

ENGAGING THE INCARCERATED MIND: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN
EDUCATOR IN A JUVENILE JUSTICE FACILITY

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ABSTRACT

Helen Holland Avis: Engaging the Incarcerated Mind: An Autoethnography of an Educator in a Juvenile Justice Facility

The United States of America has the highest incarceration rate in the world, at 716 per 100,000 of the national population (Wagner, Sakala, & Begley, 2016). While the United States represents only about 4.4 percent of the world's population, it houses around 22% of the world's prisoners (Wagner et al., 2016). Many of these adult prisoners begin their criminal history as children or young adults (Leone, Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005). This study looks at how student educational engagement can be fostered so as to increase the quality of education for juvenile delinquents in order to reduce recidivism rates, thus lowering the prison population over time.

Increasing the quality of education systems within residential juvenile justice facilities has been shown to be a critical piece of rehabilitation for juvenile delinquents. This autoethnography looks at how one teacher-researcher has worked to increase student engagement in order to increase both student motivation and achievement within one residential juvenile justice facility over four years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Typically the acknowledgement section of a dissertation is where the author thanks those who surrounded her with support, who lifted her up when she needed it, and maintained both love and challenge throughout the whole graduate school process. I have so many of those people in my life, and I am fortunate enough to have the opportunity to tell them how much I appreciate them face-to-face. Instead, I would like to use this space to acknowledge the strength of my students, past, present, and future.

Adjudicated youth must fight harder and longer for an education that is equal to that of their traditional public school peers than any other group of students in our public school system that I can find. Their rights are often revoked, their voices silenced, their creativity unnoticed, and their achievements uncelebrated. If I did not believe these things before this dissertation process, I most certainly believe it now. I have been faced with closed door after closed door while trying to share my students' voices through my research. In fact, the only way to do it was by removing their identities. I pray that this work somehow acknowledges their existence, their strength, their power, and most importantly their perseverance, while also celebrating their creative, generous, amazing spirits.

PREFACE

I think it's really important to learn about other people's stories. I think it's important because some of the most valuable lessons we learn in life, we learn from others. As humans, we are all seeking our place in this world. We are all seeking to matter. To be loved. To be heard. Hearing peoples' stories can teach us how to do this. Our life, this current life we are living, is the only thing we know right now. We seek to know more. Are we the same as others? Different? We wonder what they would have done. They wonder what we would have done. What would this life—or any life for that matter—be like without stories? There's so much we don't know about life, that we want to know, and stories help us make sense. Stories help us live outside of our own lives. In my opinion, the whole universe is made up of stories. And I want to know all of them. I wonder if others want to know, too. I bet they do. Stories are how we figure things out, and there will always be more.

— A.D., one of my inspiring students

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

Introduction

There are very few jobs in our society where teenagers tell you throughout the workday that they love you. While my days are also filled with lots of derogatory and hateful comments and many sad and traumatic stories, it is my nature to focus on the positive. As such, the “I love you, Ms. Avis” comments are the ones that I hold close and strong to my heart day in and day out. As the sole English teacher at a youth development center, I was responsible for all of the reading and writing instruction for 32 students, 16 males and 16 females, housed within the juvenile justice facility. Because of the small faculty, the five teachers (English, history, math, science, and special education) worked closely with one another to provide the best instruction possible. This was a unique setting and teaching atmosphere, and there was very little research or professional development resources available on how to achieve this goal. My students were the driving force behind my research; they were the reason I came to work every day, and why I have completed this study to help improve the quality of their education while they are confined.

Recognizing the Problem

The United States of America has the highest incarceration rate in the world, at 716 per 100,000 of the national population (Wagner, Sakala, & Begley, 2016). While the United States represents about 4.4 percent of the world's population, it houses around 22% of the

world's prisoners (Wagner et al., 2016). Many of these adult prisoners begin their criminal history as children or young adults (Leone, Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005). The US court system handled over one million juvenile cases in 2013 (Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2013) and over fifty thousand adolescent boys and girls were incarcerated in juvenile justice facilities with commitments over four months (OJJDP, 2016). Research indicates that increasing the quality of education for middle and high school students in residential juvenile justice facilities lowers recidivism and helps to eliminate criminal behaviors (Heller, Pollack, Ander, & Ludwig, 2013; Natsuaki, Ge, & Wenk, 2008). Given the high numbers of juvenile delinquents across the US, educational research focused on the best ways of improving educational systems within youth development centers seems prudent, pertinent, and timely.

Education systems within juvenile justice facilities are in a unique position to truly change the trajectories of their students' lives at a critical point when the students are removed from the pressures and obstacles of their daily lives outside of confinement (Southern Education Foundation, 2014; U.S. Department of Education and Justice, 2014). If students can reach a point where they are performing above average while in residential facilities, they are up to 30% more likely to return to school and remain in school regardless of their demographics (Bloomberg, Bales, Mann, & Piquero, 2011). Research evidence indicates that increases in education quality within the juvenile justice system support the acquisition of skills and resilience that may create the mechanisms that keep students in school after exiting residential facilities (Heller et al., 2013; Natsuaki et al., 2008).

Bloomberg, Bales, and Piquero (2012) found that when students leave juvenile justice facilities with average academic achievement, they are 10% more likely to attend school regularly post-release. Students who were able to achieve above-average academic levels

within residential facilities were not only 10% more likely to attend school regularly, but their rates of recidivism are 10% less than those with lower-than-average academic achievement (2012). Students who are not regularly attending school post-release were 52% more likely to be re-arrested within their first year of release (2012). There is a possibility that this is linked to student engagement. Research shows that when students are engaged and feel a part of the school community, they are more likely to attend school (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). These findings hold significant relevance for both theory and policy; for example, when student engagement is increased, it leads to increased academic achievement, which leads to better school attendance, which leads to a decrease in recidivism rates (Bloomberg et al., 2012).

Student engagement research originated from student dropout and disengagement research (Mosher & MacGowan, 1985). As high school dropout rates increased, educators wanted to uncover why students were leaving. This line of research uncovered specific factors leading to educational disengagement that lead to the question, how can we keep students engaged and in school?

Student engagement, as a way to increase the quality of education, has recently become more of a focus of educational researchers (Zepke & Leach, 2010). It is a difficult phenomenon both to define and to study due to its behavioral, psychological, and cognitive components. This study will add to the existing body of knowledge that is working to define the components of student engagement along with its inhibitors and ways to promote it, especially for students who are within the juvenile justice system.

After a thorough review of student engagement literature from across the globe, Zepke and Leach (2010) uncovered four major components to student engagement. The first

component is motivation and agency, which consists of the students' self-construction of knowledge, self-belief, ability to set achievable goals, and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The second component, transactional engagement, involves the relationship between the teacher and the student and includes the teacher's expectations. Through this relationship the teacher provides appropriate tasks, academic support, and the opportunity for collaborative learning. Institutional support is the third component and includes institutional culture, support services, and expectations. The final component of student engagement is active citizenship. This incorporates the opportunities provided within the school for students to understand the world beyond them, including an ethical understanding of political processes. Through active citizenship, students build social and cultural capital and begin to feel and believe that they can be agents of change.

Educational motivation has proven to be a difficult and complex phenomenon to grasp. Studies that have tried to simplify the notion or define a simple cause-and-effect model have not survived laboratory settings. "If we think of the motivational web of causality in terms of individual and environmental interconnections, we need to understand what we can about the social worlds our students come from, and how those worlds influence our efforts in the classroom" (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 3). All students come into the classroom with different levels of motivation. Students who are pre-motivated to achieve will not require as many engaging experiences, while students who are unmotivated to achieve will require much more from their educators to become engaged. This is particularly true of adjudicated students in general, because these students are not only contending with educational struggles (Leone et al., 2005) but also with being incarcerated.

At this point, research indicates that there are five characteristics of high-quality education in juvenile justice settings needed to raise student engagement and academic achievement. They are: “1) talented teachers with high energy and expectations; 2) building school culture and trust; 3) a structured curriculum that is delivered through differing, individualized instruction; 4) special education services woven into all parts of the school; and 5) time and effort spent on preparing students to transition into self-sustaining learners” (Dominici & Forman Jr., 2011, as cited in Southern Education Foundation, 2014, p. 29). These characteristics have also been identified as promoters of student engagement and are further explained in Chapter 2. My hope is that this research will begin a dialogue within the educational research community on how to better serve, and thus rehabilitate, juvenile delinquents.

Statement of the Problem

The juvenile justice system was designed to rehabilitate the children who encounter it and not to be punitive (Burdick, Feirman, & McNerney, 2011). The only punitive piece in the design of residential placement for juvenile delinquents should be the removal from their homes and communities. Once a student is incarcerated, their programming should be completely therapeutic to provide complete rehabilitation (Burdick et al., 2011; Feireman et al., 2009/2010; Mason, 2011). The population within juvenile justice residential facilities is disproportionately comprised of students with low academic achievement and high incidences of learning disabilities (Bloomberg et al., 2012), which means that these educational systems are facing a difficult task. Research indicates that student engagement is key to improving education in juvenile justice facilities and that through the system of education students can in fact return to their community schools and be successful

(Bloomberg et al., 2012). To establish what is engaging to students within these facilities in an effort to improve the system of education, we need to listen to the voices of the students and teachers as they explain what motivates them to achieve in school.

Purpose Statement

The objective of this autoethnography was to uncover what is presently working within one juvenile justice residential facility by studying student engagement through the lens of achievement goal theory and educator advocacy. The purpose for the final autoethnography was to show that this is a worthy educational research arena that can in fact cause a large impact for the fields of education and juvenile justice, the students, and the teachers as well as to be disseminated in order to foster a transformation within residential juvenile justice facilities' education systems.

Research Questions

Autoethnography is the combination of autobiography and ethnography, therefore it is both a process and a product. "When researchers do *autoethnography*, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography is more than storytelling, in that the author is a researcher and frames and analyzes the story through theoretical and methodological tools and a thorough review of research literature. It is this framework that creates an end product that contributes to the field.

This autoethnographic study was guided by the following main research question:
How are students at one youth development center (YDC) educationally engaged?

Research Strategy

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis et al., 2011). This method of research focuses on studying a “culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping *insiders* (cultural members) and *outsiders* (cultural strangers) better understand the culture” (Maso, 2001) by becoming insiders themselves. Autoethnography was designed to create a more readable product that was not value-free and that incorporated the researcher as a participant, thus making the research more accessible across disciplines.

Autoethnography is both a product and a process. Throughout data collection, authors utilize various forms of qualitative data-gathering techniques, including but not limited to field notes, observations, journal entries, and document analysis. Due to the sensitive nature of having minors who are also legal offenders involved in this study, the researcher will be the focus and journal entries will be collected. The final research product will provide a thorough explanation of what, from the author's perspective, students find educationally engaging at one juvenile justice residential facility. A detailed description of autoethnography is contained in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework

There is not one specific theory that speaks to student engagement, let alone student engagement within juvenile justice residential facilities. Achievement goal theory was chosen for this study because of the way it aligns so well with student engagement factors, and the ultimate goal is academic achievement and motivation. As such, a “Student Engagement Framework” (see Figure 1 and Appendix 1) was created by combining

Achievement Goal theory (Greene, Miller, Crowson, Dike, & Akey, 2004) with Zepke and Leach's (2010) student engagement factors. This framework gives the research project structure and consistency as the portraitist (i.e., the researcher) investigates the goodness found within the system of education. The most important focus of this study is answering the question: How does one teacher engage and see engagement within one YDC?

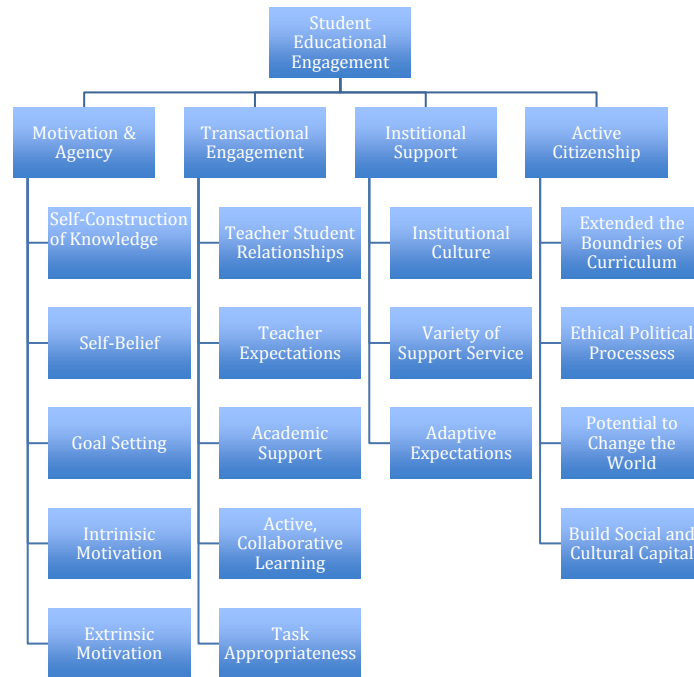


Figure 1.
Student Engagement Framework
 Adapted from Zepke and Leach, 2010

Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

Achievement goal theory: “Proposes that students’ motivation and achievement related behaviors can be understood by considering the reasons or purposes they adopt while engaged in academic work” (Wolters, 2004, p. 236).

Adjudicated: When a formal decision has been made by a judge about the legal charges brought against an adolescent and whether there will be a disposition of those charges.

Adolescent: A young person in the process of development from a child to an adult.

Behavioral engagement: The actions that indicate someone is attending to a task (i.e., eyes oriented towards assignment, writing, reading).

Cognitive engagement: What is happening intellectually when someone is attending to a task (e.g., they value learning or set achievable goals).

Delinquent: Behaviors that are prohibited by the juvenile code of the state and fall into one of two categories: behaviors that are criminal when committed by anyone of any age; and behaviors that are against the law due to the adolescent's age (Elrod & Ryder, 2013).

Extrinsic motivation: A force outside of the individual that drives him or her to complete a task, such as a grade or course completion.

Goodness: Factors that promote student engagement according to students and teachers.

Intake agency/detention center: Temporary residential placement for adolescents once they have been detained.

Intrinsic motivation: A force from within the individual that is driven by enjoyment or interest, not by the promise of an external reward or force.

Juvenile justice system: The special court system within the US designed to specifically handle criminal cases involving adolescents.

Motivation: The force that drives people to do something.

Psychological engagement: The emotions someone feels when they are attending to a task.

Recidivism rate: The rate at which people reenter the judicial system.

Rehabilitation: The act of restoring someone to a normal, healthy life through training and therapy.

Self-regulation theory: The idea that a student should be “adapting and controlling one’s own behavior under a range of conditions and circumstances” (Toshalis & Nakkura, 2012, p. 20).

Youth development center: A YDC, as defined in G.S. 7B-1501(29), is “a secure residential facility authorized to provide long-term treatment, education, and rehabilitative services for delinquent juveniles committed by the court to the Division of Juvenile Justice.”

Assumptions and Limitations

Throughout the study it was assumed that the researcher would follow all guidelines as laid out by the study methodology, the Institutional Review Board, and the dissertation committee to produce a study that is both high quality and deeply ethical. It was also assumed that the only participant, the researcher, would respond as honestly as possible to create an accurate autoethnography. Another assumption was that this study would be generalizable within the state, because the other YDCs are run in a similar manner and with a similar educational structure.

There are a few limitations to this study. Because its scope is one YDC, it is limited. The researcher has only become an insider at this YDC and has not taught at other YDCs, so she can only speak about her experiences within this one particular setting. Regardless of this limitation, the readers can “locate” themselves within the narrative by recognizing

similarities due to the clientele, daily challenges, and similar experiences that permeate all juvenile justice facilities.

Summary

Student engagement is a critical piece in increasing the quality within any education system. This autoethnography looks at the unique setting of a juvenile justice residential facility where it can be increasingly difficult to engage students who are incarcerated and where many have below-average academic achievement levels and learning disabilities (Bloomberg et al., 2012). My hope is that this study will show what is working to engage adjudicated students, thus leading to more studies within similar settings that will facilitate changes to increase student engagement, increase academic achievement, and decrease recidivism rates. Another goal of this study is that through an increase of student engagement within the residential facility, students will continue to feel motivated and engaged when they re-enter their communities, and this will assist in raising the likelihood of their completing high school.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The objective of this autoethnography was to create a thick description of a YDC teaching experience and uncover what is working to educationally engage students within a juvenile justice residential facility. This study of student engagement is framed within achievement goal theory and educator advocacy. The methodology relied on the following robust review of the juvenile justice system and student engagement literature to develop a high-quality qualitative study. Once completed, the researcher will use this evidence to advocate for more research within juvenile justice education systems and changes within the juvenile justice system of education. The following chapter details the existing research on the juvenile justice system, student engagement, autoethnography, and educator advocacy.

The United States accounts for 5% of the world's population, yet its prison system holds 25% of the world's adult prisoners (Glaze, 2011). Many of these adult prisoners began their time within the judicial system as young adults, and even as young children (Leone, Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005). Researchers have linked national, state, and school-wide politics and policies to what is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline: the funneling of low-performing and minority students out of public schools and into secured facilities (American Psychological Association, 2008; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Henault, 2001; Kang-Brown, Trone, Fratello, & Dafray-Kapur, 2013; Martinez, 2009). These politics and policies are related to and impact the education of students caught in the school-to-prison

pipeline. This research project focuses on how to educationally engage and motivate students at the end of that pipeline, who reside in secure residential juvenile justice facilities, in order to assist in lowering recidivism rates and reversing their trajectory (i.e., helping juveniles make a successful transition from the residential facility back into their communities).

The Juvenile Justice System

The criminalization of US children through the judicial system began with the formation of our government, and the populations most affected by this have remained constant throughout history. This is a system of interconnected organizations, including law enforcement agencies, the courts, social services, and detention center services comprised of mental, health, and educational service providers (Ko et al., 2008).

Historical Background

The early US judicial system originated in England's Common Law, because England governed the American colonies (Elrod & Ryder, 2013). According to Common Law, two things were required to hold someone accountable for a crime: an unlawful act had to be committed, and the accused person had to commit the act intentionally. Children were the first identified group said to be incapable of committing crimes due to their inability to fully understand the consequences of their actions (American Bar Association, n.d.). This indicates that from its formation, the US justice system has maintained the position that there are no bad children, only bad conditions, and that children in the US have a right to a court system that is designed to save them, not punish them (Burdick et al., 2011).

Illinois was the first state to implement a separate juvenile court (in 1899) to eliminate adult formalities while holding adolescents accountable on an adult level. By the mid-twentieth century, reformers could argue, citing the Supreme Court case *Kent v. the*

United States (1966), that this system was failing children. The Supreme Court findings supported the notion that the current juvenile justice system was failing and revisionary efforts were needed.

Kent v. the United States (1966) led to *McKeiver v. Pennsylvania* (1971), wherein the priority for the juvenile justice system was determined to be rehabilitation and public safety, leading to changes in both court proceedings and vocabulary. According to *McKeiver v. Pennsylvania* (1971), adolescents have no right to trial by jury and cases are to be handled by the state district courts and heard by specially trained judges with information about the child taken into great consideration. Justice White, who ruled in the case, contended “the acts of a juvenile are deemed the result of environmental or social pressures” (McKeiver, 1971, p. 501). State statutes, court proceedings, and specific juvenile justice terminology now reflect this goal to rehabilitate juveniles with education as a vital piece of the process.

Existing Juvenile Justice Court Processing

The present juvenile justice system is one of many possible steps to support rehabilitation while maintaining public safety. It is rare that an adolescent experiences every step, because the court can divert or exit an adolescent at any point the judge deems acceptable.

The juvenile justice court system uses a separate vocabulary from the adult court system to reflect the “differences between the purposes, procedures, and outcomes of juvenile proceedings and those of the criminal justice system” (Mason, 2011). An adolescent is not charged with a crime and arrested, but deemed an alleged delinquent and taken into custody. Delinquency is defined as behaviors not prohibited by the juvenile code of the state and fall into two categories: behaviors that are criminal behaviors when committed by

anyone of any age; behaviors that are against the law due to the adolescent's age (Elrod & Ryder, 2013). Warrants are not issued; parents or guardians are served with juvenile petitions and summonses. Once in custody, the adolescent enters an intake agency where the judicial process begins, within or outside of the court system. Intake agencies make decisions about how a case moves forward, either through informal retributions such as fines or community service within an allotted amount of time, after which the case is dropped, or through petitioning (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Hockenberry, 2012).

If an infraction is deemed serious or repetitive, the case is petitioned, and a formal court hearing is scheduled. If necessary, as a protective measure for either the adolescent or the community, the adolescent remains within state custody at an intake agency or detention center until the court date. If a case is severe (referred to as heinous) and the delinquent is of age according to state statutes, a judicial waiver is filed to bypass the juvenile court system, and the case is moved to an adult criminal court for judgment.

If petitioned, the adolescent, supported by family or a caretaker, a lawyer, and a court counselor, goes to juvenile court for a nonjury hearing by a specially trained judge. Juvenile judges have three priorities: protect the public; emphasize the accountability and responsibility of the juvenile and the juvenile's guardians; and provide appropriate consequences, treatment, training, and rehabilitation for the juvenile (Burdick et al., 2011; Mason, 2011; *McKeiver v. Pennsylvania*, 1971). The case can be dismissed, continued, or proceed to a disposition.

The disposition is the final step, wherein the judge, using all obtainable information, determines the appropriate sanction: commitment to an institution; placement in a group home, residential facility or foster home; probation; referral to an outside agency for day

treatment or a mental health program; or imposition of a fine, community service, or restitution (Puzzanchera et al., 2012).

Adolescents are not convicted but adjudicated when the judge creates a dispositional plan. Education plays a leading role in the goal of rehabilitation and is present in every dispositional plan (Burdick et al., 2011; Feireman et al., 2009/2010). The least-utilized dispositional plan is residential detention, often referred to as juvenile incarceration. Judges and court counselors will typically do what they can to keep an adolescent in his or her community, because once a child is incarcerated their probability of recidivism rises (Henggeler & Schoenwald, 2011; National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2010; Southern Education Foundation, 2014). Only when removal from the community and constant supervision are necessary is incarceration deemed appropriate.

