intervention had an effect on students' attitudes towards their academic skills and personal ability to enroll and succeed in college. Attitude is here defined as the mental position, emotion, or feeling toward a fact or state (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009).

In the present study, the educational intervention was in the form of four college preparatory workshops delivered during a three-week period, eight hours weekly for a total of 24 hours of instruction for each cycle. All the subjects participated in one cycle of instruction. It was hypothesized that an attitude change would occur in the workshop participants as a result of the educational intervention. The main concern of the study was not the positive or negative direction of the attitude change, but to test whether this short educational intervention produced any change in the participants' attitudes.

Method & subjects

This study utilized a quasi-experimental exploratory design for a cohort with no equivalent control group. Data were collected through a 21-statement survey that was designed to measure whether students' attitudes changed as a result of the educational

intervention (see Table 1). The participants commented on each statement of the survey using a five point Likert Scale which, ranged from: 1='Strongly Disagree'; 2= 'Disagree'; 3= 'Neutral'; 4= 'Agree'; 5= 'Strongly Agree.'

The 21 statements were grouped into four themes, which exemplified specific aspects of what students should consider before enrolling in college: awareness of their intellectual abilities and learning skills, personal goals, socio-economic and personal beliefs.

The four themes were labeled as:

1. Theme 1: Students' attitudes towards the self-assessment of their own learning skills.
2. Theme 2: Students' attitudes towards their personal motivations towards learning.
3. Theme 3: Students' attitudes towards the socio-economic benefits of attending college.
4. Theme 4: Students' attitudes towards their personal beliefs about attending college.

Thirty-four male students, ages 18 to 45, voluntarily completed the survey prior to attending the three week college preparation workshops (Pre-survey) and then again at the end of the workshops (Post-survey). All of the subjects were native English speakers, New York City residents, and had completed high school or received a high school equivalency diploma.

Results

A non-parametric test, Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test, was performed for each of the four themes and for the overall 21 statements to measure significant attitude change from the pre to the post-surveys.

The reliability of the pre and post-survey was also tested and in both cases the survey turned out to be a highly reliable instrument ($\alpha_{\text{PRE}} = .837$ and $\alpha_{\text{POST}} = .884$). An item analysis of each of the 21 statements in both the pre and the post-survey showed an average high reliable value of $\alpha = .8$ for each question. For each statement of the pre and post-survey, the Means Standard Deviations (SDs) and percentage change from pre to post-surveys are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Mean, SD and Percentage Change of Administered Survey

STATEMENTS	Pre Mean	Pre SD	Post Mean	Post SD	% Change
1. College is necessary to get a good job.	3.65	1.17	4.21	.770	15.3%
2. I wish to attend college because I see the long-term benefits of college.	4.41	.701	4.68	.535	6.1%
3. I feel that education is the most important thing in life.	4.44	.786	4.59	.609	3.4%
4. I feel a great deal of satisfaction when I know how to approach a problem.	4.26	.828	4.53	.662	6.3%
5. I wish to learn new things for the sake of learning new things.	4.47	.615	4.82	.387	7.8%
6. I feel that challenges in life can be great learning experiences.	4.62	.652	4.74	.448	2.6%
7. I enjoy challenging tasks because I feel accomplished when I complete it.	4.74	.448	4.65	.597	-1.9%
8. I work hard because I want to prove to myself that I can achieve something	4.76	.431	4.74	.511	-.4%
9. I can identify the academic areas where I need to improve.	4.09	.793	4.35	.597	6.4%
10. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my writing skills.	3.47	1.21	4.03	1.08	16.1%
11. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my reading skills.	4.06	.886	4.41	.857	8.6%
12. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my math skills.	3.29	1.14	3.76	.955	14.3%
13. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my public speaking skills.	3.38	1.25	3.76	.995	11.2%
14. If I do not understand something, I will ask for help.	4.62	.551	4.65	.544	.06%
15. Before taking on something new (such as classes or a job), I often do research on the task.	3.71	1.06	4.15	.892	11.9%
16. I am confident that I can attend college.	4.29	.836	4.71	.579	9.8%
17. I believe that I can succeed in college.	4.44	.613	4.62	.652	4.1%

