

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN A
TYPE II ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

by

Joseph Patrick Garner

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility. Three research questions guided the study: How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school? How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility? How do participants' lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility? Data was collected through individual interviews, journaling, and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted after surveying the entire inmate population and identifying 10 incarcerated participants. Questions were guided, addressing their lived experiences in the alternative school they attended and in their correctional facility. Research began using the survey instrument distributed to the entire inmate population not only to select the candidates for interviews but for the collective information gathered through the responses to the questions in the survey document. The research was completed through extensive interviews and journals of the incarcerated participants, selected based on their answers to the survey questions, which have attended a type II alternative school. Focus group discussions were also included, based on the results of the individual interviews, to gather further pertinent information about their experiences. The following themes emerged: Dysfunctional family environment, safety and stability found in institutions, and institutionalization during the formative years in life. Basically, participants grew up in chaotic environments and welcomed the structure and stability of both the alternative school setting and incarceration.

Keywords: Type II alternative-education, at risk, delinquent, dropout, incarcerated, inmate, institutionalized, intervention, punitive, truancy.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends who got me started and supported me throughout the process. They gave me the strength to continue when it was hard and kept me going when I wanted to give up. I also dedicate it to the volunteers who gave of themselves and shared their stories to make a difference for those who follow.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Dedication.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Table of Contents.....	6
List of Tables.....	11
List of Figures.....	12
List of Abbreviations.....	13
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	14
Overview.....	14
Background.....	14
Situation to Self.....	17
Problem Statement.....	18
Purpose Statement.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	19
Research Questions.....	21
Research Plan.....	22
Delimitations and Limitations.....	23
Definitions.....	24
Summary.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	26
Overview.....	26
Theoretical Framework.....	26

Related Literature.....	28
History of Public Alternative Schools.....	28
Definition of Alternative Schools.....	30
Components of Successful Alternative School Programs.....	32
At-Risk Students.....	39
Georgia Guidelines for Alternative Schools.....	43
At-Risk Students in the Alternative Educational Setting.....	45
Institutional Effects on Education and The Phenomenon of Incarceration.....	48
Summary.....	55
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	57
Overview.....	57
Design.....	58
Research Questions.....	59
Setting.....	59
Participants.....	60
Procedures.....	62
The Researcher’s Role.....	63
Data Collection.....	64
Interviews.....	64
Focus Groups.....	67
Journaling.....	68
Data Analysis.....	68
Trustworthiness.....	69

Credibility.....	70
Dependability.....	70
Transferability.....	70
Confirmability.....	71
Ethical Considerations.....	71
Summary.....	71
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	73
Overview.....	73
Participants.....	73
Tyler.....	73
Scott.....	76
Thomas.....	77
John.....	79
Wes.....	80
Sean.....	81
Matt.....	81
Brian.....	82
Chris.....	83
Nicole.....	84
Results.....	89
Themes.....	91
Dysfunctional Family Environments	91

Safety and Stability Found in Institutions.....	96
Institutionalization During the Formative Years in Life.....	102
Research Question 1.....	108
Research Question 2.....	109
Research Question 3.....	110
Summary.....	112
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION.....	115
Overview.....	115
Summary of Findings.....	115
Research Question 1.....	116
Research Question 2.....	117
Research Question 3.....	117
Discussion.....	118
Components of Successful Alternative School Programs.....	119
Institutional Effects on Education and the Phenomenon of Incarceration.....	121
Implications.....	123
Limitations.....	124
Recommendations for Future Research.....	125
Summary.....	127
REFERENCES.....	129
APPENDICES.....	141
Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	141
Appendix B: Site Permission	142

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter	143
Appendix D: Survey of Participants	145
Appendix E: Consent Forms	146
Appendix F: Interview Questions	148
Appendix G: Focus Group Questions	149
Appendix H: Excerpt of Participant Journal	150
Appendix I: Bracketing Excerpt.....	151

List of Tables

Table 1: Individual Interview Questions.....	66
Table 2: Focus Group Questions.....	67
Table 3: Study Participants.....	88
Table 4: Codes Identified from Data Analysis.....	89

List of Figures

Figure 1: Data Showing At-Risk Behaviors of Students in the Alternative Education Setting
Versus the Regular Education Setting.....46

List of Abbreviations

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA)

Quality Basic Education (QBE)

Non-traditional Education Program (AEP)

College and Career Readiness Program Index (CCRPI)

Annual Yearly Progress Index (AYP)

Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

General Educational Development (GED)

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Alternative schools exist for the purpose of providing another option for students who are not successful in the traditional school setting. While students enter alternative schools for multiple reasons, some are placed there as a disciplinary consequence. Often, these students enter the penal system and become incarcerated at some point after or during their alternative school experience. There is a lack of sufficient information about the connection between alternative school placement and experience and future incarceration. This chapter provides the background for the study, information on the researcher, and the problem statement. The significance of the study is identified as well as research questions that will guide the research process. The research plan is included with a discussion of limitations and delimitations and a list of definitions pertinent to the study.

Background

Alternative schools became a marketable movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's by educators who wanted something different than the traditional curriculum (Fantini, 1973). Practically speaking, the alternative school was just an alternate location for the students to meet from their public or private school attendance area (Fantini, 1973). Fantini was an early advocate of alternative schools, and he and Raywid (1989) used them to try to help struggling minority and poor students succeed in school. Students at risk of not being successful in the traditional high school identified specific areas or supports that made education difficult for them: Negative student-teacher relationships, unsafe situations, overly rigid authority figures, and difficult relationships with peers (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). Originally, alternative

schools fulfilled the missing elements of traditional education (Glass, 1995), and many educators believed that they helped students thrive academically (Frediana, 2002). The alternative schools offered students a development of self-concept, problem-solving, and humanistic approaches (Conley, 2002).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) greatly supported alternative education. This federally funded mandate was designed to prevent student dropout and academic failure. The idea of alternative education was to provide a learning environment that was structured differently from the traditional public school for those students who were not successful in the regular school setting. Many of these programs failed because of the lack of funding and the mounting pressure of accountability (Decker, 2012). By the middle of the 1990s, these alternatives were replaced with voucher programs, charter schools, and magnet programs (Conley, 2002). Many of these alternatives did succeed as substitutes to traditional public education in large part because of their focus on the whole child by providing emotional, social, and academic support (Conley, 2002).

This critical shift for the alternative school occurred when districts began to look at strategies to meet the needs of at-risk students (Conrath, 2001). This new focus became popular throughout the country. The creation of these alternative schools was to insure that at-risk students graduated from high school. Most of the students placed in these schools had previously struggled academically, and many had been involved in the juvenile justice system at some point in their lives (Nakkula, 2013). The increased pressures of testing, higher expectations, and greater academic standards created the need for more alternative schools (Lange, 1998). This shift resulted in a struggle with negative stigmas attached to these schools as dumping grounds or warehouses for at-risk students who were either struggling academically,

had behavior problems, or were considered juvenile delinquents. The damage of this type of labeling and the stigma attached to them has become some of the biggest obstacles for successful alternative programs (Waxman, 1992). Coraleo (2014) found that, while ESEA is designed to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, it appeared as though it segregated schools and took those students most at-risk of not graduating and placed them together at the alternative school, where expectations were not as high and discipline problems often disrupted the learning environment.

Type II, or Last Chance Schools, are schools for students in danger of expulsion due to chronically disruptive behavior, drugs, fighting, or school violence (Decker 2012). They focus on behavior modification with minimal attention to pedagogy and curriculum, are not schools of choice, and hold that the maintenance of discipline and control are more important than curriculum, creativity, and innovation (Caroleo, 2014). Waxman (1992) stated that these schools have not been very successful, resulting in low graduation rates and a high number of disciplinary issues. The students that attend the type II alternative school are isolated from the other students, lose all extracurricular activities, are forced to dress in uniforms, walk with their arms behind their backs, and are not allowed to speak to anyone outside of the type II alternative school. Once they complete their required time in the alternative school and transfer back to the regular campus, these students often are expelled again and forced to return to the alternative setting. They dropout of school at an alarmingly high rate, completing the self-fulfilling stigma of the alternative school experience (Waxman, 1992). Their disciplinary issues seem to get worse while in the alternative setting, and there are an unusually high number of these students that end up in correctional facilities (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002). There is literature regarding the short and long-term effects of incarceration (Turner, 2010) and the positive and negative

effects of attending alternative schools (Scipio, 2013), but there is little to address the lived experiences of currently incarcerated inmates who previously attended an alternative school.

Situation to Self

As the researcher, I am responsible for collecting and analyzing data. This study was accomplished using interviews, focus groups, journaling, and interpretation and coding of the information. Having spent 15 years as a criminal investigator and the last eight years as a middle school teacher in Georgia, my work experience has given me a unique sensitivity towards a particular group of alternative school students in a type II alternative school.

I have a worldview about this study that is based on *social constructivism*, relying on the participants in the study and their lived experiences in the alternative school. I used a qualitative approach that is based on the guidelines developed from research conducted by Creswell (2007). Any assumptions I have about the individuals and their circumstances are from a qualitative perspective as defined by Creswell (2007), “philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality” (p. 248). I wanted to glean from this research the realities of the lived experiences of these students, and this may be done in the most meaningful way through their description of those experiences (Zack, 2013).

The interaction between the researcher and the participants consisted of a first person interview process that gave the most direct information possible. Using this epistemological approach through interviews, journal reviews, and focus groups helped insure the integrity of the information and assist in removing possible biases (Creswell, 2007). Recognizing that there is bias built into the research, and understanding that bias, assisted me in setting it aside and recognizing the value laden nature of the research, or axiology (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell, (2007) describes the rhetoric assumption as the appropriate use of narrative and terms in the research for the potential readers. Knowing the purpose of my research was to give a clearer understanding of the alternative school experience, the statements of the participants were accurately transcribed and analyzed to support any existing phenomenon. The inductive nature of qualitative research helped the researcher determine specific themes and allowed for the development of possible phenomenon and conclusions about this specific study (Creswell, 2007).

Problem Statement

The problem is at risk students in type II alternative schools often decline rather than improve in behavior and academics, dropout of school, and frequently end up in jail (Turner, 2010). Many students in alternative schools have not been graduating from high school, and their disciplinary issues typically get worse (Beken, 2008). The concern is that the alternative school may be having the same effect on student behavior and achievement as the penal system has on the productivity of those incarcerated in such facilities. The perceived lack of a caring individual (teacher, coach, administrator) and the attitude created in a punitive environment in the mind of students and inmates that they are not being treated fairly, can have a lasting effect on a student or inmate that negatively affects their productivity (Camak, 2007).

Ozben (2010) stated, “children who got into prison more than once know the environment and even know the punishment when they commit the crime. Children may be more likely to get involved in a conflict with the courage brought forth from this knowledge” (p. 209). Many of these at risk students, which for the purpose of this study are defined as having: Failing grades, truancy, poor home communication, behavior and discipline challenges, encounters with the juvenile justice system, and poor social skills, decline from the moment they

enter the alternative setting (Decker, 2012). A shift in the approach to alternative schooling, from a facility to house students separately from peers for punishment, to a setting that uses alternative approaches to educating at-risk youth, may be considered (Gerring, 2007). After all, school programs should be engaging and lead students through a process of critical thinking and synthesis of concepts and content (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility.

Significance of the Study

The significance of understanding the phenomenon of students' lived experiences from this perspective was to shine a light on the reality of those experiences and the potential effect they may have had on the participants. It was the purpose of this study to contribute to the knowledge base of this particular type of alternative school as well as alternative schools of similar design from the unique perspective of those who are ultimately placed in a restrictive, punitive setting. The participants in this study were able to contribute to the knowledge base in a way that could be beneficial to individuals associated with a type II alternative school by providing experiences from the perspective of those who were previously confined to the alternative school. The results of this study could help change the general operation of type II alternative schools that are functioning in a similar fashion, which could make a difference in the potential outcome of these particular students. As Caroleo (2014) states, "If alternative education programs continue to be part of the greater school system, school districts should take a closer look at the risks and benefits of the programs in order to create programs that would better suit

the needs of the at-risk population that currently uses them” (p. 44). Because the participants, who are currently incarcerated inmates, share the lived experience of attending a type II alternative school, they can offer a unique perspective of the operation and culture of these schools.

Throughout the literature, an emerging theme of a successful alternative program is that of relationships. Those schools that provided a supportive setting with educators who built strong relationships with their students were more successful than those that functioned as a punitive, punishment-driven experience (Mottern, 2012). Khalifa (2013) expands this relationship concept to include school leaders and, in particular, the school principal.

The body of literature concerning the alternative school has many studies, but there are none that examine the alternative school through the lived experiences of currently incarcerated inmates. The inmates have a pattern of behavior that has led them to a restrictive, punitive setting in the alternative school and then again to incarceration. Because these individuals are currently incarcerated, it would seem that the alternative school was not successful in reforming them. Their perspective provided a different view of the alternative setting by those who did not necessarily have a positive outcome from their experience there. The data provided a rich variety of descriptions of experiences, as Herndon and Bembenuddy (2014) found that each individual in the alternative school interprets his experience in a different way. By examining the various ways these inmates view their alternative school placement, common themes emerged that they all, or most of them, experienced. These common themes provided a fresh perspective of the alternative school program that can be considered in future developments and improvements to alternative education.

A school program that is beneficial to students engages them in and leads them through

varying processes to critical thinking and synthesis of the concepts and content. However, a school program that is not beneficial to students is behavioristic, positivistic, and reductive (Kim & Taylor, 2008). To truly enact lasting change in school, the focus should be on changing the system and not the individual student (Caroleo, 2014). All schools should have this goal in mind and not become simply a place to dispose of students at the expense of their education, especially when they are 12 and 13 years of age. This type of study has the potential to produce important information that can be used for improving type II alternative schools and provide insight into ways they may better serve the needs of at risk students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school?

The purpose of this question was to provide a description of the alternative school setting from the perspective of those that have personally experienced it. Students who become delinquent often state that their school situation alienated them and lowered their self-concept, thus resulting in disenfranchisement and a search for belonging elsewhere (Sutherland, 2011). Gathering the perceptions of school from these inmates gave insight into whether they relate their criminality to their school experience.

2. How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility?

Perspective of the human experience as inmates currently housed in a correctional facility is essential to be able to fully describe any existing or perceived phenomena. Haney (2011) discusses the phenomena of institutionalization, where individuals conform to the norms of the institution in which they dwell. Inmates often enter incarceration as individuals that committed crimes but quickly succumb to the expectations of incarcerated peers and begin to embrace criminality as a lifestyle.

3. How do participants' lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility?

This question addressed the essence of the study, which was the relationship between the alternative school experience and the experience of incarceration. Herndon and Bembenutty (2014) found in their study that students with positive experiences in the alternative school setting tend to continue with positive life choices later in life. This question provided further information about the similarities and differences between the two punitive settings.

Research Plan

This was a qualitative phenomenological study designed to focus on adults currently incarcerated in a detention facility who spent at least a semester as a middle school student in an alternative school. The specific focus was on their lived experiences while they were in the alternative school and how those experiences compared and contrasted to life in a correctional institution. Using a qualitative study allowed the researcher to discover the true nature of that experience and provided valuable insight into that experience (Zack, 2013). The phenomenological approach exposed, unlike other methods, the true experiences of the students and the phenomenon that existed. This information provided readers a depth of understanding to

allow them to form their own opinions about the circumstances as they exist. It focused on the specific experiences of the students in a type II alternative school and gave a clearer perspective on a topic of familiarity (Glendinning, 2008).