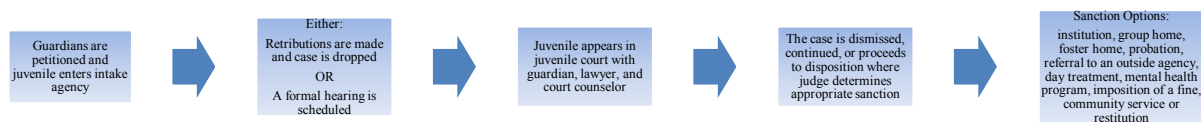


Figure 2.
Juvenile Justice Court System

North Carolina and Juvenile Justice

Currently there is a national trend to move beyond the traditional detention centers and into residential rehabilitation centers. Like other states, North Carolina has maintained a steady effort to develop models of care for juvenile delinquents to increase rehabilitation. However, NC's youth recidivism rate is 43%, and the state's school drop-out rates range between 66% and 90% of court-involved youth (Feierman et al., 2009/2010).

Youth Development Centers

Adjudicated youth in North Carolina (NC) are placed within one of five youth development centers (YDCs) across the state. A YDC, as defined in G.S. 7B-1501(29), is “a secure residential facility authorized to provide long-term treatment, education, and rehabilitative services for delinquent juveniles committed by the court to the Division of Juvenile Justice.” The offense averages for juvenile offenders within detention centers and YDCs is: 60% Class F-I felonies including involuntary manslaughter, robbery, larceny of a dog, and first-degree forgery; 21% Class A-E felonies such as armed robbery, rape, murder, kidnapping, aggravated assault, and first-degree arson; 14% serious A1 misdemeanors such as simple assault or battery; and 5% repeat offenders who have had prior charges and have now committed a Class 1-3 misdemeanor (Hayes, 2011).

Table 1.

Offense average for juveniles in residential juvenile justice facilities.

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Percentage of Youth with Offense</i>
Class F-I Felony	60%
Classes A-E Felonies	21%
A1 Misdemeanor	14%
Repeat Offenders/ Classes 1-3 Misdemeanors	5%

Recent Legislation

Presently, there are three bills in the NC General Assembly that will directly impact juvenile justice education if passed. The first is House Bill 838, Increase Dropout Age. If passed, this bill will increase the compulsory school age to 18 and would result in potentially higher numbers of students at public schools, which may result in higher numbers of school-based criminal activities, thus raising the population within YDCs. All students at YDCs are required to attend school, regardless of their track, so if there are more students, then more resources will be required.

Senate Bill 343, the Student Assault on Teacher/ Felony Offense, has presently been referred to the Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. This could potentially send more 10- to 15-year-olds to YDCs, more 16- and 17-year-olds into the adult prison system, and strengthen the school-to-prison pipeline.

The most publicized bill is House Bill 399, the Young Offenders Rehabilitation Act. This bill would create a pilot process to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction from 15 to 17 over a two-year period. If passed, this bill will result in decreasing the population of adolescents going into the adult system (i.e., from age 16 to age 18), while simultaneously increasing the age and population within YDCs. At this point, this bill has been referred to the Committee on Judiciary II.

Within the federal system, North Carolina is the only state where a young adolescent can be charged as an adult. All other states define the upper age limit for a minor within the court system as 17 (Elrod & Ryder, 2013). In North Carolina, all 16-year-olds may be charged as an adult for a misdemeanor and 13-year-olds can be charged as adults for felonies. Children younger than 10 are viewed as too young to have willingly committed criminal acts and are assigned treatment in mental health facilities, hospitals, or through other programs connected to the states' department of social services (Elrod & Ryder, 2013; Scott & Steinberg, 2009).

Adjudicated Youth

In 2013, the US courts handled 1,058,500 juvenile court cases (Sickmund et al., 2013) and maintained approximately 30 million youth under court authority, such as probation, house arrest, and court-mandated placements (Puzzanchera et al., 2012). Nationally, approximately 50,800 juvenile offenders were held in residential placement facilities in 2014

(OJJDP, 2016), with commitments generally ranging between four months and four years (Henggeler & Schoenwald, 2011).

Demographics

Disproportionality of race and ethnicity are present within juvenile justice residential facilities nationwide. The Southern Education Foundation reported that in 2010 the racial breakdown of juveniles detained in residential facilities was 41.6% African American, 32.5% white, 22.3% Hispanic, 1.7% Native American, and 1% Asian; 47% of the total number of these adolescents reside in the southern region of the US (2014). When compared to the national population data, it is evident that black youth are adjudicated at a rate almost five times that of white youth. The NAACP (n.d.) stated that “if current trends continue, one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.”

Table 2.

Youth involved in juvenile court

<i>Racial Description</i>	<i>Percentage of Juvenile Justice Population</i>	<i>Percentage of US Population</i>
African American	41.6%	17%
White	32.5%	55%
Hispanic	22.3%	21%
Native American	1.7%	2%
Asian	1%	5%

“Adjudicated delinquents disproportionately suffer or have suffered from traumatic childhood experiences such as abuse, poverty, emotional and behavioral disorders, poor physical health, relationships with antisocial peers, excessive mobility, and poor family-school relationships” (Burdick et al., 2011, p. 9). While traumatic experiences are outside of the adolescent’s control, the delinquent behavior stemming from the adolescent’s past may not be any less threatening to public safety than the behavior of an adolescent who simply disregards the law (Ko et al., 2008). This leads to two distinct groups of students with very

different needs who are nevertheless entangled in the same system (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2010).

Adjudicated students tend to suffer from academic and behavioral problems stemming from poor educational opportunities prior to entering the juvenile justice system (Leone et al., 2005; National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2010). Often students have missed large amounts of schooling due to truancy, dropping out, suspensions, expulsions, or being pushed out by other negative practices within the school system (Leone et al., 2005). More specifically, 30% of students in custody have been diagnosed with a learning disability, 48% are below grade level, 25% have repeated a grade, 61% have been expelled or suspended, 13% have dropped out of school, and 21% are enrolled but not attending (Southern Education Foundation, 2014). All of these factors make the education portion of rehabilitation a difficult task for educators.

Table 3.
Educational complications of adjudicated youth

<i>Complication</i>	<i>Percentage of Youth with Complication</i>
Diagnosed learning disabled	30%
Below grade level	48%
Repeated a grade	25%
Expelled or suspended	61%
Dropped out	13%
Enrolled but not attending	21%

Education Policies and Juvenile Justice

The John Locke Foundation (2012) found that minors in the criminal justice system have less access to education than students in traditional public schools, putting these students at a direct disadvantage once released. If adjudicated adolescents are to be successfully rehabilitated and re-enter society as productive members, they must receive an education that is commensurate with what the highest courts deem the goal of all public

education programs (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, 2010). Schools within residential facilities for adjudicated youth are public schools in the eyes of both federal and state governments and thus are held to all of the expectations that status confers.

Discipline Policies

Low-income, minority students, already discriminated against because of poverty and racism, are far more likely to be suspended, excluded, criminalized, or incarcerated than their white counterparts under these policies. There is now a “harsh discipline and moral indifference” (Giroux, 2008, p. 101) climate within many schools due to tighter policies and the presence of police officers. Rather than addressing the complex issues related to poverty and race in American society, it is easier to criminalize, exclude, or incarcerate students, contributing to the construction of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Zero tolerance. The national trend of zero tolerance policies led to an increased criminalization of children, which subsequently resulted in students being funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). Zero tolerance policies were developed in the early 1980s by the US Customs Agency to combat the thriving drug industry (Henault, 2001; Martinez, 2009; Verdugo, 2002). “The term zero tolerance refers to those policies that deal out severe punishment for all offenses, no matter how minor, ostensibly to treat all offenders equally in the spirit of fairness and intolerance of rule-breaking” (Henault, 2001, p. 547).

During the late 1980s, there was a highly publicized rise in juvenile arrests for violent crimes, causing young people to be viewed by many as increasingly dangerous members of society (Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Martinez, 2009; Scott & Stienberg, 2009). Congress reacted to societal pressure by bringing the tough-on-crime laws already in place into the

schools with the Gun-Free Schools Act in 1994, signed by President Clinton. This Act stated that to receive federal education funds through ESEA, states must pass laws that require schools to expel for a year any student who brings a gun to school, without the requirement to provide alternative education (Henault, 2001; Kang-Brown et al., 2008; Mongan & Walker, 2012; Verdugo, 2002). This law was the first time that state legislatures became involved in disciplinary policies that were, up until this point, controlled by districts and school administrators (Martinez, 2009). In 1995, the law changed its terminology from gun to weapon, expanding the opportunity for schools to expel students. Exceptions were only to be made if expulsion would violate the IDEA or if there were extreme extenuating circumstances (Mongan & Walker, 2012). By the “1996-97 school year, 79% percent of schools across the country had adopted zero tolerance policies for violence, going beyond federal mandates” (Kang-Brown et al., 2013, p.2).

In 1999, the school shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado resulted in changes to zero tolerance policies in the US (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Kang-Brown et al., 2013). Parents and school officials began to fear that they were the next victims of such violence and felt that discipline and safety policies must be tightened to protect students. “To put some muscle behind these policies, the federal government and states began to increase funding for security guards and other school-based law enforcement officers and later to install metal detectors” (Kang-Brown et al., 2013, p. 2). Between 1997 and 2007, the number of public high schools with full-time law enforcement and security guards tripled (Kang-Brown et al., 2013).

Suspensions and expulsions. “Nationally, the number of secondary school students suspended or expelled over the course of a school year increased roughly forty percent from

one in thirteen in 1972-73 to one in nine in 2009-2010” (Kang-Brown et al., 2013, p.2).

Suspensions increase the likelihood of subsequent suspensions, expulsions, lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, and lower school-wide achievement (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011). While serving their suspension or expulsion students are often home alone, where they may be exposed to out-of-school factors during the school day that can negatively impact them. In addition, such punitive actions often damage the development of a trusting relationship between school officials and families, contributing to a loss of a positive attitude towards school and loss of a feeling that there is some justice and fairness in society (Henalt, 2001).

Federal Education Policies

Since it was ratified, the Constitution of the United States has reserved the power of public education systems for the states, meaning that education is not a fundamental right afforded to all citizens of the US unless they fall into one of the exceptional education categories as defined by the federal educational policies known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), most recently reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Child Achieves Act (ECAA). The Supreme Court, through *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), publicly declared the importance of education by stating that education “is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces,” and that “education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments” (*Brown v. Board*, 1954). All adjudicated youth fall under Title I of the ESEA, special education and disability laws, or under Title II.

Title I. Title I, *Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*, is the section of the original ESEA referred to as the heart of act because it embodies President

Johnson's goal of providing quality education to minorities and low-income students through the provision of additional resources (Jenkins Robinson, 2007). Title I, Part D provides support through financial grants for *Prevention and Intervention Programs of Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk*. This section has three specific goals:

- (1) to improve educational services in institutions for neglected and delinquent youth;
- (2) to provide such youth with services to assist their transition to further schooling or employment; and (3) to address the dropout problem by preventing at-risk youth from dropping out and providing for youth returning to school after dropping out or returning to school from correctional facilities or institutions (Burdick et al., 2011, p. 8).

This section of Title I states that state-operated institutions must reserve not less than 15% and not more than 30% of Part D funds for transition and reentry projects, including the return of delinquent youth to a local public school (Burdick et al., 2011). Detention facilities must communicate with the student's local education agency and vice versa to make successful transitions that have proven to lower recidivism rates (Feierman et al., 2009/2010; Teske, Huff & Graves, 2013). When a student is of age and will be transitioning to adulthood and not to public school, appropriate supports must be given, such as vocational training, GED support, or support to enter higher education (Burdick et al., 2011). Many states have additional policies in place to guide facilities in how to help their students' transition.

Special education and disability laws. Researchers estimate that up to 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a disability that impairs their learning (Burdick et al., 2011, p.11). These students with disabilities receive educational rights under Title I of the ESEA and under the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA). IDEA requires that

each student within this category receive an individualized education plan (IEP) designed by a certified special education teacher (IDEA of 2004). Resources must be available for the facility to evaluate each student to determine if an IEP is needed. IDEA states that all students age 16 and older with an IEP must have a transition plan created by the students, guardians, and IEP teams detailing the students' plans upon the completion of high school (IDEA of 2004). These transition plans work to ensure the students' rights to a quality, free public education that will provide a pathway for adjudicated youth to make a successful community reentry (Brudick et al., 2011).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that all public education facilities that receive federal funds, including those serving juvenile delinquents, provide adequate and reasonable educational service to all students with a qualifying physical or mental disability that substantially limits a major life activity (Burdick et al., 2011). These students receive an accommodation plan that is individualized to meet their specific educational needs.

Title II. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits a juvenile justice facility from denying an adjudicated delinquent the necessary accommodations within educational settings as defined under IDEA or Section 504 if they qualify for services under those acts.

State-Level Education Policies

The North Carolina State constitution first mentions education in article 1, section 15 stating: "The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right." However, there is more detail in Article IX, where the importance of education is stated, the State Board of Education is defined, compulsory and

funding laws are defined, and the state system of higher education is mentioned (N.C. Const. art. IX). The landmark NC Supreme Court case *Leandro v State*, found that all children in North Carolina have a fundamental right to “the opportunity to receive a sound basic education” (*Leandro v State*, 1997) and that this is the responsibility of the state, not the district. Judge Manning defined a sound basic education as:

1. Sufficient ability to read, write, and speak the English language and a sufficient knowledge of fundamental mathematics and physical science to enable the student to function in a complex and rapidly changing society;
2. Sufficient fundamental knowledge of geography, history, and basic economic and political systems to enable the student to make informed choices concerning issues that affect the student personally or affect the student's community, state, and nation;
3. Sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to engage successfully in post-secondary education or vocational training; and
4. Sufficient academic and vocational skills to enable the student to compete on an equal basis with others in further formal education or gainful employment in contemporary society. (*Leandro v State*, 1997)

Juvenile Justice Education Programs

Research indicates that increases in education quality within the juvenile justice system support the acquisition of skills and resilience that may create the mechanisms that keep students in school after exiting residential facilities (Heller et al., 2013; Natsuaki et al., 2008). Students are often entering the juvenile justice system from under-resourced educational backgrounds and then continuing their pre-existing educational problems within

the secured facilities, becoming further entrenched in a system that does not meet their needs (Burdick et al., 2011). While the juvenile justice system was designed to rehabilitate youth in all areas, including education, it is proving unsuccessful, and even at times is not adhering to federal Title I rights to an adequate education for delinquent students (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2010).

Most children and families involved in the juvenile justice system, historically and presently, are poor and minority (Southern Education Foundation, 2014). The exclusion of these students from society by placing them in residential facilities further exacerbates the disenfranchisement of children who are already marginalized due to inequitable power relations, institutional racism, and economic inequality. While adjudicated youth are receiving educational support in all states, the issues remain: Does this education system meet the students' needs and rights? How can these systems ensure that students are rehabilitated, receiving a quality education, and focusing on the necessary life skills required for a smooth transition back to tradition school settings and their communities?

Bloomberg, Bales, Mann, and Piquerro (2011) found that if students can reach a point where they are performing above average while in residential facilities, they are up to 30% more likely to return to school and remain in school regardless of their demographics. This study was then repeated with other variables that may potentially reduce recidivism, and education was found to make the largest difference in the trajectory of incarcerated males (Bloomberg et al., 2012). Other empirical studies indicate a rise of graduation rates of between 7% and 22% for students receiving a quality education as defined through achievement testing and research-based best practices (Southern Education Foundation, 2014). Adjudicated youth are clearly capable of rehabilitation when the educational policies

speak directly to best practices and the implementation support is in place. “At a critical point in the lives of troubled youth, where they are away from the different pressures and obstacles of their daily lives, the juvenile justice systems have a unique opportunity to help turn around lives through education and related services” (Southern Education Foundation, 2014, p. 27).

Limitations of Juvenile Justice Education Programs

It is not only that the juvenile justice education systems are under-resourced and underfunded, or that the population is being marginalized; there are some very real limitations placed on these systems that are not present in traditional education systems. Juvenile justice educators have inconsistent curricula, fewer professional development opportunities, teach multiple grade levels and subjects simultaneously, little to no technology available, a lack of accurate assessments of students’ needs and learning levels, and a lack of high expectations, high content, and rigorous levels of support, just to name a few challenges (Southern Education Foundation, 2014). Offering empirical evidence of what is working to motivate students through engagement will help to address many of these limitations and offer support in a tangible manner.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a multi-domain phenomenon that emerged as a theoretical model for understanding school dropout (Finn, 1989) and to structure interventions that prevent student dropouts. Over the past thirty years, researchers have struggled to define student engagement and are continuing to work to parse out the dimensions (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Klem & Connell, 2004; Marks, 2000; Mosher & MacGowan, 1985; Zepke & Leach, 2010). Many terms have been used to describe this phenomenon, such as engagement (Mosher &

MacGowan, 1985), academic engagement, school engagement (Natriello, 1984), student engagement (Mosher & MacGowan, 1985), student engagement in academic work (Marks, 2000), student engagement in/with school (Klem & Connell, 2004), and participation identification, thus further muddying the ultimate definition. For the remainder of this paper, to maintain continuity and congruency, the term student engagement will be used.

The empirical discussion surrounding student engagement began with Mosher and MacGowan's seminal article *Assessing Student Engagement in Secondary Schools: Alternative Conceptions, Strategies, of Assessing, and Instruments* (1985). This review of the literature described the difficulty in trying to define student engagement as being similar to "looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack" (Mosher & MacGowan, 1985, p. 3), and they reported finding "much straw and chaff, some threads, but no needle" (p. 3). Recently researchers have become interested in the phenomenon as it relates to all students as a way to increase the quality of education (Zepke & Leach, 2010) and are working to define the components, inhibitors, and ways of promoting student engagement.

Defining Student Engagement

Natriello (1984) first empirically used the term "student engagement" in *Problems in the Evaluation of Students and Student Disengagement from Secondary Schools* by focusing on factors leading to student dropout rates. He defined student disengagement and five variables that operationalize disengagement (student origins, school policies, school environment, the community environment, and the students' anticipated futures) when he stated, "Engagement exists when students are participating in the activities offered as part of the school program" (p.14). The identification of these variables of disengagement impacted student engagement research by bringing attention to the complexity of student

disengagement, pointing out that it occurs due to multiple complex components, therefore, student engagement must also be complex, with multiple components (Appleton et al., 2008).

While student engagement is both complex and multi-dimensional, the research literature suggests that clear student engagement is both a way of behaving and a state of mind (Appleton et al., 2008; Klem & Connell, XXXX; Marks, 2000; Mosher & MacGowan, 1985; Stalling, 1980). The literature also claims that the factors leading to this behavior and state of mind interact and do not stand independently (Appleton et al., 2006; Skinner et al., 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

It is evident that while researchers use different terminology and have chosen to study the phenomenon in various ways (i.e., surveys, observation, case study), all of them are speaking to the same occurrence and reach the same conclusion: student engagement is a process involving overlapping behavioral, psychological, and cognitive components, through which students are motivated, thus increasing academic success. This process is a reciprocal one, wherein the components and factors that lead to engagement also increase engagement when present. It must be noted that student engagement does not always ensure that a student will perform well academically or that they will master the intended skills. “Levels of performance depend on additional features of the individual, task, and context, such as skill, task difficulty, opportunity, and contextual factors” (Skinner et al., 2007, p. 21).

Connection to the Learning Process

There is strong empirical evidence indicating that student engagement is a vital piece of the overall learning process and subsequent academic success (Appleton et al., 2008; Greene et al., 2004; Klem & Connell, 2004; Marks, 2000). In fact, student engagement has recently been identified as one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of student

success within academic settings (Carini, Kuh, & Klien, 2006; Hirn & Scott, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004). “The very act of being engaged adds to the foundation of skills and dispositions that is essential to live a productive and satisfying life” (Carini et al., 2006, p. 2).

Table 4.
Student engagement examples

Behavioral Engagement	Psychological Engagement	Cognitive Engagement
reading	self-awareness of feelings	set goals
studying	emotional regulation	use strategies to reach goals
responding to questions	conflict resolution skills	self-regulation
interactions with the teacher	relationships with teachers	monitor their progress
	relationships with peers	

When students are motivated, they are engaged, and when they are engaged, they are motivated. There is a lot of discussion about the difficulty of knowing which comes first and which is most important to academic success; however, it is not disputed that both are connected and both lead to learning (Toshalis & Nakkura, 2012). This also speaks to disengagement, when the student becomes dissatisfied, disengaged, alienates him- or herself and is not academically successful (Skinner et al., 2007).

Methods of Measuring Student Engagement

Because student engagement is a combination of behavioral, psychological, and cognitive components, it is difficult to design accurate methods to measure it. Many researchers design studies that look at only one component of the phenomenon (Appleton et al., 2006; Gilbertson, Duhon, Witt, & Dufrene, 2008; Greene et al., 2004; Spanjers, Burns, & Wagner, 2008), while others study how one factor, such as task difficulty or teacher-student relationships, may promote or inhibit overall engagement (Hirn & Scott, 2014; Klem et al., 2004; Ramsey, Jolivet, Patterson, & Kennedy, 2010; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2008). It is critical in any study focusing on student engagement that the phenomenon is

concisely defined and that the researchers carefully choose indicators of engagement, basing these decisions on a thorough search of the relevant empirical literature. Furthermore, the indicators for each component must also be carefully defined and linked back to student engagement.

Behavioral Engagement Measurement

Behavioral engagement is most often the focus of engagement studies because behavior is observable, while engagement is internal; it must be estimated and inferred through indirect indicators such as behavior (Shapiro, 2004; Skinner et al., 2007). In the early to mid-1980s, when student engagement was first being discussed empirically, Greenwood and colleagues developed the Code for Instructional Structure and Student Response, the Code for Instructional Structure and Student Academic Response-Mainstream Version, and the Ecobehavioral System for Complex Assessments of Preschool Environments (as cited in Shapiro, 2004). These observational systems used a set code to observe and quantify engaged behaviors of students (i.e., special education students within the mainstream classroom, or preschool and kindergarten students) in a uniform manner. These systems were used for quite some time but have been phased out as researchers discovered that “observational codes that assess engagement directly do not exist” (Shapiro, 2004, p. 5).

