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Post-Correctional Education Interventions: A Phenomenological Case Study of Empowerment Education Curriculum for Formerly Incarcerated African American Males

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POST-CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY OF EMPOWERMENT EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

BY ROLANDA J. WEST

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“Gratitude is when memory is stored in the heart and not in the mind.”
~ Lionel Hampton

This has truly been a faith journey. I am not ending this passage with just a
terminal degree, but more importantly, this journey has ended giving me a far greater gift,
of a more matured outlook and a beautiful story of strength. I could have never imagined
the twists, turns and challenges along the way…there is much to be thankful for.

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When I thought I couldn’t take another hit, your love and faith in me helped me push
forward.

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anything even when I wasn’t sure I could. Your trust in me keeps me inspired; also, my
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DEDICATION

For Imani
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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological case study describes how a Post-Correctional Education Intervention (PCEI) was developed for a local community-based organization that had recently constructed a transition house for formerly incarcerated adults who converted to Islam while incarcerated. The PCEI was an eight-week course curriculum with 60 hours of direct instruction that included social justice, health and wellness and critical thinking teaching modules and affective teaching and learning methodologies. This research contains experiential data used to assess how a PCEI affected the identity and self-concept of the participants of a reentry program designed to create an atmosphere of empowerment.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In the Urban Institute’s report (2009) on Prison Reentry Programs it is shown that, ex-prisoners face daunting obstacles to a successful reentry or transition from life in jail or prison to life in the community (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, & Lindahl, 2009). For example, most experience difficulties finding jobs, housing, and services for substance abuse or mental health problems. Recidivism refers to a person's relapse into criminal behavior, often after receiving sanctions or undergoing intervention for a previous crime (Beck & Shipley, 1989). The likelihood of these individuals returning to criminal activity is high: within three years of release, 68% of people released from state and federal prison are rearrested and over half return to prison (Langan & Levin, 2002). Identifying effective strategies for reintegrating the thousands of men and women who return home from prison and jail each year is critical not only for them, but also for the health and stability of their families and the safety and wellbeing of their communities (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, & Lindahl, 2009). Therefore, reentry education programs dedicated to addressing the socio-emotional struggles, in addition to the vocational or job skills training, of ex-offenders attempting to re-adjust in their respective communities could result in a decrease in recidivism.
Support for education programs for prisoners has diminished under the current punitive regime (Ubah, 2004). As early as 1982, United States legislators began trying to restrict educational grants for those attending college in penal institutions. Only about 13% of U.S. prisoners have post-secondary schooling, compared with 48% of the overall population, even though most of the women and men in prison have passed high school or have an equivalent diploma (Harlow, 2003). When the U.S. Congress passed legislation in 1994, barring prisoners from obtaining Pell Grants, there was a decrease in the numbers of inmates taking college-level courses. According to Ubah (2004) almost all the correctional education programs across the nation were adversely effected by Pell Grant cuts, with many prison systems eliminating their programs altogether. Some prison systems have been able to restore the level of their programs in the years since 1994 through a variety of federal, state and private funding sources.

These funding sources are often sporadic and regionally dependent, so that some states, such as New York, Maryland and Illinois have aggressively worked to obtain funding for inmate education while others are lacking in taking responsibility (Ubah, 2004). An example is the Second Chance Act of 2008, which attempts to institute a broad base of support for prisoner rehabilitation including education, rehabilitation programs provided by faith-based organizations and the establishment of “reentry courts” wherein judges would oversee each prisoner’s progress. In addition to education and courts, the Second Chance Act provides small grants for other reentry services such as substance abuse treatment, housing, transitional medical care such as a couple of weeks of prescription medication as well as employment services (Second Chance Act, 2007).
The racial disparities for African American men and other groups in the United States continue to show a trend of African American men being criminalized to a higher degree than they are being educated. According to the Justice Policy Institute study (2002), there were an estimated 791,600 African American men in jail or prison in the United States while only 603,032 were enrolled in colleges or universities. However, white high school graduates are more likely than black or Hispanic peers to enroll in college. The report states 47.3% of white high school graduates ages 18 to 24 attend college, vs. 41.1% of black and 35.2% of Hispanic high school graduates.

Among students who entered college in 1995-96, 36.4% of blacks and 42% of Hispanics earned a bachelor's degree within six years, vs. 58% of whites and 62.3% of Asian-Americans. On the other hand, the custody incarceration rate for black males was 4,618 per 100,000. Hispanic males were incarcerated at a rate of 1,747 per 100,000. Compared to the estimated numbers of black, white, and Hispanic males in the U.S. resident population, black males were six times more likely and Hispanic males were a little more than two times more likely to be held in custody than white males. At midyear 2007 the estimated incarceration rate of white males was 773 per 100,000 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). Across all age categories, black males were incarcerated at higher rates than white or Hispanic males. Black males ages 30 to 34 had the highest custody incarceration rate of any race, age, or gender group at midyear 2007 (Human Rights Watch, 2007).
Post-Correctional Education Intervention (PCEI)

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Correctional Education defines correctional education as “the part of the total correctional process that focused on changing the behavior of offenders through planned learning experiences and learning environments. It seeks to develop or enhance knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values of incarcerated youth and adults” (http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/AdultEd/OCE/mission.html, retrieved July 2010). The general term, education intervention is used to describe the strategies and processes for addressing a student’s educational difficulties.

The strategies that are used are individualized to meet the specific needs of a particular student. Strategies focus on characteristics related to curriculum and instruction, task and environment, and the student. A large number of students experience academic and/or behavioral difficulties at some point during their educational career. General education interventions are formal and informal processes used to resolve an individual student’s academic or behavioral difficulties (Green Hills Area Education Agency, 2003).

The Empowerment Curriculum that was implemented in this research study, includes teaching methods that fosters ethical, responsible, and caring students by modeling and teaching students important core values such as respect for self and others, responsibility, integrity, and self-discipline along with the other tenants of empowerment that are described below. It was designed to provide long-term solutions that address moral, ethical, and academic issues that are of growing concern in our society and the safety of our communities.

I have included the term Post-Correctional Educational Intervention (PCEI) as a means to describe a method of curriculum design that targets formerly
incarcerated adults who are in need of education that addresses many of the deficits associated with mass incarceration.

This study investigates how the more affective aspects of the Post-Correctional Educational Intervention (PCEI) influence the student’s perceptions of a range of educational and social issues. I have developed the following research questions in an effort to gain a better understanding of how the PCEI impacts the students:

1. In what ways does a Post-Correctional Educational Intervention curriculum designed for African American males influence the participants’ perceptions of empowerment?

2. In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program?

3. In what ways did the PCEI affect the participant’s social identity?

With that, the purpose of this study is to explore the results of the reentry curricula for formerly incarcerated adults that fosters ethical, and responsible students by modeling and teaching students important core values such as respect for self and others, responsibility, integrity, and self-discipline. This, however, does not assume that the students do not currently have any of these attributes, it merely reinforces the positive qualities that they have acquired throughout the years while discouraging behavior that may lead to re-incarceration.
Empowerment Defined

Initially, resulting from the 1960s’ social action ideology and the 1970s’ self-help initiatives, empowerment was conceived of as synonymous with both initiatives—such as community organization and neighborhood participation, and qualities—such as coping skills, competence, self-sufficiency, and self-esteem (Kieffer, 1984). Empowerment was an attempt to help individuals overcome external oppression and to instill a greater subjective sense of having power.

Contributing to the complexity is the variety of factors researchers examine under the heading of empowerment. Some researchers look at the psychological aspects of personal empowerment (cf. perceived control—beliefs about one’s ability to influence others, competence—role mastery, cognitive abilities—awareness of options, behavior—actions taken to influence outcomes [Menon, 1999; Zimmerman, 1995]). Others look at the relational aspects of empowerment (cf. distributed leadership, encouragement, and feedback [Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Hatcher, 2005]) and still others, at empowerment program processes and outcomes (e.g., power redistribution, improving processes to improve profits [Hechanova-Alampay & Beehr, 2001]). Some look at a combination of all these factors (e.g., Carless, 2004; Finfgeld, 2004; Spreitzer, 1995). However, this research focuses primarily on the psycho-social perceptions of the attainment of empowerment for formerly incarcerated African American males.

For the purpose of this research I used the National Empowerment Center’s working definition of empowerment to design the course modules for the post-
correctional (retrieved April 2010) education intervention. Although there are 16 values
included in that definition, I will define empowerment using the following nine:

1. Having decision-making power.
2. Having access to information and resources.
3. A feeling that the individual can make a difference (being hopeful).
4. Learning to think critically;
   a. learning the conditioning; seeing things differently; e.g.,
   b. Learning to redefine who we are (speaking in our own voice).
   c. Learning to redefine what we can do.
5. Learning to redefine our relationships to institutionalized power.
6. Effecting change in one's life and one's community.
7. Changing others' perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act.
8. Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.
9. Not feeling alone; feeling part of a group.

The additional seven values include:

1. Having a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.)
2. Assertiveness.
3. Learning about and expressing anger.
4. Understanding that people have rights.
5. Learning skills (e.g., communication) that the individual defines as important.
6. Coming out of the closet.
7. Growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated.

These elements are important to help the students move forward in American society while accepting that they are valuable in spite of the crimes that may have committed in the past.

Background

The implementation of education and training in prison programs became pervasive in the 1930s (Coley & Barton, 2006). Since then, in-prison vocational and education programs have fluctuated with society’s alternating emphasis on rehabilitation through education or vocational training programs and retributive punishment. Despite this long history, careful studies of the effects of these efforts were slow in coming. There have now been a considerable number of studies and evidence of success is accumulating (Coley & Barton, 2006).

A shift away from rehabilitation and punishment to education began in the 1970s. In 1975, Linton, Martinson, and Wilks published an influential and widely known assessment of efforts at rehabilitation. Their work called into question the efficacy of most attempts at rehabilitation, after a stretch of renewed optimism and activism beginning in the 1960s. In the United States, the focus is of prison education is on a decrease in recidivism and typically offers three educational options for inmates. The Coley and Barton (2006) research defines the main prison education models which will be discussed below:

- Vocational Education:

- Basic Secondary Education:
• College Education:

*In Prison Programs – Vocational*

Vocational education programs are designed to prepare prison inmates for work after their release from prison. In 2000, some 56% of state prisons and 94% of federal prisons offered vocational training (Harlow 2003). Examples of the types of vocational education programs sometimes offered by prisons are auto mechanics, construction trades, equipment repair, HVAC installation and repair, culinary arts, cosmetology, and desktop publishing. The exact programs offered differ among prisons (Literacy Behind Bars, 2003). Participation in vocational training may be particularly important for inmates who are getting close to their release date and will need to find a job outside of prison. Vocational training programs often include academic instruction in the reading, writing, and mathematics skills required for a particular profession, as well as instruction in general work skills such as how to communicate or work with other people (Literacy Behind Bars 2003).

*Prison Programs – Academic*

Prisons are intended to rehabilitate criminal offenders, as well as to punish and incapacitate them. The education and training systems operating within most prisons are a key component of the rehabilitation mission of prisons (Vacca 2004). There is a relationship between participation in educational programs and recidivism rates, with inmates who attend education programs less likely to be re-incarcerated after their release (Vacca 2004).
There are many reasons why prison inmates may be motivated to participate in education and training programs. Among these may be a realization that they do not have skills that will lead to employment upon their release from prison (Clayton 2005). As one inmate said, “I’ve never had a career. I’ve had jobs, but never had anything that would take me anywhere. It’s scary to come out of jail and not realize what you’re going to do” (Clayton, 2005).

Between 1992 and 2003, GED classes were available in most prisons. However, because of restrictions in Pell Grants that were implemented in 1994, higher educational opportunities were more limited for prison inmates in 2003 than in 1992 (Welsh, 2002). In 2003, some 43% of prison inmates had a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate when they began their current incarceration, so helping inmates complete their high school education is a major aim of many prison academic programs. Among prison inmates in 2003, some 19% had earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate during their current incarceration, and an additional 5 percent were currently enrolled in academic classes.

Having a GED/high school equivalency certificate or a high school diploma may be particularly important for inmates who expect to be released soon and will need to find a job outside of prison. However, the difference in the percentage of inmates who expected to be released in two years or less and had a GED/high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, and the percentage of inmates who expected to be released in more than two years and had a GED/high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, was not statistically significant (Literacy Behind Bars, 2003).
In Prison Programs – Adult Basic Education and Post-Secondary Education

Correctional education approaches include adult basic education (ABE) as well as academic and vocational postsecondary education (Solomon, Waul, VanNess, & Travis, 2004). General consensus is that education, and specifically college education, is necessary to get ahead in today’s society (Bowen, 1997; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005). The majority of states have focused on ABE rather than PSCE for their incarcerated populations (Harlow, 2003). Reasons of this are both pragmatic, as administrators often believe that ABE will benefit the greatest number of inmates and state statute frequently mandates participation for the least educated inmates, as well as political, for few would argue against the benefits of possessing a high school level education. Despite this, PSCE has both research and policy supporters who argue that benefits accrue beyond high school education attainment as inmates become more educated (Batiuk, Lahm, McKeever, Wilcox, & Wilcox, 2005; Spangenberg, 2004).

Post-Secondary Correctional Education or PSCE refers to any education taken for college credit that occurs after an inmate has received a general equivalency diploma (GED) or high school diploma. To a former inmate, such education represents the difference between returning to criminal activities and possessing the skills and credentials necessary to find employment on release sufficient to reduce recidivism (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).

Despite the documented evidence of the benefits of postsecondary education for inmates, including decreased re-incarceration rates and improved family relationships,
few states offer PSCE to prisoners in significant numbers (Fine, et al., 2001; MTC Institute, 2003; Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001). One recent study found that less than 5% of prisoners are enrolled in PSCE across the United States (Erisman & Contardo, 2005).

Low PSCE enrollment may be linked partially to policy makers’ reluctance to use taxpayer dollars to pay for the college education of convicted criminals (Cullen, Fisher, & Applegate, 2000; Zook, 1993). Alternately, many states choose to focus their limited correctional education budgets on Adult Basic Education (ABE), on the theory that the most poorly educated inmates will benefit the most from education (Spangenberg, 2004).

National Institute of Justice (2002) reports that,

“As correctional departments face increasing costs for an expanding array of inmate needs, budgets are stretched to the maximum. In some jurisdictions, this has resulted in a reliance on faith-based organizations even though very little research has been conducted to assess offender outcomes after receipt of services by faith-based providers (National Institute of Justice, 2002). A growing number of correctional administrators and community reentry experts have found that faith-based organizations can provide much-needed services to offenders through volunteers.” These in-prison and community services are important because, prior to release, they may prepare prisoners to more easily use the community services that will aid in their transition after release.”

This incarnation of prison reentry programming became more popular as President George W. Bush spearheaded a number of government funding initiatives that favored faith-based organizations. Although this strategy at the time was considered innovative the funding was not by and large distributed to programs, faith-based or otherwise, designed for women (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). For years, practitioners in just about every field took research conducted primarily with male subjects and applied the findings to women. Recently, however, researchers have begun
to question the applicability of those findings to women—and the answer has been mixed (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2005). The specificity of gender when developing reentry programs is an important component to considering when creating lesson plans.

**Religious Conversion**

Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anismanl’s (2010) study of religion and identity discusses the concepts of empowerment in terms of social identity. The student participants of the PCEI Empowerment course each converted to Islam while incarcerated. Each expressed that their sense of self changed with this conversion in pre-assessments. Religion plays a key role in defining ones identity and thusly creates a sense of empowerment for individuals while shifting their perceptions of belonging to a group. Ysseldyk (2010) first considered the unique characteristics associated with religious leadership, as well as the physical structures and practices that reinforce religious identification, may be fruitful in determining how it is shaped and maintained. Second, rather than approaching religious identity as constant across groups, consideration of varying religious ideologies could reveal important differences concerning both individual and intergroup processes (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anismanl, 2010, p. 61). Third, social identities do not exist in isolation, and religious identification might interact with other identities in unique ways to influence psychosocial functioning. And finally, given the sacred belief system linked to conceptions of religious identity, discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation is likely to be particularly harmful to individual well-being and may result in magnified intergroup responses when religion
itself is targeted; an examination of differential strategies for dealing with such threats may therefore be constructive (p. 62).

The Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anismanl (2010) study of religion and identity served to further clarify the role of religious identification in understanding (and hopefully managing) intergroup conflict, enhancing individual well-being, and gaining a greater appreciation of religious belief systems as identity—including when held with zeal and when rejected entirely—several empirical research pursuits are worth considering.

Despite the benefits of religious identification for individual well-being, as with other social identities, religion often engenders conflict between groups (Wellman & Tokuno, 2004). Although intergroup strife is not unique to disputes among religious groups, religion is often the defining marker of a cohesive and compelling collective identity. Yet it has been argued that some social identities, such as nationalism or ethnic group membership, may serve a function equal to or greater than that achieved by religious identification (Evan, 1997; Kinnvall, 2004; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007; Worchel, 2004). For example, the assertion that ethnicity is the “bedrock” of social identity is based on the notion that ethnic group membership is impermeable: “Once born a Kurd, always a Kurd” (Worchel, 2004, p. 292). Several mechanisms might account for the association between religious identification and positive psychological health. Certainly, religious people often receive considerable social support from members of their religious community, and this support may foster more positive outcomes (Lim & Putnam, 2009; Park, 2007). Supportive communities of fellow believers might also fulfill
a highly identified individual’s need for belongingness (Maslow, 1943), which Baumeister and Leary (1995) have called a “fundamental human motivation.” Yet given that membership in a variety of social groups may offer similar benefits to the individual (e.g., social support, belongingness), what makes religious identification different? A large-scale American study revealed that the influences of religious versus secular social networks on life satisfaction were distinct only when the former were accompanied by a strong sense of religious import; likewise, the importance of religion to one’s self-concept enhanced life satisfaction only when reinforced by their religious community (Lim & Putnam, 2009). Thus, in contrast to the suggestion that the benefits of religious and secular social networks might be indistinguishable (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007), this research demonstrates that “praying together is better than bowling together, and better than praying alone” (Lim & Putnam, 2009).

Another possibility rests in the finding that religious coping behaviors (e.g., increased prayer), as well as the tendency for religious high-identifiers to use a variety of nonreligious coping strategies effectively (e.g., reduced avoidance), accounted for positive psychological health, following both recollections of trauma (Ysseldyk et al., 2009) and threats to religious identity itself (Ysseldyk et al., 2009a). Thus, additional coping resources, including “spiritual support seeking” (Pargament, 2002), perhaps reflecting inclinations to resist passive tactics in an effort to resolve stressful experiences, may account for the positive outcomes enjoyed by highly identified religious individuals. Others suggest that religiousness, in general, offers a global meaning system (Park, 2007), the benefits of which are apt to be marked among individuals whose religious
group membership and the beliefs therein are central to their self-concept. In effect, the advantages of religious identification may be twofold: Individuals not only gain from the sense of belonging offered by social group membership in general (Haslam et al., 2009) but should also benefit when they accept religion as a set of guiding beliefs that offers a worldview entailing life purpose and meaning (Mahoney et al., 2005; Pargament, 1997). Moreover, those two factors appear to interact such that neither faith alone nor communities alone, but rather “communities of faith,” foster the greatest well-being (Lim & Putnam, 2009) (p. 63).

As alluded to earlier, religiosity could be driven by the need for life purpose and meaning (Park, 2007), the desire for control in an unpredictable world (Kay et al., 2008), or the longing for self-enhancement (Sedikides, 2009). Nonetheless, the stability of religious identification (given the stability of religious groups themselves across history and culture; Fischer et al., 2009; Kinnvall, 2004; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007) might build on (or go beyond) those explanations, for example, by satisfying the need for belongingness, by offering confidence in the midst of uncertainty, and by increasing self-esteem.

In effect, religious identification can offer a robust social support system, a comforting and compelling worldview, and a unique psychological enrichment to which many people hold fast. Nonetheless, collections of individuals sharing such strongly held beliefs may also risk taking their attitudes and actions to extremes to protect their worldview, thereby propagating seemingly untamable conflict. Thus, even in the case that a comprehensive explanation for religiosity is untenable (Pargament, 2002), a social
identity framework appears to be unequivocally useful toward our understanding of this complex phenomenon (p. 67).

Significance

These current incarnations of prison education and reentry programs focus primarily on basic to intermediate academic instruction but do not outwardly identify any instructional methods that will assist the student in readjusting to society and community upon release from prison. This study contributes to the literature of reentry programming and prison education programming overall by exploring how the more affective elements of curriculum design and implementation positively impact the formerly incarcerated students’ sense of self and position in society. In addition, I have incorporated the term “empowerment education” to include lessons in social and restorative justice, community engagement, self-identification and critical thinking. There are many programs educational and otherwise that incorporate the concept of empowerment for underserved populations but there are no reentry or post-correctional educational interventions that focus on empowerment specifically.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature on empowerment and affective learning, reentry, and theory in three sections and provides a discussion of the usefulness of these concepts when developing a PCEI. It will also offer analyses of the literature that most closely examines the relevance of the key terms of the research questions:

1. In what ways does a Post-Correctional Educational Intervention curriculum designed for African American males influence the participants’ perceptions of empowerment?

2. In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program?

3. In what ways did the PCEI affect the participant’s social identity?

The first section focuses on the concepts of empowerment, the second offers research on affective learning and how these components within the curriculum addresses the needs associated with formerly incarcerated African American males. It will also provide a discussion of the literature as it applies the field of education and the social sciences.
The third section gives readers an in-depth understanding of the literature as it is relevant to current prison education and reentry programs. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the necessity of reentry programs, one must first understand all of the options available to inmates and why these options are not sufficient in managing the psycho-socio-emotional needs of inmates or ex-offenders.

**Section 1 - Empowerment**

The idea of student empowerment is one that must be mentioned in order to recognize how a curriculum can be developed with this concept in mind. Patrick J. McQuillan (2005) implemented a comparative analysis of two schools' efforts at student empowerment. Each was an ethnographic case study where he collected qualitative data within the participants first two years of high school; one in a traditional high school setting and the other in an alternative high school setting. However, one case study (in the traditional school) was implemented from 1986 – 1988 and the other (in the alternative school) from 1993 – 1995 both using a purposive sample of 100 freshman students and following them into their sophomore year. He first presented a rationale for why schools should help empower students and then proposed a theoretical conception of student empowerment founded on three interrelated dimensions: the academic, political, and social. Subsequently, he presented case studies of two schools' efforts to promote student empowerment. In each study, he examined how the schools attempted to help empower students, what power shifted to students, and how students and faculty responded to these efforts. Although the research was published nearly 20 years after the initial research study began, the author contends that,
Given that it has been nearly two decades since I began research for the first study, some may wonder whether the findings are still relevant. On the basis of the extant literature (Cook-Sather, 2002; Cummins, 2000; Hemmings, 2000; Levin, 2000, McPike, 2003; Willis, 2003) and my own research (McQuillan, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; McQuillan & Englert, 2001), the system seems much the same: The student role remains largely passive and subordinate; in most schools, students have little formal power; and what constitutes educational opportunity is typically defined for, not by, students (Goodlad, 1984; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sizer, 1984).

This assertion could be accurate given the largely unchanging power dynamics between teachers and students and applies to this study in the sense that it incorporates empowerment methods that includes academics, socialization and politics to increase the student’s ability to become empowered in these ways. The study goes on to provide examples of how the students largely reported feelings of empowerment in terms of politics and socializing, however, they did not report having feelings of empowerment in academics in the traditional school on the other hand, the alternative school study was not as successful. McQuillan (2005) goes to say that, “although demanding higher standards might have enhanced academic empowerment, students consistently resisted this innovation, and faculty grew so frustrated that they eventually did away with the policy” (p. 650). As for political empowerment, students were often both skeptical of the power accorded them and uncertain why the forums created by adults should be empowering, although many initially welcomed the opportunities (McQuillan, 2005). This finding suggests that the students did not trust the process or those who were implementing the process. The authors did not examine whether these outcomes were
based on demographic indicators of the students at each school such as race, gender, or SES status.

**Empowerment – Student Motivation**

Additionally, student motivation is a factor in determining student perceptions of empowerment in the classroom. Nichols’ (2004) article focused on the goal of exploring a classroom model of motivation that result in greater student empowerment and motivation. Although the Nichols (2004) did not outline specific research questions, the qualitative research design included a 40-item Likert-type questionnaire that was developed to explore and identify each of the classroom dimensions previously described. Ten items each were developed to measure affirmation, rejection, control and empowerment. The results appear to offer an argument to support the need for extended discussions with teachers to reflect on the classroom learning environment and motivational factors that can be encouraged or discouraged in the classroom. The initial findings suggest that classroom structures can be defined in terms of motivational boundaries along a relationship and empowerment continuum that could well encourage the exploration of additional instructional formats that support student ownership of achievement while setting the stage for an internal motivational structure to develop. Additionally, the results provide support for the development of a learner-centered classroom as defined by McCombs (McCombs & Whisler, 1997). This project also suggests that students can become architects of their own learning by participating in classroom environments (1) that support student affirmation rather than student rejection and (2) in which students experience increased achievement and internal motivational
gains in classrooms that empower them rather than exhibit explicit control over their learning experiences. In her work, McCombs (1994a, 1994b) acknowledged the importance of social relationships in educational contexts by including social support as one of three critical components. She described social support as a ‘‘culture of trust, respect, caring, concern, and a sense of community with others’’ that provides opportunities for ‘‘individual choice, expression of self-determination and agency, and a freedom to fail or take risks’’ (p. 54). These characteristics serve to define what many have begun to call a learner-centered classroom experience. The PCEI-Empowerment course also focuses on learner-centered activities and like this research suggests, the empowerment dimension is characterized by two features of classroom practice: organization/structure and stimulation. Nichols (2004) explains structure as being characterized by the amount of explicit information available in the classroom in order to achieve a desired outcome and goes on the show that, teachers often communicate this desired level of outcome by clearly setting boundaries, communicating goals and responding consistently and predictably to students (Nichols, 2004). Furthermore, stimulation is characterized by the provision of activities that involve achievable and appropriate goals that challenge the learner’s skill level while allowing control to the learner within the learning situation. On this continuum, control is defined as teacher centered or driven, while empowerment is defined as student centered or driven (Nichols, 2004).

Providing a classroom environment or community culture that is based on positive social relationships, while encouraging the empowerment of students, could well
be an initial step towards improving student motivation and achievement (Nichols, 2004, p. 158). In a PCEI-Empowerment course, student attitude is a factor when recognizing patterns of empowerment by being able to assess a shift in behavior, increase in positive interactions with peers and community as well as positive sense of self. Johnson (2005) uses principles of civic education and social psychology to identify four main classroom contributors to students' pessimistic appraisals of their ability to improve social problems: authoritarian teaching methods, a culture of "doom and gloom," little attention to solutions to social problems, and no linkage of social problems to individual behavior (Johnson, 2005). This research is important in understanding how negative or defeatist attitudes within the classroom can be overcome. Johnson argues that one of the primary goals for undergraduate sociology should be to empower students in their abilities to contribute constructively to their communities and the larger society. In this case it could Johnson states that it can also be argued that the goal of educating all populations should be to empower students regardless of the subject matter. However, the author proposes that the path to accomplish this goal is to more consciously nurture four capacities in students, including: (1) civic responsibility, (2) perceived civic efficacy, (3) civic skills, and (4) knowledge about society (p. 47). To find the right balance between empowering and educating students, Johnson proposed the following five-step process to teach about social problems and injustices: Step One: Identify the process through which social problems are constructed; Step Two: Identify existence of the social problem; Step Three: Identify core causes of the social problem; Step Four: Identify structural solutions to the social problem’ Step Five: Identify individual actions that contribute to structural
This process is a broad guide that can be implemented within a variety of theoretical perspectives, including objectivist and constructionist notions of social problems (Johnson, 2005). The process is flexible enough to incorporate any of the above-mentioned teaching tools (e.g., service learning or student projects).

To examine the impact of the above five-step teaching process on student empowerment, the researcher analyzed student comments about social problems-oriented courses (Johnson, 2005). Many of the student comments came from a lecture-based course on inequality/stratification while others came from a smaller discussion-based course on nonviolence and social action. Many students indicated that the most effective aspect of the course was its positive impact on their level of civic responsibility and their motivation to act upon this notion (Johnson, 2005). The following comments about the most effective aspects of the course reflect this sentiment: "the encouragement [is] given to try to make the world a better place rather than just complaining about problems in society and doing nothing about them," "[the course] challenges you to want to be a better person. Makes you think about the things you do/don't do and how those relate to the rest of the world," "I understand the reason behind protesting and why we need to take action to 'save the world'... and without these courses I would have sat back in complete ignorance, watching the world go by," and "[the course has the] ability to motivate you to get out and make a change" (Johnson, 2005).