Qualitative research methods were used to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon and were not used to analyze or explain specific variables (Moustakas, 1994), create theory, or defend a position (Glendinning, 2008). The lived experience of each participant was gathered through participant surveys, individual interviews, group discussions, and journaling, and their shared experience was used to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

This type of study produced important information that can be used for improving type II alternative schools and provided insight into ways they may better serve the needs of at risk students. The phenomena identified were both detrimental and enlightening. I hope that in the future, the results of this study can contribute to the knowledge base and be used in a positive way to enact change within the punitive alternative setting.

Delimitations and Limitations

The research was limited to ten participants over the age of 18 who were currently incarcerated and who had attended type II alternative schools as middle school students in Georgia. This was done in hopes of gaining the most useable information from individuals who had a shared specific experience. The participants were all over the age of 18, typical of most incarcerated inmates, to eliminate the need for parental permission and to gain more in-depth knowledge from mature individuals.

The research was limited with regards to race and sex, given the small sample size and availability of inmates who had attended a Type II alternative school. It was also important in

the research questions to establish the reliability of the inmates contributing to the study given the nature of their circumstances. Inmates commonly participate in various programs and functions that they are not accustomed to or interested in, to avoid being in the facility, and to facilitate other interests. This behavior is a component of the “Control Balance Theory”.

Inmates, in an effort to gain more control from those imposing or withholding things unpleasant, will engage in voluntary actions that they would normally avoid to gain some aspect of control in an environment where control is very limited (Tittle, 1995).

Definitions

1. *Type II alternative school* – Schools that are isolated from the traditional school and are designed as a last resort for students who are at risk of being expelled from school, typically for major or repeated discipline infractions (Grunbaum, Lowry, & Kann, 2001).
2. *At-Risk* – Term used to describe students that meet certain criteria that make them more probable to not complete school as their peers (Bowers, Spritt, & Taff, 2013).
3. *Dropout* – Term used to denote a student who failed to complete high school (Bowers, Spritt, & Taff, 2013).
4. *Incarceration* – The experience of being isolated from mainstream society, losing freedom, having communication severely limited, being forced to conform to a rigid routine, and experiencing a loss of identity (Wildeman, Turney, & Schnittker, 2014).
5. *Institutionalization* – The experience of being incarcerated and succumbing to the norms and routines of prison life, resulting in a loss of personal identity and an adoption of a criminalized self-concept (Haney, 2011).

6. *Intervention* – The process of using various strategies to negate or lessen the impact of negative behaviors or influences on students (Whitford, Liaupsin, Umbreit, & Ferro, 2013)
7. *Phenomenology* – The study of anything that can be perceived as a phenomena, or experience shared by multiple individuals. Moustakas (1994) states, “The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13).

Summary

The background for the study showed that alternative education was created with the goal of serving students who were not successful in the regular education environment. While this purpose has been achieved on some level, there is still concern that the alternative school has become a risk factor for students committing crimes and facing future incarceration, the problem prompting this study. This chapter provided the research plan, including the research questions, which guided the data collection, analysis, and subsequent report. Limitations and delimitations were identified, and terms were defined as they related to the study. This study gathered perceptions of current inmates who previously attended an alternative school to determine if any phenomena existed that signaled a potential connection between the alternative school experience and the experience of incarceration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Alternatives to traditional public education have existed in nearly every country in the world (Young, 1990). In the early 1800s, with early American educational reformers such as Amos Bronson Alcott, who opened his own schools and taught with a transcendentalist approach, and Francis Wayland Parker, who began the progressive school movement that focused on educating the whole individual: Mentally, physically, and morally (Leiding, 2008), alternative public education sees changes as Americans and immigrants begin to move west. Around 1925 (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006), ideas were rooted in the belief that alternative programs for at-risk students were considered a way of dealing with students who were troublesome or wayward. Morley (1996) stated that the dual goals of alternative schools were to eliminate disruptive students from the regular classroom without moving them to the streets and allow them the opportunity to stay in school until they had earned a high school diploma. The problem is that they stopped earning diplomas and their behavior became worse. This chapter provides a discussion of the theories in which the study was rooted, or theoretical framework, and a thorough review of currently available literature on the topic.

Theoretical Framework

Dewey (1922) wrote that alternatives should focus on experimental learning and that students learn best by doing. This movement marked the shift from teacher-centered education to student-centered education. Dewey (1922) stated that individuals using the problem-solving approach and experimental focus of the scientific method to govern their own lives are the building blocks of how organizations that are reasonable and ethical operate. Schools should be

child-centered with the curriculum and instruction tailored to facilitate the development of the individual.

Skinner's operant behavior theory is the guiding foundation for this study, if the phenomenon exists, and would therefore be created by learned behavior. The reinforcement of a behavior will likely increase the possibility that a behavior will take root and repeat throughout an individual's life (Skinner, 1974). Bandura (2000) expanded on Skinner's behaviorist theory, indicating that new behaviors can be learned by watching others and their reactions and consequences to the modeled behavior, not unlike that of prisoners learning from other inmates.

Currently, type II alternative schools have the reputation as existing for the sole purpose of accommodating those students who are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school or who have become too disruptive to remain in a traditional educational environment (McGee, 2001; Raywid, 1989). Leiding (2008), however, believed the reality of alternative education had a much wider and greater positive future than McGee. A positive future for alternative education lies within the commitment from parents and teachers who believe the at-risk student deserves a rigorous and relevant education equal to their peers. Leiding (2008) states this is a testimonial to the parents and teachers who have committed to a true and diligent education for these at-risk students.

The foundation for this phenomenological research was based upon the social cognitive theory and was fitting for this study given that these students specifically learned their conduct through modeled behavior (Bandura, 1969). If the current status of alternative schools has evolved intentionally or by accident, the evolution of the current system must continue, given the problems that the current behaviors have produced. The additional information provided by

qualitative research is valuable to the progression and success of alternative schools and the understanding of the behaviors of the participants.

The original purpose and historical progression of alternative schools has been charted and monitored over time, as well as quantitatively measured. A deeper appreciation for the students in the type II alternative school and their experiences can be understood through the theoretical framework of a qualitative approach in a behavioristic theory to develop new information from the student's perspective (Zack, 2013).

Related Literature

History of Public Alternative Schools

The 1930s and 1940s brought about the progressive movement, led by educational philosopher John Dewey, that contributed to the conception of alternative education, as it is known today. Dewey wrote that alternatives should focus on experimental learning, and that students learned best by doing. This movement was the shift from teacher-centered education to student-centered education. Dewey (1922) stated:

A person using the problem-solving approach and the experimental focus of scientific method to govern their own life is the building block of how reasonable and ethical organizations operate. Schools should be child-centered with the curriculum and instruction tailored to facilitate the development of the individual. (p.26)

While the 1950s continued to see the need to individualize students' education, the passing of the National Defense Act of 1958 brought this theory to its knees. In 1957, the perception of public education began to change. Between the Cold War, the launch of Sputnik, and the National Defense Act of 1958, this era had turned public education into a manufacturing plant (Leiding, 2008). During this era, "schools were cold, dehumanizing, and irrelevant

institutions largely indifferent to humanity and the personhoods of those within them” (Raywid, 1989, p. 551). The Civil Rights Movement became the change agent on how alternative schools were to be molded to fit a struggling society; it highlighted the growing injustice that mainstream education had created. Public education could no longer close its eyes to poverty, racial discrimination, and the public’s inability to equally prepare every child for an education (Decker, 2012).

The 1960s emerged as a time for great advancement in alternative school development; these schools were going to reach students with concepts of progressive education (McGee, 2001). Alternative programs began to evolve under Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. Afterschool programs were also opened to meet this growing need of student poverty and inequality; they became places to provide opportunities for those less fortunate to receive the assistance they needed. By the end of the late 1960s, alternative schools resurfaced with a greater effort to meet the needs of less fortunate students (Lange & Sletten, 2002) and were considered positive settings for at-risk students (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). This period of time would hold the distinction as the grass-roots endeavors (Franklin, 1992) that laid the foundation for the alternative movement that met the needs of the at-risk student.

Raywid (1994), one of the first to study alternative schools, made three distinct observations in the way alternative schools had been defined: Alternative schools of this period, including Freedom Schools that excluded or alienated major sections of the poor and minority population, would no longer be tolerated; alternative schools had been designed to respond to a group not educated by the regular program and environment; and not all students learn best in the same context (Scipio, 2013).

Other historical alternative schools followed, and public school systems designed their

own alternatives to conventional education, beginning with open schools. These were schools that gave students more freedom to learn at their own pace and style, to study topics of particular interests, and to be in equal partnership with teachers in guiding their specific path to knowledge and education (Miller, 2009). The open school allowed for the opening of many other types of alternative programs at all levels of education. According to Miller (2009) and Young (1990), these programs were designed to center education on the whole child.

Definition of Alternative Schools

The definition of alternative school has caused controversy as early as 1978 (Leiding, 2008), and according to Kleiner (2002), there is disagreement within the alternative community on what distinguishes alternative schools or programs, what characteristics define these schools and programs, and the best practices to apply when teaching the at-risk student in an alternative setting.

Schargel and Smink (2005) indicate that alternative schooling provided potential dropouts with a variety of options that could lead to high school graduation. These programs paid special attention to the individual social needs of students and allowed students to obtain academic requirements needed for a high school diploma. Leiding (2002) stated that community stakeholders started to acknowledge the validity and vitality of alternative schools and programs and the roles those programs played in the success of students who failed in the traditional setting. These alternative schools and programs brought creative and diverse programs to meet the needs of all students; stakeholders to these programs were increasingly creative and innovative in their methods of reaching learners.

Raywid (1990) stated that alternative schools functioned very differently from one another because each was created for different reasons. Researchers showed that alternative

schools could be classified into four different groups (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Leiding, 2008; Powell, 2003; Reimer & Cash, 2003). Each one of these alternative schools possessed specific positives and negatives for student achievement:

Type I-Schools of Choice: This is the foundation of the charter and magnet schools of today. They represented a type of alternative school that was departing from the traditional setting. These types of schools are inventive in their programs and represent a restructured type of environment that made school challenging and fulfilling. This type of school was for those students who were self-selecting this type of program and who were in search of innovative and creative learning.

Type II- Last Chance Schools: These were schools for students in danger of expulsion due to chronically disruptive behavior, drugs, fighting, or school violence. They focused on behavior modification with minimal attention to pedagogy and curriculum. They were not schools of choice and held that the maintenance of discipline and control were more important than curriculum, creativity, and innovation. These schools might have been residential.

Type III- Remedial Programs: The purpose of these types of programs was to provide remediation for students' failures: Academically and/or behaviorally. Students attending these schools were removed from the regular high school setting in order to regain academic success and learn to change negative behavior. Once individuals succeeded, they would reenter the main campus setting. These programs revolved around the modification of students' negative behaviors while promoting academic achievement. While the environment was structured and the focus was on remediation, emphasis was on the school itself as a community.

Virtual Schools- Since the introduction of the Internet, traditional alternative high school programs for at-risk students have been supplemented and, in some school systems, replaced by

virtual schools. In virtual high schools, students have the opportunity to receive online instruction continuously through the day, seven days a week. Allowing the Internet to be the source of education for high school students facilitates the social and family issues that most at-risk students face in their daily lives (Smith, 1990). It allows for those students who are homebound, are working fulltime, and/or are parents to continue their education at their own pace and time frame.

DeBlois and Place (2002) stated that alternative schools should have smaller class sizes in order to allow students to create a stronger sense of community. Additionally, alternative schools should have a curriculum that is based on real-life applications as well as being innovative in the use of technology (Wolk, 2000). It is important to keep in mind that schools should maintain a positive relationship with outside organizations in order to provide at-risk students with life skills training (Barr & Parrett, 1997; De La Rosa, 1998; Lange & Sletten, 2002). For the vast majority of students, the link between school and the work force is that students rarely have a clear understanding of the necessary skills required for an entry-level position. School-to-work programs are the missing link between the inside of the school walls and the work force. This type of program would be able to provide at-risk students with a high level of accountability and informal mentors at the work site (Lerman, 1996).

Components of Successful Alternative School Programs

Alternative programs showing success with their at-risk populations provided appropriate assessment and support service programs to meet the needs of their students (Kim & Taylor, 2008). These assessments needed to be associated with social and emotional needs and include drug or alcohol interventions, health evaluations, individual and group counseling, conflict resolution, tutoring, and mentoring components (Kubik, Lytle & Fulkerson, 2004; Kallio &

Sanders, 1999; Kim & Taylor, 2008). Alternative high schools must maintain an environment that is conducive to learning for these at-risk youth. Kallio and Sanders (1999) introduced three main themes that were apparent from an earlier study of alternative education. First, no school can be truly effective when it is considered a dumping ground. Second, alternative education programs rely on individual instruction and small classes to promote success. Third, success of students in alternative schools seems correlated to the organizational format of the schools and the uniqueness of the individual student, given all students are worthy of dignity and respect no matter their choice of school. Teachers play an integral role in the nation's alternative schools and programs (Barr, Colston, & Parrett, 1977). Caroleo's (2014) examination of alternative schools found that students served, typically benefit from smaller class sizes and more individual attention, yet they are negatively affected by being segregated from peers. She suggests using the strategies found in successful alternative settings, or the mainstream setting, with at-risk students in an attempt to prevent future alternative placement.

Students who exhibit anti-social behaviors may best be served in the alternative setting, segregated from peers in the traditional school setting, according to Acker (2007). He found that this separation allowed those students to work on social skills in a small setting with additional support before transferring back into the larger environment of the traditional school.

While separation from peers has mixed results as an educational intervention, Johnson, Bearinger, Eisberg, Fulkerson, Sieving, and Lando-King (2014) found in a study of Minnesota alternative school programs that students benefitted strongly from the adult-student relationship offered by participation in team sports. Alternative school students who participated in team sports exhibited less risky behaviors in substance use and sexual behaviors. They suggest that alternative school administrators should consider adding sports team programs for these students

based on the study findings.

Lagana-Riordan et al., (2011) conducted a qualitative study to gather perceptions of students who were enrolled in a successful alternative school to glean information about the difference between the supports provided in a traditional setting and those in the alternative setting. Components identified as contributing to the success of the alternative setting over the traditional setting include: Positive, nonjudgmental relationships with adults in the program; behavior supports that include choices for consequences; focus on student strengths instead of weaknesses; student ownership in the culture of the school; involvement in planning and implementing improvement initiatives within the school; and connections between school and home. Basically, the students are treated as valuable assets in the program that have the power to initiate change and improve their own situations and the school as a whole. Watson (2011) also found that a student-centered approach was highly effective in educating at-risk youth in an alternative setting. The successful school in her study had a flexible schedule, and the students were given various options they could choose for the method of delivery of their content (lecture, work packets, technology-based, etc.). Students were given autonomy in the classroom and became supportive of each other and felt as though their teachers respected them as capable learners.

