A Road Never Traveled: Using Autoethnography to Gain Insights for Improving Correctional Education and Reducing Recidivism

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ABSTRACT

In this autoethnographic research project the researcher details his planned happenstance story that led to a career in correctional education. Using an arts-based inquiry methodology, the researcher documented and studied specific events that through planned happenstance and self-determination, molded his literary, academic, and professional self. By reflecting on and studying the decisions and actions taken from planned happenstance events, the researcher feels that others may benefit and learn from his experiences.

Correctional workers have a responsibility to model positive behaviors for the inmates in their charge. The more positive roles all correctional workers take in the education, rehabilitation, and re-entry efforts of the inmate population, the safer our prisons will be for staff and inmates, with the added benefit of lowering recidivism rates. The researcher discovered that using reflective writing is a beneficial strategy for learning and personal growth and is a valuable tool that can help establish a positive culture within the prison walls for staff and inmates alike.

Through this project, the researcher feels everyone has elements of their own personal story that has the ability to shape and change the lives of those around them. Additional autoethnographic research can be the medium to add to the body of knowledge related to the fields of Family and Consumer Sciences Education, in both corrections and public education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"I grew up in Prison."

~ Kyle Roberson

The prisons in our country are filled with individuals who read and write below the national average. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS, 2003) report that 68% of state inmates, and 49% of federal inmates, did not complete high school. It is understandable that educational attainment, though not a causation of incarceration, certainly could be related. The importance of education in correctional settings was explored in a meta-analysis by the RAND Corporation, sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice (2013), to assess educational programs and their effect on recidivism rates. The study evidenced positive correlations between inmates who participated in education verses those who did not regarding recidivism rates (BJS, 2013). Through the course of my career in corrections, I have personally seen the positive effects of prisons' education programs and likewise have witnessed the truth that many inmates struggle with their literary efficacies.

Correctional officers come from many backgrounds, and many will go on to play an important role in security, prison education, and re-entry. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2017, over 428,870 individuals made up the correctional officers that maintain the security of our country's jails, juvenile facilities, and prisons at city, county, state, and federal levels. This number does not account for thousands

of correctional workers in other disciplines such as education, health care, administration, social services, facilities, and probation who work within the correctional environment. Each of these correctional workers entered this field for a variety of reasons. Some people entered the profession by preparing themselves through formal education and others through related experiences that may have qualified them for such positions. Others may have not had related preparation, but simply took the job to make a living. As with any new job or career, there is a learning curve that must take place. Such planned happenstance—a career theory founded on the idea that a person can capitalize on both planned and unplanned events taking place in their life—occurs throughout many people's lives and careers, and each person's journey may provide insight that is useful to others.

My career began as a correctional officer who was promoted through the correctional ranks to the mid-management position of lieutenant. At this midpoint in my career, I began reflecting on what I really wanted from my life's work. Those personal reflections led me to take a voluntary demotion to work in the education department. I believed I could contribute in a more positive way by taking the new position. I could contribute more holistically to the inmate's rehabilitation. As a uniformed officer, it seemed that often, I consistently dealt with only the negative side of an inmate's incarceration and rehabilitation.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the ways in which my unconventional career path within federal corrections provide unique insights into the literacy and rehabilitative needs of inmates. My lived experiences as a correctional officer and lieutenant and the journey that led me to become a correctional educator

with a strong desire to improve inmate family connectedness through family literacy is the impetus for this autoethnography.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that has grown in use in the last two decades as a means for researchers to inject personal voice and experience into primarily sociological research (Preston, 2011). With this method, researchers can draw on their own experiences to garner meaningful and deeper understandings of the world around them. To better comprehend this technique as a social research method, the word should be dissected into its distinctive parts.

Ethnography is the root of the method. This word contains ethno—meaning race, people, or culture and graphy—meaning a process for recording. When the auto component is added, "self" is injected into the word. An autobiographical detailing of cultural and life experiences, when written in a manner that allows for reflective insights, is autoethnography. Leavy (2015) states that, "each research paradigm has a philosophical substructure that guides research practice" (p. 19). These substructures can be gathered as data from previous reflective writings, interactions, memories, thoughts, artifacts, and learning events and expressed in the narrative as an arts-based research methodology.

This autoethnographic study involves circumstances and choices related to education, literacy, leadership, and planned happenstance. These were the mediums by which my career progressed, and they explain my determination to improve interactions between correctional staff and inmates, foster better relationships between

inmates and their families, improve efficacies in literacy and educational programming, and ultimately reduce recidivism and instances of intergenerational criminal activity. The study explores my own literacy, life, and career and how opportunities and experiences have shaped my practices and attitudes within my current position as a prison educator. I would like to begin with a short reflection of my own literary self that began long ago in a small room I shared with my brother in North Central Texas.

The earliest memories I have that revolve around my literate life are the evenings I spent with my mother playing "school." We did this each evening after dinner and before we could watch any television. We would go to the back bedroom and sit around a little round table speckled with red and blue stars on a smooth white surface. We had that table for years, and until my mother had to start working, this was a regular part of our school year routine through about the third grade. The earliest book I actually remember reading was a Little Golden Book titled The Poky Little Puppy. We must have had a whole library of Little Golden Books. As a child, my parents always provided books for my two brothers and me. When we were in school, we were regular customers of the Scholastic Books flyers that were sent home as well. We were not exactly financially secure, so there was always a limit, but to my memory we were never denied the opportunity to expand our library.

When I started school, my mother's regular lessons provided a spring board for starting kindergarten. I have one specific memory from that grade. There was one other kid in the class that could read as well as I could. I remember sitting on the floor in front of Ms. Paulver and basically racing to read the sight words faster than the

other kid as we practiced in whole group instruction. Both of us had to be told to give the other kids a chance to answer.

I continued to be a good reader and even enjoyed writing. At one time, a friend and I were attempting to build our own library made up of our own work. This project stemmed from an assignment in the second grade that had us write, illustrate, and build our book using construction paper whose binding was stapled carefully on the creases of our folded pages.

These early memories of my literary childhood are what compelled me to attempt to replicate what my mother had done for me with my own two daughters. My brothers and I all read very well with intonation, fluency, and the ability to comprehend what we read. I attribute that to my mother's early efforts and the teachers we had in quality school districts. We were always enrolled in good school systems, at which my mother volunteered and supported through her involvement in the PTA. Over the years, both in school and throughout my careers, I have witnessed many adults who struggle to read fluently. Sometimes it was painful to listen to, and I felt sorry for them to some degree. I wanted my daughters to have the same good start I did, so my wife, who was also a voracious reader as a child, and I decided we would read to our kids and raise children who would love to read.

Research Questions

This autoethnography will examine the following research questions:

1. In what way does a correctional worker's pedagogical journey provide insights into the literacy and rehabilitative needs of inmates and their families?
2. How does reflective writing aid in literacy instruction, personal growth, and the decision-making process for educators?

Reasoning behind the Investigation

Chief Concern. Our prison systems are overcrowded and heavily burdened with inmates who are lacking in the very basics of literacy skills. They are also short on skills that equip them to find gainful employment, not to mention the vocational training needed to qualify for the jobs that might be available. These points are a major concern for all stake holders, which not only include inmates, their families, future communities and tax payers, but also the correctional workers who had the inmates in their charge for the term of their sentence. It is from the last point that my autoethnographic study will explore how correctional workers can develop more meaningful and productive interactions with the inmates they have in their care. Fostering a culture among correctional workers to take a vested interest in reentry efforts related to the inmate's literacy, learning, education, and family, are paramount in our efforts to reduce recidivism.

Daily life of an inmate. Within correctional settings in the United States, inmates are provided several outlets to expend their "time." Aside from the most dangerous criminals who may be locked up the majority of each day, a very small percentage, most have daily assignments or jobs that account for several hours of each day. These jobs serve multiple purposes in regard to how the prison systems operate. One function of the job is to assist in the inmate's time. Having a job and responsibilities each day gives inmates a sense of purpose. It is also the means by which most systems pay their populations for the work they do. Paying inmates to work also has benefits that most people unfamiliar with the system do not understand. Pay rates differ between state and federal systems, but the point is to provide an incentive to work. Restitutions are accessed from these earnings and the income also provides some discretionary spending money the inmate can use in the prison's commissary. Another function of the jobs inmates' hold is for reentry and skills training. Many of the jobs are tied to apprenticeship and vocational trades programs. Additionally, the jobs act to assist in keeping a level of normalcy in how life continues outside the prison walls with structure and daily responsibilities.

A second portion of the inmate's day is sleep, which is an important part of the inmate's day just as it is for everyone. To encourage regular sleep patterns, institutions will require inmates to be in their cells or dorms after certain hours and the lights within the housing units are dimmed. There are added benefits documented that can account for reduction in violence good sleep habits promote. People who are sleepy or sleep deprived are more irritable and get angered more easily (Graham, 2000). This is especially important in prison settings. One, there are less staff on duty during evening

hours to respond to potential issues, and two, promoting responsible sleep habits models how individuals need to be prepared for the next day's activities whether it be work or school.

The third portion of an inmate's day within prison is spent in leisure time. Depending on where an inmate is doing their time will determine how they get to spend their leisure hours. Most correctional institutions and agencies realize that having activities available for leisure time helps reduce inmate idleness, which has its own associated problems. To fill these leisure time hours, institutions provide a host of activities; physical recreation, board games, television viewing, religious services, and educational opportunities. These leisure time activities give the inmate a sense of control of their daily routine; they can choose how they want to spend these hours which, over the period of their sentence, add up to quite a lot of time.

Inmates and their families. Inmates have many hours to contemplate how their decisions have landed them in their current situation. Often, some of the time spent in penitence revolves around how their crime affected their families and the time they lose with them. By looking at how inmates perceive their time when participating in family related and educational activities, we may be able to improve programs, decrease recidivism, and improve family ties.

The time inmates spend in prison is not just their own. Muth, Walker, and Casad (2014) wrote about this in a recent study over time discourses of inmates, explaining that a child may have to view the time as if their father's sentence, in some ways, is their own. Keeping ties with family and maintaining parental responsibilities

are key components of reintegration for inmates and a major focus of the time they spend in penitence. By examining these perceptions, we can gain insight into how best to incorporate education and family activities through multiple mediums to include visitation privileges, as well as contact through phone, email, and letter writing. Ultimately, the goal is to increase positive interactions, decrease unhealthy thought processes, and aid in passing the time that weighs heavily on inmates between family visitations. One way to see these outcomes is by focusing on improving the literacy of incarcerated individuals and their children.

Literacy Connections

Children of an incarcerated parent are at risk for larger gaps in their reading proficiency between the end of the school year and the beginning of the next (Allington et al. 2010, Merenstein, Tyson, Tilles, Keays, & Rufffolo, 2011). Children of an incarcerated parent generally come from a lower socioeconomic population, are more prone to psychological issues, and are more likely to have lower self-esteem and struggle academically (Merenstein et al. 2011). There is well documented evidence that children experience summer loss in their reading proficiency, especially economically disadvantaged children, regardless of whether or not they have a parent incarcerated (Allington et al. 2010; Merenstein et al. 2011).

A study by Allington et al. (2010) found that providing twelve books of choice to disadvantaged children on the last day of school resulted in statistically significant effects in preventing summer reading loss when measured with the start of the next school year. Bridging the summer gap for at risk children through prison sponsored

literacy programs such as the Parent-Child Reading Program could decrease summer reading loss. Incarcerated parents, in a significant number of cases, want to reach out to their children and assume an active role (Galardi, Settersten, Vuchinich, & Richards, 2015). As such, there should be programs in place that provide a chance to bond with their child while also providing an opportunity to contribute to their growth and academic achievement. The Parent-Child Reading Program offers these possibilities. These programs provide an opportunity to help maintain parental ties and foster stronger relationships between the parent and child while the parent is incarcerated.

While the focus of the *Bureau of Prisons' Parent-Child Reading Program* is improving the achievement of the child, it is not unrealistic to infer that the incarcerated parents of the children could also benefit from interventions and improve their own reading efficacy. The interventions, while designed to assist the incarcerated parent in modeling literacy instruction, could have reciprocal benefits for their own literacy efficacies. The additional interaction created by the program may also increase feelings of connectedness and involvement in their children's lives.

Connections to Family and Consumer Sciences

Family and consumer sciences and autoethnography. The connection to Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) is related to the literacy journey that individuals and families experience over time. Specifically, I looked at my own life and literacy journey through an autoethnographic approach to gain insight into what lead me to pursue and attain a career in law-enforcement and correctional education with a degree

in FCS, coupled with an interest in how emergent literacy is related to family connectedness and development.

There are multiple standards and competencies found in the National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences that address human growth and development and parental responsibilities, which could include providing supportive environments for children to explore their interests and develop their literacy skills. Understanding these competencies and how autoethnography can assist in critical reflection can aid with realizing the benefits of family literacy practices. Preston (2011) explains how autoethnography can help with understanding one's own experiences and in turn use that knowledge to assist others. She described her autoethnographic experience as being "transformed by this learning" (p. 123). Parenting often requires reflective practices as a way to gain insight as to what has and has not worked regarding the raising of children. It is also appropriate to reflect about past experiences regarding work, careers, and relationships in order to determine one's direction for the future.

Family and consumer sciences body of knowledge. The body of knowledge in the field of family and consumer science is the research that has been collected to identify our professions' "integrative approach to the relationships among individuals, families, and communities and the environments in which they function" (Nickols et al., 2009, p. 269). The family and consumer sciences body of knowledge model (Figure 1.1) is made up of three categories: integrative elements, core concepts, and cross-cutting themes (Nickols et al., 2009). In reviewing the categories throughout this autoethnography, the model can be used as a tool to help frame this study. Nickols et al. (2009) go so far as to suggest that research should be framed "to address both

immediate as well as perennial problems" (p. 278). By addressing the chief concerns of this research project, both immediate and perennial problems will be addressed. The concerns related to this project are interwoven. When immediate problems are addressed, they can influence and provide direction for tackling some of the perennial problems found in our correctional systems.

Within this study, the immediate and *perennial problems* are addressed that interrelate with the themes of the body of knowledge model. Perennial problems are those trials that seem to be ever present from generation to generation and that seldom have a permanent solution. In the center of the model are the core concepts intertwined between individual well-being, family strengths, community vitality, with the basic human needs centered over the other three.

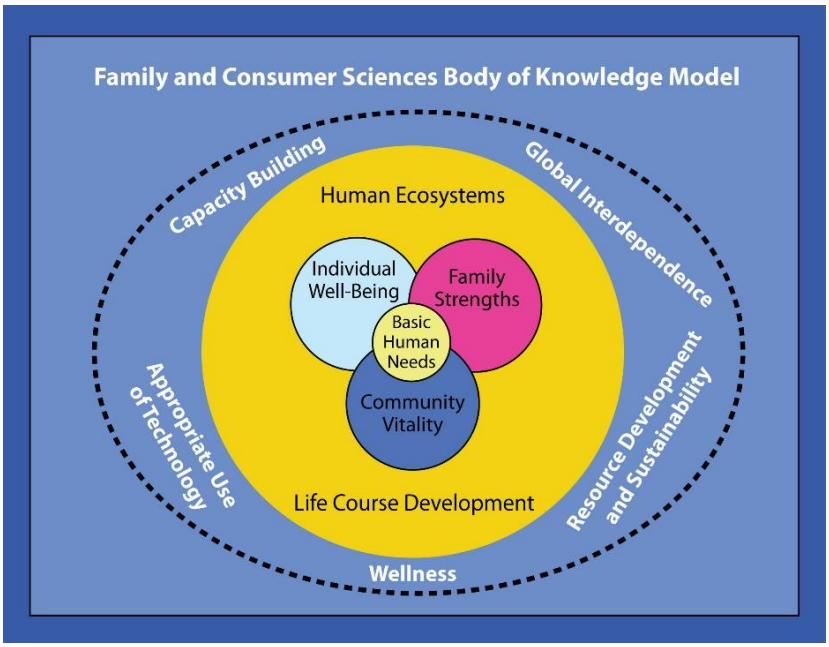

Figure 1.1: Body of knowledge model

When the integrative elements are considered they correspond closely with Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The other elements of the model include the cross-cutting themes. Those themes are the "trends and issues within society that may reflect contemporary realities as well as historical continuity" (Nickols et al. 2009, p. 275). The trend in corrections has not favored the family members who are left behind.

Several studies document the effects on children and the implications their parent's incarceration has on their well-being (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Galardi et al. 2015; Lowenstein, 1986; Petsch, & Rochlen, 2009; Wilson, Gonzalez, Romero, Henry, & Cerbana, 2010). Incorporating a literacy program in prison that includes both parent and child may reduce stress for the parent and child and increase literacy efficacies for both parent and child, while building stronger relationships between them even while the parent is still separated by their incarceration. Family is the cornerstone of FCS as shown in their tagline: "Creating Healthy & Sustainable Families" (American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences, AAFCS). Through a successful parent-child reading program, prison officials can help inmates maintain strong family ties, reduce recidivism, increase employment opportunities, and decrease instances of intergenerational criminal activity.

FCS uses a critical science approach in the development of curriculum and instruction. An element of critical science is to identify a perennial problem. This study uses temporal discourse analysis through reflective writing as a component of my autoethnography to garner additional insight on how my attitudes and education affected my thoughts in regard to inmates and their opportunities to interact with their

families during incarceration. Rehm describes this type of learning as critical literacy and explains how it "involves powerful habits of thinking, reading, speaking, and writing by which we probe beneath the surface meaning of words to comprehend root causes of problems…" (Johnson & Fedje, 1999, p. 59). Perennial problems addressed in this study are maintaining relationships with family while incarcerated, literacy acquisition, improving rapport among inmates and correctional workers. These perennial problems each have correlations to how families learn to cope with and improve their situation while working through the struggles associated with having a member of the family incarcerated. They also address how as correctional workers we can improve upon our communication and interactions with inmates to be a more positive influence on their rehabilitation and ultimately reduce the rate of recidivism.

Theoretical Framework

Two major theories guide this autoethnography. The first is Krumboltz's theory of *Planned Happenstance*. John Krumboltz (2009) is a career theorist that developed his idea based off the indecision he saw in his clients regarding their career choices. Krumboltz theorized that unplanned events can lead to desirable and sensible decisions regarding a person's career opportunities. The second is *Self-Determination Theory (SDT).* This theory was developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, both respected scholars and Ryan a clinical psychologist. SDT is a theory of motivation that focuses on intrinsic aspects of motivation and how that motivation affects social and cultural factors. According to Furlich (2013, p. 1):

> The two different types of motivation in self-determination theory are autonomous and controlled. Autonomous motivation is performed from the individual's desire to exert effort from their own choice. On the other hand, controlled motivation stems from external pressure to accomplish a particular outcome.

Autonomous motivation is associated with the more common term *intrinsic motivation,* while controlled motivation aligns with *extrinsic motivation.* Within correctional education, controlled motivation is often the driving force to encourage inmates to accomplish a task; the goal is to develop that autonomous motivation so they can become more self-determined and drive their own success to a productive life outside the prison walls.

The study will touch on how Planned Happenstance has more than career applications as a working theory. It may also guide decisions in everyday situations related to self, family, and the community. Mitchell (2003) describes Planned Happenstance as both the attitude you gain along with actions you take. In the field of FCS, major emphasis is placed on developing positive attitudes about self, family, and the community and the actions one takes to improve them.

The mission of the professional organization providing oversight and training in FCS related fields, the AAFCS (2016), states, "To provide leadership and support for professionals whose work assists individuals, families, and communities in making informed decisions about their wellbeing, relationships, and resources to achieve optimal quality of life". The field also promotes using those attitudes to pursue family

life and careers in a way that benefits the individual and the world around them. This is the action aspect of Mitchell's description. Acting on choices, whether planned or not, is the premise of Planned Happenstance Theory. It can easily be seen how Planned Happenstance Theory can be applied to most if not all of life's circumstances.

Key Terms

Andragogy: Pedagogical approach to studying how adults learn.

Autoethnography: A qualitative form of inquiry where the researcher uses personal experiences to express some form of learning and meaning to a larger audience.

Critical Science Approach: A method of analyzing and thinking in an effort to develop solutions to problems current in our everyday lives.

Ethnography: a systematic study and recording of race, people and cultures.

Happenstance Learning Theory: A model used in career counseling and related to Planned Happenstance Theory, where a person takes advantage of unplanned learning events and opportunities to improve their current situation in both their career and life.

Perennial Problems: An issue found within families, cultures, communities, and societies that continually has to be addressed. Adequate housing is an example of a perennial problem.

Planned Happenstance Theory: A career theory founded on the idea that a person can capitalize on both planned and unplanned events taking place in their life.

Recidivism: The reference term used to explain a relapse in a person's criminal behavior after having been released from some form of correctional supervision.

Reflective Writing: A method of thinking about events or outcomes in order to learn from or share your own experiences.

Self-Determination Theory: A theory on motivation that focuses on the intrinsic aspects of motivation and how that motivation affects social and cultural factors.

Temporal Discourse Analysis: A method of analysis used to gain an understanding of phenomenon, attitudes, or growth related to the social aspects of language, both spoken and written across time.

Thematic Analysis: A method of analysis used in qualitative research to find themes across data sets that are significant enough to provide insight to the research questions.

Researcher's Assumptions

As I work my way through the phases of my life experiences, formal education and career decisions, it is my belief that elements can be identified that will assist correctional workers in approaching their daily interactions with inmates with greater sensitivity and concern for their overall wellbeing, education, and the much-needed connectedness to their families and community. I also assume that through this study, readers will see the value in embracing the concept of lifelong learning, not only in furthering their own careers but in encouraging this trait in others. I also anticipate learning more about myself and how my experiences have affected my career and my goal to make a positive difference in the lives of inmates.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"*If you plan to be successful in a certain field, educate yourself, push yourself, achieve your goal, and all else will fall in line*."

~Kyle Roberson

In this review of the literature, the first two sections introduce the two theoretical concepts that guided the autoethnography; Planned Happenstance and Self-Determination Theory. Within each of these sections, related theories and examples are included to further develop the framework and understanding. The next section investigates the importance of a literacy component in re-entry efforts for both inmates and their family members. This section discusses parenting programs and specific examples of incorporating literacy coaching and learning into prison literacy outreach programs. In the last section, incarceration is investigated from the perspective of *family* and how those perspectives might affect each stakeholder.

Planned Happenstance

Most are familiar with the age-old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Truth be told, most of us never realized those early ambitions, while opportunities presented to us throughout our lives more likely spelled out different paths. Chance may prove to take a larger role in where we end up in our careers and personal lives. People and events we encounter throughout life will have a profound impact on our individual attitudes, choices, and beliefs. These influencers also contribute to the decisions we make that guide us in our personal lives and career choices. How did those influencers become part of the decision-making process? What

was the likelihood that chance played a role in who those influencers are in our lives? What opportunities have developed because of those interactions? These types of questions can be considered as we explore the theory of Planned Happenstance.

John Krumbolz developed the theory of Planned Happenstance, which simply stated, is learning to develop and recognize opportunities in our personal lives, careers, and academics whether they were planned or happened by chance. Krumboltz is a noted career theorist and has used his theory to assist clients who face indecision in their pursuit of career choices and other opportunities. When practicing strategies encouraged by the theory, Krumboltz et al. (2010) state how one can take advantage of unplanned events and transform those events into positive opportunities.

There are many aspects to planned happenstance that are discussed, but to understand the theory it may best be described as a set of steps, which are very well explained by Kathleen Mitchell. Mitchell explains that there is a wide spread notion in "American culture that career planning is a logical and linear activity" (plannedhappenstance.com, n.d.), when really it is a combination of planned events intertwined with serendipity, luck, and the ability and wherewithal to act on those unplanned experiences and chance encounters. The four steps outlined by Mitchell (n.d.) are accompanied with an additional easy to remember three-point definition.

Four step outline.

1. **Clarify Ideas**: Follow your curiosity and identify your interests
2. **Remove the Blocks**: Wonder "how I can" rather than "I can't because…"

3. **Expect the Unexpected**: Be prepared for chance opportunities, such as unexpected phone calls, chance encounters, impromptu conversations, and new experiences.
4. **Take Action**: Learn, develop skills, remain open and follow-up on chance events.

Three point definition.

Planned: having arranged the parts

Happen: to occur by chance

Stance: a view or attitude

Few people would discount that chance has benefitted them in some form or fashion within both their personal life and career choices (Kim et al., 2014; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999). Even though this belief has largely been accepted, there are a limited number of studies in how happenstance, luck, coincidence or fate affect our career and life choices. This may be because many career counselors have not considered or even discussed how chance events and encounters can play an important role in creating opportunities for their clients (Guindon & Hanna, 2002; Kim et al., 2014; Krumboltz, 2009; Mitchell et al., 1999; Rice, 2014). Typically, using traditional interest inventories that measure an individual's "interests, skills, and values with specific occupations is seen as a way to reduce the role of chance, luck, or happenstance" (Mitchell et al., 1999). Interest inventories cannot be discounted as a useful tool to provide direction or a starting point and should not be relied upon as the sole source of a client's answer to their future career. Counselors need to recognize chance events as a vital component of career counseling and train their clients to react

appropriately to unplanned events (Rice, 2014). Mitchell et al. (1999) suggested five skills needed to recognize and take advantage of chance opportunities: curiosity, persistence, flexibility, optimism, and risk taking (Kim et al., 2014). Instead of attempting to reduce chance using these inventories, the counselor can coach their clients to use these skills to embrace unplanned and chance events; these are inevitable phenomenon they are going to encounter throughout their lifecycle anyway.

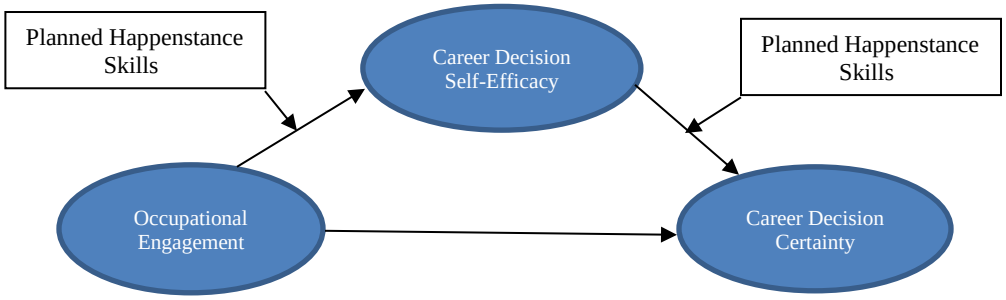

Figure 2.1: Theoretical Model (Kim et al., 2014).

In a study of 237 men and women, researchers found eleven of the most common events, both positive and negative, which were unplanned, that can be used as an example of what counselors can reference when working with clients (Betsworth & Hanson, 1996). The researchers reported, "The results of the study indicated that 63% of the men and 57% of the women felt that their careers were influenced by serendipitous events" (Betsworth & Hanson, 1996, p. 91). The categories are summarized in the table below.