More recent research has operationalized behavioral engagement, also referred to as procedural engagement, through time-on-task measures and student physical orientation (Gilbertson et al., 2008; Ramsey et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2004; Skinner et al., 2002; Spanjers et al., 2008; Stallings, 1980; Sutherland et al., 2008). Time-on-task, as an indication that a student is engaged or disengaged, is often used in student engagement studies as the dependent variable (Gilbertson et al., 2008; Ramsey et al., 2010; Shapiro, 1996; Skinner et

al., 2002; Spanjers et al., 2002) and is somewhat broadly defined. Many studies also rely upon direct observations of teacher behaviors and student behaviors to measure engagement (Hirn & Scott, 2014; Sutherland et al., 2008). These observations are each typically 15 minutes in length and repeated over several days (Hirn & Scott, 2014; Sutherland et al., 2008).

Psychological and Cognitive Engagement Measurement

“Measurement of student cognitive and psychological engagement is central to improving the learning outcomes of students, especially for those at high risk of educational failure” (Appleton et al., 2006, p. 438-439). Yet such features are more difficult to measure (Klem & Connell, 2004; Stallings, 1980) and call for the students’ and often the teachers’ voices and perspectives (Appleton et al., 2006). Often researchers state that behaviors are dictated by “simultaneous consideration of an individual’s emotions, attention, and goals” (Skinner et al., 2007, p. 9), and that therefore, by studying behavior, which is observable, the researcher can make inferences about the individual’s psychological and cognitive engagement.

Surveys have been found to be a reliable and valid method of measurement for both psychological and cognitive engagement in both students and teachers (Carini et al., 2006; Klem & Connell, 2004). To create valid surveys, a thorough review of the literature is used to determine a series of predetermined variables that have been shown to describe psychological and cognitive aspects of student engagement. However, there are limitations in measuring engagement this way (Appleton et al., 2006). For example, if survey items were extracted from a larger database that was not intended to assess engagement (Carini et al., 2006; Klem & Connell, 2004), or if surveys utilized different scales to measure variables in

dissimilar ways, or if the informants were selected through different means (Carini et al., 2006), it is difficult to merge or compare survey data and draw inferences about student engagement without significant statistical measures and researcher choices being made (Appleton et al., 2006). It is best when the researcher designs a survey or utilizes a survey that is designed specifically for assessing student engagement.

Qualitative case studies have also provided insight into student engagement through ethnographic data, classroom observations, field notes, recorded and transcribed class sessions, and secondary data sources in the form of journal entries (Wiseman, 2012). Greene et al. (2004) used path analysis to “test predictions of a model explaining the impact of students’ perceptions of classroom structures (tasks, autonomy support and mastery, and evaluation) on their self-efficacy, perceptions of the instrumentality of class work, and their achievement goals in a particular classroom setting” (p. 462). This quantitative analysis demonstrated how researchers can work to build a model depicting how different indicators impact psychological and cognitive engagement.

Research Framework—Achievement Goal Theory

Engagement research uses many lenses to study and define student engagement. For the purposes of this research project, the lens will be achievement goal theory through educator advocacy. These choices were made because of the connection between achievement goal theory and motivation that is mentioned throughout the research and the fact that the researcher was a teacher within the facility where the study takes place.

Achievement Goal Theory

Achievement goal theory predates the study of student engagement and even served as a partial catalyst for it. “Achievement goal theory proposes that students’ motivation and

achievement-related behaviors can be understood by considering the reasons or purposes they adopt while engaged in academic work” (Wolters, 2004, p. 236). This theory views the overall learning environment as a powerful factor in motivating and engaging students in the learning process, thus increasing achievement (Ames & Archer, 1988; Wolters, 2004).

Teachers can entice students by maintaining enriching and engaging classes while simultaneously understanding the science behind how students learn and process new information (Marks; 2000, Klem & Connell, 2004; Sutherland et al., 2008).

Achievement Goal Theory’s influence on the study of student engagement in juvenile justice residential facilities is due to the notion that neither “children’s academic achievement nor their chances of completing high school are predetermined by their racial, economic, or social status, but instead depend on the extent to which teachers and educational institutions, along with parents and communities, can make schools a welcoming place where students want to come and, when present, where they are willing and able to do the hard work that is learning” (Skinner et al., 2007, p. 31).

Student engagement and achievement goal theory. Zepke and Leach (2010) created a conceptual organizer of general student engagement from a thorough review of 93 articles focusing on student engagement from across the world. This organization fits well with the chosen research methodology, autoethnography, as well as achievement goal theory, because of the incorporation of context, voice, and relationship. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the combination of the two in a way that fits a portrait of educational engagement at a YDC.

Motivation and Agency

Motivational development research has shown that when students are motivated to learn, for any reason, they are more engaged with the task (Skinner et al., 2009). Motivation research reaches across both psychological and cognitive components of student engagement. While there is still much work to be done in this area of research, it has demonstrated a direct link between students' levels of motivation, their engagement within the classroom, and their academic success (Furrer et al., 2006; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ramsay et al., 2010; Skinner et al., 2009; Toshalis & Nakkura, 2012).

Self-construction of knowledge. The idea of self-construction of knowledge is derived from self-regulation theory. Self-regulation is defined as “adapting and controlling one’s own behavior under a range of conditions and circumstances” (Toshalis & Nakkura, 2012, p. 20). Cognitively, self-regulated learners can set learning goals, monitor their progress and their behavior, and self-evaluate their progress (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Zimmerman, 1990). This research shows that when students can self-regulate, they perceive the relevance of their schoolwork to future endeavors, value learning, and have set short-term and long-term personal goals that engage them in the learning process (Appleton et al., 2006; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). “Research shows that people learn best when they self-regulate; their own internal focusing processes play a crucial role in engagement and the capacity to do difficult academic work” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 33).

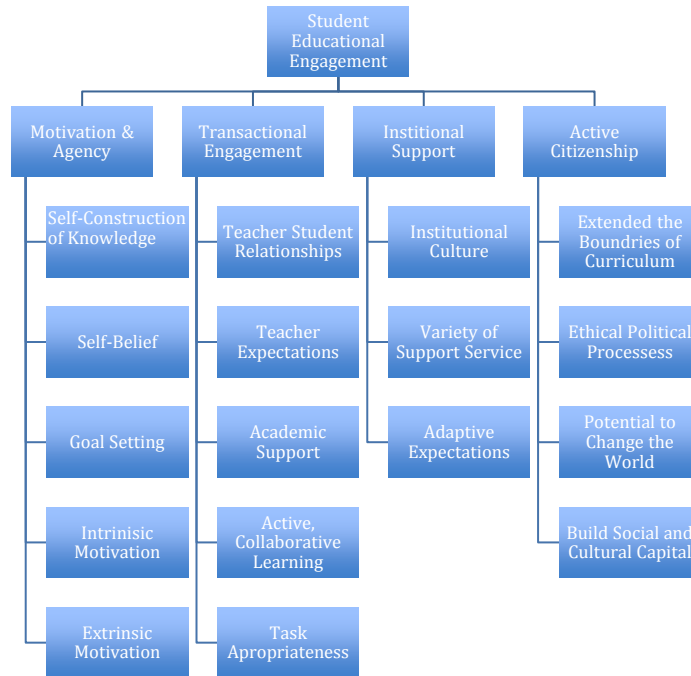


Figure 3.
Student Educational Engagement
 Adapted from Zepke and Leach, 2010

Goal-setting. Achievement goal theory “predicts that the purposes students have for engaging in achievement tasks will influence their level of task engagement” (Greene et al., 2004, p. 464). This means that students who have set their purpose at school to improve their abilities will set goals and use better strategies to reach that goal than will students who are simply trying to complete an assigned task. When students have set achievement goals and can clearly see the link between the assigned task and meeting the predetermined goal, there is an incentive value attached to the task (Greene et al., 2004). This incentive value leads to both student engagement and motivation to learn the skill through completion of the assigned task. When teachers take time to explain assigned tasks to students and connect them to their individual future goals, interests, and needs to help to shape the students’ perception of the task, student engagement is promoted (Greene et al., 2004).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. “Research shows that achievement and motivation are inextricably linked” (Skinner et al., 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 30), yet each student is intrinsically motivated by his or her own individual interests, goals, experiences, etc. While there has been some debate over the difference between motivation and student engagement, most researchers have reached the consensus that motivation is the “direction, intensity, and quality of one’s energies” while engagement is “the energy in action, the connection between the person and the activity” (as cited in Appleton et al., 2008, p. 428). It can also be true that while a student may be motivated to complete a task or learn a skill, he or she may not be engaged in said task. When students know that there is an authentic audience for their work or that there is an authentic and significant reason for completing the assigned task, they are more likely to become engaged and motivated.

Transactional Engagement

“Students exist in a dynamic ecology: it shapes them while they also shape it” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 30). Overall there are three overarching transactional factors for student engagement agreed upon across the literature: “(1) the fundamental human need to develop and express competence, (2) school membership, and (3) authentic academic work” (Marks, 2000, p. 158). If any of these factors begin to deteriorate, student engagement levels decrease and the reversal of that deterioration is often a time consuming, high-energy task for students, educational staff, and parents.

Teacher-student relationships. Teachers are in a unique position in that they can serve as a catalyst of change and motivation for student behavior. Appleton et al. (2006) found that the student-teacher relationship is statistically significant and can be used as an intervention with students who are disengaged academically or as a method to continue

engagement and motivation. This means that when students know and feel that their teachers care about them, they are more likely to want to be involved in their learning process (Hirn & Scott, 2014).

One way to build and maintain a teacher-student relationship is for teachers to provide students with opportunities to engage and respond to both the content and the teacher (Hirn & Scott, 2014). As opportunities for students to respond increase, the more students feel that they are in a true relationship and part of a community within the classroom. This builds the psychological and cognitive components of student engagement and increases behavior associated with engagement.

Teacher expectations. Teachers must provide both positive and negative student feedback through verbal, written, gestural, or other response types indicating either academic or social success or failure in a way that leaves students with a feeling of respect. “A wide range of optimal ratios of positive to negative feedback have been posited in the literature, with the most common recommendations of positive to negative feedback ratios being between 3:1 and 4:1, three or four positive statements to every one negative statement” (Hirn & Scott, 2014, p. 592). When students feel less vulnerable to criticism or embarrassment, they tend to feel that it is safe to take risks, learn new things, and work towards overcoming challenging situations. Relationships blossom in this type of setting where students feel rewarded and encouraged by their teacher.

Academic support and active collaborative learning. “Time and time again, research has shown that the more educators give students choice, control, challenge, and collaborative opportunities, the more motivation and engagement are likely to rise” (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 27). Teachers can create and support this autonomy within the

classroom through nurturing students' motivations, acknowledging both student perspectives and interests, providing rationales for assigned tasks, using language that empowers students, and allowing sufficient time to complete tasks (Turner, Christensen, Kackar-Cam, Trucano, & Fulmer, 2014). These goals can be achieved by simply providing students with choice-making opportunities in the classroom (Ramsey et al., 2010). Students in public school and young people in general have limited opportunities to make choices within the academic setting, so it is both exciting and engaging when the opportunities are offered.

There are multiple ways for teachers to offer choice within their classroom. One way is offer task sequence choices, where students choose the order of the assigned task (Ramsay et al., 2010). Another option is for teachers to provide some content knowledge and then allow the students the opportunity to choose to show how they have mastered the content or skill. The goal for the teacher is to provide an opportunity where the student can engage in some of the decision-making within the classroom so as to foster a feeling of ownership and control over the learning process.

Task appropriateness. Research indicates that when task difficulty and student skill and capability are appropriately matched, student engagement and learning are increased (Burns & Dean, 2005; Gilbertson et al., 2008). Many students who tend to feel vulnerable or threatened by a situation where they feel as though they may experience failure (e.g., a difficult learning task) will avoid or delay the activity as long as possible through disengagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). It is empirically supported that for a task to be considered appropriately matched, it must meet the following criteria: reading tasks must include 93% to 97% automatic words, and math facts must contain 70% to 85% known items

(as cited in Burn & Dean, 2005). If this is not the case, the student will become frustrated or bored and generally disengage in the task, thus disrupting the learning process.

Institutional Support

Research has also established that when students demonstrate engagement through behaviors, it elicits positive responses from teachers and support staff (Turner et al., 2014). Teachers typically respond to these behaviors by providing positive feedback, motivational support, and assistance (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This institutional support has been found to both maintain and increase engagement (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Both “theory and research suggest that a student’s psychological connection to school and being part of an academic community plays an important role in affecting student motivation and participatory behaviors” (Appleton et al., 2008, p. 377). This connection component has also been proven to increase student engagement (Mosher & MacGowan, 1985; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Other components affecting student engagement are self-awareness of feelings, emotional regulation, conflict resolution skills, and relationships with teachers and peers (Appleton et al., 2006). When students feel a sense of belonging within their academic atmosphere, they tend to be more engaged with their academics (Appleton et al., 2008; Marks, 2000; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). As students’ self-confidence and sociability increase, their educational and occupational goals increase as well (Mosher & MacGowan, 1984). This often leads to what is referred to as student autonomy, which is “the psychological need to behave according to one’s interests and values” (Turner et al., 2014, p. 1200) and has been proven to lead to academic success.

Active Citizenship

Furrer and Skinner (2003) extended Mark's (2000) research and found that "student-reported relatedness to parents, peers, and teachers significantly predicted both student- and teacher-reported student engagement" (as cited in Appleton et al., 2008, p. 377). Klem and Connell (2004) then investigated the impact of economic and social levels of advantaged and disadvantaged students and found that these extra-academic factors significantly affected student engagement for all. As students and parents begin to see the value in school, build relationships with teachers, and feel that they are wanted and needed, the students begin to attend more regularly, thus increasing engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). Clearly, student engagement and student learning are contingent upon many factors within and outside of the academic atmosphere.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) discussed the importance of creating "pedagogies in which youth have the opportunity to influence decisions that will shape their lives and those of their peers either in or outside of school settings" (p. 23). When this happens, students and the lessons they are expected to learn shift from content that is trying to somehow change the student and teach the student in isolation, to an authentic task where the student can advocate for a change that they feel is needed. The student becomes an active and engaged learner and researcher, as well as a stakeholder in his or her learning process and community, when the value in the assigned task is evident (Greene et al., 2004). This authenticity shifts the institutional power away from the school and teacher, creating a facilitating position for the teacher through which each student's ability to make sense of new ideas and challenges, as well as where and how the student plans to use the knowledge, becomes clear to the teacher (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Because student engagement involves behavioral, cognitive, and psychological components and focuses heavily on motivation, it is necessary to use a methodology that is able to expose all of these factors. Autoethnography methodology fits well with the study of student engagement because it allows the voice of the participants to be heard and works to clearly define the context of the study. This methodology will be used to explore student engagement within a juvenile justice residential facility and create a narrative that paints a portrait of what is working to engage students.

Autoethnography

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005 as cited in Ellis et al., 2011). Reed-Danahay defined autoethnography as “a writing practice that consists of highly analytical, personalized accounts through which authors draw extensively from their lived experiences to extend understanding of a particular culture, discipline, or phenomenon” (Garza, 2008, p. 164). In autoethnography, the researcher is ultimately the focus of the study, and it is the researcher’s responsibility to unpack and provide a thick description of the setting and events as well as an analysis of how these events have led to a transformation or an epiphany (Ellis, Admas, & Bochner, 2011; Henning, 2012).

In the XXXXs, researchers began to see that traditional social science research was being done by a very limited, often patriarchal group of researchers, and autoethnography was one way to address this issue and broaden lines of research (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography was developed as a way of producing meaningful, accessible, evocative research from an insider’s perspective to assist and expand readers’ understanding of issues

and experiences that are typically silent, thus deepening the level of understanding and increasing the capacity to empathize with those who are different (Ellis et al., 2011). The readability of autoethnographies is a way to entice non-educators to think critically about the challenges of being a teacher and broaden the education research audience, which is also one of the goals for this dissertation.

Autoethnography stems from the anthropological methodology of ethnography, the study of the human cultural condition, and emerged just over 50 years ago (Ellis et al., 2011; Hughes, Pennington, & Markis, 2012). This methodology has quickly grown in the mainstream education research journals since Ellis and Bochner (1996) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) brought it to the attention of researchers and students in their research textbook (Hughes et al., 2012). With each new revision of this text, the number of autoethnographic entries has grown exponentially from 1 in 1994 to 37 in 2005 (2012). This methodology is being used more frequently in educational research (Hackmann, 2002; Harding, 2005; Lynn, 2006; Mullholland & Wallace, 2005) because of the way that it connects narrative inquiry with an empirical understanding. Hairston & Strickland (2010) explored how autoethnography is causing dialogue that is both exposing and facilitating a person's construction of culture.

Autoethnography is reflexive in nature (Ellis et al., 2011), much like education and teaching itself, and serves as a way of transparently studying rules, norms, or acts of resistance associated with a cultural group while also accounting for the researcher's bias and cultural background (Hughes et al., 2012). Therefore it fits neatly in the genre of educational advocacy research. Education research seeks to call attention or make a call for action to

improve the system and/or outcomes of education. A quality autoethnography does this well by connecting personal experiences with a cultural context.

Garza, Jr. (2008) used autoethnography to explore and clarify some of the challenges he encountered during one year of his tenure as a superintendent fighting for social justice within a district heavily populated by traditionally marginalized students. This is just one example of how powerful stories can be, instead of theoretical explanations. This methodology is pushing researchers to examine the role research plays in the study. Where traditional research works to remain neutral, autoethnographies ask the researcher to remain transparent and while also allowing him/her to be participatory. Through the researcher's lived experiences, the sharing of his or her story, the constant reflective nature, and the insider view, the autoethnography provides a transformative experience for both the researcher and the audience (Henning, 2013). Chapter 3 provides a more in-depth explanation of the methodology.

Educator Advocacy

Like autoethnography, educator advocacy is also transformative and autobiographical in nature. Autoethnography lends itself to being easily paired with educator advocacy because of its reliance on the elements of relationships and voice. The aesthetic whole in this case, the completed portrait, focuses on the story that the researcher uncovers as the narrator, owning the fact that she is the sole English teacher at the facility. In this capacity, she advocates for a higher quality of education in general and the specific changes that are needed that the study uncovers.

The educator advocacy approach to research was developed in the 1980s and 1990s in response to researchers who felt that "post-positivist assumptions imposed structural laws

and theories that did not fit marginalized populations in our society on issues of social justice that needed to be addressed” (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). This new approach to research focuses on change and includes the participants so that the research is being done *with*, rather than *to* or *on*, the participants. The initial educator advocacy studies drew upon researchers who had become change agents within the realm of education, such as Marx, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, and most notably, Pablo Friere (Creswell, 2009).

The focus of all educator advocacy research, qualitative or quantitative, is focused on bringing about some type of change. Educator advocates center that change around a marginalized population, social issue, or issues of empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, or alienation. Hyman (1989) explained that educator advocacy has been developed to use data as preventive measures and to offer an organized, empirical method for experts in the field to effect change. One example of educator advocacy is Hyman (1995), who used his voice to advocate for ending corporal punishment in schools. In educator advocacy, the voices of those within the focal point of the study are included, and they have an active role in the research process in order to immediately work towards a further decrease of marginalization. By the end of the research project, there is a better understanding of the overall problem, a call to action, and a plan for action to help individuals free themselves from constraints.

Conclusion

While there has been significant work defining and measuring student engagement, this remains a relatively new area of study within educational research. Research within educational systems in residential juvenile justice facilities is extremely sparse due to the sensitive nature of the field and the students, and there is much to learn about how to improve

the educational opportunities for this demographic. This study will add to the existing research in both of these areas through the qualitative methodology of autoethnography accompanied by educator advocacy. Chapter 3 outlines exactly how this was accomplished.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this autoethnography was to create an extensive, descriptive narrative that focuses on engaging students within a residential facility for adjudicated youth by analyzing what is working to motivate and educationally engage students according to the English language arts teacher. As mentioned in Chapter 2, student academic engagement research originated through dropout prevention research. Since many of the students within the juvenile justice system are at risk of not completing high school (Leone, Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005) this line of research is especially pertinent to them. The use of student engagement as a framework for study makes the most sense. It must be noted that student educational engagement and academic motivation have been proven to be intertwined (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Therefore, if educational engagement is increased within the facility, it is reasonable to hope that student levels of motivation will also increase, thus leading to lower dropout rates and raise the possibility of their renewed interest in and feelings of success within school.

This chapter will define the research methodology of autoethnography, the context and participants of the study, as well as lay out the research question, how the data were collected, and methods of analysis. So often, research focusing on juvenile justice pursues the problems within the system through a deficit model (American Psychological Association, 2008; Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011; Henault, 2001; Kang-Brown et al., 2013; Leone,

Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005; Martinez, 2009). This study, while acknowledging that there are struggles, reports the positive aspects of the educational system within one facility and will serve as a model of *desire-based* educational research (Tuck, 2009). Also, as previously mentioned, an educator advocacy approach was used, as the researcher is a teacher within the facility and plans to use study findings to make recommendations that will increase both student levels of engagement as well as the quality of education within all residential facilities serving juvenile delinquents.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods allow the researcher to ask complex questions and develop in-depth understanding of an intricate phenomenon. This process of research provides flexibility to explore and interpret data around a central theme while incorporating the voice of the participants at the forefront of the study (Lykins, 2009; Popkewitz, 2004). Qualitative methodology was the best choice for this study because very little prior research has been done within a facility of this type and the phenomenon being studied (i.e., student academic engagement from the teacher's perspective).

Qualitative studies generally take place within the natural setting of the participants, which is key when exploring the phenomenon of student academic engagement because this subject encompasses many components and relationships. Student educational engagement does not happen within a vacuum and must be captured within the students' academic setting. To take this a step farther, an educator advocacy approach is being used, in terms of having an "advocacy and participatory worldview" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 9), and will work in two ways. One, the researcher is part of the system of education as the English teacher within the facility, allowing a participatory view from within. Second, this worldview "contains an

action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life" (Creswell, 2009, p. 9). This worldview is typically used when studying marginalized and disenfranchised populations (Creswell, 2009), such as the students in this study.