A resounding theme in alternative program research is that of the relationship between the adults in the program and the students they are serving. D'Angelo and Zemanick (2009) discussed the need for team building and trust exercises within the alternative setting to provide an environment of trust, openness, and reliance on each other. While this is a strength of quality programs, it is also difficult to achieve due to the transient nature of students who are sent to the alternative setting by the district for a prescribed period of time or can find themselves

incarcerated during their assignment to the alternative school, possibly missing some of the activities designed to bring about the appropriate level of trust and support. The relationship between students and teacher in the alternative setting was also examined by Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth, and Grahame (2008). Students with positive relationships and positive feelings toward their teachers felt greater ownership in the school and were more likely to experience success both in the alternative setting and beyond. They also found that younger students and female students in general felt more positively toward their teachers than did older male students, a factor that deserves future examination and research. The importance placed on positive relationships in alternative facilities requires leaders who are specifically trained to motivate staff and foster a climate of mutual respect and value throughout the school (Price, Martin, & Robertson, 2010).

Treating the alternative school as an agent of positive change focused on student strengths as the basis for that change, positively affects graduation rate and participation by graduates in post-secondary options, according to a 2007 experimental study conducted by Franklin, Streeter, Kim and Tripodi. They also found that having a self-paced curriculum allowed students to progress through content as quickly as they wanted without being hampered by peers in the program with differing levels of ability and readiness for content.

Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, and Cicchese (2012) studied a successful alternative school that implemented the School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) program to enhance the already supportive environment with low teacher student ratios, highly trained faculty members, and a social work program. The addition of the SWPBS enhanced the program by training staff to set goals, gather data, and track progress of students in achieving goals. When teachers demonstrated high fidelity to the SWPBS, student behaviors

greatly improved across the school population (Farkas et al., 2012). Further study of the SWPBS in the alternative setting showed teachers still giving the same amount of positive feedback as prior to the intervention, but the content of that feedback changed to be more productive and specific as student misbehavior decreased. The number of students responding positively to the SWPBS with a decrease in behavioral incidences greatly exceeded school expectations for alternative setting students (Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010).

Another program that has assisted alternative school students in managing themselves and their behaviors is the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program. The PBIS program gives teachers strategies to help students find alternate methods of dealing with adversity (Scott & Cooper, 2013). Basically, the goal is to help the student self-monitor to identify negative behaviors and then to replace those negative behaviors with positive behaviors instead. Hopefully, by encouraging the students to do this throughout the school day and school year, it will become engrained in them and will be a natural part of their functioning. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) describe the PBIS program by stating:

The critical operational feature is a continuum of evidence-based practices that first considers what all youth need from all staff across all settings (tier 1), then intensifies these supports for groups of youth whose behaviors do not respond sufficiently for success (tier 2), and finally intensifies and individualizes further for youth who require highly individualized or personalized supports (tier 3). (p. 10)

While they found that many alternative school students require the higher tiers offered by the program, students should be given the lowest tier of support that allows them to experience success. If individuals are successful with just tier 1 support, they are not given tier 2 or 3 support. However, if they are unsuccessful with tier 1, they move to tier 2 and on to tier 3 if tier

2 is not enough. This individualized program allows students to function successfully with interventions specifically designed to address their behavior and readiness levels (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Providing an after-school supplemental program to the alternative school has also added another layer of support to schools wishing to effect positive change in their students' lives and futures, according to Carswell, Hanlon, O'Grady, Watts, and Pothong (2009). They stress the importance of involving the students' families in any effort to rehabilitate and emphasize the need for school administrators to provide a high level of support for vocational learning opportunities, attendance policy enforcement, staff trained in methods of dealing with difficult students, and other resources as needed.

Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, and Tenelson (2006) came to the same conclusions as other researchers studying the alternative setting and effecting positive change. They state:

...students identified as troubled or troubling tend to flourish in alternative learning environments where they believe that their teachers, staff, and administrators care about and respect them, value their opinion, establish fair rules that they support, are flexible in trying to solve problems, and take a non-authoritarian approach to teaching. Creating caring, non-authoritarian learning environments and populating them with adults who are sympathetic to the special needs of these students and their families is likely a key to success for these students. (p. 16)

Providing the at-risk student the most effective and qualified teachers allowed the student a better chance of academic success. This staff should include: Strong and capable leaders; excited, energetic, competent teachers with multiple teaching styles; staff who are highly trained and carefully selected; and an innovative presentation of instructional materials with an emphasis

on real-life learning (Kallio & Sanders, 1999; TN Standards, 2008). Alternative education is not a piece program; it is multifaceted state (Kubik, Lytle, & Fulkerson, 2004). It is also expensive and demanding, but the outcomes of student success, no matter how small, are in large part what make the alternative programs successful (Decker, 2012).

While there are many studies supporting the teacher-student relationship in the alternative school, the relationships between students are often viewed negatively. Herndon and Bembenuddy (2013) conducted a study that focused on social factors and how they affect students in the alternative setting. The results showed that, when students are given more opportunities for positive interaction with each other, they become better influences on each other as peers. They suggest using group projects and interactive learning activities as a catalyst to teach students how to effectively interact in a manner that is beneficial for all. The Why Try social program, when implemented with students who are emotionally and behavior disordered and educated in the alternative setting, showed great results in reducing negative behaviors. The metaphor-based program used team-building activities and group discussions to change the mindset and culture of the students. Though not appropriate for younger learners who are not ready for the abstract thinking required to understand metaphors, it seems to have a positive impact on older adolescents who are at-risk and being educated in the alternative setting (Wilhite & Bullock, 2012). A 2011 study that used student interviews to reveal themes in alternative school students' views of the learning environment revealed that students need social and emotional support, a sense of autonomy and having some control over their environment and learning, and relevance to real life with concepts they are studying (Phillips, 2011).

Families of students forced to attend an alternative school as a result of school discipline were interviewed to determine client satisfaction with the program at the conclusion of the

student's mandatory placement. Carpenter-Aeby and Aeby (2012) had many respondents state that they would rather have their child educated for an additional year in the alternative school than to return to the regular school setting. They state:

Family response's indicated that the characteristics of the alternative school program contributed significantly to the success of their child. Seventy-three percent or more of the families responded positively to questions regarding the characteristics of the program. Eighty-four percent of the families felt the program's supportive environment was a contributing factor to their child's success. Another 82.5% of the families felt the individual attention and well-defined standards and rules equally contributed to the success of their child. (p. 9)

Overwhelmingly, clients (alternative school students and their families) report satisfaction with the alternative school setting in meeting the needs of these learners that need additional supports to experience success.

At-Risk Students

The term at-risk became routine with an on-going debate about students, families, schools, and educational policy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). Traditionally, society had used the term at-risk as an arbitrary label for students who were likely to drop out because of undesirable educational experiences, such as low academic achievement, poor school attendance, and grade retention (Johnson, 1997).

Hughes and Taylor-Dunlop (2006) emphasized that adolescence is one of the most difficult ages characterized by a period of rebellion where youngsters are trying to make sense of who they are and the world that surrounds them. This period becomes critical for the adolescent because the demands came from many directions: Their own physical development, family and

peers, and the environmental settings of the community. Family influence, dependency on peers for social approval, and a variety of other conflicts make this part of the teenage experience extremely difficult and prone to conflicts (Ianni, 1989).

The term at-risk, as applied to students, essentially related to the high level of probability associated with a student dropping out of school (Kellmayer, 1995). There was a variety of factors that contributed to students dropping out of school, and they included: Truancy, drug use, multiple class failures within a school year, failing or being held back a grade level, poverty, violent tendencies, antisocial behaviors, and chronic disruptive behavior (Acker, 2007; Camak, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hill, 2005; McArdle, 2003; Wiley, 2002; Zimmerman, 2003). Just as there were a large number of characteristics used to determine a student's classification of at-risk, there is research regarding various ways to meet the needs of these students.

Conrath (1986) takes the common factors identifying at-risk students and does an analysis of each factor. Referring to at-risk as "defeated and discouraged learners", he describes them as having low self-confidence, a deep sense of personal impotency, helplessness and lack of self-worth. They: Are avoiders; distrust adults and adult situations; have a limited notion of the future; usually lack adequate educational skills; come from unstable homes; are impatient with routine, long-time sitting, listening and classrooms with little variety; learn best through practical application; and do not see a relationship between effort and achievement (Conrath, 1986).

Van Acker (2007) highlighted the importance of the alternative educational setting addressing antisocial and aggressive behaviors in the population they serve. He discusses the value of the alternative setting providing necessary supports for student success in that environment but also stresses that transitional programs may need to be implemented to help

students reentering the regular education environment that does not provide the same level of support they have been receiving (Van Acker, 2007).

Juvenile delinquents in Pakistan on average reported having larger families (typically five or more siblings) and less education than non-delinquent juvenile peers (Rafique & Sattar, 2011). This lack of education deserves further attention, as the reasons identified for this educational gap could provide insight to provide better support for these at-risk juveniles. A New Zealand study looked at juveniles who had criminal convictions and their experiences in school to determine if there was a relationship between negative experiences in education and juvenile offenses. This is the result:

To many of the participants there was an overwhelming sense of unfairness, of victimisation that led to frustration and a search for ways to get out of their school life-world. It was their perspective that having to attend school was imposed on them. They did not want to attend school; it was never their choice. They describe feeling alienated from the school system and from their pro-social peers. Many found learning difficult, especially towards the end of primary school. The majority was bored with classroom routine and behavioral expectations and used this to justify their antisocial, impulsive and aggressive behaviors. They had little desire to comply with teachers' instructions, and while there was an expectation that other students should follow the school rules, they did not accept that the rules applied to themselves. Truancy, a symptom of their alienation, was routine. Discipline, detentions, stand-downs, suspension and exclusions were common occurrences. But perhaps the most dominant theme was that school personnel treated them unfairly. (Sutherland, 2011, p. 55-56)

Based on the results of this study, students did not feel a sense of belonging in the educational

environment and felt as though the school personnel were responsible for their lack of success. While this qualitative study shed light on the feelings of these students towards their educational experience, it merely gives insight into one set of students' experiences that cannot be generalized to larger populations. It is helpful to have the perspective of these students, however, as a point for discussion in considering educational needs of at-risk learners.

Johnson and Taliaferro (2012) conducted a comprehensive literature review of research involving alternative high school students and health and mental factors and found that very little research has been conducted from the medical viewpoint of factors that contribute to a lack of success in some individuals. Their findings state:

The extant literature provides consistent evidence indicating students attending alternative high schools demonstrate high risk for immediate and future poor health outcomes related to substance use, diet, physical activity, sexual risk-taking, mental health, and violence. The literature also suggests that the social environmental contexts of alternative high school students' lives contribute to the high prevalence of risk-taking behaviors among this population. (p. 92)

The question remains to be answered whether alternative settings contribute to these risky behaviors in students or whether the risky behaviors are why the students are in the alternative setting.

Ultimately factors that have identified at-risk youth have contributed to the accepted belief that being at-risk is a naturally occurring social problem not requiring scrutiny or evaluation. This lack of critique of being at-risk has produced negative consequences for the youth labeled as such and has led to inaccurate perceptions of these youth (Kim & Young, 2008).

Since peer influence is strong among at-risk students, Sussman, Arriaza, and Grigsby

(2014) conducted a literature review of studies involving alternative school settings and cessation programs for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. They found that the most successful programs were those that involved peer support groups. Programs led by counselors or other adults in these students' lives were typically unsuccessful. When peer groups are used for cessation of at-risk behaviors, students begin to discuss their struggles and feel as though they share commonalities, allowing them to support each other. They strongly suggest that alternative schools consider implementing programs that allow this peer support to reduce at-risk behaviors (Sussman, Arriaza, & Grigsby, 2014).

Turton, Umbreit, and Mathur (2011) discuss the process of improving behavior for emotional and behavior disordered students placed in the alternative educational setting as a result of their behavior in the regular education setting. They suggest that educators conduct a functional behavior assessment to determine what causes negative behaviors in a specific student, make a plan to improve those identified behaviors while taking into account the stimuli identified for the behavior, and monitor the plan to ensure it is helping. This plan of individualizing behavior plans for each student could be expanded throughout the alternative environment if educators have the proper resources for doing so.

Georgia Guidelines for Alternative Schools

Georgia's Alternative / Non-traditional Education Program began as a grant-funded program in 1994 and was known as the Crossroads alternative education program. With the passage of the A+ Education Reform Act of 2000, Crossroads grants were eliminated and Quality Basic Education (QBE) funds began providing for the Alternative Education Program for students in grades 6-12. Effective May 2010, the state board of education adopted the name, Alternative / Non-traditional Education Program (AEP) (Georgia Department of Education,

2013).

Non-traditional schools and programs are an option for students who may experience difficulty in the traditional setting. These students may require creative, innovative, and structured alternatives within a different educational setting. Alternative / non-traditional educational programs offer these options to students as it recognizes that a one model approach is no longer effective in meeting the goal of making all Georgia students college and career ready. Attributes of effective alternative programs according to Georgia's Alternative Education Program Standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2013) include:

- Addresses personal responsibility and self-discipline, as well as career preparation, which are aligned to the College and Career Readiness Program Index (CCRPI), an alternative to Annual Yearly Progress Index (AYP).
 - Develops, implements, and monitors individualized graduation plans
 - Implements research-based instructional strategies aligned with student needs
 - Implements a transition process to ensure a seamless entry to the AEP and a seamless return to the traditional home school or external agency
 - Provides students with opportunities to maintain or accelerate their current progress toward graduation
 - Provides guidance and counseling, school social work, and school psychological services to support student performance
 - Has district support to ensure effective implementation of programs and/or schools
- (Georgia Department of Education, 2013)

Georgia's Alternative / Non-traditional Education Program is designed to provide some program flexibility at the local level. Local school systems must provide a disciplinary

alternative education program, and they may collaborate with other districts, Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) or contract with an external vendor to provide services to disruptive students.

A local school system may provide the following:

- An attendance recovery program
- A choice alternative education program
- A community-based alternative education program
- A credit recovery program
- Other alternative education program models that otherwise meet the requirements

(Georgia Department of Education, 2013)

Additionally, the local alternative education program may function as a single-system or multi-system program and may be located on or off a regular school campus (National Alternative Education Association/Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

At-Risk Students in the Alternative Educational Setting

Students in alternative schools typically demonstrate more risky behaviors than do their regular education peers. Grunbaum, Lowry, and Kann (2001) conducted a study comparing the behaviors of alternative versus regular education students and found that students in the alternative setting demonstrated more risky and less healthy behaviors in every category studied (*Figure 1*): Unintended injury and violence; use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs; sexual behaviors; and diet and exercise (Grunbaum, Lowry, & Kann, 2001). While the study cannot show causation, it is interesting to note that these students overwhelmingly report behaviors that are considered at-risk.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11691595>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10697808>

One study found a correlation between alternative school students experimenting with drug use and the physical condition of the learning environment. Basically, students in alternative schools that were in disrepair were significantly more likely statistically to use illicit drugs than were alternative school students in favorable physical conditions in the school setting. While the study shows a relationship, it does not specify whether the physical conditions of the school are a factor in the drug use or if students in areas with schools in disrepair tend to use drugs more (Grana, Black, Sun, Rohrbach, Gunning, & Sussman, 2010).

Arcan, Kubik, Fulkerson, Hannan, and Story (2011) echoed the same negative results when studying substance use and dietary practices amongst students in the alternative educational setting. They compared at-risk behaviors and their frequency against each other and in concert with each other and found:

Our results revealed that cigarettes were the substance most frequently used by both males and females. Cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use were each associated with higher consumption of high-fat foods, and cigarette smoking was associated with higher consumption of regular soda and fast food restaurant use. Students who used multiple substances had progressively higher consumption of high-fat foods compared to nonusers and single substance users. (p. 6)

Basically, those alternative school students who choose to engage in risky behaviors are more likely to participate in other risky or unhealthy behaviors. Many of the at-risk behaviors

demonstrated by students in the alternative setting contributed to them being placed in such an environment. Those involved in educating students in the alternative setting need to consider interventions for these students that will limit these risky behaviors to help students have a better chance of being successful when returning to the regular education environment.