18. I understand how to apply to college.	3.56	1.05	4.18	.999	17.4%
19. I am prepared to go through all the barriers to succeed in school.	4.53	.507	4.68	.475	3.3%
20. I am looking to attend college because I want to, not because others want me to.	4.62	.493	4.74	.448	2.6%
21. My academic interests are not influenced by anyone but me.	4.53	.615	4.68	.684	3.3%
OVERALL	4.18	.793	4.46	.679	7.09%

Overall results

The overall means and standard deviations for the 21 statements are $M_{PRE} = 4.18$, $SD_{PRE} = .793$; $M_{POST} = 4.46$, $SD_{POST} = .679$ with a 7.09 percentage change between the pre and the post-surveys. The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-test ranks for all the means and standard deviations of the 21 statements were higher than the median pre-test ranks, and the change was statistically significant ($Z = - 8.61$, $p < .000$). It was concluded that the students’ attitudes towards going to college improved significantly as a result of attending the three-week college preparatory workshops.

In Figure 1, the overall improvement in students’ attitudes and motivations towards attending college from the pre to the post-assessment is depicted according to the percentage of respondents for each of the five possible responses of the Likert Scale.

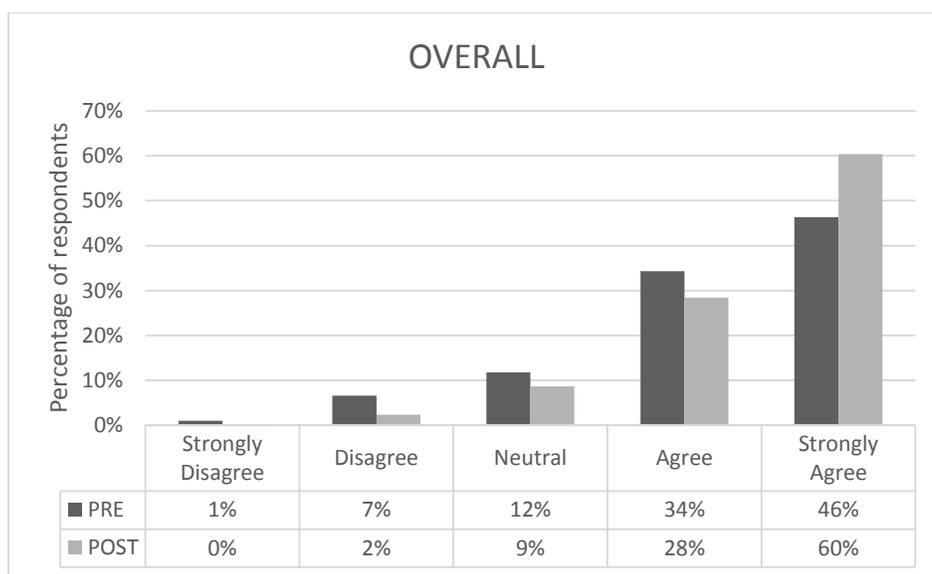


Figure 1. Overall percentage change between pre and post surveys

As the Figure 1 indicates, the percentage of students who strongly agree increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey, while the number of students who were neutral or disagreed steadily declined.

Theme 1. *Students' self assessments of their learning skills*, looked at how students evaluate (a) their general and discipline specific pre-academic knowledge in the four workshop subjects and; (b) their ability to reach out for help and prepare themselves before taking on something new, in this case, before coming to class. This theme is formed by the following seven statements:

1. I can identify the academic areas where I need to improve.
2. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my writing skills.
3. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my reading skills.
4. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to my math skills.
5. I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to public speaking.
6. If I do not understand something, I will ask for help.
7. Before taking on something new (such as classes or a job), I often do research on the task.

The means and standard deviations for Theme 1's statements are $M_{PRE} = 3.80$, $SD_{PRE} = 1$; $M_{POST} = 4.16$, $SD_{POST} = .9$ with 9.2 percentage change between the pre and the post-surveys. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-test ranks for all seven statements were higher than the median pre-test ranks and that relationship was statistically significant ($Z = -5.7$ $p < .000$). In Figure 2, the percentage of respondents for each of the five possible answers of the Likert Scale is reported.