Autoethnography

"Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005 as cited in Ellis et al., 2011). Teachers can entice students by maintaining enriching and engaging classes while simultaneously understanding the science behind how students learn and process new information (Klem & Connell, 2004; Marks; 2000, Sutherland et al., 2008). This methodology is used to explore a phenomenon through an insider's perspective and create a thick descriptive narrative in a manner that serves as an accessible explanation to those in and out of the field (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography was chosen for this study because it enables an in-depth look at student academic engagement within the education system of a youth development center, including the context, belief systems, and inspirations of those involved. By including lived stories and the perspectives of the researcher, who is simultaneously the teacher, the readers are given an inside perspective on the difficulties and ease of teaching in a setting that is typically not discussed. "Autoethnography clarifies the purpose, question, problem, context, or issue being addressed by utilizing the self as a central foundation of inquiry" (Hughes et al., 2012), which here is student engagement in a YDC through the eyes of an experienced teacher.

Limitations to autoethnography. There are drawbacks to the use of autoethnography that must be considered. This methodology takes countless hours of time spent within the cultural setting, data collection, and relationship-building. Data collection, in this case over two years' worth of notes and journal entries, produces large amounts of data to be analyzed. There are, in fact, more data than can be included in the final study results; therefore it is up to the researcher's discretion what to include and how to best represent the phenomenon being studied using the collected data. As noted, this requires a significant amount of time. However, despite this abundance of data, it is necessary to remember that it is impossible to write down and remember everything. Some things are missed and the decision of what and when to write something down is a difficult one. The best way to combat this limitation is by allotting an ample amount of time to both gather and analyze data.

Another limitation in the use of autoethnography is that the researcher is the focus of the study and all information is funneled through the researcher, which means that the researcher must remain "aware of potential conflicts of interest and researcher perspectives that may influence how the empirical research is reported" (Hughes et al., 2012). The transparency involved in autoethnography helps to combat this limitation.

This study discusses teaching within a facility where there is a doubly vulnerable population in that the students are children and they are incarcerated, so close attention to the privacy of the students was taken by creating fictional students that are combinations of real students. The experiences were all lived experiences, and the statements and reactions are also true; it is the exact identities of the students who took part in these experiences and the time lines in which the experiences took place that will be fictional. "In using personal

experience, autoethnographers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close, intimate others” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 6). The researcher must be very careful in how he or she creates the fictional characters and reports the experiences so as to do justice to the authenticity of the data while also maintaining the privacy of the students.

There are two other limitations that are significant in this study. First, there can be no member checking other than the researcher going back to her notes. Second, this line of inquiry is being completed according to a timeline created to complete a doctoral degree. Because this study is a dissertation, there are time constraints and organizational parameters that otherwise would not be a part of this study. All of these limitations will be taken into consideration, and the researcher will work to discount them through careful planning and analyzing of data.

Reliability, generalizability, and validity. Autoethnographers are often challenged on the reliability, generalizability, and validity of their research because of the memoir-like, qualitative style utilized. Yet autoethnographers remain aware of these criticisms and thus understand that “memory is fallible, that it is impossible to recall or report on events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt” (Ellis et al., 2001, p. 7). This is why it is important to note that what is being done is exploring and reporting a phenomenon within a unique, often closed arena through the use of thick description provided in a readable narrative fashion. Autoethnographers follow a close methodological procedure, creating reliable methods of data collection and analysis as well as creating a framework based on rigorous research already completed in the field. This framework serves as a guide when asking research questions and analyzing the data. Ultimately, reliability for

an autoethnography will come down to the credibility of the researcher and their ability to produce factual information and evidence (Ellis, et al., 2011).

Validity is closely related to the issue of reliability for autoethnographies. “For ethnographers, validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7). This is done by reporting accurate information that is aligned with the student engagement framework mentioned previously and the narrative manner in which the final product is produced. This allows readers to see into the setting and have experiences within the setting through reading the final product.

Generalizability is particularly important for this autoethnography because the researcher is working towards advocating for improvements within systems of education for adjudicated youth. Unlike many other methodologies, generalizability in autoethnographies is concerned with readers, not respondents. A truly generalizable autoethnography is able to illuminate unfamiliar cultural processes (Elis et al., 2011) in a way that the reader can compare their lives to the lives of others and feelings are evoked that cause the readers to want to know more, or advocate for others.

Research Question

This autoethnography seeks to answer the following main research question: How does one teacher engage and see engagement in her students at one YDC? This research question aligns with the student engagement framework that will be used during analysis.

Data Collection

Data collection for this autoethnography began in September of 2012, when the researcher began volunteering at the YDC once a week in the English classroom. She visited

the facility to simply gain an understanding of what a facility of this type was like. She had spent many years studying the school-to-prison pipeline and wanted to understand what the end of that pipeline was. While on the tour, she learned that the students had been without an English teacher for several months, and she inquired about volunteering. After passing a basic background check, she was permitted to come into the classroom setting to work with students every Friday 8:30-3:00. During this time, she kept a journal with her to collect her thoughts and also notes about classroom assignments and student interactions.

In 2015 the students were still without an English teacher and the researcher had completed her doctoral coursework, so she inquired about the possibility of taking on the English teacher position while completing her dissertation. She was offered the job almost immediately, and once her paperwork was complete, she took on the role. At this point she continued to journal and then added student artifacts, including pictures, notes that students had written, lesson plans, and completed assignments. This continued until she left the position in 2017.

Context

In autoethnography, the context becomes part of the framework for the study, as opposed to other methodologies where the context is stripped away in order to isolate the phenomenon being studied. Here, because the context is an unusual and typically very closed educational setting, creating a frame of reference for the reader will create a more truthful understanding of the phenomenon of student academic engagement within the facility.

The context for this study was a youth development center in the rural part of a southeastern state. This facility is a secure juvenile justice facility that is rarely seen by community members or even family members of the employees and students. All students at

the center are adjudicated youth, meaning that they have been charged and found guilty of one or more criminal offenses, and have been court mandated to a YDC placement. This type of facility often creates a sense of curiosity in outsiders, which the researcher hopes to capitalize on to entice readers to learn more about this marginalized population.

This YDC is one of four YDCs run by the state's Department of Public Safety Juvenile Justice Division. It was opened in the early 2000s, has 32 single-bed rooms, and is the only YDC in the state serving both male and female students between the ages of 10 and 18. The facility is divided into two mirror-image buildings, one housing males and one housing females. Each building contains two housing units, two classrooms, and four offices for social workers, mental health clinicians, the chaplain, and the school's assistant principal. There is one administrative building housing the director, nursing station, visitation area, kitchen, employee lockers, and facility storage closet.

Students at the YDC receive four ninety-minute blocks of core education (math, English language arts, social studies, science, and elective courses) five days a week, 48 weeks per year. There are many safety measures within the facility that are different from a typical public school that possibly influence the quality of education. For example, every door in the facility automatically locks when closed and cannot ever remain unlocked. The doors to get inside or outside buildings and housing units require a badge and a code to operate, while the classroom doors, student room doors, restrooms, and closets require a key. All students must silently transition with their housing unit (typically eight students), in a single file line based on their housing number with an adult at the beginning and the end of the line, with empty hands crossed behind their backs. There are no exceptions to any of these rules, ever.

The school faculty at the YDC consists of an assistant principal, science teacher, math teacher, English language arts teacher, special education teacher, and a permanent uncertified substitute social studies teacher. The center director is present within the facility but does not enter the classrooms frequently. There is always a minimum of one unit staff member within the classroom, though ideally there are two, and at times even three. The center's policy is that there must be a minimum of two adults present for every eight students, one of whom is certified in restraint, control, and defense techniques (RCDT). While it is preferred that the same unit staff members travel throughout the school day with the same unit, this is not always possible, therefore the position of unit staff members fluctuates throughout the day. Presently, the facility is grossly understaffed, and this has complicated the staffing of the education classrooms.

Student demographics. The participants for this study were 30 students, 16 males and 14 females, within the youth development center. While the exact number of students at the facility can fluctuate day to day, it steadily maintained an average of 16 male students (generally 14 African American and 2 white) and 14 female students (10 African American, 3 white, 1 Latina) during the time that data was collected.

The state's offense average for crimes of juvenile offenders within development centers are: approximately 60% of these students have committed F-I felonies (termed serious), 21% have committed Class A-E felonies (termed violent), 14% have committed serious A1 misdemeanors, and 5% are repeat offenders who have had prior charges and have now committed a Class 1-3 misdemeanor. Students from marginalized categories defined by race and socioeconomic status constitute, on average, 90% of the population. Their age range is 10-18 years. In addition to the students, this study included the researcher, who is also a

classroom teacher, three other classroom teachers, and two unit staff members who work within the classrooms as well as within the living units with the students.

Because of the sensitive nature of these students' incarceration and their overall status as a vulnerable population, all precautions were taken to ensure the students' anonymity and safety throughout the process of data collection. This was done by making the researchers the primary participants and by compiling multiple student biographies into single, composite representations of students.

Researcher as Participant

Throughout this research study, the researcher took on the role of participant. The researcher began as a volunteer, participating in the classroom as a note-taker for two years and then serving for two more years as the teacher. By immersing herself into the culture, the researcher could build relationships and gain the trust of students and staff in order to add to the robustness of her study. Because this is an intensive and extensive study, it required a considerable amount of time developing trusting relationships with participants at the beginning of the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) in order to become a true insider.

The researcher's immersion into the culture of the YDC also made her presence less awkward than if she had simply been stationed somewhere in the room with a notebook, taking notes. Cognizant that this particular population of students generally has problems trusting adults (Henalt, 2001), trust had been built over the researcher's first two years as a volunteer, allowing her gradually greater access to having more open conversations with the students.

Autobiography

Growing up as a public school student most likely sparked my interest in systems of education. Due to frequent moves and an unstable family setting, I was enrolled in three distinctly different elementary schools within the same southeastern state. The first was a well-funded school settled inside of a nice neighborhood in the state's capital. The second was a poor rural school where the busses were still segregated and the classrooms may as well have been. The third was in the richest school district in the state, yet the circumstances of my life were such that I was the poorest that I had been yet, creating a great deal of personal tension. All three of these schools taught me by the age of ten that context really does matter and that not all schools are created—nor do they function—equally.

Beginning in middle school and throughout high school, my life took a path similar to many of my fellow students. I quickly left my elementary school title of being “academically gifted” and took on the title of being a special education student through a 504 plan. When I was in the eighth grade, my stepmother left my father for a drug addict that she met at the homeless shelter while doing volunteer work, and I was left to live with my father and a half-brother 11 years younger than me. My half-brother often called me mom because I took care of him, while my stepmother's presence remained sporadic for the first few years of his life. My life revolved around emotionally surviving while my father fought for our physical survival needs. There were many days when the electric company came to turn off our power and the tow truck would come to repossess our car. I responded to these difficult times through self-destructive, and at times criminal, ways of escaping. These experiences help me now to look at my students as people suffering, doing what they can to survive—not as their charges or adjudications. Their strengths define them, not their offenses.

After finishing high school at the very bottom of my class, I decided to get my life back on track and pursue a teaching degree to make the difference I felt needed to be made. I was working off the adage: “If you aren’t part of the solution, you are part of the problem.” I took my first teaching job as a middle school language arts and social studies teacher in a rural school in the western part of the state and was shown again the inequity within the education system. It was obvious that I had to continue my education to get the power needed to make a change, so I applied to graduate school and started on my path to working with adjudicated youth.

Now, as a mother of three and a National Board Certified, master’s-prepared teacher who is working on her dissertation, I am still fighting daily to find my voice for change. At the time of this study, I found myself working as an English teacher at a youth development center, a locked residential facility for adjudicated young men and women between the ages of 10-18. Throughout my doctoral-level coursework, it became clear that students in almost every sector of the educational system have multiple people working as change agents, with one exception: juvenile delinquents. This category of students is difficult to study because they are somewhat transient throughout facilities, are an extremely vulnerable population, and can intimidate even the toughest of teachers. Each day I try to wake up as a change agent and educational advocate for these students.

Relationships

There must be both reciprocity and boundaries in place throughout the research process. Qualitative studies, and especially ethnographic studies, require researchers to intrude into settings, and therefore the participants must become acclimated to the researcher’s presence. “People may be giving their time to be interviewed or to help the

researcher understand group norms; the researcher must plan to reciprocate. Where people adjust priorities and routines to help the researcher, or even just tolerate the researcher's presence, they are giving of themselves" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 69). One way in which I could show appreciation to students was to have a party on my last day, where I passed out thank you notes.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data is an on-going process when using autoethnography methodology. The researcher is reminded to always be listening *for* the story and not *to* the story. As the researcher is collecting data, there is a constant analytical process occurring (Straus & Coburn, 1998) in order to define subsequent questions, dig deeper, learn more, and thus create a more comprehensive product. During this process, themes begin to emerge to the researcher. The analysis method that was used with this study is that of layered accounts, thus creating a narrative autoethnography.

"Layered accounts often focus on the author's experience alongside the data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 5). A framework was completed through a careful study of existing research on educational student engagement to guide the collection and analysis of data (see Table 5). Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously over an extended amount of time. Once the framework was in place, the researcher continued to consult it throughout the process. Once collection of data was completed, the researcher again went back to the data to continue looking for answers and themes. As the patterns and relationships became clear, the data were organized into similar groupings aligned with the framework of student engagement (see Table 5). Finally, a thick description of both the experience of teaching within a YDC and the process of eliciting

student engagement in their own educations was formed out of the personal and interpersonal experiences that defined and described the phenomenon.

“Critical and postmodern [research] genres assume that all knowledge is political and that researchers are not neutral, since their ultimate purposes include advocacy and action” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 112). It was imperative to address this fact of inherent non-neutrality and work towards not allowing it to take away from data collection or analysis. The success of this study depended upon the researcher’s interpersonal skills and ability to “build trust, maintain good relations, respect norms of reciprocity, and sensitively consider ethical issues” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 119). The researcher was working particularly on dropping what Marshall and Rossman (2011) refer to as *academic armor*, that is, the notion that incorporating emotional engagement into my research would be negative. Building relationships with both students and staff that were based upon trust was a priority, and that meant being willing to be emotionally engaged.

Table 5.
Student engagement data analysis

Student Engagement Components	
Motivation and Agency	Self-Construction of knowledge Self-Belief Goal-Betting Intrinsic Motivation Extrinsic Motivation
Transactional Engagement	Teacher-Student Relationships Teacher Expectations Academic Support Active Collaborative Learning Task Appropriateness
Institutional Support	Institutional Culture Variety of Support Services Adaptive Expectations

Active Citizenship

Extend the Boundaries of Curriculum

Ethical Political Processes

Potential to Change the World

Build Social and Cultural Capital

Themes

The first step of data analysis for this autoethnography was to uncover themes. As research began, the anticipatory framework was defined by the identification of the intellectual, ideological, and autobiographical themes that must be clarified and would serve as the “voice of preoccupation” and the “voice of autobiography” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185). While changes to this framework were anticipated, the initial framework served as a guide, a way to self-reflect, self-criticize, and register preoccupations and to help keep the researcher focused on what is already known about student engagement. The ideological theme was achievement goal theory, the intellectual theme was student academic engagement, and the autobiographical theme was becoming an educator-advocate.

Throughout the process of observing, journaling, and analyzing, repetitive ideas, topics, and notions emerged within the anticipatory framework. The researcher used five modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast to extract themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). These modes were:

- Repetitive, persistent refrains forming commonly held views;
- Resonant metaphors and symbolic expressions revealing ways that realities are experienced;
- Cultural and institutional rituals that exhibit importance within the organization;
- Triangulation to weave the data collection points together;

- The construction of themes and patterns.

The most obvious themes appeared in repetitive refrains: the same notions being stated and observed again and again. These refrains proclaim: “This is who we are. This is what we believe. This is how we see ourselves” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193). Next to surface are the resonant metaphors: words or phrases that contain meaning, symbolism, and represent the culture of the institution or a dominant element of a life story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Institutional and cultural rituals are reflections of value systems and priorities within the system, therefore the emergent themes that stem from these activities must be analyzed through the researcher witnessing and experiencing them. Themes also emerged using triangulation of multiple data points including, but not limited to: journal entries, observations, and student artifacts. Through the combination of these four modes, the final mode of revealing patterns is initiated. Here the researcher acknowledged common themes across modes, revealing the “harmony of voices” within the institution.

It was important to recognize and reflect on the role of the researcher as an educator-advocate through the analysis process. “The identity, character, and history of the researcher are critical to the manner of listening, selecting, interpreting, and composing the story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). As a teacher at the YDC, the researcher was familiar with the facility, the students, and the culture, which was influential during analysis.

Final Product

The final product of this research study is a narrative autoethnography that will hopefully persuade future researchers to conduct more educational research within juvenile justice residential facilities. The purpose of this study is to be a catalyst sparking interest in and showing the need for improvements within educational systems in these facilities. It will

also show the importance of student engagement in the rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents, thus informing both traditional and nontraditional educational settings.

Instruments and Measures

To increase study credibility and dependability, autoethnography methodology recommends a research design in which data is collected at multiple points. Using multiple data instruments and measures increases the rigor and quality of the overall study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a part of these multiple data collection points, observational data for this study included a record of the researcher's interactions and experiences within in the classroom as well as with the assistant principal, teachers, students, and unit staff members. All data points were chosen based on their relevance to research focusing on student academic engagement and the methods that have been proven as quality measurements and forms of capturing student academic engagement (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Scheider, & Shernoff, 2003; Zepke & Leach, 2010).

Student Factors

To capture students' perceptions of their educational experiences and to better understand their own classroom practices, observations were collected through teacher notes and reflections. These were collected, organized, and analyzed to create fictional, composite characters that together serve as an accurate representation of the real students.

Teacher Factors

It is important to uncover and understand teacher perceptions about student academic engagement and how teachers view their roles as motivators. This information was gathered through the researcher's observations and journal entries. Because the methodology of

autoethnography focuses on the researcher's experiences, these perceptions and revelations were shown through the voice of the researcher as an educator-advocate.

Contextual Factors

There are many contextual factors that play into the educational experience at a juvenile justice facility and must be accounted for. Most of these factors will be captured through observations and thick descriptions of the physical area.

Ethics

Adjudicated youth are a doubly vulnerable population because they are both children and incarcerated. Respect for persons, beneficence, and justice must be considered and remain a focus throughout the study. Autoethnographers "seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience" (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 4). Throughout this process, the focus remained solely on the researcher and her experiences, which is why IRB approval was not necessary. All other characters within the research are portrayals of students as composite characters within the YDC over a four-year period. There were no personal identifiers at all.

Respect for persons was maintained through confidentiality. At no time was any student information released. This study was concerned with the process of the educational system in YDCs; therefore student information at an individual level was not pertinent.

Beneficence, the notion of doing no harm, was considered primarily through the lens of my emergence. I had to be careful not to build unwarranted personal relationships with students and staff, but still be seen as someone who could be trusted. By remaining at some distance, I worked towards ensuring that accurate data was collected that was not infused with my own emotional perspective. It was difficult to do this, because as I started working

with the students I found myself seeing them as children who needed and wanted positive adult relationships, and I wanted to make a difference in their lives. Reaching out to my advisor on this project has been my way of dealing with this issue.

The benefactors of this research must be the teachers and students within educational systems teaching court-involved youth. The ethical area of justice works to ensure that those who should benefit from the research are, in fact, benefitting.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to show that there are some great things happening in a system of education very rarely studied, and this is a population worth researching. The study also shows where there is room for improvement in these classrooms. By going into the system, becoming a fixture, and talking with the experts (the students, teachers, and staff), the overall product is an autoethnography that is being written in order to be accessible to those inside and outside of the educational arena. I hope that this work will serve as a change agent to better the lives of those receiving their education within residential facilities for adjudicated youth.

CHAPTER 4
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Introduction

My journey into a life in which most of my days are spent with incarcerated youth began in my second year of teaching when I met Derrick, the first student whom I know I truly failed. I think of him often as I drive to work, particularly on the days when the burden feels heavy and the impulse to turn around feels strong. Derrick had a dark, brooding face that rarely smiled, with dreadlocks hanging heavily around it and an anger that you could feel as soon as he entered a room. I feel weighed down with all that I wish I had known then—and did not. But that is the plight of the adult, isn't it?

Derrick was the seventh-grade student that no one wanted to teach, yet for some reason I felt drawn to him. His anger and frustration pushed me to try new things to try to reach him. He was a challenge, and I accepted it. As soon as the administrators learned that I would keep him in my classroom instead of sending him to them, I ended up with him three to four periods a day. Then, at the end of the year, they asked me to teach him in summer school, and I happily obliged. At the end of that summer I found that I was “needed” in the eighth grade, and by the way, could Derrick be in my homeroom, social studies, and English classes? A few months into the school year, when he could no longer stay in his science class due to his behavior, I was asked if it would be alright if he *double-dipped* in English? Sure! Bring it on! I was young, full of ideas and energy and I wanted to save him.

But I didn't. And now I have a better understanding of why. I was young, naïve, somewhat culturally ignorant, and I believed that I had the ability to save a student. To believe that I can save someone is to believe that I hold power and have answers, and this is simply not true. What I do hold is compassion and a desire to teach students where they are, with what they have, and to be a force of gentle kindness in their lives. While I am embarrassed that I once held this naïve and ignorant belief, it is what motivated me to enter this path that has taught me differently, that has helped me change my cultural lens. And so, through my wrongs, I have grown immensely and continue to grow every minute of every day. There are times when recognized ignorance becomes recognized blessings. So now I have dedicated my career to students who were not successful in their schools, or communities, or homes and have landed in the juvenile justice system, much like Derrick. My way of trying to help these students is by spending each workday morning driving in the dark towards a youth development center in a southeastern state, to work with adjudicated youth.