To more consciously contribute to our students' civic abilities and motivation, Johnson (2005) encourages further research on the causes of student cynicism and
empowerment related to social problems. Further scholarship on teaching and learning can empirically evaluate this link between the actions of teachers and the impacts upon students regarding social action (Johnson, 2005).

**Student Empowerment in Non-traditional Settings**

Conversely, the idea of student empowerment extends to adult students in non-traditional settings. A case study of a Chicano prison inmate's progress in a year-long literacy tutorial course demonstrates ways in which writing can negotiate and reorganize race, class, gender, and power identities and legitimize the student's voice, native language, and discourse stance (Shethar, 1993). Shethar found that through dialogue, the student progresses from the passive-learner role to a presentation of self as knowledgeable expert; from denial of his prison group-membership, he progresses to a critical analysis of the power structure it represents (p. 357).

Shethar (1993) presents a case study of individual tutoring among people who are systematically disempowered, inmates at a county jail. The researcher wanted to find out if there was any sense in which literacy tutoring could lead to meaningful change for participants, given that tutoring was so individualized, so highly monitored and controlled, and given that the social position of the learner was so fixed. Instead, a case study of a 23-year-old Mexican American inmate who had already served three and one-half years in the county was researched. The researcher monitored the participants writing progress in a court-sponsored literacy program. The researcher tracked his writing for 10 months while the participant was incarcerated. The participant said he signed up for the literacy program as a chance to work on spelling and learn to write
more fluently, but also to use his time well and make a good impression on the jail authorities (Shethar, 2003). He thought that he would be in jail for a while but that afterward he wanted to be a nightclub owner or learn electronics or work for Coca-Cola, he did not mention any other goals for participating in the program. The author claims that the participant, his tutor, and the pantheon of men that surround him negotiate and contest claims to power and authority through and about the changes in his literate practice (Shethar, 1993).

What the researcher found was that before this research program, the participant wrote letters from jail; now he is in prison, still writing letters. She argued that new practices and changes in his position as a subject potentially engender new forms of collective consciousness seeds from which larger movements of resistance or assimilation can grow (Shethar, 1993). During the ten months, the participants writing progressed in terms of the roles he takes as a writer vis-a-vis his readers, the social context of writing, and the forms of writing itself (Shethar, 1993). The author attributes this shift in his empowerment as an emerging writer to the access to private tutoring and literacy education and maintains that his new form of collective consciousness would now assist him in negotiating a more esteemed self-image or identity in spite of his status as an inmate.

This article furthers my assertions in the following theoretical framework(s) that Critical Race Theory (narratives and storytelling) and Social Identity Theory, specifically the concept of in and out-groups apply directly to those in and who would benefit from prison education and reentry programs.
Empowerment Through Community Involvement

In the same manner as empowerment through religion, empowerment through community engagement could also be beneficial to a student of a PCEI-Empowerment course. McKay (2010) goes on to note that in the community education course, the Senior Advocacy Leadership Training (SALT) program being researched, the African American adult learners have been given the opportunity to deconstruct, and co-develop new narratives for themselves by exploration of their repressed memories, silenced consciousness and cloaked histories. The participants included thirteen elders, aged 61-80, who are enrolled in the (SALT) program, a social action group facilitated in an African American community of a Large American city (McKay, 2010). The SALT program was first offered in 2002 for elders ranging in age from 61-80 years old. The student sample of the PCEI-Empowerment course is also participants of Islamic community-based organization. Community education is perceived to be more inclusive and tolerant to difference, power and inequality than more formalized educational settings (Sedgemore, 2007). Therefore, within a more equitable space, learners are afforded the privilege to explore and embrace their own consciousness and counter-narratives. The program developer and instructor, Mrs. Nyem felt that until individuals understood their own lives within a historical context, they would be incapable of fully participating in a democratic society. The SALT program emphasizes the study of African American history and the development of leadership skills. Mrs. Nyem, the founder of the SALT program, strives to develop influencers of community culture, who articulate and advocate for the needs of others, by their sheer commitment of time and
effort to community affairs (McKay, 2010). Without feeling affirmed in their identities based on knowledge of their own heritage, Mrs. Nyem felt that she was witnessing individuals’ inability to advocate for self or others. Mrs. Nyem was not content with facilitating a course so that participants could learn interesting facts but do nothing with the knowledge. She hoped that through critical pedagogy these participants would become more active in their communities, addressing issues that concerned them and generations to come.

Section 2 – Affective Learning Domain

According to Oughton (2009), affective learning inculcates the values and beliefs we place on the information we engage with. It refers to our attitudes and willingness to take part in new things, and ability to make decision about how we operate and behave in a variety of circumstances. Attitudes are not directly observable, but the actions and behaviors to which they contribute may be observed (Bednar & Levie, 1993). Although there are some difficulties in measuring attitude formation and change, the affective domain is important in education (Oughton, 2009). Bloom's Taxonomy includes the cognitive domain, the affective domain and the psychomotor domain. The cognitive domain’s hierarchy begins with straightforward acquisition of knowledge, followed by more sophisticated cognitive tasks of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The psychomotor domain relates to the learning of physical movements and progresses through the levels of reflex movements, fundamental movements, perceptual abilities, physical abilities, skilled movements and expressive movements (Oughton, 2009). Piaget noted, “at no level, at no state, even in the adult, can we find a behavior or a
state which is purely cognitive without affect nor a purely affective state without a cognitive element involved’ (as cited in Clark & Fiske, 1982). McKeachie (1976) emphasized the need to understand humans holistically; in doing so we employ cognition and affect, and these should not be separated.

Affective educational outcomes that focus on individual dispositions, willingness, preferences, and enjoyment must be acknowledged and integrated into curricula throughout institutions. This is an essential component of an empowerment curriculum. Evidence that such outcomes are lacking, but required, in education can be found in the soft skill shortage among employees in the workplace (Clark, 2005). Soft skills are important to productivity, employee satisfaction, a healthy workplace, and ultimately, economic success for society. They include self-awareness, analytical thinking, leadership skills, team-building skills, flexibility, acceptance of diversity, the ability to communicate effectively, creativity, problem-solving skills, listening skills, diplomacy and change-readiness (Clark, 2005). One of the core concerns of many formerly incarcerated people is job attainment upon release from custody, however, as evidenced in the above research, many students, especially ex-offenders, do not receive the essential skills necessary to compete in the current job market. Affective educational outcomes allow students participating in a PCEI to “feel” in an environment that it safe and free from the perception of oppression. In prison environment, oftentimes, their emotional growth is stymied by an environment that is physically and emotionally restricted by its very design.
An empowerment curriculum using affective learning outcomes which emphasize a feeling, tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection may be difficult to teach or measure (Clark, 2005). Affective outcomes vary from simple attention to selected phenomena to complex but internally consistent qualities of character and conscience. Further, emotions are messy and unpredictable. Music that energizes one person may irritate another (p. 6). Exercises connecting students with their emotions may release feelings and memories from non-school life that educators are uncomfortable dealing with. The affective domain is less predisposed to classification. While a considerable body of material existed with which to evaluate performance and achievement in the cognitive domain, only marginal work is available in the affective domain.

It is important for teachers of an empowerment curriculum to convey to the students that feelings are never wrong; people’s ways of expressing that emotion may be. Changed behavior is slippery ground, and learning theories of attitude change are no longer as popular as they once were. Focus on reinforced behavior as the primary factor responsible for attitude development is now frowned upon. Early research on attitude change drew on Festinger's (1956) cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that, when a person is persuaded to act in a way that is not congruent with a pre-existing attitude, he or she may change the attitude to reduce dissonance (Smith & Ragan, 1999).

### Affective Education – Social Emotional Learning and Teacher Training

In this article Cohen (2006) discusses contemporary best practices and policy in relation to creating safe and caring school climates, home-school partnerships, and a
pedagogy informed by social-emotional and ethical concerns. He also emphasizes the importance of scientifically sound measures of social-emotional and ethical learning, and advocates for action research partnerships between researchers and practitioners to develop authentic methods of evaluation. Based on Cohen’s assertion that there is a paradox in our preK-12 schools, and within teacher education; parents and teachers want schooling to support children’s ability to become lifelong learners who are able to love, work, and act as responsible members of the community. Yet, we have not substantively integrated these values into our schools or into the training we give teachers (Cohen, 2005). This paradox, Cohen goes on to note, is all the more striking because recent studies have shown that research-based social, emotional, ethical, and academic educational guidelines can predictably promote the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that provide the foundation for the capacity to love, work, and be an active community member (Cohen, 2005). Social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions provide an essential foundation for life-long learners who are able to love and work (Beland, 2003; Cohen, 2001; Elias et al., 1997; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Consequently, when evidence-based social, emotional, and ethical education is integrated into traditional teaching and learning, educators can hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support effective participation in a democracy (Cohen, 2006). The Character education Partnership’s eleven key principles underlie its work (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1996). Cohen (2001) suggests that there are five. A review of evidence-based programs by Cohen (2003) concluded that there are seven core dimensions to successful Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programming and
Elias (2003) summarizes his understanding of the ten key facets of effective academic, social, and emotional learning. Cohen (2006) argues that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical competencies. This assertion is along the lines of the claim being made for PCEI-Empowerment courses. Surveying the current state of research in the fields of social emotional education, character education, and school-based mental health in the United States, Cohen (2006) suggests that social-emotional skills, knowledge, and dispositions provide the foundation for participation in a democracy and improved quality of life. Cohen discusses contemporary best practices and policy in relation to creating safe and caring school climates, home-school partnerships, and a pedagogy informed by social-emotional and ethical concerns. He also emphasizes the importance of scientifically sound measures of social-emotional and ethical learning, and advocates for action research partnerships between researchers and practitioners to develop authentic methods of evaluation (Cohen, 2005).

Cohen (2006) goes on to argue that, in order to protect and support students and to increase clinical and political efficacy, advocates must marshal the results of four new research-related developments. First, longitudinal research has revealed that social and emotional competencies are predictive of children's ability to learn and solve problems nonviolently (Elias et al., 1997; Zins et al., 2004). These same competencies are predictive of healthy marriages and the ability to work in adulthood (Bar-On, 2003, 2005; Goleman, 1998; Gottman, 1994; Heath, 1991; Valliant, 1977, 1993). We now have a clear sense of which of these competencies are most important to focus on (Cohen, 2006).
A range of factors complicates the introduction of social-emotional and academic educational innovations into our nation's preK-16 schools, education departments, and education schools. He focuses on three: research, policy, and the current state of teacher education (Cohen, 2006). In theory, research shapes policy, which in turn results in teacher-education requirements. In practice, the relationship among policy, research, and teacher training is much more complicated and rarely so logically related. Since researchers have demonstrated the efficacy of SEEAE (Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education), current studies should focus on SEEAE-informed evaluation and scaling up these programmatic efforts. In that regard, the author poses the questions, how can we evaluate students' developing social-emotional competencies and ethical dispositions? How can we most helpfully evaluate the school as a system and the climate it fosters in the classroom? The lack of measures in these two areas often undermines SEEAE efforts (Cohen, 2006).

In fulfilling that obligation, schools must respect the inherent dignity of the child, create an environment of tolerance in the classroom, and bar practices or disciplinary policies that harm or humiliate. His final observation was that our nation's current dramatic overemphasis on linguistic and mathematical learning is shortsighted and misguided (Cohen, 2006).

If the cognitive objectives are developed, the development of the affective behaviors follows. Krathwohl et al. (2001) deny this assumption: “The evidence suggests that affective behaviors develop when appropriate learning experiences are provided for students much the same as cognitive behaviors develop from appropriate learning
experiences” (Utah State Office of Education, 2006). To really undertake the work of shifting a vast array of attitudes and values to some pre-determined “better” outcome is daunting, which may explain why it receives more lip service than pedagogical attention (p. 4). How many course outlines and lesson plans specifically address how the students feel about the material, or how they are to achieve or modify attitudes and values? Silence pervades these areas except in courses that explicitly address issues like motivation, persuasion, teamwork, leadership, or empathy with clients/patients. Some professors are more skilled in getting their students excited and involved, but we rarely explore how they do this, although researchers in educational psychology have done some good work on motivation and interest. When it comes to mastery of skills, we see that “Learning is essential for students to master skills but if the affective domain is ignored, the cognitive areas are greatly affected. If one feels threatened, sad, stressed, etc. the learning process can break down” (Griffith & Nguyen, 2006).

Because of this potential breakdown in learning, Shepard (2004) interprets aspects of education for sustainability in relation to educational theories of the affective domain (values, attitudes and behaviors) and suggests how the use of these theories, and relevant experience, in other educational areas could benefit education for sustainability. The research data included an analysis based on a literature review of relevant educational endeavors in affective learning (Shepard, 2004). The article also emphasizes the application of a relevant theoretical underpinning to support educators’ legitimate aspirations for affective learning outcomes. It was also designed to help educators reflect
on how the use of these approaches accords with the liberal traditions of higher education (p. 87).

In order to adequately research affective learning outcome the Shepard (2004) asked the following research questions. The questions began with asking what are these principles of learning for sustainability and how do these projects relate to students' learning outcomes and educational theory? How effectively do they impact on student learning? What curriculum changes are envisaged, what do they attempt to achieve and in what way might they be different from what has come before? Is there an existing educational theoretical framework within which Tilbury et al.’s (2004) need for all students to address sustainability, and aim for at least half of them to be sensitive to sustainability, can be addressed (Shepard, 2004)? Shepard suggests that a central element of education for sustainability is a quest for affective learning outcomes of values, attitudes and behaviors. It describes the theoretical foundations of this form of education and interprets a range of educational endeavors in these terms (Shepard, 2004). It supports this analysis by identifying other areas of higher education that attempt to achieve affective learning outcomes and by describing how they do this. The article proceeds to consider key aspects of teaching and learning in the affective domain that potentially have application in education for sustainability. These include the need to design particular approaches for assessment and evaluation, the need to give academic credit for affective outcomes, the pivotal role of role models, and the need to achieve realistic, assessable and acceptable learning outcomes in the affective domain (Shepard, 2004).
Shepard (2004) then considers key aspects of teaching and learning in the affective domain that potentially have application in education for sustainability. These include the need to design particular approaches for assessment and evaluation, the need to give academic credit for affective outcomes, the pivotal role of role models, and the need to achieve realistic, assessable and acceptable learning outcomes in the affective domain. These examples and this analysis asserts that some disciplines in higher education actively seek particular attitudes and behaviors as student learning outcomes whereas in many areas, teachers attempt to stimulate critical analysis without seeking particular values, attitudes or behaviors (Shepard, 2004). By categorizing the range of affective outcomes in a hierarchy or other form of taxonomy, it is possible for teachers to address the acceptability of their approaches to their profession, their institution and to the liberal traditions of higher education. Shepard (2004) speculates that this area of study is particularly important to higher education for sustainability as an emerging field of enquiry. Research that contributes to epistemology and contextualization in this field was recently identified as one of several priorities by a cohort of higher education for sustainability experts (Wright, 2007). To benefit from this analysis and from the experience of other educators who attempt to achieve affective outcomes, educators for sustainability need to identify which of their intended learning outcomes are indeed affective outcomes of values, attitudes and behaviors (Shepard, 2004).

In an effort to better understand the implementation of affective learning I am using Krathwohl’s (1998) Affective Domain Taxonomy as a method of developing empowerment lesson plans for the PCEI. While studying with Benajamin Bloom,
Karthwohl co-authored the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, (also known as Bloom's Taxonomy) a critical publication on education and has also edited, authored and co-authored several books in regards to education.

Krathwohl's (1998) affective domain taxonomy on the other hand, is perhaps the best known of any of the affective taxonomies. "The taxonomy is ordered according to the principle of internalization. Internalization refers to the process whereby a person's affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is 'internalized' and consistently guides or controls the person's behavior‖ (Seels & Glasgow, 1990). The affective domain taxonomy includes the following strategies, receiving, responding, valuing, organization and characterization. A brief definition of each strategy includes:

*Receiving* is being aware of or sensitive to the existence of certain ideas, material, or phenomena and being willing to tolerate them. Examples include: to differentiate, to accept, to listen (for) to respond to.

*Responding* is committed in some small measure to the ideas, materials, or phenomena involved by actively responding to them. Examples are: to comply with, to follow, to commend, to volunteer, to spend leisure time in, to acclaim.

*Valuing* is willing to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas, materials, or phenomena. Examples include: to increase measured proficiency in, to relinquish, to subsidize, to support, to debate.

*Organization* is to relate the value to those already held and bring it into a harmonious and internally consistent philosophy. Examples are: to discuss, to theorize, to formulate, to balance, to examine.

*Characterization* by value or value set is to act consistently in accordance with the values he or she has internalized. Examples include: to revise, to require, to be rated high in the value, to avoid, to resist, to manage, to resolve.
Affective learning is demonstrated by behaviors indicating attitudes of awareness, interest, attention, concern, and responsibility, ability to listen and respond in interactions with others, and ability to demonstrate those attitudinal characteristics or values which are appropriate to the test situation and the field of study.

_Affective Learning and Figurative Language_

In order to gauge affective learning through figurative language, the Manca and Delfina (2007) study investigated how the participants of an online learning course employed figurative language to express their emotions and feelings during the learning experience. Textual analysis was carried out in the social and metacognitive discussion areas as those related to the expression of the social dimension (p. 25). Figurative language, to some would be considered “figures of speech”. The expression of emotion in a PCEI-Empowerment course could also contribute to feelings of empowerment for the student. In Manca and Delfina’s research, its aim was to analyze the distribution of figurative language across the course, to understand if figurative language elicited the creation of new figurative language, and to classify recurring types of conceptual categories. Results showed that figurative language use increased to coincidence with crucial, social events; it did not necessarily encourage the production of further figurative language; and it allowed participants to represent their affective domain and to conceptualize the learning environment in an original manner (Manca, 2007). The purpose of their research was to provide answers to the following research questions: (1) Did figurative language occur accidentally across the course or did it especially emerge in conjunction with some course events? (2) Did the adoption of figurative language
encourage further use by peers and tutors? (3) Are instances of figurative language classifiable according to some set of recurring types of conceptual categories (Manca, 2007)?

The authors explain that an inductive and iterative content-based analysis was conducted on a longitudinal basis in the discussion areas devoted to socialization and metacognitive reflection, because they are mainly related to the expression of self-disclosure and of the social dimension of learners. The results of this qualitative analysis were firstly subjected to quantitative and statistical analysis to verify the hypotheses in research questions 1 and 2; then they were subjected to further qualitative treatment in relation to question 3 (Manca & Delfina, 2007).

The context of this qualitative research was a 10-week course delivered at a distance via a computer conferencing system, by the Institute for Educational Technology of the Italian National Research Council (ITD-CNR) during the 2002–2003 academic year, on the topic of educational technology (Delfino & Persico, in press). The course was offered to 57 student teachers of the local Post-graduate School for Secondary School teachers (SSIS) and was managed by seven tutors. Ten teacher training supervisors (TTS) also took part in the course (Manca & Delfina, 2007).

Instructional activities were carried out in small groups and organized in a number of phases. This included reflection upon the main learning theories, analysis of and comparison between educational software and discussion on its integration in the school setting, and development of a project for the implementation of educational technology in a specific educational context. One of the course aims was to encourage collaborative
learning processes and develop a community of learners (Conrad, 2005; Dillenbourg, 1999; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1994). The use of some familiarization facilities and a metacognitive reflection area were especially promoted for socialization and reflection (Manca & Delfina, 2007).

About half of all the learners in the course expressed themselves affectively and socially, and represented their perceptions of the learning context, through the use of figurative language. Most of them, this being their first experience of online learning, had to face several new problems, including learning to communicate by written discourse in an asynchronous manner, familiarizing themselves with communication technologies, and collaborating within a group setting (Manca & Delfina, 2007).

What is valuable in accommodating students’ need for expressing the affective domain is the role played by face-to-face meetings and by the tutors. The opportunity to meet face-to-face and the frequent private chat sessions in small groups helped to sustain the community, by helping participants to face problems and, together with their tutors, find possible solutions. This appeared particularly so in the middle of the course, when disagreements were solved through discussion: the second face-to-face meeting encouraged students to interrupt their silence and write again, thus increasing their sense of togetherness (Conrad, 2005).

Results of the Manca and Delfina (2007) research show that figurative language may be a creative way through which people construct and reconstruct what Novak (1991) named “the liquid architecture of cyberspace,” by giving it some substance and concreteness. Figurative language can allow participants to represent their affective
domain—their emotions and feelings—and to conceptualize the main learning components on the web. Participants in this study used figurative language both to give themselves and other participants shape and body (Alzola, 2003; Giese, 1998), disguising their corporeity and making it move in different settings, as well as to give body and soul to objects. In other words, they used figurative language with the effect of changing the shared ontological status of people and objects.

**Student Voice**

Similar to figurative language, “Student voice” has accumulated to what Hill (2003) describes as “a new vocabulary—a set of terms that are necessary to encode the meaning of our collective project.” These terms strive to name the values that underlie “student voice” as well as the approaches signaled by the term. Like any attempt at such encoding, however, an effort to identify a new vocabulary that captures the attitudes and practices associated with student voice work raises questions, especially because it makes use of already common terms, albeit in new contexts and in new ways (Cook-Sather, 2006). These questions prompt us to reexamine the terms we think capture our commitments as well as those commitments themselves. Such a reexamination is critical, particularly in regard to terms we think we understand. Indeed, the word “term” itself is defined as a word or phrase referring to a clear and definite conception, and yet despite its increasing and emphatic use, none such clear and definite conception exists for “student voice” (Cook-Sather, 2006).

In an attempt both to clarify and to complicate current understandings of “student voice,” Cook-Sather (2006) organized the discussion as follows: traces the emergence of
the term; she explores positive and negative aspects of the term, some of which are identified in the research literature and some of which is offered from the researchers own perspective; she also goes on to identify two underlying premises of student voice work signaled by two particular words—“rights” and “respect”—that surface repeatedly in publications on student voice efforts; and I focus on a word that also appears regularly in the research literature but that refers to a wide range of practices: “listening (Cook-Sather).”

Cook-Sather (2006) took a close look at three associated terms, that are not intended to provide a complete lexicon associated with student voice work; rather, her aim was to highlight some of the premises shared by researchers and practitioners concerned with this work as well as to highlight some of the different perspectives, commitments, and approaches of those whose work is aggregated under the term (Cook-Sather, 2006). Taken together, the various parts of this discussion will, help instructors map where they have come from with “student voice” work, where we currently find ourselves, and where we might go next in our efforts to name and act upon our convictions regarding the repositioning of students in educational research and reform. In understanding student voice in this sense, instructors who facilitate a PCEI-Empowerment course can interpret written assignments, such as journal writing, as well as in-class discussion that are teacher or student-led.

A further explanation is provided by Cook-Sather (2006), who says that the research is an exploration of the term “student voice” as it is evoked and applied in the educational research literature; it is not an exhaustive exploration of the practices
associated with the term (p. 309). Cook-Sather agrees with Fielding’s (2004a) assertion that “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together” (Cook-Sather, 2006) and thus that student voice efforts, “however committed they may be, will not of themselves achieve their aspirations unless a series of conditions are met that provide the organizational structures and cultures to make their desired intentions a living reality” (Fielding, 2004). However, this PCEI was designed to offer instructors and students a genuine space to meet and work together.

Cook-Sather (2006) goes on to clarify that, “this exploration of the way of naming associated with “student voice” is preliminary, not meant to be exhaustive or definitive” (p. 375). Instead, it follows in the spirit Hill (2003) describes: “Rather than seeking to provide a new official set of meanings/words, we seek to open up for debate these familiar signifiers, and thereby their different contexts and signifying realms.” The terms “rights,” “respect,” and “listening” are all central to many publications on student voice work, but they raise questions and concerns as well as signal possible productive shifts in power dynamics and practices that might, in turn, lead to a significant cultural shift (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Cook-Sather (2006) also mentions that change is a big idea (p. 393). To genuinely engage not only students’ voices but also their entire beings, we need to be open to change, willing to change. Also, what students say and what we do will change over time. None of these are one-time things; they are ongoing. Currently, many people are using the term “student voice” to assert that young people have unique perspectives on
learning, teaching, and schooling, that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults, and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education. Until we find a better way to talk about how students are positioned in educational research and reform—about the sound, presence, and power of students in education—“student voice” will need to carry these convictions (p. 393).

On the other hand, Griffith and Nguyen (2006) wonder if educators are even prepared to “affect” the affective domain. The authors believe that because of their motivation and compassion, educators believe they can significantly influence the development of their students’ personal and emotional growth. Unfortunately the focus that most educators find in today’s classroom is not how we can positively affect our students, but rather the intense focus on the acquisition of minimum levels of academic skills (p. 1). We are so intent on meeting the No Child Left Behind act that we don't make the time to address the affective domain. This study conducted on pre-service teachers completing their clinical semester of student teaching found their "real life" practices pushed accountability at the risk of minimizing or ignoring the affective domain. We focus on diversity, but we do not focus on the diverse needs that include the affective domain.

The purpose in conducting this study was to determine the effectiveness of the educator preparation program in the College of Education and Human Development. In the state of Texas, Griffith and Nguyen show that accountability drives the educational preparation of students in grades K - 16. The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) govern the curriculum for K - 12 (Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2005b).
Educator preparation programs are also governed by a state-adopted exam known as the Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES). These exams, which cover several different areas, stress competencies in standards which educators apply critical instructional skills in educational environments. Although we are to have an understanding of the needs of the diverse learner, we seldom look at the diverse needs of each child we teach. We focus on diversity, but we do not focus on the diverse needs that include the affective domain (Griffith & Nguyen, 2006).

Seventy students, who had recently finished their clinical semester of student teaching, were asked to complete a Student Teaching Needs Assessment during the last week of their educator preparation program (Griffith & Nguyen, 2006). These respondents had returned to the university to complete the final requirements of their educator preparation program and provide feedback for program improvement. Students were asked to complete a Likert based survey evaluating their student teaching experience. The Student Teaching Needs Assessment was used to measure their feelings of preparation in the areas of communication and addressing the affective domain in their instruction.

The data provided insight into the current trends in public schools. Though students entering the education profession thought they had the knowledge to teach the affective domain, many student teachers did not find the time to teach affective skills (Griffith & Nguyen, 2006). Before starting student teaching, 68% of respondents felt they had the knowledge and skills necessary to teach affective skills. After the ten-week student teaching period, only 39% of respondents actually had the chance to teach those
skills. In addition, respondents felt that principals and teachers focused the most attention on TAKS testing in the cognitive domain, rather than the affective domain. For example, character education time is usually used for teaching additional TAKS skills. This research shows that although teaching affective learning, it is also a time-consuming and sometime overwhelming endeavor. However, in this PCEI Empowerment course, the number of students was limited and allowing instructors to engage students further than the average K-16 teacher.

Section 3 – Prison Education and Reentry Programs

Research regarding prison educational and reentry programs has remained sparse and inconsistent in terms of methodology and effectiveness (Urban Institute, 2009). Reentry programs offer options to formerly incarcerated adults in the form of vocation, life skills, and adult basic education or GED programs. In researching reentry programs, there was no research that was found, to date, that included empowerment for prison populations. The Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center compiled a meta-analysis of research of the past 15 years of prison education programs and post-prison employment, recidivism, and postsecondary education. This analysis showed that, while there has been increasing discussion about the intersection of prisoner reentry and issues of workforce development, housing, health, and public safety, insufficient attention has been paid to the role that in-prison and post-prison education can play in facilitating successful reentry (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, & Lindhal, 2009). Education has been widely recognized as a pathway to assimilation and economic mobility for immigrant and other disadvantaged populations throughout U.S. history (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins
For people involved in the criminal justice system, education offers a path to increased employment, reduced recidivism, and improved quality of life (Gaes 2008).

However, in spite of its potential to change lives, high-quality education is not readily accessible to many people involved in the justice system (Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, & Lindhal, 2009). Adults returning from prison and jail and those on community supervision are still overwhelmingly undereducated compared with the general population, with lower levels of formal educational attainment and poorer performance on tests of basic literacy (Crayton & Neusteter 2008).

The Urban Institute (2009) study on reentry programs showed that there were several limitations to the existing research on the prison and post-prison education programs research that was used as a part of their study. First, the report shows, that the research on educational programs for current inmates and ex-offenders in limited in both scope and rigor. Additionally, the methodologies used in many of those studies, make their findings unreliable (p. 17). They also listed the following methodological concerns and research gaps:

- Creating Matched Comparison Groups
- Accurately Specifying the Treatment
- Defining and Measuring Relevant Outcomes

These concerns make it difficult to adequately research the field of prison and post-prison education programs. For instance,

Very few studies use random-assignement evaluation designs, though this is not surprising given the difficulty of implementing such evaluations in real-world settings. Participation in most programs is voluntary and some
studies fail to account for potential selection bias, in terms of factors such as intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes that might set participants apart from nonparticipants. Some of the stronger studies attempt to address selection bias by modeling the selection process and creating carefully matched comparison groups. Few studies control for the pre-treatment education and ability levels of participants and nonparticipants, in part because these data are rarely readily available (The Urban Institute, 2009, p. 17).