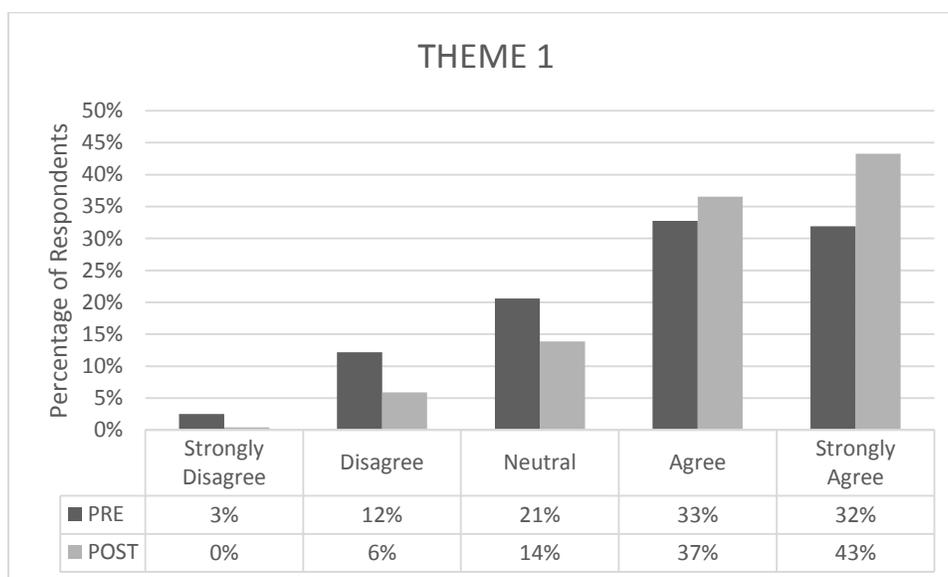


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents between pre and post surveys for Theme 1.

As Figure 2 indicates the percentage of students who agree and strongly agree increased from the pre-survey to the post-survey, while the percentage of neutral and disagree answers declined.

Theme 2. *Students’ attitudes towards the benefits of attending college*, asked students about their attitudes towards the socio-economic and personal long term benefits of a college education. This theme is formed by three statements:

1. College is necessary to get a good job.
2. I wish to attend college because I see the long-term benefits of college.
3. I feel that education is the most important thing in life.

The means and standard deviation for Theme 2’s statements are $M_{PRE} = 4.17$, $SD_{PRE} = .976$; $M_{POST} = 4.49$, $SD_{POST} = .671$ with a 7.7 percentage change between the pre and the post surveys. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-test ranks for all three questions were higher than the median pre-test ranks and statistically significantly ($Z = -3.93$, $p < .000$). In Figure 3, the percentage of respondents for each of the five possible answers of the Likert Scale is reported.

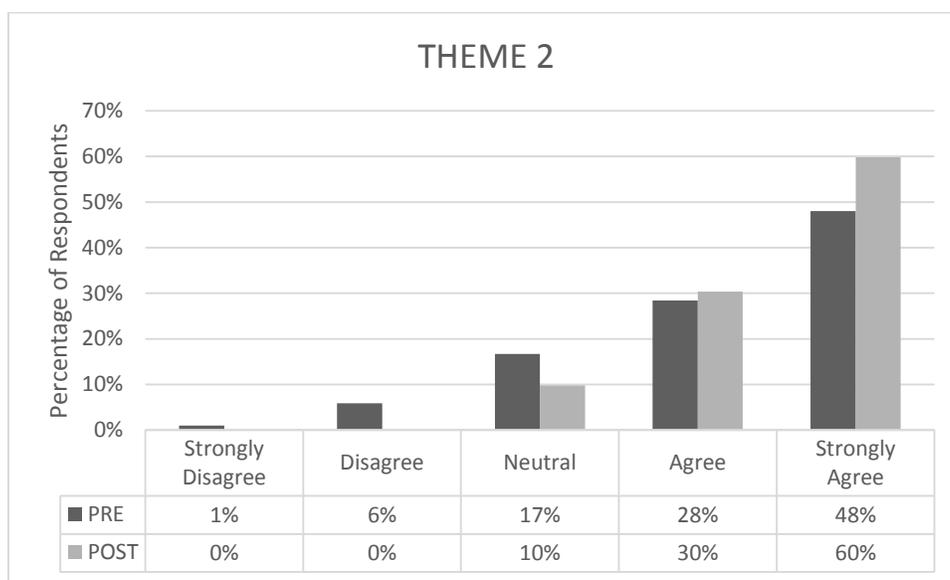


Figure 3. Percentage of respondents between pre and post surveys for Theme 2.