Every morning the sun rises behind me on my commute, and the irony is never lost on me. I feel like I am driving away from light, desperately trying to pull it with me, working to show that my students can and will shine, even if it isn't today. And as the day passes, the sun does shine right on us, slowly moving by us, and I wonder what the passing of time is like for my students. They are watching the days move slowly by until the day that they can rejoin the world, what they refer to as "the outs."

I am the English teacher at a youth development center in the southeastern part of the United States. This secure residential facility, run by the Division of Corrections and Department of Juvenile Justice within the Department of Public Safety, houses 32 male and

32 female students between the ages of 10 and 18. A judge has adjudicated each of the students here for numerous offenses ranging from drug possession and larceny to aggravated assault, sexual offenses, murder, and more. Before students are adjudicated and placed in this facility, it is likely that several other diversions (therapeutic foster homes, group homes, therapy, house arrest, alternative schools, etc.) have been attempted and exhausted. This is the last resort. Once students come here, while everything is done to rehabilitate, the chances of recidivism do nothing but rise exponentially day-by-day. This is an institution and as the students live out each day within the walls of the facility, they become more and more institutionalized (Leone, Krezmien, Mason, & Meisel, 2005).

One Week

The best way to understand life as an educator within a YDC is to live through a typical week. No two days are ever the same, and we staff members look at weeks as manageable chunks of time. We often discuss how we try to live each day separately and not anticipate too much about the future. Our students are in a constant state of change, so there is no way to anticipate or predict their behaviors—or growth—beyond a day. We are also consistently adding and subtracting students, and this causes changing dynamics with students, staff, and housing assignments. Over the past four years, I have taken notes, kept notes written to me by students, reflected, talked with staff members, and tried to take in all that is happening around me in order to explain and paint a clear picture of my experiences within this unique, and closed, teaching environment. My prayer is that this will open the eyes of others and show the importance and the potential within the students and through this revelation researchers will work to improve the system of education for adjudicated youth.

Monday

Mondays are always tough. The unit staff does not wake up or let the kids out of their rooms until 10:30 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, so I always know that Monday mornings are going to be hard for my students. Chances are that they have stayed up late, and their 6:30 a.m. wake-up was rough. Then there are the couple of kids who are almost ready to leave and have been allowed to go home for the weekend, only to have to return on Sunday afternoon. They have stayed up late, eaten a ton of junk food, and possibly been able to drink or smoke. Now these students may feel depressed because they are back at the facility. So as I drive up to the facility on Mondays, I always take a deep breath and remind myself that I must be patient. Mondays only come once a week.

To get into the administration building, I must have a badge that unlocks the first in a series of doors. Once in the building, I check the white board to see exactly how the day will begin. The board has the four housing units listed (A, B, C, and D) and their assigned unit staff member names. There are two groups, or shifts, that work during one day and two night-time shifts that I do not ever see (see Table 6). There are two rotations to ensure that each shift works every other weekend and has the following Monday off to recover. Shift changes often add to the Monday tension, because any change is difficult for many of the students.

The board also serves as a messaging system for alerts. It lets those of us coming in see which unit has students that are having difficult times, but their names are not listed on this board. The most common alert on the board is for suicidal behavior. These are students who have stated that they are feeling suicidal or have attempted to harm themselves. The other most common alert is administrative restriction. This means that the students have been

placed in their rooms because their behavior has been deemed dangerous to others by the staff supervisor, and they must remain in their rooms until the facility director determines that it is safe for the unit and the staff to have them back in the population. Most mornings there is at least one alert on the board. Because all students are required to come to class unless they are on administrative restriction, it is important for me to know ahead of time which units may be struggling. On this morning, there is a suicide alert on the girl's B unit, and I instantly start to guess who it may be.

Table 6.
Youth development center staff rotation schedule

Week Number	Shift Number	Day of the Week	Time In-Out
1	Shift A	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	6:30am - 6:30pm
	Shift B	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	10:30am - 10:30pm
	Shift C	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	6:30pm - 6:30am
	Shift D	Wed., Thurs.	6:30am - 6:30pm
	Shift E	Wed., Thurs.	10:30am - 10:30pm
	Shift F	Wed., Thurs.	6:30am - 6:30pm
2	Shift D	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	6:30am - 6:30pm
	Shift E	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	10:30am - 10:30pm
	Shift F	Mon., Tues., Fri, Sat., Sun.	6:30pm - 6:30am
	Shift A	Wed., Thurs.	6:30am - 6:30pm
	Shift B	Wed., Thurs.	10:30am - 10:30pm
	Shift C	Wed., Thurs.	6:30am - 6:30pm

My next stop is the locker room, where I unload my keys, my cell phone, and any other personal items that I may have brought into work with me for the day. Then I sign in in the front office. My principal is often sitting and waiting to see that I sign in on time. This is often a struggle for me and a bone of contention. I am presently responsible for dropping my three daughters off at three different locations and then driving thirty minutes to work—all before 7:30 a.m. I am often ten minutes late, and while students do not come to class until

8:30, I work through my 30 minute lunch breaks, and I am paid based on salary not hourly, I am nevertheless constantly reminded that the work day starts promptly at 7:30. This is not the way to start off a great day, but I know that I am doing the best I can, so, over the years, I have learned to let it go.

As I step out of the administration building, the recreation field is directly in front of me. Three raised garden beds lie in front of me, neglected for the past couple of years and full of weeds, and there is a picnic table and two small metal tables with attached benches on all four sides. The recreation field itself sits behind this area and is roughly half the size of a football field. The students measured it as part of a math activity and learned that you have to walk eleven laps around it to equal one mile. All of this is surrounded by a high fence with curved barbed wire at the top to prevent anyone from climbing out or in. It was a sad setting to me when I first came, but now it holds years of memories of kickball games, walks with students, and learning how to throw a football properly from a young African American girl who was an expert.

I use my badge to open the electronically locked door and step into the male side of the facility. Each morning I am greeted by C unit boys smiling and waving as they are eating breakfast, and I start to relax. Their smiles and warm greetings remind me why I am here this morning and erase the principal's curt greeting. A lot of times I am greeted by one overzealous student who has read several books over the weekend and cannot wait to tell me all about it. "Mrs. Avis! Come here! Can I approach you? Please, Mrs. Avis! I have something to tell you!"

I use the same badge to enter their unit and state my presence by saying, "Female on the unit!" and then head straight to the excited young man. After five minutes of hearing

about the books he has read and the books he now wants for me to find for him, I tell him I have to head to my classroom to get set up for the day. We exchange a fist bump, and I head out.

I use a simple, ordinary key to step inside my designated English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. This classroom is officially mine, though I am only in it for half of the day. All four ELA blocks were taught in this room when I first came here four years ago. One day when the girls were transitioning over to the male building a riot broke out, and girls and boys began to fight. Since that day, the girls stay in their building and the males in theirs unless there are exceptional circumstances like an assembly. Now, for the second half of the day, I head to the history classroom to teach the girls, and the history teachers come to my room. Fortunately, we work well together, and this causes no problems or major inconveniences.

I pride myself on my classroom's orderly set-up and the decorated walls. Half of the back wall is full of "our" one hundred vocabulary words. Students are excited to learn the new vocabulary words and can often be heard using them in their day-to-day conversations. We celebrate each usage with a fist bump and some extra credit (which I pretend to keep up with, but really just give to everyone at the end of the grading period). There is a large poster of Michael Jordan in the center left side of the same wall that states: *I've missed more than 9000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.* And surrounding that poster are posters made by the students. These posters change with the units we are studying. They have been book covers for *Roll of Thunder Hear*

My Cry, social interest information posters, and right now are the posters that the students made for our Cultural Awareness Assembly.

The side wall looks out on the rec field and has one large window that lets in the sunlight. The principal has often remarked that I need to keep my blinds closed because the students look out the windows to try to get the attention of people walking by or the girls in the other building, but I come up with different excuses to keep them open. Below the window, I keep my “classroom library,” which consists of three bookcases overflowing with books. When I came here, there were very few books, and the books that were here were old. Several times a year I post a message on Facebook asking my friends to look through their homes and donate any books that they no longer need. We have received hundreds of books this way! Often people are surprised by what voracious readers all of my students are, but I have yet to have a student who doesn’t spend a good amount of their time here reading.

The same side wall also contains sixteen pieces of abstract art that students created when I invited a local artist here to speak to the students. I love inviting community members into the classroom, and this particular artist was by far one of the best. He not only had a lot in common with my students, but he also looked like them, as he stood at least six feet tall, with long dreadlocks, and dark brown skin. They were enthralled with him and used his art lesson as a way of personal expression. This spot in our classroom reminds me of this particular day and the beauty that we can create.

The front wall has the white board straight in the center, with bulletin boards on either side. One bulletin board says, “#Goals” and the other says, “#GoalsMet.” Students decorate index cards with their goals on them, tape them to the Goals side and then move them to the Goals Met side once they have achieved them. Some examples of these goals are: To make

five school points this week and stay positive; No stabilizations this week; Get my stage 4; Get a home visit; Get a 100 on my vocabulary quiz. I often participate in this as well, as a way to show them that I, too, have goals that I am trying to accomplish. There is always a small celebratory moment as a class when someone gets to move their goal over to the #GoalsMet board.

The center of the room has eight individual plastic desks with plastic chairs, all with a particular design to not cause physical damage if thrown, and set up in two rows. The students come in and move the desks to where they will work best (usually there are three right up next to my teacher desk and others in corners so that students have their backs to walls). It is too difficult for me to do assigned seats because tensions often move from student to student and many students need to have specific physical placements to feel safe, so I tell them, “There are no assigned seats. Just sit where you will work, and if you are working, I will not bother you about your seating.” The desk movement annoys some of my colleagues, but it works best with my teaching style and my students.

I often have to sit behind my desk because I teach some sex offenders, and when I am up and moving around their eyes are following me, which makes me feel uncomfortable. Behind the desk, I can relax, and when they push their desks up to me, we are close enough to work comfortably together. At the end of class, they simply slide their desks back into the two rows. This annoys the principal to no end. She is a fan of quiet classrooms and worksheets, but she is not in my classroom frequently, so I just take the feedback when I get it and keep moving in my own direction because my students’ level of attention, task completion, and test scores show that my arrangement is working for them.

I start each day in the same way, with a quote of the day written on the far right-hand side of the board and with the agenda for the day on the far left side. The week's ten vocabulary words are in the center of the board as a constant reminder of what we are working on this week. Today's quote of the day is a journal prompt: *If you could make it rain anything except for water or money, what would it rain? How would this affect people and the environment?* I got the idea out of a book, but thought to add the money part because it seems like every time I ask this type of question the go-to response is money. I am trying to push the students a bit out of their boxes and bring back, or help create, their appropriate childish creativity. The week's vocabulary words are: *amorphous, catharsis, deter, expedite, incarnation, machinations, overwrought, preeminent, sardonic, and unalloyed.*

As I sit surveying, the classroom I hear over my radio, "Eight students, two staff from Unit D to Classroom C," and my week officially begins as eight young men, all African American ranging in age from 12 to 16, file into my room.

"Good morning young men," I say as they find their seats. "Did you have a nice weekend?"

"No. We were here," one student replies as he slinks down in the large plastic chair behind the plastic desk.

"Well, I hope that you will have a better day today," I respond with a smile and hand him a pencil.

All of the students go ahead and take out their composition books for the quote of the day and start writing. I have to admit that while it took some time, structuring our classroom time has helped tremendously with reducing negative or disruptive behaviors. The students know the routine, what to expect, what I expect, and how to be successful. One of the

unintended benefits of this structure has been that the unit staff also know the structure of the classroom, so they are able to help students get started and stay focused on the assignments.

“Whatcho mean! We can’t write ‘bout no money?! What the hell. I’m goin’ make it rain guns then.”

“Why you always trying to get us to be all positive! I want some money. You aint’ gonna change that.”

“Come on fellas! Give her a break and just write your paragraph. You guys can think of something other than money.” Ah, the voice of JS. He is always a voice of reason, and for some reason he is always on my side. He is determined to remain the involved gang member that he most definitely was when he was on the streets, when he gets home, but in the classroom he is an amazing student: extremely bright, creative, motivated, and motivating. There are many moments when he is actually my classroom discipline plan. When things start going sideways, I wait and count to twenty in my head to see if he is going to step in. The kids will listen to him, and they respect him, so he can quiet a situation without a major eruption needing to take place, and today is no exception. The students go back to their assignments and write about food, second chances, candy, and shoes falling from the sky, and we laugh at their ideas together.

The rest of the class moves along smoothly, and before I know it I am walking among the desks collecting pencils and having the students line up to leave. When the next group enters the classroom, there is a lot of positive energy that comes with them. They are excited because we have been working on their Christmas Rap for the school holiday program. Four of the eight boys are planning on writing and performing the rap in front of the whole

facility, and they are very enthusiastic about it. I am using it as an opportunity to teach writing...after all, rapping is heavily linked to poetry!

“Ms. Avis! If we good today, can we work on our rap?” RR asks as he runs up to me.

“Hey Man! You can’t be running up on her like that!” Mr. W says in a firm but kind, deep voice. He is a senior staff member, and I love the days he comes to work. His firmness is deeply respected by the boys because they understand it comes from a place of kindness.

“Oh! Yeah! Sorry ‘bout that Mrs. Avis! But can we?”

“It’s ok. I know that you are excited, and thank you for apologizing. Absolutely, we can work on it! Now let’s get this class started.”

The whole class goes along smoothly, and we are left with almost 20 minutes to work on our rap. While I initially was not involved, the students came to me one day asking for help writing the rap because they wanted to incorporate as many vocabulary words as possible. I’m not much of a rapper, but I do love to hear them rap, so I was excited to help. Then they asked if I would rap at the beginning of their song as a way to sort of introduce them, but mostly to help ease their stage fright. I agreed, and we all got super excited. The B unit girls have also been helping me write my part, and on this day I almost have it all memorized.

Here I am at the YDC
Teaching some fools vocabulary
Learning dope words like bureaucracy
But let me not make this a biography

I’ve been working hard on my skills
Keepin’ my job so I can pay my bills
Don’t let catch any epistles
While watching CNN learnin’ about missiles

Some days I learn, some days I teach
Some days they teach me how to JuJu on that Beat

Today we're here to rap about Christmas
Let me pass the mike and mind my own business.

Then I pass the mike to RT, who starts the boys' group "Night Before Christmas" rap with, "Once upon a time, on Christmas day, we woke up early, it was time to play."

We had so much fun practicing and laughing that we were almost late for lunch. As I walked into the room to meet up with the other teachers, I can tell something is wrong.

"What's going on?" I asked tentatively.

"You aren't going to like it," Mrs. C responds, looking down.

"I don't like a lot of things around here, to be honest, so who is going to tell me?"

"Ms. Mann found out about the rap that you are doing with the boys," Mrs. CM starts to explain.

"So? It is totally appropriate. Y'all will love it! I am so proud of them."

"No," Mrs. CM explains, "She found out that you are participating, and she is really upset."

"Why?" I ask as my face starts to turn blush and I can feel myself getting simultaneously defensive and angry.

"She says it isn't all about you. You think that all of this is about you, and it is about the kids," Mrs. C blurts out.

"What?!" I am shocked. "Yes, I was having fun, but the boys asked me to help, asked me to participate, said they wanted me there because they were nervous and if I was up there, it would help!"

"Well, yeah, we know that but she just doesn't get it."

The rest of the day seems to revolve around this disappointment. I tell the B unit girls as soon as we get to class.

“I hate that bitch! She is always ruining everything!”

“Now, I am sure she has her reasons,” I try.

“Nah. She is always comin’ for you! Yesterday I saw the way she looked at you in the hall,” JB says.

“Ok, well, there is nothing that I can do about it. It is out of my hands, and I don’t think that there is anything I can do about it.”

“No! Just do it anyway! You got this! We been workin’ so hard!” KB says.

I spend at least another ten minutes just trying to calm them down about it and finally get things started when my phone rings and it is the principal asking me to come down to her office. “Now? I am teaching, can I come down in a few minutes?”

“No. Please step down to my office now.”

“Ok,” I say quietly as I hang up the phone.

“You guys study your vocabulary while I run down to Ms. Mann’s office for a minute.”

The kids start to groan and curse, but all I have to do is look up at them and they stop. They realize now that my feelings are a little hurt by the situation, and they do not want to make things worse for me.

I knock on Ms. Mann’s door and hear her deep smoker’s cough before she can say, “Come in.”

“Hey, Mrs. Mann,” I say trying to sound upbeat and not give away the fact that I know what she is going to say.

She launches into an explanation of how she was upset to hear that I was planning to participate in the Christmas Show, to which I explain that I had participated in other events

so I was not clear that the expectation was for me to not participate. She tells me that she feels like I wanted to have all the eyes on me, and so I just stop. I stop caring about it, I stop feeling, I stop talking. This is what I do when I find myself in a position where someone is trying to cut me down, cut me off, or cut me out. If I listen, I take it in and the negativity stays with me and tears me down. I decide at that moment that I will not allow that to happen. I won't participate in the program because I care about my job and my relationship with my principal, but at the same time I now know how she thinks of me, and this changes things.

I leave her office and go over to tell the boys. I let them know before I break the news that I cannot do anything about it and that I will help them in any other way possible. Then I just say, "I can't open your rap for the Christmas Show because Ms. Mann will not let me."

They are definitely upset but not nearly as vocal about it as the girls, which I was a little surprised by, to be honest. I ask that they go back to their class, keep working, and not talk about it too much because I am afraid that they will get into trouble if they do.

When I get back to class, the kids want to know what she said, why I cannot participate, and what the big deal is. I refuse to talk about it, tell them that my job is important to me, and so I will follow directions. I try to use it as a teachable moment, but the whole thing feels fake, so I just make it through the day and know that tomorrow will come.

Tuesday

Today has been a good day. My boy classes were calm today, and we got a lot done. My first class of eight is the younger group of males, and this morning they were on time, came right in, said the Pledge of Allegiance, and then promptly moved their desks around to get ready to work. I have always wanted one of those handheld counters that people use for

large events to keep track of how many people enter a building so that I could track how many times I hear, “Mrs. Avis!” I guarantee that it would be over one hundred in a day. The principal has requested that we require students to raise their hands before talking, but this has not been something that I have enforced successfully. The reason is that if a student speaks out before raising their hand and I correct them, they invariably respond defensively with, “I didn’t want to talk to you anyway!” And this particular group of boys is what I call *Jello*. They are in serious need of leadership, so they conform to anything. Before coming to this YDC, I had never seen anything like it. One kid will say something that the others think is funny or sounds cool, and then they all say it over and over again. Right now this is their tag phrase when they do not get what they want, “I didn’t want it anyway.” But they do want it and keep asking, and the cycle is vicious and annoying, so I just roll with the hollering out because at least it is school-focused.

When my second group of boys enters the classroom, I have to stop what I am doing to do a special handshake with JM. He is a 13-year-old, energetic, African-American boy who requires me to drop everything the moment he enters and again right before he leaves to do this handshake. Once I tried to delay this for a few minutes, and he had such a violent temper tantrum that he had to be restrained and removed from the classroom. So now I wait for JM to come in and complete the handshake before I even attempt to start class by reading aloud the quote of the day.

This group of boys is a bit older, and their needs are slightly different. Three of the students tend to need a lot of individualized instruction, so they have their desks pushed up to mine, one on each side of me, and then the other five students work at their desks more independently. As they leave at 11:30 a.m., and JM and I are completing our handshake, I

think about how today is flying by. I am tired, but tired from teaching and answering good questions, and popping up and down from my chair—the good-teacher tired—and I pray that the rest of the day continues this way as I head to the teachers’ workroom to eat my lunch with my friends while I simultaneously work on my paperwork.

As I enter the teachers’ area, two of the teachers are already there heating up their lunches. We are allowed to leave campus for lunch, but we only have 30 minutes to move our stuff to the other classroom, eat lunch, and take a second to regroup. Regrouping is seriously important with this population. If one group is extraordinarily demanding or a fight breaks out during class, or a student curses at you, it is easy to carry that tension with you to the next class, so this lunch time serves as a moment of decompression.

“How are the girls today?” I ask as I sit down with my lunch.

“Pretty good! Just watch OH and KB today because there seems to be some tension there,” the science teacher tells me. He has been on the girls’ side all morning, so he can fill me in on what is happening over there before I start class.

This is the only facility in the state that serves adjudicated female students, therefore the females have often committed much more serious offenses and tend to be much more unpredictable than the males. There is also a larger incidence of severe mental illnesses on that side, so the level of alert is higher when teaching them. Once, when I was seven months pregnant, one of the female students threatened to kill my baby and me after I asked her to please stop talking while I was going through the day's assignment. Unit staff removed her from my class, and I continued on teaching like it was nothing. I honestly thought that it was no big deal. I knew she struggles with emotional impulse control, and I figured she was just saying whatever she thought would upset me at the moment. I was called after class by the

shift supervisor who had gone to speak to the girl, and it turns out she had actually made plans to harm me. I was shocked! But not as shocked, and honestly touched, as I was when I received a typed letter from her before she was released, apologizing for the incident. The first line of that letter was: *I am so sorry that I said, and planned a way, to try to kill you and your baby.* I learned that day to remember that I am working with young women who have killed, severely injured, or caused significant amounts of damage and pain to others in the past. I still love and respect them, but I try not to walk into my afternoons blindly, which means my lunchtime conversations revolve around them every day.

After my quick lunch, I grab my bag and water bottle and head over to let my group of girls know that I am ready for class. Just as I enter Unit B to pick up my third block class, I hear, “Assistance on Unit A! Assistance on Unit A!” over the radio attached at my hip. Using the word assistance over the radio is a call for all available staff to run as quickly as possible to Unit A because someone needs immediate help.

“Ms. C, you go! I’ll help Ms. T get the students into their rooms!” I say with urgency as the students dutifully hop up quickly from their seats and step to their doors.

“Thank you ladies,” Ms. T calmly says as she starts at the far left side of the wall and uses her key to pop open each door. The girls kick their identical black velcro shoes off and step into their rooms while Ms. C sprints down the hall where we can hear a student cursing and screaming. I step to each door asking if the girl behind it is ok, looking intently for signs of distress, wondering if this assistance call has triggered anyone’s PTSD. Each of the six girls looks ok and responds to me, so I step out into the hallway to assess the situation.