The study goes on to note that very few studies use random-assignment evaluation designs and often fail to account for potential selection bias. However, it is mentioned that some of the stronger studies do attempt to address this bias. It is also difficult to account for the participant’s education, or lack thereof, due to the data being difficult to accurately attain by the program administrators. Additionally, the more pressing issue is whether the existing research answers questions about what type of programs are the most effective for different types of participants. Very few studies explore program characteristics such as instructional methods, dosage and staff qualifications, which can vary significantly across programs (The Urban Institute, 2009). The vast majority of studies conceptualize treatment as participation and/or completion of programming, without examining intermediate outcomes that could indicate how programs actually affect thinking and behavior. Relevant intermediate outcomes might include literacy gains, development of concrete skills, improved cognitive abilities, and reduced criminal thinking (p. 19).

Brazzell, Crayton, Mukamal, Solomon, and Lindhal (2009) surmise that this analysis showed that there is not a reasonable amount of literature, to date, that can accurately assess the success or failure of prison education or reentry programs (p. 20).
However, the Urban Institute research does consistently indicate that increased education does contribute to a decrease in recidivism – although there is no common consensus on what exactly constitutes recidivism – and an increased likelihood of employment. This research also did not show if the employment gained post-incarceration allowed the participants a living wage as defined in their state or how long the participants retained employment. It is likely that those factors would also contribute to the issue of recidivism.

Vocational and Education Reentry

While the Urban Institute study looked at the programmatic aspects of prison education, the following study discusses race and gender. In 2000 the Center for Urban Studies at Wayne State University, in Detroit, MI ex-inmates were queried as to whether they felt that the education that they’d received had been beneficial to them in their efforts remain outside of the prison system (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). There were a total of 29 ex-inmates participated. Of these, 27 were male and two were female. Also, 15 were African American and 14 were white. The focus groups were homogenous by race with all but one being 100% one race. The one exception was a focus group that had one African American male participant and seven white participants (p. 2). The average number of participants per group was seven (range = 6-9). Case and Fasenfest used qualitative research methods that primarily included focus groups with formerly incarcerated adults and document analysis provided by probation officers. The research participants included white and African American men and women who had participated in correctional education programs, including literacy, GED, and Adult Basic Education.
(ABE) programs. The researchers did not mention what type of crimes the participants were convicted of or their background prior to incarceration.

Participants were asked to discuss their involvement with the prison education system, whether or not they continued their educational pursuits post release and how useful they found their education to be in their current life situations. Participants were also asked whether or not they believed that education had increased their employability, and their overall quality of life (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).

The data collected for this study came from the prison education system in the area that functions as an independent school district. This district partners with 14 local colleges and universities and offers college-level courses to participants. What is different about this program versus other similar programs, is that the students receive transcripts that are identical to those given to students of traditional schools in the area and therefore poses no risk of the potential stigma associated with prison education programs. In addition, focus groups were held in communities that were located close to prisons and that had post-release centers to provide social support to prisoners as they reintegrated into their communities.

The findings showed that White males were more likely to perceive college courses in prison as being beneficial, reported a higher level of self-esteem post education, more often reported that they had taken courses post-release to continue their education and were not likely to perceive barriers to employment post release. Black males, on the other hand, reported opposite experiences that are likely reinforced by institutionalized racism that additionally reduces opportunities (Case & Fasenfest, 2004).
Black males reported more value in vocational training that provided a work skill, experienced lower levels of post education self-esteem and reported more barriers to finding and maintaining employment. Only one of the black participants reported that he was continuing his post release education. He was enrolled in a four year degree program in radiology. His goal was to finish his degree and become an x-ray technologist. This research also shows that the perceptions of education and vocational are typically issues of race and gender in addition to access and opportunity. None of the participants overtly discuss power dynamics or need for advanced degrees, however, they do mention the practicality of the type of education they found to be more useful, especially to African American in a society dominated by white men.

In more recent research, Owens’ (2009) article questions whether college participation has any meaningful effects for former prisoners, beyond quantifiable measures of recidivism and income? Owens implemented open-ended interviews that were conducted with a sample of formerly incarcerated persons in New York City. Although Owens research does not look at African American males, specifically, his research does provide strong argument for educating formerly incarcerated adults through post-secondary education upon reentry. Potential participants were solicited by email, with the help of several social service organizations that link currently and formerly incarcerated individuals with opportunities for higher education (p. 317). Owen did not limit the sample to those participants with regular access to computers; he also recruited participants through meetings at local community-based organizations. Of the 32 people who expressed initial interest in further contact to set up an interview, these petitions
yielded the first 13 participants in this study. The snowball technique was used to round out the sample for a total of 17 informants. Interviews were conducted face-to-face; with the exception of one participant, whose interview was conducted by phone because he lived well outside the New York City area (Owens, 2009). Interviewees were met at their convenience in easily accessible public locations, their offices, or wherever they felt most comfortable. Questions were posed with the intent of engaging 'interviewees' in a narrative dialogue, with follow-up questions presented in order to tailor the dialogues to participant responses. Self-investigation helped ensure consistency in administration of questions for each participant (p. 318).

Of those interviewed, nine had completed college degrees during incarceration. Among the remaining participants, one pursued college-level coursework while inside even though no formal degree was available, and the remaining seven had either completed college upon return from prison, or were currently enrolled; presenting an interesting source of variation for analysis. Twelve participants were male; five were female. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 58 years old and had served sentences ranging from 6 months to 37 years, with a median sentence of 10 years. The amount of time between release and the date of the interview ranged from 3 months to 12 years, with half of the interviews taking place within 21 months of the respondent's release. With respect to race, participants self-identified with the following groups: nine black (about 53% of respondents), four Hispanic or Latino/a (about 24%), three white (about 18%), one Asian American (about 6%) (Owens, 2009).
Owens (2009) argues that, it appears that access to educational opportunity may deter engagement with criminal activity (p. 317). Although scholars have correlated increased educational attainment with lower levels of recidivism, they lack the ability to determine exact relationship between the two (Erisman & Contardo 2005; O’Neill, MacKenzie, & Bierie 2007; Steurer, Smith, & Tracy 2001). As researchers continue to debate the meaning of education for ex-offenders, they have offered three ways for understanding how education may work to reduce recidivism: individual change, motivation, and social change. Yet for all their potential as rehabilitative measures, correctional education programs face numerous barriers to successful implementation including: overcrowding, unorganized leadership, and resentment fueled by the stigmas of incarceration (Erisman & Contardo 2005). Indeed, several scholars have documented the pervasiveness of stigmas surrounding people who have had contact with the criminal justice system (e.g., Mauer 2006; Page 2004; Pager, 2003; Petersilja 2003; Pettit & Western 2004; Ubah & Robinson 2003; Waldfogel, 1994).

Owens’ (2009) investigation is especially interested in the site where loss of these rehabilitative efforts takes place—the college classroom. Noting the pervasive stigmas associated with a criminal record, this paper suggests that college education helps reduce recidivism by working as a mechanism to counter the effects of stigma. Indeed, college may function as a means of notable social transformation that is particularly consequential for former prisoners who are looking to find work after incarceration. This paper highlights the experiences of ex-offenders in an effort to understand whether—and how—education matters for formerly incarcerated students. Indeed, for formerly
incarcerated individuals who are looking for work, the question of stigma cannot be overlooked (p. 318). To these ends, Pager (2003) argued that ex-offenders are classified in such a way that makes employers less likely to hire them. Her findings suggest that a criminal record remains a negative and deeply stigmatizing credential, which prohibits ex-offenders' access to gainful employment in the post release labor market.

Importantly, adoption of a credentialing framework allows for theoretical balance and leaves room to consider the mutability of stigmatizing marks in the post release labor market. This paper highlights that framework in order to suggest that college may work as a mechanism for circumventing the negative effects of stigma (Owens, 2009).

Although stigma, overt discrimination, and a shrinking labor market brought about notable challenges to reentry, some studies suggest that college experience helps former prisoners successfully avoid recidivism (Owens, 2009). Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate how college may work as a mechanism for reducing criminal activity. Proposing that college increases former prisoners' access to mainstream opportunities and holds particular implications in the labor market; Owens’ paper revises Lofland's (1969) normal-smith theory to identify a new idea of institution coined: the 'opportunity-smith'. Thematic content analysis of data gathered through interviews with seventeen formerly incarcerated college students suggests that the credentials and skills acquired through college participation help formerly incarcerated individuals successfully face the challenges of reentry.

This investigation sought to uncover those mechanisms that promote such low rates of recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals with college experience.
Ninety-five percent of prisoners will eventually return home and have to navigate the challenges of reentry; but scholars, social service workers, and policy makers, disagree about the best way to work with this growing population. Advancing the idea of the opportunity-smith, this paper reasons that college facilitates social transformations that explain both its viability as an opportunity-generating institution, and how college may work to reduce recidivism by combating direct and indirect stigmas associated with the criminal record; helping account for time lost to incarceration; and providing a means by which participants could pursue quality, gainful employment (Owens, 2009).

The problem of stigma remains a highly nuanced area of sociological inquiry (Owens, 2009). Although participants in this study were looking to work in New York City, where anti-discrimination legislation is supposed to protect people with criminal records, these laws could not shield them from the collateral effects of stigma. Indeed, participants paid informal, social penalties for criminal conviction that held negative implications in the labor market. College-crafted opportunities offer some means of recourse, to the extent that college experience diverts attention from potentially stigmatizing aspects of an ex-offender's identity. When pursuing work, college credentials created opportunities for participants to make other aspects of their identity (in this case educational attainment) salient for employers apart from the criminal record (p. 337). Importantly, college provided former prisoners with a practical way explain time lost to the incarceration, and with a relatable way to signal their interests and abilities to potential employers.
Although it is generally understood that incarceration carries a stigma upon reentry and more so in the labor force, it is equally important to understand that college participation is not a viable option for all formerly incarcerated adults. There have been different attempts to gauge the education and literacy levels of inmates compared to community populations. Harlow's Special Report for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2003) tracked trends in the correctional populations from 1991 to 1997 based primarily on the inmate survey conducted by BJS. There have been two studies published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1994; Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007) that measure the literacy levels of inmates as part of a national assessment of literacy throughout the United States. Literacy was defined for both of these surveys as "Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007, p. iii, Executive Summary). The overall picture that emerges from the NALS and BJS surveys is that prisoners are an undereducated class compared to the community and have lower literacy skills to handle everyday tasks they may confront. Furthermore, both Harlow (2003) and Lynch and Sabol (2001) found that fewer inmates reported receiving educational or vocational programs in 1997 than in 1991; however, the NALS 2007 report shows that a higher percentage of inmates in 2003 than in 1994 either had a GED or high school diploma when entering prison, or had completed the GED while in prison at the time of the interview. In a PCEI – Empowerment program, on the other hand, literacy rates become less of an indicator of future success based on the affective teaching and formative assessment strategies incorporated in the curriculum. Teachers are better
able gauge the best means of assisting the students in societal integration whether the students’ preference is vocational or educational programs.

Owens (2009) ends his argument stating that, clearly, a cohesive political strategy is needed to ameliorate the challenges of mass reentry and incarceration. Postsecondary education is one kind of intervention that can help achieve this goal, at both preventative and rehabilitative levels (p. 338). Owens study suggests that college experience helps formerly incarcerated individuals access quality employment by deploying powerful social symbols that help counter stigma in an increasingly credentials-based economy. Thus, post-secondary education presents the kind of interventionist strategy that working in concert with other equally beneficial opportunities promotes desistance from crime and helps ensure public safety. In this respect, access to college simultaneously aids ex-offenders and the public at large (Owens, 2009).

*Culturally Comparative Educational Reentry Programming*

In a cultural comparison Warner (2007) provides the reader a meta-analysis of research of past and current adult education programs for prisoners in Europe, specifically, Ireland. Early on the author sets forth a three-pronged research question that addresses learning, prisons and prisoners respectively. He asks these three questions to essentially answer only one overarching question: “What is the purpose of prison education?” Warner explains that the research is prompted by a European conference in which researchers address correctional education. The focus of the article was more or less how the prison system is counter-productive in educating prisoners. Warner makes his position clear early on and sets the tone for the article by writing, “How can we judge
education by recidivism rates when even some of these factors are at work? Even in Nordic countries, where the prison systems are among the best, they fully and explicitly recognize the detrimental effects of imprisonment. Why can we not do so in prison systems that falls short of their standards? The negative effects of prisons will be returned to again” (p. 173).

Rather than develop a list of prison education programs within the UK and their effects on the prison population, he looks at the impact of prison on would-be students. Warner also goes so far as to cite the prison itself as a breeding ground for criminal activities as evidenced in his statement that, “The presumption seems to be made that we can measure the impact of programs because the rest of the prison regime is neutral in its effects. But such a presumption seems naive in the extreme, for it is clear that prison, far from being neutral, is generally in itself criminogenic - by the very act of imprisoning someone you add to the chances that he or she will commit further crime” (Warner, 2007).

Furthermore, the research methodology used in this article was not clearly articulated, however, the author did provide a thorough synthesis of the literature and clearly articulated why he used the data that he used. Though generally, it is not enough to show that prisons are inhumane and education in that regard may not serve its intended purpose. The strength of the article is that the author did provide evidence to support each of his claims. He also clearly pointed out some of the inconsistencies in the classes offered to inmates and their subsequent ability to use the information to their benefit upon release. But what the author did not include was specific examples of programs working
or otherwise. He also did not provide any recommendations as to how to help create more relevant programs for prisoners in the future.

Jane Alcala, the Resource Officer for the U.S. District courts in Inglewood, CA has been working with federal probationers for over five years. She began working with her clients prior to release in Adult Basic Education classes that had a “strong emphasis” on the life skills necessary to make participants successful upon reentry. According to Alcala (Interview, 2009), “you can never really be sure if your program is working until about three years after they are “off-paper” [probation or parole]. It’s really a situation where you just have to wait and see.” If this is the case, then Warner (2007) is correct in his assertion that there is no direct answer to the question, what works? When discussing the strengths and weakness of Alcala’s current ABE courses, she goes on to say that, “that the profound weakness in the program is that they are in jail while they are taking the classes. There is no way to say if the students are there because they want to be or because they have nothing better to do? Either way, at least they’re learning something in meantime, right?” Alcala’s current case load consists of approximately 120 probationers with 35 more being released within the next 60-120 days. Of this population of 155 approximately 98% are African American. She works with males and females yet she maintains that the African American males are overrepresented (Alcala, 2009).

**Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiatives**

The literature regarding the effectiveness of prisoner reentry, including Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiatives SVORI-style programs is still emerging however the results to date from these few studies have been promising. For instance,
Seiter and Kadela (2003) examined the effectiveness of various activities designed to facilitate prisoners’ community reentry. In particular, they measured the empirical evidence presented in published research studies of high scientific rigor on various efforts to smooth prisoner reentry including those aimed at: (1) Vocational and work programs, (2) drug rehabilitation, (3) educational programs, (4) sex offender and violent offender programs, (5) halfway house programs, and (6) prison pre-release programs.

Results from Seiter and Kadel’s (2003) review indicated that vocational and work release programs effectively reduced prisoner recidivism and enhanced job skills among released inmates. Graduates of drug rehabilitation programs were less likely than non-completers or their counterparts who did not take part in the program, to violate parole, continue drug use, or commit an offense under the influence of the drug. While educational programs were found to increase educational achievement scores, they generally failed to reduce recidivism rates. Halfway house programs on the other hand, were successful in decreasing future offense incidence and severity, and pre-release program attendees were less likely to recidivate than their counterparts who did not receive the curriculum. Taxman and her colleagues (2002) also noted that few if any existing evaluations of the newly developed adult prisoner reentry programs exist. Yet despite this lack of empirical knowledge on the new generation of well-coordinated SVORI-type programs, Taxman and colleagues provide a review of the existing scientific literature related to various reentry program components (e.g., matching offenders to relevant and appropriate treatment, using the criminal justice system to coerce offenders into participating in treatment). They conclude that while few comprehensive program
evaluations of reentry initiatives have been published to date, there is good reason to expect, based on what is known about the individual components of reentry programs, that they should be effective in transitioning offenders back to the community and in helping them avoid recidivism.

The Bouffard and Bergeron (2006) article focuses mainly on the effectiveness of the State of North Dakota’s SVORI program on “in-program” and “post-parole” recidivism. The findings reported in this article are the result of a comprehensive evaluation of this SVORI program’s operation and its impact on recidivism for all program participants dating back to the start of this reentry initiative in 2003 (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006). The data collection and evaluation activities included a review of written program materials, as well as personal interviews with reentry and other criminal justice system personnel. In addition, information about offender participation in the program was collected from a database maintained by the reentry program coordinator (a state parole officer), which includes information such as sentence length, current offense, offender demographics and treatment services to which participants were referred, as well as those that they completed (both in the institution and in the community after release). Similar information on the comparison sample was collected from the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s (DOCR) computerized case management systems.

Despite recent attention to the development and implementation of SVORI-style reentry programs around the country, there is as yet a lack of published evaluation research examining the effectiveness of these interventions (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006, p. 7). Given that considerable state and federal funds are being expended to develop these
programs, evaluations which demonstrate their effectiveness are crucial to determining whether these efforts are being successful, especially in terms of reducing recidivism among the serious and violent offenders who are targeted by these programs.

This evaluation examines 71 SVORI participants and 106 comparable offenders who did not participate in these enhanced reentry services, but rather received traditional pre-release services prior to being paroled (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006). This SVORI program targets serious and violent offenders returning to a single urbanized (Cass) county, while comparison offenders were released to other counties within the state (also among the more urbanized counties in this state, e.g., Burleigh County, ND) which were not targeted for these enhanced services.

All reentry participants were required to meet six specific eligibility criteria. For instance, all reentry participants were required to be between the ages of 18 and 35 years of age at the time of involvement in the reentry program. They also were required to have a current offense or history of violent crime which meets program definitions for serious and/or violent crime (e.g., weapons offenses, robbery, aggravated assault, stalking, etc.) (Bouffard & Bergeron, 2006). The average age of reentry participants was 25.6 years, compared with 25.8 years for the traditional parolees. Further, 85.9% of participants in the reentry initiative were male, as compared with 84.0% in the comparison group.

Further, 81.7% of the reentry sample was Caucasian, 9.9% Native American, and 4.2% African American, and 4.2% Hispanic offenders.

While the current study examines a comparatively small SVORI program serving inmates returning to a modest-sized urban area (Fargo, ND) it is still important in that it
is one of the first efforts to examine the impact of this type of intervention on recidivism. Specifically, this article reports on the impact of SVORI participation on officially recorded, in-program and post-parole re-arrest rates using a quasi-experimental design to compare these reentry offenders with a comparable sample of offenders released without enhanced reentry services (i.e., on traditional parole).

The results of Bouffard and Bergeron’s (2006) study, in general reveal that reentry participants were referred to five or more program types on average and participated in over four of them each, for an 80% participation rate in community programming. In summary, it is clear that reentry participants are referred to more programs in the community than are traditionally supervised offenders and that they participate in a large percentage of these programs/services (nearly 80%) (p. 18). Further analyses of the rates at which individuals from each group actually participated in specific types of programs generally reveal that reentry-involved offenders were less likely to have participated in most of the specific programs examined here relative to offenders in the comparison sample. In particular, among those reentry participants referred to each of these program types, they were significantly less likely to have participated in chemical dependency aftercare treatment, anger management, employment services, and mental health services than were comparison group offenders.

Even in terms of social service or treatment programs it could be argued that a PCEI could better prepare ex-offenders for their transition into those programs as well. The Empowerment components allow students to prepare themselves emotionally for what could be a trying experience.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In this chapter the theoretical framework(s) will show how Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy/Liberatory Pedagogy, and Social Identity Theory are important in developing PCEI Empowerment Curriculum. Specifically, I will show how these theories were used to implement a curriculum that allowed instructors to acknowledge the racial disparities in education and the prison system while providing an atmosphere that would allow students to readjust to society as an ex-offender, in an environment that is safe and free from judgment. Social Identity Theory is most appropriate in this effort to gain an understanding of how these individuals perceive their criminal justice status as a barrier to educational and vocational attainment and how their perceptions of their social status pre- and post-incarceration informs their perception of their ability to succeed outside of prison.

Critical Race Theory

Incorporating Critical Race Theory as a lens in implementing a PCEI Empowerment Curriculum to formerly incarcerated adults could be used to help oppressed people of color to articulate and voice their own counter-narratives, in order to combat the falsely neutral, colorblind, and dominant narratives of mainstream American society (Gillborn, 2006). As Tate et al. (1993) writes, “The elements that characterize
Critical Race Theory are difficult to reduce to discrete descriptions, largely because critical race theorists are attempting to integrate their experiential knowledge into moral and situational analysis of the law” (p. 210). Nevertheless, a relatively consistent set of tenets, or themes, emerges. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), these include:

1. Racism is commonplace, and colorblind conceptions of equality will only address the most egregious forms of individual-based racism, rather than structural inequalities between social groups.

2. “‘White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes’” via the notion of interest convergence. Most anti-racist reforms are expected to only happen incrementally, and only when they also serve the interests of white elite.

3. Race is socially constructed and historically embedded.

4. In contemporary American society, the unique voice of color serves important purposes.

Alongside its firm stance against notions of racial essentialism, CRT contends that the social realities of people of color nevertheless give them experiences, voices, and viewpoints that are likely to be different from mainstream, dominant narratives (Crenshaw et al., 1995). It therefore becomes imperative that people of color advance their own counter-narratives, often via storytelling modes that fall outside the usual confines of academic discourse.

Perhaps the most relevant appropriation of CRT to educators comes from Marvin Lynn’s (1999) writings where he articulates a critical race paradigm of education to benefit our “racially and culturally subordinated students” (p. 615) - there is arguably no
student more subordinate than the formerly incarcerated African American male.

Based on the findings of his ethnographic study of eight African-American pedagogues committed to social justice agendas (p. 612), Lynn came away with four general issues that are remarkably similar to the basic premises of CRT: “the endemic nature of racism in the United States; the importance of cultural identity; the necessary interaction of race, class, and gender; and the practice of a liberatory pedagogy” (p. 615).

By all indications, drawing upon the theoretical framework of CRT may be a viable approach for shattering the deep institutional oppression that resides within our educational system. Not only does this deep institutional racism exist in our educational system, it also exists in our criminal justice system (Stovall, 2005). In that regard, ex-offenders, specifically African Americans, are criminalized to both ends-within the justice system and in education.

**Social Identity Theory**

Social identity on the other hand is a theory formed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1959) to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. It is composed of four elements:

- **Categorization**: We often put others (and ourselves) into categories. Labeling someone.
- **Identification**: We also associate with certain groups (our in-groups), which serves to bolster our self-esteem.
- **Comparison**: We compare our groups with other groups, seeing a favorable bias toward the group to which we belong.
- Psychological Distinctiveness: We desire our identity to be both distinct from and positively compared with other groups.

I am using the term “social identity” to refer specifically to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships. In the above definition of empowerment, one important aspect is that students are allowed to redefine who they are (speaking in their own voice) (Reid, Giles & Harwood, 2005).

Social Identity Theory (1959) is a diffuse but interrelated group of social psychological theories concerned with when and why individuals identify with, and behave as part of, social groups, adopting shared attitudes to outsiders. It is also concerned with what difference it makes when encounters between individuals who are perceived as encounters between group members. Social Identity Theory is thus concerned both with the psychological and sociological aspects of group behavior.

Reacting against individualistic explanations of group behavior on one hand, and tendencies to reify the group on the other, Tajfel (1979) sought an account of group identity that held together both society and individual (Moghaddam, 1994). Tajfel (1979) first sought to differentiate between those elements of self-identity derived from individual personality traits and interpersonal relationships (personal identity) and those elements derived from belonging to a particular group (social identity). Each individual is seen to have a repertoire of identities open to them (social and personal), each identity informing the individual of who he is and what this identity entails. Tajfel then postulated that social behavior exists on a spectrum from the purely interpersonal to the purely intergroup (Moghaddam, 1994). Where personal identity is salient, the individual will
relate to others in an interpersonal manner, dependent on their character traits and any personal relationship existing between the individuals. However, under certain conditions social identity is more salient than personal identity in self-conception and that when this is the case behavior is qualitatively different: it is group behavior. Social identities... are associated with normative rights, obligations and sanctions which, within specific collectivities, form roles.

I will use Social Identity Theory in an effort to gain an understanding of how these individuals perceive race as a barrier to educational and vocational attainment and how their perceptions of their social status pre- and post-incarceration informs their perception of their ability to succeed in an academic setting. I addition, I will use Critical Race Theory to inform the pedagogy and curriculum development.

Again, referencing Case and Fastenfast (2005), African American ex-offenders were apt to shun the idea of additional education. The common consensus in that study was that the participants found the education they received in prior and in-prison education worthless, to some degree, and did not see a direct connection to employment acquisition, the ultimate end for them post-incarceration.

SIT primarily looks at the perception of the student, but does not provide a thorough application process when developing a post correctional educational curriculum. In looking at the development of the pilot program summary and the summaries provided in the background section you will find the similarities in the perspectives of the African American participants. In both programs African American
ex-offenders tend to see the attainment of education as an obstacle rather than an opportunity.

In that regard SIT would be essential in assisting researchers in gaining an understanding of how this type of “group think” can contribute to the perceptions of education by ex-offenders. Were these notions held by the individuals prior to incarceration or did admittance into the “prisoner” intergroup inform their identity to such a degree that they began to take on beliefs that were commonly assigned to that group?

Social and racial discrimination was also an indicator of how the student participants identified themselves. The concept of affective reactions to identity must be taken into consideration when attempting to understand reactionary anger due to discrimination. The Hansen and Sassenberg (2006) article shows how research of affective reactions to social discrimination has not yet addressed self- and other-directed anger at the same time. Four studies tested the hypothesis that the perceived cause of negative feedback moderates the impact of social identification on self-directed anger. In Studies 1 and 2, high levels of social identification led to less self-directed anger when negative feedback was attributed to social discrimination but not when it was attributed either to other external causes or internally. In Study 3, a cross-lagged design showed that higher identification led to less self-directed anger when negative feedback was attributed to social discrimination but not the other way around. This effect was found using scenarios (Studies 1-3) and also when using the recollection of personal experiences to manipulate attribution (Study 4). These results indicate that following social
discrimination, social identification protects the self and does not increase individual vulnerability (p. 983).

So far, contradictory findings do not allow us to determine the exact impact of social identification (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; McCoy & Major, 2003). Therefore, researchers felt that it would be worthwhile to investigate the consequences of anger and the moderation by social identification. In sum, the goal of the current research was to gain a better understanding of the affective reaction following social discrimination by investigating the impact of (a) different causal attributions of a negative treatment and (b) social identification on self- and other-directed anger (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006).

To be called social discrimination, the researchers provided an operational definition of social discrimination to include, a negative treatment fulfilled by two criteria besides being negative: (a) it needs to be perceived as illegitimate by the target and (b) its expression is based on the target’s group membership (Crocker & Major, 1989). Individuals who are targets of social discrimination are faced with attributional ambiguity. They can attribute the negative treatment to different causes: either to prejudice or to their own responsibility (e.g., Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991). Crocker and Major (1989; Crocker et al., 1991) assume that attributions to prejudice are external attributions because another person behaved in a prejudiced manner. In contrast, Schmitt and Branscombe (2002a, 2000b) suggest that attributions to prejudice have not only an external but also an internal component: the prejudiced perpetrator behaving illegitimately as external cause and the target’s group membership triggering the
perpetrator’s behavior as an internal cause. The latter aspect of the attribution is internal because by means of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) the group is part of the self. To be able to differentiate between these two assumptions concerning the external and internal components of an attribution to prejudice, it is necessary to investigate if and how the impact of negative treatment attributed to prejudice differs (due to its internal component) from the impact of exclusively externally attributed causes for negative treatment. Such an exclusively external cause would be merely inappropriate behavior of another person that is unrelated to one’s group membership. Member of the formerly incarcerated in-group can often be victims of discrimination within and outside of the prison system, therefore the negative treatment defined by Hansen and Sassenberg (2010) would apply to this population.

Regarding the design of a study, besides a condition of attribution to prejudice and a condition of attribution to exclusively external causes, a condition of a pure internal attribution (own responsibility) should be included in the comparison to test for differences between all three conditions. Because an attribution to prejudice fulfills the criteria of social discrimination—the negative and illegitimate treatment being due to the target’s group membership—in the following, we will refer to this condition as “social discrimination.” In conclusion, in line with Schmitt and Branscombe (2002a), we assume that an attribution to social discrimination has an external as well as an internal component (i.e., the target’s group membership). Therefore, an appropriate test of the impact of social identification on anger should include three conditions: (a) social
discrimination versus (b) external attribution versus (c) internal attribution. (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2010)

In a series of four studies, researchers investigated the impact of different types of attribution on self- and other directed anger. Moreover, they examined how different types of attribution moderate the impact of social identification on self-directed anger (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2010).