Table 2.1

Categories of Chance Events from Betsworth and Hansen (1996)

Type of chance event	Description
Professional or personal connections	Relationships with employers, friends, professors, advisors, or colleagues produced information about jobs, informal recommendations to employers, invitations to join a specific program or position, and job offers
Unexpected advancement	The resignation, firing, or death of a previous worker and the subsequent selection or promotion of the participant into the vacated position
Right place/right time	Job opportunities arose at a time when participants were best able or prepared to take advantage of them
Influences of marriage and Family	Events related to family. Commonly: (a) participants discussed the influence of their partners' careers on their own choices, including lifestyle, occupation, homemaking, and nonwork activities; and (b) participants discussed changes in their relationships that altered their career paths, such as the illness or death of a partner or divorce
Encouragement of others	Significant others provided encouragement for participants to acquire education and experience, set higher goals, or pursue a new field
Influence of previous work/volunteer experience	Past volunteer or work experiences allowed participants to develop talents and interests, gain necessary qualifications, or acquire experience in new areas of interest
Military experience	Military service experiences influence participants' career Paths
Temporary position became permanent	Participants' tenure in jobs that they initially viewed as short term, evolved into long-term tenure due to personal choice (position was interesting or challenging) or job change (position became permanent or full-time)
Obstacles in original career path	Obstacles (e.g., lack of jobs, financial strain, illness, discrimination) hindered participants from pursuing their original career goals
Influence of historical events	Participants' career development was influenced by historical events, such as the Great Depression and World War II
Unintended exposure to interest area	Events that reflect the unexpected manner by which participants become interested in their subsequent fields (e.g., "I happened to visit an animal hospital and became interested in veterinary medicine")

Related Theories

Career development theories, which include Planned Happenstance Theory, also include several other theories related to chance and unplanned events. These events go by many names. However, there are differences, and a brief explanation can assist in understanding the implications of their use in career development practices and ideologies associated with an individual's values, beliefs, and skills.

Synchronicity. One of the earlier explanations used to describe chance was developed by Carl Jung, a psychiatrist, who wanted to explain phenomena that could not adequately be explained by science; but were relevant to the opportunities one might have experienced through coincidence. Synchronicity is the term coined by Jung to explain "the occurrence of a meaningful coincidence in time" (Guindon et al., 2002, p. 197). This approach, Guindon et al. explains, is holistic in that the career counselor is not only considering objective indicators such as personal interests, skills, values, needs, and personality, but the counselor also considers subjective factors such as spirituality and transcendence.

Guindon explains that synchronicity can be viewed in three primary forms:

1. The coincidence of a subjective psychic content with a correspondingly objective process that is perceived to take place simultaneously.
2. The coincidence of a subjective psychic state with a dream or vision, "which later turns out to be a more or less faithful reflection of a 'synchronistic' objective event that took place more or less

simultaneously, but at a distance" (as cited in de Laszlo, 1958, p. 282).

3. The coincidence of a subjective psychic state with a dream or vision in which the "synchronistic" objective event perceived takes place in the future and is represented in the present by the dream or vision that corresponds to it (p. 197).

Without going into the full depth of the case studies in Guindon et al. (2002) research, synchronicity can be explained with these simplified explanations:

1. In the first form, a person has a sense about what they should be doing or what their life work should entail. Through chance and the subconscious notion of where they should be directing their energy, events take place that lead to the realization of their dream(s). For one example, consider a person who dreamed of being a nurse or saw themselves as someone who should care for other people. This person may have taken steps to realize this dream, like attending college for nursing, but he or she ended up in a position that was not satisfying personally due to other uncontrollable events. As this person realized the dissatisfaction with their job, they simultaneously have an encounter with someone or something that allows them to change direction and fulfill their original goal. For instance, while looking for a new position, they run into an old friend or professor who mentions a new medical clinic that is looking for nurses with their specialized skill set.

2. The second form can correlate with a person's spiritual beliefs. Take for example a person who has a strong faith in allowing God to direct his or her life through prayer. A person may find themselves praying for a change, while at the same time they are taking the steps to better their situation. A layoff from a job may be something this person prays about. They may ask God to provide a new source of income or employment and to take care of their family in trying times, while at the same time they are taking steps to help themselves find that new job. When that new job comes along the person may faithfully reflect that God has answered their prayers.

3. The third form may take place through dream interpretation coupled with a person knowingly seeking to understand what the dream meant. An example may be a person who tells of a recurring dream of walking through a junk yard of old cars surrounded by wheat fields. This same person may be an auto mechanic with an ardent desire to restore old cars but does not have the means. This recurring dream may be interpreted when the mechanic finds himself walking through a farm yard that has been unexpectedly inherited from a distant relative. While surveying the new property, it is discovered that behind the barn are a lot of old cars needing to be restored. This unexpected event and added income from leasing the farm land out has compelled the mechanic to pursue his dream of restoring old cars, giving credit for the opportunity to the recurring dream with the belief, "I always dreamt I would get to do this." This

> situation may be explained, in that the mechanic could have visited that farm as a young child and played around those old cars, later developed a love of cars and pursued a career in auto mechanics. When the dreams began, it stirred an interest in restoration of old cars. This feeling of transcendence is synchronicity.

In each case, the person has done something to assist themselves in realizing their goal, while also crediting chance, fate, coincidence, happenstance, or the hand of God. This theory is subjective and Guindon et al. (2002) suggest four ways for their clients to think in this synchronistical manner: (a) understand synchronistic phenomena in relationship to their spiritual beliefs, world views, and scientific inquiry; (b) be willing to investigate one's own spirituality in the broadest sense; (c) think outside the box and be willing to be unconventional in their approach to career counseling; and (d) be willing to approach ideas and opportunities in a non-traditional way in the career development process.

Chaos Theory. The chaos theory is a multidisciplinary concept that attempts to explain how relatively minor occurrences, that often go unnoticed can lead to events that have major implications. Three key terms describe what chaos theory researchers consider essential in understanding the theory: *sensitive dependence, deterministic*, and *nonlinear*. Sensitive dependence is the mathematical version of the concept (Smith, 2007; Williams, 1997), which for the purposes of this investigation will not go into any significant detail on the actual formulas, but rather, will use narrative to explain how the unpredictable nature of chaos is evident. Deterministic refers to the mathematical prediction of a *system* "whose past and future are completely determined

by its present state and any new input" (Williams, 1997, p. 451). *System,* in chaos terms, refers to any grouping of interrelating parts such as social systems, i.e. families, work places, communities, and societies. *Nonlinear* simply stated is anything not linear. Linear, therefore, is anything that when observed or plotted does not deviate from a straight line, completely predictable. One last term used often when discussing chaos theory is the term *noise*. Noise across many disciplines, when discussing possible variables, can consist of any outside influence that is present and uncontrollable that potentially affects our perception of information or data being collected.

The most notable example of chaos theory is the phrase coined by the theory's recognized developer, Edward Lorenz, when he spoke at a conference in 1972 (Oestriecher, 2007). The title of the presentation is now a familiar phrase, *Predictability: does the flap of a butterfly's wing in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?* The seemingly harmless flap of a butterfly's wing causing a tornado miles away is what in physics is called the *principle of causality*, which simply stated means: "Every effect has a cause" (Oestriecher, 2007, p. 281). The idea of cause and effect certainly dates back further than the conference where Lorenz's discussion put chaos theory on the map. However, for this research, the mathematical axioms used in chaos theory for most disciplines are not relative to aspects of causality related to the qualitative study of nonlinear events of a social context.

According to Rice (2014), "Chaos theory states that we live in a world of nonlinear, dynamic, changing systems that can produce complex and varied outcomes over time" (p. 450). Using this definition, we can see how it applies to our personal

and career lives. To put this in an easy to understand context, we can take the interactions of two separate people who respond differently in virtually the same situation.

Consider two police officers who have the same goal of promoting into a supervisory position within their department. Both take the sergeant's exam, scoring the same, both have stellar performance evaluations, and each are equally supported by their respective supervisors. The point being that either one of the officers is likely to be selected. Chaos theory does not consider chance events or how people react to them (Rice, 2014). Over time each officer will make decisions that affect their career progression and presumably end up in completely different positions by the end of their respective careers.

In sticking with the butterfly effect, the one officer who was selected may end up becoming Chief of Police or the next director of the FBI, while the one not selected decided the stress of the application process was not worth pursuing again and finished out a career as a uniformed officer. That single decision, *flap of the butterfly's wing*, in choosing one officer over the other for promotion, possibly had profound or disproportionate effects on each of their lives. In chaos theory, this is called "sensitivity to initial conditions," (Kiel & Elliott, 1997, & Oestreicher, 2007). One officer moved on to greater positions of responsibility while the other officer's career stagnated. These minor chances, decisions, opportunities, and sensitivity to the initial conditions, for two individuals, whom we could reasonably consider as having linear career trajectories, end up demonstrating the nonlinear system by which chaos theory in career progression is evident. Williams (1997) summarized this well in stating,

"important practical implications are that long-term predictions under chaotic conditions ... can have simple causes" (p. 7). In contrast, nor will every flap of a butterfly's wing cause a tornado in another part of the world.

Happenstance Learning Theory. Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT) is the evolution of the theory of Planned Happenstance that addresses the cognitive processes we develop with each new experience, whether those experiences were planned or unplanned (Krumboltz, 2009). Within HLT there are several components that must be considered, as each one is influential in the learning that takes place and how we use planned and unplanned experiences to further our knowledge and make informed decisions.

To begin with, Krumboltz (2009) pointed out that there are certain aspects of our existence that are completely uncontrollable. Each of us, when born, have no control over our genetics, who are parents are, what part of the world we are born into, and no ability to control our socioeconomic situation as a child. HLT comes into play when we take the opportunity to learn from the happenstance that occurs around us.

Instrumental Learning. Instrumental learning experiences are associated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that will be discussed in more detail further in this review of literature. This type of learning can be both positive and negative. Take positive reinforcement for example. A child might receive a reward for having accomplished a task directed by their parent. The instrument of learning is not only accomplishing the task but learning that a good job pays rewards. The reward may

encourage the child to volunteer for other tasks, which increases their opportunity to learn.

Instrumental learning must have the necessary components to take place. Using the above example, there must be a task to be accomplished and a parent that is willing to reward the child for their accomplishment. Negative consequences also afford the opportunity to learn. Should the child not have accomplished the task, there would be no reward and maybe even punishment. Both offer a mechanism for learning, and depending on the individual child, they "can judge the extent to which the experience is enjoyable or painful and may govern their future behavior accordingly" (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 138).

Associative Learning. Associative learning experience relates to one's environment. An example of this can be a younger sibling learning from the mistakes of an older sibling. Consider a teenager who missed curfew and is punished by having an earlier curfew the next few weeks. The younger sibling may have witnessed the distress of their sibling and when they are old enough to go out in the evening, they consciously choose to adhere to the curfew to avoid negative consequences.

Associative learning is more than learning from those around us, but it ties to all aspects of our environment. A person's socioeconomic position will determine what exposure one receives; the number of books and literacy opportunities, experiencing parks and museums, what school system they are enrolled in, or college or vocational trades schools they are able to afford. A good example of this type of learning can be explained using the same two siblings.

Propose the older sibling graduated from high school and entered a trade school to learn a skill that immediately after graduation landed them a job which afforded opportunities the two siblings had dreamt about growing up. The younger sibling, through associative learning, might follow the same path or make similar choices to create those same opportunities.

This example of associative learning brings us full circle back to planned happenstance theory and how the two are related. The younger sibling had no control over who their sibling would be—happenstance, but learned using elements of HLT, that positive rewards can be experienced when acting on what one learns. The "planned" component of happenstance theory is evidenced when the younger sibling took the necessary steps to achieve the same opportunities witnessed with the older sibling. This situation brings us to what motivated each of them, as we look at self-determination theory as a consideration.

Self-Determination Theory

In order to act on planned happenstance, there is also the need to have a certain level of intrinsic motivation that drives a person to take advantage of those unplanned situations. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory on motivation that focuses on the intrinsic aspects of motivation and how that motivation affects social and cultural factors. Brooks and Young write, "According to SDT, Reeve & et al. (2011) state, people are intrinsically motivated when they are self-determined" (p. 49).

There has been a significant amount of research conducted using SDT over the years. This is understandable when considering how many aspects of our lives revolve around being motivated to get something done, pursue a career, achieve goals, etc. For

the purpose of this investigation, the focus is on SDT in regard to motivating learners and acting on happenstance.

Motivation. There are three basic forms of motivation: amotivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. Amotivation is the lack of motivation. With intrinsic motivation, a student does not need outside incentives, and it has been argued that these may even be counterproductive (Hartnett, St. George, & Dron, 2011). With intrinsic motivation, a student learns because they enjoy the process of learning and not because it comes with some type of reward, such as good grades. Extrinsically motivated students in contrast seek recognition, good grades, or simply avoiding negative consequences for their efforts. The realm between these types of motivation is where SDT lies and is well stated by Hartnett et al. (2011):

> This model conceptualizes a continuum of regulation that ranges from amotivation (lack of motivation) at one end to intrinsic motivation at the other. Between these, there exist different types of extrinsic motivation that vary in the degree to which externally motivated behavior is autonomously determined (i.e., self-determined) (p.22).

Self-determination theory is another way of explaining the idea of intrinsic motivation:

> "To the extent that behaviors are self-determined, they are experienced as freely chosen and emanating from one's self. In the first part of the self-determined theory, intrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity for itself and to the pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation" (Betul, Haluk, & Ozmen, 2011, p.219).

In science classes, research has shown that even though the margin is not huge, learning that involves laboratory experiments is more of a motivation for learning than lecture or rote memorization of scientific information. Students gain satisfaction from the participation and hands on activities necessary in the lab.

Research also shows that the less restrictive nature of learning in the lab where students are free to work together in collaboration with their peers provides a more positive atmosphere for making connections with new knowledge (Betul et al., 2011). With more academic success comes an increase in student motivation, which in turn perpetuates more academic achievement. Betul et al. (2011) researched several studies that explained how students' academic success increases when their motivation levels increase.

Other sources of motivation in regard to learning mentioned in the literature are related to gender and parental education levels. Researchers have found that female students outperform and maintain higher levels of motivation than their male counterparts. Differences in motivation can be attributed to their environments. Family attitudes towards education and career opportunities may be a major contributing factor. Parents may have higher expectations for their daughters because they know they will have to be better prepared for entering male dominated industries of science and research.

Education levels of parents are also a contributing aspect of student motivation, though not at the degree that researchers expected. However, the concept makes sense. Parents with advanced degrees tend to encourage and expect higher levels of success and academic performance. One study as cited by Mamlok-Naaman

found a positive relationship between the "number of books in a home, frequency of buying a daily newspaper, and income as indicators of SES and self-efficacy" (Betul et al., 2011, p.220). Self-efficacy in this example can be related to intrinsic motivation. Parents may be responsible for providing support and the best environment for their children, but they are not the top resource students use for information when it comes to science learning. With advances in technology, students often refer to the internet for most information (Betul et al., 2011), a modeling effect of their parents' own self-efficacy.

Reading. Reading is a necessary skill for success across most all curricula, jobs, and careers. Fostering a love of reading is critical to the success of students and those entering the workforce (Wise, 2009). So how do we motivate people to read? Research in reading strategies has suggested that a lack of motivation in reading can be directly attributed to reading difficulties. In a report from the US Department of Education, 37% of 4th graders in 2001 had not learned to read (Manning, Aliefendic, Chiarelli, Haas, & Williams, 2012). Motivating a struggling reader is a difficult task. Many times, these students become withdrawn from class and discussions out of fear of being called upon to read aloud (Beers, 2003). This is arguably the worst teaching method to use when teaching reading in any content area, because students read at so many different levels. There is no need to further a problem by embarrassing a struggling reader. Without intervention, students who are entering the 4th grade will very seldom achieve reading skills at the level of their peers who are fluent readers. Intervention is then only successful in 13% of those students (Manning et al., 2012). At this point, students who are not reading fluently will probably never read fluently.

The researchers point out an interesting analogy called the *Matthew Effect* in connecting meaning, stating "the rich-get-richer," and "the poor-get-poorer." Findings show that "children who read well and have good vocabulary are the same children who will read more, learn more, and view the learning as interesting and relevant" (Manning et al., 2012, p.12). To keep learning interesting and relevant for struggling readers, researchers suggest allowing more individual choice in reading material.

Research has also found that teachers are spending far too much time on exercises that simply ensure students perform well on standardized tests (Gallagher, 2009). Minimal time is spent in sustained silent reading (SSR). This activity has been removed from school curricula to allow for more time to prepare for standardized tests (Gallagher, 2009). The result is students have lost valuable reading time and spend more time listening to their teacher. In order to motivate students to read, we as educators, have to allow them the time to read and to read material that is of interest to them. SSR provides students that time to enjoy reading without worrying about tests or homework and is a valuable way to complement other reading lessons. "Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed" (Manning et al., 2012, p.12). Many schools have gone so far as to remove novels from their curriculum to allow for more testing. Gallagher (2009) states that this denies students the necessary reading skills to develop deeper analytical thought and critical thinking skills. Leavy (2015) also states that fiction based research is an excellent way to bring knowledge to a larger community. An example of this could include fictional stories that base their characters around actual historical events. The

students may be more motivated when they can relate to the characters and may seek to find more information on their own.

Then there is the question of whether we need to motivate students or rather focus our attention on not diminishing what motivation is already there. Dr. Richard F. Bowman Jr. (2007) suggests in our current educational system that we as educators are responsible for the lack of motivation we see in older students. He mentions that almost all preschool and kindergarten students come to school eager and excited to learn and enjoy coming to school. However, as children get older and start to enter the 3rd and 4th grades, many students begin to dislike school (Bowman Jr., 2007). Research suggests that the more restrictive environments and strict curriculum hamper student motivation. Schools will knowingly place restrictive policies on students and teachers which are meant to control 5% of unruly students, while the 95% suffer the same restrictions, thus hampering their motivation (Bowman Jr., 2007). This is not unlike most, if not all correctional education settings. There is a balance that needs to be maintained between the security needs of the institution and being so strict that learning is stifled.

The educational setting is not meant to be a restrictive environment, but rather, it is a place for growth and fulfillment. Often school work is viewed as a source of points, grades, and treats, when what educators should be doing is developing a love of learning and showing students the real reasons why they would want to excel. Intrinsic motivation is key to students' success, and this is what Bowman suggests educators encourage. Bowman (1982) references an excellent analogy from some of

his previous work, using the idea behind students' motivation to play video games as to how educators should develop productive learning environments:

> Each is steeped in (a) clarity of task, (b) clear awareness of participant roles and responsibilities, (c) choice in the selection and execution of problem-solving strategies, (d) potentially-balanced systems of skills and challenges, and (e) a progressive hierarchy of challenges to sustain interest. Moreover, each reflects (a) unambiguous feedback, (b) affirmation of the instructiveness of error, (c) seemingly infinite opportunities for self-improvement, (d) provision for active involvement in tasks which are rooted in the high probability of success, (e) freedom from fear of reprisal, ridicule, or rejection, and (f) an overarching recognition of the need for learners to enjoy what they experience in the classrooms of life.

Bowman (1982) continues with seven suggestions to aid educators in helping create this type of environment: Say thank you, Recognize students' actions, Foster positive expectations, Provide precise feedback incrementally, Aid students in finding meaning, Put a human face on opportunities, Show values as a source of self-motivation, and Provide new perspectives (p.84-85).

Literacy and Incarceration

Illiteracy is an epidemic in this country and around the world. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), there are 32 million U.S. adults who cannot read, while 21% of U.S. adults read at or below the 5th grade level. Globally there are 774 million people who cannot read with 66% of those being female (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Illiteracy in these numbers is staggering and comes at a huge

cost. Illiteracy detracts $225 billion or more a year from the United States alone due to non-productivity in the workforce, crime, loss of tax revenue, and unemployment. Another $230 billion is lost to annual health care costs due to illiteracy, reports the Sioux Falls Literacy Council (2014).

Illiteracy and high school dropout rates are also seen as a contributing factor to why men and women find themselves operating on the wrong side of the law. It is estimated that sixty-eight percent of state inmates, and forty-nine percent of federal inmates, did not complete high school or could be considered illiterate (BJS, 2003). Being unable to read and write can be directly attributed to the reasons many individuals end up in prison, with high school dropouts being "far more likely to be arrested or incarcerated" (Wise, 2009, p. 371). Being unable to support their families by not having opportunities that being literate provides leads some people to potentially seek illegal alternatives by which to support their family. This is evidenced by the growing prison population, and adversely affects all the members of their family and their communities.

Prison populations have increased dramatically during for a period of time, leaving an increasing number of children in single parent homes (Lowenstein, 1986; Petsch & Rochlen, 2009; Wakefield, Lee, & Wilderman, 2016). Petsch and Rochlen (2009) reported that in 1991, the population of children with at least one parent incarcerated jumped 8 percent. Part of this is due to the increase in the number of female inmates being convicted and having to serve prison sentences. The negative consequence of having a parent removed from the home is the creation of an environment prone to a multitude of psychosocial difficulties (Petsch & Rochlen,

2009). Children with incarcerated parents are more likely to act out in school which will undoubtedly inhibit their academic progress. This behavior can be attributed to a number of factors such as their socioeconomic status, violence, substance abuse, mental illness, isolation, and family dissolution, all of which are potential problems faced by the children of incarcerated parents (Arditti et al., 2003; Block, Brown, Barretti, Walker, Yudt, & Fretz, 2014; Galardi et al., 2015; Lowenstein, 1986; Peterson, Cramer, Kurs, & Fontaine, 2015; Wilson et al., 2010). Since poor academic performance can be tied to increased likelihood of criminal activity, it is important to provide intervention programs that are effective and include support from the incarcerated parent. Visiting and parenting programs in prisons and jails have proven successful in helping children cope and maintain a healthy relationship with their incarcerated parent (Petsch & Rochlen, 2009).

Parenting Programs. Expanding parenting and visiting programs offered through prisons and jails can help strengthen family ties and provide an opportunity for the incarcerated parent to contribute to their child's mental wellness, academic growth, and reduce recidivism rates of the inmates (Galardi et al., 2015; Hutton, 2016; Wilson et al., 2010). In the federal prison system, this aspect of wellbeing for both parent and child has been addressed in the form of required programming within each of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) 122 institutions. The importance of literacy is specifically addressed in the program statement under the Parenting Education Program Outline, which states, "Understanding the importance of raising the reading levels of inmates, spouses, and their children" (BOP, p. 4).

Literacy is an important life skill, and the majority of incarcerated individuals do not score as well in prose literacy evaluation (Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007). It has been documented that both incarcerated males and females had lower prose literacy skills than adults with the same degree of education living in households (Greenberg et al., 2007). Correspondingly, children with incarcerated parents experience declines in their academic performance including their literacy skills as well as exhibiting behavioral problems (Solomon & Uchida, 2007). Soloman and Uchida also express that children with incarcerated parents are at higher risks for delinquency and other anti-social behavior. Using programs that encourage interaction and parental assistance with literacy and homework can increase student achievement. Waldfogel (2012) states that "some groups of children are more likely than their peers to experience challenging early environments and less-than-optimal early parenting, they are at risk for problems in literacy as well as other domains" (p. 40). Students who cannot read give up trying and eventually may give up school (Beers, 2003). These types of behaviors can lead to a continued cycle of family incarceration.

Modeling Strategies. Modeling strategies can be used to encourage children to read even when the parent is incarcerated. "Say Something" is a very effective strategy that can be used a couple of different ways in a correctional environment. This purpose of the strategy is to help students comprehend what they read by reading or saying something about what they just read (Beers, 2003). There are many other strategies that can be used by parents to aid comprehension. Gill (2008) lists several that can be used by incarcerated parents: (a) Connecting—during phone conversations, the parent can discuss how the stories they have read connect with or

relate to their lives or other readings; (b) Questioning, Predicting, Retelling—can each take place in all three methods parents are able to communicate with their children: phone, writing, and social visits, and (c) Visualizing—during social visits, the parent can have the child draw a picture related to the events in the story. During visitations, parents can model reading strategies using inflection when they read to their children. This strategy aids in reading comprehension because it can demonstrate important points of the text. Parents can incorporate a number of reading strategies during social visits to include Think-Alouds, Reciprocal Questioning, Directed Reading-Thinking, and can even ask their children to draw pictures of what they read to encourage and determine comprehension (Gill, 2008).

> *I do not remember the year this childhood memento was created; however, I do remember my mother encouraging us to draw about some of the stories she read us. Possibly, after having the story of Dumbo read to me, I wrote the story of Bobo the Sukes elifint. Obviously, I was still working on my spelling.*

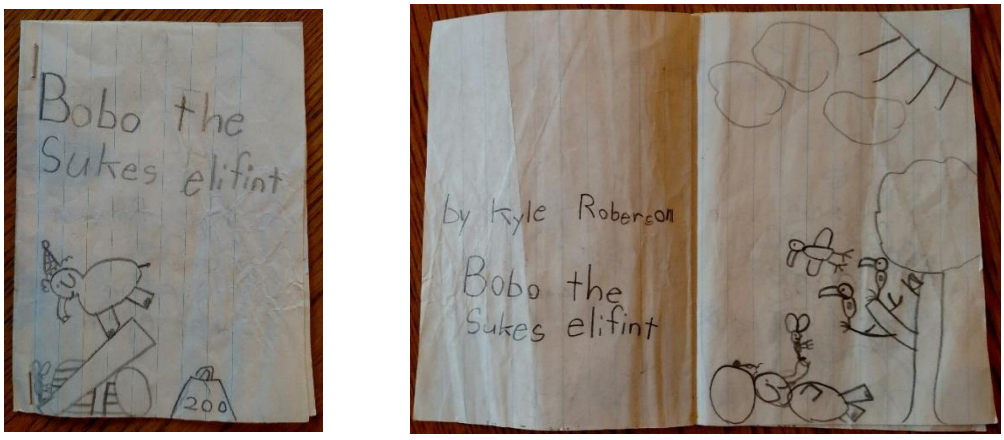

Figure 2.2: *Bobo the Sukes elifint* (Circus Elephant)

Building Vocabulary. Writing and vocabulary are other methods tied to literacy that can aid parents in improving their child's comprehension skills. Keene and Zimmermann (2013) point out that not only when readers discuss the content of the text, but write about it, "students are better able to dig deeper with their thinking when they read. In the process, they become better writers as well as readers" (p. 604). Vocabulary is no less important in developing proficient readers and improving comprehension. Research has shown that vocabulary instruction "often fails to produce measurable gains in reading comprehension" (Nagy, 1988, p. 4). Therefore, it is important to make it a component of reading comprehension and not the hinge pin. An important aspect of developing vocabulary is through Schema Theory. Schema-based processes in learning and remembering involves several processes and levels of analysis to include graphophonemic, morphemic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and interpretive. There are several processes at work when a reader is interpreting text. Analysis has to be ongoing using the information within the text and the schema the reader has already developed. First impressions may not always hold true. Anderson (1984) refers to this as "bottom-up" or "data driven" when the information is taken from the text verses "top-down" or "hypothesis driven" when the reader's schema makes the first judgment (p. 247). When a reader comes across an unknown word, they can infer its meaning based on the words around it and use their preexisting schema to develop a more thorough definition. Combining techniques in comprehension instruction, like building sematic maps (Table 2.2) or graphic organizers, can be used for vocabulary instruction and schema building. Anderson (1984) cautions that when using organizers, the words themselves have to be grounded

in familiar terms. The word *terrified,* for example, may be a new word and without other identifying text within a sentence such as, “The boy was terrified when he found out the roller coaster went upside down”, could be improperly defined. Using Schema Theory, the reader can be introduced to the word and create meaning with a little assistance. Without the assistance or other identifying text readers might infer the wrong meaning of *terrified*. The reader could as easily assume the word meant excited, thrilled, or happy depending on the reader’s outlook on roller coasters.