When I first arrived at the YDC, teachers were “certified” meaning that when a situation such as this arose, where all of the available staff has to step in to either calm a

student, restrain a student, break up a fight, or stop a suicide attempt, teachers would be hands-on. When I took the job, I wrote a proposal stating that I felt students need some staff that had never restrained them, never been an overpowering force. I cited the American Psychological Association and the other trauma study resources that said that students need some adults in rehabilitative settings that did not overpower them. Most students in this setting are behind in their academics due to either learning disabilities or often just a lack of exposure due to absences. Because teachers are asking students to accept their academic difficulties and face them, I felt that having teachers restrain students would damage this potentially fragile relationship, therefore possibly causing them to refrain from taking risks in the classroom in regards to their education.

So on days such as this, when there is an assistance call, I hang back to help the students who are witnesses, assist the staff with the remaining students who are not involved in the incident, and just try to stay out of the way. On this particular day, my role was to help and calm a new employee. It seems that one of our new students is withdrawing from drugs and became particularly agitated with this staff member. She is now standing in the hallway explaining how she hates when someone yells at her, and she is visibly shaking. A social worker comes down the hallway and hears the conversation and thankfully says what I want to say but don't.

“Girl! If you don't like being yelled at you may be in the wrong profession. These kids are going through it and will yell at you, curse at you, and threaten you from time to time. Tomorrow she will tell you that she loves you, though.”

As the shaken woman hangs her head, still obviously very upset, and starts to walk back down the hallway, I think to myself how the social worker is so right. I note that my

pulse has not quickened, my adrenaline has not kicked in, and I do not feel at all upset. My lack of adrenaline response has been one of the side effects of this job; it takes a lot to get my adrenaline running these days. I have just adjusted and gotten used to the screams, cursing, beating on doors, fighting, and being threatened. When I first realized this, I was disturbed, but now I am thankful. Because I now have the ability to remain calm, I can think and respond better as well. My calmness helps to keep the other students calm, and this helps reduce the number of students who may be triggered by the violent outbursts of their peers.

Within ten minutes, about ten adults file out of Unit A. The screaming and banging seem to have stopped for now, and I return to Unit B to collect my students for class. When I walk in, Ms. T has already opened their doors, and they are getting into line.

“Ladies, face forward, quiet transition line. No looking at or gesturing to another unit. No talking in line. Count from the front. One,” states the line leader.

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Four.”

“Five.”

“Six.”

“Two staff, one teacher, and six students from Unit B to classroom A,” I call over the radio. And the day goes on as normal. The girls file into the classroom, take their assigned seats (which they chose), and I hand out pencils. Because of their adjudications, their crimes, and the likelihood that a child may use a pencil as a weapon, the only pencils we use are short golf pencils with attachable rubber erasers. They wear out quickly and the principal does not like for us to trade them in frequently, so often the kids are writing with pencil nubs,

which is aggravating to them. The trick is to not hand out the pencils in the same order every day or the same people will end up the best pencils every day. I have to keep track of not only how many pencils I have handed out, but also who had first pick yesterday. Even the simplest things can turn into the biggest eruptions very quickly, and showing any favoritism at all, even if it is just perceived, can result in a child shutting down completely in school for days. Today as I hand out the pencils I can tell that there is still a little nervousness and tension from the assistance call made just minutes earlier.

You never know when something you do or one of your skills is going to be amusing and break the tension that can build for your students in the classroom. As a child I took tap dancing lessons and even danced in a little company performing at local elementary and middle schools. While at the time this seemed really cool and fun, as an adult it seemed like a skill that I was not going to use at all. I was wrong. Last spring I bought a pair of really funky wooden clogs. I thought that they were cool because they were different from what most people I work with wear and they were sturdy and closed-toe, which I am required to wear. My students call them my wooden shoes. It turns out that on the linoleum floor those wooden shoes make quite a bit of noise, so then we started referring to them as “Mrs. Avis’s Kick Ass” shoes because you could hear me coming to kick your ass into learning, and the kids said that when I wore those shoes it meant that I was “ready.” This is a term meaning that I was aware of everything and ready to take on anything, or anyone. While this seems a little harsh, it was somewhat of a joke and a way to laugh with the kids. And when I’m ready my students are ready! Those shoes became really well known all around the facility. They are my magic shoes.

So last year, on the first day of the mandatory End of Grade exams, I wore those shoes. I went from unit to unit, talking to my students, giving them pep talks, and telling them that I was ready and so were they. But when they came to class, they didn't seem ready. They seemed nervous, stressed, and tired. I knew I had to wake them up and get smiles on their faces and positive attitudes in their hearts, so I started to tap dance. I don't know why I did it, and at first I couldn't believe how much I remembered! But I remembered a ton and was still pretty good, which was amusing to all of us! We totally all started laughing! And now when I wear those shoes, the students asked me to tap dance and even teach them a few steps. They have taught me fun new dances including *JuJu on that Beat*, which I have in turn taught to my own children. So it turns out that sometimes you have to dig way down deep to find those old skills, not be afraid to look foolish, and do a little dance! And that is what I did today to break that heavy tension after the assistance call: I danced.

Wednesday

One of the things that I enjoy the most about this job is that I get to teach. Just teach. As a public school teacher in a regular setting, I was regularly overwhelmed by paperwork, cafeteria duty, bus duty, Open House nights, going to after-school ballgames, having 140 students who all needed detailed report card comments, and oh, the number of essays that needed to be graded! The grading of essays used to make my head hurt! But here I am a teacher. I have 32 students and only eight at a time. That number can go down but never up, because there are only 32 beds. And there is no bus duty; they live there. There are no Open House nights, ball games, cafeteria duties—none of that! Eight of the students are on my caseload, which means that I attend their monthly service meetings, but those are enjoyable and productive. We discuss how the students' educational services are serving them and the

students' success or decline. And while parents can attend these meetings and often do, there are no parent emails; we are completely in charge. I spend the majority of my time teaching; it just isn't always English content that I'm teaching.

Now, while this is fantastic—honestly amazing—to me, there are some serious challenges that teachers in regular settings do not encounter. Let's just start with the eight students. As previously mentioned, there are four units at this YDC, two male and two female. Each unit has eight students on it, all the same gender, and all different ages, and they live, eat, and move throughout their day with only the students assigned to their unit. Decisions about unit assignments are made by the director, the supervisors, and the social workers, and these assignments are made based on gender and safety only. This means that if two students are from the same geographic area, claim membership in two different gangs, are threatening one another, get into a physical altercation with a peer, or form a sexual relationship with one another, they are moved to another unit. Thus, the population is constantly fluctuating throughout the facility, as people need to be moved or new students arrive.

What does this mean for the classroom? It means that in each class I potentially have students enrolled in eight different classes and most certainly with eight different reading ability levels. This makes student engagement very difficult at times. The way I face this challenge is by incorporating student choice where possible and differentiating the essential rubrics to help develop realistic expectations and achievable goals. On this day, students are working on their social issue projects after we finish the Quote of the Day and our vocabulary puzzle for review. Each student has chosen a social issue that they find important (gun control, abortion, the school-to-prison pipeline, immigration, etc.), and they are

researching the issue and planning for a whole-class presentation. They must have their topic approved, complete a great deal of research on the topic, and develop a well-thought-out, factual presentation to present to their peers. They also must put together informational posters to hang throughout the facility to educate other peers with whom they have no contact about their topics. This assignment maintains their engagement because they have chosen the topic, and I have differentiated the research that I have printed for them (they have no access to the internet). This project almost always goes very well, and the students spend a lot of time reading the research and dissecting it, with my assistance. By the end, they are experts on their issue.

It was while students were working on this project that I was observed by someone from the central office. These types of visits from Central Office do not happen often, maybe twice a year, but they are always disheartening. I feel judged based on surface information that is often misinterpreted. There is never any conversation between the observer and me. Instead, she reports to my principal, and my principal talks to me about what was said. The problem with that is twofold: one, I feel that I deserve a conversation if someone is going to observe me, and, two, I am not sure my principal can explain anything about my classroom on my behalf. When she comes in to perform her quarterly observation, she often sits in the corner and falls asleep, so how she talks to the observer and others about my classroom worries me.

During this visit, the woman from Central Office stated that she was worried about my teaching style. She stated that all the students were working on projects that revolved around gun rights, which was a complete and total misunderstanding that resulted from her interviewing only one student, who was in fact looking at the right to bear arms in the

constitution. He was the only child working on that topic, however. Her next complaint was that the project did not meet the standard course of study. The research project does in fact meet multiple standards in all of the grade levels that I teach, both in terms of reading and writing skills. I was able to clarify this by showing her my objective sheet, where I track objectives for each subject. And finally, her last complaint was that it was too loud. It seemed that all of the students were talking to one another about their projects, but they could also be talking about something else that could be a security concern.

Her last complaint really speaks to a major issue around the facility. This constant fear of the kids, what they may do, and what they say, is a real problem for two reasons: if you fear the students, you are ineffective and, if you forget who you are teaching, you are not safe. There is a very fine line between being aware and being afraid, which I was unaware of until I took this job. When I first got my job, I bought myself a Hydro flask water bottle made with stainless steel that is incredibly durable. Mine holds 24 ounces of water, is bright orange, and I have it with me all the time. I bought this water bottle for a few different reasons, one being that it keeps water cold all day and the second being that the water at the center is gross. The third reason was because I was pregnant, and I knew that the water bottle could serve as protection if I needed it. I kept it with me all the time because it made me feel safe. There is now a small dent in the bottom of that water bottle, and it came from one of my students. Now no matter how hard I tried, I don't think I would be able to dent that bottle, but I had one student who was so irrational and became so violent and out-of-control that she managed to do it, thus reminding me that at times what is meant to serve as protection can become a weapon.

There are days with this job where you have to prove that you will honestly protect your students from harm, the day my water bottle was dented for example. You could feel the tension in the room, and you knew that something was brewing and if you could not get ahead of it, something really bad might happen. The problem is that even when I can feel the tension in the room, I am not exactly sure where it comes from, or who it comes from. On the day that my bottle was dented, I could see on the looks on the faces of the girls. They knew who was upset with me, but if I had asked it would only have caused the chaos to ensue faster than if I tried to figure it out on my own. So I greeted the girls as usual and tried to get them started on the quote of the day. One student refused to open her notebook or pick up her pencil and instead pulled both arms inside of her sweatshirt and leaned back on the back two legs of her chair. Now I knew where the tension was coming from.

This particular student had been diagnosed with both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; when she is having a particularly rough day, she pulls her arms inside of her sweatshirt. I walk over to her but left a desk between the two of us to help her feel safe and not threatened by my proximity. In a quiet and upbeat voice, I asked her how her day was going.

“Fuck you!” she yelled.

“Ok, TS. I see that today is not going well. Is there anything I can do to help you?” I responded in a quiet, calm tone of voice.

“Did you not understand my first response?” she spit back sarcastically. “Fuck you! I’m not doing shit today! Get the fuck away from me!”

I turned around and walked back to my desk calmly to document on her school card that she is cursing at me and refusing to work. I stayed calm and did not continue to try to

talk to her, because one little bit of perceived tension from me would have set her off. In the past, she had thrown desks and chairs, ripped the blinds off of the walls, smashed a computer, attacked other students, and kicked the principal so hard that she had to receive medical attention. I made eye contact with the two staff members in the room to make sure that they were aware of TS's current state and checked for my radio in case I needed to call for a supervisor to come to the classroom to help me. Unfortunately TS noticed me making these changes and arrangements for an outburst, and it infuriated her.

"I ain't doin' shit! Why you acting like I doin' shit! You want me to? I'll fuck this whole classroom up!"

"Can a supervisor please step to Classroom A?" I called over the radio. The two staff members stood up so that they were in place if I needed them.

"Why did your bitch ass call for the fucking supervisor? I'm not doing shit to you!"

"I called for the supervisor because you clearly need a little space, and I need to teach. I cannot teach with you cursing at me."

She stood up abruptly and pushed both arms back out of her sweatshirt, so I knew we were in trouble. The plan is always to try to de-escalate the situation while keeping all students safe. I placed myself between her and the other students, motioning with my hands for the other students to move towards the back of the room. All of these girls were well aware of the damage that TS can do, and they moved behind me. They were not scared, but they did not want to get caught up in any of the drama, which would force them to lose privileges.

"If it weren't for her bitch ass, motherfucking mouth I'd be OK!" TS screamed across the classroom.

“10-4, Mrs. Avis, I am on my way,” I heard the supervisor say over the radio.

While I was trying to manage TS, move the girls slowly, protect myself and my unborn baby, and think of way to calm TS down, she started to quickly move to the door to try to either block the supervisor or greet him. I honestly was not sure which, but as I was trying to figure it out I saw that I had left my water bottle on the desk, and I knew that I had made a huge, possibly dangerous mistake! As the enraged student walked toward my desk, all I could think of was that if she threw that water bottle at someone, they were going to be seriously hurt! What was meant to protect me had now become a weapon that could be used against me and everyone else in the room.

When I glanced back to check on the other students, I saw that they had moved desks toward the back of the room and were watching everything as if it were a television show. The other two staff members had gotten up, one heading towards the door and one heading towards the student. The first step in getting a student out of a room is to call a supervisor, and the second step is to simply ask the student to leave.

“OK TS, it's time to head on to your room now,” one staff member said, trying to coax her out of the classroom. “Let's go take a minute to calm down.”

“Fuck you! Don't touch me! Don't touch me! Don't touch me!”

“I will not have to touch you if you will walk out of the classroom and down to your room on your own.”

At that moment, TS grabbed all the papers off my desk and in one swift motion threw them into the air. I could see, as the papers fell, that the supervisor had arrived, and I was very thankful! TS was right by the door, but I was praying that that was a good thing because maybe that meant they could get her out quickly. Then she did what I was so afraid that she

would do. She grabbed my big, heavy, stainless steel water bottle, raised it above her head, and slammed it on the floor.

I let out a sigh of relief, rushed to it grab it, and held on tightly. She started to come towards me with a lunge, but the supervisor grabbed her from behind.

“Don't fucking touch me! I told you not to touch me!” she screamed as he pushed her to the floor, forced her arms behind her, and held her in a restraint. He then popped her up onto her feet and, with one other staff member, escorted her out of the classroom.

I turned to face my students and said, “They are going to get her calmed down. Thank you so much for staying calm. Thank you so much for being so helpful. Is everybody OK?” I walked around the classroom as I said this, touching them lightly on the shoulder to give them a little bit more reassurance. We could still hear TS yelling in the hallway, but the tension had already been cut in half. The yelling hadn't stopped 10 minutes later. Even through our heavy locked door, the locked door of the unit, and TS's locked door, we could still hear her loud, wailing screams and cries from her room. But somehow we carried on like nothing had happened. Two students picked up my papers and straightened them, everyone went back to their seats almost immediately, and we began working on our vocabulary. I wondered what this does to a person. It doesn't seem healthy that we can witness someone becoming so upset, being physically restrained, being cursed at, ourselves, and then be expected to carry on like nothing happened. But somehow we do.

The culminating portion of the social issue project is a poster on the issue, and the students put their name on the front so that other students can learn from the poster but also know who to talk to if they want to learn more about the issue. This has created some really interesting and often intense classroom discussion, especially around gun control (they are

normally not allowed to even utter the word “gun”) and the school-to-prison pipeline. The pipeline poster has a large portion of it devoted to graphic statistics, and unfortunately, the students see themselves depicted as a stat. They have never heard about the school-to-prison pipeline and are astounded by the whole process. One student tells me that a teacher taught him to spell the word *principal* by noting that the word *pal* is at the end.

“I never met no principal that was friendly! They just try to get you caught up and out of there!”

“All them I ever met just wanted me out of their mother fucking school. They sure ain’t no pal!”

“OK, language and conversation skills please, and is there any chance that while you are probably making valid points, you may have had a little bit of responsibility in them feeling that way?”

“Bruh! They should be able to handle some kids if they goin’ be a principal!”

Several other kids nod in agreement and state how unfriendly their schools were. I ask for a show of hands of students who have been suspended, and every hand goes up. We spend the next several minutes talking about the actions that lead to suspensions and how they think the principals should have handled the punishments. Moments like this are both incredibly sad and yet rewarding when they become moments of courageous conversation, and they exhaust me. Not only am I continuously on the offensive to make sure that we are all safe, but the conversations can be so emotionally heavy. It is on days like this that I am thankful that I now know that my students’ worlds do not rest on me. The sense of responsibility that I once felt as a novice teacher has shifted, and now I have a better understanding that I am their teacher while I am here.

I find that I am more effective, and in the end more helpful, if I can live in each moment. My goal is to try to assess what students need at that moment and think about the long-term separately. Do they need proximity to help them feel safe? *I'll watch your back while you work, I promise.* Or do they need a break to talk about how they were feeling after their 5-minute phone call last night? *Tell me how your grandfather is feeling. I know he had a stroke.* Do they need a challenging task that they can complete and feel really good about? *I was thinking about you when I was planning this lesson, and I really can't wait to see what you come up when you read this.* And sometimes they just need to be left alone. *Here is your work for today. When you feel up to it, let me know, and I will help you if you need it.* But all of that individual assessing is exhausting after eight hours, particularly when my educated guess is wrong and the student is agitated by my mistake. When that happens, I am thankful for staff, radios to call for help, and that one kid who always steps in between me and the anger.

Exhaustion and getting burned out is a real problem for teachers everywhere, but then when you add this population to the mix, I think you have to look at what can be done to help alleviate this issue. Students who are adjudicated have an extended-year school, which means that teachers teach all twelve months of the year. There is no spring break, summer break, or significant numbers of teacher workdays, and there are no substitute teachers. That means that if you are out, the kids may not have class, which causes a real feeling of guilt when you need a day off or you are sick. There have been times when I have come in, against my better judgment, because I was worried about what would happen with my students if I was out. This is the same for the unit staff as well, because their twelve hours shifts, worked several days in a row, with very needy students in a high-stress environment often results in

exhaustion and grasping for patience. The turnover rate is very high, and this just fuels the students' lack of trust, making it difficult to build relationships with them. To add to their stress, they figure out early-on that the directors will not allow the staff who are leaving to announce their last day to the students until that final day arrives. This is a very traumatic experience when a student has built a relationship of trust, only to have it abruptly end. I combat these fears by explaining to all of my students that if they show up at my house one day, I will invite them in for supper. This is a common statement I make almost daily when they state, "You don't care about me," or "What if you leave?" or "You are racist, and I hate you, and I wish you weren't here!" I respond, "If you show up at my house, I'll invite you in for supper." It is amazing what a dinner invitation can accomplish. But some days, as I leave, I pray no one shows up for supper tonight, because I am exhausted.

Thursday

Thursdays are the day that we focus on our ten SAT/GED vocabulary words, because the quiz is on Friday. While I have always been taught that teaching vocabulary in isolation does not work and is never a good idea, I tried it anyway. This position allows you to try things because so many of the pressures are removed. No one expects my students to pass their End of Grade tests and End of Course state exams (although my students have a 90% pass rate), and no one is watching my teaching (even though my every movement is captured on video), so I try teaching the same ten words a week to all the students in the entire facility, regardless of age, grade, or achievement level. And it turns out they love it!

On Mondays, I introduce the words and give the students the same short definitions. For example, I will say, "Machinations. Everyone say machinations. Machinations means plots and plans. Please write down next to machinations on your paper, plots, and plans."

And I will hear about four or five, "What? What was the definition? What did you say?" before moving on to the next word but by the end, everyone will have the same list with the same definitions, word for word, and they will have practiced note-taking. On Tuesdays we use the words in a sentence, story, poem, or rap, depending on personal choice. On Wednesdays, I create a crossword or word search and students have to tell me the definition of a word that I chose in order to line up to leave class. On Thursdays we pair up and quiz one another, we have someone go up to the front and randomly touch a word, and everyone calls out the definition, and we spend 5 minutes quietly reading our list. By the time Friday rolls around everyone is familiar with the words, and on most Fridays, everyone passes the quiz.

Throughout this process, we bring those isolated words out of isolation by using them in conversation, writing poems, stories, and raps with them, and finding them everywhere. I always tell them they get extra credit when they use or find one of our words, but they have started using them so much that I just give everyone extra credit at the end of the grading term. Staff and other teachers have even been asking me for my words lists so that they can translate the students' conversations! It turns out that some things that may not work in a traditional setting tend to work in this setting. I think in this case it is the power that words have. The students feel smart, confident and even worldly when they use these words correctly. Many students have been here for so long that they have learned over 200 new words. I never repeat lists, so those students who are with us for years continue to add to their lexicon.

One of the most astonishing things, and the most amusing parts of this job, is how students also confuse words. For example, one student recently told me that if she lived in

my house, it would cause me to become a "drug a dick." She said it multiple times, and when I stopped her and said that I thought she meant a drug addict, she said she was pretty sure it was "a dick, because that is how you act on drugs." Another told me that the facility had to call EMS because she was "weaseling" last night due to her asthma. I have determined over the years that this is a combination of lack of background knowledge and a lack of quality adult conversation. When these happen, you can choose to feel sorry for the students, but I tend to try to teach them to laugh at themselves and learn to enjoy and learn from the silly mistakes we make in life. Here are two of my favorites from over the year:

"Quick! Avis! Open the bathroom door!"

"It's ok, OH. I'm coming," I say as I start to stand up and grab my keys, but not in a hurry, as everything with this child is an emergency.

"No! Avis! It's an emergency! For real! I got gonorrhea! Real bad gonorrhea! Grab the tissue too! Hurry up, damn it!"

I stop dead in my tracks. "Gonorrhea?" I ask.

"Oh my God! Yes! Avis! I got gonorrhea! It's going around, I got it, open up the fucking door!"

I look at her. She is visibly sweating and distressed. "Do you mean diarrhea?" I ask calmly.

"Whatever! Yes! I am going to booboo on your floor if you don't open up the God damned door. Now!"

"Oh no! OH! I am so sorry!" I say as now I sprint to the door.