In Studies 1 to 3, participants were told that another ingroup member received negative feedback due to different causes. This information manipulated the three types of attribution: (a) an attribution to social discrimination (i.e., attribution to one’s group membership), (b) an external attribution (i.e., attribution to the source of feedback), and (c) an internal attribution (i.e., attribution to the person’s own behavior) as a control condition. In Study 4, a different paradigm was used by asking participants to recall a situation in which they personally had experienced a negative treatment. This different paradigm was used to also test our predictions using real personal experiences. Two different social categories were used (i.e., gender in Studies 1 and 4, university affiliation in Studies 2 and 3). The design of Studies 1, 2, and 4 were cross-sectional. In Study 3, a cross-lagged design was used to investigate the causal direction (p. 985).

Their research was aimed at investigating the impact of social identification on affective reactions to social discrimination by differentiating, first, between the results of all four studies support Schmitt and Branscombe’s (2002a) prediction concerning the buffering effect of social identification. In line with Schmitt and Branscombe, we believe that it is the “group within the self” that drives this effect. This buffering effect not only protects against depressed emotions, as has been shown in earlier research, but also against self-directed anger. Going beyond depressed emotions and self-directed anger in situ, several studies have shown a long-term positive relation between social
identification and well-being among members of stigmatized groups (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O’Connell, & Whalen, 1989). In a similar vein, research on cutting-off-reflected-failure (COREing) has demonstrated that following a lost game, highly identified fans of a basketball team strive to distance themselves to a lesser extent from their negatively viewed team compared to low identifiers (Wann & Branscombe, 1990). They do not use the self-protective coping strategy to ward off the threat (i.e., the lost game) to their social selves because their social identification serves as a buffer. In line with these results, we believe that social identification has this positive effect because the ingroup serves as a source of social and emotional support. According to Crocker and Major (1989), attributions to social discrimination do not inevitably have negative consequences for the self. This seems to be true, but only for highly identified individuals (p. 996).

Researchers concluded that, the present findings demonstrate that when experiencing social discrimination, high levels of social identification buffer the individual insofar as high identification decreases self-directed anger. These results are a further step toward a better understanding of the impact of social identification on the targets’ affective reactions when facing an incident of social discrimination and open avenues for further research on behavioral reactions of individuals belonging to stigmatized groups. Branscombe’s (2002a) prediction concerning the buffering effect of social identification.

Furthermore, they found that it is likely that the perception and appraisal of a situation as an incident of social discrimination might be different depending on the level
of social identification that in turn is driving this effect. Lowly identified individuals, who do not consider the group central for their selves, might have a more individualistic perspective on the situation. Therefore, they might feel more responsible for the negative feedback and in turn show higher levels of self-directed anger. Also, they might use temporal comparisons with themselves in other situations, whereas highly identified individuals make use of intragroup comparisons to a larger extent (Kessler, Mummendey, & Leisse, 2000; Zagefka & Brown, 2005). Thus, for them, the negative experience might be limited to only one ingroup member.

So far, research has mostly studied the impact of social discrimination on depressed emotions (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Major et al., 2002). The unique contribution of the current research is to include Weiner’s (1985) notion of the direction of affect. The two directions—self-directed versus other directed anger—elicit different behavioral reactions. Other-directed anger is likely to trigger action tendencies toward the perpetrator of discrimination (e.g., Mackie et al., 2000), whereas self-directed anger is less likely to elicit this type of action tendencies. Hence, further research also should examine action tendencies resulting from self-directed anger following individual experiences of social discrimination.

**Critical Race Theory (Counternarratives) and Critical Pedagogy**

In *The Constitutional Contradiction* (2005), Derrick Bell argues that the framers of the U.S. Constitution chose the rewards of property over equality and justice. Racial realism, according to Bell, is both the acceptance of the permanence of racism and a challenge to racial equality. Bell believes that the pursuit of racial equality is futile in a
societal structure in which African Americans are permanently on the bottom. Bell argues that Racial Realist should adopt a strategy that acknowledges the permanence of racism but agitates for equity. Bell's insights cast traditional racial discourse in a different, more critical light.

In light of the tenants of CRT and the subsequent statistics outlining the blatant and sometimes subtle racism within America’s criminal justice system, it stands to reason that the most highly criminalized population of the United States could benefit from an educational intervention designed to not only acknowledge the existence of such an unbalanced playing field but also include thoughtful and relevant subject matter that would serve to enhance the students ability to participate in a society that seems to demonstrate an unwillingness to play fairly.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) forces scholars to look beyond well-intentioned rhetoric and liberal notions of equality. Instead, it suggests that we should examine the everyday practices, patterns of inequality, and results of real-life struggles for racial justice. In the context of education policy, this means community organizing should be an integral component of policy-making, as this is how people of color might get a chance to voice their vision of what good pedagogy and education looks like (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). In this sense, it stands to reason that these interventions should not be implemented in a traditional academic setting. Rather, these programs would be implemented in partnership with a local community based organization that could also provide additional social and economic services.
Although CRT began as legal scholarship, its applications in education policy were apparent from the beginning. Bell’s (1979) work on Brown v. Board of Education, for instance, contended that the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision for racial desegregation in the public schools was structured in such a way that did not seriously threaten dominant interests. Thus, its limited impact could have easily been predicted via CRT (Bell, 1979, 1980, 1987). Brown v. Board of Education not only failed to break away from patterns of interest convergence, but it also prevented people of color from shaping education policy by withholding financial resources and governance control (Su, 2007).

CRT could be used to analyze how education organizing groups can help oppressed people of color to articulate and voice their own counter-narratives, in order to combat the falsely neutral, colorblind, and dominant narratives of mainstream American society (Gillborn, 2006). Critical Race Theory forces scholars to look beyond well-intentioned rhetoric and liberal notions of equality. Instead, it suggests that we should examine the everyday practices, patterns of inequality, and results of real-life struggles for racial justice. In the context of education policy, this means community organizing should be an integral component of policy-making, as this is how people of color might get a chance to voice their vision of what good pedagogy and education looks like (Tate, Ladson-Billings, & Grant, 1993). In this sense, it stands to reason that these interventions should not be implemented in a traditional academic setting. Rather, these programs would be implemented in partnership with a local community based organization that could also provide other social and economic services.
Yet, a common critique of CRT is the contention that the theory has been much stronger at criticizing pervasive racism in major institutions (such as public education) than in forwarding potential remedies. Some have even argued that CRT is essentially nihilistic in its pessimism (Rosen, 1996); in response, CRT scholars point to the many remedies they have helped to forward (Delgado, 1988; Yamamoto, 1997). It also limits this research in the sense that it can only be an asset in the programmatic sense, it can inform the research, in that, it shows that there is inherent racism in the academy and other large social institutions but it does not give much insight into the participant’s perception of self and society. However, because it is understood that racism exists in this context, implementing this teaching modality can serve as a way to increase the self-concept of the participant during and after its inception.

Instead, post-incarceration, these same students can have an educational experience that is heavily influenced by their experiences pre- and post-incarceration. Their stories, whether they are considered negative or positive can serve as a tool to help them work through many of the psycho-social traumas that were experienced throughout their lives. In addition, some sense of purpose can be gained allowing these students to work within their communities in order to mend relationships that may have been damaged due to their criminal exploits or even build new relationships as a free person, without the stigma of being a prisoner.

Paulo Freire’s (1968) concept of Liberatory Pedagogy enhances the instructor’s ability to implement lessons developed using CRT, especially in terms of lesson planning. Because the PCEI is an intervention developed for the purposes of
empowering students, the power dynamics between teacher and student must be eliminated. With the employment of lessons that require the student’s voices to be heard, the culture of silence must also be eliminated.

Freire’s (1968) concept of a culture of silence suggests that, every person, however ignorant or submerged in the "culture of silence," can look critically at his or her world through a process of dialogue with others, and can gradually come to perceive his personal and social reality, think about it, and take action in regard to it. He goes on to explain that, through the process just described, the view of an illiterate or other oppressed person is so transformed that he or she is no longer to be a mere object responding as surrounding social forces direct. In terms of empowerment educational approaches to curriculum development, the curriculum can either condition the younger generation into acceptance of society's status quo or becomes "the practice of freedom" through which people deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to transform their worlds (p. 15).

Freire (1968) argues that it if given a bit of power, at first the oppressed tend themselves to become petty tyrants. "Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity. They are still identified with their oppressors' values. The peasant who becomes a foreman may be harsher toward the other peasants than the owner. The context of the situation remains unchanged” (p. 30). Because it is the nature of the oppressor, which in this context is the traditional educator, to attempt to dominate the student which also dehumanizes both parties and stifles their humanity, the oppressed has to lead the struggle for a fuller humanity for both. Freire
(1968) suggests that, [t]he oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he
dehumanizes others, tries to hang onto his power in dehumanizing practices (p. 32). This
statement holds true particularly for educators who work with prison populations. It is
important to not further criminalize student upon reentry and empower them through
education in a manner that will not employ strategies for the student to attempt to
“overpower” or dominate other when they regain their own sense of power. It is in this
way that, the contradiction between the two classes is resolved by the appearance of a
new kind of human being, one in the process of liberation. It’s not possible to eliminate
oppression just by a shift of roles in which the oppressor becomes the oppressed and
vice-versa (p. 42). In such change we can't say that one person liberates himself, or
another, but that people in communion liberate each other (p. 128).

Because of the background of formerly incarcerated African American males,
dehumanization, which afflicts both those whose humanity has been stolen and those who
have stolen it, distorts the process of becoming more fully human (Freire, 1968). Which
makes it necessary to creates lesson that are designed to fully engage the students and
therefore attempt to restore the “humanity” that may have been lost while incarcerated. It
would be in this type of educational implementation that the student begins to get courage
to overcome his dependence when he realizes that he is dependent. Until then, he goes
along with the boss and says, "What can I do? I'm only a peasant” (Freire, 1968), or in
more recent cases, I’m only a student, convict, Black man, etc. This type of
institutionalization or socialization is especially common amongst inmates which in-turn
can lead to a state of self-depreciation (Freire, 1968). Freire points out that, this derives
from internalization of the oppressors' opinions. The educator seems to be the only one who knows things and is able to run things” (p. 50). However, in an empowerment curriculum, the students voice is as important, if not more so, than the instructor, therefore an opportunity for a self-depreciation change or shift in identity is possible.

In terms of Critical Race Theory and personal narratives, Freire’s (1968) insistence that in order to substitute monologue, slogans, and communiqués for dialogue is to attempt to liberate the oppressed with the instruments of domestication" (p. 52). While no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others (Freire, 1968).

In an empowerment curriculum, communication is key because through dialogue new terms emerge. The students, while being taught, also teach. "They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." Here "arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid [and] authority must be on the side of freedom, no against it. No one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught." We teach each other, mediated by the world (Freire, 1968). "The educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflections of the students [who] are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. Problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality, the emergence of consciousness, and critical intervention in reality (Freire, 1968). This is education as the practice of freedom rather than the practice of domination.
Critical Pedagogy

In a society, which ostensibly promotes homogeneity, it is easy to consider adult education simply in terms of skills and activities (Ferdman, 1990). Yet adult education around the world (e.g., Brazil, Cuba, Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea-Bissau) has been venues for consciousness raising aimed at human liberation (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Moreover, beyond the formal classroom and closer to home, African American community education may provide adults a space to counter the master narrative, recover silenced consciousness and “facilitate their ability to articulate what they do and think about in order to provide a foundation for autonomous action” (Fasheh, 1990).

Within the field of education, the master narrative is affiliated with the process of assimilation which is imposed upon learners of color, requiring conformity to the status quo and silencing a diversity of knowledge and opinion. The master narrative is conveyed via stereotypes, communiqué, and ideology which objectify persons of color as inherently weak, devoid of power and voice, and incapable of positively contributing to the larger society (Aguirre, 2005). African American community education can act as a vehicle by which to interrogate these master narratives. Further, this type of adult education empowers learners to gain skills to assess the social and political contradictions and injustices of society, and assert action in addressing those contradictions and injustices. Education ceases to be solely for individual advancement, but “it becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated, as the individual transacts with the socioculturally fluid surroundings” (Ferdman, 1990). Once new ways of seeing the world are learned and acted upon, it is from this adult population that emerge resistance to and
transformation of societal structures (Welton, 1987, as cited in Mayo, 1999). This type of educational experience mirrors Paulo Freire’s (1968) work with Brazilian disenfranchised poor. Freire’s work not only encouraged adults to acquire knowledge and skills in order to navigate a growing literate world but he also encouraged a type of community education that was situated in the societal concerns of the learner’s community. Moreover, resolutions for these concerns were located within the same community (p. 25). Utilizing a critical pedagogical model, Freire (2000) encouraged: social action by the learner against those oppressive elements that impact the civil liberation of people, the learner to question the status quo, and employment of the learner’s voice in articulating reflection and liberatory social action. (Friere, 2000)

Critical pedagogy is an instructional approach to teaching that employs a theoretical framework by which social injustices (e.g., discriminatory practices based on class, or race or gender or privilege—indeed any systematic form of oppression) are critiqued (McKay, 2010). Subsequently, the learner’s life experiences and new uncovered knowledge are engaged in order to generate individual and societal transformation. The model mandates that the instructor take risks to address the unjust dominant themes and practices within society via reflective and action-oriented instruction. This type of pedagogy encourages the learner to critique obstructions to the learner’s full participation in society (e.g., labor exploitation, economic stratification, and social marginalization), and encourages critical collective action, through the engagement of the learner’s experiential knowledge and social agency in society (p. 26).
Critical pedagogy, however, falls flat in addressing racially oppressive practices due to its shortsightedness on the intersectionality of race and class. In response to this shortsightedness, Critical Race Theory emerged to address specific social, political, educational, and economic concerns of race (Ladson-Billings, 1997). When critical pedagogy and critical race theory (CRT) act in concert, adult education gives stage to the voice of the learner. CRT challenges governance based on the interpretive structure of socially constructed reality that is disconnected from the individual’s reality. Therefore, CRT encourages a method of naming one’s reality, by use of storytelling and counternarratives. Counternarratives act as a tool to: challenge the perceived wisdom of subscribers of a dominant culture by providing a context to understand and transform an established belief system; and (2) open new windows into the reality of marginalized citizens by showing them the possibilities beyond where they live, and the shared aims of their struggle. Moreover, the use of “voice” in education research is critical; conveying personal thoughts, feelings, desires and politics. It engages the reader to infer his or her own interpretations to the data (Dana, 2005). It is the interaction between voice of the participant and the interpretation of the reader that mirrors an exercise in critical pedagogy and celebrates the storytelling and counternarratives of Critical Race Theory. Affirmation and assertion of voice and the notion of love for self and others is critical in furthering any collective effort toward social justice (p. 32). The very success of community education within an African American setting is based on how these elements are engaged, and the strengths and wisdom of the learners are affirmed and utilized (Keeling, 1993). Kharem (2006) asserts that “culture gives people group identification
and builds on shared experiences, creating a collective personality. It represents the values that are created by the group out of shared knowledge as a methodical set of ideas into a single coherent affirmation” (p. 14). Yet often in educational settings, the lack of acknowledgement of these cultural strengths coupled with an air of superiority from the instructor or community program complicates the power of the community and its members. When banking instructional approaches are utilized, learner’s voices, culture and consciousnesses are silenced and dismissed.

And historically, for the African American learner to be silenced in the educational setting is all too common. Part of the African American experience represents a people who have been denied a useful past (Dana, 2005). As colonization occurred, many languages and traditions were lost or repressed. A critical view of African American history seeks to recover repressed memory and subjugated knowledge, and then to explore the influence of such repression on the life of the present (Kincheloe, 1993).

Race is socially constructed for the purpose of ranking and dominating (Apple, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1997) so “African American identity” originates from a fictional ideology. This fact does not negate the idea of African Americans as a people, but it does locate the notion of African American identity within an American historical mythology (Shelby, 2005). Influenced by the work of Franz Fanon, Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan (1985) affirms that American history is deformed by absences and denials of the contributions of African Americans. Therefore the entire national American identity is incomplete and fragmented. This fragmented identity lends itself to an impaired and repressed capacity
for intelligence, competence and informed action of the American citizen. The politicization of the African American identity is one remedy in addressing this fragmentation. Shelby (2005) advocates for the creation of a non-separatist political solidarity formed not only based on a thin or even thick notion of African American identity, but through the struggle of (1) improving conditions for those individuals oppressed on account of their race; (2) receiving relief from the burdens of racial inequality and ghetto poverty; and (3) and encouraging greater political participation in our multicultural polity (p. 34).

Derrick Bell (1987) iterates a dangerous truth that African Americans “cannot purge self-hate without nurturing black pride through teaching designed to show that the racism of Whites, rather than the deficiencies of Blacks, causes our lowly position in this society” (p. 229). Reminiscent to Bell’s healing sessions in And We Are Not Saved (1987); the course seeks to uncover hidden facts concerning the strengths and wealth of the African American community. These African American elders have experienced overt and covert racism within their childhood and early adult classrooms, many of whom are only two generations removed from slavery. The notion of ownership of self emerges from the discussion. Mrs. Son poses a question to the group, “Are you free?” implying an individual’s ownership of self. Critiquing apathy currently found in the African American community, she asserts: If they could do all those things that they did back there and they had to hide to read, the opportunity that we have now to do the things that we should be doing that we are not doing. That is having our own stuff. We as a race of colored people we should have our own resources… I could bake cakes and pies so I could have had a
business. And the people of color that did and do have businesses, some of them are going out of business. I would like in our community we would have our own business. Instead we will go to other businesses where they will follow us around.

McKay (2010) concluded in her research that, the use of critical pedagogy and critical race theory gives learners permission to embrace their counternarratives. Moreover, educational movements for resistance must start with reconstructing the internal narrative of the oppressed (Clark & Brown, 1996; Freire, 2000; Horton & Freire, 1990; Horton et al., 1998), before there can be substantial social action. As highlighted within the SALT community education program (see Chapter II), knowledge of African American heritage and questioning the powers that would obfuscate this knowledge is a prerequisite to social action. Through their storytelling, the SALT participants embark on small gradations of social action, in hopes of raising the consciousness of their listeners. Furthermore, acknowledging the power of voice, counternarratives can deconstruct demoralizing learned curriculum and reconstruct a curriculum that gives utterance to silenced consciousnesses (McKay, 2010).
CHAPTER IV
METHODS

Introduction

In order to study the effects of the Post-Incarceration Education Intervention this study investigates; in what ways the PCEI Empowerment Curriculum of the City Transitions Program influences the participants’ perceptions of empowerment? And, in what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the empowerment curriculum of the City Transitions program? I developed this PCEI after collecting research and implementing a “life skills” program for the Federal Department of Probation in 2005. In conversations prior to the development and implementation of the program future participants disclosed in writing to their respective probation officers that they have experienced socio-emotional stresses that surfaced upon their reentry from prison. Moreover, the participants found little value in education subsequent to their incarceration but found more value in obtaining employment regardless of their ability to earn a living wage. There was a disconnect between their understanding of an increase in education and the potential to earn a wage that would accommodate their lifestyle. In that regard, the objective of the curriculum is to provide an educational experience that includes attention to the:

- Narratives and counter-narratives of the students,
- Perceptions of power and empowerment
• Feelings of inadequacy due to social and/or criminal justice status

*Case – Post Incarceration Education Intervention*

*(City Transitions Empowerment Curriculum)*

This research consists of phenomenological case study methodology used to assess how a Post-Correctional Education Intervention Empowerment Curriculum affected the identity and self-concept of the participants. The case is a Post-Correctional Education Intervention (PCEI), a reentry program designed to create an atmosphere of empowerment for the participants. The PCEI was an eight-week curriculum with 60 hours of direct instruction that included social justice, health and wellness and critical thinking teaching modules and methodologies. The class met for 2.5 hours three days per week.

The PCEI was developed with health and wellness and empowerment modules. The health and wellness module was included as an enhancement to the curriculum that allowed the participants to gain an appreciation of the “total-self” and develop an increasingly positive self-image that includes their physical and emotional wellness.

*Research Design*

The design for this research will be a phenomenological case study with the case being a Post-Incarceration Education Intervention Empowerment Curriculum. I will incorporate Stake’s strategies in this study. According to Robert Stake (1995), the case is usually selected because of something particularly interesting going on within that environment. One possible outcome is the discovery of a petite generalization limited to a particular context or grand generalizations that can be developed into a theory, although
these are not the central goals of case study research. Stake defines the goals of the case study as a detailed study of the case as a self-contained entity. He writes:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to know how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is an emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (p. 8).

In order to gain an accurate understanding of the perceptions of participants of this research case study methodology is most appropriate. According to Stake (1995), we are interested in a case for both their uniqueness and commonality. An innovative program may be a case; and the case is a specific, complex functioning thing. This case is unique in the sense that it:

- is the only Muslim-run transition house in Chicago;
- has a target population of African American men who have converted to Islam while incarcerated;
- is the only transition house in Chicago that offers free housing, in addition to educational assistance, job counseling and Islamic education to its residents upon release.

With that in mind, researchers will use phenomenological research methods that address the meaning and “essence” or crucial elements of the participants lived experiences.
**Phenomenology**

In order to properly utilize this methodology, the data sources include; journal entries, field notes and individual interviews. This triangulation strategy will be useful in interpreting words (written and oral) and actions (behaviors). The participant’s experiences with the PCEI are the core of the research itself and must be understood in context in order for researcher to make the proper assessment of the effectiveness of the curriculum. The importance of deciphering inconsistencies or commonalities of the words and actions of students could prove beneficial in understanding the student’s perceptions of the instruction they are given and activities that they choose to participate in throughout the course. It may also lend to a more thorough understanding of the effectiveness of the affective teaching strategies if the behaviors in the classroom are inconsistent with what is said in interviews or written in journals.

Kvale (1996) remarks with regard to data capturing during the qualitative interview that it “is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,” where researcher attempts to “understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences”. At the root of phenomenology, “the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms— to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998) and allowing the essence to emerge (Cameron, Schaffer & Hyeon-Ae, 2001). The interviews will be designed to capture the fundamental nature of the participants by examining their accounts of lived experiences before, during and after the intervention. In order to understand the student’s progress, assuming the
participants felt a sense of growth after completing the course, it is important for the researchers to be aware of the participant’s life prior to the intervention and after.

**Context**

The Islamic Community Organization (ICO) was formed in 1995 and incorporated in 1997 by Ralph Islam in an effort to work with community members who may have been caught in a cycle of poverty and were in need of assistance including medical and social services. They used the central tenants of Islam and the spiritual ideals of community service, social justice and human compassion to work within a community that was not Muslim. Their mission articulates that ICO is in the community to:

… foster a dynamic and vibrant space for Muslims in Urban America by inspiring the larger community towards critical civic engagement exemplifying prophetic compassion in the work for social justice and human dignity beyond the barriers of religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Our services, organizing and arts agenda stem from our spiritual convictions about community service, human compassion, and social justice, particularly for marginalized people of color. ICO categorizes all of its work to serve and empower disadvantaged individuals and communities within three broad areas:

- Direct Services
- Organizing & Social Justice
- Arts & Culture

After ten years of working in a predominately African American and Latino community of a metropolitan area in the Midwest, stakeholders devised a plan to make ICO a “holistic community organization that offered a range of programming and services while organizing to affect positive social change.” Islam notes that, “while led
by Muslims, ICO sought from the outset to work for and alongside community residents of all ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds: a commitment clearly reflected in the constituency that ICO serves and organizes with through its many programs and projects.”

ICO receives approximately 50% of its funding from the Ummah or Muslim Community members who hold the organization in high regard. In addition to partially funding all of ICO’s programming, as an answer to community outcry and the awareness of the growing number of African American men who converted to Islam while in prison, the Ummah came together to fund the City Transitions Program in its entirety.

In 2005 ICO established the City Transitions Program, a “two-pronged strategy using direct services and advocacy work to address recidivism and public safety in our communities. The goal of City Transitions is to help reduce mass incarceration and provide alternative sentencing for nonviolent drug offenders (retrieved January 2010).” In discussions with the Executive Director, another goal of the program is to decrease the apostasy rates of their participants as well. This program was developed and designed by two men; Ralph Islam (executive director), a Pakistani immigrant living in the Marquette Park neighborhood of Chicago. Islam converted to Islam in his teens and has worked in the community on Islamic awareness since his conversion. And Harry Peters, Coordinator of another community organization and member of ICO’s board of Directors. Peters, a formerly incarcerated African-American Male who converted to Islam in prison found that it was necessary for the organization to assist this population in integrating, not only into society, but also into their former community as a new Muslim.
ICO’s City Transitions Program has been working in a leadership capacity with the Developing Justice Coalition to enact The SMART Act—a bill that allows judges to divert low-level, non-violent drug offenders into county "drug schools." Drug schools have a 15% recidivism rate as opposed to the 55% percent that return to prison. In May 2007, this critical piece of legislation passed unanimously through the Illinois State Senate.

In 2007 ICO introduced its City Transitions Transitional Housing Pilot Program. ICO’s transitional housing facility currently houses five formerly incarcerated Muslim men who are focusing on community service, counseling and job training. The residents are also involved in criminal justice reform work with City Transitions and provide services at ICO’s food pantry.

**Sample**

The participants included: four formerly incarcerated African American males (ages 35 to 53) who were participants in the City Transitions Program. The participants of City Transitions are also residents of the transition house, but not necessarily participants of the umbrella organization ICO and participate on a voluntary basis. The average sentence served by the participants was 19 years for charges that ranged from federal racketeering charges to murder in the first degree. Each of the men are also fathers. Because these men are the first participants to reside in the transition house, they are expected to become the new “leadership” of the program when the founding director leaves his current position. This particular program was chosen because of the transition
of the participants into these leadership positions within the coming months. The empowerment strategies instruction was designed to assist them in this transition.

Instructors were interviewed and asked to submit reflections journals in order find emergent themes. They were chosen after they applied to volunteer for the program. The lead instructor will play a dual role as co-facilitator and researcher in order to provide a more cogent explanation of curriculum development and experiences throughout the course.

Data Generation

Archival Data Sources

Students of this course were assigned weekly readings from the text, The Black Male Handbook, edited by Kevin Powell. Students also engaged in daily class discussions and journal writing. The wellness module included free-writing, instructor-led activities and group discussions. Journal entries were assigned within the last 20 minutes of each class session. Finally, self-assessments were given to student one the first and last class session.

Pre/Post Self-assessment

Participants completed pre- and post-self-assessment instruments that assessed participants’ feelings and/or perceptions of traditional, alternative and higher education prior to and after incarceration. The participant completed those instruments prior to beginning the PCEI and at the culmination.
Journal Entries

Journal entries allowed me to compare what was said in interviews with what was written in journals. This method was important in helping to understand what the student understands or perceives the questions to mean. The journals were given to participants and instructors. The participants were given journal prompts at the end of each class session that allowed them to reflect on the session and based on class discussions and the readings. The instructors received a reflection journal that allowed them to communicate their individual experiences with lesson planning and implementation.

Observational Data

I also used existing observation data from classes and planning meetings in order to get a sense of structural strengths and weaknesses of the program and facilitators. Students were asked to participate in interviews in which the student provide information about their feelings regarding the success or failure of the program, while understanding what they felt were the most important aspects of participation, ie, why they thought it was important, helpful, useful, etc. In addition I used daily journal entries that were prompted by the instructor and in-class written assignments as well as existing video and audio recordings obtained in the implementation of the curriculum.

Evaluations

Finally, participants completed evaluation questions for the class and instructors. The evaluations included 10 questions that the students completed anonymously and in writing. The questions included: strengths and weakness of the class and instructors,
success or failure of lessons, as well as their perceptions of the instructors ability to teach lessons in a relevant manner.

Post-course Data

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants and instructors that were audio-taped. The participants were interviewed three times six months after the course ended. Instructors were also interviewed at the conclusion of the program. The average duration of the interviews were between 45 and 65 minutes. Those interviews had to do with the student’s perceptions of the class, other participants, lessons and instructors. The use of interview data allowed me to:

- obtain descriptions and interpretations of the participants that will allow the interviewer to denote tone and context (Stake, 1995, p. 64);
- discover and portray the multiple views of the participants perceptions of the class and instructors (Stake, 1995, p. 64);
- develop a short list of issue-oriented questions that will assist in disseminating data, interpret results and create recommendations (Stake, 1995. p. 65).