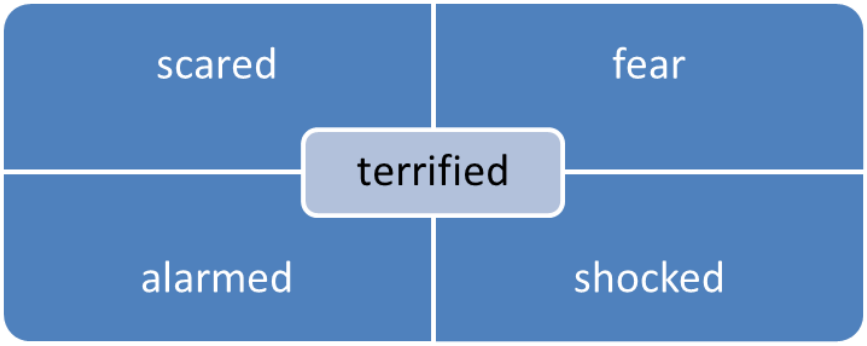

Figure 2.3: Semantic Map

Should a reader make the mistake in the definition of a word, there is no immediate cause for alarm. When we allow a reader the room to make mistakes, it aids in the learning process. Smith and Goodman (2008) believe that “we can be right without knowing, why we are right, while being wrong provides the opportunity for knowledgeable recertification” (p. 62). Additionally, when a child feels safe to make mistakes, coupled with discussion from a knowledgeable adult or peer, critical thinking is encouraged. Under adult guidance, as explained by Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the learner’s potential for greater gains is made available (Smagorinsky, 2007). The ZPD encourages the social aspect in learning

which can be accomplished through reading programs within prison visiting rooms. While reading the sentence with the word *terrified*, a parent will be able to relate a story or use a graphic organizer to assist the child in defining and using the word in other contexts.

Parent-Child Reading Program. The social aspect of literacy instruction ties in smoothly with the importance of a parent/child bond during a parent's term of incarceration. RIF states that through family literacy programs one can expect to:

- Improve family reading skills and enhance family interaction by sharing books with children.
- Promote parents' confidence as participants in their children's education.
- Foster supportive relationships among parents who face similar challenges.
- Encourage program advisors to become advocates for parents' needs.

These bullets align with the goals of the Parent-Child Reading Program and further quantify the need for literacy programs within prisons that include the sharing of books, visiting room access, and collaboration with other parents and advocates. This type of intervention will help expand and improve upon already existing programs. Several studies have found that the literacy level of both parents and children is lower than their peers when books and reading materials are not common around the household. The RIF website highlights a few key points which studies have found: children who receive print material read more often and for longer periods,

have improved attitudes towards reading and learning, and make progress on developing basic reading skills in sentence completion, sight words, and phonemic awareness (RIF).

Family and Incarceration

It has previously been discussed that when a person is incarcerated, they alone are not doing their time (Muth et al., 2014). Each member of the family, in a sense, is doing that same time with a whole separate set of challenges. Those being exposed to the criminal justice system through the incarceration of a spouse or parent has evidenced many negative outcomes such as residential instability, economic strain and financial hardship, mental health problems, poor academic performance, behavior and social problems, drug and alcohol use, and self-esteem issues (Arditt et al., 2003; Block et al., 2014; Galardi et al., 2015; Lowenstein, 1984; Peterson et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2010). Some of these risks can continue or evolve even after the parent is released (Galardi et al., 2015), and as reported in other research, nearly 40 percent of marriages end in divorce after the inmate returns home (Massoglia, Remster, & King, 2011). The importance of understanding family issues related to incarceration can assist researchers, correctional workers, counselors, teachers, administrators, and policy makers in developing and promoting programs that can hearten positive and continued family ties during a period of a spouse or parent's incarceration, to include transitions into family roles post-release.

Children. In discussing literacy programs within correctional settings, we have already touched on some of the issues related to the parent child relationship and how

prisons can facilitate improved relationships through educational programming. Parenting from behind bars goes beyond the literacy component when addressing the concerns of children. This is extremely important as longitudinal studies have revealed that children with an incarcerated parent are five times more likely to see prison time than their counterparts who have not had an incarcerated parent (Bock et al., 2014). Keeping relationships open and honest and having the parent accessible, whether by phone, mail, or visitation, have shown in studies to reduce the occurrence of intergenerational criminal activity and reduce the recidivism rate of the parent (Galardi et al., 2015, Kazura, 2001).

Incarcerated parents have the right to maintain a relationship with their children, and the children deserve the same expectation in maintaining a positive relationship with their incarcerated parent. This marginalized sector of our population concerns 2.7 million children (Gardner, 2015), hardly a demographic not worth considering in our policy development. Institutions along with inmate and child advocacy groups have recognized this and worked to develop parenting programs to address parenting efficacies and retaining relationships from behind bars. These rights have been spelled out by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership (SFCIPP) and are applicable to children across the country.

I HAVE THE RIGHT…

1. TO BE SAFE AND INFORMED AT THE TIME OF MY PARENT'S ARREST.
2. TO BE HEARD WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT ME.
3. TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT MY PARENT.

4. TO BE WELL CARED FOR IN MY PARENT'S ABSENCE.
5. TO SPEAK WITH, SEE AND TOUCH MY PARENT.
6. TO SUPPORT AS I FACE MY PARENT'S INCARCERATION.
7. NOT TO BE JUDGED, BLAMED OR LABELED.
8. TO A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MY PARENT.

Figure 2.4: Bill of Rights- SFCIPP

The question to be considered in viewing parent and child relationships for those families with an incarcerated parent, is "how do we implement programs and track outcomes that make a difference?" Consider that within the federal system alone, 122 institutions, there is not a standardized curriculum for a parenting program. Then consider fifty states and countless jurisdictions that may or may not have a parenting program. Moreover, many of these programs do not include the child as part of the program, but simply provide knowledge and instruction for the incarcerated parent. Block et al. (2014) asserts that not enough research has gone into evaluating parenting programs or fully understanding what does and does not work, specifically, for programs aimed at incarcerated fathers. However, there have been advancements in some programs that include the children as participants in the program.

Universal Children's Day is one such program that has been instituted within the BOP. This program was instituted in 2013 and mandated that every institution work with their local communities to hold special events through the visiting room at least once per year, allowing for inmates to bond with their children through activities not usually available on regular visitations (BOP, 2013). During that first national event, the BOP reported nearly 8,500 children visited more than 4000 of their parents

across the country, many experiencing the first time they could read to their children, draw and color pictures, and at some institutions, play outside on the grass and throw a football around (BOP, 2013).

Image source: https://www.bop.gov/resources/news/20130925_reconnecting.jsp

Figure 2.5: Camp Hope, BOP Family Day Event (2013).

The BOP also instituted an educational program in 2016 directed toward all staff, to assist them in understanding the benefits of the relationships needing to be maintained between inmates and their children. The program is called "*Children of Incarcerated Inmates Course"* and it trains staff to recognize the importance of the relationships and how to assist inmates in maintaining them. The then Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates (2016) said,

> Assisting inmates in maintaining family relationships while they are in prison is not only good for the individuals returning from prison and their families,

it's good for the community as well, because when a person has a strong support system when they are released, they are less likely to re-offend.

Other Family Ties. It is evident that children of an incarcerated parent are the focal point of research that promotes and supports empirical evidence that maintaining relationships between incarcerated parents and children is important. However, research on how other family members are affected by the incarceration of a significant other is sparse and under researched (Harlsey & Deegan, 2015; Wakefield, et al., 2016). For this section of the review, the focus will be on the significant other, including the incarcerated individual. It is understood, however, that the incarceration of any individual can have a profound impact on other family members, extended family, and the community at large (deVuono-powell, Schweidler, & Walters, 2015; Harlsey et al., 2015; Massoglia et al., 2011; Wakefield et al., 2016). When a family member is incarcerated, they alone are not the only one having to face difficult situations and hardships related to the separation. As mentioned previously, each family member is doing their *own time*, a victim of collateral damage in their family member's incarceration.

Significant Other. Considering that female inmates made up only 7% percent of the total prisoner population nationally as of the end of 2015, reported the BJS, this section will focus on the spouse or significant other of male inmates. This is not to minimize the point that when a female is incarcerated it does have significant ramifications on their significant other or any children involved. Evidence shows, "The reality, of course, is that 'the burdens of caring for prisoners from the outside' (Codd, 2007:260) are carried overwhelmingly by women" (Halsey et al., 2015, p. 133;

Lowenstein, 1984, 1986). This includes taking care of the family when children are involved, now as a "temporary, involuntary single parent" (Arditti et al., 2014, p. 196), dealing with financial difficulties more likely brought on by the criminal activity's court and litigation fees, loss of income, providing resources and financial support for the inmate, while still maintaining the household; arranging for social visits to maintain family ties, which can be costly using phone calls and considering travel expenses, not to mention time consuming, for making trips to and from where the inmate is incarcerated (Massoglia et al., 2011), and the trouble it takes to process into secure facilities (Halsey et al., 2015). A study by Arditti et al. (2003) shows that dealing with the incarceration of a family member can cause a decline in health, reporting that 48% of their respondents felt this way. These feelings have been substantiated by several subsequent studies which investigated the welfare of those family members left behind to deal with the associated stress.

Not only do spouses contend with the physical aspects of the predicament, i.e. the separation, they have been involuntarily placed in, they also endure the stress of being stigmatized. In the literature, multiple studies address the stigma associated with a family member's incarceration. Females have found themselves with less of a support network, "abandoned by friends who could not tolerate females' continued allegiance to a criminal partner" (Halsey et al., 2015, p. 137). Halsey et al. likened this situation to that of the ritual of a family member passing away. In this scenario, family and friends normally show support through kind gestures such as bringing over food and attending the funeral. However, when the partner is incarcerated, that show of support is often unavailable, even though the support needed in the sudden absence of

a family member is very similar. One respondent to this study replied, “Some of my best friends have just walked away” (Halsey et al., 2015, p. 137). This type of stress and reactions of the family have been documented for even very short jail or prison sentences (Arditti et al., 2003; Wakefield et al. 2016).

Even though the stigma of having a family member incarcerated and the burdens placed on the *still at home parent* have evidenced negative consequences, research has shown that the greater weight of evidence on the dissolution of the family has more to do with the actual physical separation (Massoglia et al., 2011). Divorce rates are high among returning incarcerated males and returning military personnel. As mentioned earlier, the divorce rates are 40% for inmate’s post release, while returning Vietnam veterans experienced a 38% divorce rate within six months of returning (Somanader & Jilani, 2011), and recent research on returning Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans indicates divorce is 28% more likely (Negrusa, Negrusa, & Hosek, 2013). This correlation is significant because the common factor is the separation. Massoglia et al. (2011) point out that even though spouses of veterans do not have the stress of the stigmatization, they do often deal with stress related to PTSD and other health issues upon the veteran’s return home. The link that Mossoglia et al. (2011) make, along with other research related themes, is that the separation through incarceration, much like deployments, “prevents meaningful interactions and limits physical and emotional connections” (p. 148). Over time, the connections and intimacy the couple shared deteriorate; when a spouse must suddenly adjust to a spouses’ return when they alone have been managing the household, adjustment

problems are likely to occur. This is evident in a statement cited by Mossoglia et al. (2011) from the work of Comfort (2008, p.161):

> When they leave and they're gone for a long period of time an' you're used to handling your own, a woman is used to handlin' they own, the bills, *everything*…that's kinda hard too to switch. Okay it's been like this for hecka months. Now you want me to come in and *switch*?

The Inmate. When an inmate is incarcerated, the concept of the court ordered sentence is that the separation from society is the punishment, along with any punitive monetary fines that may be ordered for restitution. The collateral damage experienced by the family in the absence of the inmate is not clearly recognized, because "historically, the justice system has concentrated on inmates as individuals, ignoring their families and communities" (Kazura, 2001, p. 68). Separated from their family, the inmate has very little control in maintaining a relationship with family. They can write letters, yet no one is required to write back. They can call home, but the receiver, with most prison phone systems, can block the calls, and they have no means to *make* anyone come visit them. They are essentially *shut off* from family if that is what the family wants. This can, understandably, create a lot of stress for the inmate.

Research suggests that when an inmate can maintain ties to their family, and the positive connections they have to the community, their chances of recidivism drop substantially (Bell & Cornwell, 2015; Cochran, 2014; Kazura, 2001; Merenstein et al., 2011). Additionally, evidence supports that inmates who assume their roles as parents and partners upon release have lower rates of recidivism versus those inmates without

community and family ties (Kazura, 2001). This empirical evidence points to the need of insuring that inmates have the ability and means to maintain contact with their families and communities.

Earlier in this review, we discussed using literacy to bond inmates with their children, addressed visitation opportunities, and reducing recidivism. What is deficient in prison programming across the correctional spectrum are programs designed to assist inmates in maintaining those other relationships, primarily those with their significant other. Funding is sparse, with the focus for reentry being on drug use prevention, education, vocational programming, anger management, and reentry skills necessary for securing employment and social services (Block et al., 2014). Institutions are lacking in on-site interventions supportive of services for families (Arditti et al., 2003). Families are at a loss, in this manner of support, and simply not recognized by those that hold the purse strings; "informal harms are not created by law or debated by legislatures" (Wakefield et al., 2016, p. 11) and thus not adequately funded.

One study found that simply holding family days, as described above, allows inmates to feel more like "real" families and that doing this more than once a year, a minimal cost, aids in maintaining those ties (Kazura, 2001). Additional programming related to marriage and family wellness would serve all stakeholders and depending on design, can be insignificant in cost. Bell et al. (2015) reported significant gains in contact with family members, especially children, when they conducted an evaluation of a family wellness course in three male prisons and two female institutions. Following up three months later, Bell et al. found that changes in behavior were

retained and even improved over time. For this population of inmates, it is seemingly applicable to provide resources and support during visiting hours, and to include dissemination of available outside resources (Arditti et al., 2003).

Summary

The review of this literature explains Krumboltz's career theory of Planned Happenstance, and how unplanned events and chance encounters can have a significant impact on the trajectory of our lives. The literature also points the benefits of having the right mental attitude when faced with unplanned opportunities. By taking advantage of serendipitous events, people can transform those events into positive opportunities (Krumboltz, 2009). The literature also explains how many career counselors neglect to discuss unplanned events; failing to train their clients on how to handle these inevitable occurrences. Mitchell et al. (1999) suggested five strategies to consider when faced with chance opportunities; (1) have some curiosity, (2) be persistent, (3) be flexible, (4) be optimistic, and (5) be willing to take risks.

The literature also discussed how motivation is a factor in acting on unplanned events. Self-Determination Theory explains how a level of intrinsic motivation in needed to be self-determined. Specifically, in this review of the literature the focus was concentrated on ways to motivate students to be successful in school. Intrinsic motivation is another way of describing self-determination, "To the extent that behaviors are self-determined, they are experienced as freely chosen and emanating from one's self (Buteul, Ozman, & Yigit, 2011, p. 219). The literature focused on

motivation in reading; pointing out specific strategies that can be used to foster intrinsic motivation.

Additionally, the literature discussed literacy and incarceration and how literacy intervention can be incorporated into parenting and visiting programs within the prison walls. Prison's are overcrowded with individuals who lack basic reading skills. Estimates from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2003) put state inmates at sixty-eight percent and federal inmates at forty-nine percent. Furthermore, the literature discussed how children are at higher risk of falling behind academically if they have an incarcerated parent (Solomon & Uchida, 2007). Strategies for incorporating literacy into prison parenting and visiting programs included teaching modeling strategies inmates could use with their children during social visits, how sematic mapping could be used to build vocabulary, and how writing can be used to increase comprehension.

Lastly, the literature discussed aspects of the family in regards to each of the stakeholders; children, significant others, and the inmates themselves. Muth et al. (2014) discussed in their study how an incarcerated person is not the only one doing *their t*ime. The literature pointed out that children have rights to maintain relationships with their incarcerated parent. The *Bill of Rights* used by the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership have been recognized across the county and include eight specific rights children should have regarding the incarceration of a parent.

The literature evidenced that the majority of studies concerning the affects on family revolved around the children. However, the literature addressed aspects of a

significant others. The stigma of having a family member incarcerated was detrimental to some people's relationships with friends. One study quoted a respondent as saying, "Some of my best friends have just walked away" (Halsey et al., 2015, p. 137).

Finally, the inmate was discussed in the review of literature. The difficulty with being separated from family and having to adjust to new and often difficult surroundings was addressed. Specifically, the idea that the person incarcerated is not the only person who suffers. while they do bare the weight for the suffering they cause their family members. The literature focused on how to reduce recidivism by assisting inmates in maintaining family ties. Because the family is a vital component in the successful re-entry of the inmate, it is important to carry on further research from that perspective.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"*…prisons are not simply warehouses for the "dregs" of society, but rather a place to develop untapped or misguided talent, capable of giving back in a positive way.*"

~ Kyle Roberson

This study was conducted using impressionistic methods to construct an autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that has grown in use in recent history as a means for researchers to inject personal voice and experience into primarily sociological research (Preston, 2011). Ethnography is the root of the method which contains *ethno*—meaning race, people, or culture and *graphy*—meaning a process for recording. With autoethnography, the auto component is added meaning "*self*." This autobiographical detailing of cultural and life experiences, when written in a manner that allows for reflective insights, is autoethnography. Leavy (2015) states that, "every research paradigm has a philosophical substructure that guides research practice" (p. 19). These substructures are the data gathered from previous reflective writings, interactions, memories, thoughts, and learning events that took place over the course of my life, expressed in the narrative as an arts-based research methodology. Additional data regarding principles of autoethnographic research will be included to inform my writing and the understanding of the discourses associated with my pedagogical journey.

Research Questions

1. In what way does a correctional worker's pedagogical journey provide insights into the literacy and rehabilitative needs of inmates and their families?
2. How does reflective writing aid in literacy instruction, personal growth, and the decision-making process for educators?

Background to the Study

Before I ever dreamed of pursuing a doctoral degree in Family and Consumer Sciences Education (FCSE), I realized I had a unique story in how I came to work in a prison setting as an educational administrator. While working on my undergraduate degree in Adult Education through Bellevue University's online accelerated bachelor degree program, I found myself educating my cohorts on the importance of prison education programs. They found the information fascinating and generally seemed very curious as to how I came to work in a prison. Of course, with many online classes there are introduction assignments that take place on the discussion boards. In these discussions, I often noticed the thread with the most responses and feedback revolved around my initial post. Not that I personally was all that interesting, but my peers found my work with inmates through education and prisons interesting. Some understood the need for reentry and rehabilitation and praised the work, while others had the attitude that spending tax payer dollars on education programs, specifically higher education and vocational training for inmates, was not fair. Their argument was that they were struggling to pay their own tuition without going into massive student

loan debt: “Why should they [inmates] get it for free?” In most cases I could win them over as to the benefits of reentry and education, especially when I discussed the benefits related to the inmate’s family upon their release.

Throughout my undergraduate and into my graduate work, I also noticed a great deal of reflective writing being used as a learning method. At first, I was annoyed by this practice. However, as I got better at writing and reflecting, I was retaining more information and making better connections. I used the information garnered from both the course work and the reflections in my current role as a prison educator. I also appreciated what I learned about myself and how, through reflecting, I noticed a change in my own attitudes regarding a substantial number of societal issues. What I had considered as a burden and chore helped me grow as a person and turned into an informative and enjoyable way to recount what I took away from any given lesson. It is within these reflections, early on in my academic pursuits, that I made the connection between the courses we offered the inmate population and what program I needed to pursue to earn a teaching license. This is how I came to study Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS).

When I attended my first conference as an FCSE major, it was on invitation from the South Dakota Association for Career and Technical Education to present at a breakout session for the FCS Division. It was my first public speaking event representing both prison education and FCS curriculum. I knew the banquet room was not full because I was the speaker. There would be no reason for this because no one had ever heard of me. I do believe the participants were interested in the topic, though it probably did not hurt that my academic advisor along with my cooperating teacher

for one of my practicums were both present; they were two very well-respected professionals with the state's FCS educator pool who might have encouraged some attendance. The title of the presentation was "Coming Soon to a Neighborhood Near You." The title is a play on the reality that most inmates will return to society and they may just end up being *your* neighbor. When I was done with the presentation, I had a teacher from the audience approach me and share that she had cried during a portion of my presentation. It was at this point, I realized that what I had to share regarding my personal journey, as a student and as an educator, could affect people on a personal level and change negative perceptions of the inmate population and their families; I had the responsibility to continue to spread that message.

Autoethnography As Methodology

There are different theoretical perspectives by which an autoethnographer can develop his or her framework. Some of the theoretical frameworks that have been identified for this form of inquiry include predict, next, understand, emancipate, and deconstruct (Kaufmann, 2014). Though each paradigm has its own unique features in regard to how the researcher approaches their topic(s), they can be combined (as cited by Stinson, 2009) in what is called theoretical eclecticism; which draws on multiple paradigms when recording text (Kaufman, 2014).

Malcolm Knowles has been credited with developing the theory of andragogy, defined as the pedagogical approach to studying how adults learn (Henning, 2012). One aspect of Knowles' theory is that adults learn through reflection and linking prior knowledge with current learning. Using an autoethnographic approach to record personal experiences can lead not only to meaning for the writer as

a therapeutic and knowledge-building tool but can also aid readers in learning from and contriving meaning from the experiences of others (Custer, 2014). This is a form of transformative learning which is defined by Clark (1993) as "learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner's subsequent experiences" (p. 48). Transformative learning shares similarities in its definition with Happenstance Learning Theory (HLT), in that learning from those chance opportunities can have profound implications in future experiences for the learner. This method of inquiry can be beneficial to anyone with a tie to the story, culture, and interactions of the autoethnographer. Autoethnography is a tool that can be used to uncover feelings, truths, and perspectives. Custer (2014) explains that writing an autoethnography is no easy task when we have to recall and relate to past experiences and attempt to translate them into useful information that forms our identities today.

Data Sources

Within this study, I will be using triangulation of data sources to support the validity of this autoethnography. Triangulation is a qualitative research technique that facilitates using three or more data sources, theoretical perspectives, and even multiple investigators, to aid in the credibility of research (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Glesne, 2011). For this autoethnography, I will be using two theoretical perspectives; Planned Happenstance Theory (PHT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) coupled with self-observational and self-reflective data. External data for triangulation will include artifacts, previously written work, and the literature review of this study.

Chang (2016) reassures that the literature review acts in a manner to "contextualize your personal story within the public history," and by doing so we use the literature review as autoethnographic researchers by "intersecting the subjectivity of the inner world with the objectivity of the outer world" (p. 110). It is critical to look at the data from these multiple lenses to weed out personal bias and analyze the information for patterns that develop.

Considering the main data sources collected for an autoethnography are the researcher's own memories, experiences, and observations, I had to be aware of a few behaviors to avoid and a few principles to adhere to for strengthening the data obtained. Chang (2016) states:

> the autoethnographer (1) is complete member in the social world under study; (2) engages reflexivity to analyze data on self; (3) is visibly and actively present in the text; (4) includes other informants in similar situations in data collection; and (5) is committed to theoretical analysis (p. 46).

Second, the autoethnographer avoids simply telling their story and failing to connect the data to other people, the culture, and community (Chang, 2016). Self-narratives are made up of much more than just our physical being: "Friends, acquaintances, and even strangers from the circles are interwoven in self-narratives. Therefore, studying and writing of self-narratives is an extremely valuable activity in understanding self and others connected to self" (Chang, 2016, p. 33). However, Chang (2016) also advocates in the autoethnography what he calls the "nonscientific" factor of "the three 'I's" (p.130). The three I's are "insight, intuition, and impression" as cited by Cresswell, (1998). Chang (2016) says, "These nonscientific factors are necessary…because a

holistic understanding of a cultural case requires a comprehensive approach" (p. 130). Balancing these two points is an important part of the data collection process of the self-narrative and the autoethnographic process.

Theoretical perspectives. The two theoretical perspectives used as a data source for this autoethnography are HLT and SDT. Both these theories have been previously explained in chapters one and two. However, it is important to mention them as a data source. Framing research around a theory can assist in the "data organization, analysis and interpretation, and the structure of the writing" (Chang, 2016, p. 137). When using these theories to garner data over the course of my lived experiences, the theories serve as a type of analysis called *temporal discourse analysis* (Compton-Lilly, 2014). Compton-Lilly (2014) explains that when we look at discourses across time they can provide "rich insights into issues related to literacy learning, identity construction, and trajectories through school" (p. 41). My experiences over the course of time, when viewed through the lenses of HLT and SDT, provided insights in how to best approach situations related to the educational programming offered to the inmate population and their families.

Self-Observation and Reflection. My self-observations and reflections were recorded in a reflexive journal. As I began the research process, I recorded and reflected on both past and present events that had significant meaning or impact on my personal life, career choices, and attitudes. Past life events and interactions I had with those around me are significant to my personal development and where I am today. These events, memories, and reflections make up the bulk of the research data. When new experiences occurred during the research process, I journaled about them to see

how they effected my learning and attitudes. I found that while writing, whether in the journal or academically for presenting this research, I was consistently jogging up memories related to the information and narrative I wanted to convey. Leavy (2015) states, “ethnography requires an ongoing subjective writing and interpretation process, and in recent years ethnographers have only become more reflexive about the process” (p. 43). This example was used when Leavy was discussing autoethnography as a legitimate form of inquiry.

As I made entries into my reflexive journal, I did not expect that everything would be of use in the final report. For data analysis purposes, I did attempt to tie my journal entries back to the theoretical frameworks mentioned earlier: predict, next, understand, emancipate, and deconstruct. By including these frameworks as I wrote, I reinforced the self-narrative research process (Chang, 2016; Kaufmann, 2014; Leavy; 2015). For example, when reflecting in the journal, I would write about events to better understood them and then attempted to predict how I could use that information to determine what I needed to do next. This provided rich data, however, Chang (2016) points out that written text cannot be the only source of data, because memories and recollections of the researcher can be “incomplete, lost, or partial” (p. 109). This brings me to the discussion of artifacts used as data to support my autoethnography.

Artifacts. Artifacts can be a beneficial component of a qualitative research study. These tangible pieces of evidence can be used as data to support the narrative portion of the research. Chang (2016) describes artifacts as both textual and non-textual. Textual artifacts can include many sources: the journal I used to record past and present experiences, previous written work and publications or “archival data,”

and official documents such as diplomas, flyers, or programs (Chang, 2016; Leos, 2014, p. 62). Chang (2016) asserts that "personally produced texts, are particularly invaluable to your study because they preserve thoughts, emotions, and perspectives at the time of recording, untainted by your current research agenda" (p. 107). In my situation, I was fortunate enough to have saved much of my previous college course work, and even found material from high school that my mother had saved. This archival data was important in validating some of the discourses I had experienced, highlighted some of my current thinking, while also correcting some of my memories.