* * * * *

Another day my students were creating new goal cards for the bulletin board #Goals. A relatively new student, JH, had refused to do any work and instead cursed at me routinely, referring to me as the “White Bitch,” but today he had finally decided to participate. I was trying to play it cool, but I was excited and feeling like this might be an exciting win. He asked me if he could get a dictionary, and I responded that sure he could, but if he would like me to help, I would be happy to. He said no, that he wanted to use big words, and he wanted to find them on his own in the dictionary. Inside, I am cheering! About ten minutes later he said he was done and has used fancy vocabulary. I asked him to come on up and show me his card. As I was looking at, I realized it said, "My goal for 2017 is to achieve menopause!"

“Um, menopause, JH?” I said hesitantly.

“Yeah! Do you like it?” he asked.

All that I could think was that I couldn’t blow it. He had stated time and time again that he hated me, that he thought I’m a racist and out to get him. This was my chance! But I could not let him put this up on the bulletin board!

“So, um, yes, I do like your idea, but I am pretty sure that only women can achieve menopause, so let's find another word.”

“What the hell! See, you always be givin’ me a hard time.”

“Um, why did you choose menopause?”

“Because it is a change of life! I want to change my life and get out of this shit hole!”

“Ok, yeah, see I think that is a great goal! The problem is that menopause is when older women get to the point that they can’t have babies anymore.” I try to explain quietly so that no one else can hear.

“Um. No. It means change of life. The fucking dictionary says it. DM! Hand me that dictionary!” he yelled across the room.

“No, that is OK, DM. I really do believe you, JH. Let’s Google it! I will show you!”

Google led us to diagrams of female reproductive organs that went into great deal about menopause, and I thought this was going to go downhill very fast. But he laughed! He laughed! So I do, too, and we change his card together, hang it up, and for the rest of the class period, he works well. And then the next day comes, and everything is back to normal once again. This became a really funny memory for us, created an inside joke, and in the end, while we still have had many difficult times, it worked to build a better relationship with a student I was struggling to enjoy.

On this Thursday, and every day, building relationships is exactly what I am trying to do through these vocabulary words, and today, specifically, with the six new students that have been admitted over the past two weeks. All six of these new students, three in each class, are African American males and all have names that start with the letter J. I hope that by creating common background knowledge through the vocabulary words, and by spending a lot of time with all of the students learning the words, I have created an opportunity for success that will engage and excite them for next week’s list. If I can do that, and they decided that they want to be in my class, then they will be more open to learning and taking risks, and hopefully, that will continue in their community schools when they return.

After vocabulary review, it is time for some silent reading practice. I go over and over with them that reading silently in a classroom setting is important for their state exams, and that is why we practice. They go over and over how much they hate reading silently in class, explaining that they cannot concentrate. It is the same story in each class, told over and over

again. It is exhausting, because the argument that students are using to try to get me to drop silent reading is the exact argument I am giving them as to why they need to do it. They are not good at it yet! I try to stay calm as I pass out their books and I hear their groans.

“Today can we just read for 10 minutes?” whines one student.

“Yeah, man!” yells out another.

“I keep telling y'all I am not a man,” I say with a smile, so they know that I am not angry. “And no! You guys can do 15 minutes. I know you can!”

“Damn positive, white lady,” I hear, and then ignore, from the other side of the room.

“Hey, JS! Don’t be antagonistic or she will make us read longer. Y’all be laconic!” exclaims JB. “And you hear that, Bruh! That’s two extra credits! Antagonistic and laconic!”

“Yes, JB, two. And I’m not your Bruh, either,” I say with a calm voice, even though I am starting to feel a bit irritated.

I go back to my desk and look on my desk calendar where I have written down all of their page numbers, and I tell them what page they are on. I do not understand why they cannot remember this information, but it seems just as easy to write it down and keep track of it myself. Then I set the timer on the computer for 15 minutes and ask if everyone is ready, wait for their responses, and then press start. Within seconds I get this:

“Can I take my shoe off?”

“Yes but hide your foot under your desk so we don’t get caught with you having your shoe off.”

“Can I read under my desk?”

“Yes.”

“Can I take my chair in the bathroom to read?”

"Yes, and I have now paused the timer. Anyone else needs anything?"

"Oh, my GAWD! Fo' real! Come on you guys!"

I just stop and watch until they are all ready, and as one by one I see them open their books, I press start again. As they read, I survey the classroom for a minute, and I feel calmer and so proud. They are good students, they are good kids, they are my students, and I love each and every one of them. I know, because it happens every time: when the timer dings, they will groan and ask for more time. Because that is what readers do. They read, and these kids are readers.

Friday

I love Fridays. I always have and my students know that on Fridays I am happier and more energetic. They think it is because I "turn up and get lit" on the weekend (that is teenager slang for going wild and getting drunk), but honestly, I am tired and excited that I can take a nap on Saturday and Sunday. While other moms are taking their kids to soccer and activities, a lot of times I am napping. This is by far the most exhausting job, both physically and psychologically, that I have ever had.

One of the most exhausting parts of this job is the interruptions, which are truly endless. I remember feeling slightly annoyed as a public school teacher when the announcements would come on a little bit early, or my phone would ring as a secretary needed a student to be released early. That is nothing compared to now! Each staff member is issued a radio, and that radio goes off constantly. This is not to mention that when one radio call is made, at least three radios are reporting it out because each person has their radio on. But we can only turn our radios down so much. We must always be able to hear them,

because that is how we make (and respond to) emergency phone calls or calls for help. Here are a few examples of what we might hear in the course of one class period:

“Stuart to Ward.”

“Ward to Stuart. Go ahead.”

“Can you give me a 21 at 6262?”

“10-4.”

“The SPM for Marquice will begin in 10 minutes in the conference room. Again the SPM meeting for Marquice will begin in 10 minutes in the conference room.”

“Blake 1086. Earle 1086.”

“Earle to Blake, 10-4.”

“One student, one staff from classroom C to unit C.”

“One student, classroom C, de-escalation. One student, classroom C, de-escalation.”

“10-4”

“Nurse to Mr. Patterson. Nurse to Mr. Patterson.”

“Patterson. Go ahead.”

“Patterson, when you get a chance can you give me a 21 at 6224?”

“10-4.”

“Whoever is calling 6234, please hold. I'm on the other line.”

Fridays are the only days that we all work together as a whole class for the entire day.

We start off, of course, with the quote of the day. Today's quote is *Tell me, in at least one solid paragraph, about something that is important to you*. The boys do a nice job with this one this week. They say basketball, their mothers, their grandmothers, and money. In my second block, one boy asks why nobody said their Dad, and the responses get heated pretty quickly.

“Let me catch that man! Nah, he ain't even a man! I'd punch him right in his face!”

“How somebody gonna be important to you when you ain't got no idea who he is...”

“Or where he at!”

These types of conversations are ones that as a white mother who is married to the father of all three of her children, I try to respect and stay out of. For this conversation, I turn to an African American male unit staff person and say, "Man! None of these guys has a positive relationship with their father. I'm not really sure what to say about that, other than that must be frustrating and hard."

"Yeah, it is a real problem in our community. Fellows, what do you think you will do when you are a dad?" he responds as he takes over the conversation.

Once we move through that, I collect all the students' folders. I used to have a lot of cheating going on, and I would deliver a cheating speech, and give zeros to cheaters, and make a big deal out of it. This did not stop the cheating, but it did stop the class and cause a lot of discipline problems. Then a few weeks ago I thought about how after the quiz no one needs their notebooks for the rest of the class, so I could just collect them. Now the cheating and the discipline problems around quiz time have stopped.

I pass out the quizzes, and the students work diligently and quickly. They are furiously trying to write down the words in their correct spot before they forget them. I know that they have learned these words and will not forget them, but their confidence surrounding testing is low, and they are afraid that the words will leak out of their memories like water. I correct each completed quiz at the student's desk so that they can see exactly how well they have done, and then I congratulate them, often with a piece of candy. If, in the rare case, someone has not done well, then I give him or her an opportunity to correct the mistakes, because the goal is to learn and to accept feedback, not get a 100%.

After the quiz, we all gather around my desk to watch Flocabulary, an on-line resource that teaches content through rap. On Fridays, they produce a three-minute rap that

discusses the week's current events. There are two front and back handouts that accompany the raps that the students work on each week. First, we watch the short video all the way through, then we watch it again, and I pause it where students need information for the graphic organizer on the back. The next page has to do with vocabulary words, and we use context clues to guess the meaning and then an online dictionary to look them up together. There is always a page with statistics connected to the video, and then one more short activity that often differs each week. Most students enjoy this activity, and I have found that most also enjoy working together as a large group. This is one way that students can work cooperatively, but with me still serving as a strong facilitator and model.

Finally, we end the class period with CNN10, a ten-minute daily video produced by CNN specifically for middle and high school students. We watch these on days when we finish early or when students ask to watch them. There are no assignments for this video; we just watch and learn and often have to pause the video to talk about what is happening, why it is happening, or look up something that we do not understand. It is a great way for students to learn how to ask thoughtful questions. Some of the questions stump me, and I can model how to find the answer. For example, one student asked about the trash in outer space, and we found out there is a man from Japan who wants to be the garbage man in outer space. This was a fun and fascinating conversation where we all learned something new.

Before the students leave on Fridays, I have them return to their seats, and I ask them to tell me one thing they learned this week before they line up. This is one of my favorite moments in the week, and maybe because in so many ways it is self-congratulatory. But really because I am told both verbally and through actions by people in my community that these students can't learn, don't want to learn, aren't worth teaching, and once it was brought

up to me that maybe I am just making them better criminals by making them smarter. It is hard for me to believe that people say these things out loud without reservation. I like to feel like together we accomplished something throughout the week and that I have earned my Saturday nap.

Reflections

Sometimes it startles me just how fast and easily I can switch out of work and therapeutic mode on Friday afternoons. I am always exhausted on Fridays and never make weekend plans for Friday nights without incorporating childcare that facilitates a nap before heading out. I learned very quickly when I started working with this population that I am very poor company on Friday afternoons, and in fact, I honestly lost a dear friend because of this. Before this job, she and I had a standing Friday afternoon date before our husbands got home from work and kids had to go to bed. After my starting this job, she began complaining that I just was not myself anymore; then I started cancelling our dates because I was just too tired. After a month or two, she stopped rescheduling with me for a different day and explained that I had changed and she had not.

It seems odd as an adult to have friendship break-ups like these, but during the weekends I tend to think about how this job, these students, this line of work all together, has affected my overall life and perception. It's true that I am not myself anymore, I have changed. I worry about things and people that I did not use to worry about. This week I cannot shake off a particularly upsetting journal entry. The quote of the day question was, "Where do you see yourself in a year?" My hope was that students would write about their goals, think about the future in a positive way, but one student wrote:

Where do I think I will be a year from now is in jail or dead. I don't think I will have a job I'm going to have 1 child and still be staying with my mom. I probably will still

be in school either the 9th or 10th grade. If im dead or in jail I really wouldn't care because that's really where I belong.

These relationships, these children, their experiences and our experiences together have changed me. I am a more attentive parent, I have more patience in some respects and less in others, I am a little sadder, a lot stronger, and much more understanding. I think about these students, their goals and fears, constantly. Some people cannot handle these changes, but many love me more because of them. My prayer is that change remains a constant in my life and that together my students and I grow, heal, learn, and laugh together for years to come.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Introduction

“Can anything be sadder than work left unfinished? Yes, work never begun.”

-- Christina Rossetti

This quote resonates within me as this research study concludes only to become the beginning of my life’s work. The purpose of this study was to serve as a beginning, a start to a conversation that I hope to continue, and to advocate for an improved system of education for adjudicated youth in residential juvenile justice facilities. This study did not take the initial path I had chosen due to multiple roadblocks that in turn showed me how important it is for me to use my voice as a method of advocating for all of the students in education programs in these facilities. This body of work has already begun to open doors that will lead to more research in the areas of adjudicated youth and student educational engagement within residential juvenile justice facilities.

So often we blame the victims in our society. I constantly hear how difficult my job must be, how *bad* and *dangerous* my students are. These statements hurt my heart, even when they are said with concern and the best of intentions. At an annual American Education Research Association meeting, I was told by a group of influential policy makers that my heart was in the right spot but, “Those kids can’t be saved...we must save our others students from them.” It was at that point that I knew I must not back down, and I must speak the

authentic truth that adjudicated students are victims of a system not created for them. They are smart and can learn, and they are full of both potential and social capital.

The purpose of this section is to revisit the research question, the data that defines the problem: the importance of student engagement within residential juvenile justice facilities and how to show that these classrooms can be places for success. I will share my findings and the implications of these findings for both practitioners and future researchers in order to spark further research and advocacy for adjudicated youth.

Revisiting the Research Question

Throughout the research study, I continually revisited the primary research question: How are students at one YDC educationally engaged? Over almost four years of time, in each class, conversation, assignment that was planned or speaker that was scheduled, I kept this question in the forefront of my mind. My data collection and analysis was centered on the framework created through analysis of the existing literature as well as my desire to increase engagement within my classroom.

Revisiting the Problem

Throughout the process I have been told by policy makers and school leaders that there are simply not many kids in the juvenile justice system and that my research will not have a significant impact. This is simply not the case. There are over one million children in the juvenile justice system. In 2013, the US courts handled 1,058,500 juvenile court cases (Sickmund et al., 2013) and maintained approximately 30 million youth under court authority, such as probation, house arrest, and court-mandated placements (Puzzanchaera et al., 2012). Many of these youth will join over 50,000 juvenile offenders across the country who already reside in residential juvenile justice facilities (OJJDP, 2016). This means that at

the very least, there are 50,000 students enrolled in the public schools within these facilities. Therefore, increasing the quality of education through student engagement could affect over 50,000 students' entire education within one year and significantly reduce their rates of recidivism by up to 22% (Bloomberg et al., 2012). It is also important to mention the ripple effect of changing the trajectory of adjudicated youth. By lowering recidivism rates, the victim rate is also reduced. I believe that by reducing one child's criminal behavior, multiple lives are impacted.

The primary difference in adjudicated students and traditional public school students is that adjudicated students tend to disproportionately suffer from both academic and behavioral problems, primarily stemming from poor educational opportunities prior to their adjudication (Leone et al., 2005; National Collaborative of Workforce and Disability, 2010). Thirty percent of adjudicated students have been diagnosed with a learning disability, 48% are below grade level, 25% have repeated a grade, 61% have been expelled or suspended (in my experience this number is much higher), 13% have dropped out of school, and 21% are enrolled but not attending (Sothern Education Foundation, 2014). Student engagement has been linked empirically to both the overall learning process and subsequent academic success (Appleton et al., 2008; Greene et al., 2004; Marks, 2000). Most recently, student engagement has been identified as one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of student success within academic settings (Carini et al., 2006; Hirn & Scott, 2014; Klem & Connell, 2004).

Revisiting the Setting

I believe that the setting for this study, being a residential juvenile justice facility, weighed heavily on the results. In traditional settings there are more students and the outside world has a big impact. There are extraneous forces such as parents, sports teams, churches,

and social media that pressure the students' motivation, self-beliefs, goals, attitudes, and sense of education. All of the students within this study have at some point been in such a traditional educational setting, but they are now being influenced primarily by the people within the facility. The only outside influence by family is a possible once-a-week, monitored, two-hour visit and a monitored five minute, twice-a-week phone call. The removal of external forces that typically play such a large role in an adolescent's life have been stripped away, thus impacting each part of the student engagement framework.

Another difference for students at the facility is that school is a major form of entertainment. This must impact educational engagement and for many students serve as a motivator to attend classes. While at the YDC, students have no choices about whether or not to attend school. There is no dropping out, no suspension, and the only way to have a sick day is if a student is vomiting or has a temperature over 100 degrees. The punishments for not attending are loss of all privileges and possible isolation in the student's room with everything removed, including the mattress. While the findings of this study strengthen the student engagement research within traditional settings, the implications of the setting and their weight on the findings cannot be forgotten, thus the traditional framework does not fit exactly within the setting.

Revisiting and Reworking the Framework

After a close analysis of the data, the notion that student engagement is both complex and multi-dimensional became even clearer. Student engagement in any setting is both a way of behaving and a state of mind (Appleton et al., 2008; Klem & Connell, YEAR; Marks, 2000; Mosher & McGowan, 1985; Stalling, 1980) and, while I was only able to gather data that was specifically observed through behaviors, I believe that these observed behaviors are

windows into the cognitive and psychological engagement that was occurring simultaneously. One way that I could see cognitive engagement was through student academic growth in both authentic classroom and state assessments, but due to the nature of this study I was unable to document and report this.

The findings of this study both support some areas of the framework and call for a reorganization of it when used with adjudicated youth attending school in a juvenile justice residential facility. This organization of the framework extends the research into a new setting and adds examples of how engagement behaviors look within such a facility. Table 7 illustrates how I worked to initiate student engagement as it aligned with the student engagement framework (see Figure 1), and Table 8 reveals examples of behavioral, psychological, and cognitive components of student engagement. It was through the analysis of these two tables, with the resonant themes exposed in the initial analysis, that I was lead to see that the framework needed adjusting in order to fit the nontraditional setting.

Table 7.
Student engagement initiation

Motivation & Agency		Transactional Engagement		Institutional Support		Active Citizenship	
Self-construction of Knowledge		Teacher Student Relationships		Institutional Culture		Extended Boundaries of Curriculum	
	<i>Classroom Norms Enabling Self-Regulation</i>		<i>Responding to Work</i>		<i>Relationships Between Teachers</i>		<i>Speakers from the Community</i>
Self-Belief		Teacher Expectations	<i>Proximity to Teacher</i>	Variety of Support Services	<i>Relationships Between Teachers and Unit Staff</i>	Ethical Political Processes	
	<i>Providing Opportunities to Succeed</i>		<i>Teacher Feedback</i>				<i>Social Justice Project</i>
Goal Setting	<i>Emotional Regulation Practice Within the Classroom</i>	Academic Support	<i>Agenda on the Board</i>	Adaptive Expectations	<i>Special Education Teacher</i>	Potential to Change the World	
			<i>Differentiated Rubrics</i>		<i>Social Workers</i>		<i>Social Justice Project</i>
	<i>Connecting Assignments to Personal Goals</i>		<i>Proximity to Teacher</i>		<i>Unit Staff</i>		<i>Career Presentations</i>
	<i>Goal Board</i>		<i>Utilizing the Unit Staff</i>				<i>Build Social and Cultural Capital</i>
	<i>Weekly Goals</i>		<i>Block Scheduling</i>		<i>Flexible Teacher Expectations</i>		<i>Speakers from the Community</i>
	<i>Goal Celebrations</i>		<i>Differentiation</i>				
Intrinsic Motivation		Active, Collaborative Learning					
	<i>Student Choice</i>		<i>Quote of the Day</i>				
	<i>Student Interest</i>		<i>Working in Groups and Pairs</i>				
Extrinsic Motivation	<i>Quote of the Day</i>	Task Appropriateness	<i>Study Groups</i>				
			<i>Allowing Spontaneous Conversation</i>				
	<i>Proximity to Teacher</i>						
	<i>Authentic Audience</i>		<i>Quote of the Day</i>				
	<i>Sharing Assignments with Peers</i>		<i>Whole Class Assignments with Differentiation</i>				
	<i>Small Class Size (<8)</i>		<i>Choice Incorporation</i>				
Task Appropriateness			<i>Providing Sufficient Time</i>				
	<i>Quote of the Day</i>		<i>Aligning Task Difficulty with Skill Capability</i>				
Choice Incorporation			<i>Whole Class Assignments with Differentiation</i>				
	<i>Providing Sufficient Time</i>		<i>Aligning Task Difficulty with Skill Capability</i>				

Table 8.

Examples of student engagement

Components of Student Engagement	Examples
Behavioral	<p>The students read diligently for a solid 15 minutes.</p> <p>“There are no assigned seats. Just sit where you will work, and if you are working, I will not bother you about your seating.” Students come in and move their desks to where they will work best (usually there are three right up next to my desk).</p> <p>I have to stop what I am doing to do a special handshake with JM</p> <p>Students are excited to learn the new vocabulary words and can often be heard using them in their day to day conversations.</p>
Cognitive	<p>It means that in each class I potentially have students enrolled in eight different classes and most certainly with eight different reading ability levels therefore both instruction and tasks must be differentiated.</p> <p>Many students have been here for so long that they have learned over 200 new words.</p> <p>The Social Issue Project almost always goes very well, and by the end, they are experts on their issue.</p>
Psychological	<p>Students decorate index cards with their goals on them, tape them to the Goals side and then move them to the goals met side once they have achieved them.</p> <p>Each student has chosen a social issue that they find important (gun control, abortion, school to prison pipeline, immigration, etc.) and they are researching the issue and planning for a whole class presentation.</p> <p>“Come on fellas! Give her a break and just write your paragraph. You guys can think of something other than money.”</p> <p>“Mrs. Avis! Come here! Can I approach you? Please, Mrs. Avis! I have something to tell you!”</p> <p>Four of the eight boys are planning on writing and performing the rap in front of the whole facility and they are very enthusiastic about it.</p>

My analysis, as illustrated in Tables 7 and 8, indicates that educational student engagement is much more of a spiraling process, and once it is initiated it continues and grows over time, along with motivation and achievement. The literature supports this idea in traditional settings and states that none of the factors leading to and maintaining student engagement stand alone (Appleton et al., 2006; Skinner et al, 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This study shows that the same is true in a residential juvenile justice facility. The remainder of this section focuses on the reorganization of the framework based on the analysis of data.

The New Framework

Figure 4 shows the reorganized student educational engagement framework. The original elements are still present, yet they are organized in a manner that better facilitates engagement in a juvenile justice residential facility, while also incorporating transition plans for students once they leave the facility. The transition portion also accounts for the link between education and lowering recidivism rates.