As Figure 3 indicates, the number of agree and strongly agree answers increased from pre to post-survey, while the number of negative and neutral answers declined.

Theme 3. *Personal motivations and attitudes towards learning* was meant to evaluate students’ motivations and attitudes towards learning new things while challenging themselves in the process of working hard to solve problems and meet the challenges learning presents to them.

This theme is made of five statements:

1. I feel a great deal of satisfaction when I know how to approach a problem.
2. I wish to learn new things for the sake of learning new things.
3. I feel that challenges in life can be great learning experiences.
4. I enjoy challenging tasks because I feel accomplished when I complete it.
5. I work hard because I want to prove to myself that I can achieve something.

The means and standard deviations for Theme 3's statements are $M_{PRE} = 4.57$, $SD_{PRE} = .633$; $M_{POST} = 4.69$, $SD_{POST} = .533$ with 2.6 percentage change between the pre and the post-surveys. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-test ranks for all the five statements were higher than the median pre-test ranks and statistically significant ($Z = -2.29$ $p < .022$). In Figure 4, the percentage of the number of respondents for each of the five possible answers of the Likert Scale is reported.

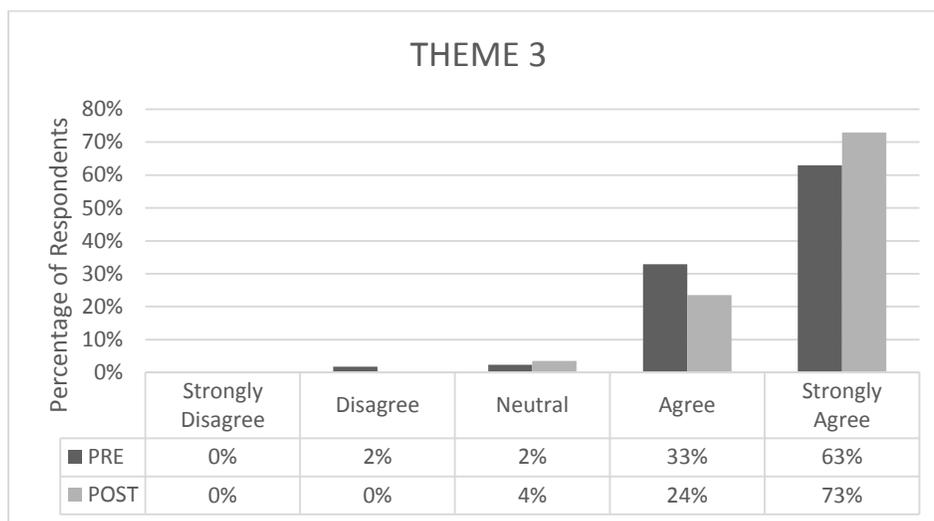


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents between pre and post surveys for Theme 3.

As Figure 4 indicates, across the five statements of Theme 3, the number of strongly agree answers increased from the pre to the post survey. There was no major change as far as the negative answers.

Theme 4. *Personal beliefs and opinions about attending college* assessed students' confidence and willingness to successfully attend college. This theme is made of six statements:

1. I understand how to apply to college.
2. I am confident that I can attend college.
3. I believe that I can succeed in college.
4. I am looking to attend college because I want to, not because others want me to
5. I am prepared to go through all the barriers to succeed in school.

6. My academic interests are not influenced by anyone but me.

The means and standard deviations for Theme 4’s statements are $M_{PRE} = 4.33$, $SD_{PRE} = .791$; $M_{POST} = 4.59$, $SD_{POST} = .685$ with a 6 percentage change between the pre and the post surveys. A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that the median post-test ranks for all six statements were higher than the median pre-test ranks and statistically significant ($Z = - 4.83$, $p < .000$). In Figure 5, the percentage of number of respondents for each of the fives possible answers of the Likert Scale is reported.