The non-textual artifacts can include any number of items that help in "telling the full truth about a person" (Chang, 2016, p. 109). These artifacts are what Chang (2016) refers to as "physical representations of your life" (p. 109). Picture a shelf in your home with some mementos displayed: a picture, a souvenir from a trip, a keepsake handed down from previous generations. Each of these artifacts tells a story and can assist in providing evidence to support the narrative in the autoethnography. A specific example are the three pictures of me taken while serving in the United States Army. I started out as a young Private ready for the challenges the Army had to offer. My career progressed, and in the end, I retired from the United States Army Reserve at what I consider the pinnacle of my career, an Army Drill Sergeant. Arguably one of the toughest, but most rewarding jobs in the armed services. These non-textual artifacts, along with others found in Chapter IV, provide validity to the narratives that make up the autoethnography.

Figure 3.1: PVT Roberson, 1989; SGT Roberson, 1994; DSG Roberson, 2003

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data for this autoethnography began when I initially started working on my research design and ideas. Upon realizing I had a story to share that could possibly provide insight and direction for others working with inmates and their families, I started analyzing what parts of my life experiences would help tell that story. Data analysis in qualitative research "begins…from the initial interaction with participants and continues that interaction and analysis throughout the entire study" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 466). Gay et al. also detailed that for researchers to decide what data was important, and what was not useful, the researcher must ask before conducting the study, "How am I going to make sense of the data?" (p. 466). I knew the main objective of my study was to explore my own pedagogical journey and events leading to my career in correctional education. To make sense of this data, I had to begin the analysis from the earliest memories I could recall.

I began my study initially using temporal discourse analysis. I reflected and journaled about major themes from past to present; I believed my autoethnography

would need to spark learning, growth, and reflection in my readers. As these themes developed and data were collected, I turned to using thematic analysis to decipher more common themes across data sources. The major themes developed from these analyses included my pedagogical journey, my literary self, mentors who shaped my life decisions, and how planned happenstance and self-determination played a significant role in the trajectory of my life.

Data Collection

The task of data collection began with the reflexive journal I started once I recognized I was going to attempt a research project in autoethnography. As I focused on the themes of the narrative that would encompass the autoethnography, I wrote in a reflexive journal anytime I had an epiphany, memory, or experience I felt may be useful. Not all data gathered was useful or some was less important than originally thought (Chang, 2016 & Gay et al., 2012). Regardless, as I collected the data in the reflexive journal, I was aware that I needed to triangulate the data source. I collected artifacts associated with journal entries to provide further evidence, study the material, and reflect more on the experience. This, too, generated more data through recollections of other associated events.

Coding

Glesne (2011) points out that *coding* can be confusing when referring to qualitative data. Coding using quantitative data is different from coding with qualitative data. Glesne (2011) clarifies by explaining that when working in quantitative research, researchers can code with the purpose of counting:

> "Sixty-three percent of the parents worried about issues of safety, but only 12 percent believed that higher taxes should be part of the solution." Counting is not a primary goal of qualitative researchers. Qualitative researchers code to discern themes, patterns, processes, and to make comparisons and build theoretical explanations. (p. 194)

The terms *index* or *categorize* rather than *coding* are interchangeable and may even be preferred by some qualitative researchers (Glesne, 2011, Gay et al., 2012). Whichever term researchers choose to use does not really matter; it is the organizational process that carries more weight. The concern with coding that researchers must consider when dealing with loads of descriptive data is the tendency to place items in preconceived categories to support the research questions being asked (Gay et al., 2012). I had to take careful consideration in this regard to ensure I recorded and coded data that was honest and rich in detail but "framed in the context of the bigger story, a story of the society, to make [my] autoethnography ethnographic" (Chang, 2016, p. 49). In order to frame my story, I had to include data that tied my personal experiences back to the culture from which I want my research to affect. For me, that was including the combined subcultures within the prison; my interactions with inmates and my interactions with staff, and how my previous experiences outside those subcultures influenced the discourses I currently hold and practice.

Each piece of data, whether from reflexive writing, archival data, or artifacts was placed in categories that aligned with the narrative. I wanted to convey in the autoethnography of my lived experiences. This data was then organized in chronological order. This process assisted in the temporal discourse analysis and

assisted me in seeing the connections between events and interactions I planned on, and how those events corresponded to happenstance. If an event took place that was not planned, I labeled it with a code. The same process was used when coding experiences and goals I was self-determined to achieve.

For this process I used index cards with brief descriptions or pictures of the actual data sources. For example, I took a picture of an artifact and placed it on the colored index card with a date and code representing its respective meaning to the narrative. Yellow was used for educational data, orange for leadership and mentorship, and green for literacy. The codes used and recorded in the upper right corner of the index cards identified data related to Planned Happenstance Theory (HLT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). I used the initials of the respective theories, *HLT* and *SDT* as the code on the index cards. By doing this, I was able to manipulate the cards as needed for the thematic analysis of the data. If data was redundant, then it was removed. Through this coding process, I was able to compile the necessary data to report on the findings of this research project.

Summary

Autoethnography has been being used as a method of inquiry for many years but has only recently been accepted as a legitimate method of qualitative social research (Heath, Street, & Mills, 2008; Leavy, 2015; Leos, 2014; Preston, 2011). By using sound research practices in data collection and organization, the researcher can inject his lived experience into a research study that can be beneficial to other readers: "Studying others invariably invites readers to compare and contrast themselves with others in the cultural texts they read and study, in turn discovering new dimensions of

their own lives" (Chang, 2016, pp. 33-34). Telling these stories may allow other readers to learn from my experiences, while also gaining insight into my own personal discourses. To further validate my research as beneficial contribution in the academic community, and aid in my own self-reflection, triangulation was employed in the data collection process of this research project. The triangulation of the data adds to the truthfulness of the narrative and the legitimacy of the research methodology (Glesne, 2011). Data was coded to identify themes, patterns, and discourses; it was then sorted in a chronological order and cross-referenced with the theoretical frameworks of HLT and SDT to add to the organizational structure of the narrative.

Chapter Four is the narrative derived from the data sources; including the literature review, my reflexive journal, archival data, and artifacts. The narrative includes accounts of my past and present lived experiences and how those experiences contributed to the person and professional I am today working as an educational administrator in a correctional environment. I can only hope that others can learn from my experiences and improve their own opportunities by taking advantage of happenstance, while also contributing to the shared goal of improving the lives of inmates and making our prisons safer in the process.

In Chapter Five, I conclude the study by giving my interpretations and findings. I also include in this final chapter a discussion of the implications of my research and suggestions for additional ethnographic research related to the correctional environment.

CHAPTER IV

A ROAD NEVER TRAVELED

"If we model this behavior and practice it ourselves, we are not only encouraging this behavior but teaching it as well."

~ Kyle Roberson

Foundation for Work Ethic

When I look back on the start of my work history, I see myself pushing a small red lawnmower with a Briggs & Stratton engine up and down the streets of my neighborhood looking for untidy lawns that needed to be mowed. I did not bother with the well-kept yards because those people always wanted to mow their yards themselves. I wanted the yards with weeds and no landscaping, because they were the ones that would allow me to make a quick ten bucks. I was in the 3rd grade when my parents allowed me to pursue my money-making venture of becoming the neighborhood yard kid. Granted, I was not allowed to go beyond two blocks from my own street, but what the heck, they were long streets. My dad only had one other rule for my enterprise. I had to do a good job, and he would allow me to use his lawn mower and would also provide the gas.

I learned a lot about responsibility, money management, and work ethic working for myself at such an early age. I continued to mow yards in every neighborhood I lived in all the way through high school. Of course, my territory got larger as I got older and even more so when I obtained my driver's license.

One of my requests when I got my first vehicle was that it be a truck. I needed something to haul my yard equipment. Dad came through again by buying me a little red 1972 Ford Courier, an automatic to boot. I started passing out flyers in every neighborhood in South Arlington. Usually by the time I got home from passing out flyers in a new neighborhood, I would already have a couple of messages on our old-fashioned phone answering machine, the kind with an actual tape. Or my mother, who also took messages for me, would have them ready for me on a scratch piece of paper. Business was good.

Throughout high school, I held a few other odd jobs, but none I loved as much as mowing yards in the summer. During the winter months, I worked at Albertsons, a grocery chain, as a sacker. I also did a two-month stint at McDonalds. I drove a delivery truck for my dad's business, *Construction Related Products*, or *CRP* as we called it. The other high school job I held for three years was as a parking lot attendant for the Texas Rangers, which I enjoyed in the evenings. I started out in the yellow lot which is where all new attendants start. However, I think my work ethic and the professional pride I took in my uniform paid off. I was very quickly promoted to the VIP lot, which is where all the people that owned suites parked. Even the owner of the Texas Rangers parked there. When I first started, Eddie Chiles was the majority owner, and I opened the door for his wife almost every game, and he was always good for a $5.00 tip. My last year there my checks were signed by George W. Bush—yes, the future president. He purchased the team in March 1989, so I had a season before leaving for the Army where my checks had his printed signature on them.

I enjoyed mowing yards and working for the Texas Rangers organization, but I had much bigger plans for myself. I joined the Army on the delayed entry program in April of 1989. I signed up to become an Army firefighter. My thought was that since my grades in high school were not all that great, I would join the Army, gain some skills, and move back to Texas to become a city firefighter for Dallas, Ft. Worth, or Arlington. Fire fighters made a good living and had great schedules with good retirement benefits. So off to the Army I went, and that is about the only part of that plan that worked out.

I did train as an Army firefighter at Chanute Air Force Base and was then transferred to Ft. Lewis, Washington, where I served five and one-half years on active duty working for the Ft. Lewis Fire Department. I loved my job. I worked at Fire Station #2, which was located on the airfield. In this position we were called crash firefighters, our equipment was a little different and we used foam in the trucks to suppress fires that would engulf a downed aircraft.

Figure 4.1 Fire Academy, Chanute Air Force Base

I started out as a nozzleman and progressed through the ranks to become an engineer, which means I drove and operated the pumps on the fire trucks. I was also promoted through the military ranks during that time and left active duty to join the Army Reserves as a Sergeant. When I transferred into the Reserves I had to cross train as a military police officer. This is what started my law enforcement career both in the military and within the civilian arena. Being a reservist only required one weekend a month along with my two-week annual summer training. Primarily my job on the weekends and during my summer training events consisted of pulling traffic patrol duty on Ft. Lewis to give the active duty guys some well-deserved time off. I'll come back to my military career a little later.

When I left active duty, I took a labor job in a machine shop in the deburring department. I had a little help landing the job through a close friend—only leaving active duty for personal reasons. I spent a few weeks in the deburring department before I was quickly selected to learn other aspects of machining. If one listened to the guys in the deburring department it was because I had connections. I know my promotion had more to do with my work ethic and the quality of my work, so I paid little attention to that crowd.

Law Enforcement. I enjoyed machining and even advanced to the point of being a night shift lead with responsibilities in set-up, programming, and operating 3, 4, and 5 axis Computer Numeric Control (CNC) mills. After five years in the industry though, I had to pursue my passions. I wanted a civilian career in law enforcement or as a fire fighter. I started applying in all the local cities and towns, concentrating

mostly on the law enforcement side because I really enjoyed my duty in the Army Reserves as a military police officer.

When I announced to my peers within the Reserves that I was going to pursue a career in civilian law enforcement, some of them informed me about an opportunity in a new prison that had opened. I had not even considered corrections, but I thought "why not?" If anything, it could just add to my résumé.

I was hired as a correctional officer by the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) in March 2000. My first duties at Federal Detention Center Seatac—an administrative prison within the BOP—included working in the housing units and as a yard or corridor officer. As my seniority and experience increased I was able to fill more demanding and responsible roles within the correctional services department of the prison operation. I worked in the control center, as the rear gate officer, and as a phone monitor. The phone monitor part will play a role later, but for now, back to how the military maintains its role in my careers.

Shortly after hiring into the BOP, I met another officer who was also a reservist. He was doing his duty in a drill sergeant unit. He suggested that I come and attend a couple of weekend drills with him to see what being a drill sergeant was all about. Of course, going through basic training, I knew what drill sergeants did, they trained Soldiers. I liked the idea of a new challenge. I requested a transfer into the unit and began my yearlong training to be certified as a drill sergeant in the United States Army. I graduated the school second in my class in June 2001. I spent the next 11 reserve years training new Soldiers and loved every minute of it. I would still be doing it if I had not made a deal with my family to retire when I was eligible. We had an

agreement when I decided to go into law enforcement, that when I hit my 20 years of military service, I would retire from the Army. I held up my end of the bargain. It was quite a sacrifice for my whole family during my years of service. It never failed, if something big or exciting was going to happen it always conflicted with drill weekend or annual training.

Now, back to the phone monitor job that I mentioned previously. How did this job relate to everything? The military led me to law enforcement and law enforcement connections led me to taking a training job in the military. When I worked as the phone monitor in the intelligence office within the prison my direct supervisor was a former Lieutenant at another prison in Yankton South Dakota. When we talked in the office, he told me how much he loved it there. I told him that my wife was originally from South Dakota and that we visited there often. He suggested I transfer there because he thought there would be a lot of promotion potential for a young officer. One year later, I was an officer at Federal Prison Camp Yankton (FPC Yankton).

I jumped in with both feet at FPC Yankton. I wanted to make a name for myself and show my supervisors that I was a team player. I was selected to be a staff trainer because of my experience as a drill sergeant. I went to two different BOP training courses to become an instructor in both self-defense and disturbance control. During my third year at FPC Yankton, I was selected as the Correctional Officer of the Year. I moved up in rank and seniority and was promoted to a mid-level manager position as a Lieutenant.

Lieutenants are responsible for the security of the institution in the absence of the Warden and Captain. They manage a shift of officers and have several collateral

duties assigned to them. I enjoyed the job, but it just was not the right fit. What I wanted to do full time was train and educate staff, but there was no such position, they were only collateral duty positions. This was a pivotal point in my career. Overall, I enjoyed working for the BOP, but I was lacking a certain level of job satisfaction. I wanted to use my skills as an instructor and trainer.

One of my mentors at FPC Yankton was the supervisor of education. She told me about an education technician position that would be opening within the education department. I had not thought about educating the inmate population, but it sounded interesting once she explained the scope of responsibilities of an education technician. She expressed to me that the position would open in about 18 months. I looked at the job qualification requirements and realized if I was going to apply, I would have to get serious about some formal education in "education."

I started my research and found a college that would accept all my credit and allow me to complete a bachelor's degree online. I gained enough credit in the right disciplines to get selected as the Education Technician, and later graduated with a *Bachelor of Science in Adult Education from Bellevue University*. However, I was on the fast track now because no sooner did I get promoted into the education department, one of the professional teaching staff told me about her retirement plans. I had just over two years to pursue more education and obtain a teaching license to qualify for her job. She retired earlier than what she said, and I was not able to apply. But I continued with my education. In December 2012, I earned a South Dakota teaching license in Family and Consumer Sciences with endorsements for machine technology

and ROTC. I also graduated from South Dakota State University with a Master of Science degree in Family and Consumer Sciences Education (FCSE).

I ended up spending three years as the department's education technician. During that time, I concentrated on learning everything I could about all aspects of each position within the department while also keeping my own responsibilities in order. My mentor, who was now my direct supervisor, was in tune with what I was trying to do. She realized I was preparing myself to apply for her position when she retired. It was a long shot, but I valued every bit of what happened within the education department. We helped inmates obtain their GEDs, we ran successful college programs, and we also provided vocational training, and leisure classes. We taught interview skills, soft skills, technical skills, and maintained a leisure library and had programs that keep fathers in touch with their kids through different literacy outreach programs.

However, no matter what I did, I would not qualify for the supervisor of education position without direct teaching experience in public education at the secondary or lower levels. All my experience training soldiers and staff did not count. To qualify, I had to have more graduate level schooling leading to a doctorate degree, hence my enrollment in Texas Tech and the doctoral program in Family and Consumer Sciences Education.

By the time my boss retired I had the knowledge, skills, and ability to run the department, just not the practical teaching experience or enough graduate level college credit. The first time the job posted I was in mid-semester, so those credits did not count. However, when the Warden only had one qualified candidate, he decided to

repost the position. This was a several week process, and by the time the announcement closed again, I was able to add those credits to my application.

I was promoted to Supervisor of Education in August 2013. I still do this the same work today at a larger facility. I was promoted in January 2018 to Federal Correctional Institution Oxford (FCI Oxford). I enjoy the mission education is tasked with as a department within the BOP. I feel like each day my department can have a positive impact on our students.

What I enjoy about telling my story is that most of it was not planned, it happened by chance. One experience led to the next, and with the right mentors and my own work ethic and determination my career path developed from there. I have been fortunate and blessed. The following sections will provide more detail about the specifics of my planned happenstance story, and how I believe others can learn from my experiences by reading these narratives.

Role Models

There are many points in my life when I have encountered someone that, through some aspect of our interaction, helped determine my position in life and career. Through reflective writing I have been able to see how influential these encounters have shaped my perspectives, discourses, and attitudes. One of the earliest memories I have of a person having a profound impact on my life's direction, aside from my own parents, was with an athletic trainer and health teacher at my high school in the great state of Texas.

Making a Difference. High school for me was not easy. Academically, I was an average "B" student; however, it was the social aspect of high school that was

difficult. I was not hazed or picked on, but I was undersized and not very strong. Most of my friends were a year older, so my senior year was especially difficult. I felt like I did not know anyone. Not being a star athlete like my older brother did not help much either. Being an athlete was important in my home, so when I did not make the Junior Varsity baseball team my sophomore year, it devastated me. My older brother who made the Varsity team his sophomore year was a prodigy. I was living in his shadow. Everyone expected I would make the team by just being his brother. It did not really occur to me at the time that it would have been wrong. I had always played up a level, not by choice, but to ease transportation logistics for my parents. This meant I got less playing time, because the other boys on the team were older and stronger. Of course, the rules allowed a kid to play up, but older kids could not play down. I guess you can say I took one for the team—with three boys in our home involved in sports, it was go go go.

Both my brothers were natural athletes. I was not so blessed. I envied their skills, but had to work hard to keep pace, and usually that did not even make a difference. I was a decent athlete, just not at the level that got me through a program that had tryouts. There were some very gifted athletes the years I went to high school, and at that high school specifically. The three years I was there, the school went to the state tournament. When I did not make the team, I wanted to move and live with my grandparents to play baseball in their town, in a school that did not have tryouts. They were happy to have enough kids' turnout for the team. I just wanted to play, it was part of my identity at that point in time. My dad said something to me as he denied my request that cut deep. He said, not knowing the full implications of his statement, "so

you want to move away and be a big fish in a little pond?" I hate that saying to this day. I only wanted to play baseball on a high school team, to letter in a sport I loved; that my parent's loved. Baseball was everything in our home growing up. I thought it would make my parents, my dad especially, proud of me. Looking back, I know my dad did not mean to hurt me with his statement. He was a father that wanted his children close by and did not want to break up the family over baseball.

When I tried out for the team my junior year I still did not make the cut. It was another challenging time for me. I was close with one of the coaches because I was still taking physical education credits in the baseball program, and we had a shared interest in collecting baseball cards. We had even traveled out of town together to attend baseball card conventions on the weekends. Of course, no teacher would ever get away with that today, but back then was a different time. I still think to this day, that he enjoyed me as a student and friend and orchestrated the meeting the day of selections, so he could personally break the news to me. I still did not make the team, and the program was so good, that they would not even consider placing a junior on the JV team—believe me, I asked. I was so desperate to play. They needed those spots for the upcoming freshmen. He must have had a plan in mind already, because as he broke the news, he said he had someone he wanted me to meet. Little did I know, it was that day that changed the course of my life. Without it, I would not be where I am today.

Coach walked me over to the athletic trainer's officer, where he introduced me to the school's athletic trainer, Mr. Fisher. Here I shook the hand of a guy who would impact my life immeasurably. Only years later do I see the impact of our short

relationship. Over the next two years I worked as a student athletic trainer under his supervision. We had several conversations about opportunities, school, and responsibilities. One such discussion happened in a stressful situation where our starting quarter back broke his clavicle in a game. For whatever reason, I had brought the wrong trauma kit to the sideline. I remember Mr. Fisher telling me, "Kyle, I have given you a lot of responsibility. You need to be able to handle that. I need to be able to count on you." I wanted to give him an excuse but could not muster one. I remember crying that evening because I had let him down.

Another discussion that we had revolved around my future goals. I had explained to him that I did not want to letter as an athletic trainer. If I earned a letter I explained to him, it had to be as an athlete. Well there was nothing he could do about that, nor did I have the athletic ability to do so, but what he did go on to explain to me was that he saw I had the ability to make a difference. He pointed out that the football players wanted me to wrap their ankles at pre-game, not one of the other cute female student trainers. Mr. Fisher went on with a list of my contributions to the success of the program, which I'm sure was a little inflated, looking back. He continued with telling me I needed to focus on a goal and stick with it. I told him that I enjoyed the medical aspect of the athletic training but did not want to be involved in sports as a future profession. This stemmed from my parents making comments about using my brother's talents as an athlete to ride his coat tails (not their words) into the major leagues as an athletic trainer. My brother was a gifted pitcher and was eventually drafted by the Atlanta Braves organization and played a few seasons in the minor

leagues. I wanted nothing to do with this train of thought. I know my parents meant nothing negative about it, they just never knew how it made me feel. I never told them.

I do not quite remember if I had the idea or if Mr. Fisher planted it, but somehow, we got on the topic of using my interests in the medical aspect to become a paramedic or firefighter. Firefighter it was, I could make a difference here, doing that job, saving lives, helping people. I just had to be willing to run into burning buildings. The idea of that was very exciting. I could not quit thinking about it. I researched it, ordered a magazine subscription about it, and talked to a family friend who was in the fire service. Ultimately, to my disappointment, I found out that no paid department would hire new recruits before the age of twenty-one. To be a firefighter required no post-secondary schooling, unless a person wanted to go to a trade school. Even this would not guarantee a job on a paid department. What was I going to do between high school graduation and turning twenty-one?

Mr. Fisher continued to encourage my train of thought, while still providing me opportunities to learn more about athletic training. Between my junior and senior year, he sent me to a couple of summer camps at Texas Christian University where I learned a lot more about being an athletic trainer and other interesting medical principles related to developing healthy student athletes. Here I had more discussions about wanting to be a firefighter with the camp counselors. They were encouraging as well, and only helped solidify my aspirations. I had now confirmed in my own head, that being a firefighter was what I was going to do. Getting there was the question and where more happenstance enters my story.

Figure 4.2 Student Trainer

I was worried about paying for post-secondary schooling. I never really considered going to junior college or university, because going to school after high school was never discussed in my home growing up. I am not sure I even thought it was an actual option. I know my parents did not have the funds to support it, and back then student loans where unheard of, you either had the money, or you worked your way through. I already struggled in school, so working to support my schooling was an even larger challenge in my view. Now comes that serendipitous event.

I received a call from an Army recruiter. I specifically remember telling him I was not interested unless he could tell me that the Army had firefighters. He had never heard of it before but stated he would be glad to investigate. Never-the-less, about a month later I was enlisted on the delayed entry program. I would be heading off into the Army and getting trained as an Army firefighter that coming August. The draw back was that firefighters had to enlist for six years as opposed to the traditional four. However, my research had shown me that most firefighters were not hired onto paid

departments until their mid-20's anyway. That would we perfect. Enlist at 18, get out at 24, and enter the fire service in the civilian sector.

Mr. Fisher only recently got a small hint about how his talks of encouragement and responsibility led to my life's trajectory as a Soldier and United States Army firefighter. My brother recently ran into him at a baseball semi-reunion type event and he mentioned he would like to hear from me. I reached out via Facebook and thanked him for the influence he had on my life. The happenstance that surrounded these events, along with some planning, self-determination, and ability to develop the proper attitude in facing my failures as an athlete, led to some fantastic opportunities for me. Much, if not most, of my life would not be the same had I simply made the JV baseball team that sophomore year.

Ft. Lewis Fire Department. A defining life experience for me is having served in the United States Army as a firefighter for the Fort Lewis Fire Department. Being introduced to the Army was by happenstance, while joining the Army was a planned event. I was assigned to the 87th Engineer Detachment straight out of basic training and fire school. I had no control over that or who my fellow service members and Department of Defense (DOD) civilian firefighting partners would be. This was all pure happenstance.

Reflection:

The guys in that department will always mean a lot to me. Under their guidance and mentorship, I truly decided a life in civil service is what I wanted. They were professionals, men who would put their own life on the line for any of their fellow firefighters and civilians for that matter. I remember the

first time I had to pull a victim out of a vehicle involved in a crash. Unfortunately, she did not make it. I had to cover her with a blanket and then attend to other matters at the crash scene. Back at the station, this is before they had counselors for the profession; the men looked in on me and made sure I was dealing with things. Sometimes it was just a pat on the back and a "you did a good job out there." I came to realize I want to be one of those kind of men. A teacher and mentor to those willing to enter professions most shy away from. I also remember the first time I entered a burning building. Sure, I was scared, but as I opened the nozzle and started in, I felt my crew chief's hand on my back and him saying, "Stay low, let's get in there." I knew I had a partner I could count on right there with me. I spent six years in the fire service before I left active duty, and loved every minute of it (Roberson, 2014).

Figure 4.3 Engines and Crews of the Ft. Lewis Fire Department

I think about my current position in correctional education and can see how my experiences at the Fort Lewis Fire Department shaped a lot of my attitudes. My interactions with the inmate population have the ability to shape positive or negative relationships and trains of thought. Negative thoughts and actions can have such an impact on how we conduct ourselves in the workplace.

Being a Duck. I remember a trying week while serving in the Army. I was upset at a situation regarding an immediate supervisor and how he was choosing to handle a situation. After getting more upset than what was probably really called for, I consulted with one of the fire inspectors, from the department, Mr. Bailey, while out on a training event. He was older than I was and had already retired from the Army and was now a DOD employee working as one of the Fort Lewis Fire Department's fire inspectors. I had a lot of respect for the guy and had explained to him my situation. I went so far as to ask him, because at the time I was considering staying on active duty as a career: "How do you stick with a job you enjoy but not some of the people and politics that go with it?" I was referring to my current situation as bothersome enough to make me reconsider my staying on active duty. I do not recall his exact words, but I do remember his advice. Mr. Bailey said, "Every job is going to have those same people and situations. Look at what works for you. You like being a firefighter? You like the Army in general?" I don't remember how I responded, but I do remember his last statement. It was the first time I had heard the analogy; how it stuck with me. The inspector said, "You have to be like a duck, and let the little things roll off your back." He went on to tell me to pick my battles, and not to worry about things I could not control. It was such a simple piece of advice and stuck with me over

the years. In this situation, I took his advice and stayed in the Army for the time being, thinking I was going to make a 20-year career out of active duty.

I learned a valuable lesson that afternoon talking to the old Army retiree, a lesson I too have shared and passed on with my colleagues, staff, and inmates alike. Working in a correctional setting can be very stressful for everyone involved. Staff must work with a population of inmates that can be disrespectful and dangerous, work shifts that can add to irritability and family strain, and work with other staff who can be challenging to say the least. Taking Mr. Baily's simple advice can assist in lowering stress levels and foster better working relationships. I followed this little piece of "be the duck" advice and have managed to complete a 20-year career in the Army and Army Reserves, and I am currently closing in on a 20-year career in federal corrections. Trust me, I have had to deal with some real, pardon my French, assholes (staff and inmates) and tough situations over the years, and *being a duck* has helped get me through.