Institutional Effects on Education and The Phenomenon of Incarceration

According to James (2009), approximately 82% of prisoners are at or below the writing level of an 11 year old, and half of all prisoners do not have the skills required by 96% of jobs. James (2009) also proffers that only one in five people in prison are able to complete a job application. Post release opportunity limitations exist among the masses of inmates, but these limitations can be overcome through education. Gomes and Serrano (2014) suggest, however, that inmates and those post release individuals entering higher education struggle with current educational methods. Lack of access to and little knowledge of technology causes frustration, and these students require a higher level of individual support from professors to achieve success than does the traditional higher education student. How do you instill pride and confidence into someone that has experienced failure for the majority of their lives? The likelihood of financial success without an education is minimal. Campbell (2004) states that, as the gaps between lower and middle classes grow, our secondary schools, particularly in the inner cities, are increasingly ineffective in preparing non-college bound students into a workforce that requires advanced education and computer skills.

Ellsworth, Person, Welborn and Frost (1991) conducted a study of inmates who chose not to participate in prison educational programs. From their findings, approximately 60% of those questioned responded that the largest influence against participation was lack of confidence. The stigma that is associated with being illiterate is imposing upon those who cannot read. This

creates an atmosphere of “don’t ask, don’t tell” on behalf of inmates and general population dropouts as well. Palmer (2012) stresses the importance of prison postsecondary education options by stating:

Daily, ex-inmates are being released from prison into conditions that may have played a significant role in their initial arrest. Postsecondary correctional education could potentially increase the ex-inmates’ economic and social position, thereby decreasing the likelihood of recidivism.... it may be possible to expand postsecondary education, potentially reducing recidivism by changing lives, not locking them away. (p. 163)

The hope is that, by further educating inmates, opportunities will open for them that will decrease the likelihood of them returning to prison.

There has also been a distinction made between andragogy and pedagogy as those who are adults have probably ended up in a facility through their own actions. This enlightens inmates to the weight of their own responsibilities. This is different from cursory education where the need for an education is placed upon the student by parent and society. There are internal motivation components that make up the drive of an adult to change his or her life. Again, within the general population, the burden of survival by means of gainful employment is the biggest burden to finishing school (Knowles, 1989). There has been little study to this point that would specify the reasons for those who are in this country’s jails and prisons. There is value, according to Smith and Silverman (1994), in efforts to educate younger inmates, as these efforts yield the most positive results. Those who make the greatest gains have not had the long life of initial experience and recidivism. Repeated failure and exclusion from the American dream causes those who are marginalized to create their own American Dream.

Inmates have high self-esteem and are on average willing to use their skill sets in

unconventional, often illegal, ways. According to Greenberg, Dunleavy, and Kutner (2007), Black and Hispanic adult prisoners have a higher rate of prose literacy than Black and Hispanic adults in the general population. Many times it is not the intelligence level that creates barriers and success patterns, as much as it may be education levels which lead to sustainable living wages. Binswanger, Booth, Corsi, Glanz, Long, and Nowels (2012) studied drug use and overdose of inmates after release from prison and found that, due to a lack of resources to change their environment from where they lived, committed crimes, and used drugs prior to their arrest, they were forced back to those same neighborhoods post-release. They state:

Participants highlighted the significance of poor social support, medical problems, and inadequate financial resources to support integration into the community. Furthermore, they experienced ubiquitous exposure to drugs in the neighborhoods to which they were released. (p.7)

Perhaps with an education, these former inmates would have access to better resources to be able to cope with life post-release and avoid returning to old habits and neighborhoods.

According to Horton (1994), inner city kids are motivated and eager to learn until they encounter inexperienced teachers and underfunded schools. He goes on to state that most inner city schools are bleak fortresses with classrooms in disrepair and few amenities that inspire or motivate the young, whereas wealthy suburbs have the finest schools and best paid teachers. Siegal and Senna (1994) state that juveniles rationalize crime as a normal response to existing social conditions. To these juveniles, crime becomes an acceptable means to secure mainstream society's highly materialistic standard of success. It is difficult for the young, from lower income areas, to move above and beyond this type of existence. This is especially relevant when students can comprehend that they are not a priority to the establishment.

Blombert, Bales, Mann, Piquero, and Berk (2011) found that several factors contributed to the success of adolescents who are incarcerated and being released. Students who achieved academic success while incarcerated had a more positive attitude about attending school upon release, and they returned to school at a higher rate than those who were not successful academically. Consequently, those who returned to school upon release were less likely to be re-arrested.

Efficacy and self-esteem are primarily based upon social condition and association among peers. According to Horton (1994), these associations help determine whether gain of pursuing the illegal activity is more attractive than abstaining from breaking the law. Classroom education is not a determining factor in producing success or failure in one's pursuit of material items, which represent a "micro-class" system of re-evaluation in priorities among the impoverished. Campbell (2004) illustrates this by stating that teen pregnancies are at record levels because young inner-city girls have little else for which they can claim success. By completing a pregnancy and giving birth to another person, they can finally claim an accomplishment. It has been shown that those inmates that have become much too familiar with the penal system do not react to incarceration in the same way. Some do not see education as being capable of changing their life's course. Education of inmates under the age of 21 drastically increased probabilities that inmates will not return to prison within five years (Nuttall, 2003). The older the inmate becomes, the less belief in self-efficacy they possess. There is also a decrease in believing in an internal locus of control. Everything happens to the inmate instead of the inmate being responsible for his or her own condition (Bushfield, 2004).

The lack of education among prisoners in our society creates more crime and higher recidivism. The James Madison Memorial contains this quote made in 1822, "Knowledge will

forever govern ignorance; and people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives". Not having an education lends itself to being involved in activities that are not productive. These non-productive activities include, but are not limited to: Burglary, rape, illegal narcotic distribution, theft, and assault. When a student is arrested and sent to jail for an offense, there is no obligation by the state or local government to continue cursory education if a person is over 18 years of age. This presents a problem, as this inmate will eventually become a citizen again, this time being older with an even less commensurate education. There is no dialogue between the student's past and future educators occurring behind bars. The student vacillates between two worlds. One world exists in which education is important to the student, and another world where education is not. The student is forced to begin all over again upon release with basic rules of society and engagement to societal normality (Nashe, 2010). To an educational administrator, the responsibility and processes of educating students should not be dictated by the location or the legal circumstance of a student.

When crime is high, there is an inordinate amount of money that has to be allocated from municipal budgets to keep criminal threats off of the streets. From this increased funding to corrections, there are trends that pull this funding from social programs that are not deemed to be as equally important (Nashe, 2010). With decreasing fiscal allocations to public schools, it is important for educational administrators to divert children from criminal activity to educational activity. By actively increasing education, it is possible that they can actively decrease truancy and transgressions against the law.

When inmates are incarcerated, they have the opportunity to contribute to changing the direction of their lives within the facility walls. Programs such as General Education Degree, Adult Basic Education, and Vocational Programs are available to assist in the changing of

direction (Georgia Department of Corrections, 2009). While it is mandated in certain federal and state facilities that inmates participate as a part of their incarceration or pre-release conditioning, many inmates face obstacles that prohibit this from happening. Inmates may lack the requisite educational background, have learning disabilities, or be restricted within the prison based on their classification. All of these and other issues, such as drug abuse and addiction, may contribute to the prohibition of these programs for certain inmates (Nashe, 2010). Watson et al. (2007) provided an addiction program for adolescent inmates being educated in an alternative setting and found that the interventions were most successful when they involved work on an individual level, with family, and within a support group. Staff training and support were found to be the most critical factors contributing to the success of these programs.

While programs are available within the prison walls to assist in post-release success, former inmates still face many obstacles. A focus group of previous inmates identified difficulties in finding proper housing, gaining education, and finding employment. They identified support systems that aided in their lack of recidivism that focused mainly on social support, such as employment assistance, drug and alcohol counseling, and aid in finding suitable housing (Spieldnes & Yamatani, 2011).

Though opportunities exist for inmates to obtain an education, there is concern about the culture of prison life and difficulty assimilating back into mainstream society upon release. Jimenez and Garcia (2014) reveal issues that prisoners face once released that center around moving from a highly structured schedule, lack of privacy, and low expectation for quality social interactions to society in which each person determines his/her own schedule and is expected to be a productive member of society with manners and an understanding of social norms for interaction. They stress the importance of creating programs that help these individuals adjust to

this major change by guiding them through the difficulties experienced as they adjust to societal expectations for behavior. A study conducted on juvenile facilities found that education level of the inmate and participation in prison activities or programs were positively correlated with appropriate societal behavior. Ozben (2010) states:

Prison activities consist of activities through which children can discharge and socialize. These activities also consist of activities that are beneficial for the personal development and by which they have an occupation when they go out. Being in the same activities is beneficial in terms of socializing even if they do not like each other or even when there are differences in thought. In this way, they learn how to respect the different ideas of other people. (p. 209)

Because of the difference these programs tend to make in the interactions of those who participate, Ozben also suggests that juveniles not be sentenced to facilities but instead be given opportunities to learn these social skills to better function in society. This would eliminate the need for programs to re-socialize these inmates back into societal norms if they were rehabilitated rather than incarcerated. For incarcerated adults, Wolff, Shi, and Schumann (2012) determined that the longer an inmate has been incarcerated, the more difficult it is for him/her to remain free once released. Haney (2011) addressed the culture inside the prison walls as one meant to diminish personal autonomy and contribute to degradation of individuality. He states:

Older, experienced inmates know the routines, the pressures, and the dangers all too well. They have felt or witnessed the consequences of violating one or another of the complex maze of official rules and regulations that are rigidly imposed by staff, and they have seen what happens to persons who fail to meet the equally complicated set of unofficial expectations and demands that are just as harshly administered by other inmates. (p. 122)

This daily routine and adherence to official and peer-initiated rules creates habits in prisoners that are difficult to overcome when released into mainstream society where they are free to make decisions and govern their own actions. Wolff, Shi, and Schumann (2012) suggest that educational programs to teach inmates skills needed outside of prison should begin at least three years prior to their release. This idea of institutionalization means that the lack of freedom to make choices and take responsibility while incarcerated makes it very difficult for those released to function in a society where each individual is responsible for every aspect of his/her life.

Summary

The marketability of alternative schools that existed in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to fade in the 1980s and was replaced with vouchers programs, charter schools, and magnet programs (Conley, 2002). Many of these schools succeeded and are still operating today in numerous forms and varieties. In the 1980s and 1990s, a new development in alternative education took place with the pressures of testing tied to funding and job performance, and this is what eventually gave rise to the type II, or punitive, alternative school.

The most critical shifting of alternative schools came when many school districts and administrators began to look at the problems among at-risk students (Conrath, 2001). This focus became popular throughout the country, and the creation of these schools was originally designed to insure that at-risk students graduated from high school. The problem is that this type of response may have caused many districts to lose focus and abandon the original intent of these schools, as many of them became dumping grounds for problem students (Waxman, 1992).

What is known about these particular type II alternative schools, in which the goal is to reform the student, is that they are not very successful at properly educating students and have

failed at changing behavior issues that exist in at risk students. These schools have been very successful at serving as detention centers for the main campus and removing problems that exist within the student population. Caroleo (2014) states that, “programs that focus more on changing the system tend to have better results, yet many alternative programs have a greater focus on making a change within the child” (p. 44). School systems have also succeeded in using Type II alternative schools to secure large amounts of money that can be effectively used elsewhere in the system since the state provides more money for systems to educate students in alternative settings (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

This chapter provided background information on the theories that guided the research process and a review of the body of literature related to alternative education and institutionalization. In this qualitative study “the questions go beyond the task of gathering information, they call for social change as well” (Shank, 2002, p.102). The participants were allowed to discuss and identify many of the problems that existed in the alternative school setting. They may be responsible through their commentary for potentially changing and improving the environment in the alternative school. They offered insight into their experiences in the alternative school and the experiences they had while incarcerated.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now incarcerated in a correctional facility. Having a better understanding of the programs offered to alternative school students and the methods applied to these at risk students from their perspective may help identify some areas that can be improved. The research design was qualitative. Understanding the meaning people have constructed, the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, fieldwork, and inductive research (Merriam, 1998). This chapter provides specific information on how the study was conducted, including the research design, research questions, a description of the setting and participants, the researcher's role, and the procedures followed through out the study. Data collection and analysis are described in detail, as well as factors that affect trustworthiness of the study and any ethical considerations that were pertinent.

Allowing former students to voice their feelings about and experiences with their education at the alternative center provided the researcher the opportunity to focus on the human element and not be limited to numerical data to identify to what extent these students perceived their education while attending the alternative center (Gerring, 2007; Merriam, 2008). McArdle (2003) noted, by using the qualitative approach, researchers working with alternative schools would be allowed to determine what was important to the participant interviewee, the student. Leedy and Ormond (2005) state, "qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view" (p.95).

Allowing participants to relate their experiences at the alternative center gave credence to qualitative research and its focus on the quality of relationships based on the 10 participants' construction of reality within groups and settings, and the information gathered revealed how all the individual parts work together (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research and education are intertwined because of the base interest of all educators to continue to build on past knowledge and experience in order to meet the needs of students in an ever changing and growing society.

Design

This was a transcendental phenomenological study, using former alternative school students who were at least 18 years of age and are currently incarcerated in a jail or prison. This provided the most usable data and the true essence of the lived experiences of the former students. The use of a phenomenological method allowed the researcher to bring forth into consciousness, preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and then set them aside (Moustakas, 1994). Using this method allowed each statement to have equal value and allowed the researcher to bracket the phenomenon so that the focus of the research was clear. Gaining meaning from the statements and developing insights as a result of the reduction process was enhanced through this process (Moustakas, 1994). "Transcendental phenomenology aspires to access the personal, the individual, the variations within themes. It is, inherently a means of creating knowledge that is particular; knowledge that offers a portal of insight into the individual and idiosyncratic" (Conklin, 2005, p. 3). This intimate insight into individuals and their interpretation of their life experiences provided information that was not previously available. Bracketing out the feelings and opinions of the researcher in the data analysis process allowed biases to be identified and considered as themes were identified and described (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviewing the participants was the primary data source, but data was also gathered via focus groups and journaling to gain further information in different environments. This allowed the use of a greater information base for the research purpose, and assisted in formulating hunches about the phenomena being studied (Hatch, 2002).

Research Questions

1. How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school?
2. How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility?
3. How do participants' lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility?

Setting

The site of the interviews was the local detention center in a rural mountain town in North Georgia, where many of the former students of type II alternative schools and other alternative schools are currently housed as inmates. This facility was chosen because of the open access the researcher, as a former sheriff deputy, had to the facility and because it offered the specific type of participant that was most desirable for this particular study. The participants offered all of the criteria necessary for the interviews and shared in common the relevant background that offered the most in depth and useful information. The town that housed the detention center was small and rural, but the facility housed inmates for the surrounding counties, resulting in a fairly large population in the detention center. The facility itself was secure and offered opportunities for inmates wishing to better themselves to become involved in

GED programs, post-secondary education, drug and alcohol counseling, and work-release day programs providing labor for various service projects that benefitted the community. While the setting was very structured and punitive in nature, inmates did have the opportunity to gain new skills and receive an education while there.