Pilot Program

In 2008 in the local Department of Probation in conjunction with a local community based organization, I created a pilot PCEI program designed for adult men and women who had been released from federal prison in the preceding one to two years. These individuals were in danger of being sanctioned by the federal district courts for non-compliance of their probation. If sanctioned those individuals would be remanded
into court custody and returned to prison in order to serve the remainder of their respective sentence(s). The amount of time served would be dependent on how much time was remaining on their sentence before being released to half-way house supervision. That sentence was usually three to six months. The 10 participants in this program were African American and each had previous youth incarceration records, self-professed negative racial encounters within the criminal justice system, as well as reported negative experiences within traditional educational settings.

The program was incorrectly named a "life skills intervention" program (which could in some circumstances denote a negative interplay between instructors and participants). This course was offered in lieu of returning to prison and designed based on research related to character education and cognitive behavioral methods. These methods were implemented to assist the participant in evaluating his/her ability to successfully re-enter the workforce and/or academic environment. The findings showed that the participants were more apt to look for jobs that did not or could not secure them a living wage rather than increase their academic skill set by reentering school. The common consensus amongst the participants was that further education was unattainable for several reasons including, financial obligations, time constraints, and negative experiences in academic settings. Those findings prompted this subsequent curriculum design and research that focuses on the empowerment of these individuals.
Data Analysis

In general, qualitative data analysis involves making sense of text. However, the qualitative inquirer must tailor analysis beyond the more generic approaches to specific types of qualitative research strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Specifically, the phenomenological researcher analyzes specific statements, generates meaning units, and develops a description that captures the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Data analysis is a journey along an interpretive, critical, and objective path. The responsibility of the phenomenological researcher is to analyze specific statements and themes in a search for meaning (Creswell, 1998). In so doing, the researcher must rely on “intuition, imagination, and universal structures” (p. 52) for a representation of experiential meaning. The researcher while setting aside prejudgments, biases, and perceptions of their personal experiences must accomplish the task of subjective interpretation. For this study, the analytic procedures consisted of the following four phases: (1) storing and organizing data, (2) generating categories and coding data, (3) testing emergent understandings and searching for alternative explanations, and (4) writing the report (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). According to Gall and colleagues (2003), “data analysis in phenomenological research generally follows the procedures of case study analysis ...” (p. 482).

In this study, interview data for each student was analyzed individually in search for emergent themes. These themes were then compared across participants and data sources to identify shared meanings of the student and instructor participants. Individual meanings held by the student participants for the PCEI are discussed in Chapter V and
instructor participants, in Chapter VI. The data analysis was ongoing and took place concurrently with data collection.

For this study, data analysis took place immediately following the first one-on-one interview with a student. Each interview was tape recorded. The first phase of analysis consisted of listening to the interviews at least twice immediately upon concluding the interview and making field notes. The interviews were then sent out to a professional transcription service and transcribed verbatim and read several times in order to obtain a general sense of the information and reflect on its overall meaning. The transcribed data body consisted of 65 pages of transcripts and 43 pages of field notes.

I used AtLas.ti software, a tool designed to aid in qualitative analysis, to assist in the storage, management and organization of the data. I began the second phase of data analysis which consisted of coding and categorizing the data. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (p. 155). The coding process was done electronically using the previously mentioned categories of meaning as my initial codes. My initial codes were empowerment and social identity. Throughout the coding process, I created additional themes as appropriate. This process resulted in an additional eight sub-themes under the code, empowerment; and four sub-themes under the code social-identity.

Throughout the third phase of the data analysis I assessed commonalities and assumptions and examined for outliers; according to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “alternative explanations always exist” (p. 157). And lastly, I determined the usefulness of the data in shedding light on the three research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).
The final phase of the data analysis consisted of a narrative reflection of the data. Writing the report is central to the data analysis process. During this process, I determined the most effective means by which to present the data. In general, the narrative reflects a detailed story of the phenomenon by using the words of the participants to assist in telling of the four African-American male students' stories regarding their experiences in the PCEI - Empowerment Course. The role of the phenomenological researcher in writing the report is to capture of the stories of the participants and the essence of their lived experiences. According to Polkinghorne (1989) the reader of a phenomenological study should come away feeling, “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46). Researchers gave priority to existing data sources, including journal entries, classroom assignments and audio/video recordings. Then interview and self-assessment data sources were analyzed to triangulate the data and validate findings.

**Strengths and Limitations**

The lead instructor participating as a researcher will lend authenticity to the process of developing the findings of this research. This would provide a “thicker” description of the curriculum development process as well as the “feel” of the class and allow the researcher to give the reader a proper of analysis of the entire process – beginning to end. This would not be possible if the researcher was a passive observer that did not interact with the participants or was not involved in the development process.

The use of multiple instructors also allowed the researcher to have a “member check” throughout the life of the research. This is important in further establishing
validity of the findings. Also, the use of volunteer participants ensures that the participants of the research are contributing with no threat of dismissal from the program any other adverse effect and suggests that they would be more apt to provide honest data as it would not benefit them overtly or otherwise not to.

Researcher bias would be a limitation to this particular study. The researcher has worked with formerly incarcerated males and females in the past and is a critic of the current prison industrial complex as well as in-prison education program. In addition, the researcher is also a person who converted to Islam and is also a volunteer of the ICO/City Transitions program. This may cause a level a familiarity with the participants that may not allow an unbiased understanding of context, in terms of interview and self-assessment data.

Additionally, participation as instructor and researcher may present some ethical concerns regarding perceived influence of the participants standing in the program. In order to limit this concern, students are informed, in writing, about their rights as a volunteer in the research. There is no direct connection between their participation in the program and their participation in the City Transitions Program. To reiterate that point, the director of the City Transitions Program only allowed volunteers to participate so that there were no feelings of coercion. My dual role may also so affect the validity of the research because I have also developed the curriculum and do have a vested interest in its success, however, only a true representation of the findings will allow me to properly replicate the program.
CHAPTER V

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Introduction

As stated in Chapter I, this research investigates the affective experiences of the participants of the PCEI – Empowerment Course. The narratives were composed using data comprising of the participant’s journal entries, interviews and researchers field notes. The student participant’s descriptions of everyday life before, during and after participating in the intervention were explored through semi-structured interview questions. The scope of the interviews encompassed the lived experiences of the student and instructor participants – before, during and after the intervention – and was not limited to classroom experiences.

Importance of Participant Narratives

The narratives that touch upon the second research question: In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program, in order to get a sense of the student’s lives and lifestyles. Student participants were allowed to express their perceptions of their lives and backgrounds in a number of arenas including classroom sessions, as well as in writing through journal entries and classroom assignments. In oral presentations, student participant’s also included aspects of their lives that they found
relevant without being prompted by instructors or volunteers. In this chapter, their stories are told in a manner that was genuine to their lived experiences.

Bruner (2004) suggested we assume everyone self-reports their life story precisely and correctly, and that they leave out no important details. Bruner adds, “But what is coverage? Are not omissions also important?” (p. 693). The narratives in this chapter attempt to uncover not only what the participants said, but also what they may not have said. This is critical to valid qualitative analysis, because as Riessman (1993) suggested, “The text is not autonomous of its context” (p. 21). The participant’s names below as well as the names of schools, counties, etc. are pseudonyms to protect the participants’ identities.

The concept of narratives comes from Knaus’ (2009) article applying critical race theory results in self-reflective teaching that develops classroom structures to enable students to express critical, culturally-rooted voice, and emphasizes how to listen to students as part of framing a classroom. As such, narratives require detail; these narratives explore in detail the participant’s perceived social identity, as well as their reactions to society’s power structure(s), how they fit into that structure and the participant’s subsequent sense of empowerment or lack thereof. This chapter is divided into three sections: An overview of participant’s narratives as interpreted by the instructors, personal narratives of the participants and personal narratives of instructors.
Participant Narratives – Students

Pete’s Story

I had a relatively happy childhood although my family was dysfunctional. My stepfather was an alcoholic and would be considered abusive and I lived in the projects. Overall, I lived the typical urban experience. I was in a low income family and dealt with the typical issue around that. I ended up leaving my mother’s home when I was 14. I have an older brother and sister who both have passed and another older sister who is still alive and a younger brother who is still alive.

I grew up in the Southwest projects in the 60’s when we first moved down there you actually had working class families like Mr. Prince, James Prince, me and his son Dave used to be best friends. Mr. James was actually an FBI man, and even my father drove a garbage truck so you had men working in the community. It was very different from what you see today. As I grew older, it got worse but originally it (the projects) was community-based. You had parents who were concerned. There were checks and balances. Not like today where you have the youth terrorizing the elderly. Looking back, I looked at a brother named Emperor Sam as successful. I did not like my stepfather. My older brother left the house at 18 and got married so I looked in the streets for what I thought was manhood and what was respected in the community. He (Emperor Sam) always dressed nice and had money and nobody in the community messed with him. Everybody respected him. People would get out of his way. Years later I realized he was
a “numbers man”, as a child I didn’t know that. Years later, he died in a shoot-out and even that I respected because it was five guys against him and he took three with him.

I never considered the concept of empowerment at that time. But when I was in school, I was an excellent student. I actually had all honors classes in high school. And all through grade school I was an honor roll student. On a regular basis I would have cakes baked for me by my mom for getting straight E’s (for behavior). My mother was an avid reader and she talked to us about many social issues in the house, she stimulated us in a lot of different ways. But it was the after school time that mattered. I’ve been introverted most of my life but I have always been self-assured, a self-starter, I never ran with crowd or felt the need to seek out others. When I was little I was in a group called the Little Midgets that could be considered a street gang and right off the top I had a problem with the brother that they elected to be chief because he didn’t come from the “Gardens”. I was the one who would start the fights. That was during the time I was between the sixth and eighth grade. But in that group from that point on I have been what you would call an outlaw or a rebel. By the eighth grade I cut them completely loose.

Probably the best time in my academic life was between the fourth and sixth grade where I had two African American male teachers that made me feel good about being in school, in the third grade I had a white Irish redheaded teacher who used to pick on me because I had a stutter and I wasn’t comfortable participating in her class. She used to call us pickaninnies and it wasn’t until I was older that I knew what that was. She was really rigid and wanted everything done her way. My grandmother was blond haired
blue eyed, but I never looked at her as being white. She was just grandma. She never treated me in any kind of way… that woman taught me how to tie my shoes in an hour rubbing her knuckles across my head (laughs). But when I got to the fourth grade my teacher was an African American male. He was the first one that had us (the students) call each other brother and sister. Those were the types of brothers that would come to your house for dinner just to check on you. When I got in the eighth grade I could see that my school was more about control than teaching and high school was similar. It was a turbulent time then, a lot of violence all around. In my senior year I got shot, when I was sixteen, got stabbed. One of my best friends got gunned down then my other friend got natural life in prison. When my friend got killed, that changed me. It put me in another frame of mind.

I converted to Islam in prison in 1993. It took me five years to convert because I did a comparative religious study of Christianity, Jehovah witness and Islam. I studied with Jehovah’s witnesses before I went to prison. I got locked up in ‘85. When started writing home telling everybody I was Muslim, they thought I had snapped. Because before that I used to be a “Dialectic Materialist”, I would tell you that if I couldn’t, see it, touch it, feel it, I didn’t believe in it.

*John’s Story*

I decided to participate in this program because I needed mental stability. I never took a class like this before. During my youth I was affiliated with the Black P-Stones community organization. I saw them come through my area and I liked the way they
carried themselves, and that caused me to become interested in them. I became a Peewee in 2nd grade. When I was in grammar school, I wasn’t doing well, because I wasn’t going. I transferred to a trade school (in eighth) and my grades improved. It was more fun and more hands on. I got to junior high and had more fun and also had more time on my hands. I was more attracted to school because it was more hands on. I grew up in the southside projects. The people I considered to be successful were the owners of the corner stores. A lot of people I saw had fancy cars, but weren’t successful in a proper way. I considered the store owners to be successful because they had something others didn’t, and you could see it. I considered having things such as money and cars empowerment. This was around 1971-1974. When I got my first job, it was a summer job I had in Grant Park, and I was able to buy things and help others by myself; I felt empowered then. I was about 15 years old. This also kept me out of trouble.

I went to my local neighborhood school, until 8th grade. In high school, I was easily distracted. Afterward, I transferred to the vocational school. It was generally pretty well integrated although it was mostly African American; there were some Latinos. I got along with my teachers. They loved me, but I was very easily distracted. The only negative experiences I can recall is when I wasn’t there.

I converted to Islam while incarcerated. There was a Muslim brother who took a liking to me because of the way I carried myself, even though I was gang affiliated. This was during the time I got my GED and he was a tutor. He was drawn to me. After we met he began to tell me things about my character. He told me I had the character of a good person. He’s the one who gave me name, John, which means beautiful. My family and
friends did not react negatively to me taking my Shahadah. They all responded positively. I was incarcerated for six to seven years before I converted.

Donnie’s Story

I decided to take this course in order to understand some of the things I’ve been through so I could, try to put my mind at ease and reconnect. When you’ve been through some of the things I’ve been through, you don’t feel connected all the time, although you may feel you are. It was an opportunity to let my guard down and help me realize that although my experiences are unique to me, they aren’t unique at the same time because others have also experienced similar things.

I come from a large family; I have 13 siblings and I am the youngest boy living. I was given most of the things I wanted as a child. I didn’t have a good relationship with my father. He liked to fight me. As a child, although we didn’t get along, whenever I felt I needed protection I called for my father, when other kids called for their mama’s. I felt my dad was a successful. He was a very hard working man. He worked at a steel mill and he didn’t talk much. I saw what he did in terms of making sure that our family was fed, had decent stuff, and had a roof over our heads. He would make sacrifices. I grew up on the Southside of Chicago. As a child, around the age of 9, I started following my older brothers and became a Black P Stone. This was around 1970. This was before they were a gang; they more of a community group. Empowerment to me at that time was having the ability to dominant the next guy. I wanted power. My reputation in the street was as a guy who would do anything to stay on top. I thought power was strictly having the ability to
overpower others. I felt I had power from the age of nine until I was sent to the institution. At that time I was a General of the Black Stones.

As a student, I thought I was a very good student. I paid attention in school and I was never rude. Although I did a lot of bad things, I had a lot of respect for my elders. People tolerated me because I had this respect. I went to my local neighborhood school. My schools were not segregated, and they were quite diverse. I had good relationships with most of my teachers, except for one I had in 8th grade. I liked school, but I didn’t feel any connection with school. I couldn’t see myself directly associated with school.

I started studying Islam in 1975. I took my Shahadah in prison and I learned Arabic mostly by myself while in prison. I took my Shahadah about two years after entering prison, in about 1980. My family did not react very negatively to my conversion because they already knew I was studying Islam, which made them slightly familiar with it. I didn’t have friends, I had what I consider “Brothers”, which were doing about the same things as me, so they didn’t have much of a reaction. I entered prison at the age of 16. You know coming from a family of 13 brothers and sister, you’re family are your friends. While I was locked up seven of my brothers and my mother had passed. As soon as the prison door closed, I felt like I instantly turned 28. I felt like everything I was doing was over. I didn’t talk to the people I was originally associated with. My original sentence was 110 years, but while I was in prison, the law changed in 1978 and they offered me a new sentence. I ended up only serving 22 years.
My whole childhood was important. I was raised by my mother; she was a single parent. My father was around during my childhood. He was one of the founders of the street gang The Black Disciples and held a high position, but tried to keep my siblings and me away from gangs. I was mostly raised by my mother. I am very close to my grandmother and my siblings. I grew up in Englewood and graduated from Englewood high school. I lived about three blocks from my high school. My friends and I didn’t start becoming a part of gang related activities until the near end of high school. We weren’t like the typical gang bangers; we mostly stayed to ourselves. We avoided random acts of violence. We did what “typical” teenagers do; we smoked marijuana, sold drugs and things like that. I have about 18 siblings. When I was young, I found drug dealers and gang bangers to be successful because in Englewood, where there is the highest poverty level in the city of Chicago, there weren’t many people who had nice things. I could see gang bangers and drug dealers who had nice things such as flashy cars, clothes, and jewelry, which was very different from others who didn’t do those things. A time in my life where I felt successful was right before my incarceration. At this time I had money, multiple cars, clothes, and a status in the neighborhood. I was respected in the streets. During this time, I was about 19 years old. I was almost 22 when I was incarcerated. While incarcerated, I was partially able to maintain my gang connections. There are gangs in prison, and while in there I met members of the Gangster Disciples from different states, but I was only able to maintain control over the members from Chicago.
Before I was incarcerated, I was around many Muslim men who would explain Islam to me, but I never truly listened because when anyone mention Islam to me the first thing I thought of was Farrakhan, and I wasn’t going to commit to selling bean pies and wearing three piece suits in 100 degree weather. I was respectful, but didn’t really consider it. What appealed to me more was the more orthodox form of Islam. In every institution I landed in, I always gravitated toward the Muslims. When I made it to the last institution, there was a Brother I met in my first institution who was originally a gang member. This was about eleven years after I entered my first institution. We talked and began to remember each other and he told me he had converted to Islam. He asked me what I felt about Islam and I told him. He was very respectful and didn’t get offended. He told me… explained to me what Islam truly was. He gave me books and answered any questions that I had. After finding out what Islam was, it answered all the questions I had internally about religion itself and on my own existence. This was right after 9/11.

My conversion to Islam didn’t change my relationship with my family, but there was a change in my lifestyle, mostly the prayer. After I converted to Islam, I called my mother and told her the news. I was surprised to find out my mother actually knew about the Islam and its teaching and at one point, was studying to be Muslim, but did not convert. Most of my family didn’t believe I was serious about converting to Islam, but now that they see I plan on staying Muslim, they are more respectful.
Rolanda’s Story (Primary Researcher)

I am an African American woman who converted to Islam in 1990. I am 35 years old. I am currently the director of the organization that was contracted to implement the Empowerment for City Transitions. I am also a doctoral candidate at City University and primary researcher for the PCEI. I became affiliated with City Transitions Program when my organization was asked to evaluate another program through the larger organization. I began developing this program in 2007 for the Federal Department of Probation. When asked to create a program for this organization, I realized that I needed to tweak the previous program for a number of reasons. One, the population was significantly different in terms of gender, religion and types of convictions. Before this, I had never developed a program for violent offenders. Also, the programs were typically gender neutral and made no consideration regarding religion. I originally began working with formerly incarcerated youth (but to a lesser degree) in 2002. I worked at a small social service agency creating Job Readiness Training and e-Business courses for disadvantaged youth. As I developed and taught those courses I found that students were disclosing to me that they had misdemeanor and/or felony convictions that would make it more difficult to find jobs. I soon realized that I needed to develop courses specifically for them. I never had any apprehensions about working with these students. My main concern was addressing their needs.
In the Empowerment course, I was the lead instructor. I taught on Mondays, co-taught on Tuesdays and worked on administrative functions of the course on Wednesdays. Throughout the course I found that the men had many strengths; including the ability to clearly communicate their ideas orally. They were not shy and did not seem ashamed of their experiences in prison. I also found the men to be extremely chivalrous and respectful. Considering we were all women instructors they were careful about their language and demeanor in our class sessions. Our classes were held in the evening and the students would walk us to our cars when it was dark outside. As students, each of the men was conscientious of assignments and due dates. They did things as a community and participated in some healthy competition in terms of course work and participation. In terms of weaknesses, the students had some problems with staying on topic. They also, at times, displayed some rigid views of right and wrong in terms of religious beliefs.

*Tracy’s Story*

I am an African American, Christian woman and I am 32 years old. I am currently a Kindergarten teacher at WORK Charter Academy. However, I was also an instructor for the Empowerment Curriculum Study at City Transitions Program. I consider Empowerment to be the action of enabling individuals through education and self-actualization to help themselves. I had very little experience working with formerly incarcerated adults prior to this experience. I used to mentor at a small social service agency in Humboldt Park for about five years. A few of my mentees had problems with the law. I have worked with children in the juvenile detention system in the Midwest
while I was in college. I was interested in working with this particular group of
individuals because I am an educator who works with a population of children who have
lost at least one parent to the justice system. These students are highly affected by the
absence of their parent, usually their fathers.

I was apprehensive initially about teaching this class because I would be in the
home of convicted murderers. I was nervous because of my own ignorance. To my
surprise and delight, I have acquired new friends. The participants’ greatest strengths are
their ability to overcome adversity and their desire to become better people/citizens.
Their greatest weakness is their communication skills, specifically their writing skills.

In terms of the course itself, Rolanda completed the majority of the curriculum. I
added some in-class activities for the participants. I co-facilitated Tuesday sessions and
facilitated Wednesday session independently. Rolanda and I discussed and determined
our teaching schedules while planning the course. I believe that the curriculum has given
the participants the confidence they need to explore new ventures. Participants held a
Town Hall Meeting as a culminating activity. In order to prepare for their presentations,
they had to learn how to conduct research, navigate through PowerPoint, and present
their findings in front of an audience. One participant has mentioned that this program
has helped him find his voice and release some of his anger. I think the most effective
part of the curriculum are the activities the participants needed to complete both in-class
and independently.

My experience as an instructor for this class was unlike any teaching opportunity
I have experienced. The participants drive and strength made me take a close look at
myself. I realized that there are some ways that I can make some improvements in my life for myself and my family. Their faith in their religion has inspired me to take create a sanctuary within my own home. I have dedicated my life to child advocacy; in addition I am now a proponent for rehabilitation for ex-offenders.

Dana’s Story

I am a 50 year old African American woman who grew up Christian and would now consider myself a Spiritualist. I am a health and well-being coach. My work in the Holistic Health field started with my certification in massage therapy in 1990. I went on to become certified in Reiki and clinical hypnosis. The intention of my work is to assist clients in finding the mind, body and spiritual focus and practice in order to create a life of peace and healthy balance.

Rolanda introduced me to the Director of City Transitions, and he hired me to develop and deliver the well-being portion of the program. Rolanda and I connected through my holistic work.

My 16 years of classroom teaching experience made me feel comfortable to work with this population that I had never encountered. Although at times the discussions got kind of ‘raw’ and intense, they were always respectful and conscious that a lady was in the room. [The guys made sure I never lost that ‘empowered feeling (smiles)].

While the classes were yet in progress it seemed that the intention of the program was coming to fruition. The introduction of habits that support life and that benefit and uplift a healthy and balanced lifestyle and how these habits affect your day, from the
reaction, it seemed that they had not thought much about. Creating awareness created change of mind. It is my sincere hope that positive change in behavior is very close behind! The Health and Well Being module was developed using the text (The Black Male Handbook) and 19 years of study and practical experience of being in the holistic health care business. I also facilitated the health and well-being modules during week six and seven of the class.

**Participant Overview**

This section is intended to give the reader an overview of the participant’s personality, character, and role in the PCEI-Empowerment Course as interpreted by the researcher using, field notes, classroom assignments, classroom observations and interviews. The participants of this research were chosen as a purposive sample of four formerly incarcerated African American males ranging in age from 35 to 53. These four student participant’s – Pete, Donnie, Tommy and John - were selected from eight participants in the City Transitions Program due to their court supervision status. No participant in this had any further legal obligations, in terms of reporting, to the criminal court system stemming from their original conviction or subsequent release. These four student participants have also participated in the City Transitions Program longer than the other participants and were due to graduate from the program in December of 2010.

Each of the men were convicted prior to their 27th birthday and we find through interviews that Donnie was convicted as an adult at age 16 and initially sentenced to 110 years in an adult facility for a triple homicide. Pete was married prior to incarceration
and divorced within his first five years of being in prison and each of the four men had infant girls when the crime was committed and they were sentenced. It is important to note that none of the participants claimed that they were innocent of committing the crime that there were convicted of.

**Student Participants – Summary**

This section was constructed using classroom observations, field notes and a member-check with each instructor of the course providing input. The section provides the reader with insights into the student-participants demeanor, behaviors and characteristics from the perspectives of the instructors.

**Pete – The Leader**

Pete is a 53-year-old African American male who was incarcerated at age 27 for just over 12 years. Pete is the “leader of the group”, not because he identifies himself that way, but because the participants identify him as such. Pete converted to Islam in his fifth year of incarceration. Pete is the most educated of the group; he holds an associate’s degree and a bachelor’s degree in sociology. He was able to participate in PSCE courses while in prison before the Omnibus Act passed which cut funding for post-secondary education in prisons. He was also the most outspoken in the class and participated on a more advanced level than the other participants”; for example, he finished reading the entire text before first class. There was a running joke in the class that Pete was trying to be a “teacher’s pet”, although it was made clear from the beginning that there would be no grades given in the traditional sense; only informal assessments.
Pete’s journals were the most clear; they showed he had an understanding of the questions the class was given. We also found that Pete dominated the classes in terms of participation. His perspective was seen as “law”, by the other students to a certain extent. I cannot recall any instances where the other participants would disagree with him or contradict him, though they may have asked questions or needed him to clarify. Pete is the most determined in terms of his career goals; his aspirations went beyond having a job requiring manual labor. Pete is in the process now of applying to graduate school because he would like to have a master’s degree in psychology. He is also a board member of a community organization and an advisor at another community organization. He typifies the “model student” behavior; he turns in his assignments on time, he rarely missed class or was late, but if he was going to be tardy or absent he would let the instructors know in advance. He was the most dedicated to the program in the sense that this was his vision; he didn’t want the program to fail nor did he want to fail, and this was apparent through his actions, willingness to learn and in our class discussions.

In terms of intellectual acumen or his perceptions of his intellect, he made it clear in many class sessions that he was well versed in a number of areas, particularly religion, politics, and sociology. He asserted this knowledge in several class sessions by mentioning books he read on the subject, often citing authors or theorists and was able to quote text verbatim. He was able to break down the concepts in the texts to a degree that the others did not. Pete could also get off task at times by going into anecdotes about the way he does things, his life, and personal experiences, but he did so in a way that let you know he understood the process although he sometimes goes off on a tangent and
discusses things that were irrelevant. He once mentioned that it was our responsibility, as instructors, to make sure the class stayed on task, which was true a true assessment. Pete’s influence in the class was one that made the other students know that they needed to keep up. We did find, however, that when Pete was not present or was late, the other students were more apt to participate at a higher level.

*John – The Introvert*

John is an African American male and has participated in the City Transitions Program longer than any of the other participants. It is not very clear how old John is; he has never told us directly. Researchers and instructors assume he is anywhere between 48 and 50 years old. John has spent the most time in prison, being there for 27 years. He converted to Islam within three years of being incarcerated. He was our most challenging student in the sense that he did not open up or talk unless he was asked a question directly. What was interesting about John was that it was not clear to the instructors how well he understood the program or what was going on with him personally at any given time. John, seemed to have had the least amount of formal education of all of the participants, as evidenced in his journal writing and his ability to complete the assignments correctly. We later found that John participated in this program because he has some personal mental and or emotional health concerns. John was the most closed off socially and emotionally of the participants, but when the class turned its focus to the health and wellness portion, he participated at a higher level than any other point in the course. He had one of the highest stress levels in the class when stress levels were tested. We knew less about John than anyone else in the class. We were concerned about that
from the beginning. It was assumed that he read the class text, but it was not clear that he comprehended it. He always participated in class in the sense that he was there and answered questions when asked. He also participated in the town hall meeting and culminating event and in both sessions he chose to lead his discussions on health and wellness. What we found was that his mental health was his biggest concern and even in post course interviews, we found that he is still struggling with his mental/emotional health, but it is something he is working on to a larger degree than the other student’s.

In terms of his journal writing, we found that John’s was the least coherent of the other participants. His spelling and reading comprehension is not strong. For each journal entry, he would write on average, two to three sentences. What was also found was that there wasn’t a clear understanding of sentence structure, punctuation, or how to communicate through writing, in that sense; it was difficult at times to understand what he meant or what he was referring to when he answered his journal prompts. It was the same in his other written course work.

Donnie – The Orator

Donnie is 50 years old and is African American. He was incarcerated for 22 years. What we found interesting about Donnie was that he was the first one of the group to be incarcerated and was incarcerated at the age of 16. Donnie converted to Islam within five years of becoming incarcerated and was an Imam (an Islamic leader) and religious scholar for the inmates. He was originally sentenced to 110 years in prison and that was a great shock to all of us. Donnie talked more than anyone else in the class did when there was a topic of interest to him. At other times, he seemed disconnected from the
class and sometime fell asleep. When he talked he caught your attention and although he joked a lot, it was clear when he was serious. It was also clear that his personal convictions were strong. Although at times, it seemed that he was talking just for the sake of talking. In terms of relationships, he and Pete were incarcerated in the same facility and, in turn, had what seemed to be the closest friendship. Donnie was the only student who was a participant in the program but did not live in the transition house. Donnie was recruited by Pete to participate in the City Transitions Program. Pete allowed Donnie to participate in the City Transitions Program without being a resident due to their personal relationship and Donnie’s obligations to his family home. In terms of personality, Donnie was most similar in his way of expressing himself to Pete than the other student.