Inmates are no different in having to deal with stress. They not only must navigate the subcultures of the inmate population, they must also deal with a multitude of different personalities they find in the correctional workers. All this compounded with the strain of being separated from family. Teaching inmates to handle stress by "being the duck" can help alleviate potential conflict. The following reflection details a time when I had to intervene in a conversation between a correctional officer and an inmate because the conversation was not moving in a positive direction for the inmate based on how he was choosing to react to the officer's order.

Reflection:

Not all of our students [inmates] *have been afforded the same opportunities. I think of an example of each having a different schema that relates to authority and rules. Many of our inmates, who have less education and exposure to reading and text, often have trouble understanding posted rules and inferring what and how those rules affect them. This is difficult to explain, but with some inmates, their actions go beyond simply defying authority. They seem to not be able to make the connection between cause and effect. This in itself is a new schema that has to be intentionally taught. Many of us developed these schemas from having a structured childhood, whereas many inmates have never had any structure to speak of through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood (Roberson, 2015).*

The inmates at one point made a conscious decision that placed them in federal prison. However, the fact that they ended up at my prison, with me as their educational advisor, was by chance. I have come to realize the fact that when I find them on my floor seeking opportunities to learn, whether by choice or because the level of education they require is mandated by law, it is a unique and valuable opportunity for me to have a positive influence on their rehabilitation. I can provide the structure, the mentorship, and the knowledge necessary for them to grow academically, emotionally, and responsibly. For the above-mentioned inmate, I gave him the "be the duck" speech. Even though he was in the wrong, being corrected by the officer was a little thing he needed to just let roll off his back. Because there was no point in him making it a bigger issue and having to deal with the consequences of an incident report. For

most encounters like this, it is usually a no-win situation for the inmate simply because they do not have a right to question posted violations or the authority of staff.

Lessons Learned. Correcting inmate behavior is part of the job. How we do it can make a definitive difference in the outcome of the situation. I have learned from my own interactions with inmates and have made improvements in my methods.

Reflection:

Fully knowing that many inmates are not as literate as we hope for them to be, without thinking, I've asked inmates to read aloud posted rules I have found them to be violating, to have them struggle through, skip words, and simply give up because of embarrassment or frustration. I learned from my own mistakes and have not used that strategy in the recent past. My idea was, if they read it aloud they would not only think about it, but hear for themselves what they were doing wrong, and understand why I had to correct their behavior. I realized this was a flawed plan. If they have trouble reading the words, they certainly are not thinking about the meaning and comprehending the full text (Roberson, 2015).

In this specific situation, it would have been more appropriate for me to read the posted violation to the inmate, giving me the small teaching moment to not only inform him of the violation, but to model fluency, intonation, and accuracy in my reading of the posted regulation to him. The same goals would have been achieved and the inmate would not have felt the additional shame or embarrassment that was evident in his attempt.

Always Learning. I had one interaction with an inmate early on in my correctional career that haunted me for quite some time. Even early on in my career, I prided myself on being able to deescalate situations and have a generally good rapport with the inmates I worked with on a regular basis. However, one sizzling summer afternoon, I was working as a compound officer attempting to get the compound of the institution mowed with a crew of inmates on my detail. There was this one inmate who had a knack for finding other things to do when real work had to get accomplished. I was making my rounds, using my mobile patrol vehicle—an old yellow golf cart that was on its last leg—when I found the inmate under a shade tree holding a rake. I am guessing the rake was his instrument of choice to look like he was doing something, though he was not. I remember scolding him and calling him a "lazy piece of shit." Of course, talking to an inmate like this is completely inappropriate and in violation of policy. However, it happens, and to think it does not is naïve, which leads to my point. Through training and with good mentors, we can develop better communication skills for both staff and inmates so incidents like this do not happen.

I had such a mentor, and after this shameful incident, I recalled what he told me. It was a couple years before this when I was on my first annual training as a new Drill Sergeant at Fort Benning, Georgia. I had just witnessed a group of more senior Drill Sergeants literally screaming at some Privates. When I noticed it, I looked around to see who else was in the area. I happened to make eye contact with my supervisor, the First Sergeant (1SG) of the Company. He had seen the incident himself and waved me over to his position. He asked me, "Did you see that, did you hear that?" I replied, "Yes Top, I did." *Top* is a common nickname for a Company 1SG,

meaning he or she is the top ranking enlisted member of the Company. Top then said,

> "Let me tell you something. What you're seeing isn't right, and I'll address it. What I want you to learn as a new Drill Sergeant is that anyone can yell at a Private, but can you TRAIN one? Those guys can't train, so they yell. I want you to be one who trains them, you get me Sergeant Roberson?"

What he told me was that all too often a Drill Sergeant will use yelling to mask his or her own lack of knowledge or insecurities to maintain his or her position of authority. He said there is usually very little reason to yell when you know your job and know what must get done to properly train the soldiers. I knew exactly what he meant and made a pact to myself right then and there, that I would be a trainer and a professional Drill Sergeant. As I grew in my seniority and years of experience as a Drill Sergeant, I shared that same ideology with new Drill Sergeants coming into the ranks. What I did not do was translate that piece of sound advice into my civilian career until that very moment when I called that inmate a "lazy piece of shit."

The Monarch Butterflies. I have grown over the years and have found that when I try to develop that human connection between myself and an inmate, I have much better results. This is not going so far as to say I cross the professional boundary, but to say that I simply try to connect in a way that lets them see me as a human being who cares about another human being. One such experience where I saw an opportunity to connect with an inmate developed because the Monarch Butterflies happened to be making their yearly migration through the prison's botanical garden.

There was a new student who had transferred in from another institution and had a bit of a chip on his shoulder, a real bad attitude when it came to following

instructions while participating in his GED class. The problem had gotten bad enough that one of my teachers asked me to intervene. My initial interaction with the student was not all that great. He stated that he had no need for a GED and was only in class because he did not want to lose his good conduct time for not participating. We did come to an understanding that he would not distract other students who were there to learn, and because he was required to be in class, he could at least read a book or magazine for the 90 minutes of class.

Fast forward a couple of months, and this same student was still not interested in learning and continued to display the same negative attitude at any sign of authority. I happened to be working a late shift one evening and when managers do this we are required to assist in supervising the evening meal. That night, I had posted myself outside the exit of the food service facility to check inmates as they left to make sure they were not taking unauthorized food back to the housing units. The spot where I posted myself was adjacent to the botanical garden that the horticulture program used as a lab for identifying woody plants, perennials, annuals, and various other plants used in landscaping. It was a beautiful evening out and I could see rays of sunshine beaming through the lower branches of the trees and lighting up the walking path leading out into the garden. I decided to walk out to the edge of the garden and see if I could get a glimpse of the sunset. As I walked down the path, I experienced one of the neatest things I have ever seen in nature. With each step I took down the path literally hundreds of Monarch Butterflies took to flight as I passed by and then settled themselves back down on the multitude of flowers that were in the garden. The feeling

Figure 4.4 Pathway to the Monarch Butterflies, FPC Yankton

was euphoric; I felt like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*, walking through an enchanted garden of some kind. The Monarchs were everywhere and just slightly disturbed by my walking through. As I got to the end of the pathway leading through the garden, I saw the sunset but was in such awe of what I just experienced I was looking more forward to retracing my steps back to the dining facility. The experience was the same, I took a step and to flight took the Monarchs. As I passed they landed back on their flowers as if I had not been there at all. The experience was so amazing, as I stood there now watching inmates exit the dining facility, all I could think of was who could I share this with. On my mind first was other staff who were on duty, but at that moment out of the dinning facility walked Mr. *Attitude* student.

Of course, when I called him over his first facial expression was that of what does this guy want, or what did I do now that this guy must talk to me. As he

approached I simply asked him, addressing him by name, "You want to experience something really neat?" The look on his face amounted to a complete look of confusion with the question of, what did this guy just ask me, clearly visible in his expression. I repeated my question, adding that I thought he would appreciate something very cool, if he would like to. He agreed and wanted to know what it was. I pointed down the pathway and gave him instructions to slowly walk down the path to the very end, and to come back the same way and then tell me what he experienced. He was a bit apprehensive, because the pathway is normally an out-of-bounds area for the general inmate population. Understanding his demeanor and attitude toward staff, I could tell he thought I was setting him up for something that might get him in trouble. Staff do not really set inmates up like that; it is a negative Hollywood stereotype that all correctional staff are dirty, power tripping, knuckle draggers, only there to harass the inmate population. At least that is how a great deal of Hollywood movies that revolve around a prison setting portray those of us working in corrections. I reassured this inmate, telling him that I had given him permission to walk down there and just wanted him to have the opportunity to experience something very surreal.

Mr. *Attitude* started down the path with a little apprehension, turning his head around looking over his shoulder at me. I waved at him to keep going. As he moved down the path, I could start to see the first round of Monarchs lifting off their resting places, but this time I could also see the light bouncing rays of sunshine off their wings as they fluttered around. I had a feeling of wonder going through me; hoping this experience would mean something to the inmate. It did not take long to confirm this feeling. After having stepped out of view down the pathway for a brief few

moments, the inmate was on his return trip walking back up the path toward me. This time though, as he approached, the expression on his face was not of an inmate attempting to portray a hard-disgruntled look who despised authority and all correctional staff, but of a man who just had a wonderful experience and forgot where he was for a brief period. The smile on his face was from ear to ear, his eyes were wide with amazement, and even his gait was that of a more relaxed person. I could tell by the way he approached that he fully understood what was so neat about the little stroll I asked if he would like to take.

As he walked up I said, "Well, what do you think?" He replied with complete appreciation for letting him walk down the pathway and inquired about the butterflies and why they were all there. He commented on the beauty of the flowers and the sunset and continued with thanking me for allowing him to walk down the path. It was as if he saw me as a person, not an authority figure, just another person who shared in a wonderful experience of nature. Besides explaining a little bit about the Monarch's migration, I just expressed that I wanted to share that with him because I knew it would be a neat experience. He thanked me again and I told him to have a nice evening. I knew he was sincere in his appreciation, not only because he expressed it, but I could see it in his demeanor and posturing. I also saw it as he walked away. He tagged along side another inmate that was exiting from the dinning facility, and almost immediately as he began talking with him pointed up toward the botanical garden as they were walking along the sidewalk leading back to the main part of the compound. I knew he was sharing what he had just experienced.

Our relationship changed that day because we made a human connection with a little assistance from nature. From that point on every time I saw that inmate he gave me the appropriate greeting of the day, “Good morning Mr. Roberson” or “Good evening Mr. Roberson.” This is significant because the culture of the inmates in general is to not address staff and for many to not even make eye contact when they pass by. In their culture, addressing staff in this manner is a sign of respect. The staff they address this way is a signal that they respect you because you see them as a person, a fellow human being, and not just an inmate. This student changed his attitude on the education floor as well. I cannot say he worked any harder on his GED, but he did start treating the education staff with more respect. It would be nice to think that he realized we were there to help him with his educational needs, to provide the tools and opportunities for him to have a successful re-entry.

Education and Motivation

The level of education I am attempting to gain stems from many different chance encounters with planned and unplanned events. Furthermore, my motivation to attain the level of education is driven by various goals, attitudes, and the desire for self-efficacy in my chosen professions. When I think back on all the conversations I have had with others about my careers and education, I seem to focus on one specific statement an instructor made during Army firefighting school. The statement has stuck with me throughout all my different careers and duties since that time: soldier, machinist, certified nurse assistant, correctional worker, educator and staff trainer. What he said was not all that profound but had an impact I wish I could go back and thank him for. What he said was really nothing more than just a rhetorical question

posed to the class one day during training. He asked us, “Do you want to be a fire fighter in the profession or a professional fire fighter?” Since that point I have taken on every job, career, and assigned duty in a manner that sets me up to be a professional in that area. As an educator, I have progressed from being qualified to work in the education department due to my experiences as a drill sergeant, to pursing formal degrees that place me in a professional status. Earning an undergraduate degree in adult education, completing a graduate degree licensing me as a teacher in Family and Consumer Sciences, and now working toward a terminal degree, a Ph.D. in Family and Consumer Sciences Education, are all actions that I have taken to become a professional in my chosen field.

A Ph.D.? My current degree plan through Texas Tech University, which will culminate with the completion of this dissertation, is not only a product of my pursuits in life-long learning and professionalism, but a condition of happenstance. After having completed my master’s degree with South Dakota State University (SDSU) and needing additional graduate credit for promotion potential, I had discussed with my advisor from SDSU about pursuing a doctoral degree. She advised me to call one of the professors I had through the consortium, Dr. Alexander, about the doctoral program in FCSE offered at Texas Tech University. It turned out Dr. Alexander was also the program chair of FCSE in the College of Human Sciences at Texas Tech University. When I called her, it was the first time we had ever spoken, as the courses I had taken with her before were all online. I told her I was looking to pursue a doctoral degree in education, so I could qualify for a promotion within the prison. She went on to explain how her program would work for a distance student in the program.

I let her know that a lot of the decision on which program I considered revolved around cost and convenience, relaying that I had been taking classes full-time for the past four years and wanted to spend some time with my family without worries of homework and studying. She understood and ended the conversation stating, "Don't rule us out."

I had been considering an online Ed.D. program through the University of South Dakota (USD) in Adult & Higher Education. This program had a blended format, consisting of both on-site and online courses, and the school was close in proximity, and at a much lower cost compared to out-of-state tuition and the distance of Texas Tech. However, when I reflected on what I really wanted to gain from a program, it came back to the foundations of what Family and Consumer Sciences offers, and the question of, "how could I best serve my current students?" When I contacted Dr. Alexander again and relayed that I was seriously considering Tech, she offered to fly me down for a recruitment visit. That right there sold me, because when I had contacted USD, they seemed like they barely had the time to answer my questions much less ask me to come visit. I figured I could take one class at a time and slowly work toward the credit hours I needed to qualify for the next promotion, and in the end maybe end up with a doctoral degree.

When I arrived on campus, I was enamored with the university and the idea of being a Red Raider. Attending an institution that was recognized across the country was also a big draw: A R1: Research University, not to mention a Division I school in a power five conference; the BIG XII. The architecture was beautiful, all Spanish Renaissance in style with the exception of the library, which I guess when completed

did not sit well with alumni. Otherwise, the grounds were beautiful and well maintained, the central Pfluger Fountain was awesome. Then there was the seal of Texas Tech University at the main entrance to the university. I stood there staring at it thinking, how is it possible that I, Kyle Roberson, a kid from North Central Texas who never even realized that college was an option, was about to sit in an interview to become a doctoral student? I had already come a long way—certainly not without support and assistance—but still, through planned happenstance and self-determination, here I was savoring the idea of getting to put a Ph.D. behind my name.

Figure 4.5 Texas Tech University

The recruitment trip was a success; not only did I tour the campus and the local area, but I also interviewed for acceptance into the FCSE doctoral program. The

interview went great. I even wore a newly purchased Texas Tech tie with my suit during the interview, stating to the interview panel that it was a way of me visualizing my own goals. They seemed to appreciate my confidence. Little did they know that I was as nervous as could be. Here I was sitting with the very same professors and researchers whose names I read in research journals while working on my master's degree.

Through this interview process I got to know Dr. Alexander a little bit more. I felt we had a good rapport, and I was looking forward to the challenge ahead of me. A few weeks later, in steps another unexpected event. I was playing golf in a scramble as part of an annual correctional workers appreciation week, when coming off the 9th green to get some refreshments from the clubhouse, my phone rang. On the other end was Dr. Alexander. She had called to explain to me that she had submitted my name for a prestigious fellowship, the Helen DeVitt Jones Endowed Fellowship. The fellowship would cover a large portion of the tuition needed to get through the program. When she explained that my name was the one selected, I asked her in a jokingly way, because I was already very appreciative of the nomination, "What's the catch?" Her voice, I remember, got a little softer, and she explained that I had to take enough credits to be considered a full-time student, in other words, nine credits per semester. My mind immediately started racing with thoughts going to my family and the continued burden it would place on them. Dr. Alexander sensed this, and suggested I talk it over with my family, explaining that I did not have to decide right then. One of the last questions I remember asking Dr. Alexander was, "Why me?" She said something special to me that afternoon that has stuck with me and been a driving

force behind not wanting to let her down throughout my whole tenure in the program. Dr. Alexander simply stated, “I know a star when I see one.” Needless to say, the last nine holes of that golf scramble, I do not think we used a single one of my shots.

When I got home and explained the offer to my family they were very supportive. My wife said, “How can you justify turning it down?” That Fall I was registered for ten credit hours leading to a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Family and Consumer Sciences Education.

School Spirit. The only post-secondary education I have received from a traditional brick and mortar school is my associate degree and about a year’s worth of work toward the bachelor’s degree. All my other course work has been completed as a distance and online student. I have taken some razing and even experienced outright disrespect for my level of education due to this fact. What I have taken from it is my desire to make sure that students enrolled in programs in my education department are treated with respect and admiration for completing programs. This includes GED and college graduates, as well as those that complete vocational trades and adult continuing education courses. One way I wanted to develop pride in their accomplishments, specifically the college students enrolled in our associate degree program through a local private college, was by helping them develop a sense of pride in their school. After writing the reflection you see below, I worked with the college to provide water bottles and pens with the school’s name and logo to each enrolled student.

Reflection:

Along this same line, is creating a sense of pride and school spirit for distance learners who may quite well have never stepped foot on the campus, virtual or real, from which they received their degree. There is currently an ad campaign being run by the University of Phoenix that comes to mind. Maybe some of you have seen it, where alumni of the school are seen in all sorts of situations but have on red socks that identify them as graduates of the University of Phoenix, which is one of the most widely recognized online universities. I don't know that wearing red socks is the answer, but I think you understand my point (Roberson, 2013).

Be Open to Opportunities. Again, I have learned from my own mistakes through reflective writing completed through courses in my own educational journey. What this helped me realize is the extreme value in one of the programs that we facilitate within my education department and prison. This program is the Artist-in-Residence program that uses an outside contractor to come in and work with the inmates on writing with the culminating project being a journal that is published. The project serves a very powerful purpose which is transactional in theory. The instructor guides the students in writing and telling their stories in a manner that is safe, fun, and therapeutic in nature.

Reflection:

Many of our students have interesting stories to tell, and to quote the great poet and author Maya Angelou, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Understanding the social aspects of my students and

> *allowing them to simply write in their own words and express themselves on paper is an exercise in and of itself. Giving them reason and purpose is half the battle. Dr. Lesley gave me advice on this as well from a class I took while working on my master's degree. She recommended a book about letting students write in their own voice or style, to not worry about the grammar yet, that would come with practice (Roberson, 2015).*

The book Dr. Lesley suggested was, *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken Word Poetry in Urban Classrooms* by Maisha T. Fisher. The book is an ethnographic account of how the researcher immersed herself in this group of young writers lead by Joseph Ubiles, a teacher and leader of a group of students referred to as *Power Writers*. I related this influential educator that Fisher had so much admiration for with the work my contract instructor did with the students in the prison's writing program.

Dr. Reese is the instructor of our creative writing class and a faculty member at Mount Marty College (MMC). The program he instructs is funded through the National Endowment for the Arts and is in his eleventh year of producing and publishing the journal titled *4 P.M. Count*, a yearly anthology using the writings of the inmate students. As an accomplished writer he brings a lot of experience to share with his students. He exudes confidence while not being overbearing, very sure of his ability to make a positive impact on the lives and future of his creative writing students. He takes such a sincere interest in their lives and stories; he really wants to connect with them to help them sift through their emotions and feelings. Often this led to excellent pieces of work that were later published in *4 P.M. Count*.

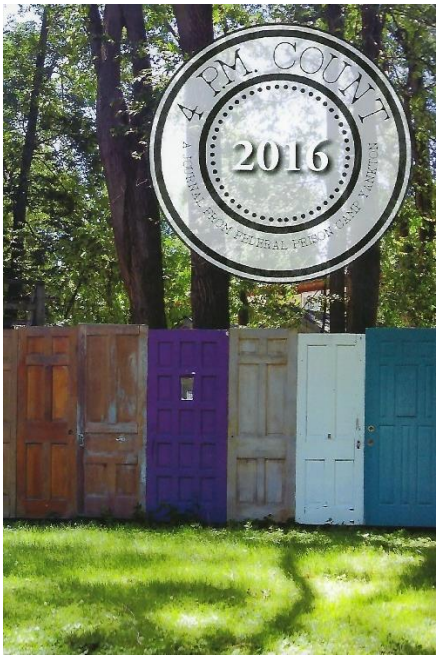

Figure 4.5 *4 P.M. Count*

I was only closely involved with the writing project since I was promoted to a position that required me to be directly involved. I look back now on when I could have been more involved and was not, as wasted opportunities to learn and grow from the interactions and text the students provided. Taking an interest is vital to developing a sense of responsibility. I could have learned this earlier from the very staff I now supervise.

Reflection:

I know within my department that the teachers interact with the students and have developed a rapport with them. These social interactions also help to develop a level of responsibility in the student. They don't want to let their teacher down, so they study and work more diligently toward the goal of passing the GED exams (Roberson, 2013).

I always had a lot of respect for the three teachers I worked with and eventually supervised at FPC Yankton. They are all passionate about their jobs and look at the inmates as students and not just inmates. All of them had to take on extra responsibilities the semesters I had to complete my student practicums, especially when I took time off from work to complete my student teaching experience.

Not Everyone is in Your Corner. Something that bothered me, though, was that none of the teachers I worked with ever really gave much credit to the program I was earning my teaching license through. When I was discussing with a couple of them about a lesson I was preparing, I was asked what my anticipatory set was. I replied, "What do you mean?" because I had not heard that term before, or if I had, it had not stuck with me. I knew I needed to introduce my lesson with something exciting to peak student interest, I just did not know the vernacular. They responded, "You don't know? What kind of program are you in? I bet your program chair would want you to know." The tone was so ugly, it hurt my feelings. I realized part of my job moving forward was to never discourage or discredit someone's educational goals or programs. They knew I was working on an online degree program. They simply gave more credit to the teacher preparation programs they completed at a brick and mortar school in a more traditional way. I went on to complete my program without much encouragement from my peers, but I was grateful they covered my responsibilities during my absences. This was all before I became their supervisor.

Diplomas and Swag. Two additional areas I feel I need to touch on and have taken a bit of ridicule and silent forms of disapproval for are the display of my diplomas in my office and the wearing of college apparel on and off duty. I was never

encouraged to attend college while growing up in my home, nor did I ever think of it as a possibility until I entered the Army. During that time, I realized I could earn an associate degree by combining my military training with some general education courses. After earning that degree, it took me an additional nineteen years to earn a bachelor's degree. Once I began work on my online degree, as mentioned earlier, I had trouble connecting to the school and my peers online. I had never visited the campus or attended one of the school's athletic events. However, I wanted to connect to the school and stay motivated to complete the program. What I did was purchase a couple of shirts and a baseball hat with the school emblem and mascot. I started checking the school's athletic web page to follow the school's basketball program, a sport I had interest in anyway. Since the school was only one state away, I looked to see if the team played locally. To my surprise they did, and I attended a game. I was only one of a handful there supporting "my university."

As my education progressed, I wore more and more college apparel and people often questioned why. I told them it was a way to connect with the school and a motivational technique to continue my course work. Wearing the apparel motivated me to continue until I achieved alumni status. Regarding the inmates, what I noticed was it opened conversations about my own educational pursuits. This allowed me to have conversations about life-long learning, the *big picture*, and the opportunities a degree might open for them—well worth the bit of razing from friends and peers.

The diplomas on my office wall worked the same way. Some staff view this as bragging or arrogance, whereas my experience is it has opened conversations with the very students I encourage to enroll in our college and vocational programs. I cannot

count how many times I have heard a student say something to the effect of, "I'm going to have one of those on my wall someday." I have had the pleasure of presenting diplomas from the college we contract with to some of the very students that have made that statement. I consider that well worth a fellow staff member giving me grief about displaying my accomplishments or for wearing my school colors.

What I did not realize about my diplomas hanging on the wall was some staff were also motivated to continue their education. I did not know my diplomas had this impact until a couple years later; a former employee of mine resigned from his position as education technician to pursue a technical degree in auto mechanics. We had conversations about his dreams and goals, and I encouraged him to do what worked for him and his family. He was resigning from a good job with good benefits, so I wanted him to weigh all options and discuss it with those close to him. In the end he resigned and started school that fall at Western Iowa Tech Community College.

I followed him on Facebook, so I saw posts about his progress, and we have stayed in touch through that means. What I did not expect was a phone call at my new prison the week he was to graduate with his degree. He had gone out of his way to try and get a hold of me personally. He wanted to tell me how much he appreciated my encouragement for him to pursue a degree and career he really enjoyed. He went on to add that the diplomas on my office wall were a part of his motivation. He could not see me of course, but I was a little choked up and had trouble telling him how proud I was of his accomplishment without my voice cracking. He even mentioned that he was thinking of continuing with an education degree, so he could teach high school shop. He felt he could relate to the kids and make a difference in their lives. He did not

say so much, but I was always telling him in our office in one form or the other, that we need to see the *big picture* with our inmate students by making sure we provided the best service possible. I preached that we could make a difference in the lives of the inmates and their families. I like to think that sunk in, and he was seeing the bigger picture in what larger contributions he could make.

College Program. A *big picture* aspect I also preached with the inmate population was the pursuit of higher education. We had a very successful college program facilitated through MMC, the small private college in the same town as the prison that I was fortunate to work with during my tenure at that facility. It was a collateral duty since policy did not require the program be offered. However, I saw the value in it and did everything I could each year to submit for funding and justify the program's expense. This was a stressful time every year because I never knew if the program would be funded again for the next academic year. The program offered three different Associate degrees: Business Administration, Accounting, and Horticulture. While I worked closely with the college's actual registrar and support staff, I essentially acted as the inmate students' admissions counselor, advisor, registrar, academic dean, and faculty coordinator. I had at times, up to 12 adjunct and full-time faculty from MMC that subcontracted with the prison to facilitate the courses needed for the respective programs.

While I was working as the college program coordinator, a lot of students successfully graduated through the program. Several of the graduates began their education journey in our GED program and ended up releasing with an associate degree, some of them even double and triple majoring with all our programs. This

made it possible for a few students to take some correspondence courses they would then transfer into the college, leading to enough credits to apply for a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. I took immense pride in knowing I helped these men attain their educational goals while serving time in prison. One specific interaction that took place that I will never forget has to do with something an inmate said to me as he was releasing from prison.

A Heartfelt "Thank you." This student had graduated with an associate degree just prior to his release. He started out as a GED student, but made it clear he had intentions of being the first in his family to earn a college degree. He was on a very tight timeline to be able to enroll in the program. One of the drawbacks of our funding requirements was that students had to be able to complete the degree prior to release; we simply could not pay for them to take college credits for the purpose of getting a head start for other college programs outside of prison. However, this student was motivated and was able to complete the course work on time. He had a slight hiccup along the way when he failed his required history course. He had to retake that course to get a high enough grade for it to count toward his degree. At one point he commented he wanted to do better and was a little down on himself. After he passed the course the second time with a "C" he still was not happy. I asked him, "What do they call a medical student who graduates last in his class?" He looked at me confused, and I said, "Doctor!" He got what I was saying and felt better about what he had really accomplished.