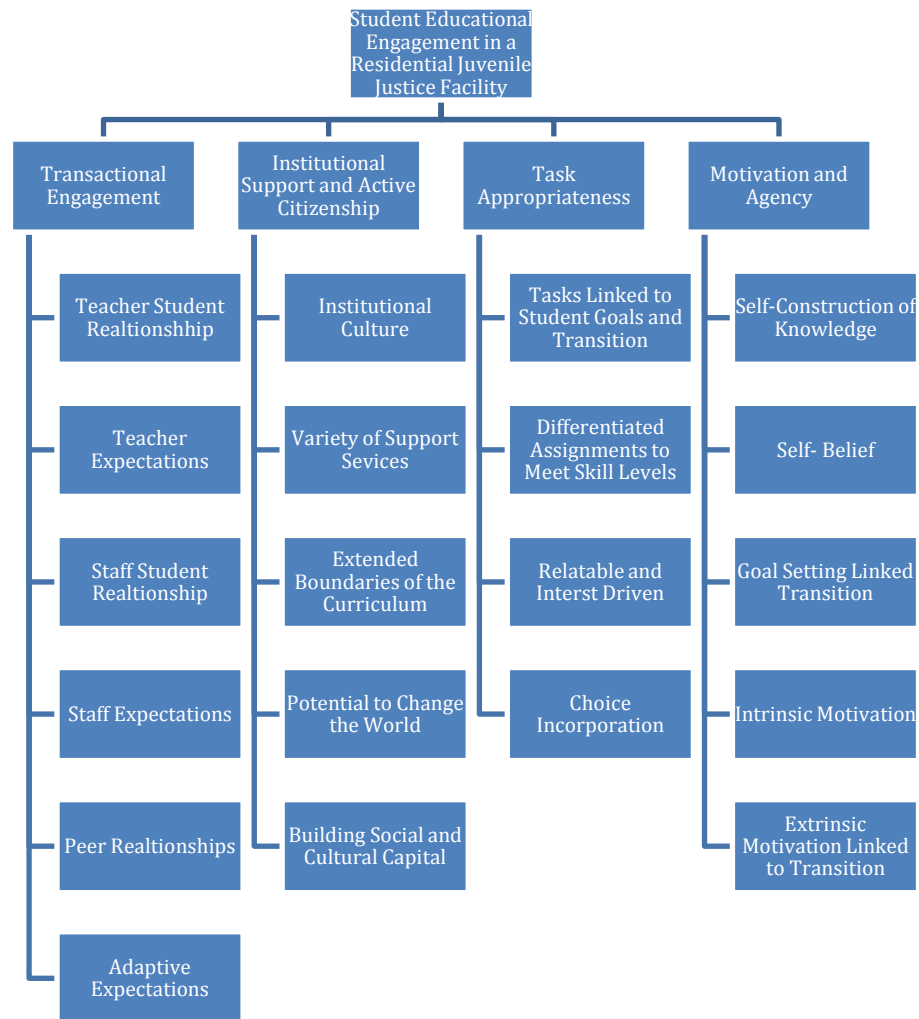


Figure 4.
Student Educational Engagement in a Juvenile Justice Facility

Transactional Engagement

Transactional engagement was the most resonant theme throughout the data analysis, and that is why it is the first tenet in the new framework. The existing literature shows that teachers can entice students by maintaining enriching and engaging classes while simultaneously understanding the science behind how students learn and process new information (Marks, 2004; Klem & Connell, 2004; Sutherland et al., 2008). My analysis suggests that within this setting and population, most students will not become educationally engaged without this factor. Through analysis, it was clear that all other components of student educational engagement were in fact linked to relationships with staff members, peers, and most prominently me, the teacher.

“Will you hang this picture on your refrigerator at home?”

“Can I talk to you?”

“I know all my vocabulary words! Does that make your heart replete?”

“I love your education, but F everybody else’s! You hear me?”

These are a few examples of student questions that I heard constantly during my classes and on the units. Each question or comment came from a student who demanded, or at the very least expected, an immediate response from me. This was another significant difference between traditional public-school students and adjudicated youth; typically adjudicated youth are more needy and vocal. There is rarely a silent moment in the classroom, and I must hear my name over one hundred times a day. This desire to be noticed, heard, and responded to may be due to past traumas or maybe just because they are removed from their families and communities and need attention. Either way, I found that quick, deliberate responses to this population of students were one of the quickest ways to make or

break relationships with them. I found this to be the most draining part of my job, because repairing relationships with students proved to be more draining than building them so I was careful to try to initiate and then maintain positive relationships. Even now, as I type, at this very minute, I have a student talking to me constantly about the grassland documentary that he is watching. It is just part of the job. Hirn & Scott (2014) show through their research that the more students feel their teachers care about them, the more they want to be involved in their own learning process, thus engagement is initiated, and achievement may be reached.

There is empirical evidence linking motivation and engagement (Toshalis & Nakkura, 2012), and often the relationship between the teacher and the student is an academic motivator for the student (Hirn & Scott, 2014). Students in residential juvenile justice facilities seem to feel that the teachers there define student ability (Hirn & Scott, 2014). This position is extremely powerful and can serve as motivation for students when teachers show that they see potential in the students' abilities. This is where Achievement Goal Theory comes into play, because it "proposes that students' motivation and achievement-related behaviors can be understood by considering the reasons or purposes they adopt while engaged in academic work" (Wolters, 2004, p. 236), and relationships are often the reason.

The successful teacher-student relationships throughout my study were initiated by me at the very first meeting with the student and maintained throughout their entire stay at the facility. This meant making myself extremely available. The more often students have the opportunity to respond to their teachers, the more likely they are to feel that they are cared for within the educational setting (Hirn & Scott 2014). The first day a student arrived, I would go to their unit before they had a chance to come into the classroom. I wanted to let them know that I was aware that they had arrived, and that I was already thinking about

them. I introduced myself with a handshake and let them know that I would work with and for them while they were at the YDC. Most students did not respond with more than an, “OK,” but our first interaction was positive, which initiated our relationship.

Intentional relationship-building is a part of the classroom aesthetics and norms. All of the books made available to the students, the goals board, and the students’ work being displayed send the message that this place is theirs and encourages students to take the space on as their own. The lack of assigned seating, the ability to sit at my desk with me, and the openness to conversation allows the relationships to develop naturally, without being forced.

There are multiple occasions where this relationship formation process can be witnessed. One example is when C-Unit students call out in the mornings for me to come and visit. I also received countless notes and cards, even Mother’s Day cards, from students. Students encouraged me to participate in after-school activities and chose to sit with me during class. This need and want for proximity shows a trust that allows students to be vulnerable enough to take on new and difficult tasks. I must reciprocate these invitations as well, and this is just as important. When I see students who are behaving in a quieter or withdrawn manner, I ask if they want to come sit with me, speak to me in the hallway, pass them a little note, or just give them space.

Once these relationships were developed, I was able to get to know students in a way that allowed me to understand their educational past, learn about what they were interested in, and determine how far I could push their zone of proximal development in order to teach them new skills. This is where teacher relationships feeds into appropriate teacher expectations as a part of the process of student engagement (Hirn & Scott, 2014). These relationships and expectations have been linked to impacting students’ belief in themselves

as learners and became obvious when they would choose the Quote of the Day or use the vocabulary words in conversation or take the time to complete a task with attention to detail. I could then influence their thoughts about themselves as learners, as well as encourage goal-setting, emotional impulse control, and incorporate more personally relevant choices within their curriculum (Greene et al., 2004). All of these things combined made the overall classroom experience more enjoyable for everyone.

I would be remiss to leave out the importance of the relationships between unit staff and students. There have been students that I have had a difficult time forming relationships with for a multitude of reasons. Often, unit staff members have close relationships with these students and can motivate them in a way that I cannot. These relationships are very valuable to the student, because the staff member travels to all four classes and throughout the day with the student, so this person can serve as a mediator between the student and teacher. The same is true for peer relationships within the educational setting. The eight students live together and attend all daily activities together, so often close bonds form. Together, unit staff and peers serve as motivating forces when the teacher is not quite enough or unable to reach the student.

In turn, these relationships can also work against building an effective teacher-student relationship. When the teacher and the unit staff and the peer goals and motivations are aligned, it is both helpful and obvious to the students. If a power struggle develops, it becomes counterproductive. Often, as the teacher, uncertified in unarmed self-defense, I have sided with the unit staff in front of the students in order to maintain a calm and safe environment. This hurts the relationships between the students and me, because they feel that I have chosen the other side. At the end of the day, these students are teenagers, and loyalty

is incredibly important to them and very hard to regain once the trust on which it rests has been damaged. The most effective solution is being proactive in building and maintaining positive relationships with the students.

Institutional Support and Active Citizenship

The institutional support and active citizenship have been combined in this new framework because while the students are incarcerated, their entire community is their institution. The students must show citizenship within that institution due to fact that they are generally not able to leave the grounds. This means that the culture of the institution is more important in a residential juvenile justice facility than in a traditional setting because it is the entire functional culture for the student (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). In fact, the institution serves as a surrogate family for the child while he or she is in custody; therefore, the institutional norms become the norms for the child.

The traditional setting literature shows that as students and parents begin to see the value in a school, build relationships with teachers, and feel that they are wanted and needed, the students begin to attend more regularly, thus increasing engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). This simply does not fit within the residential juvenile justice facility setting because the students are removed from their families, if they have families to begin with, and there is very little, if any, contact between the juvenile justice teacher and the families of the child.

There is, however, more institutional support in the form of adult supervision and support services within the juvenile justice residential facility. In traditional middle school and high school classes in this particular state, there are often more than twenty five students and only one teacher. In this facility, there are eight students, two unit staff, and a teacher. There are also the special education teacher, multiple social workers, two licensed mental

health clinicians, a chaplain, a unit supervisor, and a nurse who are there to support the students. When this influential group of people value education, they become amazing resources for the teacher through the support and education they can provide within their specific areas, including behavior management strategies, one-on-one student support, and productive, goal-oriented conversation. These adults, as well as speakers from the community, are how teachers extend the boundaries of the curriculum and also explore ways in which the students can build social capital and learn how they can impact the outside world.

Active citizenship was the most difficult component of student engagement for me to incorporate when I took this position. This component means incorporating opportunities for the students to understand the world beyond them, including an ethical understanding of the political process, in order to build their social and cultural capital. Through this component, students should come to feel that they matter and have the ability to impact their communities. This is difficult to do when they have been removed from their communities and know that this removal was done because people feel threatened by them.

Because students cannot leave the facility, I tried to bring the outside community into the classroom in order to extend the curriculum and assist in building social capital. Students are from all over the state, so I tried to find people who represented faces from all sorts of communities. The combination of their having been very literally been removed from their communities, the fear surrounding them, and the intimidation of the secure setting made it difficult to find great speakers who were willing to come in and truly connect with the students. So I used my own community as a personal motivator and turned to them for support.

First, my husband, a state park ranger, came in and spent the day with my students talking to them about the animals and habitats in our state. He brought in animals that had been stuffed and mounted and allowed the students to have hands-on experience. It went really well! There were funny moments, but we worked through them, taught the students how to have a speaker come into the classroom, and then practiced thank you notes afterwards.

This first experience was enlightening for all of us. My husband and I began telling our friends about it, and then I would contact them about coming in to speak. By the end of this study, I had had the following speakers come in: two activists, a nurse, a teacher, a lawyer, a fire fighter, a storyteller, an artist, a park ranger, and two professors who conducted two university-level classes. These guests helped the students gain an understanding of the world outside of the facility, the importance of education, and built social capital in that many of the guests offered to assist students in a multitude of ways once they were released.

Another way I tried to incorporate the Community Connections factor of student engagement was through the social issue project. Students could research and become experts on an issue that was important to them and affecting their communities. The goal of this project was to help them connect to something outside of the facility while also strengthening their research, reading, and writing skills. This was successful for some students who chose topics that they truly were passionate about (single parenting, abortion, and the school-to-prison pipeline), but other students found it too abstract and had difficulty completing the project.

Task Appropriateness

Both empirical research and my own data analysis show that assignments make a tremendous difference in student engagement (Greene et al., 2004). As supported by the research, regardless of how close a relationship I built with a student, they had to see value in the assignments they were given. If not, they were most likely to either not attempt it or very quickly lose interest in it and stop (Greene et al., 2004). Task difficulty is also a critical part of the equation to promote achievement and a productive transition back into the community school post-release. This is most often the most difficult component of student engagement for teachers, because each student is working on a different level and bringing different personal goals to the table.

Research has shown that linking student choice to classroom decisions is vital in increasing educational engagement (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). As can be seen in Table 7, I incorporated rap, social interest topics that they could relate to, and gave as many choices as I felt I possibly could in order to combat this notion of giving up and to maintain the notion of motivation and engagement. Students could choose how to present what they learned, what book they wanted to read, what topic they wanted to research, etc. Students often mentioned that they enjoyed the assignment because they were able to choose the topic and presentation medium. It was one way in which they felt in control, in a situation where they had very little control over anything.

One challenge with task appropriateness and the incorporation of choice is not losing focus of what skill is being taught. For example, Flocabulary is a website that I used often that incorporates rap into all core subjects and current events. The students enjoy the raps, but within them is high-quality instruction of basic skills, such as the parts to a five-

paragraph essay, or imagery. It can be easy for the student to become engaged with the beat of the rap and not the words, so my job was to work as a facilitator to maintain engagement with the concept being taught and continually check on what the student was learning. Again, if the student chose to research gun violence, I had to stay engaged and ensure that they were digging into the issues of cause and effect, statistics, and what is being done—not the different types of weapons that are available or the most popular. The task appropriateness must be coupled with constant monitoring by the teacher in order to ensure that the student is educationally engaged, not just engaged.

Another difficulty is to ensure that the task assigned is academically appropriate for the student. This is where the relationship piece must be coupled with task appropriateness. The teacher must be able to distinguish whether the student has the necessary skill level, background knowledge, and educational stamina to complete the task at an instructional level with minimal support (Burns & Dean, 2005; Gilbertson et al., 2008). Tasks that require a great deal of support should not be given to students in a whole class setting because of the vulnerability that the teacher is asking the student to feel (Klem & Connell, 2004). If the student can achieve some success with an assignment, they are more likely to complete it, try another task, and maintain personal motivation. This is also difficult because the students within this setting are not only at different skill levels, but also different ages and grade levels. Students in juvenile justice facilities have often gone long periods of time without being in school and have a very low stamina for tasks. Even if a task is assigned at an appropriate instructional level academically, it may need to be chunked into smaller sections to help the student build academic stamina. Differentiation of expectations and taking

stamina into consideration are crucial, and this is a skill that takes time for teachers to develop.

Motivation and Agency

Motivation and agency were the first tenets in the original framework used within this study because of their empirical support throughout the literature. The adjudicated youth in this study had generally lost the majority of their educational motivation and agency way before I met them. This is seen in the conversation about principals in Chapter 4, where students revealed that they did not feel they were wanted in the school setting and thus were not motivated to attend. Students felt no agency or educational self-belief because they had generally lost any sense of their educational self-worth within the traditional setting.

Through data analysis I found that the most efficient way to restore this motivation and self-belief was through goals linked to their transition outside of the facility. Students begin to count down to their release the moment they enter the facility, so teachers can capitalize on this enthusiasm to transition back into the community through realistic goal creation. Teachers can help students understand their individual realistic educational options and goals for post-release. Then, through assignments and conversation, teachers can show students how to achieve these goals. In this way, teachers are serving as surrogates for all the extrinsic motivators that would normally be shared by parents, siblings, coaches, and community mentors in a traditional setting.

Once student goals have been defined, they should guide teaching and conversation. When student goals guide teaching and tasks, students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, which encompasses the entire section of the framework (Skinner, et al., 2007; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). This is illustrated throughout Chapter 4 in the goals board, the

social justice project, and conversations throughout the week. Often the student goals shift, and the teacher must be flexible with these shifts and help students understand that as they mature, the goals will as well. As these shifts occur and students begin to see that they have advocates and experience some success, their sense of self-belief grows, thus building and maintaining their motivation.

Implications

Practitioner Implications

This study shows that teaching in a secure facility in and of itself is a very different experience from teaching in a traditional public-school setting. The classes are single sex, much smaller, generally capped at eight, and contain students of all different ages and abilities within the same class. Enrollment is fluid as students come and go from the classroom and the YDC at any moment. Often you do not become aware of a new student or a release date until that day. There are also behaviors that students display that are not accepted in the regular setting that are used as teaching moments at the YDC. Teachers in this setting must be aware, flexible, and calm in order to maintain a safe environment for students and staff.

This study contains a great deal of insight of benefit to educators within juvenile justice settings in that it is the seminal research exploring student educational engagement within such settings. The goal of all quality educators is both achievement and motivation, and this framework (see Figure 4) serves as a roadmap for how to create and sustain achievement and motivation through educational engagement within classrooms designed for young offenders. The framework also shows areas in which professional development should be focused in order to strengthen teaching and educational experiences within such a facility.

Policy Implications

The new framework speaks to policy makers in that it shows the importance of the support staff, the need for professional development in task appropriateness, and how residential juvenile justice facilities differ from traditional settings. Often education policy makers have not stepped foot into a residential juvenile justice facility, and this study provides a thick description of what these facilities are like and how the classrooms and the challenges differ from traditional settings. It then offers support for some best practices that will lead to more educational engagement, motivation, and achievement—all of which will help to create lower recidivism rates.

Research Implications

There are many ways in which this study shows that there is much more work to be done in educational research within juvenile justice facilities. One, it would be great to extend this study to other facilities, other teachers, and incorporate student voices. Two, it leads to the question of how to better support teachers and support staff in order to help them maintain their ability to serve as surrogate community motivators throughout a student's time in a facility. Third, a quantitative or mixed method longitudinal study looking at engagement and recidivism rates would be extremely valuable as a way to guide and influence policy makers.

And finally, the authentic voice of students is missing in educational research done within juvenile justice settings. I found that gaining access to the student voice was beyond difficult; in this particular state, it was just not possible. In most states the researcher must gain access through both a university IRB and a state IRB, and in the case of this research study, the researcher was repeatedly blocked by both. The student voice is imperative for

gaining a full understanding of student engagement within residential juvenile justice settings because the cognitive and some of the psychological factors of student engagement cannot be collected and analyzed without surveys, interviews, and specific observations. Furthermore, there needs to be more educational research in this setting in general in order to develop a better sense of best practices. Dissemination of this research study will hopefully engage others in future studies with these unique and extraordinary students.

Strengths and Weakness of the Study

This study was conducted over a four year period of time, the last two of which I was in the classroom and at the facility 5 days a week, 8 hours a day. The amount of data that I collected was tremendous and it was a time-consuming task to comb through and decide what to put into the final study. This large amount of data made the combination of personalities in order to protect student and staff data easier, because there was so much to choose from and combine. The difficulty is that not everything could be put into the final autoethnography, so I was left with decisions about what must be left out.

The most overwhelming weakness in this study is that it is my voice, my perspective. The student voice is captured as authentically as possible from my point of view; however, it would be strengthened tremendously if I could have conducted interviews, focus groups, and possibly surveys of the students, staff, and teachers within the YDC. Over time, I plan to use this initial autoethnography to gain trust and credibility in order to produce more research that incorporates the many other voices within these facilities.

Links to Achievement Goal Theory and Educator Advocacy

Achievement goal theory “proposes that students’ motivation and achievement related behaviors can be understood by considering the reasons or purposes they adopt while

engaged in academic work” (Wolters, 2004, p. 236). This theory links the purposes students have for engaging in tasks with their level of task engagement (Greene et al., 2004). There was significant student growth in achievement during the time that I focused on student educational engagement within the classroom. Due to the nature of this study being an autoethnography, I am unable to share information pertaining to specific instances of student growth. However, some achievement can be seen in the use of vocabulary words, the increased stamina in silent reading times, and the content-focused conversations that took place in class. This study shows that student educational engagement and student achievement are connected and that more research in this area should be done.

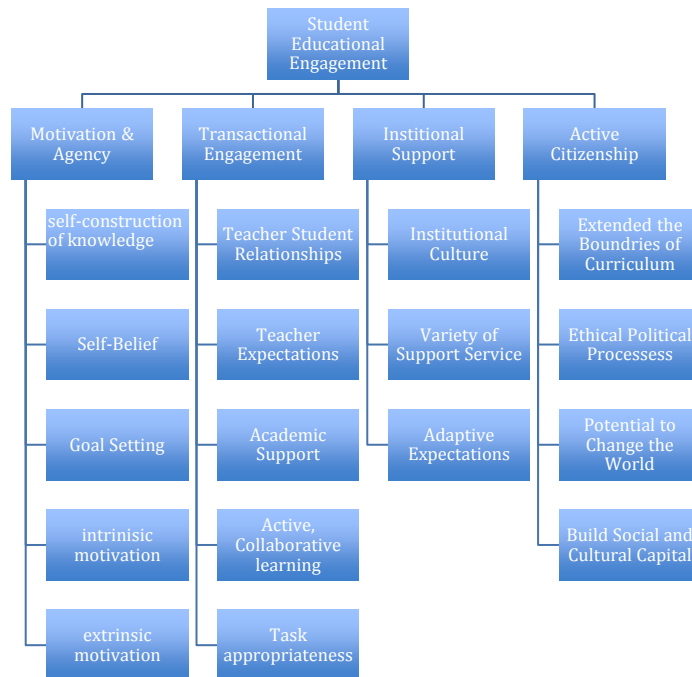
The purpose of this journey was to use my voice to advocate for the rights of my students. I hope that this research study will do this in multiple ways, one being the preceding implications and suggestions. I will also use my study findings as the basis for future research and professional development presentations at national-level conferences. I believe that simply talking about these students, sharing their potential with others in the field, may cause doors to begin to open in support of further research and in support of my students.

Summary

This has been a journey of growth, happiness, sadness, and strength for me as I have been a witness to the young men and women who have faced trials and tribulations that I cannot begin to imagine. My goals when I began this process were: Hear my students; See my students; Learn to love my students; Respect my students for the children that they are. I honestly feel that I have stayed true and focused on these goals, yet I understand that I still have so much to do in order to release their individual voices and strength from their captivity. This study was written to serve as a catalyst, not a culmination; to begin to fill in

the gaps in educational research within this arena, but more importantly, to advocate for educational equality for the more than 50,000 students in public schools housed in juvenile justice residential facilities. I beg readers to advocate for this worthy cause and to begin their days with as many “I love you’s” as I do.

APPENDIX 1



Adapted from Zepke and Leach, 2010
Student educational engagement

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