Donnie prided himself on being able to work with his hands and loved doing things that involved working with his hands and manual labor. He aspired to be a “freelance” carpenter. In terms of his education, Donnie received his GED while he was incarcerated, but he considered himself a good student before being incarcerated. Of the students, he turned in less work than the others and missed the most days, but we found later that he was having health problems throughout the course. From the fourth week on, he would come in late, and he seemed the least interested. However, when we look at his coursework and transcripts from interviews, his assignments were all complete, his recollection of events and comments on the overall course were sound. His journal writing was interesting and he wrote about the same amount as Pete if not more for many entries. What was interesting about Donnie’s journal entries was that his answers were
always a reflection of his life rather than a direct answer to the journal prompt, as if he was telling a story. What was also interesting was that instead of using periods and commas or questions marks, he only used exclamations points at the ends of his sentences. He also wrote like he spoke and his words were usually spelled phonetically rather than correctly, and he used figurative language rather than traditional language. Like the others, Donnie did not consider going back to school. One thing we thought was very interesting about Donnie was that for his culminating event project, he chose the topic of “violence against woman and girls”. Considering some of the comments about violence that he made during the class, there was some concern about his perception of the subject.

*Tommy – The Entertainer*

Tommy is also African American and the youngest of the participants at age 35 and the only one who was convicted of a federal crime. He was incarcerated for a little over 14 years and was convicted under the RICO Act. Tommy was the jokester of the group and was always in good spirits while in class. We were unsure of how seriously he actually took the class, but he was always respectful, in spite of the fact that he could not always participate due to work commitments. He did not always turn in his work on time or at all, however his writing and reading comprehension was higher than that of Donnie and John. He graduated from high school before he was incarcerated. Concepts of spirituality and religion were most profound in this class for him. He was also the newest to the Muslim community. He chose the topic of spirituality and religion in his culminating presentation. Out of all of the presentations, Tommy’s was the most detailed,
precise and research based. He prepared a comparative analysis of Islam and Christianity without being disrespectful or hurtful to anyone in the audience. He was very serious about his presentation of these ideas. Tommy appeared to be the one most apt to go into higher education setting other than Pete. However, he would like to go into a management position with his current organization.
CHAPTER VI

CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

Introduction

Chapter VI begins with an overview of the course preparation and classroom experiences of instructors. Next, an outline of the PCEI-Empowerment course is added to assist the reader in understanding the context in which the observations took place. Finally, the classroom observations and field notes as told by the instructors through interviews and journal entries; these observations and field notes are written out by week and only incorporate what instructors agree to be the most relevant scenario’s in assisting the reading in understanding the tone and context of the sessions. Finally, the students provide their individual narratives about their overall impression of the course.

Classroom Observation Overview

In January of 2010, the lead instructor and primary researcher was contracted to develop a reentry course for City Transitions. The class was intended to be an extension of the life skills course outlined in chapter three developed in 2008 for the local department of probation. The class was developed for eight participants; however, due to the constraints of the research, we researched the four members of the class who were not on state or federal supervision.
In order to develop the curriculum in a manner appropriate for the specific needs of the participants we had approximately four planning meetings with the program director prior to completing the programs and lessons. For the previous incarnation of the class, we did not include a textbook.

However, after speaking with the program director in the second planning meeting he explained that he would like for the class to be more rigorous and felt that the inclusion of a text book and daily lessons rather than open discussions would be more appropriate. We came to a consensus on meeting three that the best measure would be to incorporate both. We also added the health and wellness portion after this meeting and considering the ages and the length of incarceration of the participants. We decided that we would use teachings centered around the affective domain in our lesson planning and formative assessment strategies. The curriculum was completed by Rolanda, Tracy and Dana and approved by the program director approximately three weeks before the class began on March 8, 2010.

The classes were scheduled for Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays of each week. Rolanda taught alone on Mondays. The Monday sessions consisted of lessons, including worksheets, movies, or others handouts that were given as a supplement to the readings. Student read 1-2 chapters per week.

On Tuesdays, Rolanda and Tracy team-taught. Each Tuesday the class engaged in open discussions about the text. The instructors led the discussions and prepared prompts before class. On Wednesdays, Tracy taught alone and her session would include a recap of the previous class discussion and lesson based on the discussion to insure that the
student could apply the concepts learned throughout the week. Rolanda and Tracy led classes from week 1 through 5 and 8 through 10. Dana facilitated the class during weeks 6 and 7. The health and wellness classes started with tai chi practice for breath consciousness and focus which we all did together. Surveys and self-assessments were taken to bring awareness to their current life habits. Then information from various sources were discussed in order to consider some habits that may be incorporated into their life styles that could be more beneficial for healthy aging and mental balance. The daily journal topics were taken from the handbook and discussion each day.

Course Outline and Observations

(The following section outlines the activities and lessons scheduled for the eight-week PCEI; then an explanation of the experiences of the instructors.)

Outline

Week 1 & 2

Chapter 1: Creating a Spiritual Foundation (pgs. 1-24)

- Class Introduction
- Self-Assessment
- Student will discuss chapter one of The Black Male Handbook
- Writing assignment.
- Week One

The first class began with the introduction of instructors and students. Each of the instructors took turns and described our background, things we hoped to get from the
class and something others may not know about us. The students decided that they would be more comfortable holding classes in the living room of the transition house. The area looks like that of a typical home in Marquette Park. However, it is meticulous in its cleanliness and guests are not allowed to wear shoes inside. There are Qur’an passages hung over the mantle of a makeshift fireplace. The colors are mellow, w/ pale yellow and browns. There was some confusion as to how many "Brothers" were to attend - we agreed to keep all eight slots open for the first two days and to close sessions after that. After class introductions, we completed the first set of self-assessments. The instructors agreed to spread these individual assessments over three sessions as to not overwhelm the students.

Approximately one hour into the session the intern – Diego, a 28-year old Puerto Rican, Criminal Justice graduate student - came in and seemed to disrupt the "flow" of the class. No one complained but the group discussion subsided after this interruption. In order to get back on track, we allowed the intern to facilitate interviews for participants who came into class late. We ended the first class early. We used this session to set up initial introductions, interviews, class agreements and journal entries. We also gave students journals, textbooks, personal folders and syllabi. Prior to ending the session the instructors went over the syllabus by week and explained the intent of each themed session. We opened the discussion for questions but none of the students had any at that time. Students were then instructed to read chapter one for the next session.

I was a bit surprised at how open the students were to the instructions. They are older than I had originally anticipated ranging in age from 34 to 52. All had been
incarcerated for more than 10 years. Two of the four participants were living in the same facility while incarcerated. This was the instructors’ first time working with violent offenders and admitted that they were cognizant of the implicit danger involved with working with the group. A more staunch or stoic demeanor in the students was expected, however, the class was met with enthusiasm.

After class, Tracy and Rolanda met to discuss the outcomes for the first class and were generally pleased and excited about moving forward. Session two began with a "check-in" and Q&A session from the previous class. There were no questions. The session began with students selecting passages from chapter one of the books that focused on spirituality and religion. There was some surprise that each of the students had shown that they read the chapter by citing and referencing the text when making a point. This particular chapter touched home for the participants because of their own religious or spiritual conversions. They were then given a handout that described more succinct definitions of spirituality and religions to see if this changed their understanding or perceptions of the terms. In an effort to gauge the reading levels, paragraphs were read aloud. Two participants struggled with some of the words, one in particular claimed to have trouble due to problems with his eyesight. After reading, there was some debate as to the accuracy of these definitions.

Instructors were pleased to find so early on that participants are willing to share personal stories and anecdotes in class. This willingness to share could be due to the fact that they shared a common experience within the same facility? This session was dedicated to discussing the text and for us as instructors to gauge the critical thinking
abilities of the participants. Instructors found that the students were easily able to apply the text to their experiences inside and outside of prison. It was also found that the students like to tell stories of their personal growth and prison experiences, although they do not discuss criminal acts. This discussion went well. So well in fact, that there was not have enough time to complete the activity.

Week 2

- Morals and Ethics instruction
- Handout 1: Morals and ethics defined
- Group discussion – How do you define morals and ethics?
- Video: The Smartest Guys in the Room - A lesson in Morals and Ethics
- Handout 2: Enron scorecard
- Handout 3: The Smartest Guys in the Room Q&A

Preparation for this week was as any other. The class is scheduled to watch the documentary - Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room. In past courses, this film sparked a lot of conversation amongst the student. The typical discussion included things like, "We would have been buried under the jail!" And "I would've done that extra jail time if I was gonna get an extra 20 mil." These comments are usually accompanied with laughter, however with this group the guys seemed to be angry. This response was not expected.
Week 3

Chapter 2: Developing Political Awareness (pgs. 25-38)

- RICO/Drug Laws
- Politics and Big Business (the privatization of prisons)
- Prison Reform
- Democrats/Republic/Liberals?
- Disenfranchisement
- Mock Interviews

The men were given a presentation on the politics of punishment, highlighting the criminal justice system, political deliberations, bureaucracies, the economy (capitalism) and the delusional concept of the "American Dream." Instructors were very pleased to find the men interested in the lecture. Pete was passionate and knowledgeable about these topics and would interject to include his knowledge on the matter—which was great—it turned out to be a very thought provoking and interesting discussion on all accounts. The week prior Instructors handed out copies of Derrick Bell’s Space Invaders (1992) for discussion, but the men said that they did not have time to read it, and besides they had to read chapter two of the course book. So the instructors summed up the story for them and talked about it a little bit as well. They expressed their disgust with the criminal justice system as well as their frustrations with society (capitalist society) as a whole. The session covered RICO laws, disenfranchisement, prison reform, poverty, and political ideologies.
The class talked about mass incarceration of blacks and Latinos/as in this country and the status of our communities in Chicago and around the country. Some of it bordered on conspiracy theories, but Instructors wanted to get these men thinking “outside of the box” as they move forward in their new lives outside of prison—Instructors found out that they were already good at thinking “outside of the box”—an ability that they developed inside of a “cage”. Pete shared his knowledge gained in doing community work as well as work with previously incarcerated men—he was very passionate as usual. After the discussion the men were asked to write in their journals about the topic. It was a good day, and like most of the weeks instructors learned a lot from the men. The power elite was described as the fortune 500 CEOs, political leaders, heads of banks, oil tycoons, major broadcasting networks and wealthy individuals. These individuals use capitalism to obtain their main objective, which is to create financial gains. Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production are owned and operated for private profit. Capitalism is a deliberate system of a mixed economy. All but one participant were familiar with the concept of the power elite.

Instructors gave the participants a working definition of the RICO laws. One participant had firsthand experience with the infamous RICO laws. He feels that he was wrongly convicted of this crime. He admitted to having been caught with a large sum of money, but he claims that he was not a part of an organized crime group. He and several other participants feel as though the RICO law was put in place to target African Americans. Participant also explained that the prosecuting attorney “used their tricks” to put a spin on his trial and convict him on a crime he did not deserve. He feels that the
RICO laws made him serve more time than he deserved. The facilitator passed out some information about RICO and Disfranchisement. The participants seemed to have some relative knowledge about both topics.

One participant actually described the RICO law as the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. He explained that the law increases the penalties for crimes in conjunction with organized crime. The law states that any individual or group of individuals who commits any two out of a list of 35 crimes within a decade can be charged with racketeering. One participant claimed that the infamous RICO laws directly affected him. He believes that the RICO Act is the reason why he had to serve so much time. He admits that he was breaking the law, but he said he has never been part of an organized crime group. He explained that the prosecuting attorney did what they do best and used his "tricks" to convict him on charges that were simply unjust. The consensus was that the RICO laws and the War on Drugs is a ploy to prolong jail sentences for African American men. The participant who was prosecuted on these charges is extremely passionate about the subject and for good reason. No one wants to be prosecuted for a crime they fell they did not commit! All of the participants understand that they are affected by disfranchisement. Disfranchisement is the revocation of the right of suffrage to a person or group of individuals. Disfranchisement may occur through laws or intimidation. Many states disfranchise people who have been convicted of crimes. Many jurisdictions disfranchise those who have a penalty above a certain limit. According to the article, in 20 states, persons who have been convicted of a felony
are denied the right to vote only while serving sentences in state prison. On these states, the right to vote is returned after time is served.

The participants were disappointed to learn that Illinois is not one of those 20 states. Instructors feel as though they already knew that the legislators in Illinois were not so forgiving. Seeing it on paper makes it more of a reality. The participants understand the importance of exercising one's right to vote. One participant decided to take matters into his own hands. He explained that many counties in Illinois have drug schools. (Ask Pete for more specifics on this topic). He worked diligently to add the SMART Act to the books. According to the participant, the legislators claim that the reason why they do not open drug schools is due to lack of funding. The participants disagree. They feel it is really a ploy to increase recidivism.

The remainder of the class was led by a participant that typically takes the lead in discussions. Instructors felt as if the participant was teaching the class and the facilitator merely passed out a handout. The participant was well versed in sociological theory. He had read works by sociologists such as Max Weber and Karl Marx. The participant could explain the origins and functioning of capitalism. The other participants did not participate in a discussion.

When the subject of the privatization of prisons was examined, all participants had an opinion. No one was surprised to hear that the privatization of prisons was a 2 billion dollar industry. One participant reminded the group that the War on Drugs is one example of how the government keeps African American men in prison. Another participant mentioned that the Chicago Public School system essentially creates future
offenders. Many children are promoted to middle and high school and they can’t read or write. The consensus was that better education and terminating the war on drugs would decrease profit. They all exclaimed that that was the last thing the government had in mind.

Week 4

Chapter 4: Starting a Plan for Economic Empowerment (pgs. 73-114)

- Managing a budget (What is a budget?)
- Bring in a newspaper for students to do a search on housing, automobiles, food, etc.
- Discuss the difference between a career and obtaining a job
- Lesson: Living vs. Lifestyle/Wants vs. Needs
- Opening a bank account
- Renting an apartment
- Savings account
- Credit card debt (Don’t do it!)

Week 5

This week started out with a lot of stress. In the previous weeks, there were a total of 19 shootings in the area within a 24-hour period with more than half of those shootings occurring in their neighborhood. One incident involved an African American Muslim man who had shot his wife and five additional members of his immediate family, including an infant child. This happened in the midst of constant negative press in
American media about Muslims and terrorism. This impacted the tone of the class because it is a part of mission of the transition house is to provide security in the neighborhood and act as liaisons for families who are the victims of violence.

Tracy and Rolanda discussed how to proceed and if class should be cancelled. They decided not to cancel because they did not want the momentum of the class to shift to that of non-participation or to send the message that the class was not important. It was difficult to assess how the class would go after this happened but they agreed that it was important that they came to show their commitment to the process. They were unsure of how to broach the subject of the murders and decided that we would discuss it only if the students brought it up.

The session began with some “housekeeping”. The class discussed the assignments for the coming weeks, specifically the town hall meeting. Instructors asked the students how they felt about facilitating the discussions at that time and explained the topics and how they were to develop topics that dealt specifically with Black men in the community. One instructor asked the students how they felt about the subject of homosexuality in the Black community. The demeanor immediately changed, negatively. They were noticeably uncomfortable. Pete, in particular, seemed agitated and explained to the class that homosexuality was a sin and if I brought it up during the group discussion, instructors should, “be very careful” about how I did it. Tommy went on to say that “he did not understand why the class should discuss it because it was not relevant in the Black community”, this was an issue that “other communities have to deal with.” Instructors asked for clarification and he simply stated that he “really don’t [sic]
understand why it matters…There’s no gay people around me. I mean… I don’t even know any gay people.”

The lead instructor was not sure how to proceed at this point because she noticed them becoming agitated and frustrated. They began to talk louder than usual and told personal stories that reflected their disagreement with the lifestyle. They also began to quote Qur’an verses that “proved” their point that the lifestyle was wrong.

Realizing that she lost control of the class and didn’t have much class time left the lead instructor attempted to shift the discussion to a more positive one and one that was relevant to the class. She agreed to take all of their comments into consideration and make the final decision with Tracy based on whether they felt it would be beneficial to the overall discussion. Finally, we began our discussion on economic empowerment.

(Notes: John did not talk at all during this session. Donnie is becoming standoffish…not participating as much. He’s coming in late/leaving early, sleeping in class and not reading.)

The next day the class welcomed a guest speaker, who has worked with adults before, but mostly with young adults. She also worked with ex-offenders while working at an organization on the Westside. She was excited to work with participants of City Transition because she was interested in seeing how being in the Transition House was different from a Halfway house and the fact that this Transition house was run by an organization that had a religious focus, working with a faith-based organization and learning more about how the faith-based aspect played a role in the lives of these men who were trying to transition back into society. When she met the men, she was
impressed by their motivation to get back into society, their motivation to find themselves and their motivation to find something meaningful to do with their lives.

She was most impressed with Pete, essentially as the supervisor of the Transition House. She was impressed with his leadership, his intelligence, his vision, and the fact that he was very dedicated to helping himself and these other men. Her interaction with him was very positive and she was very anxious to give him some good information that would help him on his journey toward moving forward with his career. When she learned about his role in the transition house and that he had a bachelor’s degree, she realized that she was working with someone who could take it a step further and obtain even higher education and really be of value to his community. She was able to give him information regarding graduate school, the steps needed to be taken to apply, requirements and anything else regarding his advancement.

Her experience with Tommy led her to believe he was very entrepreneurial and very insightful you man. He was very eager to do something besides working for his current employer. He saw his job as limiting and was ready to move on. Her session with him went very well. What she did with all of the men was a quick personality profile with a career inventory to help them see how various types of personalities work with various careers. This opened them about telling me what they really wanted to do and the profile and inventory confirmed what they already knew about themselves.

Her impression of Donnie was also very entrepreneurial and wanted to expand his work in carpentry to move more into redevelopment and real estate. She helped him research and figure what he could do in that realm, regardless of his background. What
she gave to him, and Tommy, was information regarding which careers were acceptable to them based on their backgrounds. She was not able to meet with John because he arrived to the class late, but he did do his profile and inventory.

Week 5

Chapter 3: Redefining Black Manhood (pgs. 39-72)

Chapter 7: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (pgs. 165-180)

- Lesson: Definition of a man: How are Black Men defined in contemporary American society? PowerPoint Presentation

- Conflict Resolution

- Lesson: Role Playing/Interpersonal communication

- Handout 1: inter/intrapersonal communication

- Student led class discussion on communication skills

-Event: Student-led Town Hall Meeting-

This week began with a guest from California; a formerly incarcerated African American man who wanted to participate in the Town Hall meeting. This week’s topic was Black men in American society (past and present), and violence against women and girls. The class began with a Powerpoint presentation given by the guest speaker. When discussing Black men and incarceration (one of the points on the slides) and how this affects Black families; the students began to reflect on and discuss how incarceration had influenced their relationships with their respective daughters. This was the first time the
instructors realized that all of the men had daughters. Only John had a son as well (who was conceived while he was imprisoned).

Each told a story about how their prison experience negatively impacted their relationships with their daughters in particular and women in general. Then, they began to compare their experiences and give each other advice. Each of them also shared that they had never talked to their daughters or significant other about their experiences in prison. The lead instructor asked, “Where do your daughters think that you were?” They each said that the daughters knew that they were in prison but didn’t know why or at least that they never told them why. Donnie said that his wife (at the time) “lied on him” and essentially did not tell his daughter the truth about why he was incarcerated. This caused a rift between him and his daughter. He told a particularly shocking story to relay how this “lie” strained his relationship with his daughter. He explained how his daughter called him to move furniture for her and he told her he would do it, but was late. When he made it to her house she berated him for his lateness and called him a “nigga.” He said that he immediately, “grabbed her by the back of her head and slammed her” to the ground. He then told her that, “no matter what happened” he was still her father and she “better not ever talk to” him like that again. Donnie reflects on this moment with visible pride and attributes this act to the beginning of the resolution of his relationship with his daughter. He also said that she respects him now “to this day” because he asserted his position as her father in spite of his prior incarceration.

No one commented on his story and the lead instructor found excused herself for a moment. The conversation, much like the one about homosexuality, left her with a
feeling of uneasiness. She was not afraid of them but felt herself making judgments about them, attempting to assess their worth to some degree. The story Donnie told upset her, and she was angry. She began to form counter-arguments and explanations about why he was wrong in his thinking and doing but did not verbalize them. Her opinion of Donnie changed (negatively) that day and she had trouble reconciling those feeling for the next week or so.

As the presentation moved forward, the discussion stalled at the slide about relationships with women after incarceration. They found that their positions as the “Man” of the family had quickly diminished upon incarceration and each of the men had a difficult time realizing that they could no longer provide for their families.

The next day the class had their town hall meeting. The town hall meeting was in a sense, a midterm project that took place during the fifth week of class. The instructors invited several community members from all social classes from African American men with advanced college degrees to men who were unemployed. The participants were told about this assignment on the first day of class and reminded the participants throughout the weeks about the assignment. Students were asked to invite community members to the session. The day before the town hall meeting, students were asked to develop questions from specific chapters in the book. The night before, instructors refined the questions, put the questions into four categories, and assigned each student a category. The students were told what group that they would facilitate. Afterward, community-members began to arrive and were instructed to sign in. The students, instructors and community members were then broken into groups. The topics were – spirituality,
politics in the United States, incarceration of African American men, relationships in
the African American communities.

Week 6 & 7

Chapter 5: Taking Care of Your Physical Health (pgs. 115-134)

Chapter 6: Moving Toward Mental Wellness (pgs. 135-164)

- Group discussion
- Journal Writing
- Activities: discussion - nutrition and healthy food choices; body cycles
- Conscious Breathwork, Tai Chi
- Discussion - religion and spirituality, practice - Reiki
- Self-Hypnosis (hand-out)
- Activities: discussion - theory of mind, practice - Imagery

Note: On weeks six and seven the regular instructors did not facilitate in the
classes. A Health and Wellness professional came in to facilitate this module of the
course. She taught a total of six sessions – three sessions per week.

Week 6 – Facilitated by Dana – Health and Wellness portion (Dana’s
interpretation)

Rolanda came in and did the wrap up from the previous week and made the re-
reintroductions. We had met in February but it had been a few months so we took about 10
minutes to re-acquaint ourselves and get discuss the concept of wellness and where/how
wellness fits in their lives. A survey was introduced at this point to bring out the notion
that wellness is for the mind, the body and the spirit. Each facet must be nurtured and
have a practice of care i.e., mindful eating for body care and exercise for heightened brain
function and health.

Discussed article “Preventive Measures for quality Aging”

(Intention: to give options on what to do to bring about mind, body, spirit
awareness to begin balance process.)

This article provided the format for the final project which was for each student to
create his own wellness plan.

Intro meditation – Breath & Tai Chi practice

There seems to be interest in the program and making it work in their personal
lives. They are showing interest in the breathing and moving meditation. To begin each
class with breathing and meditation helps the students to center their focus and assist the
feeling of being present. The importance of keeping a clean body was discussed and the
Master Cleanse was distributed. I was astounded! They were all past stress levels where
the charts indicated they should be having a stroke or a heart attack! They just joked with
each other about the things on the stress list just being “Life”…“you just deal with it”.
We talked about “cost of stress” or “one dis-ease leading to another.” This discussion
went into how to cut down dis-ease by cutting down stress. Each man considered some
ways that he could cut down stress in his own life and discussed some strategies for
dealing with it better.

Class 3 - Meditation – Breath & Tai Chi
Today’s wellness discussion was based in the concept of allowing family and friends to help and share information and being open to new learning rather than letting the new developments over-whelm them. Donnie shared an incident where he illustrated to his daughter that he really wasn’t handicapped as much as she thought he was. He needed some information. His daughter told him to get it from the computer. He didn’t know how and from the story, the daughter seemed kind of smug. He played the “if you’re so smart…show me” game on her and she ended up getting all the information he needed! He understands that he doesn’t have to know everything, just have a team that has your back. That cuts out a whole lot of stress right there…

Week 7

We tasted, tested and discussed ways to ‘work the new choices into the diet and dispelled some food/eating myths and preparation strategies. Today the class was very calm and light. Food was a subject in which they all had active interest. We talked about how to eat well on the go. Prior preparation of food helps to make the transition into healthy habits easier. Even if they didn’t cut out all of the ‘unhealthy’ habits, add healthier habits to offset as they go into the transition of healthy eating. Having meals five times a day was an unwelcomed concept until they became aware of the concept of tying eating to prayer times…it’s that important to get a regular eating cycle. Questions were thoughtful and showed interest in the subject. They were interested in getting light on a lot of things that they’ve heard here and there. We ended about 10 minutes early. Pete and Donnie were not there. Malik (a resident of the transitions house but not a participant in City Transition) sat in and added good points and questions. I tried to get
Tommy to think about exchanging 10 raw almonds for a piece of fried chicken in one of his meals. (I’m staying hopeful!)

We started right in on class five. No meditation. We just jumped right in to what their relationships are to themselves. We talked about how they’ve grown as people and what they have to offer in relationships and what they need from all the relationships that they have.

The discussion was about relationships, and I have discovered from today’s discussion that their relationship to Allah is the most important. They are very committed to Islam and have no tolerance for anything that goes against the principles. We talked about homosexuality in the family. They half-heartedly joked that it would be appropriate to take that family member “on a camping trip” and “accidents happen all the time.”

Journal – What are your strengths and what kind of relationships do you need?

Today’s discussion made evident that these gentlemen consider themselves warriors. Their service to society is to protect spiritual morals and physical dangers for those who may need them. Rather than ‘peace’, ‘non-violence’ is a concept that is better suited. They live and work in an environment where the consciousness of violence is everywhere. Their plans to be well in this kind of mindset reflected a strong consciousness of violence and a willingness to stretch outside what is normal for them to see something else.
Week 8

Culminating Activity

The instructor’s and students had a conversation at the beginning of week eight and decided to extend the program for an additional two week in preparation for the culminating activity, which was to take place on week 10.

Student Classroom Experiences

Pete’s Classroom experience (Data Sources – Journal entries Mar-May. 2010/participant interviews 2 and 3, Dec. 2010.)

I volunteered to participate in the (Empowerment) program. The thought of the program was curious to me. While taking this course I was a supervisor and board member of local community based crime prevention organizations. I also worked as a community organizer.

On the first day of class, when we were told about the class, I felt like it was going to be like Vegas…everything that goes on in the class was confidential and I think forewarned Rolanda that all of us had “issues.” I think everybody was kind of leery of how we were going to go about learning in this class because it was uncharted territory for everybody. I was a little apprehensive all the way around. I do think the sisters did a wonderful job because nobody could have done what they did. It had to be Black women dealing with Black men dealing with some serious social issues. Because it is always the Black women who nurtures us (Black men) and I got that from the atmosphere from day one… that it would be a nurturing experience. The brother Cruz (intern) was also good because even though he wasn’t Black, he was still a brother and he was coming back
from the war (Iraq) and many of us felt that we were coming back from war. We were soldiers too in many ways. Some of us were from tribes (gangs) or had tribal affiliations. And everyone felt that they could relate to what Cruz was going through.

I think this class was more raw and down to earth than other classes I have taken before and it was directed on a more personal level, directly for us and dealing with our issues. I’ve sat through seminars and I don’t think I have ever had a class address things just for us and at us. This was designed around us and our needs. I became comfortable around the third class; after it became more relaxed especially when we broke bread together and talked more openly. I think by that time there was a bonding that took place. I felt uncomfortable sometimes when we talked about the emotional and psychological abuse that we experienced in prison and having to relay that to women when sometime we haven’t even talked to our own women (mates) about it. I feel like we dealt with everything, we broke barriers. A lot of the stuff we talked about we had never discussed before. You block things out sometimes and in the class was the first time we had a real emotional response to things that had happened inside.

I think the town hall meeting was the best session we had because everybody came. It was phenomenal because we had such as variety of individuals with different backgrounds that came from different socio-economic backgrounds and religious beliefs, some who had been in prison, some not. There was so much variety that added to the conversation so there were a lot of twists and turns that made the event so lively. Also when we had to come up with the life plan, where we had to figure out our next move…
that was important. When we talked to Renee (Career Counselor) about our career and education options, that was good and also the stress test.

Before the class we would talk about our experiences in prison but only in general terms, we would talk about the more humorous parts of it and depending on the circumstances you might talk about the more violent parts to let somebody know that you didn’t forget how to get down if you have to. It went between those two extremes.

*John Classroom Experiences (Data Sources – Journal entries Mar-May 2010/participant interviews 2 and 3, Dec. 2010)*

I came to participate in the Empowerment class through Pete, the overall leader in the City Transitions house. He always had a vision to make things better for all of those around him. He came up with the idea to talk to you all (researchers), and asked us if it was a good idea; I thought it was a great idea. I did this voluntarily and had no apprehensions. When I started the program, my job outside of City Transitions was construction on another City Transitions house. During my free time, I played a lot of music. I am a musician and I would hang around bands and play music. I also went to the movies. I also spent a lot of time with my family, like my children, my five grandchildren, and my mother.