I had a history with this student throughout his academic journey in the prison—encouraging him, mentoring him, and doing what I could to look out for his

educational goals. He paid it back ten-fold on the day he came to my office to receive his diploma. He had already participated in the commencement exercises, of which he was so grateful to be allowed to participate. All graduating students from the prison college program are taken on escorted trips outside the prison and over to MMC to participate in the actual commencement ceremony. This is an important part of their journey; they get to be like any other graduate who devoted long hours and hard work toward earning their degree. Their families can come and watch them walk across the stage and receive their diploma. For many, it is literally the first time they have taken part in any type of recognition ceremony.

The students' actual diplomas usually showed up about a week later, and I had the privilege of getting to present these awesome documents to them. It was a highlight of my job. Usually, I would page them to my office. When they showed up, I would invite them in and as they walked up, I would stand up and flip the cover open so that their diploma and its shiny gold seal with their name so neatly imprinted on the document stared up at them. The looks I received almost always made my day. Anyway, on this day I was not expecting anything other than the excited expression and the typical polite response of some type of "thank you." However, this graduate had more to say. He stated I was the key reason he would get to leave with an A.A. degree, and I had made a huge difference in his life. He went on to tell me that when he got out he would not disappoint me. What he said next is what touched me greatly. He said, "Mr. Roberson, don't ever quit your job." When I journaled this event, I wrote how his comments meant more to me than any favorable performance appraisal or recognition award I had ever received from my administration. I still believe this to

be true. I wish all staff could experience a compliment like this from an inmate. It would help them realize how we can all make a difference, and that inmates can be sincerely grateful.

Figure 4.7 Graduation Day, Class of 2017

Always Room for Improvement. Inmates who have seen the *big picture* and have realized that the path they were on was not going to be favorable for them or their families often have the same concerns as those of us in regular society. How will we care for and provide for our families? What jobs are out there that will allow me to do this? The problem for them is they must also factor in being an ex-felon. Understanding some of their concerns, I am always looking for ways to improve programming that would increase the inmate's ability to earn a living wage. One such program that I improved was the institutions welding program. I would like to say the project got off the ground on my own accord, but I cannot take all the credit.

The institution already had an uncertified introductory welding course that was popular with the inmate population. It was supervised by staff, but inmate taught. The students spent four weeks on a welding simulator before going to the welding shop for four more weeks of hands on instruction with actual equipment, and other related shop tools. What I was not expecting was the challenge the warden sprang on me during a community relations board meeting. I had just given a small presentation to the board about the programs currently being offered, when the warden threw out to the board that it was his goal to start a fully certified welding program while he was stationed at our facility. Like it or not, that actual goal fell on my shoulders. Challenge accepted.

The warden had no idea how much a program like that would cost, nor did we have the space or infrastructure to pull it off within the institution. I had to think outside the box on this project. What we came up with was a program where the inmates furloughed out into the community to participate in an already certified welding program at a local training center. It was not an effortless process and took almost a year to get the logistics and contracts negotiated. Through all of this, I was excited for what opportunities this would provide to the inmate population. The welding certification would allow for immediate employment upon release with a living wage to boot in an inmate hiring friendly industry. Win-win for everyone. What I did not expect and was actually very disappointing was the push back from the correctional services staff (or uniformed officers). They were more worried about the extra work it would cause for them to process the inmates in and out of the prison than what benefits it would provide for the inmates and their families. This inability to see the *big picture* was a recurring theme, and basically infuriated me. It was not as if I

was asking them to do something that was not a normal part of their job description and responsibility. It simply came down to more work, so they did not want to do it. The program moved forward, the correctional officers complained, and I had conversations with as many as I could to explain the benefits of such a program, the *big picture*. No one likes change, especially when one does not have any control over it. I get that, but when we are supposed to be working toward a common goal of rehabilitating the inmates, I wonder where some staff's intentions really are at times.

Once we got our foot in the door at the welding training center, and staff got over the little extra work of processing inmates, the program took off. It was super popular with the inmate population. Staff could see the difference it made in their demeanor and attitudes; it was like a weight had been lifted off these men's shoulders. (Figure 4.2). A sideline benefit was also felt in the community as well. Most of the projects the students worked on while honing their new skills came from community requests. They built park benches, handicap access ramps, tool bins, and repaired bleachers and soccer goals destroyed in a wind storm. Additionally, the students also felt like they were giving back to the community. The program was a total success. When our state's U.S. Congresswomen, Kristi Noem, visited town she wanted to see the program for herself and hear about its possibilities in filling gaps in the South Dakota work force.

The program continued to grow as did our relationship with the training center. After the second year of running the welding program, we added a Computer Numeric Control (CNC) machine operator course. This program was also well received, and by then the correctional staff saw the benefits as well. There was no push back when this

Figure 4.7 Welding Graduates

program was started. I remember one staff member telling me how he was talking with one of the CNC students, and he thought it was "cool" how excited the inmate was about the programs offered at the training center. Those little connections that staff might not give a thought to can make a tremendous difference to an inmate. That inmate was telling a correctional officer about his training, and since the officer showed interest in his success and excitement, the officer achieved more than simply providing security for the institution.

I Can Help You. At one point our college program was directed to abolish our undergraduate certificate program that ran in conjunction with the MMC associate degrees inmates could earn while in the program. The idea behind offering the undergraduate certificates was to offer educational credit to students who did not have time to complete a whole 2-year degree. Remember, by policy, the program will not allow my department to pay for college credit—a program must lead to a completion.

I still reflect on the Central Office decision to abolish the undergraduate certificate program today. It never made sense to me considering our mission in the education department is to provide educational opportunities to as many students as we can reach. I did not like telling someone who saw the value in taking courses that could improve their re-entry success that they were out of luck because they did not have the time to complete a whole degree or certificate during their sentence.

The problem came down to finding another way to pay for it since I was not allowed to use the funds from the Advanced Occupational Education (AOE) budget. The funds would have to come from my general education budget. The general budget, however, was already tight because I ensured year after year that I spent the allocated funds on quality programming. If a person has worked in the federal government for any length of time, they know there is almost always what we call "year end spending money." Those are the funds that agencies make sure they spend so Congress does not cut the budget the next year. The Bureau of Prisons is not any different. Individual institutions and departments who fall short of spending their budget go through a mad spending spree at the end of the fiscal year to buy supplies, complete projects, etc. It is very frustrating as a tax payer to see this take place. However, in my case, I spent education department funds easily, always asked for more and helped other departments spend their year end funds as well. This baffled me simply because each year when I requested additional funds in my own budget, it was inevitability denied. Before, when I received these extra funds, I used them to pay for more college classes, new texts, and tuition for the college program. These funds were placed in my general education budget and were allowed to supplement the AOE

budget. It could not work the other way around. Had I ever had excess funds in the AOE budget, the funds would have to be sent back to Central Office. I never did, though, because I always enrolled enough students to use the whole AOE budget. One of my college students, however, gave me an idea.

This student was getting transferred and was well over a year into his college program. A transfer is usually a disappointing situation, not only for the student but also the program. When a student leaves a program at our institution, we do not get to count his college courses as a completion to help justify our budget for the next year. What I could do for him though, was put what classes he did complete toward one of the previously offered undergraduate certificates listed in MMC's catalog. The institution did not get credit for the completion, but the student received a diploma from MMC. He was very appreciative of my extra effort.

I thought to myself, knowing I would get year end money to spend, why not budget for the cost of allowing those students with less time before release to take a few classes leading to an undergraduate certificate? Then I could use the general education budget to pay for it. The first order of business was to revamp the undergraduate certificates because they were made up of too many courses and credits. I reached out to MMC to see what we could do. Of course, MMC was on board, but had to go through the proper procedures and get approval from their board of directors. The previous program offered a total of five different certificates. After reworking the certificate program to meet the student's needs, MMC and I came up with two certificates that needed between 16-19 credits to complete: one in management (business emphasis) and one in horticulture. Both were in line with our

associate degree programs. Once that was in place, I had a conversation with the Warden to let him know how I was going to increase programming. Luckily, the Warden at the time was pro-programming. If programming increased, he assured me there would be funds available to cover my costs.

Ultimately, without going into further detail, my overall general education budget was increased in proceeding years to cover this new aspect of the college program. It gave me a great deal of pride and pleasure the next time an inmate approached me about starting college, but only had a year or so before he released. I specifically designed the certificate programs to be completed in about three semesters. Instead of turning them away and crushing their hopes and plans, I could now say, "I can help you."

Planned Happenstance finds its way into a great deal of circumstances. This inmate did not plan his transfer, nor did he know I would go out of my way to not only assist him with a certificate completion but would improve the program because of our interaction. Learning to recognize happenstance and developing the skills to act on the opportunities it may provide is a valuable tool.

Ties to Family and Literacy

In high school I took one class which was related to Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS). Back then it was called Home Economics and we had units on human development, child care, foods and nutrition, sewing, and relationships. I do not recall much about the course work because I did not take the class very seriously. However, 30 years later I see the great benefit of classes like these which are part of the current FCS curriculum. Through my employment at the prison, I facilitate many classes

which are directly related to FCS. For example, we have classes for the inmate population on parenting, basic money management, life skills, resume building, basic computer and communication skills, mock job fairs and interviews, marriage enrichment, and many others. When I decided to return to school to obtain a master's degree, I decided on a degree in FCS because the information I would learn would help assist in developing the institution's programs to meet the needs of our inmate population. I chose a degree that came with teacher licensure to help me get promoted within the education department, where licensure was a requirement. By choosing the degree and program offered through South Dakota State University (SDSU), I was able to work on a degree that met both my objectives.

The coursework was offered through a consortium of colleges working together called the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (GPIDEA). I chose SDSU as my home university. Through this program, I was able to take courses from top professors in the field from universities across the country: Texas Tech University, North Dakota State University, University of Nebraska, Central Washington University, and my home school of SDSU. This experience gave me a great deal of perspective on educational programs and learning platforms. It was through these classes that my attitudes about the importance of prison education exploded with excitement. I could not wait to get more involved and work on some of my own ideas. The practicums and student teaching I completed through the teacher preparation program only heightened my resolve as this reflection tells about some of my experience.

Reflection:

I learned from this practicum experience a great deal on how being a teacher involves more than just having the knowledge to teach your content area. Teachers have to be able to communicate with their students, administration, parents, and their peers. Teachers are expected to participate in and are assigned extracurricular activities, sometimes these assignments are outside their comfort zones. I learned about the many programs needed to insure that every student has opportunities to learn, grow, and socialize. I learned I have a special interest in reading fundamentals. I enjoyed my time spent in the Reading 180 classroom, this being a program offered by Yankton Middle School that targets at risk readers and assists them in learning some reading strategies that work for them. I enjoyed seeing the students make connections with what they read and how the reading teacher facilitated those connections. I will, as a result of this work, investigate taking more classes that may lead to certification in literacy coaching (Roberson, 2012).

Incorporate Literacy. I had already taken a literacy course that helped me understand the power of reflection and self-narrative. That course enlightened me to the benefit of the prison's creative writing program I discussed earlier. This practicum further identified the desire for me to take the literacy component to another level at the prison. I wanted to rise to a level that would not only assist inmates in being better readers but afford them opportunities to help their children become better readers too. I wanted to include a literacy component to as many programs as possible and increase the participation of our parent child reading programs. To further develop my own

expertise with the literacy component, I added a graduate certificate program as a minor. In December of 2015, I completed this work and earned a graduate certificate in Developmental Literacy from Texas Tech University. Every class I took through this program enlightened me to the need to advocate and develop the prison's literacy and parenting programs, not just assist the students in earning their GED. To do this I needed to get more staff, specifically those outside of the education department, on board.

Get the Word Out. I started publishing our GED graduates through the institutions email system. The idea behind this was to encourage other staff to congratulate the graduates. For the most part this went over very well, especially at my last institution. However, this practice has hit a little resistance at my current institution. To explain, every institution has a certain culture. At my current institution, FCI Oxford, little value is placed on the programming of the inmate population. More concern is placed on security. This is not completely a bad thing, though it does make relating to the inmate's needs more difficult. FCI Oxford's culture results in staff being less likely to show that little bit of empathy or provide that encouragement an inmate might need to place value on what they contribute or accomplish while serving their time. However, I continue to email to all staff the names of the newly graduated GED students in the hopes that some staff will read them and congratulate the inmate if they see them in their daily interactions. I remember one inmate who asked me, "Mr. Roberson, did you put something out about me completing my GED?" I told him I had and asked him why. He responded that it was very nice of me because he had been congratulated by his detail supervisor. Many

of these inmates have never accomplished anything that would justify a congratulatory response from anyone, much less a correctional worker. I could tell by the way the inmate told me about his interaction that he was stunned by the comment, and grateful at the same time. Those brief positive connections not only built up the confidence of the inmate but make the institution safer. In this situation, the GED graduate may never have a confrontation with that staff member out of respect because the staff member congratulated him on his accomplishment.

Sometimes it just takes time. After several months of putting emails out I finally heard some staff congratulate an inmate for passing the GED at my new institution. I also received a couple of compliments about the success in our GED numbers. One staff member even told me they appreciated seeing the emails, so they know if the inmates that graduate are on their case load. I presumed they were congratulating them when they came in for their team counseling sessions.

In a recent GED experience, we had an inmate who still needed to pass two of his official exams. The problem was that the inmate was in the Special Housing Unit (SHU). The SHU is a jail within the prison, where inmates are placed when they cannot function on the main compound without causing trouble, are a threat to staff or other inmates, or have placed themselves there because they are afraid to be in the general population. One inmate was motivated to earn his GED but was also scheduled to transfer. I wanted to assist him but had to jump through some hoops to pull him out of the SHU so he could be brought to the education department to take the exams. It was a logistical nightmare to make happen, but the staff from multiple departments pulled together and were able to get it accomplished. I am not sure this

could have been done, had I not been advocating and modeling the value we as staff need to place on our population's education and re-entry efforts. All staff should place value in these efforts. When we do, the inmates might show appreciate and advocate for us out in the population with other inmates who may be harder to reach.

C**oming Together.** During the task mentioned above, there were opportunities for positive conversations with staff regarding educational programming for inmates. Many indicated a change in their own discourses regarding programming for inmates based on my philosophies and mentoring. Two conversations in particular come to mind.

Book Fair. Soon after I transferred to FCI Oxford, I hosted a book fair in the visitation room. The book fair was Winnie the Pooh themed; I ordered a life sized Pooh cut-out for taking pictures, Pooh wall clings, Pooh books, stuffed Pooh characters, and printed a pin-the-tail on Eeyore game to play with the inmate's children. I also planned a story time and read to the kids to not only interact with the children, but to model reading aloud strategies for the parents to observe while the activity took place.

To pull off the book fair, I assigned one of my teaching staff to assist with the organization and supervision of the event. He was a willing participant, and on the day of the event even wore a Pooh themed neck tie I had purchased for him. Though I could tell he was skeptical at first—once he saw how involved I wanted to be—he joined in to make it a good event. He told me after the fact that he was a bit apprehensive when I explained what all was going to take place but seeing the smiles on the kids' faces changed his outlook.

Figure 4.9 FCI Oxford Book Fair.

Change in the Atmosphere. The second conversation was with one of my education staff. He admitted to me that he had been wrong on his thinking. In this case, he was referring to how, as correctional workers and professional educators, we can first view the inmates as students and then as inmates only when their behavior or actions call for it. He said he had been working on this approach and had noticed a big difference in the rapport he was developing with his students. Additionally, he commented on some of the Adult Learning Theory points I had been making about giving the students more control of their own learning. He mentioned their motivation levels where higher and they were more engaged in their daily instruction, because he had given them the opportunity to take the GED exams they felt most confident about.

Previously, the practice had been to make all students pass the Mathematical Reasoning exam first, before moving onto the other subject areas. This caused a lot of negative feelings about the GED program and was demoralizing to the students who

struggled with math. They were not motivated to apply themselves because of consistent failure in one subject. My philosophy was to let them work on and pass areas they felt stronger in and that would motivate them towards the other subject areas when the time came. The motivation on the education floor after the round of GED exams where students had input into which exam they took was simply amazing. Multiple inmates commented and thanked me and staff for the change in procedures. When the staff member told me that he had noticed a drastic change in the atmosphere of the floor, it reinforced my drive to change the culture of how correctional workers approach the inmate population. They are people first and inmates second. If all correctional workers approached the inmates this way, the prison would run smoother and safer and there would be fewer confrontations between inmates and staff. One point I seem to find myself repeating when mentoring staff is to remember that their punishment is being separated from society, not for us to make their lives more difficult or unpleasant while here. Our job is to keep them behind the fence, while providing opportunities for improvement, and modeling appropriate and professional interpersonal communication is part of that.

Every Student Counts. There was this one student I had an in-depth conversation with while trying to find ways to improve our literacy program. I will call him Jerry. Jerry was a 63 year-old male of larger than normal stature. He had a hefty but soft demeanor about him, the kind of guy who looked like he could be any kid's favorite grandpa. He had a soft voice with a heavy backwoods southern accent. He put forth a lot of effort in both his classroom studies and his job assignments

within the prison. Jerry was, of course, a convicted felon who served a ten-year sentence for production of methamphetamines.

About Jerry. Jerry came from a small rural community in Northwest Missouri, where he stated that the only jobs that pay anything required training and an education. He came from a large family with three brothers and two sisters. His parents always struggled to make ends meet and never really pushed any of their children to take their education seriously. Only one of Jerry's siblings graduated high school. Others obtained a GED, while he and one brother quite going to school prior to entering what we now call middle school. Jerry stated he never enjoyed school and could not even remember ever having completed an actual homework assignment. He said he learned to get by with cheating and "following and watching what [his] friends did."

At the time, Jerry was our lowest level reader without a documented learning disability. He simply never learned how to read. Jerry adapted his whole life by watching other people to accomplish what had to be done. He held jobs that did not require any literacy skills. He explained that he worked a lot of years in a feed mill as a janitor and laborer. When the job required something to be read he would sometimes take the material home to his wife and have her read it to him. Jerry also spent a few years working as a self-trained tractor mechanic. Jerry never received formal training and often struggled when he had to look at repair diagrams to place orders for new parts. He claims this is what kept him from being more successful in the field.

When Jerry first came to my prison after having served two years in a higher security level facility, he was not functionally literate. He could read a few sight words, and even then, I am not sure he was reading them or simply saw them as a

symbol for what the text represents. For example, the word *stop*, he recognized because he drove and knew the word on the signs was "STOP." I asked Jerry how he received a driver's license, and he said he never had one but drove anyway. He stated, "I knew enough to drive, and my wife would read directions, and I knew my way around, so I didn't really have to read any signs in my neck-of-the-woods. And if we left there, Sharon (changed for privacy) would get us there by giving me the directions."

At Jerry's previous institution he was on a waiting list for GED instruction. Those were wasted years, when the institution should have placed him based on level and not time remaining on his sentence. At my facility, Jerry was placed in class immediately and began instruction first by learning to "read" posted signage, so he would not find himself getting into trouble by not following posted policies and procedures. For example, "No Loitering," "Staff Only," "Out-of-Bounds," and other signs that aid in the supervision of the inmate population.

Jerry's Plan. Jerry made some significant strides in the program. Before he released he was reading at about the 4-6 grade reading level. Unfortunately, Jerry did not earn his GED prior to his release, nor did we get the impression he would pursue services to assist him upon his release. However, he was very appreciative of the efforts we put toward his progress and he hoped to be able to read to his great-grand kids when he returned home.

Jerry and I talked about his likes and dislikes of our current program. When he first started the program, he reminded me that we had him in the classrooms with all the other students. Our program works in a pod structure based on individual student

academic levels in math, science, reading, and writing. Jerry was placed with a tutor that worked with a group of two students plus Jerry. Each of the other two students was reading below a sixth-grade level. However, they could read, and Jerry could not. Jerry made much greater gains when we took what used to be a storage room and turned it into our developmental reading room. Since Jerry was the first student we have had in recent history that was literally learning to read and write, we pulled him from the pod system and created a new and more private learning environment for him. We also provided a private tutor that usually assisted the teachers with day to day lessons. Jerry stated, "It was a little embarrassing and I didn't try as hard when I was in the bigger class, because I didn't want people to see me working on simple stuff."

At one point, Jerry made a comment about wanting to be able to read the newspaper from his region. Although we were not able to order a specific paper for his area, we were able to find a newspaper subscription that is specifically written for developing adult readers. The paper is usually a week behind front page daily news but has all the latest national headlines. Jerry still struggled through the paper, but when combining the text with the pictures he said he got a "good idea about what was going on out there." Jerry mentioned that it made him feel better when he saw other people reading the same paper; "Other people must struggle too because y'all put a copy in the regular library, it's like a regular paper to the other guys."

Another strategy that improved Jerry's confidence was the use of adult developmental readers. A lot of progress has been made over the years to create books designed to give learning adults texts that they can read that do not appear to be children's books. We bought books specifically for Jerry related to his interests to use

within his educational plan. Additionally, Jerry stated that one of the nicest things anyone in the prison system has done for him is ordering him books that everyone else reads and providing him the audio version for him to follow along. Jerry followed the text in books he listened to written by Tom Clancy, Clive Cussler, Louis L'Amour, and J. K. Rowling.

Jerry spoke very highly of his assigned staff teacher and inmate tutor. He made the comment that the only thing that he would have done different is to have his teacher work just with him every day. Jerry also implied he knew this was not practical since there are several students she must divide her time between each day.

I asked Jerry to describe where he started and where he planned to be before he released. Jerry said, "I came here not being able to read anything and just sort of faked my way through things. Now, I can see something and sort of read some of it, and I never thought that would happen for me. I would like to read well enough before I leave to read to my new great-grand daughter. She will be five when I get out. That would be nice."

As our conversation was coming to an end, I told him that we were happy with his progress, and we wanted to do everything we could to assist him in reaching his literacy goals and then some. Jerry, in his typical lunky way of carrying himself, stood up and offered to shake my hand. I reached across the desk and shook his hand, and he thanked me for talking with him, to which I replied, "I'm the one who owes you the thanks. Thanks, for being a good student for your teacher and to yourself. It's guys like you who work hard, that make our jobs more rewarding and meaningful. Have a great afternoon."

An Outstanding Teacher. I admired Jerry's goal of wanting to be able to read to his grandchild when he returned home. It reminded me of reading to my own daughters and how much I cherish those memories. I know my own mother read to me as a child, though I cannot remember a specific instance other than the times around the little round table I mentioned in the opening chapter. I did recall a time in the 3rd grade when I had a teacher who read to the class every day after our lunch period. I remember this event because of the story she was reading. The book was *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls. I believe the reason this specific time stuck with me is because I remember being able to visualize the story in my head as the teacher read. She was so good at reading aloud, using intonation and facial expressions to help convey whatever was happening in the story. She would stop and ask questions and point out details, all of us eager to voice our opinions and thoughts. What she was doing was modeling multiple reading strategies, and she did a wonderful job. All of us were completely taken in by her read alouds. At one point in this story, I remember her stopping and not wanting to read the next section, because she thought it was too "gross." Of course, we pleaded for her to continue. It was the part of the story where Rubin was chasing Billy's coon dogs, threatening to kill them, when he tripped over a stick and fell on the axe he was carrying. Billy was standing over him trying to figure out what had happened:

> "Stopping in his effort of getting up, still staring at me, his mouth was opened as if to say something. Words never came. Instead, a large red bubble slowly worked its way out of his mouth and burst. He fell back to the ground. I knew he was dead" (Rawls, 1961, p. 147).

She read it, and several of my classmates around me made squeamish sounds. Obviously, we were all visualizing the text and learning to comprehend. Thankfully, we had a teacher who was extremely good at fostering those skills. I recall getting to watch the movie after we finished the book at school. It solidified my love of the story. For the longest time it was one of my favorite books, not only because I enjoyed the story and the movie, but because I enjoyed my introduction to it through my teacher's wonderful modeling strategies. Obviously, at the time I did not understand that aspect of my enjoyment, I just knew I liked the teacher reading to us. It was a point that helped me develop a love of reading that I still enjoy today. It makes me think about every kid I have seen or child I have read to myself and how they seem to naturally enjoy being read to—little kids in the laps of their parents or children huddled around a teacher. This makes me feel passionate about the importance of developing literacy programs and assisting people like Jerry, and his goal to be able to read to his grandchild.

My Daughters. My wife and I read to our kids virtually every night when they were infants and toddlers. When they could read on their own, we encouraged them to use the first 30 minutes of their bedtime as quiet reading time. We ended up producing two of the most book thirsty kids on the Olympic Peninsula (back then we lived in Washington state). They read before bed, they read when they got up, the read during the day, they read in the car. If I had a dollar for every book we bought, I could probably pay for a full semester of grad school.

The big change for me came when they started reading chapter books. They were reading on their own, and I wanted to be able to discuss the books and characters

with them and show an interest in what they were reading. So, I read books I would have otherwise never picked up: *Pony Pals* chapter books, *Harry Potter* series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* books, to name a few. The most memorable books I read for this purpose was *The Hunger Games* series. The first book of *The Hunger Games* is the only novel I ever picked up and did not put down until I had finished it. My daughters had been hounding me to read the series (by this time they were in the 8th and 12th grades), and the first movie was about to be released. One Saturday morning I was waiting on my wife to leave with the girls on a shopping trip so I could start my homework. While they were getting ready, I began reading the first book of the series. I figured I would read a couple chapters and after they left move on to my homework. Well, several hours later they returned to find me laying on the couch and finishing up the last chapter. They were amazed I had spent all day reading the book straight through. Luckily, the homework I had planned to work on was not quite due.

The main point to my binge reading story is that I had not really read for the joy of reading in quite some time. Having gotten so tied up with homework while working on my degrees, I realized I was missing out on shared interests with my girls. After this experience I began squeezing in more novels. I read all kinds of titles for simple fun and pleasure when not reading for content and knowledge, though usually only between semesters. I have found light leisure reading to be a great escape from having to read for content. I thank my parents for modeling for me a way to encourage reading in my own daughters.

Keep Reading. Growing up, my father was the reader in our home even though it was my mother who worked with us as previously mentioned. I remember

my father always having a western or science fiction novel on his table next to his recliner. They were never there long, because when he picked up a book, he usually read it almost straight through. He was not exactly a Louis L'Amour fan but had read several of his books. I had subscribed to a Louis L'Amour book club when I first moved into the barracks on Ft. Lewis. I enjoyed it and shared my reads with my dad. I remember thoroughly enjoying those conversations. We discussed how the main characters all were rough and weathered yet handsome cowboys with a square chin and steel eyes, whose gaze went soft when looking into the eyes of a pretty young gal. We laughed at this, and how the same story line seemed to occur with every cowboy. We both enjoyed the *Sackett* series of his books, and how the mini-series did the books justice. Tom Selleck was the perfect Orrin Sackett. These discussions led to other conversations about western movies and other genres of books. I enjoyed these conversations and can see how my dad was just as much an influence on my literary self as my mother and the work put in during the earlier years.