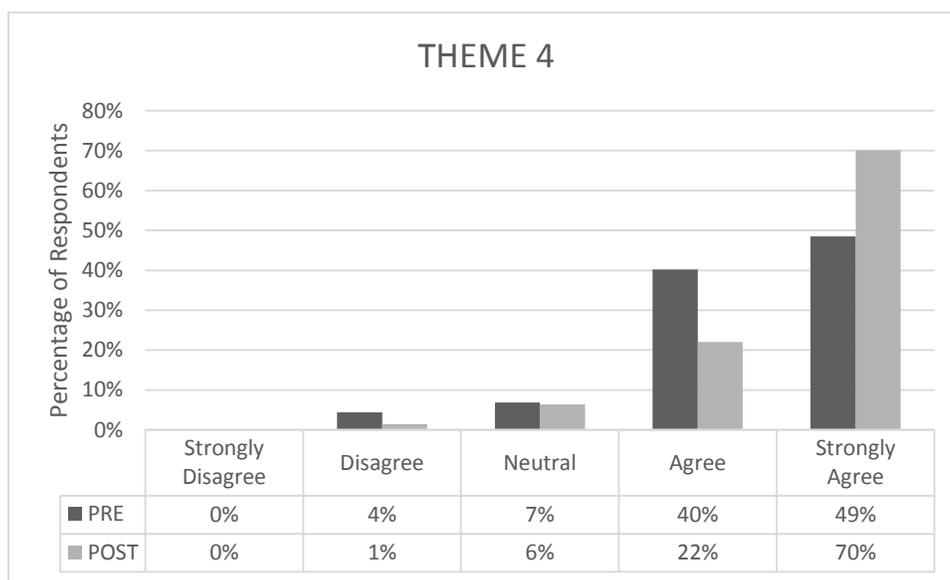


Figure 5. Percentage of respondents between pre and post surveys for Theme 4.

Also for this theme, Figure 5 indicates that the subjects' their beliefs and opinions about attending college positively improved by a substantial increase in the percentage of the “strongly agree” answers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an educational intervention had an effect on students' attitudes towards their academic skills and personal ability to enroll and succeed in college. Through pre and post- surveys administered to 34 students, the hypothesis that even a short educational intervention of 24 hours had an effect on incarcerated students’ perception of themselves as potential students attending college was tested.

Results indicated a significant change in students' attitudes from before attending to after having attended a series of educational workshops, suggesting a positive attitude change towards college education and attending college among incarcerated students of approximately 7%. The data analysis clearly indicates that even a short educational intervention has a positive effect on students' attitudes toward learning and enrolling in college and their self-perception as potential college students upon release. Considering the relatively short amount of hours students spent in a classroom setting and the limited exposure to the topics taught in each of the four disciplines during a workshop cycle, an overall increase of 7% is a positive indicator that educational interventions have positive effects on incarcerated students. The overall data suggested that in a short amount of time, incarcerated students not only improved substantially academically, but they gained the confidence to see themselves as students pursuing a college education upon release.

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Looking closely at the results obtained in each of the four themes, Theme 1 (*Students' self assessments of their learning skills*,) is the most relevant for the pedagogical aspect of the educational intervention. The percentage change for all the statements relative to the four disciplines taught in each cycle showed that students significantly improved their self-confidence in their writing, reading, math and public speaking skills. For instance, as far as public speaking, students showed a great deal of improvement in their verbal (fluency, rate, volume) and non-verbal skills (eye contact, gestures, posture) while delivering a short informative speech in front of an audience within a short three-week span. Students' speech grades improved on average from a C to a B+ level and students' weekly self-reflections about their individual performances indicated that students became more aware of what aspects of their performances needed improvement according to the material learned in class.