The alternative schools these individuals attended were located in the north Georgia mountains area within the town that housed the detention center and in the surrounding counties, all of which were rural and had similar demographics. The alternative schools were type II alternative schools, which were largely punitive in nature, and were all established in the 1990s for the purpose of providing an alternative to suspending students from the schools, giving school administrators another option for placement of students with behavior issues. The schools typically had 20 to 30 students in the facilities that ranged from elementary to high school age. The schools were all physically separate from the base schools from which the participants were expelled, and they had full-time teachers that delivered content as well as behavior interventions, as necessary. Most of the students were placed in the alternative schools as a result of behavior in the regular school environment that warranted long term suspension or expulsion. Systems were required to provide an education for any student under compulsory education law, which included all students under the age of 16. These alternative schools provided an environment segregated from mainstream education where these students received academic instruction and behavioral intervention strategies. The intent of these schools was to reform the students' behavior to allow them to be successful upon returning to the base school.

Participants

This was a purposeful sample with an established criterion based on the participants and the type of participant desired. According to Patton (1990), "The purpose of purposeful

sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 169). He explains that criterion sampling is “to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 177). For the purposes of this study, the use of former alternative school students (at least a semester) who are currently incarcerated in a correctional facility, and were at least 18 years of age, was the desired participating group. This provided the most useable information from participants with shared and pertinent experiences. The scope of the study was limited to the similarities of these participants to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and their unique circumstances. Using inmates was also deemed to be beneficial because of their shared specific experiences and the potential phenomenological connection between them and their circumstances.

All inmates in the detention facility were asked to complete a short survey (see Appendix D) that asked about the required criteria for the study. Those inmates who were over the age of 18 and had previously attended an alternative school for at least a semester were invited to participate in the study. In this restrictive setting, inmates often volunteer to participate in studies to allow them some time outside the confines of the normal, extremely structured day. From the group of inmates that met the criteria, a group of 15 was chosen for the study based on answers given on the survey. The goal was to have as diverse a participant group as possible with regards to age. Five of the potential participants were then released prior to data collection, making them no longer eligible for the study since they were not currently incarcerated at the time the data was collected. Nevertheless, the sample size used for study allowed for data saturation, which Mason (2010) describes:

There is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample- as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a

piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic. (p. 8)

Adding additional participants would have resulted in repetitive information that was not necessary to the analysis of the qualitative data.

Procedures

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A), the sheriff and members of his staff reviewed my study proposal and granted permission to carry out the research within the local detention center facility (see Appendix B). I also discussed the surveys to be used to establish the base of candidates for the study and the questions that were used to guide the interviews and focus group discussions. I then formulated a plan to work with the sheriff's department to accumulate the data necessary to proceed.

Once facility permission had been granted and all facility rules and procedures had been studied, data collection began. A recruitment letter and short survey to screen for specific criteria in the participants was given to all inmates willing to volunteer (see Appendix C and D). Those who met the specific criteria were chosen in a manner that allowed for the most diverse group of participants possible.

Consent forms were given to each individual that participated in the study, and they were required to sign them for the purpose of starting the interviews (see Appendix E). Triangulation was applied throughout the process of collecting data using interviews, focus groups, and journaling. Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and, along with journals, coded for emerging themes and common threads of experience among the participants. Peer

reviews were also employed to reduce as much as possible the natural bias that existed with the researcher. Information was kept safe in a secure facility, and pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and agencies involved.

The Researcher's Role

I am a former police officer and criminal justice major who has spent 15 years in law enforcement, mostly as an investigator, but have served in all aspects of law enforcement during my tenure. Many years of interacting with institutionalized, as well as first time inmates, has given me a unique insight into the meaning of institutionalization. I have observed that process on many occasions involving doctors, lawyers, teachers, and numerous other professionals. I have watched as these well educated, articulate individuals, changed in a relatively short period of time, and became indistinguishable from the career criminals around them. I have understood during that period of my life how the isolation of that environment can change an accomplished adult and also observed how quickly it changes the young offender. Those experiences, while beneficial to help me understand and anticipate the behavior and motivations of my participants, have created in me biases about the expected responses of the participants. I attempted to identify those biases by bracketing my personal thoughts in the margins of the data transcripts as I worked to identify themes and ideas that contributed to the study.

I am now a middle school teacher and for eight years have made similar observations among students in a type II alternative school held on the same campus as my school. Each year, I have at least one of my students sent to the alternative school as a result of behavior in the traditional school setting. I visit these students in that setting and continue to provide support and encouragement for them throughout their placement. I am concerned that the phenomenon that exists among inmates and the institutionalized behavior may also exist among these students.

Because I believed that I would find this phenomenon, I needed to be cognizant throughout the study to make sure my expectation was not clouding my analysis of the data. The effect of this bias was minimized, by using the words and ideas expressed by the participants verbatim as much as possible in the final report. Having access through observation of these students and access to the current inmate population were advantages to my study. I am from the community and also have the advantage of knowing many of the currently housed inmates, with personal knowledge of many of them and their life experiences.

Data Collection

Using phenomenological research methods, data collection focused on the participants' experience and how that related to the phenomenon under investigation. The methods of data collection involved interviews, focus groups, and journaling.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in the detention facility after gaining permission from the facility and the participants. The sheriff's office granted access to the inmates, and they were recruited and chosen personally by the researcher based on responses to a short survey (see Appendix D). The participant group consisted of 10 inmates. Of the inmates in the facility who were willing to participate in the study, only 10 were identified (and available) that met the criteria of having previously attended a type II alternative school. While the number of participants seemed low, the depth of the data collected was sufficient to provide a rich description and comprehensive analysis of the experiences shared by these participants. Data saturation was reached, allowing a plethora of information to be gathered without the data becoming repetitive (Mason, 2010). The interviews were conducted in the facility, using the interview room available with a deputy and the facility manager overseeing the interviews.

While his and her presence may have inhibited responses in the interviews, participants did not seem to be bothered by either and appeared to give honest responses. If they were not comfortable with responding with complete honesty in the interviews, they were reminded that they would be keeping a journal that would only be seen by the researcher. All notes and the journals were given to the researcher at the conclusion of the interview sessions. There was a script of the interview questions to follow while allowing the interviewee to speak freely beyond the guided questions (see Appendix F). The questions were designed to look deeply at the recalled lived experiences of the inmates when they were in an alternative school program.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

Questions Asked of Participants in Individual Interviews

Tell me about yourself, like where you grew up, school experiences, family, and anything else you would like to share.

You indicated on your survey that you experienced school in the alternative setting. Describe this experience.

What kind of relationship did you have with your peers at the alternative school?

Why did you have to attend the alternative school?

How did the alternative school program impact your behavior?

What kind of relationship did you have with your teachers at the alternative school?

If you participated in any kind of character education program in the alternative school, what impact did that have on you?

Describe your experience the first time you were incarcerated.

Describe your current experience in incarceration.

Describe your interaction with fellow inmates.

How has incarceration impacted your behavior?

Have you participated in educational or rehabilitative programs while incarcerated, and what impact did that have on you?

What experiences did you have in the alternative setting that was similar to experiences as an incarcerated inmate?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the alternative school and as an inmate in the correctional facility?

Focus Groups

Focus groups were developed from the interviewing process of the 10 inmates divided into smaller groups of five each to allow individuals to become more comfortable in a different environment. An informal atmosphere created by this group dynamic helped create new usable information not obtained in the formal interview setting.

The focus group discussions, guided by questions from the researcher (see Appendix G) were also transcribed, and information coded. The inmates were allowed to use the language of the facility and were made to feel comfortable in this setting while reminiscing about their experiences in the alternative schools.

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

Questions Asked in Focus Group Discussions

What were the positive aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience?

What were the negative aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience?

What would you do to improve the alternative school program if you had the power to change it?

How did the program help you or change the direction of your educational experience?

Is there anything you would like to add or change about the comments you have made in this or the other interview?

Journaling

Participants were asked to maintain a journal over the course of a week in which they were able to provide more in-depth details about their experiences in the alternative school and in the detention facility. They were asked to reflect on the daily schedule in each setting and describe their activities, feelings, interactions with others, and any other information they felt compelled to share. These journals (see Appendix H for an excerpt) were reviewed individually and coded for themes that emerged, and then the themes were reviewed collectively to identify common ideas that were expressed across multiple participants' journals.

Data Analysis

Each individual interview and the focus group discussions were preserved by extensive note taking, transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and the use of the participants' direct quotes for authentic responses and meanings. Notations made of the pertinent information, particularly tone and voice inflection that indicates emotion that could not be included in a review of just a transcription, journal, or note taking was included.

Transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions and participant journals were reviewed multiple times, the first time to notate main ideas from each response. Following Moustakas' (2004) suggestions for data analysis, listing was used to identify and list all ideas that were relevant to the experience. At this time, the researcher's thoughts and reflections were also bracketed in the margins to help identify any biases or ideas that may affect the analysis. Lists were then reviewed to code the ideas into specific themes that developed from the participant responses. A final review allowed the data to be categorized into the specific themes across the three data sources, resulting in triangulation of the data. Triangulation strengthened the study by taking information from multiple data sources to identify themes and ideas that were

shared. Patton (1999) states, “Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (p. 1192). Throughout the process, the researcher returned to the bracketed notes and reflected on the experiences of the participants in relation to his identified ideas and biases and attempted to paint a non-biased description of the phenomenon.

Triangulation methods were employed to insure the integrity of the information in an attempt to reduce the amount of researcher bias. Reading through the data and coding the data helped identify themes and describe data that ultimately helped to interpret the significant meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing researcher thoughts reduced personal bias in interpretation of the data.

Trustworthiness

The researcher attempted to maintain objectivity throughout the inmate interviews, as much as possible, using the peer review process and following the prepared outline of the interview document. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist/notary, and these documents were also peer reviewed. Transcriptions, notes, and journals were kept in a secure facility for privacy purposes. Member checks were used to give participants the opportunity to check what they had said and correct any mistakes or misstatements, and bracketing was used to identify researcher ideas and biases. Using triangulation of the data to give it credibility, while clarifying researcher bias, clearly identifying background and connection to the participants, if any existed, strengthened this study. Peer reviews were used to double check data and give additional input into the data analysis.

Credibility

Credibility examines whether the study reflects its purpose. Does it study what it intended to study (Shenton, 2004)? To ensure credibility in this study, the researcher had peers review the data and findings to confirm that the study was properly representing the intended content (Anney, 2014). The researcher, having long-term experience in law enforcement and working with incarcerated individuals, was familiar with inmate behavior, routines, and what motivates them. This experience of immersion within the setting (Anney, 2014) allowed better communication as the lingo and language of the inmates was used throughout the data collection process.

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when a study can be repeated with the same procedures and yield similar results. To increase dependability in a qualitative study, the entire set of procedures followed needs to be clearly delineated in the report (Shenton, 2004). This report provides every detail of each step followed throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure that anyone wishing to complete a similar study can do so easily (Anney, 2014).

Transferability

The applicability of the study results to other settings and individuals, or transferability, is difficult in a study that examines personal experience (Shenton, 2004). However, for this study, the inmates did not all attend the same alternative school program and all have varying experiences to share. Because multiple schools are represented, it is more likely that others will be able to use the results to apply to their own situations. Transferability is stronger when participants are from varying sample populations (Anney, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability is synonymous with objectivity in qualitative research. Reducing researcher bias increases confirmability (Shenton, 2004). For this study, data triangulation was used, and the results of the study consist of a culmination of ideas expressed across all three data sources. Bracketing of researcher thoughts and reflections (see Appendix I for an example of this) provided a catalyst for reducing bias and attempting to increase the objectivity and confirmability of the study. Peer reviews of the data and results were also conducted to ensure a lack of researcher bias throughout the report (Anney, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher gained (IRB) approval from Liberty University, permission from the sheriff's office to use their facilities and gather data from their inmates, and informed consent from each participant being interviewed. The researcher protected the institutions and participants in the study through the use of pseudonyms. All transcripts, journals, notes, and data were stored throughout the study in a locked file cabinet belonging to the researcher, and it will all be shredded once the study ends and the results have been documented.

Summary

This phenomenological study involved gathering perceptions of currently incarcerated inmates on their experiences both in a Type-II alternative school and in incarceration. These descriptions were examined and reviewed to describe the two settings that give further insight into future development of appropriate alternative learning environments for students who are not successful in the traditional school setting. This chapter provided detailed information on the research process, from the description of the setting, participants, and researcher's role, to the

data collection and analysis used to determine study results. Issues in ethics and trustworthiness were addressed to ensure results are useable and do not cause harm to anyone.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility. Data was gathered from participants using interviews, focus group discussions, and journaling. This chapter presents the results of the data collection in the form of codes describing specific ideas presented by participants that were then collectively reviewed across all data to develop common themes. A detailed description of each participant, results of the data analysis, discourse on identified themes, and a discussion of research questions, are included in this chapter.

Participants

Participants were all adults who were incarcerated in a county jail in a rural town in North Georgia at the time of data collection. All had previously attended an alternative school and volunteered to share their experiences. Pseudonyms were used for each participant to maintain anonymity. Originally, 15 participants were chosen for the study, but five were released from jail prior to data collection and had to be excluded from the study since they were no longer incarcerated.

Tyler

Tyler is now 27 years old and has had a history of incarceration. He describes his life as normal until he was 10 years old. At that time, his father and step-mother were arrested for drugs, which resulted in him being sent to live with his mother, who he describes as unstable and an alcoholic. After two years, he was placed in state custody and went into foster care, isolated from his siblings. He stated of that time:

So I lived with my mother a total of two years. Then we were put into state custody. At that time I was acting out pretty bad, not trying to make excuses, but I missed my dad a lot and I didn't ever know this lady who said she was my mom. I thought my mom was my step-mom, but anyways. I was placed in foster care and because of my behavior and my actions; no one wanted to keep me. So they separated me from the only family I had left, which was my sister. So it just went downhill from there. To this day me and my sister are extremely close. I have a total of eight brothers and sisters, but only that one sister and I are the ones who talk religiously. We don't talk to my mom. She is a drug addict and always causing problems with us. I know you're supposed to always love your mother and I do and always will, but her priorities are a little messed up.

During his first year in foster care, his father died of cancer in prison. He said, "I didn't take it very well, you know. He was my hero." He was placed in 37 different foster home settings, including group homes for children with behavior issues, and was incarcerated in a Regional Youth Detention Center twice for running away. While his first ten years were stable, the remainder of his formative years was highly unstable, resulting in an adult who does not know where he belongs. Being rejected in so many settings, even though many of those were due to his behavior, has fostered a sense of uneasiness and distrust of anyone. He stated of his numerous placements, "They treat you like a toy of a store to where if you don't work the way they want you to, then they take you back and get a newer model."

Tyler's experience in the alternative school was in a rundown school in the city of Atlanta, where he stated the students were treated like criminals. Students wore uniforms and walked through metal detectors each day. The focus of the school was not academic but on maintaining order and security in a hostile and sometimes violent environment. Peer

relationships were negative, with many fights between students trying to earn the respect of their delinquent peers. He said:

So I felt like I had to try to fit in. So I did what I had to do or what I thought I had to do. I thought I had to act big and bad just to fit in. Got into plenty of fights...I felt like I never learned anything because the things they were teaching was elementary material, and I was in 9th grade.

He continued his discussion of the alternative setting by stating:

After being at the school for a while I had established myself to be something that I wasn't to my peers. I liked the respect and attention I got from my peers, but my relationship with my peers overall wasn't too good.