The first day of class was interesting to me. The overall class stood out a lot to me after they explained everything we would learn. After my first session, my impression of my instructors was great. Before my instructors explained the goals of the class, I thought the class had to do with the betterment of the body and mind. I figured it couldn’t go wrong. This class was very different from classes I have previously been in because it
covered a lot of areas I never would have thought about before now, as far as assisting me and my state of mind.

I felt sharing personal information about myself was good because it was for a good cause. The fact that one of instructors had knowledge of prison made a difference because it gave me different views on the way things are done.

It brought out what others might call “stinkin thinkin.” I became comfortable participating in the class after the second class. I never had any negative or uncomfortable experiences in the class. I never considered quitting the class. I didn’t have a favorite assignment though, all of them were important to me. Overall, the text was a different perspective different from mine, but it was still genuine. I wouldn’t want to change the text or add any more text because the writer of our text was a very good writer and the book was very good.

The fact that all of our primary instructors were women gave us different points of view. The religious differences did not make much difference for me.

Donnie Classroom Experiences (Data Sources – Journal entries 1, 3, 4, and 6 Mar-Apr. 2010/ participant interviews 2 and 3, Dec. 2010.)

As for the class, it was an opportunity for me to let out some tension, be heard, and listen. When I heard about the class, I was excited and anxious to participate because normally I don’t communicate with others, especially not about myself. Some people don’t even know I’ve been to jail. Before I started the class, I was a carpenter. I did rehab on houses because that was my trade. I left jail on May 5, 2000. After leaving jail, I had been home for almost 10 years, but hadn’t even thought about doing any type of re-entry
program. Right before I went to jail, one of my 13 siblings passed. While I was incarcerated all of my other brothers, except one, passed away also. I had nine brothers. My mother also passed while I was in jail. When I got out, I felt alone. The state didn’t offer me any type of help. This class allowed me to go into the world and understand and stand on my own. It made me take care of myself.

The first day of class was mostly an introduction and was a learning experience. It set the groundwork of what was to be expected in the class. The instructors were very nice and knowledgeable. By nice, I mean they allowed us to express ourselves. Sometimes, you have instructors who don’t let you express your thoughts; they don’t give you an opportunity to express things for yourself and try to tell your story for you. I feel you can get a lot more out of a class where you can express yourself because it puts you more at ease.

At the beginning of the class I thought the goals of the class were to teach about empowerment and to teach the ideas and principles that go behind the idea of being empowered and to allow you, once you understand these ideas, to also become empowered. I started feeling much more comfortable with expressing myself after the second day. During the class, there was nothing that really made me feel uncomfortable. This class reminded me of a philosophy class I once took. I really enjoyed my philosophy class because it was very open and there were no definitions of right and wrong, which I thoroughly enjoyed. It was much like this class in its openness. Both classes were very enjoyable. I felt empowered in every single class. I never felt like I was “out of it”. The
town hall meeting was very calm because it provided a lot of different perspectives from many different people, but the similarities between these people were evident.

Intern: smooth brother… he was very knowledgeable. He was strong, quiet, knew when to interject and could take lead, but was not dominating. Guest speaker: Very knowledgeable. They were helpful and I appreciated them allowing me to be myself, especially because I enjoy making jokes, which is something I use to calm myself.

Although our instructors were women, they were very thorough, well prepared, and knew how to handle things; they weren’t timid. Religion wasn’t a factor for me because I feel you have to be tolerant of all religions. The fact that some of my instructors were a different religion than me didn’t bother me. The fact that all of my instructors didn’t have knowledge of incarcerations didn’t bother me because to have knowledge, you have to be able to learn, not just experience. The fact that they were unfamiliar with this system, to me, made it even better because it made the topic even broader and allowed me to express myself more.

Tommy’s Classroom experience (Data Sources – Journal entries Mar-May. 2010/ participant interviews 2 and 3, Dec. 2010.)

The federal prison system has a program called pre-release and you have to do it within two years of release. So I completed that program and what it really was, was a program that helps you find jobs and write resumes and stuff not too much that can help you and not really a reentry into society but basically to help you with jobs and stuff when you get out. They also told us that if we needed to get counseling, to not be ashamed. I only paid attention to the job skills part of the class because I always kept my
dreams in the streets, because once your dreams are on the inside you become institutionalized and I didn’t want to be one of those guys who were burnt out because everything they do is geared towards prison life. When Pete told me about this program, I was definitely down for because knowledge is key and as a servant of Allah and a follower of Muhammad we are told to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave and it was for our betterment.

At first I thought the class was going to be boring… I just didn’t think the class was going to be like it was; the first class totally changed my perspective of what I thought the class was. Sometimes I found myself speeding to make sure I made it to class on time. I think that all the instructors brought to the class genuine warmth… some teachers teach to get a pay check, but these teachers genuinely wanted us to learn and I think that they learned a lot from us too. This class was kind of similar to the anger management class that I had while I was in prison, but this class had a wide range, it taught me about myself and get my life back on track. I’m working on building my credit now because of one of the lessons we had in class. I’m looking at life different now, at first I was thinking, I’m just happy to have a job, not that I was content, but I was grateful for it. In prison you only get paid once a month for working five days, 40 hours a week… and most people only get 70 or 80 dollars and if you have a fine you might only get $5 for manual labor. So coming home, I was grateful for getting a job that was more than minimum wage. So, at first, I guess I was content. Although I like all the activities, I especially liked the session where Dana brought the food (laughs) but seriously, I still
think about the movie that you showed us on Enron (The Smartest Guys in the room).
I still think about that.

The town hall meeting was off the chain… the way we pulled that off definitely made us express what we were taught. It was very informative and I think we ALL learned something from each other. I think for us the students in the class and complete strangers, in that short amount of time we were there, we all became family. I wish we could have done that a couple more times before the class was over. At first I didn’t think I was prepared to lead that type of session… I’m not going to say I felt pressured, but I kind of didn’t want to, but afterwards I was glad I did. Sometimes in life we need that push, and I’m so glad we were pushed because I really enjoyed that.

In general I thought the text was good, but some things I disagreed with coming from a religious standpoint. Also, there were some things that the author talked about as far as manhood, like all Black men are alike, some of the things he said I thought were kind of disrespectful, because that’s not how I am. The author didn’t say all black men, but he didn’t same some either. To be honest I never read that type of book before, only more urban books, so I wouldn’t have recommended another one. But the book we had was good overall.

It didn’t bother me that some of the instructors were not Muslim, when we would talk about what we believed, Tracy’s might present another perspective from her beliefs, but in a very respectful way, so I liked that. I also don’t think that gender mattered either. The only time I talked about my prison experience before this was when I was trying to
deter young cats from going into the joint, trying to save them from having that experience, but it wasn’t really too often. And never in a group setting.
CHAPTER VII
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived experiences of four formerly incarcerated African American males participating in a PCEI-Empowerment Course. Chapter six uses participant narratives to portray to the reader the essence of being in a PCEI-Empowerment program. This chapter begins with findings that answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program?
2. In what ways did the PCEI affect the participant’s social identity?
3. In what ways do a Post-Correctional Educational Intervention curriculum designed for African American males influence the participants’ perceptions of empowerment?

Two major themes emerged regarding what contributed to participants’ experiences in the PCEI Empowerment course. The major theme of empowerment reflects the nine constructs of empowerment that were identified in chapter one and social identity (major theme) produced four sub-themes that represent perceptions of self that participants believed might have encouraged their continued participation in community after taking the PCEI-Empowerment course. Themes are presented using descriptions of
what (texture) participants experienced in the PCEI-Empowerment course and how (structure) they experienced the course. Understanding texture and structure is necessary to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Empowerment refers to participants’ indication of perceptions of ability while social identity refers to the participants’ perceptions of self in terms group identification and acceptance. The analysis of the major theme of social identity and the four emergent sub-themes of social identity: Black manhood, Religion/Spirituality, Fatherhood and Black male sexuality allowed researchers to answer research questions one and two: In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program? And In what ways did the PCEI affect the participant’s social identity?

The analysis of the major theme of empowerment allowed researchers to answer question three. In what ways does a Post-Correctional Educational Intervention curriculum designed for African American males influence the participants’ perceptions of empowerment? - By separating out the nine tenants that comprised the operational definition of empowerment within the scope of this research.

Social Identity

Social Identity has to do with the students’ sense-of-self and the in-groups that they most identified with before, during and after their participation in the PCEI – Empowerment course. From the major theme of social identity, four sub-themes emerged.
a. **Black Manhood**

To be Black and male in American society places one at risk for a variety of economic and social ills. Afro-American men are twice as likely to be unemployed as white men, with unemployment rates highest in major urban areas and among youth (U.S. Department of Labor 1991; Wilson 1987). In school achievement and academic skills, Afro-American males are at risk for lags in performance as a result they suffer the highest rates of school dropout and failure (Garibaldi 1988). The absence in mainstream employment sectors and educational institutions is paralleled by the disproportionate incarceration of Afro-American males, who make up 42 percent of the prison population and 47 percent of those on death row. In addition, the average life expectancy of Afro-American males, who face a lifetime homicide risk of 1 in 21, has declined during the last three decades (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1985, 1988). However, even in the context of oppression, African American men have been instrumental in the continuation of their communities and families, suggesting that there is a cultural tradition within which Black men have forged a meaningful and viable identity for themselves (Bowman 1989; Cazenave 1979, 1985; Gwaltney 1980; Gutman 1976; Hunter 1988; Shaw 1974). This paradox of crisis and survival is at the core of the Afro-American experience.

African American men move between majority and minority cultures and must negotiate the racism and discrimination that accompany castelike minority status. Franklin (1986, 1987) suggests that Black masculinity and male role identity must be viewed in these varying social and cultural contexts. Specifically, Afro-American men are expected to conform to dominant gender role expectations (e.g., successful,
competitive, and aggressive) as well as to meet culturally specific requirements of the Afro-American community that may often conflict (e.g., cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group). Further, he suggests a Black men's group also exists that embodies expectations (e.g., sexism, irresponsibility and violence) that are antithetical to adequate male role performance as defined by both the Afro-American community and mainstream American society (Hunter & Davis, 1992).

The sub-theme of black manhood emerged throughout interviews, journals entries and the culminating event. Most evident was this concept's impact on Pete. He most often discussed the concept and differences of Black manhood as opposed to other groups of men. He identified so heavily with this concept that he chose to define and discuss it in his culminating project. Throughout the life of the class, the student participant's perceptions of Black Manhood were met with pride in some aspects as well as a sense of shame in others.

On the first day of class Pete states that three principles that he lives by are his religious beliefs, his principles and being a man. He goes on to state that, "there are certain things that I feel I don't have to accept as a man. And I also believe in the warrior spirit. I think I have earned the right to be classified as a warrior so there are certain things and certain principles that I will not tolerate from anyone (Self-Assessment – March 2010). This concept of “warrior male” in conjunction with Black manhood quickly became a theme of the class.

Pete recalled in a journal assignment (Journal entry 1, March, 2010) his past concepts of manhood may have been naive:
Twenty years ago. Just as a brother once told me, he said, “You are obstinate in your display of pugnacious tendencies. So combined with that, I was a fool’s fool. Um I definitely had to see this attitude prior. And I was too stupid to be fearful and too ignorant to know when to stop, you know. And uh since I loved to do physical battle back then. I loved to fight, and I’d look for excuses to get physical. That combination, I had issues…”

As an explanation of his prior behaviors and the changes that he has made while incarcerated, he explains, “So when I came up here I had to relearn and feel my way through this environment, because the social norms from there did not necessarily fit out here.” He goes on to explain:

But today my whole paradigm has shifted from where it once was. It used to be about the all mighty dollar uh with me. So back in the day of people paying me literally, I have done some very vicious things for money in my life. I wasn’t a chump, I wasn’t a cheap (he laughs). I came with a high price, but I was definitely for money it was um I would just about do anything for money.

He then goes on to show repentance by saying in interview 3 (December, 2010), “Well today I’m very much more in-tuned with the reality that I’ve got to answer for everything, I’ve done both good and bad and now I’m trying to balance that and cover up with a lot of good. But before I never even thought about it.”

Donnie had a similar experience. On the first class, he disclosed that 20 years ago he was a “zip fool” and had very little understanding [of empowerment]. He thought being strong was being physically strong; “Able to overpower someone or willing to do whatever it takes to overpower someone” (Self-Assessment, March 2010). This concept
of empowerment and manhood was further explained in his self-assessment (March, 2010).

Prior to incarceration, I wanted to be the baddest Black Stone Ranger to walk the south side of Chicago. To run my hood like no one else could. I liked that life so much that, that was all that mattered. It was in my blood to the point of no return. I stole, robbed fought... I was willing to die for that idea of being a Stone. My goal was to die a Stone.

When asked what people thought of him prior to incarceration. He says, “People looked at me like I was a fool on the loose. I was one of the last people you wanted to see coming.” But now he says, “People look at me as a positive person, I’m the one in the community who other people bring problems to. (Interview 3, December, 2010).

Pete also disclosed in interview one (December, 2010) that he amazed at how the (female) instructors were able the “crack their shells” and bring out things the he “never talked about as a man.” He discusses his concept of black manhood in his presentation (May, 2010):

…you know when you grow up in these hoods and in these streets you don’t see the benefit in being emotional, emotionally vulnerable because that makes you a mark. That makes you a target. That makes you an easy victim. Only a black man can teach a black boy how to become a black man and we have to do them something different. Being a male does not make you a man. When they pick up a dog, when the dog has pups they raise them up and they look between his legs and says, “it’s a male.” That don’t make it a man.
More so than any of the other student-participants, Pete discussed the feminine influences in his life and in his community. He also discusses the influence that women have on black manhood:

It’s women who give us our men, I mean, it’s women who teach us how to be a human being. It’s our mothers, our grandmothers, everybody up here can attest it’s probably a woman who put the most of what essence of a human being that we are. Now on the flipside coming being in those dismal crypts (prisons), which is an artificial man-made environment and what it is, insanity is that any environment where there is no women or children is insane. With men controlling it. This is insanity.

Pete was the only student-participant to equate male/female and family relationships with sanity, explaining that he lost aspects of his manhood while incarcerated, therefore losing aspects of his sanity and to some degree, his humanity.

Towards the final weeks of the PCEI-Empowerment Course, Tommy began to write about the importance of manhood in his life.

My legacy will be from a boy who grew up in a violent, drug selling street life who went to prison and learned about religion, politics and life itself and came home as a man. A man who realized the error of his ways and how the role he played caused the destruction in the black community. (Journal Entry, April, 2010).

Dana added in fields notes (May, 2010) that, “Today’s discussion made evident that these gentlemen consider themselves warriors. Their plans to be well in this kind of mindset reflected a strong consciousness of violence and a willingness to stretch outside what is normal for them to see something else.”
During the civil rights era, the Black power movement offered a radicalized image of Black manhood. Black manhood as the embodiment of "Black rage" was an alternative to the emasculated Black male, particularly in inner cities. Grier and Cobb's (1968) Black Rage was a major articulation of this perspective, found also in the works of Afro-American men writers of the period (Baldwin 1961, Brown 1965). The collective frustration and anger over the denial of manhood, identity, and peoplehood that led to urban riots was seen as a powerful expression of manhood and as a vehicle for social protests (Grier and Cobbs 1968; Segal 1990; Turner 1977). In contrast, the imagery of contemporary urban Black manhood emphasizes hypermasculinity (i.e., hyperaggressiveness, hypersexuality, excessive emphasis on appearance of wealth, and the absence of personal accountability) as a form of ghetto-specific manhood born out of the pathology or despair of the "Black underclass" (Anderson 1990; Franklin 1984; Glasgow 1980; Oliver 1984, 1989a, 1989b). The expressed rage of the urban Black male, which was once viewed as a political vehicle and a form of self-expression, is now seen as aimless, dangerous, and self-destructive (Franklin 1987; Kunjufu 1982; Oliver 1989a, 1989b).

The concept of manhood was also the theme of the text that was used in the PCEI-Empowerment course. The instructors chose this book because it acted as a guide for black men living in racist and oppressive environments in the United States. The first chapter dealt specifically with religion and spirituality of black men. It was no surprise that the sub-theme of spirituality and religion emerged in the class, especially considering that all of the students converted to Islam while incarcerated.
b. Religion/Spirituality

Since the early 1900's, there has been an increase interest in the role religion plays in the lives of African-Americans (Taylor et al., 2004). According to Hill (1999), strong religious commitment is one of the most pervasive cultural strengths of African-Americans. Religion and spirituality continue to provide African-Americans with incredible resolve when facing adversity. Only a few studies have examined the effect religion and spirituality have on African-American students who are attending college.

Some researchers believe that there is a vast difference between spirituality and religion. For instance, Jagers and Smith (1996) suggested that spirituality is a worldview that is central to the cultural expressions found in the African Diaspora. Love and Talbot (1999) maintained that spirituality is a process that involves the pursuit for discovering direction, meaning, and purpose in one's life. Taylor et al. (2004) defines religion as, "an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals designed to facilitate closeness to God, whereas spirituality is seen as a personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning, and relationships to the sacred." Mattis (2000) states that, "religion is typically associated with organized, institutional activities. It involves the practices and rituals of attendance in worship services, the reading of sacred texts and affiliation with an organized church, mosque, of synagogue." Even though spirituality and religion are used interchangeably there is definitely a disparity between the two.

Throughout the course the instructors discussed a spiritual perspective of the text while the student-participants often discussed a more religious perspective. They did not tend to discuss their beliefs in a “loose” context. Their religious belief system seemed to
be fixed and rigid. Each of the men was born and raised Christian and had a good understanding of that perspective and how it related to their current beliefs. Pete, Donnie and Tommy each commented in their second interview (December, 2010) that they felt that the text had a strong Christian influence and would have liked a more balanced representation of their Islamic beliefs. Although all of the students mentioned their religion and/or spirituality while participating in PCEI-Empowerment course, it was Tommy, who had converted most recently, and the conversations gave him more opportunities to study and analyze religion in a group environment that included Christian and non-religious participants (Instructors). In his final presentation (May, 2010), Tommy chose to discuss religion and spirituality. In it he proposed steps to pursuing spiritual growth and wellness based on his research of the subject. He suggested that, “First you have to set aside a home to reflect. Set aside a place in a home to meditate and pray. You also have to pursue media, where the print, audio or visual content that promotes good character and balanced living.”

He also says:

Now, what we have here is a relation to some of the key things to what a spiritual foundation is. It’s relationship with one’s self. Relationship with God. This is the most important.

The importance of Tommy’s religious transition was outlined in his ninth journal entry.

I grew up in a Christian home raised by my mom and grandma. I sang in the choir as a kid, but once I went to high school, I started trying to be more like my dad who was a gang chief and major player in the game. I saw all the things negative and thought this is what life was about. I started selling kilos of cocaine at an early age and I had a
lot of them. I was arrested by the FBI and charged with conspiring to possess and conspiracy with the intent to distribute cocaine. I was sentenced to 172 months in federal prison. During my prison term, I studied many religions and when it came to Islam it answered all of my questions and I submitted to the will of Islam (Journal Entry – April 2010).

On the flip side, Donnie was the first to convert to Islam of the four student-participants. It was actually his gang affiliation that prompted his religious conversion. As a member of the Black P Stone Rangers, Donnie was introduced to “loose” Islamic interpretations in the late 1970s when Jeff Fort (Founder of BPS) was released from prison and changed his name. He also renamed the Black P. Stones as El Rukn. El Rukn adopted their Islamic principles from the Moorish Science Temple - also the forerunner of Black Muslim groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Five Percenters. They take inspiration from the historic black African Moors who came from north and West Africa and conquered Iberia in the Middle Ages, and who were fundamentalist Muslims. While in prison, Donnie learned more orthodox Sunni Muslim principles and converted within five years if his incarceration. Donnie says in his self-assessment that, “

Islam has made me more humble. Years ago I was more aggressive, and more violent, and more unruly to learn or whatever, but today has made me more patient and you know, respectful and stuff like that” (Self-Assessment, March 2010). He explain further in his second journal entry that,

My spiritual being has allowed me to integrate some of what I think is the high principles into my life such as love, loyalty, honor, respect, trust and most of all belief in the good in myself and the greater good in the world. To this day I try to use these facts in my life by doing so I am at a
point where people begin to see some of these principles manifest in themselves in everyday life. Because of my spirituality, I am a better man.

c. Fatherhood

During the early twentieth century, massive Black migration to northern cities placed the "Negro problem" on the national agenda. Frazier's (1939) seminal work, The Negro Family in the United States, suggests that the history of slavery, oppression, and disenfranchisement had born a cultural pathos in which the patriarchal family system had been replaced by the "matrichate." Frazier (1939) suggests this pattern may not have been maladaptive in rural areas, but in the context of urban living the structure and organization of many poor Afro-American families led to juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, increasing numbers of female-headed households, and a litany of other social ills.

The role that fathers, especially nonresident fathers, play in providing support for their children may be particularly important for African American families. Although gaps with other racial and ethnic groups are narrowing, a greater proportion of young African American women are low-income single parents than are White or Hispanic women (Lerman, 1993; Ventura & Bachrach, 2000). A better understanding of fathering among African American males is thus particularly important. We know remarkably little about the relationship between young African American fathers and their children, especially from the fathers’ perspective, and this is particularly the case for nonresidential fathers (Danziger & Radin, 1990; Parke, 1996).
Much of the available literature has tended to perpetuate a stereotype of dysfunctional and deviant young African American males (Gibbs, 1988). Rasheed and Rasheed (1999) have observed that the social science literature has generally described African American males as “invisible” or barely existing. Scott and Black (1991), in a discussion of kin networks within the African American family, suggest that membership in “street corner networks” (p. 208) leads to African American males’ becoming transient family members. Marsiglio (1993b), in a review of the fatherhood literature, noted the general public’s view of African American fathers as hypermasculine males who are financially irresponsible and uninvolved fathers.

It was found in week three of the course that each of the participants are fathers and each had infant daughters (although Pete’s daughter was slightly older) prior to incarceration. Tommy and John seemed to discuss their daughter the least while Pete and Donnie mentioned their daughters or told stories about their interactions throughout the course. Each of the four student-participants mentioned how important fatherhood is and expressed a sense of sadness for missing a bulk of their daughter’s lives. By far the most profound shift in identity in terms of fatherhood was Donnie as identified in other chapters. It was mentioned in the previous section that Donnie spoke about his daughter’s assault in the culminating event, however, we found in his interview (1 and 2) data that he did not intend to talk about his daughter’s assault during the culminating project because it was in front of the community. His description of it was so powerful that the audience members were in tears. In his interview, he also explains that,
For the culminating event, my topic was on the abuse of women and girls, and it was an interesting subject because I didn’t understand the magnitude of women’s power. Things started to pop up because of what my daughter went through and it was bigger than I thought it would be. It was very personal for me because it reminded me of my daughter who was also abused. In my presentation, I shared more than I originally planned… It helped me understand her and her feelings of vulnerability because I was also feeling vulnerable when I was incarcerated because there was nothing I could do.

In a reflective moment in his presentation he discusses his words and actions during the class, specifically about his jokes about violence against women and says that, “We have to be careful of the examples we set for our children. We gotta watch that; because if we don’t, we’re in trouble.” Pete also discusses fatherhood by saying:

We’ve got to become better fathers. We’ve got to become better brothers, sons, leaders, teachers, mentors, husbands, providers, and protectors. And we’ve all got to do that. If you ain’t got no children, then find some children to father. Because fatherhood ain’t got a damn thing to do with biology. It’s mentality. Self-reflection of self-accountability. And that’s something that each one of us has to do.

d. Black Male Sexuality

Although there was never a discussion in the PCEI-Empowerment Course about any overtly sexual topic, the idea of homosexuality became a sensitive topic throughout the life of the course. Current research suggests that, due to a combination of both religious forces and political forces, antigay attitudes and sentiments may be more pronounced among Black Americans (Collins, 2004; Douglas, 1999; Dyson, 2003;
Research examining Black American perceptions and attitudes on homosexuality has yielded contradictory findings. Some found Black Americans to be less accepting of homosexuality than Whites (Lewis, 2003; Waldner, Sikka, & Baig, 1999), while other studies failed to find significant differences between these two groups (Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Irwin & Thompson, 1977). One noteworthy study found paradoxical results: After controlling for frequency of church attendance, education, age, and gender, Lewis (2003) found that Black Americans were more resistant to homosexuality than Whites. However, he also found that Black Americans were more supportive than Whites of gay civil liberties and significantly more opposed to antigay employment discrimination than Whites. This paradox of having both strong religious issues with homosexuality with support for civil rights for homosexuals suggest that the dislike for homosexuality among Black Americans cannot be easily distilled to a single causal factor. Further research is needed to identify how historical, political, and religious views coalesce around homophobia in this particular community (Valero & Taylor, 2011).

Discussing black male sexuality was something that the female instructors struggled with while preparing the course and leading class discussions. As mentioned in the classroom observation section of Chapter VI, the subject of homosexuality came up during weeks five and seven and was met with hostility from the students. As described
earlier, in an interview, Pete disclosed that these discussions were the most uncomfortable for him.

We discussed the assignments for the coming weeks, specifically the town hall meeting. I asked the Brothers how they felt about facilitating the discussions at that time and explained the topics and how they were to develop topics that dealt specifically with Black men in the community. I asked them how they felt about the subject of homosexuality in the Black community. The demeanor immediately changed, negatively. They were noticeably uncomfortable. Pete, in particular, seemed agitated and explained to the class that homosexuality was a sin and if I brought it up during the group discussion, I should, “be very careful” about how I did it. Tommy went on to say that “he did not understand why we should discuss it because it was not relevant in the Black community,” this was an issue that “other communities have to deal with.” I asked for clarification and he simply stated that he “really don’t [sic] understand why it matters… There’s no gay people around me. I mean… I don’t even know any gay people.”

Dana mentioned in her field notes (May, 2010)

They are very committed to Islam and have no tolerance for anything that goes against the principles. We talked about homosexuality in the family. They half-heartedly joked that it would be appropriate to take that family member “on a camping trip” and “accidents happen all the time.”

The strong stance take the student-participants take against homosexuality is not surprising when taking their religious conversion into account. In Islam, homosexuals (called qaum Lut, the "people of Lot") are condemned in the story of Lot's people in the
Qur’an (15:73; 26:165) and in the last address of the Prophet Muhammad. In every instance of this discussion, Qur’anic verses were quoted and used by the student-participants as evidence of their correctness on the subject.

Summary

*In what ways does the social identity of the participants influence their perceptions and experiences of the PCEI implemented in the City Transitions program?*

The student-participants of the PCEI-Empowerment course began the course identifying heavily with gangs and other organized criminal organizations. At the same time, each of them also identified heavily with their religion. This seeming contradiction allowed the students to relate in a unique way in the class sessions. Their relationships to traditional school environments and prison made the student-participants feel skeptical in the beginning. However, their comfort level increased as the class progressed. In terms of their religious ingroup, it was clear that knowledge of Islam (by the instructors) was important. There was not a class session held that did not require a conversation about their religious influences. Although the student-participants reported that they had no aversions to having non-Muslim instructors, it was clear that having one Muslim instructor assisted in bridging a potential disconnect between students and instructors.

It was also important that instructors had a basic understanding of gangs, the criminal justice system and the prison system. The student-participants would sometimes challenge Dana and Tracy’s comprehension of those concepts because of their perceptions of those instructors being raised middle to upper-middle class. Oftentimes the students would say things for shock-value and monopolize discussions, especially when
In their identifications of themselves as men and heads of households they went from sharing stories of violence and pain to those of vulnerability.

*In what ways did the PCEI affect the participant’s social identity?*

Analysis revealed that each participant discovered feelings of empowerment, as defined in Chapter I, after participating in the PCEI – Empowerment course and while there was no evidence of a shift or change in the participants ingroup, there was evidence that the participants sense of positionality within those groups did increase. For example, each student-participant remain to have feelings of loyalty to their designated ingroup (gang, tribe, religion, etc.), however, journal entries and interview data showed that each student-participant now felt more responsible for the others in their ingroup and now have intentions to gain or in some cases regain leadership while providing positive examples.

Additionally, each student participant showed evidence of understanding that regardless of their criminal history or prior/current affiliations, they are able to shift ingroup participation should they choose to do so; an option that they were not aware of before.