In later years my dad's eyesight was getting bad enough that he developed headaches when he tried to read. For a period of years, he stopped reading for pleasure, much like I did when I was working on my undergraduate degree. However, we had a conversation one day about some of the books I had read with the girls. Specifically, I had mentioned *The Hunger Games*. When he told me why he had not been reading, I asked him if he had ever checked out books in large print. Funniest thing, he did not know they printed books in large print. That evening I ordered all three books of *The Hunger Games* in large print and had them mailed to him. I remember my mother telling me how it was like old times. Dad got those books, and

my mother swore he did not put them down until he had read all of them. After we discussed the books, I mentioned some others he might enjoy. The next time we talked, he had gone to Barnes & Noble and bought the other two series I mentioned; *The Maze Runner* and the *Divergent* series. This time, he bought them in regular print. He had forgotten how much he enjoyed reading, and he just needed to pace himself to not strain his eyes.

Reflection:

If I could explain or teach the inmates ways to connect with their family through literature or reading, I could maybe help them find better ways to interact with their families. A program like this might help kids connect with their fathers while also providing meaningful conversation while talking on the phone. A book club of some kind could work well, that when done, the institution could mail a copy of the book home to the family of the inmate for them to read and they could all share in the experience (Roberson, 2013).

Escape from Prison. Experiencing literacy through my own reading and seeing it as an enjoyable way to interact with family has influenced how I approach literacy with the inmate population. One of my responsibilities as the supervisor of education is to provide an admission and orientation briefing about educational and leisure opportunities to all newly arriving inmates. As part of this briefing I tell the inmates that I am going to show them how to escape from prison. It is always interesting to see the looks on their faces when I say this; sometimes it is even comical. I go onto explain that I have a library up in education with over 9000 volumes of books they can choose to read.

Quoting Dr. Seuss usually gets a reaction as well after I ask them if they know where the quote came from. I tell them while encouraging them to read, "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go" (Seuss, 1978). I use this quote to tie in reading to their children and to relate that, "See, even a children's author knows how to escape from prison." This usually gets some type of positive reaction, if not just a few smiles and nodding heads. I then explain the phenomenon of getting lost in a book, and how they too can experience that feeling. When I explain this, I let them know those hours in a book are an escape from their present reality, with the added benefit of being able to share what they read with family and friends, thus giving them endless things to talk about that have nothing do with their current situation or residence in a prison.

I have used this same expression with success in motivating students to work toward completing their GED or a vocational trade program. I often say to them, "I'll help you escape form prison, but you have to give me your best work." When they look at me funny, I explain that prison is not the life they want to lead, and that preparing for release with marketable skills and an education will help them escape from prison by not being a recidivism statistic.

Love the Passion. Communication is a key element in both the family and the workplace and my encouragement of family literacy helps to build on communication skills. Prisons essentially provide no training in this regard to the inmate population. Sure, we offer it to staff to help them with interacting with the inmate population, mostly in hopes of using their verbal skills to deescalate potentially violent situations. But what could be done to offer some type of communication skill building to the

inmate population? I learned of a new program offered to staff and students at the college I contracted with that could possibly be incorporated into a course at the prison. A meeting and speaking engagement was arranged to determine the feasibility of this program and to see if it could be incorporated into our college program. Dr. Kalsow, the Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs from MMC, approached me with the idea. I agreed to allow her to present the program, in a condensed form, to our creative writing class. The program is called the Fierce® Leadership Program.

I met Dr. Reese, the creative writing instructor, and Dr. Kalsow at Control early on the day Dr. Kalsow was to present. Control is short for what we in the corrections field call the Control Center, the heart of the institution, where all visitors are processed, internal and external security doors are controlled, and the running count of the inmate population is maintained. Control is also where a vast amount of security cameras are controlled and monitored and where all radio traffic flows through. It is a very busy room often referred to as the "bubble" or the "fish bowl" because the officer that mans the post is in a room with all the aforementioned equipment surrounded by thick sheets of glass. Inside, the officer has all the power and authority to run the prison should something unthinkable take place anywhere else on the institution or within the prison. It is quite interesting to explain the function of the Control Center to new guests of the prison. Dr. Kalsow was no exception regarding her curiosity of how the prison worked. I barely had time to say hello before the questioning began. I suspect this is just part of her personality and love of learning that she jumped right into educating herself on what she was experiencing. I spent a

few minutes getting her and Dr. Reese checked in and answered her questions about the prison, explaining security procedures she would have to follow as a guest.

Dr. Kalsow arrived in a red leather suit jacket that had to be expensive from the look of it. She also had on a colorful scarf tied around her neck in what appeared to be a complicated knot. Her shirt and slacks were black, and she presented a very professional and warm appearance that matched her personality. She is the type of person who within minutes makes a person feel like she has been their friend for years. She listens as you speak, confirms your thoughts, and seems genuinely interested in everything you have to say.

The three of us left the Control Center and headed to the education building located on the top floor of Forbes. Forbes is the old science hall from back when the prison was a college itself before the federal government purchased it and converted it into a prison. I explained all this to Dr. Kalsow as we walked. She was absolutely stunned at how nice the grounds and buildings looked. She wondered aloud, "Why didn't Mount Marty purchase this place and move over?" while explaining how much better shape our campus was in comparison to theirs. I proceeded to explain that the cost of renovations even 25 years ago when the prison took over the grounds was in the millions of dollars. She laughed and stated, "Yeah, no small Catholic school would have been able to do that."

We arrived on the education floor and I gave her a quick tour. I pointed out the different classrooms and answered her questions about the programs we offer: GED, ESL, library service, parenting program, adult continuing education, recreational activities, and of course, the college program, which she is very familiar with since the

prison contracts with MMC for those services. Dr. Kalsow especially enjoyed the bulletin board that had last year's MMC graduate's pictures in their graduate regalia. She was equally impressed with our bulletin board of GED graduates as I explained that for the last several years my professional staff had done an outstanding job of exceeding our strategic plan goals regarding our number of GED completions. We moved down to my office and I continued to answer her very thoughtful questions regarding our programs. As we sat in my office, I directed the conversation toward the program she was going to present to the creative writing students. It was obvious by her reaction that she is very passionate about the program and believes the information can positively affect the lives of those who experience it. She explained that the reason she took her current position at MMC over other opportunities, was that during her interview, the president of the college was receptive to her implementing the program at MMC should she get selected for the position. She was excited to report that the college had already trained all their staff and 175 students with the program. This brought us to the discussion of how we could implement the program with the inmate student population and how this mini presentation would allow me to get a good idea if the program was feasible for full implementation within a prison.

The presentation was not scheduled to begin until 12:15, and both Dr. Reese and Dr. Kalsow had arrived at 11:00 am to give us time for the short tour of education, a little time to talk, and to have lunch in the Officer's Mess. Dr. Reese is a huge fan of the Officer's Mess and wanted to expose Dr. Kalsow to the experience. I am not sure if it is the taste of the food or the price. Staff and guests at the prison can dine at the Officer's Mess for $2.25 per meal. The food is prepared by the inmate population as

part of one of our Department of Labor apprenticeships programs, and is usually very good, with several options for the main entrée. This day was no exception. There was a pulled pork and coleslaw sandwich, which is what I had, baked chicken with rice, and homemade vegetarian pizza. There were also several options for sides, a full salad bar, and at least three different options for dessert.

Our conversation around lunch revolved around getting to know each other a little closer. I have known Dr. Reese for several years, so he basically allowed the conversation to be between Dr. Kalsow and I, interjecting only when prompted with our attempts to include him in the conversation. Dr. Kalsow explained her interest in why she chose to be an educator and her decision to pursue her doctoral degree. She mentioned that teaching in high school had become too mundane regarding her own personal growth and wanted more challenges in life than simply "teaching to tests" as she put it regarding her district's restriction on teachers adjusting their curriculum.

Around the table at lunch is when she also explained how she found the Fierce® program. She knew that after she experienced the program as a student, she had "found her life's mission." She sought out the organization that developed the program and became an advocate. She was super excited about her current opportunity to present at the prison; the organization had been seeking a connection to the prison population because they felt there was a need. She could hardly contain herself when she began talking about it. It was invigorating to see someone so passionate and excited about something. This is difficult to experience when working in a correctional setting because of the negative persona that surrounds the inmate population. Most shy away from having to interact with inmates, and here was a lady that was chomping at

the bit to speak to every one of them that will listen. Who was I to hold her back? I looked at the clock on the wall and said, "Well, if we want to be on time we better head out. I know the guys are looking forward to your presentation."

The presentation blew me away. It was so thoughtfully organized to specifically address skills the inmates needed in their current situation. It has a clear and precise message, that if practiced by those who heard the presentation could improve their communication with not only staff and other inmates but improve communication with their families and in work settings. The students were so enthralled with her dynamic presentation, I literally had to cut the class off when it was time for our guests to leave.

As I escorted Dr. Kalsow and Dr. Reese out, I made the comment that I would love to not only incorporate the program into the college program but would like to offer it as a self-improvement course to the general population. I even suggested it was a course that many of our staff could benefit from as well.

Refection:

Effective communication skills are paramount in managing and working in a correctional setting, yet regularly we have staff who, despite their training, escalate a situation verses deescalating a situation, using poor interpersonal communication skills. Additionally, more than administration would like to see, staff are accused of unprofessional conduct because of the way they address inmates. In the field of corrections this is a perennial problem. The actual and perceived authority of the correctional worker gives them a heightened since of superiority over the inmates in their care. To prevent

> *unnecessary and possibly violent situations staff need to be trained, and more importantly, model good interpersonal communication skills with the inmate population. Communication skills do not come naturally and need to be learned and practiced routinely. Since most communication styles are learned through observation, I would like to incorporate modeling and role playing into our lesson plan for interpersonal communication skills (Roberson, 2014).*

Family Bonds. One of the most disheartening things I have witnessed in a prison visiting room was when I was pulling a tour as the Institution Duty Officer. This is collateral duty every supervisor must fill every few weeks. It is a weeklong tour of being at the institution during the off hours as a point of contact or liaison to the warden. During this one tour, I stopped by the visiting room to check in with the officers and look at the material we had in the family section of the room. Each institution is required to have at least a small portion of a visiting room set aside for parents to have a specific space to interact with younger children, stocked with games, books, puzzles, and whatever else the security level of the institution can justify. On this particular weekend I happened to witness a family processing into the institution. When the mother attempted to hand a small child over to his incarcerated father, the child began to cry and scream. He did not recognize who the guy was. I know this because I overheard another member of the family make the comment, “It’s okay, this is your daddy.” Of course, this did not do much to comfort the child, and the father had to hand his son back over to the mother. What it did do was make me start to think of a way I could assist with this problem. Before this incident, the inmates were only allowed to have visits every third weekend. This was due to crowding issues and

building occupancy laws. However, our population had dropped, so I ran the numbers to see what the average visiting numbers were for the past few months. Turned out, the institution could alter the policy and allow families to visit every other week.

I ran the suggestion past the executive assistant but told him I did not want credit for the idea. I was still in the depths of working out the welding program at the time and was not the most favorable supervisor in the eyes of the correctional officers. This simple yet positive change would also be perceived as causing more work for the custody staff. I did not want the idea to hit a road block because it came from me. Luckily the executive assistant agreed on both points: (a) yes, coming from me would probably cause some grief, and (b) he thought it was a great idea to allow the families more time to visit. The next week a memo to the inmate population was put out from the warden outlining how the new visiting schedule would work so families could visit every other weekend.

Lack of Compassion. When all of this took place, I was in the middle of my FCSE coursework and *family* was a regular part of my own reflections. This event itself made me think of a time I could have been a better family member to my own brother who at one point in his life was serving a yearlong sentence inside a county jail. When I first journaled about this event, I was emotional, and I am finding it difficult to write this narrative. I totally gave up on my brother when he went to jail. At the time I was angry with him for all the heartache and pain he had caused the family because of his drug use and criminal activity. I justified it at the time as *tough love.*

My parents were always bailing him out and choosing to sacrifice seeing me and their granddaughters because they had to stay home to be there for my brother. I was so angry at one point back then I did not talk to my father for a period of several months and I certainly did not talk to my brother. One time my parents did find a long weekend to come visit while my brother was in jail, however, they pre-warned me and asked that if he called, to please accept the collect call. I literally shook my head in disgust, but I told them I would. Of course, he did call, and I accepted the charges. We even talked for a couple of minutes in an awkward exchange of "how are you," "good to hear from you" type of conversation. I turned the phone over to my dad, and they picked up the conversation like it was just another day of the week. I remember that so vividly that I still get upset thinking about it. At the time I was angry, but as time went on, and as a parent myself, I grew to respect my parents for never giving up on their son. They were there for him through the worst parts of his life, and luckily lived long enough to see him become a great father, husband, provider, and a leader in his church. He was a guy that saw rock bottom and had the support from his wife, loving parents, and his faith in the Lord to get him through it. What he did not have is the support of his brother. I do not know if I will ever be able to think about how I treated him without getting upset at myself. I never sent him a letter, allowed him to call, or visited him in jail. I abandoned him in his hour of need. Only through seeing and studying the effects of incarceration on family through my FCSE course work did I realize my huge mistake.

I resolved to advocate for better visiting opportunities for inmates. It hit me like a brick that the incarceration of a person did not just punish the inmate, but the

family unit and the community as well. I questioned why I used to be proud of the fact that I would write an incident report that took away an inmate's good conduct time. Do not misunderstand, inmates still must be held accountable for their actions within the prison for the safety of both staff and other inmates. But where policy will allow it, I now use informal resolutions to deal with misconduct and use every opportunity I can to explain consequences of actions to inmates violating posted policies and regulations. I think of my brother's children, being without their dad. I think of that little boy who did not even know who his dad was that day. I try to think about how the person's incarceration affects those they love and those that love them. I try to implement ways to increase parental and family connectedness in the programs I am responsible for within my department. I feel I will never be able to do enough in this regard, and it weighs heavy on my conscience.

Where to Go from Here

There is a lot of work to be done when it comes to preparing inmates for re-entry and training staff to do this in a manner that encourages personal growth for both staff and inmates alike. As I worked through my life experiences and the happenstance and self-determination that got me to where I am today, I can appreciate we are all in different places and need those personal interactions, mentors, and learning opportunities to help us grow and thrive in our chosen professions and personal lives. My hope is that my story will provide some insight and opportunities for improving correctional education and assist correctional workers in not only assisting inmates in their journey to re-entry but also experience and encourage

personal growth in themselves and the inmate population, making our prisons and communities safer in the process.

In the next chapter I will discuss my findings and the limitations of this autoethnographic study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

"Educators who can teach offenders improved methods of interpersonal communication, both for at home and in the work place, can have an even deeper impact on improving the lives of offenders and their families."

~ Kyle Roberson

Research Questions

This autoethnography examined the following research questions:

1. In what way does a correctional worker's pedagogical journey provide insights into the literacy and rehabilitative needs of inmates and their families?
2. How does reflective writing aid in literacy instruction, personal growth, and the decision-making process for educators?

Methods and Procedures

This study used autoethnography as a research method as a means of inquiry to explore how the lived experiences of the researcher might be useful in the field of corrections and correctional education. The process of data collection included elements of the researcher's past experiences, memories, and written work. It also included a journal that was started at the onset of developing the research project. As the data was collected and analyzed, themes developed that were used to create the narratives found in Chapter IV.

Discussions

Reflection Component. Autoethnography is an effective way to generate ideas and reflect on past experiences that can improve our interactions with others. In the field of corrections every interaction we have with an inmate is a chance to model appropriate behavior, encourage self-improvement, and foster a professional relationship that can lead an inmate to a better future. As you read through my reflections, it is evident there are lessons to be learned in a wide variety of situations. Making mistakes is part of life and reflection is a powerful tool in identifying shortcomings to facilitate changes in our own behavior for the betterment of all stake holders. The ability to reflect and use those insights to make positive changes is not only critical of the correctional worker, but equally critical to the inmate population as a way for them to achieve self-awareness and assist them in seeing how their actions can affect those around them. As one inmate tutor working within my literacy program wrote in a journal entry,

> I learned something very valuable and important today that I will never forget. I learned that we don't tutor or teach to share what we already know. We tutor and teach to ignite a passion to re-learn what we may have forgotten, and along the way, help stoke the flame in others (Yost, 2015, pp. 105-106).

I found through the reflective practices of this autoethnography that the process of learning was taking place. As I was writing and reflecting, I found myself recalling other events or memories that shaped how I interact with both staff and inmates. Small events I took little notice in started to create a larger picture of who I was as both a correctional worker and an educator. Had I not used the reflective practices of an

autoethnography, I am not sure the impact of these seemingly small events would have registered as learning events that shaped my current self. Not only did I learn about how I interact with both staff and inmates, but also how other staff and their attitudes and communication with inmates can foster a certain tone or culture within the prison setting. Chang (2016) informs us that autoethnography is not necessarily focusing on just the autoethnographer but is also about searching for understanding with those around us, as I learned from those around me.

Positive Change. Throughout this process, I have witnessed how my attitudes have influenced those I work with and supervise. Specifically, I have used what I have learned in my own reflective practices to foster changes in how correctional workers and educators interact with the inmate population. One specific example is elucidated in the change of teachers' approach to inmate students. Over several months, I had been encouraging the teachers in my department to take a more sincere and vested interest in their student's success. All but one of the teachers come from a custody background—former correctional officers. It was my belief, after having observed their interactions with their students for several weeks when I first arrived as their new supervisor, that they saw their students simply as inmates, not as students who needed a teacher to help them advance through the GED program. Ironically, it was that one teacher that hired into the institution as a teacher, who attempted to foster a more teacher student relationship and worked more directly with his students in whole class instruction.

Most inmates considered their assigned inmate tutor as their teacher, not the staff member. The staff members are viewed by the inmates as correctional workers

simply supervising the floor. I specifically remember multiple times hearing inmates referring to the teaching staff as "they aren't teachers, they are never in here teaching us." This is how I knew there was a problem. This has changed over the last few months. I believe the way I have modeled how staff members can develop a rapport with inmates while still maintaining the professional boundary has made a significant difference. During multiple staff meetings, I encouraged developing that rapport. I explained that if staff work directly with their students and encourage their progress and celebrate their successes with them, we will have more students passing the GED exams, develop that rapport, and make the prison safer in the process.

Relationships. Relationships form the building blocks by which we make connections with the world around us, and therefore, are of crucial importance as educators and correctional workers. Forming positive relationships will enable all correctional workers to provide the best opportunity for inmates to believe in their ability to be successful, through the programming and vocational training offered by the prisons. As professionals we should always be setting the example or modeling what we want the inmates to achieve, which is to embrace lifelong learning, personify professionalism, and be a mentor.

One way I specifically model relationship building is by *fist bumping* a student when they pass an exam leading toward their GED completion. Ordinarily, this would be a practice that is discouraged in the correctional environment. However, when done within the educational setting, I explained to my staff, the *fist bump* is a completely appropriate way to express encouragement and develop rapport with students. It is a

simple gesture that sends a powerful message from the staff member to the inmate that we care and are excited about their success.

During a recent GED testing cycle, I witnessed two staff who previously would not have been as encouraging during the process, extend sincere congratulatory remarks to students who passed their exam. One teacher even fist bumped with the student, albeit, the inmate initiated the fist bump. The staff member commented, "that's a first." I reinforced our previous conversations, relaying that that was a good sign he is making great progress in motivating his students. I mentioned that the student would not have done that if he did not identify him as someone who helped get him to where he was in the GED process. In other words, it was a sign of respect for him as a teacher. The staff member responded that he had been working hard at changing how he approached his students and stated he had noticed a huge difference in their attitudes toward him.

A Promising Practice. The reflective practices that I used during this autoethnography helped me see my own personal and professional growth. Though the data collection and writing process, I was able to focus on key events that shaped my pedagogical journey. I did not have control of who I would meet, or what challenges I would face, but through determination to be a professional and wanting to serve the greater good, I have witnessed in my own narrative how happenstance and using the reflective process played a role in decisions I have made.

Some decisions improved educational programs. Had my warden not committed me to a certified welding program, I would not have developed the off-site program that proved so popular with the inmate population. Being mentored and

mentoring others allowed me to use experiences from my past to assist numerous staff in seeing the *big picture.* Mentoring them helped them find ways to better communicate with inmates, and conversely, I helped inmates with ways to better communicate with the same staff. This aspect alone, though hard to measure, has made the two prisons I have worked at safer. I cultivated better relationships with inmates and modeled for staff how to do the same. By framing the stories in my narrative in view of the bigger picture, it is evidenced that reflective practices within education and correctional work can be a promising practice.

New teachers, whether working in public education or as adult educators in a prison setting, can use reflective writing as a tool for learning. By using this approach, educators can later reflect on events and experiences, and may be able to see ways to improve or identify how much happenstance was involved in the outcomes. Reflecting on how planned happenstance was a factor, allows for educators to identify happenstance events and learn to use them to their advantage. For example, I became a Drill Sergeant through the happenstance of meeting a fellow correctional officer who invited me to visit his Drill Sergeant training unit. While serving as a Drill Sergeant, I learned a great deal about who I was and who I wanted to be. Ultimately, this one event relates directly to my current pursuit of the doctoral degree that will culminate with this dissertation. Through reflection of my time and experiences as a Drill Sergeant, I learned more about myself, and how those experiences influenced me both personally and professionally.

Implications of Reflective Writing in Corrections. Within my different positions in corrections, over the years I developed my attitudes and beliefs in the

rehabilitative benefits of correctional education. The reflective writing I did in this autoethnographic study brought to light both mistakes and successes. Krumboltz et al. (2010) reminds us that inevitably we are going to make mistakes—their point being to not dwell on them but learn from them. By incorporating reflective practices into the routine of the correctional worker, we may be able to develop better relationships and hone our communications skills, so we can be more constructive earlier on in our correctional careers. Early in most corrections training little is discussed about the rehabilitative needs of the inmate, or how our own interactions with them can have a positive influence. Earlier introduction may have a greater impact on the rapport developed between inmates and staff, leading to a safer prison and a more productive rehabilitative environment for the inmate.

Through my own memories, and those experiences I rediscovered through the reflective process, I found that empathy is lacking in the correctional environment for not only the inmate but how the inmate's incarceration affects their families and the community. I had mentioned that part of my own empathy was generated from a couple of events that enlightened my outlook of the inmate. Through those experiences, I started looking at an inmate as a son, a father, a husband, a brother, and a student. I have grown in this regard and feel from my own observations and experiences that the lack of empathy and compassion for the inmate is a perennial problem that needs to be addressed on a larger scale if those of us working in corrections truly want to rehabilitate the inmates, reduce recidivism, and make our prisons safer. Studies have found that reflective writing has direct benefits for both physical and mental health. Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (2015) in their definition of

andragogy, assert that reflection is a key element in how adults learn, often using prior knowledge with current learning to develop their conclusions. Through this research I feel others can learn from my reflective practices since "studying others invariably invites readers to compare and contrast themselves with others in the cultural texts they read and study, in turn discovering new dimensions of their own lives" (Chang, 2016, pp. 33-34). Reflective writing and sharing those experiences can be a valuable training tool within the field of corrections. Considering the high stress environment of the correctional setting and what our mission entails, I offer these suggestions for implementation within prison training programs:

- During correctional workers' initial year of training have them keep a reflection journal where they make daily or weekly entries about the different encounters they have with the inmate population. Have the staff member reflect about what was good and what was bad about their interactions, and what they feel they could have done differently.
- Assign situational scenarios for reflective writing. For example, ask staff members to reflect in their journal about how being separated from their family would affect their children or spouse. Reverse the scenario and ask the staff member to write their reflection from the perspective of the child or spouse. Discuss these reflections during quarterly evaluations to assist staff in seeing the prison sentence from all the varied perspectives of the inmate.
- During required annual training seminars, incorporate a segment that uses reflective practices for showcasing positive interactions with the

> inmate population. All too often, annual training seminars focus on the negative side of dealing with the inmate population. Staff need to be reminded and encouraged to appreciate the positive and rewarding parts of the job that prepare offenders for successful re-entry and family reintegration, and how our contributions have a positive impact on the inmate, their families, and the community.

Included in the appendix is a tool for use in reflective writing assignments (Appendix D).

Literacy Component. When I began the work on my developmental literacy certificate, I found I had a passion for promoting literacy. However, it was my reflective writing that brought a lot of memories to bear on just how much reading and literacy contributed to my own literary identity. Understanding the importance of how literacy contributes to the success of a person's overall wellbeing regarding academics and career pursuits, I believe my personal literacy identity is focused around family literacy. Evidenced by numerous studies, families who read and promote reading and have reading materials readily available for them and their children tend to be more successful both academically and professionally.

Having experienced a childhood where I was encouraged to read and write undoubtably had a direct influence on how I promoted the same behaviors in my own daughters. Forefeeling my determination to be a professional in my field is what guided my desire to assist inmates in connecting with their families through literacy. This is twofold, in that both the developmental literacy certificate and my degree in

family and consumer sciences combined, helped me find my literary identity. This understanding fostered my enthusiasm in using the literary resources at my disposal as an educational administrator to help inmates develop better ways to stay connected with their families.

Comics. I now realize I have connected with my family and even peers throughout my childhood and into adulthood through shared interests in the books and other literature I have enjoyed reading. For example, besides the Louis L'amour novels, I also shared comic books with my dad. I believe part of the reason I enjoyed them was because I knew once I read them my dad would, and then we would compare notes and thoughts. Those are enjoyable memories. Today, I still buy a couple of my favorite comic book titles through a discount club I belong to with a couple of coworkers. It is still fun to discuss the directions of the stories, characters, and plot lines as the relate to the Marvel and DC movies that have been so popular the past few years.

When I ordered comics for the inmate population, I was questioned by other staff as to why that form of literature was necessary within the prison. My explanation detailed that not only do comics provide a fun form of reading, vocabulary and comprehension development, it provides an outlet the inmates can use to communicate and stay connected with their children and tie the stories into movies they both may have seen (Beverly, 2013; Genisio, 1996, Jones, 2014). Additionally, I added the point that most comics deal with a hero, or good verses evil. I remember asking one staff member, "don't you think it's a good idea to encourage the idea of right versus wrong,

or good triumphs over evil, like most comics do, any way we can with our inmate population?"

Turned out that we had way more inmate comic book fans than I originally figured, and I received numerous requests for additional titles. Based on these requests, I ordered the complete set at the time of *The Walking Dead* comic series in the hardback versions. They were a huge hit. Wanting inmates to be able to share and enjoy the comics like I did also helped develop more rapport between myself and the inmates who read them.

Book Fairs and Programs. Encouraging remarks I have heard after running a bookfair or book mailout event include phrases like: "Hey, Mr. Roberson, my kids got the books in the mail. They loved them; thanks again for doing that" and "My kids really liked getting those books in the visiting room. It was great to get to read them right there with them; thanks for doing that." These comments are certainly a driving force for me to find more ways to provide more books to the children and families of the inmate population. As I discussed in the literature review, one way to break the cyclical process of intergenerational incarceration, is to promote literacy and the academic success of the children of our inmate populations.