His feeling about the alternative school was that the students all needed someone to care about them and talk to them about issues they had faced or were currently facing in life. He said of the students in the alternative school, "We were all just screaming for attention."

Tyler's current incarceration is for being present at a residence that was raided for drugs. He had been previously incarcerated for drugs, so it seemed logical that he was a part of the criminal activity. However, he maintains his innocence and states that this incarceration saved his life, even if it is unwarranted. He believes his case will be dropped, but he does not have the resources to get bailed out to await his court date. He is patiently passing time behind bars until the judge is ready to hear his case, possibly within the next couple of months. He has already spent seven months awaiting his trial. Because of the hours daily with little to no interaction, inmates have a lot of time to reflect on life, including previous actions and future plans. Tyler felt as though he was losing control of his life and making terrible choices just before being arrested. The time in jail has allowed him to become focused again on his goals and how to meet

them once he is free again. He stated:

I feel different. Every day I see people whose lives have been destroyed because of drugs and poor decision-making. Old men who will never have anything because they can't let the drugs go...I'm not judging no one because I'm not in any place to judge anyone. Just saying, I'm thankful for this "vacation". It was really needed to give me time to think and get rid of the people I didn't need in my life.

Scott

Scott is 25 years old. His parents divorced when he was five years old, and he lived with his mother in Georgia until he got into a fight in elementary school and was sent to Florida to live with his father. He made several moves back and forth between the two households while growing up, each parent rejecting him when his behavior became troublesome for them. He stated of his elementary experience, "I was small so people, other kids would pick on me so I didn't want people to think I was a pushover." In middle school, he began skipping school and disrespecting teachers and ended up incarcerated in a Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC), which is basically the juvenile version of jail. In his words:

My record started when I was 14. So young I was and had a lot of trouble follow because I was bored and wanted to fit in with a crowd, anyone that accepted me for me. That made me do things I'm not proud of because I thought it was cool to smoke pot and smoke meth. I made poor decisions after I entered the drug world. In order to fit in with that crowd, you do stupid things that don't make any sense.

Around the same time as his RYDC stay, he was placed in an alternative school. He described this as a positive experience for him since he was placed in a smaller setting with fewer distractions. This allowed him to sober up, to be able to focus on his academic work, and to have

the attention from his teachers that he needed to complete the work.

Scott's first experience with incarceration was when he was 14 years old. He had begun using marijuana and meth, and while under the influence of these, stole multiple vehicles and wrecked them all. His incarceration and subsequent placement in the alternative school allowed him to escape the drug influences, become sober, and reflect on his life. While incarcerated, he has obtained his GED. Though he found redemption in the alternative setting and jail, he has continued to make poor life choices, resulting in his current incarceration.

Thomas

Thomas was born to a drug addict mother who put him up for adoption. He was adopted at age two and states, "I've lived a good life." He was given the opportunity to meet his mother several years ago, but soon after developing a relationship with her, she was sent to state prison for a drug conviction and has since died in prison. He states of the relationship with his mother:

So I just met her about five years ago. She died exactly one year ago. I really didn't get to know her because she sold some crack to an undercover police and went to prison for three years. When I met my mother, the only thing we really did was smoke crack and do drugs together. We used to play pool, but that's about it. And she informed me that I have a sister that I never knew about.

Thomas self-reports mental issues that prevent him from leading a normal life. He is unable to hold a job, does not interact well with others, and cannot afford the medication he needs for his mental health. Without a job to provide benefits, he cannot afford the medication he needs to hold a job. It is a vicious cycle in which he has become trapped.

Because of his behavioral issues, Thomas bounced from school to school, always finding trouble in each setting. His parents kicked him out of the house when he was a teenager, and he

was homeless for about two years. He was sent to RYDC as a teenager and was educated for a time in the system. The setting was comfortable for him because he said the peers with which he was incarcerated had a lot in common with him. Drug use was prevalent with them all, giving them something common to discuss and share amongst each other. Thomas admits that his drug use throughout his life was his attempt to self-medicate to better cope with his mental issues for which he could not afford medication. He said:

Ever since I graduated from high school, since I lost all insurance and medication, I've been self-medicating myself with drugs. I had one job that I was able to get legitimate medication for about eight months. I have had many jobs. I can't hold a job because of my problems. I find it very hard to live by myself now.

Though he was fearful at first, incarceration seemed to be a safe place for Thomas. Of his first experience in incarceration, he stated:

I was a little scared until I saw where and how I was incarcerated. I felt like I was going to fight and I did and got put on lockdown, but after that it was fine. I got recreation time regularly. I was fed properly and got the schooling that the facility had to offer because I was a minor. But it was okay for a minor. It was kinda the same when I was incarcerated in jail, too.

Thomas described his experience in the alternative school as similar to his experience in incarceration. The schedule was predictable, and basic needs were met. In the alternative school, his teachers were supportive and helpful, and in both the alternative school and jail, peer interactions, though minimal, were positive.

Though Thomas described his peer relationships as positive, he did not feel as though his peers were his friends. He said:

We all think that we have friends, but we don't, or at least I don't. I sit here and really think about it. No, everyone that I knew was smoking dope and trouble buddies. They only wanted to be around when I had drugs or wanted to do something stupid.

In his adult life, because of his poor decisions, his wife left him and took their two boys with her. His goal now is, "I am going to concentrate on me and getting my life on track so I can be the father for my children that they need and want and one day be a good husband for a good woman." He is searching for redemption and hopes to emerge from incarceration a changed man, ready to tackle the world.

John

John has grown up in the foster system and has changed schools many times. When asked to introduce himself and share about his life, he succinctly stated:

Well, I'm John [pseudonym], and I grew up in foster homes and group homes and RYDC. I have been to a lot of schools in Georgia, and I have two sisters and one brother, and my dad died in 1998 in a car crash.

He spent time being educated in a psychoeducational center that served students who were diagnosed as emotional and behavior disordered and also was educated in the regular alternative setting in his school district. His experiences in the alternative schools were not described as either positive or negative. His relationships with teachers were positive, but he fought with peers and ended up dropping out of school. Of his school experience, he stated:

I needed one on one help on my schoolwork, and I have really bad anger problems and I could not keep my self-control around a lot of kids. But I made it to the 10th grade, and I quit school because of my anger problems. Well I could not behave in a public school so they said that I would have to go to the Psychoeducational School but I was always

getting into fights and cursing at school.

John currently is incarcerated and says that the experience has calmed him and helped him think before acting. He interacts very little with peers in his current setting, having learned early in his adult life that it is not wise to be aggressive in a setting where everyone is frustrated and ready to fight. Fights early in his incarceration have resulted in him becoming very complacent and keeping to himself as much as possible. While he fought with peers often during his upbringing, he has taken the opportunity in incarceration to reflect and calm the anger that previously fueled his rage.

Wes

Wes was raised in a supportive home by his upper middle class parents, and said, "I led a very blessed childhood." Despite his positive roots, he still spent time being educated in an alternative school. He was a chronic behavior problem in school, and this resulted in his placement change. In the alternative setting, teachers were very supportive and treated the students with respect. The students, in return, respected the teachers and worked hard for them.

He stated:

I had a good relationship with my peers. Of course there was only about 15-20 students and the school consisted of two singlewide trailers that made four classrooms. We all got along. There were no cliques and no one picked on or looked on anyone else. We were all in it together. Small groups are better than larger ones in these settings.

He was able to catch up academically and reform his behavior issues, alongside peers who did the same. He was able to successfully return to the regular school setting to finish his high school career. While his experience differed from others in the study, he was in the alternative school 20 years ago and describes that setting as a positive one, possibly implying that today's

alternative schools are negative settings.

Wes' experience with incarceration has been the opposite of his alternative school experience. There is no attempt by the state or facility to rehabilitate and prepare inmates for life outside the razor wire fences. When asked how incarceration has impacted his behavior, he stated:

It has not impacted my behavior. Will I do what I did to get locked up again? No.

However, it has not had an impact on my actual behavior. I'm locked up for an incident, not my behavior.

Despite his current negative experience in incarceration, he spoke fondly of his time in the alternative school, reminiscing about specific teachers that helped him in that setting and peers that were memorable and influential at that point in his life.

Sean

Sean was not very articulate, spoke with a speech impediment, and had difficulty communicating complete thoughts, both written and verbally. He had spent time in the alternative school and was currently incarcerated, but he was not able to provide a rich description of either setting. His description of the alternative setting in his journal said, "Terrible, one tech and not much help. Low supervision. I learn more when I'm asleep than in alternative school." He stated that a court order placed him in the alternative setting and that he did not like his peers there. He stated in his journal of his current incarceration, "It made a anger in me wake up. It won't go to sleep."

Matt

Matt was born in a small town in South Georgia to a very involved, supportive family but then, due to his parents' divorce, moved to the community in which he is currently incarcerated.

He was a talented middle school wrestler, but he began to spiral down when he was introduced to drugs by his peers. He stated:

I had a love for wrestling more than anything but around 7th grade, I found a new love.

Weed was the best thing that ever happened to me at that time. I thought it was so cool. He brought marijuana to school when he was 13 years old, and he was arrested and sent to the district alternative school. His relationship with peers in the alternative setting was a positive one, but he describes it is as such because he and his peers all had a love for drugs in common. He enjoyed the alternative setting because he was able to exchange drugs with fellow students and remain high much of the time at school. Upon returning to the regular school setting, he was caught with drugs again and was sent back to the alternative school.

Matt's description of his first experience with incarceration was:

Angry, just upset and angry. I couldn't even think straight. I was so mad. I didn't know but felt in my subconscious; my mom had gotten me locked up. I love her very much and understand now what she had to do for my benefit to save my life.

While Matt has tried repeatedly to escape the grip of drugs, he has not been able to, which has resulted in several subsequent arrests and stays in jail.

Brian

Brian grew up in a supportive home with parents who are still married. He struggled in school, both academically and behaviorally, resulting in his placement in the school system's alternative school. He has a learning disability and reports that his time in the alternative school was very positive and provided him the individualized help he needed to be successful. He said, "Having a learning disability, my teachers always took extra care and creative ways in teaching me."

Brian stated that jail has nothing in common with his alternative school experience. Teachers in the alternative setting were supportive and encouraging, while guards in the jail have been very confrontational and negative. He stated, "My behavior towards law enforcement will remain the same. I respect the law and those who enforce it, but I feel I will need counseling because of a bitter development towards cops." While jail has been a tough setting for him, he talked about the experience of incarceration as life changing, a time to reflect on who you are and what you want to become. He spoke of himself:

To this day, despite my charges and incarcerations, I am respected and well looked up to. I have tons of support from my community and peers. It's because I learned in school the importance of being of good character.

Chris

Chris also comes from a two-parent, traditional family. He always struggled in school and was more interested in partying than completing his work. Because of grades and chronic behavioral issues, Chris was placed in an alternative school. He stated that the alternative school was very similar to the regular school except the requirement to wear uniforms and stricter rules. Peer relationships were difficult in the alternative setting, resulting in frequent fights. Though peer relationships were negative, his interactions with his teachers were positive. He stated of his teachers, "I got along with them all because I had a more mature demeanor than the rest."

Chris was incarcerated and forced to sober up from a life of drugs when he went to jail. He stated of his first incarceration experience, "I was coming off drugs, and it was the worst time of my life. I hated everything and everyone." With his current incarceration, he does not want to be in jail, but the experience has given him time to reflect on his impulsive behavior and work on his temper. He stated that incarceration is nothing like alternative school and that jail has

forced him to think about consequences of his actions much more than the alternative school did. The alternative setting, to him, could not rival the experience of incarceration, since in the alternative setting; you get to go home each night. True isolation that only jail can provide forces one to examine life and reflect during the long hours with little or no stimulation or activity.

Nicole

The only female participant in the study, Nicole, has led a very difficult life that has resulted in a series of incarcerations. She was raised by her grandparents in a nurturing, wholesome setting. When she was born, her mother, a drug addict, told her grandmother that she could take her home and keep her. The family owned the trailer park in which they lived and a general store, and she worked alongside her family in the store, while spending her free time enjoying being a child. She said, “We made handmade quilts, canned our own food, worked our own garden, sold produce and fish bait, and were self-made people.” Her grandparents had plenty of money to provide for her, allowing her a carefree childhood until her grandmother passed away when Nicole was 13 years old. She was then taken from her grandfather and was sent by the state to live with her mother that abandoned her in the hospital when she was born. Her mother married a man that Nicole considered a father figure, and then, her mother had an affair and ran away with a man who lived across the street, abandoning her again. Once her mother settled in a new town with her new boyfriend, she forced Nicole to move in with them. At that point, Nicole began to run away, drink alcohol, skip school, and use drugs. She was incarcerated 19 times by age 14, at which point the state took custody of her and placed her in a group home. She fled the group home several times, resulting in dangerous situations for her. In her own words describing one of her experiences as a runaway:

The third time Jessica and I escaped we were walking down the road...It was a bad town, but I did not know that at the time. It was also late at night. We stood out and the cops stopped and asked us what we were doing out so late at night. Also they asked if we knew what part of town we were in. The cops then told us we were in the worst part of town. We told them we were walking to Kim's house to spend the night. The cops offered us a ride. They told us to stay put until they came back after a call. Again, we get in the first car that stops. It was a white van parked on a hill, and it didn't have any door handles on the inside. It was too late before we realized we needed to get out. The drivers were two older black men. They told us straight up we were not gonna come out of there alive. They drove us around joking about killing us, and what they were gonna do to us for two days. They finally pulled into a house. When we arrived they made us get out. The two men told us to go into the house. There were a lot of older drunk black men. We knew this was going to be the end for us. They gave us a bedroom to stay for the night. The whole night Jessica and I held on to each other. Every couple of hours, they would come in, turn on the lights, and check on us. The next morning, we were still alive. They soon began to terrorize us by driving us around in the van telling us ways they were gonna kill us. They took us to another house but I didn't know where we were. We go to the basement of the new house. They didn't lock us in and stood outside where we could see them. I found a phone and called my boyfriend. I was telling him that I need help and he kept asking me where we were but I had no idea. We locked the kidnappers out and they were getting angry. They busted a 40-ounce beer to make the ends jagged and got in by using their ID's. They got in and raped us. We didn't even fight back because we were so scared. They held the bottle to Kim's throat and I thought

they were going to kill her in front of me. We knew they were going to kill us. When they left the room we got away and ran into another house across the street. We got the owners to call the law. The kidnappers left while we were at the neighbors. The police office came and took us back to our individual counties. I went to my counselor and told him what happened. He got me a physical, and they discovered that I was pregnant. I ended up having an abortion. They let me go home for a while, but that wasn't good for me either.

Within a few months, she was pregnant again by her boyfriend and really wanted to keep the baby. When her mother found out about the pregnancy, she drove her to an abortion clinic and forced her to have another abortion. She stated that she was at a point in her life that she really needed support and guidance, and instead her mother forced a decision on her that was devastating. She stated of the experience:

My mom called her friend who took me to the clinic. When we got there we saw protesters hollering baby killer, don't kill your baby. I was so confused. My mom was not there for me when I needed her most.

All of this happened before she turned 15.