*Empowerment*

**Having decision-making power**

Empowerment was defined in Chapter I and included nine tenants or concepts that would help researchers identify perceptions of empowerment throughout the PCEI-
Empowerment course. The first tenant of, having decision-making power was shown in several instances, including Donnie during his culminating project. Donnie (Interview 1, Dec. 2010) says that he knew, “taking this class would reconfirm the idea of hope” for him. Adding that the course,

…has put me back sort of like on the track, you know, and um it’s kind of like putting me out there. So what I got from this class. This class is empowerment; I realized I’ve been in power all my life. I realized through my uh stupidity and my youth and my aggressiveness when I was young and doing whatever I chose to do. I was empowered at that time. And was incarcerated doing all that time. I was in power and I realize I’m in power in what I do today. So this class has confirmed and reaffirmed the fact that whatever you do, whatever you want to do, you got the power to do it.

It was found early on in the data analysis that the information provided to the student-participants throughout the course had been the first time that they had access to information such as, credit-building, educational options, career mobility; as well as information concerning healthy options for their age and lifestyle. During week four of the course, students were offered an opportunity to meet one-on-one with a career and college readiness specialist.

Learning to think critically

Michael Scriven and Richard Paul (1987) defined critical thinking as, the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In its exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend
subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound
evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness.

Analysis of the interview and journal data revealed several examples of students
learning to think critically, the third tenant of empowerment. Donnie showed evidence of
learning conditioning and seeing things differently by sharing with the audience during
the culminating event that, “[t]oday, I am a headstrong positive person whose willing to
do the things I didn’t do yesterday, which was deal positive and do the things that are
right. Right now, I want to do the right thing. So I, I try to set my goal on doing the right
things (Interview 3, Dec. 2010). He goes on to share:

I have two daughters and my oldest daughter has been
raped. So, I understand how it is. The subject matter is kind
of touchy to me in terms of not being there. If I could take
that back, I would give my life for her not to experience
that. It’s a touchy thing when you’re dealing with, when
you’re touching a person and grabbing them and forcing
yourself on them against their will. It’s a very, very, very
harsh reality to make a person live with. Very harsh.
Because when you walk away, you don’t realize they’re
living that, they’re living that for the rest of their life. It’s
gonna re-occur at certain times and certain hours. It’s not
fair to that person. When they re-live that, guess what, it’s
like it’s happening again. It’s not fair to do that to a person.
It’s not fair to overpower a person in that manner.

This was an important revelation for Donnie considering that throughout the
course he made several “jokes” referring to assaulting a person regardless of gender.
Researchers and instructors were concerned about Donnie’s proclivity towards violence
against women and his nonchalant attitude toward the subject during week five of the
course. Donnie revealed to us, during the culminating event (May, 2010) that before the
PCEI-Empowerment course he was not able to discuss this issue and that his ability to joke about the subject in class was a defense mechanism that assisted him in dealing with his feelings of inadequacy in helping his daughter during her assault. He now understands how to talk about his feelings about the attack with his daughter. In this example, Donnie was able to relive the experience and process it in a manner that would allow him to assess his feelings and behavior after his daughter’s attack and communicate his vulnerability in the situation; then connect it to his recent coping mechanism of joking about violence against women.

Donnie goes on to show evidence of learning to redefine who he is by speaking in his own voice on the passing of his mother while he was incarcerated as well, he goes on to say (Interview 1, Dec. 2010):

I felt I couldn’t talk to no one. You know what I’m saying, because my voice, my uh reason, uh and even my strength to breathe was lost in 1996 when my mother passed. Because this was my voice from when I got locked up. This was my eyes. She told me things and she talked about things and she taught me things over a phone. She developed me over a phone. She chastised me over a phone. And this is how I made it through. It was my mother who said, quit doing this, don’t do this, stop doing this, you’ve got to do. This was my mother who was beating me down. You know what I’m saying, with this welt that I could not see, but I could feel it for the 22 years of my incarceration. And on her passing, at that point there was no need in whooping me no more, because I had the message. So to me I look at everybody included in my life has a purpose and the purpose might not be known to me on the daily come, but I believe the lord will unfold to me in purpose. But today, I can see what it is. I couldn’t see it or say it before.
Learning to redefine what we can do

John also showed evidence of finding his voice during the culminating event (May, 2010) when he shared that he, “was totally isolated from socializing with a lot of people”, he goes on to say,

If you wasn’t close to me, if you wasn’t a Muslim or something, I was kind of shunned [sic] from you. But I’ve been around these people and they taught me a lot. These brothers and this class and being around people, you know what I’m saying, I went down (was incarcerated) when I was young. I came out as an older man. I missed half my life. You know, I gave more time in prison then I did on the streets. So that kind of like took me to a whole nother [sic] world. And trying to get out of that world after coming back to society it kind of helped me. And I was like in chains and I had to find a way to break them chains. And all of a sudden, behold through a lock, I was blessed with this class and they helped me a lot.

Tommy expressed in his first interview (Dec. 2010) that, “[t]wenty years ago or 10 years I didn’t care about anybody, but me. I did whatever it took for me to survive. Uh not really a bully, but a person that didn’t take no mess, you know, I did what I wanted to do.” Contrary to his persona in the PCEI-Empowerment course, Tommy explains that in his youth that he was not a “person who would compromise.” But he then explains that, “…today, I’m basically the opposite of all that, I’m more willing to compromise. I’m more understanding, I’m more forgiving. But I see now that I don”t have to be the same way I was back then.” Donnie added that, “this class made me open up and think about yesterday and today.”
Learning to redefine our relationships to institutionalized power

Institutional Oppression is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group (Tri-County Domestic & Sexual Violence Intervention Network, 2006). Institutional Oppression occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups. If oppressive consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs, or practices, the institution is oppressive whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have oppressive intentions (Tri-County Domestic & Sexual Violence Intervention Network, 2006).

Although there was some evidence of the students relationship to institutionalized power shifting, to some degree, it may not have been directly related to their participation in the PCEI-Empowerment course. There were some factors that could have directly impacted that relationship, including the number of years in society after incarceration, a re-institutionalization while living under the rules and regulations of the transition house, or a shifting sense of self after converting to Islam that made their religious devotion stronger than their dependence on the institution; or a combination of these factors.

In a class assignment (April, 2010), we provided a handout to students with a list of personality indicators. The assignment was to identify who they believed themselves to be in the past, present and future by writing those words next to the characteristic, for example, Man, criminal, activist, lover, friend, convict, inmate, and father. There were a total of 25 indicators listed, what the instructors found in that three of the four student-
participants identified themselves as “convicts” for the past and present but no one identified themselves as inmates (past or present). When asked about this, Pete explained, “An “inmate” is somebody in the institution that is a “model citizen” a “snitch”, somebody who is not respected in the joint. A convict is somebody who is a rebel, who was convicted of a crime but doesn’t fall victim to the system.” These definitions are a direct response to the power dynamics that they perceive are in place to divide them as prisoners. The “inmate” becomes the “overseer” and the “convicts” are the slaves. In order to compensate for the discrepancies in their treatment while incarcerated they developed a verbal system of identifying those who could and could not be trusted by using language to acclimate to the environment. A sense of power, is in effect, restored in being considered a “convict” because the term suggests that they have more control over their lives whereas, as an “inmate” simply “going along to get along”, but has no integrity or personal power in relation to the institution of prison.

**Effecting change in one's life and one's community**

Two of the four participants increased the amount of community work that they participate in the months following the PCEI-Empowerment course, Tommy expressed in interview 2 (Dec. 2010) that, “…now I’m working every day and working with boys who were like me at that age. I work with community organizations now because I was part of the problems that were on the street before, the gang-banging and shooting started in my era and now it’s really out of hand and I want to be a part of the solution now.” He also mentioned in the culminating event (May, 2010) that, “…back in the day, we were only bad things, we were introducing the negativity, so we’ve got to be the same way
with positive things. And we need to instill that in them (youth)… make examples, like the house that we doing right now. Introduce them to things like that and show them that they have a chance.” In that same event, Pete (May, 2010) adds that, “Each of us has to extend ourselves by taking responsibility for our community. We have to spread love to all members with the understanding that not all fruit ripens at the same time. He explains his point by saying that, “The young brothers on the corner, those are your young brothers, your young sons, your young nephews, cousins, and we need to reach out to them. And if you talking about what they ain’t doing where are those fingers pointing back at you.”

In Donnie’s twelfth journal entry, he began to show evidence of understanding the importance of change:

The first thing you need to do is make a change in yourself. Once you have the ability to change yourself, you then have the ability to bring about change in others. I would like to bring about change for the betterment of my people and society as a whole. I would also like to see a change in our educational system. The system as a whole does not address the “so-called” Black man on no [sic] level. It needs to address the needs of the people, then it would be moving in the right direction.

Changing others’ perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act

In terms of competency and capacity to act, John (Interview 3, Dec. 2010) showed evidence of embodying the spirit of this tenant by explaining in an interview that his feelings and thoughts about his own life has definitely changed and that the PCEI-Empowerment course gave him some better options, especially in terms of his personal relationships. However, Pete showed the most evidence of this tenant’s influence in his
life. Pete discusses in the culminating event (May, 2010) his experience in the class by saying:

What the class has done for me, it has given me like, you say hope, but it has given me another belief that there’s more to this life. There’s more to it if we just work at it. Um, I’m getting ready to go back to (graduate) school. But I’m going back to school because I see the necessity in that and I understand it now a little bit better. So the class has motivated me as well as enlightened me and I just said, you know, it showed me also the dutiful power of our sisters. I didn’t want to do it before. I didn’t think it was necessary or maybe I didn’t think I could.

He also talks about his capacity to act in terms of his commitment to his community by saying:

A person must accept some self-responsibility for our communities, families, households…people. You must take an honest look at the root causes of our problems such as poverty, a lack of parenting skills, because we have babies, lack of quality education, because our children are being undereducated. They’re being bored. Pete- Culminating Event- No more finger pointing or blaming the man, because we are the man. Often you hear in our community here come the man, or the man doing this or the man won’t let me or the man won’t let us do this. We need to become the man, because in that term itself, when you say “the man” you also implying an instinctively that you the boy. You are other than a man. You are the man. Now let’s do what we have to for what we have been created to do and that is change this world. And can’t nobody stop us from doing that but us.

Tommy (Culminating event, May, 2010) also pointed out:

All I wanted is what I could get for right now. And we really can’t live like that. We got to be able to help somebody out sometimes to help bring them up to your level so they can, so somebody else above your level can help you get up to their level. We so content, well I’m just
trying to get mine, I don’t care about nobody else. And with this class it showed me that as a society we can’t make it that way.

Tommy also showed his capacity to act early on in the course. He stated in his self-assessment (March, 2010) that he definitely has a story to tell. He talked about how he tried to really “authenticate” himself while working in the community,

...because when you go out and talk to people, you know, you don’t want to seem like a fraud, a fake or a wannabe. So a lot of times I authenticate myself. You know, and I keep my Prison I.D. in my pocket right now so I show that to them first, and then I tell them I did 13 calendars in prison straight, you know, half of you all 14 years old, so I did your whole life in prison. So that’s what I do, I authenticate myself.

**Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma**

Although each participant showed evidence of an increase in self-image and overcoming stigma, John’s increase was the most pronounced. He shared with the audience in the culminating event (May, 2010) that,

...they brought me to this class. And this class has really pushed me over. You know what I’m saying, it helped me take that big step that I was like, you know, I was fighting it. You know what I’m saying, I was like, oh man, I don’t want to do this, I don’t want to do this, I can’t do this, I can’t do this. But I realize that now I can do it, you know what I’m saying. It brought me out of a shell. I was in a shell. You know, institutionalized, I was in a shell.

To reiterate, Pete (May 2010) added, “We’ve got to get away from that. That’s what our problem is. All we content with is just getting a job, getting a paycheck. Don’t want to do no work, don’t want to do nothing. No, we got to, we got to come out of that.”
This sentiment was repeated throughout the life of the course by each participant.

The stigma of being an ex-offender was something that was often discussed in class, but in the data analysis, it was found the student-participants talked and wrote about their experiences outside of prison to a much larger degree than they did about experiences in prison. Although there was evidence that there was an increase in their self-image through discussion, Tommy wrote in his last journal entry:

Not to be overly confident but I like the way my life is going. I’m spiritually grounded, have a good job and I like who I am as a person. I am a people person and I think that’s what works for me. I love making people laugh and I try to enjoy life to the fullest. Prison was hell on earth for me so to be free and being a Muslim is a joy and I try to enjoy every day. People gravitate towards me and I like that (Journal entry, May 2010).

Not feeling alone; feeling part of a group

Each of the students expressed their feelings of empowerment since being able to interact in a group environment, John (Interview 2, Dec. 2010) admits that in the PCEI-Empowerment course that when he was able to communicate and socialize, he felt empowered. He says, “Before, I was locked in my own little time frame, or world, but communicating gave me an idea about everybody that helped me feel better.” He also mentions that his interaction with the instructors helped him to socialize, which was something he wasn’t used to. Tommy (Dec. 2010) then discloses in his interview three that, “In the beginning, I was kind of embarrassed to talk about those (prison) experiences, and making the mistakes that I made that made me go into prison, but then the class made me realize that hey, it is what it is. It’s not about where you’ve been it’s
about where you’re going now.” Pete furthers this assertion in the culminating event by explaining,

You know, we carry that burden, I mean that’s a hard one to deal with. It still bothers me to this day. You know, so you know I think that we just got to create spaces where we can be vulnerable, where we can be real with one another and that as we did with the United Congress when we first off we had to be onions. We had to be able to peel the onion.

However, Donnie (May, 2010) shared with everyone during the culminating event:

I deal with men on different levels and the thing I’ve learned about having pain in your life is that you come to a point where as you can be so known, or so unknown in a situation. And at that point to me it’s a lot. See I thought when I met this brother (Pete), and we met each other, the circumstances where we met was very unique. The way we became instantly locked was unique. Um I guess I dealt with a lot of pain, you know what I’m saying, in terms of what I was into. And this was one of the brothers that we just locked. You know what I’m saying, and so when that situation was hitting me, you know what I’m saying. I felt a lot of vulnerability for that purpose. I believe that Allah brings people consistently into your realms for a reason. And the reason at that point was to help alleviate some of the pressure that I was feeling.

Summary

In what ways does a Post-Correctional Educational Intervention curriculum designed for African American males influence the participants’ perceptions of empowerment?

The analysis of interviews, classroom assignments, observations and journal data showed that the student-participants had little to no understanding of the concept of
empowerment prior to participating in the PCEI-Empowerment course. Each participant more closely identified with perceptions of power in terms of violence and bravado that were sometimes confused with empowerment throughout the life of the course.

In the PCEI – Empowerment course each student-participants showed evidence of having adversarial relationships with those in power, including politicians, police office and officers of the court. Their feelings of subordination often led to violent rebellious acts against those authority figures in an effort to regain a lost sense of power. Each student-participant revealed feelings of remorse when coming to terms with the impact of their incarceration on their families and communities and each are now working with community organizations. Pete and Tommy began a mentoring program and are paid to lead speaking engagements in the community. John and Donnie are now working as carpenters with ICO building a new transition house for new participants of the program.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION – COMPARISON OF LITERATURE REVIEW FINDINGS

In this phenomenological study, there were connections made between the literature review and the themes from the participants. In 2004, Nichols provided research that suggests that students can become architects of their own learning by participating in classroom environments (1) that support student affirmation rather than student rejection and (2) in which students experience increased achievement and internal motivational gains in classrooms that empower them rather than exhibit explicit control over their learning experiences. Each of the four participants of the PCEI-Empowerment expressed in their third interview (December, 2010) that they felt like they were a part of the learning process and took pride in feelings that “the instructors learned from us (students) as well.” It was important during each class session that the student-participant’s took ownership of, not only their respective learning experiences but also, what and how they “taught” the instructors and volunteers.

In her work, McCombs (1994a, 1994b) acknowledged the importance of social relationships in educational contexts by including social support as one of three critical components. She described social support as a “culture of trust, respect, caring, concern, and a sense of community with others” that provides opportunities for “individual choice, expression of self-determination and agency, and a freedom to fail or take risks” (p. 54). It was important in the preparation of the PCEI-Empowerment Course that the
instructors came together to develop lessons that were student-centered. It was equally important that they agreed on teaching in an environment conducive to breeding an atmosphere of trust and community. Prior to implementing classroom sessions, the instructors and student-participant’s (Feb. 2010) met to discuss the best facilities to implement the PCEI-Empowerment Course. The participants opted to hold class sessions in the “common area” of the transition house. This allowed them to learn in space that was “familiar and comfortable”.

Providing a classroom environment or community culture that is based on positive social relationships, while encouraging the empowerment of students, could well be an initial step towards improving student motivation and achievement (Nichols, 2004, p. 158). I also agree with Fielding’s (2004a) assertion that “there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where staff and students meet one another as equals, as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together” (p. 309), and thus that student voice efforts, “however committed they may be, will not of themselves achieve their aspirations unless a series of conditions are met that provide the organizational structures and cultures to make their desired intentions a living reality” (Fielding, 2004b, p. 202).

Johnson (2005) states that it can also be argued that the goal of educating all populations should be to empower students regardless of the subject matter. However, the author proposes that the path to accomplish this goal is to more consciously nurture four capacities in students, including: (1) civic responsibility, (2) perceived civic efficacy, (3) civic skills, and (4) knowledge about society (p. 47). Although Johnson made this
statement in the context of undergraduate sociology classes, it could be applied to this
PCEI-Empowerment precisely because of the subject matter; each of the four concepts
that Johnson outlines were also covered in the PCEI-Empowerment course, albeit in the
context of self-awareness and reentry. To more consciously contribute to our students’
civic abilities and motivation, Johnson (2005) encourages further research on the causes
of student cynicism and empowerment related to social problems. Further scholarship on
teaching and learning can empirically evaluate this link between the actions of teachers
and the impacts upon students regarding social action (p. 56). In addition to social action,
additionally, Shethar (1993) found that through dialogue, the student progresses from the
passive-learner role to a presentation of self as knowledgeable expert; from denial of his
prison group-membership, he progresses to a critical analysis of the power structure it
represents (p. 357).

Affective Learning

According to Oughton (2009), affective learning inculcates the values and beliefs
we place on the information we engage with. It refers to our attitudes and willingness to
take part in new things, and ability to make decisions about how we operate and behave
in a variety of circumstances. It was the introduction of the PCEI-Empowerment Course
as an affective learning tool that allowed the student-participant’s to volunteer to
participant in the course. In our initial meeting (February, 2010) participants inquired
about the specific topics that would be addressed in the course and expressed concern that
this would “be like any other prison program.” After discussing the components that they
felt were most important, including, religious discussion and accommodation, instructors
made modifications to the lesson plans and text. It was also the instructors understanding that the student-participants may have lacked pertinent soft skills that influenced the development of the course as it was implemented. Evidence that such outcomes are lacking, but required, in education can be found in the soft skill shortage among employees in the workplace (Clark, 2005). Soft skills are important to productivity, employee satisfaction, a healthy workplace, and ultimately, economic success for society. They include self-awareness, analytical thinking, leadership skills, team-building skills, flexibility, acceptance of diversity, the ability to communicate effectively, creativity, problem-solving skills, listening skills, diplomacy and change-readiness (p. 3).

Consequently, when evidence-based social, emotional, and ethical education is integrated into traditional teaching and learning, educators can hone the essential academic and social skills, understanding, and dispositions that support effective participation in a democracy (Cohen, 2006, p. 202). Cohen argues that the goals of education need to be reframed to prioritize not only academic learning, but also social, emotional, and ethical competencies. To further that assertion, it was important to include lessons that included group work, direct instruction and student-led discussions. This allowed the student-participants to interact as active learners who were also showing evidence of respect, ethics, and social emotional knowledge. Shepard (2004) then considers key aspects of teaching and learning in the affective domain that potentially have application in education for sustainability. These include the need to design particular approaches for assessment and evaluation, the need to give academic credit for
affective outcomes, the pivotal role of role models, and the need to achieve realistic, assessable and acceptable learning outcomes in the affective domain. Because students were assessed formatively rather than summatively, instructors of the PCEI-Empowerment Course were allowed to assess student-participants in terms of social-emotional and behavioral growth.

Reentry

It was found that Black males reported more value in vocational training that provided a work skill, experienced lower levels of post education self-esteem and reported more barriers to finding and maintaining employment (Case & Fasenfest, 2004). Only one of the participants reported that he was continuing his post release education. This assertion was confirmed in the PCEI-Empowerment Course research when three of the four student participants opted to pursue career opportunities that required additional job-training rather than additional (post-secondary) education. The only student-participant to opt for additional education had received his undergraduate degree while incarcerated; the others received GED’s while incarcerated. Results from Seiter and Kadel’s (2003) review indicated that vocational and work release programs effectively reduced prisoner recidivism and enhanced job skills among released inmates. Consequently, the Bayer-Contardo (2009) study found that post-secondary education was also a factor in decreased recidivism.
Limitations

The results of this study represent the shift in social identity as told by four African American males who participated in a PCEI-Empowerment Course. The information discussed in this study cannot be generalized for all formerly incarcerated African American males. Another limitation in this study was participant interviews. These dialogues were crucial in phenomenology as the participants divulged intimate details of their lives. The results of these interviews limited the research as to what the participants revealed. As the time between the culmination of the course and interviews progressed, it became difficult for three of the four participants recall certain events and oftentimes shared extremely personal experiences that could not be used in the findings. Also, the participant’s conversion to Islam while incarcerated greatly impacted the discussions, interviews, behavior and responses.

Recommendations

The purpose of this investigation was to understand how a PCEI-Empowerment Course influences the social-identity of formerly incarcerated African American males. This research was designed to provide an insight to the perceptions and experiences as told by the participants in the study. The development of reentry programming is essential to the positive transitions into the community after prison. However, there has to be a consensus of what is useful in designing these reentry programs. Awareness and understanding of this subset would be useful in providing necessary information on ways to reduce recidivism, unemployment and lack of education upon reentry. A more detailed, longitudinal study of this sort may assist in identifying and determining
strategies to support formerly incarcerated adults from varied walks of life upon reentry. To date, there were no phenomenological studies on empowerment or affective education strategies for formerly incarcerated adults regardless of race, gender or religion.

In subsequent iterations of a PCEI-Empowerment Course, priority must be given to the development of lessons that encourage affective teaching, learning and curriculum development strategies that include:

- Student voice
- Instructors ability to speak the language of the student population
- Sense of student ownership of lessons and instruction
- Multiple instructors offering differing perspective (especially in terms of prior knowledge of the population)
- Specialized training of prospective instructors
- Gender-neutral instruction
- Health and wellness components
- Connection to and/or understanding of students community and lifestyle or status in that community

This study will be a useful source of literature for future investigations on such topics. Educators, administrators, and policymakers must continue to work towards discovering ways to improve the system of reentry for formerly incarcerated African American males.
APPENDIX A

PROJECT RESTORE EMPOWERMENT COURSE SYLLABUS
Project Restore Empowerment Course
Syllabus

Course Time: Mon-Wed 6:30PM – 9:00 PM
Project Restore
Instructor: Rolanda J. West, M.Ed.
Shaunda Partida DeRon, M.Ed, M.A.T.
Office hours: as needed
Email: rwest@luc.edu
stpartida@yahoo.com

Text Required: *The Black Male Handbook A Blueprint For Life*. Edited by Kevin Powell

**Course Description:** This course will examine instruction that fosters ethical, responsible, and caring students by modeling and teaching students important core values such as respect for self and others, responsibility, integrity, and self-discipline. It provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical, and academic issues that are of growing concern in our society and the safety of our communities.

**Educational Goals:** As a result of this course, students will learn:

1. How cognitive social and restorative justice instruction will impact the students standing in American society.
2. How their personal point of view effects their behavior and personal interactions in American society.
3. How their tolerance of differences will enhance their aptitude in terms of group work and learning.
4. How their own differences and uniqueness is an asset in social settings.
5. How personal and moral values will shape their behavior in social settings.
6. The differences between morals, ethics, and values.
7. The historical perspective of minorities in American society.
8. Economic and political responsibility.
9. Why respect and responsibility are traits of a man in American society.
10. The importance of mental and physical well.

Policies:

Harassment: It is unacceptable and a violation of policy to harass, discriminate against or abuse any person because of his or her race, color, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age or any other characteristic protected by applicable law. Such behavior threatens to destroy the environment of tolerance and mutual respect that must prevail for this learning community to fulfill its educational mission. For this reason, every incident of harassment, discrimination or abuse undermines the aspirations and attacks the ideals of our community.

Diversity: This course approaches the topic of leadership from a constructivist lens grounded in social justice and cultural influences. Particular attention is paid to how historically underrepresented population experience and approach academic leadership. Students in the course will be introduced to literature and research that emphasizes leadership as a tool for empowerment and means to contribute to a diverse and socially just society.

Participation: Class participation includes but is not limited to, attending class, completing all reading assignments before coming to class, actively participating in class activities and discussions, asking and answering questions, listening to and respecting the views, thoughts, and opinions of your classmates.

Course Expectations:

Learning Community: I perceive each of you as students, learners and scholars. As such, I expect that you view yourself in the same manner. You have chosen to be here and therefore are responsible for your own behavior, learning, and success. However, as a group we make up a class and as such are a scholarly community. In order to succeed as individuals and as a group we must be willing to agree to the following set of expectations:

Academic honesty: Academic honesty is an expression of a professional ethics of interpersonal justice, responsibility, and care. It demands that the pursuit of knowledge be conducted with sincerity and care.

Attendance and participation: Students are expected to attend all classes and to participate fully in their activities. Professionalism includes being present, on time,
prepared, and engaged. If you must be absent from class because of illness or emergency, please leave a message for the instructor in advance.

**Week 1/2 – Creating a spiritual foundation –**

**Chapter 1: Creating A Spiritual Foundation (pgs. 1-24)**

- Class Introduction
- Self-Assessment
- Student will discuss chapter one of The Black Male Handbook
- Writing assignment.

**Week 2**

- Morals and Ethics instruction (mon)
- Handout 1: Morals and ethics defined
- Group discussion – How do you define morals and ethics?
- Video: The Smartest Guys in the Room - A lesson in Morals and Ethics (90 mins) (Tues)
- Handout 2: Enron scorecard
- Handout 3: The Smartest Guys in the Room Q&A

**Week 3 – Developing Political Awareness**

**Chapter 2: Developing Political Awareness (pgs. 25-38)**

- RICO/Drug Laws
- Politics and Big Business (the privatization of prisons)
- Prison Reform
- Democrats/Republic/Liberals?
- Disenfranchisement
- Mock Interviews
Week 4 – Starting a plan for economic empowerment (bring a visual) – Guest Speaker (TBA)

Chapter 4: Starting A Plan for Economic Empowerment (pgs. 73-114)

- Managing a budget (What is a budget?)
- Bring in a newspaper for students to do a search on housing, automobiles, food, etc.
- Discuss the difference between a career and obtaining a job
- Living v.s. Lifestyle
- Wants v.s. Needs
- Opening a bank account
- Renting an apartment
- Savings account
- Credit card debt (Don’t do it!)

Week 5 – Self Concept (Redefining Black Manhood) – Panel Discussion

Chapter 3: Redefining Black Manhood (pgs. 39-72)

Chapter 7: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (pgs. 165-180)

Lesson:
- Definition of a man: How are Black Men defined in contemporary American society? PowerPoint Presentation
- Journal writing

Conflict Resolution
- Lesson: Role Playing/Interpersonal communication
- Handout 1: inter/intrapersonal communication
- Journal writing – prompt:
Student led class discussion on communication skills

Week 6/7 – Taking Care of your physical health/Moving towards Mental Wellness

Chapter 5: Taking Care of Your Physical Health (pgs. 115-134)

Chapter 6: Moving Toward Mental Wellness (pgs. 135-164)

- Group discussion
- Journal Writing
- Activities: discussion - nutrition and healthy food choices; body cycles
- Conscious Breathwork, Tai Chi
- Discussion - religion and spirituality, practice - Reiki
- Self-Hypnosis (hand-out)
- Activities: discussion - theory of mind, practice - Imagery

Week 8 – Planning for the future

- Lesson: Culminating Activity TBD
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VITA

Rolanda J. West is the daughter of Leroy and Jean West. She was born in Culver City, California on October 12, 1975. She currently resides on Chicago’s South side with her daughter Imani.

Rolanda attended public schools in Los Angeles, CA for the majority of her elementary and high school years. She graduated from Columbia College Chicago with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism in 2005. In 2007 she earned a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction at California State University, Dominguez Hills.

Rolanda has worked in the field of education for the past 10 years. She began her career as an educator of disadvantaged students on Chicago’s West side. Rolanda has worked in a social services advocating for the education of formerly incarcerated youth and adults, and as an education consultant for Los Angeles Unified School District and Alternative Education Research Institute.

Rolanda, an active member of the Loyola community, has served on the School of Education Diversity committee and held a post as the Teaching and Learning Graduate Assistant.

Rolanda is a member of Human Rights Watch and the Urban Affairs Association and serves as a board member of Alternative Education Research Institute.
The Dissertation submitted by Rolanda J. West has been read and approved by the following committee:

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