Similar improvement was achieved in Mathematics. The students revered but also feared mathematics, as evidenced by their defensiveness associated with completing a short diagnostic quiz in algebra that was planned for the first session. After listening to their negative experiences with math, the quiz was abandoned, and the syllabus of the math workshop became the first six units that are covered in an elementary algebra course at CUNY. The first lecture reviewed solving algebraic equations that required operations with whole numbers, and the first homework assignment involved solving arithmetic word problems. Without the use of a calculator, the majority of the students were able to complete the homework problems and demonstrated their command of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers. The second lecture covered the addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of signed integers, and the final lecture focused on solving algebraic equations that require operations with signed numbers. By the final lecture, students were less fearful of algebra, able to solve basic algebraic equations, and the majority felt that they would be able to keep-up in an elementary algebra course.

While writing proved to be the most challenging subject in terms of being able to produce fast progress over a short period of time, the students showed an improvement in their ability to distinguish between different types of writing (expository versus argumentative), their understanding of effective paragraph structure, their ability to produce well-organized paragraphs, and their use of textual evidence to support claims.

Theme 2 (*Students attitude towards the benefit of college*) measured students' attitudes towards the socio-economic and personal long-term benefits of a college education. It showed a 7.7% positive increase, though the relatively high means for the three questions forming this theme suggested that students were already aware of the positive benefits of receiving a college education. Interestingly, students' understanding of the marketable job skills of a college education increased over 15% in just three weeks, making the college option a more viable one.

Theme 3 (*Personal motivations and attitudes towards learning*) showed the least amount of positive attitude change among the four themes. The very high pre-assessment mean of 4.5 interestingly painted a picture of incarcerated students' inquisitive minds and their desire and drive for learning new things and solving problems while meeting new intellectual challenges.

One of the biggest intellectual challenges students faced was in the reading class when learning how to dissect and understand concepts from Foucault's theories of power, body, gaze, discipline, knowledge, and surveillance and how these concepts may intersect in the students' lives in prison and beyond. Students' positive attitudes towards learning allowed the professor to create a contextual platform for students exchanging dynamic ideas and critical thinking. Many of the men in these classes had never attended college or heard about Michel Foucault. Yet, they were able to analyze complex and, at times, challenging political and philosophical concepts translated from French to English.

But most importantly, Theme 3 clearly seems to confirm the results of the 2013 John Jay's Reentry institute report depicting the image of incarcerated students as learners with high desire to acquire knowledge and with a drive and motivation to excel in school. These qualities of incarcerated students are an asset that if brought to traditional college classrooms will definitely benefit the entire student population and society at large.

Finally, as far as Theme 4 (*Personal beliefs and opinions about attending college*), the data analysis showed how students' confidence and willingness to successfully attend college significantly improved. In a short time span, students' attitudes and confidence to attend college improved by 10% and 17.5% in their understanding on how to apply to college. The results obtained for Theme 4 clearly speak of the validity of the 'College with an Edge' program in terms of facilitating access to higher education not only by helping incarcerated students to understand their academic potential showing what a college class is about, but also by providing practical support while answering admission and financial aid questions.

Future directions of higher education programs in TPIs

As mentioned above, the results of this study clearly indicate that even a short educational intervention has a positive effect on students' attitudes towards learning, enrolling in college, and their self-perception as potential college students upon release. The question arises if only eight hours of instruction per week can motivate a person to change his/her life and to seek a better opportunity in their post incarceration life through the obtainment of a college degree, what if incarcerated students could attend daily college preparation courses as part of their reentry programs? As Lochner & Moretti's (2004) analysis of Census data and of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data shows that there is a significant relationship between education and incarceration. For instance, spending one extra year in school results in a .10 percentage point reduction in the probability of incarceration for whites, and a .37 percentage point reduction for blacks. Similarly, as Becker & Mulligan's (1997) study suggests more time devoted to schooling may increase patience and risk aversion while decreasing the chances of returning to prison because education and the promise of a college degree increase the returns to the work force.