Nicole attended three different alternative schools, two of which were in RYDC facilities. Her third alternative placement occurred when she was taken into state custody at age 14. The RYDC facilities were not pleasant experiences for her, but they were safer since the boys and girls were separated. Her third alternative placement was tainted by sexual abuse by male classmates, bullying by female classmates, and a very negative environment in which there were no positive influences. She said:

When I was committed to the state, I went to my 3rd alternative school in Atlanta. I hated

this school. The school was 99% black and being one of the two white girls, we were picked on a lot. People would call us names and try to start fights. The boys would always touch us because they thought they could. I also did not like having to take the public bus to school every day. It scared me. We acted out there more, too, because everyone there was troubled kids. Everyone was either already acting out or being mean.

At age 18, once Nicole was old enough to leave state custody, she was incarcerated in an adult jail for the first time. She was pregnant again. At the time of this study, Nicole was 44 years old and had spent the majority of her life in jail. Reflecting back on her experience in the alternative school compared to her incarceration, she stated that both settings confined her, caused her to fight, and fueled her rebellious spirit. She has been incarcerated so much that she feels uncomfortable outside of that setting and feels more supported and at home in jail than when she is free. She is now a grandmother and is reflecting on her life. She is completing her GED and wants to be free to be with her grandchildren, but she also is torn about leaving the comfort, safety, and stability of the facility and the incarcerated life that she has known for so long.

Table 3

Study Participants

Participant	Gender/Ethnicity/Age	Brief Biography
Tyler	Male/White/27	Parental drug use, alcoholism, and death State custody and foster care Distrust of anyone because of rejection
Scott	Male/White/25	Parental divorce and rejection of him Drug use and early incarceration Obtained GED in jail
Thomas	Male/White/24	Drug addict birth mother who died in prison Adopted but later kicked out Homeless for two years as teenager Mental issues and drug use No job to pay for mental health medication Not able to work without medication
John	Male/White/18	Father died in car wreck early in his life Grew up in foster care No real relationships with anyone
Wes	Male/White /38	Grew up in traditional, two parent home Chronic behavior problem in school Positive experience in alternative setting
Sean	Male/White/18	Not able to provide complete thoughts Placed in alternative school by the court
Matt	Male/White/19	Divorced parents resulted in move Talented school wrestler Drug use continues to plague him
Brian	Male/White/20	Grew up in traditional, two parent home Learning disability Considers himself to have good character
Chris	Male/White/19	Grew up in traditional, two parent home Drug use and partying Described isolation in incarceration
Nicole	Female/White/44	Mother gave her up at birth Grandmother raising her died Foster system and state custody Runaway- was raped and forced to have abortion Prison has become home for her

Results

Each piece of data (interview responses, focus group discussions, and journal entries) collected from the participants was coded for common ideas individually, and then codes were identified across all data sources. Those codes, the participants' own words, and the themes that emerged from the data analysis form the basis of the study results. Table 4 shows the frequency of responses for each identified code to show which ideas were most represented by the participants for the purpose of guiding data analysis.

Table 4

Codes Identified from Data Analysis

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Number of Appearances</u>
Alternative School Setting	
Overall Experience	
Negative	12
Positive	17
Relationships	
Peer	
Negative	11
Positive	5
Teacher	
Negative	2
Positive	12
Positive/Negative Dependent on Situation	2
Setting Effect on Behavior	
Negative	7
Positive	6
Dependent on Teacher	1
Improvements Needed	
More Academic Help	5
Counseling	6
Improved Teaching Strategies	2

Incarceration

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Number of Appearances</u>
Current Experience	
Negative	4
Positive	23
Peer Relations with Other Inmates	
Negative	1
Positive	9
Receiving Education/Rehabilitation	
GED Courses	2
Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings	1
Religious Services/Support	3

Not Setting Specific

<u>Codes</u>	<u>Number of Appearances</u>
Home Setting Growing Up	
Supportive Two-Parent Home	3
Divorced Parents	4
Incarcerated Parents	3
Deceased Parent(s)	4
Parental Drug/Alcohol Abuse	3
State Custody (Foster Care, Group Home)	3
Runaway	2
Homeless	2
Instability	
RYDC Incarceration	6
Prior to Alternative School Placement	4
Changed Schools Multiple Times	7
Feeling of Not Being Wanted	9

While many codes were identified from the data, those mentioned with the highest frequency are discussed in depth with their overarching themes that emerged. Because of the nature of qualitative research, statistical significance was not determined using this data. It was only used in concert with rich descriptions of the human experience to give insight into participants' thoughts and feelings.

Themes

Three main themes emerged as a result of the data analysis. The first of these themes, which resounded with nearly every participant, was dysfunctional family environments. Safety and Stability Found in Institutions was another identified theme. The final, and perhaps most pertinent to the research questions and purpose of the study, was institutionalization during the participants' formative years in life.

Dysfunctional Family Environments

Throughout much of their lives, participants had been victims of circumstances that were beyond their control. Parent life choices resulted in situations of homelessness for several participants, and others spoke of being forced to do things, such as Nicole being forced to have an abortion against her will and Tyler being forced by the state to live with a mother that abandoned him more than once in his life. As adults, they have had difficulty controlling their situations and even regulating their own behaviors and actions. Thomas shared that he cannot afford medication for his mental problems, and because of those problems, he cannot work a job to provide an income to purchase his medication. Many spoke of drug addictions and negative relationships that influenced them to act in ways that result in their incarceration. None of the inmate participants were in jail for the first time during this study. All had committed multiple crimes throughout their lives that resulted in repeated incarcerations.

Participants all described the pain of loss of loved ones at some point in their past. Many were abandoned by parents and ended up in foster care or in the custody of the state. Stability was found periodically, but it never lasted. Another crisis would strike, and they would be uprooted again. For most participants, family relationships were strained or nonexistent, loved ones were imprisoned or died, and the individuals all experienced a loss of their own sense of

identity. Their experience was very transient, with multiple school placements resulting in few lasting relationships with friends. Living conditions mirrored that of their school experience with multiple placements, including being sent to live with various family members and being placed in multiple foster settings or group homes.

Tyler's experience began with a father and stepmother arrested for drugs, followed by custody with an unstable and alcoholic mother, and then state custody in which he was repeatedly moved to different foster homes, group homes, and RYDC facilities. Each move coincided with a change in school, as well. There were no lasting, long-term relationships in Tyler's life, leaving him unsure of how to connect with others. Scott was sent back and forth between his mother's house in Georgia and his father's house in Florida, always feeling rejected with each move. Thomas was rejected by his birth mother and was adopted at age two. He had a dysfunctional relationship with his mother filled with drug binges, and then she was arrested and passed away in prison. He was kicked out of his house and was homeless for two years. John mentioned his father dying in a car crash in 1998 and then stated that he grew up in foster homes and group homes, never identifying any individual that cared for him. Nicole was abandoned by her birth mother, had her custodial grandmother die when she was 13, was sent to live with the mother who abandoned her, and was committed to the state's custody at age 14. The study participants had no roots on which to grow. Their home setting was uncertain, schools were changed frequently, friendships were short-lived, and life was in a constant state of change. The lack of stability in life was discussed in depth by participants and even stated by several as the reason being incarcerated was a positive experience, since it was always predictable and stable, providing structure to their lives that had been so chaotic.

Relationships for participants had always been difficult. Family relationships were

typically negative while growing up, and they seem to continue to be even into adulthood.

Relationships with peers were hostile while in the alternative setting for all participants except two. In the current incarceration setting, most individuals did not interact much with peers to avoid conflict. Thomas stated that, “I get along with the few that I talk or interact with. Some of them are laid back and relaxed, calm, collected. Some are young and wild and easily angered and a little too playful.” John shared, “Well I stay to myself and when they talk to me, I normally talk back.” Wes said, “I get along fine. Not much else to do. I avoid young thug trouble makers and do my own thing.” Sean’s relationship with other inmates was not as peaceful as the other participants. When asked to describe his interactions with other inmates, he replied, “Fights. No trust or respect.” While Matt feels that his relationship with other inmates is tolerable, he shared his distrust by saying:

It is bad that I knew half the inmates on the streets. It was okay. They like me. I liked them but I knew I came to jail by myself and I’m gonna leave by myself.

Brian described a mix of individuals and varying relationships he had with them when he said:

I get along with everyone well. There are always those that will try you and I will stand my ground. And because I have helped others they will back me up if needed. I have brought laughter and hope to this pod. I’m the longest standing inmate at this jail and I’ve had very little altercations with inmates. When I see someone in need of a pep talk or just a small word of encouragement, even if I’m down myself, I have to try to keep our chins up. There are those in this pod that are sick individuals. I do not interact with them at all.

Nicole admitted to conflicts with peers in jail, but she also stated that the other inmates were her family. She said:

I act out with some of my fellow inmates. When someone says something I don't like I am quick to let them know. I have a short temper, but I am currently working on controlling my emotions and mental health. However, there are inmates that I do like and respect. I feel more loved and cared for by my fellow inmates than I do by people on the outside.

There were few, if any, positive role models in the participants' families, and even now, participants find themselves surrounded by people who are just as lost as they are. They have not experienced positive relationships with people who genuinely care about them, and they do not know how to have those relationships now.

Participants spoke of unsettling home lives, chaotic situations, and dysfunctional relationships. Several of them stated that counseling would have benefitted them by helping them learn to cope with difficult experiences. When asked how their alternative experience could have been improved, they replied that counseling would have been helpful to give them strategies to allow them to lead a life in a setting with less structure and more freedom. Nicole stated that counseling should be mandatory for all students in all-alternative settings. She suggested, "Some kind of class about structure and discipline. More one on one, hands-on activities. Things like you have to work together and help each other." Tyler expressed a similar sentiment when he stated,

If I could go back and change one thing about the school, it would be some kind of counseling program for the students because obviously we were all having problems and I don't know about anyone else, but I would have loved for someone to ask me what I felt about everything that was happening in my life.

When asked how to improve the alternative school program, John simply stated, "Get some

counseling.”

Study participants shared their stories about growing up and gave insight into events that may have led to their repeated placement in alternative and incarceration-type settings. All of the participants changed schools at some point, many of them changing schools more than once each school year. RYDC incarceration was discussed by six of the ten participants; with four of them stating that they were incarcerated in RYDC prior to being placed in the alternative school setting.

Parental issues were described in depth, with multiple participants telling of drug and alcohol abuse, abandonment, incarceration, and tragic death of one or both parents. Instability was a common theme; participants often changed custody and schools and reported feeling like they were unwanted.

Nicole told of her birth, when her mother told Nicole’s grandparents, “You name her and you can have her.” She was sent home from the hospital in the custody of her grandparents, who later passed away when she was 13. When speaking of an abortion at age 14 forced on her by her mother while protesters were screaming pro-life insults at her outside the clinic, said, “My mom was not there for me when I needed her most.” With a life of constant rejection, instability, and turmoil, Nicole now finds great comfort as an inmate, where order and stability abound. Thomas shared a tragic past in which he suffered himself from mental illness (and still does), had a drug addict mother who died of cancer while in prison for selling drugs, changed schools often due to his behavioral and mental issues, was homeless for two years, and now cannot hold down a job because of his mental impairment. Incarceration also provides him with safety and security that he was not able to find outside the jail walls. Tyler’s life was also very difficult, moving back and forth between a drug addict father, who died in prison, and an alcoholic mother who

lived a very unstable life, moving often and struggling to maintain a household. He was taken from his mother's home because it was not suitable for children and placed in the state foster care system. He stated, "I was placed in foster care and because of my behavior and my actions, no one wanted to keep me." He lived in 37 different placements while in state custody, including foster homes, group homes, and RYDC incarceration.

The one participant that described a somewhat normal upbringing in a traditional two-parent home spoke of being overpowered by drug addiction. He later revealed that he had been adopted at age two, showing a history of dysfunction in his home life from a very early age. This seemed to fully complete this theme as critical to the lives of the participants. Dysfunctional family environments formed an unstable base on which the participants' lives are built.

Safety and Stability Found in Institutions

Participants all were from dysfunctional homes with no stability or security, and their insight on both the alternative school setting and incarceration was helpful in painting a picture of institutionalization and the reason it appeals to them. Scott stated of the alternative school and jail, "Both took distractions away so I could concentrate on me. Both situations I have bettered myself because of that I had nothing to distract me on myself." He was able to catch up academically with grade level peers while in the alternative setting and has obtained his GED while being incarcerated. John shared that he had to walk in a straight line with peers with his hands behind his back in both the alternative setting and in jail, both environments that have strict rules and routines. Wes and Brian, who both described a very positive alternative school experience, stated that their experience in incarceration has had nothing in common with the alternative setting. Matt summed up the difference in the two settings when he said,

Well, the alternative setting can't really compare to jail besides being taken apart from

the free world of public school, but at the end of the day, you can go home. It gets ‘real’ I guess in jail...my experience with alternative school was a joke. Jail made life real because you don’t just go home at the end of the day.

Brian agreed by stating, “Jail sucks. Being locked down 20 hours a day will break a person’s will to live. I have over 10,000 hours of lock down in a 10x12 cell.” Nicole stated, “I am still confined.” During the focus group discussion, she shared that being on “lockdown” at a young age conditioned her to a life of being on “lockdown” and made her feel as though that was the only appropriate setting for her.

Several participants have taken advantage of their time as inmates to improve their lifestyles. Two participants, Nicole and Tyler, were currently working on earning GED’s; while another, Scott, completed his GED while incarcerated and was helping other inmates work to complete theirs. Nicole also mentioned that she was attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, but her attendance was sporadic. Three other inmates were using religion as their rehabilitation, attending church services regularly, reading the Bible, and praying for God to intervene and help them lead better lives. When participants were asked if they had participated in any character education or rehabilitative programs in the alternative school setting, every participant responded that no such program was available to them.

While relationships with peers in the alternative setting were extremely negative and threatening, peer relationships with inmates in incarceration were reported by most as positive.

Tyler stated:

My relationship with fellow inmates is definitely positive...I try to encourage people as much as I can, either in working out physically or just talking to the ones no one else will talk to. I like to think of myself as a leader, so I just try to lead in the right direction.

Scott also described an amicable environment when he said:

I get along with everyone that will be at least a little bit civil. Show respect and you will get it. I don't care what people did to get here. It doesn't matter to me. I have to live in here with these inmates. So far I haven't had any problems. I don't judge people.

John, Thomas, and Wes all keep to themselves and just participate in small talk with fellow inmates. They have not had negative experiences in interaction, but they limit their interactions to those who are approachable. Brian, like Tyler, has taken the opportunity to try to help other inmates. Brian stated:

I have brought laughter and hope to this pod. I'm the longest standing inmate at this jail and I've had very little altercations with inmates. When I see someone in need of a pep talk or just a small word of encouragement, even if I'm down myself, I have to try to keep our chins up.

Nicole, speaking from her life of incarceration stated that, "I feel more loved and cared for by my fellow inmates than I do by people on the outside."

While peers in the alternative school spend much time and energy on creating conflict with each other, it appears as though this is an adolescent behavior that lessens with age and/or subsequent incarcerations. Most of the currently incarcerated inmates in this study have found that avoiding conflict is best and that they can find more solace and support with each other than with individuals outside of the incarceration setting.

Overwhelmingly, participants describe their incarceration as a positive experience. Of the 27 occurrences of discussion of the experience of being incarcerated, only four of those were negative. They felt as though their time in jail allowed them to slow down, reflect on their actions and reactions to situations, re-evaluate their lives and future goals, and escape negative

influences in the community. Participants did not feel secure when given freedom and often longed for the predictability and stability offered by a restrictive, structured setting. They grew to trust the institution more than their own families or even themselves.