As I receive appreciation for sponsoring these events, it provides a sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction. I would like to share the success of these events with my employer, because the agency provides the funding for such events. However, through my reflections and experiences I have witnessed that the concept behind providing such programs needs to be shared with all staff within the correctional setting. Through my observations and interactions with staff, it has been evident that a

great majority of staff feel the program is nothing more than a way to pacify the inmates by claiming we do nice things for them occasionally. Because this program is facilitated through the education department, my staff and I have been labeled as "inmate huggers" on occasion, a derogatory term used by staff to describe other staff they feel are to friendly with inmates. This narrow-minded view and inability to see the big picture and the importance of these programs, only evidences the need for additional training within the agency. It is one reason I have taken upon myself to be an advocate for literacy programs and attempt to educate staff anytime I hear or experience negative comments and attitudes associated with conducting a literacy event for the inmates and their families.

GED Program. The GED program is unquestionably the largest component of the BOP's educational mission, with vocational training coming in a close second. In 2017 the agency assisted 2,667 students with earning their GED (United States Sentencing Commission, 2018). As mentioned early in this paper, earning the GED is a major factor in lowering recidivism rates. Having teaching staff who understand the importance of this is vitally important. During my career in correctional education, I have worked with teachers who took a great deal of pride and interest in their students. I have also worked with teachers who required more encouragement and training in order to develop their ability to be effective adult educators. This has included providing training in Adult Learning Theory, and more importantly, the previous discussions regarding developing a meaningful teacher student relationship that includes direct classroom instruction, not simply classroom supervision.

For me though, the real challenge continues to focus on educating additional staff who work outside of the education department to see the benefit and rewards that come with helping the inmates to be and view themselves as someone that can be successful. When additional staff take a role in the process, it sends a positive message to the inmate population that we are all there to assist them in their re-entry efforts. This directly aligns with a portion of the BOP's mission statement to, "provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens." It is imperative that staff take this aspect of the mission statement to heart. If as an agency we include all staff as an element that leads to the successful re-entry of the inmates in our charge, we can better foster a culture of one team one mission, which is contrary to the current culture revolving singularly around only the "protect society" aspect of our mission statement.

Making our prisons safer while also developing the literary identities of the inmate population are aligned with my research questions. My own literary and pedagogical journey accompanied by my reflective discoveries have facilitated a more literary rich atmosphere among the inmate populations and their families. Using the suggestions below would be of great benefit in developing a culture that promotes literacy at all levels within the correctional environment.

- Institutions should hold regular cost-free book fairs within the visiting rooms or other appropriate areas for the inmate population and their families.
- Prison visiting rooms should have an assortment of books available for parents to be able to read to their children.

- Institutions should provide a resource through the inmate commissary system for inmates to be able to purchase books to send home to their children.
- Use annual training events to educate line staff on the benefits of encouraging literacy within the inmate population and with their families.
- Include line staff in the facilitation of literacy events whether through keeping them informed and part of the planning for security reasons or to participate in hosting the events.
- All institutions should facilitate creative writing workshops for the inmate population. Teach reflective writing and other prose to allow an outlet for expression through the written word. Publishing an anthology of their compiled work would be a great motivator for participation in the program.

Limitations

The chief limitation of this autoethnographic investigation was not having permission to interview inmates and staff. Inmates, or *prisoners* as they are called in the academic community when working through an Institution Review Board (IRB), are considered a vulnerable population and special consideration must be taken to ensure they are not taken advantage of, put under duress, manipulated, or intimidated to participate in a research study. Additionally, as an administrator within the system, my position of authority over line staff posed a concern as well. As the autoethnographer, I could only use my past experiences and current interactions related to the scope of my responsibilities when writing the narratives of this paper. While it could have been beneficial to go through a full IRB and obtain the necessary clearance to include interviews as a data source, there was no guarantee that the study

would have been approved as proposed. Chang (2016) asserted that when interviewing for an autoethnography the researcher is using the information to "provide external data that give[s] contextual information to confirm, complement, or reject introspectively generated data" (p. 104).

The reason that IRB approval was not pursued was due to the nature of my position and the lengths it would take to obtain authorization. Not only was it necessary to get IRB approval from the university, but it was also needed from both my agency and the Union that represents the federal prison workers. However, due to time constraints and the inconsistency of how autoethnography is still currently debated, the decision was made to only include my personal thoughts, reflections, memories, and artifacts in the narratives of this autoethnography.

Another limitation was not being allowed to use member checking. Member checking is a vital component of qualitative research, which is using others to cross check and verify data and add to its trustworthiness, not necessarily interviewing but confirming or correcting the narrative (Glesne, 2011; Guest et al., 2012; Leavy, 2015; & Leos, 2014). I sought to use member checking to authenticate my perspectives, memories, and observations. I wanted to utilize friends and family to authenticate past experiences, peers within the prison to confirm ties useful in the correctional field, and my advisors and cohorts in my dissertation program to collaborate and maintain focus on the academia of my research. This type of data analysis could have been helpful in adding validity to the narratives used in the research and to weed out information not needed, all while helping me contextualize what was important. The initial reviews from the IRB indicated that for full board approval ALL individuals mentioned in the

narratives would need an opportunity to participate in the member checking process. This was an impossible request because some individuals were deceased, some were staff at prior institutions, and others were released inmates. Therefore, the formal member checking process was eliminated from the data collection process. With the removal of the interviews and member checking, the study was reviewed by the IRB and it was determined that no approval was required (Appendix C).

The last limitation I wish to discuss includes my own memories. With an autoethnography, the main source of data is the autoethnographer. Over time memories can become faded and details of events forgotten. In this regard, although I wrote what I honestly remember, there is still the possibility of my remembering details of events differently than how they transpired. Without being able to use member checking or interviews to assist in the validation of the data, it leaves the reader to trust what I have written is accurate.

Future Research

Ethnography. There is a lot to be gained from the experiences of others in the field of corrections. Due to the limitations of this research project, more research is needed that includes specific data from correctional staff and inmates that could be gathered through interviews and surveys. In future studies, it would be beneficial to record reflections of staff and inmates and compare and contrast the practices and ideologies each feel could make for a safer and more positive atmosphere within the correctional setting.

This type of ethnographic study could be very useful in developing training programs for both staff and inmates that works to build better interpersonal

communication skills and develop positive attitudes for the work that must be accomplished from each stakeholder's perspective.

- Correctional workers and officers taking an active role in occupational training programs, whether it is simply being more supportive and encouraging, or physically providing specific instruction and opportunities for learning and growth.
- Inmates realizing and accepting the role of correctional workers and the authority those rolls require in order to maintain a safe and secure facility.
- Inmates taking full advantage of the programs and training opportunities offered to them.
- Correctional educators taking on a more holistic approach with each of their students and the inmate population in general. Develop and facilitate programs and activities that not only assist the inmate with educational goals, but address all aspects of life literacy; employment, finances, family, health and wellbeing, and how to balance those aspects.

Literacy. Another area of inquiry that could provide useful information for stakeholders is the Parent Child Reading Program currently facilitated throughout the Bureau of Prisons. This research can include reading and instructional interventions to determine if incarcerated parents are able to connect with their families in meaningful ways through literacy. Additionally, the study could measure if promoting literacy increases the reading level and/or the joy of reading for the inmate.

Taking it a step further, it would be especially beneficial to see if the program results in the reading efficacies of children who receive books regularly from their incarcerated parents. A longitudinal study along this line could follow the children to determine if the program assisted in better performance in school, decreasing social anxiety related to having an incarcerated parent, making a difference in the level of connectedness with their parent, and ultimately, if the program helps reduce intergenerational family incarceration.

Final Reflection

When I began this pedagogical journey to become an educator within the federal prison system, I had no idea it would culminate with this dissertation. Or, is this really the end? There is so much to learn and so much room for growth, I feel it might really be just the beginning. I also had no idea how many people, events, experiences, and opportunities had to align just right for me to get from one stage to the next. It was a combination of planned happenstance and self-determination that came together at the appropriate times that helped me map my path. That path led me to degrees in Family and Consumer Sciences and eventually developing this research project.

Through the research process, I found the reflective writing process helped me hone my own identity and thoughts about who I was as an educator, an employee, a supervisor, friend, father, and brother. Not all the experiences were positive, and I certainly hope my mistakes do not have lasting implications on those affected. I learned from those experiences and hope others can learn from them as well. I found I

owe much of my success to those people, that through happenstance, had a roll in my life's story.

Finding Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) as a degree plan is a big part of that story. I do believe that my overall outlook and perspective as an educator inside a prison is amplified because of the values instilled through the FCS curriculum. I felt so strongly about this, I wrote an article for *Corrections Today* magazine encouraging administrators to hire FCS teachers because they have the best repertoire of skills for meeting the educational mission of correctional institutions. Not that other teaching disciplines are ineffective, but when combining the general education needed to earn a GED with the other life skill needs of the inmate population, FCS educators are the sensible choice (Roberson, 2015). The newly revised brand key published by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (2019) strengthens my argument.

The new brand summarizes multiple ways those in the FCS profession can advocate for inmates and their families. FCS professionals can actively participate in the rehabilitation of the inmate while also providing education and support assistance for the inmate's family members. For example, our practice settings include FCS educators working in areas that can directly tie back to assisting inmates and their families. The FCS field works within extension services, other areas of government, and health and human services; all areas families dealing with the hardships of having a family member incarcerated, can reach out to for assistance. As FCS professionals working in these fields, it is our responsibility to assist all families, to include those dealing with the separation caused by incarceration and do what we can to help these

families cope with the situation. Merestein et al. (2011) acknowledged that too often the child is the focus of most assistance programs related to a family member being

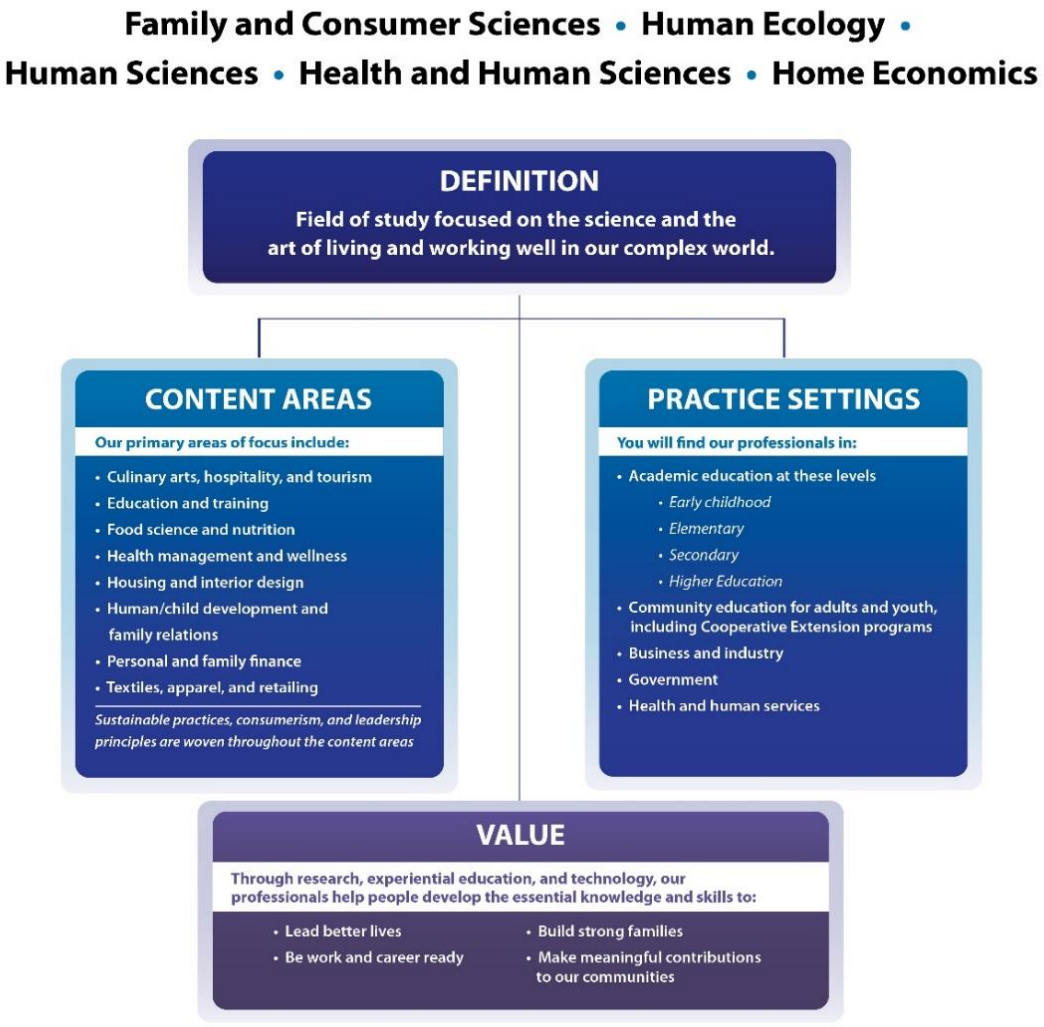

Figure 5.1: Newly Revised Brand Key Messages for Our Field

incarcerated while the "caregiver is also a key part of the equation with needs that often go unfulfilled" (p. 174). As an FCS professional myself, I feel there are some action steps that can be taken to address and support families of incarcerated individuals. The following suggestions hit broader implications of our responsibilities:

- Institutions should specifically recruit FCS professionals to work in the prison setting. This can include areas of general education, vocational trades, food service, and counseling and re-entry services.
- FCSE collegiate programs and organizations such as Phi Upsilon Omicron and AAFCS should develop community services projects that target assisting this special population of people.
    - Book drives for the children of incarcerated parents.
    - Food donations and child care assistance for families struggling financially due to limited income.
    - Provide resources to insure children and spouses have the means to travel to prisons to visit their incarcerated family members.
    - Provide volunteer services, classes, and support where policy allows to prison education programs, visiting rooms, and re-entry activities such as mock job fairs and release simulations.
    - Donate clothing for families while the incarcerated member is serving their sentence. Additionally, provide donated clothing and resources for releasing inmates.
- FCSE programs should address in their teacher preparation programs, elements and risk factors associated with students in their classrooms that have an incarcerated parent.

The field of Family and Consumer Sciences has the wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of families and communities. There is no reason more

focus cannot be given to the families and communities related to prison populations and their families. The services we can provide through advocacy, volunteering, educating of the inmate population, working with their families, and promoting empathy to the lay public about the needs and hardships experienced by this population, can be another avenue to grow and future proof our profession.

As I conclude my final thoughts, I found reflective writing to be a valuable learning tool. I only hope my experiences can assist other educators, correctional workers, and FCS professionals is not only seeing the value in using refection as a medium for personal growth, instruction, and supervision, but that they can also learn from my specific experiences as well.

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APPENDIX A

Career and Education Timeline

I have included a career and academic time line to assist readers in seeing the progression of my lived experiences through the narratives of this autoethnography.

April 1989 - Enlisted into the United States Army (delayed entry)

May 1989 - Graduated Arlington High School

August 1989 - Left for Basic Training

January 1990 - Began work at the Fort Lewis Fire Department

- Entered Pierce College as a part-time student

August 1993 - Graduated Pierce College with an Associate in Technology

April 1995 - Transitioned into the United States Army Reserve

- Cross trained as a Military Police Officer
- Started civilian work in the aircraft machining industry

March 2000 - Hired by the Federal Bureau of Prisons as a Correctional Officer

May 2000 - Transferred Army Reserve Units / Started Reserve Drill Sergeant Academy

July 2001 - Graduated Army Drill Sergeant Academy

October 2008 - Promoted to Correctional Supervisor (Lieutenant)

January 2009 - Enrolled in Bellevue University (online program - Adult Education)

May 2010 - Selected as an Education Technician within the Federal Bureau of Prisons

October 2010 - Retired from United States Army Reserves

April 2011 - Graduated Bellevue University with a Bachelor of Science

May 2011 - Admitted to South Dakota State University graduate program in Family and Consumer Sciences teacher preparation program (online program)

December 2012 - Graduated South Dakota State University with a Master of Science degree and South Dakota State teacher certification

July 2013 - Promoted to Supervisor of Education within Federal Bureau of Prisons

September 2013 - Admitted to Texas Tech University graduate program in Family and Consumer Science Education (online/blended program).

December 2015 - Completed Graduate Certificate in Developmental Literacy from Texas Tech University

July 2016 - Admitted to candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Family and Consumer Science Education

January 2018 - Promoted to Supervisor of Education (larger facility) within Federal Bureau of Prisons

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Consent Form

A Road Never Traveled: Using Autoethnography to Gain Insights for Improving Correctional Education and Reducing Recidivism

Please share your thoughts in my research project.

What is this project studying?

The study is called "A Road Never Traveled: Using Autoethnography to Gain Insights for Improving Correctional Education and Reducing Recidivism." This study will help us learn from experiences the researcher had throughout his life that may contribute to improving the lives of inmates, lower recidivism rates, and making our prisons safer for staff and inmates.

What is my roll if I allow the use of my information?

In this study, your only roll is to provide consent to use your personal information, because the nature of your relationship with the researcher may require more personal information be shared in the narrative, i.e. your name (last or first only), previous or current employment, association as a friend, mentor, coworker, or family member.

How will I benefit from allowing you to use my information?

Besides allowing the researcher to accurately express his thoughts in the narrative of the study, there are no benefits.

Do I have to allow the use of my personal identifiable information?

No. Your consent is completely voluntary. You can request to have your name or other identifiable information de-identified if you prefer.

How can you protect my privacy?

If you choose, the researcher will protect your identity by giving you an alias and changing the circumstances to your story, while staying true to the basic theme. However, be aware that anyone close to the researcher may still be able to identify you simply by the nature of your relationships and history. Any data collected will be maintained in the researcher's private office. No one other than the researchers associated with this project will have access to the data. The researcher's computers where some information may be stored, are password protected.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

- Dr. Alexander from the College of Human Sciences at Texas Tech University is overseeing this study. If you have questions, you can call her at 806-834-2212.

_____ _____

Signature Date

_____ This consent form is not valid after 05/17/2019.

Printed name

APPENDIX C

IRB Letter

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Human Research
Protection Program

October 19, 2018

Karen Alexander
Fam and Consumer Sci Education

Re: IRB2018-750A Road Never Traveled: Using Autoethnography to Gain Insights for Improving Correctional Education and Reducing Recidivism

Dear Dr. Karen Alexander:

A Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board member has completed the review and determined your project does not meet the definition of human subjects research because the data are completely de-identified and publically available. Therefore, no IRB approval is needed.

Thank you for your submission.

Sincerely,

Scott Burris, Ph.D.
Chair Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board Professor,
Department of Agricultural Education and Communications

Human Research Protection Program
357 Administration Building
Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075
T 806.742.2064
www.hrpp.ttu.edu

APPENDIX D

Reflection Introduction

Written assignments

Reflective writing: a basic introduction

An increasing number of courses require students to write reflectively. Reflective writing may be an occasional requirement or it may be a core feature of most or all assignments. There are many different models of reflection and **it is vital that you follow any guidelines offered on your course.**

The aim of this handout is to model some basic ideas about reflective writing. We are not suggesting that this is the only way to approach it!

What is reflective writing?

Reflective *writing* is evidence of reflective *thinking*. In an academic context, reflective thinking usually involves:

1. Looking back at something (often an event, i.e. something that happened, but it could also be an idea or object).
2. Analysing the event or idea (thinking in depth and from different perspectives, and trying to explain, often with reference to a model or theory from your subject).
3. Thinking carefully about what the event or idea means for you and your ongoing progress as a learner and/or practising professional.

Reflective writing is thus **more personal** than other kinds of academic writing. We all think reflectively in everyday life, of course, but perhaps not to the same depth as that expected in good reflective writing at university level.

Example of basic reflective writing

Specific tasks were shared out amongst members of my team. Initially, however, the tasks were not seen as equally difficult by all team members. Cooperation between group members was at risk because of this perception of unfairness. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called 'positive interdependence', meaning cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, cited by Maughan & Webb, 2001), and many studies have demonstrated that "cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement" (Maughan & Webb, 2001). Ultimately, our group achieved a successful outcome, but to improve the process, we perhaps needed a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks were being shared out. In future group work, on the course and at work, I would probably suggest this.

Reference

Maughan, C., & Webb, J. (2001). *Small group learning and assessment*. Retrieved August 01, 2007, from the Higher Education Academy website:
www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/temp/assessment.html

A possible structure for reflective writing

Reflective *thinking* – especially if done in discussion with others – can be very 'free' and unstructured and still be very useful. Even reflective *writing* can be unstructured, for example when it is done in a personal diary. **In assignments that require reflective writing, however, tutors normally expect to see carefully-structured writing.**

The example of basic reflective writing on the previous page can be broken down into three parts: description, interpretation and outcome.

1 Description (keep this bit short!)

What happened? What is being examined?	*Specific tasks were shared out amongst members of my team. Initially, however, the tasks were not seen as equally difficult by all team members.*

2 Interpretation

What is most important / interesting / useful / relevant about the object, event or idea? How can it be explained e.g. with theory? How is it similar to and different from others?	*Cooperation between group members was at risk because of this perception of unfairness. Social interdependence theory recognises a type of group interaction called 'positive interdependence', meaning cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1993, cited by Maughan & Webb, 2001), and many studies have demonstrated that "cooperative learning experiences encourage higher achievement" (Maughan & Webb, 2001).*

3 Outcome

What have I learned from this? What does this mean for my future?	*Ultimately, our group achieved a successful outcome, but to improve our achievement, we perhaps needed a chairperson to help encourage cooperation when tasks were being shared out. In future group work (on the course and at work), I would probably suggest this.*

This is just one way of structuring reflective writing. **There are others** and you may be required to follow a particular model. Whichever approach to reflection you use, however, try to bear in mind the following four key points (all of which were made by course tutors who set and mark reflective work):

- Reflection is an **exploration and an explanation of events** – not just a description of them.
- Genuinely reflective writing often involves 'revealing' **anxieties, errors and weaknesses, as well as strengths and successes.** This is fine (in fact it's often essential!), as long as you show some understanding of possible causes, and explain how you plan to improve.
- It is normally necessary to **select just the most significant parts** of the event or idea on which you're reflecting. (The next page has some suggestions on how to do this in your writing.) If you try to 'tell the whole story' you're likely to use up your words on description rather than interpretation.
- It is often useful to '**reflect forward**' to the future as well as 'reflecting back' on the past.

Vocabulary aid

The following are **just a few** suggestions for words and phrases that might be useful in reflective writing. Using any of these words and phrases will not in itself make you a good reflective writer, of course! The vocabulary aid is structured according to the three-part analysis that is modelled on the previous page of this handout.

1 Description (the short bit!)

We are not suggesting specific vocabulary for any descriptive elements of your reflective writing, because the range of possible events, ideas or objects on which you might be required to reflect is so great.

Do remember, though, that if describing an idea, for example a theory or model, it is usually best to use the *present* tense e.g. 'Social interdependence theory recognise**s**…' (not 'recognise**d**'). *Events*, of course, are nearly always described using the *past* tense.

2 Interpretation (probably the most important bit)

For me, the [most] { meaningful / significant / important / relevant / useful } { aspect(s) / element(s) / experience(s) / issue(s) / idea(s) } was (were)…

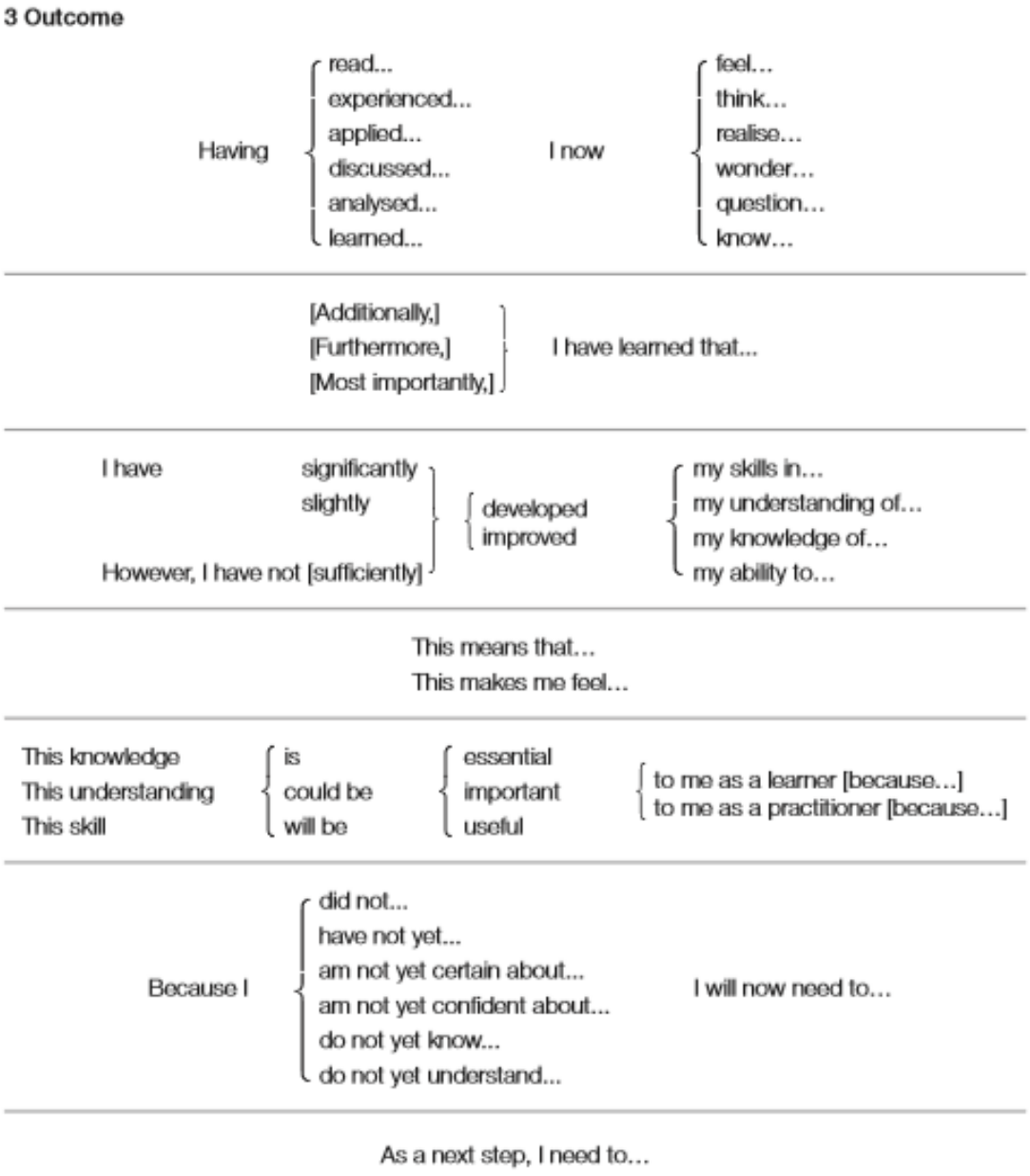
learning { arose from… / happened when… / resulted from… }

{ Previously, / At the time, / At first / Initially, / Subsequently, / Later, } I { thought (did not think)… / felt (did not feel)… / knew (did not know)… / noticed (did not notice)… / questioned (did not question)… / realised (did not realise)… }

[Alternatively,] / [Equally,] This { might be / is perhaps / could be / is probably } { because of… / due to… / explained by… / related to… }

This { is similar to… / is unlike… } because…

[Un]Like… this { reveals… / demonstrates… }



The Academic Skills Unit, University of Portsmouth, graciously grated permission to use this reflective writing basic introduction handout.