Therefore, the findings from this study help inform the development of interventions and strategies aimed at creating college readiness programs in TPIs. TPIs play a fundamental role in equipping incarcerated men and women with the tools to reenter society. Among all the reentry programs offered, TPIs should include college preparatory programs such as the 'College with an Edge' program. These programs offer a pathway towards higher education to incarcerated people. More importantly, they show how becoming a full time college student is a viable career option, especially at city and state colleges whose tuition costs can be offset by grants, scholarships, financial aid, and work-study programs. Therefore, the findings of this study have important implications for educational leaders, policymakers, and nonprofit organizations interested in using post-secondary education programs as a tool to improve the chances of incarcerated men and women to live a fulfilling life after incarceration.

The 'College with an Edge' program is a simple educational program whose structure and content can be easily replicated and expanded in any prison at a very low cost. If, CUNY Start, for instance, the college preparatory program for students accepted at CUNY, costs only 75 dollars, and it offers 12 to 24 hours of weekly instruction during several weeks, a reduced version of it could be offered in all the TPIs in New York State at affordable costs. As the results of this study show, college preparatory programs such as the 'College with an Edge' program offered at TPIs can create a prison to college pipeline like many of the higher education programs offered at Federal and State non-transitional prisons.

To conclude, college Preparatory programs such as the 'College with an Edge' program are a valid and low cost reentry tool that can really change life after incarceration and can motivate and guide incarcerated men and women towards a more optimistic outlook of their future. As many of the 'College with an Edge' program students said to us about the importance of going to college, furthering education is a viable option to "make something out of ourselves so that we can also be very successful in life".

Finally, one more time, we raise the following question: if, as shown in this study, a short educational intervention can change a person's attitudes toward attending college and can bring him/her new hope and possibilities, what if the same person could double or triple the hours spent in a college classroom setting while incarcerated? If education is a social good, what benefits will education bring to him/her, to his/her community, and to society at large?

Conclusive remarks

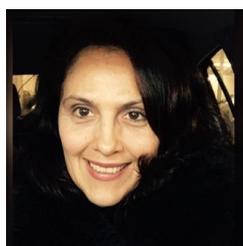
This study implies the important role of higher education in the lives of people with criminal histories, both immediately before reentry and after release. Consequently, the study suggests that college educators and administrators, both those already involved in education in prison and those teaching in traditional, "real world" classroom, have an opportunity and a responsibility to expand their role as agents for social good. To those who are part of college-in-prison programs or who contemplate starting a program, the study will hopefully help them to consider exploring the area of programming in transitional prisons and jails. These carceral spaces remain underserved by college programming, yet they offer a valuable opportunity to present college as a realistic goal for the upcoming life after reentry to those individuals who are incarcerated. For some students, college programming in the final weeks leading to their reentry may be the only opportunity they ever get to be exposed to the notion of seeing themselves as potential students, especially if the prison(s) they were previously incarcerated in did not have a college program. For others, such exposure to higher education, even if brief, immediately before release, may provide the much-needed confidence boost and a chance to integrate college plans into the now-tangible vision of life after prison. In other words, the authors of this study ask their colleagues in the field of college-in-prison not to dismiss the idea of bringing higher education to transitional prisons.

The study also calls on those educators who teach "on the outside" to consider their own key role in the national crisis around mass incarceration and the struggle for social and educational justice. Given the disproportionate impact of incarceration in communities of color and the poor, those educators who believe that higher education is a civic service and an instrument of democracy may consider how their own work facilitates access to educational opportunities for all. Some suggestions for educators looking for ways to engage in actions and pedagogical practices that reflect inclusiveness and social awareness around the topic of incarceration include: contacting local college-in-prison and reentry programs to learn about the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated college students; advocating for tuition assistance for students taking college courses in prison; when appropriate, integrating lessons that address the topic of incarceration in a stigma-free manner reflective of support for those who have criminal histories; and further nurturing an inclusive campus culture by examining their own language practices when referring to incarcerated people and the experience of incarceration, and eliminating stigmatizing and dehumanizing vocabulary, such as "inmate," "felon," and "convict." In other words, the study, by casting reentering citizens as college students in their own eyes as well as

the eyes of others, also casts educators as actors who have a social obligation to participate in the nurturing of these new identities.

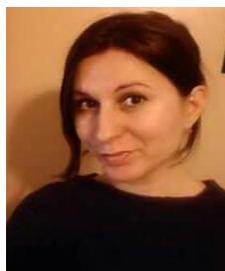
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