Scott, who described the alternative setting as helpful to him, does not feel the same about his incarceration, saying that, “I still don’t like being detained, especially in this jail...I have been to prison and had more freedom and dealt with less crap in a state prison. This place sucks.” However, when asked more specific questions about his experience in the current jail, he stated, “I have learned to be content with what I have. I have concentrated on myself and I don’t act out on emotions that are negative. I have outlets for that...exercise, etc.” Sean, however, did not find any redeeming qualities in his current incarceration, saying that he has been involved in fights and altercations and that being an inmate has “made an anger in me wake up. It won’t go to sleep.”

Of the positive accounts given regarding current incarceration, none were more reflective than that of Nicole, who responded:

My current experience in jail feels like nothing new. I’ve been incarcerated so much that it feels like normal life but in this experience I am 44. I am getting tired and older. I am ready to change. I am working on getting my GED and I am ready to make this my last one.

When asked how incarceration has impacted her behavior, she stated, “I think it has caused me to be very angry, but I have also learned to be patient and accept things for the way they are.”

Tyler has had a redemptive experience with his current incarceration:

I say it is amazing because I’ve gotten so much accomplished and yes, I have lost a lot since being in here as far as friendships that I really didn’t need but I got saved on July 3,

2015. I'm getting my GED. I've been going to classes for almost six months now. I've had time to re-evaluate my life...I was on my way to a bad place (prison or even death). I was reckless but then I got incarcerated for something I didn't do, but it really was a blessing in disguise.

Thomas stated that his current experience is "good and laid back" and that "It slowed my mind down and made me think about what is important." When asked how incarceration has impacted his behavior, Matt responded, "Greatly. I feel like everyone should go. I would be a crazy geeker dope head if it wasn't for my experience being incarcerated." Brian stated of his experience that it was, "Bad at first but I have always found the good in the bad. I would have never learned things about myself if this never happened to me." Chris also has had a positive experience, stating, "It has made my impulse and temper settle down substantially because I don't want to be here." Nicole sums up her experience with the following:

I've been in and out of jail so much that it feels normal. As holidays pass I see inmates get upset about not being with their families. Holidays to me in jail just feel like another day. I feel more wanted here.

Overwhelmingly, the inmate responses showed that being incarcerated is, for the most part, a safe experience in which they can escape the real world, re-evaluate their lives, and work to better themselves. The same type responses were given in regards to the alternative school setting with the difference that going home at night still caused them to live in a world of instability and chaos.

While relationships between teachers and students were, for most participants, positive experiences, relationships with peers in the alternative setting were overwhelmingly reported as negative. Teachers were described as respectful, supportive, attentive, and caring by most

participants, while a small number of participants described teachers as incompetent and so discipline-focused that they did not interact positively with students or even provide academic support at all.

Nicole, who reported a terrible overall experience in the alternative school setting, said of her teachers, “I don’t really remember any of my teachers specifically but I do remember that they liked me. The teachers bragged on me and said I was a good student.” Scott, who appreciated the structure alternative school provided, stated of his teachers:

Well, I didn’t give them any trouble. If I had a question they would answer it. It didn’t go much further than that. I gave respect so they returned it. It was pretty much professional. I do well in a structured environment.

Thomas when asked what kind of relationship he had with his teachers at the alternative school shared an even more positive experience. He described it as a “close, professional relationship. They were very attentive when I needed help, keep me focused and on task. They tried to get to know my character so they could see and find out how to teach me.”

While teacher and student relationships appeared to be positive overall, relationships between peers were described as extremely negative. Participants described a setting in which peers were trying to prove themselves in a negative way to earn respect of classmates, often threatening others and fighting. Many when asked to explain interactions with peers expressed feelings of fear. Wes, one of the few participants that had an overall positive experience in the alternative school, stated of his interactions, “There were no ‘cliques’ and no one picked on or looked on anyone else. We were all in it together. Small groups are better than larger ones in these settings.” Matt also described his interactions with peers as positive but for a negative reason. He responded:

Relationship? Please. So you take all your biggest druggies and pile them into one place and not expect drug use several times a day and trading drugs...essentially yes! We all had a close-knit relationship because we all had something in common. Drugs!

Nicole spoke of an environment in which her sense of security was compromised on multiple occasions:

When I was committed to the state I went to my third alternative school in Atlanta. I hated this school...People would call us names and try to start fights. The boys would always touch us because they thought they could...It scared me. We acted out there more too because everyone there were troubled kids. Everyone was either already acting out or being mean.

Chris concurred with other participants' analysis of peer relationships in the alternative school by stating, "I didn't really get along with them. Always had conflicting personalities with a lot of them and got into fights often." Regardless of the relationships with peers, the participants overwhelmingly described positive experiences in the alternative school setting that had supportive teachers and offered them a stable setting in their chaotic lives.

Participants shared stories of instability throughout their lives that made them desire safety and stability. The theme that resounded from their responses was that institutions, such as the alternative school or jail, provided a stable, predictable environment that was welcomed as an escape from the chaotic environments in which they lived.

Institutionalization During the Formative Years in Life

While freedom seems like a commodity every individual should desire, participants in this study were relieved to be placed in an alternative school setting or incarcerated where they could avoid freedom, if only for a short amount of time. Several shared that their lives were

spiraling out of control and that they were saved from further negative experiences by being moved to the alternative school or incarcerated. Tyler described his current incarceration experience as “amazing”, because it has given him a chance to escape negative influences on the outside. Scott spoke of his experience in both the alternative setting and in incarceration as helpful when he stated, “Both took distractions away so I could concentrate on me. Both situations I have bettered myself because of that I had nothing to distract me on myself.” Thomas found solace in jail because he was able to have his basic needs provided, and he did not have the pressure to find a job and function as a member of society. Study participants viewed their alternative school placement and incarceration as a means to escape negative influences, find sobriety, and attempt to reevaluate themselves and their purpose.

While participants expressed feelings of relief at being incarcerated due to the highly structured schedule and lack of freedom, they also shared a desire to rejoin free society and attempt to find their place as constructive individuals. In reminiscing, several spoke of their past experience outside of jail as being overwhelming and too difficult for them to handle. Since they had been incarcerated for some time, they were wanting another chance to try freedom in an attempt to lead a more normal life. Matt spoke of the pain and isolation inmates feel when they realize they cannot go home at the end of the day. Brian said, “Jail sucks. Being locked down 20 hours a day will break a person’s will to live. I have over 10,000 hours of lock-down in a 10x12 cell.” Chris, when asked how incarceration has impacted his behavior, stated, “It has made my impulse and temper settle down substantially because I don’t want to be here.”

The structure provided by those in control of the facilities seemed to help participants view the setting as helpful and safe for them. While relationships between teachers and students were, for most participants, positive experiences, relationships with peers in the alternative

school setting were overwhelmingly reported as negative. Teachers were described as respectful, supportive, attentive, and caring by most participants, while a small number of participants described teachers as incompetent and so discipline-focused that they did not interact positively with students or even provide academic support at all.

No matter the setting, the participants discussed times during which they were more restricted, such as in the alternative setting or incarcerated, where they were able to reflect on their lives and find a sense of purpose. Several spoke of finding God and religion and all talked of living a better life once free again. Tyler found God and is currently working to obtain his GED while incarcerated. Scott has also taken advantage of his time behind bars to earn his GED. Nicole stated of her experience in incarceration, “I am getting tired and older. I am ready to change. I am working on getting my GED, and I am ready to make this my last one.” When asked about participation in rehabilitation programs while incarcerated, Nicole added:

I have attended a couple of AA meetings. I have a life recovery Bible, and I’m working on my 12 steps myself. Also I am working on my GED. My GED has helped me commit to something and actually go through with it. It will help me get a better job and will help me feel better about myself. Obtaining my GED and working on rehabilitation has helped me take on responsibilities for my actions. Even if I don’t finish in jail, I plan on taking classes to obtain my GED.

Self-reflection for all participants has left them with a sense of purpose and a desire to improve. None of the participants expressed self-hatred or the belief that they were inherently bad people.

The desire to emerge back into freedom as a changed person was shared by all of the participants. While many expressed that there was a feeling of safety in jail that they did not have when free, they all wanted to have another chance to prove themselves. Brian stated:

My incarceration has been the best, worst experience ever. No classroom could ever teach me what I've learned in here. I can only hope to go back into the world and begin the next chapter of my life a better man. Not because of anything this facility has done. This jail is straight breeding homegrown terrorists by the way we are treated. I hear the talk among other inmates. Me, I will be one of the ones to take the road less traveled and find the good in all this chaos. I will arise courageous.

Tyler spoke of working toward his GED and emerging from jail ready to face his future, whatever it may hold.

Several participants spoke of their futures with uncertainty and fear. All of the participants expressed a desire to improve their situations and join the free world, but they were not sure how to be successful there. Nicole had spent her entire adult life behind bars and was now in her 40's and still incarcerated. She wants to leave, but her home is the jail. Tyler has enjoyed his current incarceration, because it has allowed him to escape the pressures of the real world and avoid negative influences. He is hopeful about his future but fearful that he is going to repeat the same behaviors that continue to result in him being incarcerated. Thomas, who is plagued by mental health issues, is very comfortable in jail, since the setting provides him structure and stability. He wants to rejoin society as a changed man, but he is unsure of how to go about doing so.

Participants stated that the alternative setting could have been a more productive place for them if there was more individualized help, with several specifically mentioning the need for more teachers or teachers better trained to provide interactive, hands-on learning. Multiple participants mentioned the need for counseling or rehabilitative services. Tyler spoke of the need for more support when he said,

My personal opinion, I feel like alternative schools/RYDC need to have some kind of counseling program to talk to kids/inmates and find out what has happened to them or really be there for them just in case they want to ‘just talk’. I mean I would have loved for someone to just pull me aside and ask me how I felt about everything. You know losing my family and moving all around the state, losing my father, and as I recall all of my peers acted the same way. We were all just screaming for attention.

Nicole spoke of the need for counseling coupled with lessons in how to better interact with others. She stated that alternative schools should make “counseling mandatory. Some kind of class about structure and discipline. More one-on-one, hands-on activities. Things like you have to work together and help each other.” During the focus group discussion, Tyler said:

If I could go back and change one thing about the school, it would be some kind of counseling program for the students because obviously we were all having problems and I don’t know about anyone else but I would have loved for someone to ask me what I felt about everything that was happening in my life.

John’s comment in the discussion was simple but repeated the same sentiment as other group members, “Get some counseling.”

Also identified as an area of possible improvement is in the student-teacher ratio. Scott simply replied that the schools would benefit from “more teachers.” Thomas stated, “Put more teachers in the schools now. Take out the way the punishments more or less feel like jail. I feel like it prepares kids for jail.”

All participants who gave suggestions for alternative school program improvement focused on the relationship between teachers and students and did not mention peer relationships, although those seemed to be the most problematic for students when asked to identify negative

aspects of the alternative setting. Suggestions for counseling, a lower student-teacher ratio, and a need for less punitive policies all focused on how the adults in the school can change. Student behavior or actions was never discussed as an area that could be improved.

There were mixed results when participants were asked how the alternative school setting affected their behavior. Those who felt positively about the experience were able to use the isolation or small setting to work on academic issues and get individual help from teachers in a more focused environment. Negative experiences centered around poor peer relations and influences, an unsafe setting, and lack of support behaviorally and academically. Scott described the impact of the alternative school setting on his behavior by saying:

Well, it got me off the streets and once I was sobered up I realized how dumb I acted. I straightened up. I'm good unless I do some meth. It provided structure for me to sit still and do my work. I believe it gave me discipline. I feel it also made me mature a little bit.

We agreed that the environment was helpful when he stated, "It had a good impact. We, the students, were not 'looked down on' by the faculty or other students so we all tended to behave. We were treated more like adults."

In contrast, John stated, "Well, it made it worse. I was getting into trouble more than I was at a public school but it depends on the peers and teachers." Chris had mixed feelings on the impact of this setting, stating, "It made me more violent I guess but also made me respect authority more." Nicole also felt as though the alternative setting made her "act out more".

Overall, participants spoke of dysfunction, chaos, and instability in their upbringing that created in them a longing for structure and order that could be provided by incarceration and, to a lesser degree since they still returned home at night, the alternative school setting. While it may

seem the alternative school is setting the students up for a future of incarceration, the study results show that these participants were prepared for a life of incarceration from earlier in their lives, before they were even old enough to attend school.

Research Questions

The summaries of the participants' statements were used to address the research questions guiding this study. The following is a review of the guiding questions and brief compilation of collected, codified, and generalized participant statements, which answer those questions.

Research Question 1

How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school?

Participant opinions varied greatly about the value of their experience in the alternative school setting. Positive aspects identified included supportive relationships with teachers, small class sizes, and fewer distractions that allowed them time to catch up academically. The most negative aspect of the alternative setting was the relationship between peers. Since the schools were filled with students who had exhibited behavioral issues, there were few positive role models. This left the students fighting for control and respect and often created an environment that was conducive to violence and threatening behaviors. A theme that continued to surface throughout the data was the need for counseling. Multiple participants shared that they were troubled youth and did not know how to deal with the family, personal, and mental issues they faced. They desperately needed guidance and to be taught coping skills. None of the participants were offered such services while in the alternative setting.

John expressed difficulty interacting appropriately with peers in his alternative settings.

He said:

My relationship with the kids at the schools was fairly okay for the most part, but some of the kids I went to school with, they got on my nerves, and I got into fights, and when I got into trouble I would go back and apologize to them.

Tyler stated of the alternative experience:

I would say it changed my educational direction in a positive way because after going to and through that program, it was so horrific that once I finally did get back into public schooling, I appreciated it a lot more. I started to realize that it could definitely be a lot worse. After that, I enjoyed school a lot more; you know I got to wear what I wanted. I got to play sports or do what I wanted. So I do believe alternative schools can be beneficial if they just actually put some time and money into the program.

Research Question 2

How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility?

Participants stated that jail was not a terrible experience, and, by being locked up, they were able to take time to reflect and reevaluate their lives. Several spoke of redemption in the form of religion and others shared that incarceration had allowed them to escape negative influences in the outside world. All expressed a desire to leave jail a better person and did not plan to be incarcerated again in the future. While they certainly did not enjoy incarceration, it

was a comfortable setting for them in which each day was predictable and stable. Relationships with other inmates, while strained at times, were usually amicable, with several participants stating that they took every opportunity to be a leader and encourage other inmates to better themselves.

Tyler stated, “It was really needed to give me time to think and get rid of the people I didn’t need in my life and get to know someone, God, who I do need in my life.” Scott said, “I have learned to be content with what I have. I have concentrated on myself and I don’t act out on emotions that are negative.” For Thomas, “It slowed my mind down and made me think about what is important. It has thrown obstacles both mental and physical to make me learn how to react appropriately to certain situations.” John stated, “Well it’s impacted my behavior a lot. I am a lot calmer now. And I think before I act.” Wes did not state any positive aspect of being incarcerated and stated, “There are no educational or rehabilitative programs offered here or at any county facilities. Being locked up in the state of Georgia is not about rehabilitation. It’s only about incarceration.” Brian shared, “I am for sure the wiser, more alert to others and myself.”

Research Question 3

How do participants’ lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility?

While several participants stated that there were no similarities between the alternative school setting and being incarcerated, their responses to questions showed that there are similarities.

Scott stated, “Both took distractions away so I could concentrate on me. Both situations I have

bettered myself because of that I had nothing to distract me on myself.” He was able to catch up academically with grade level peers while in the alternative setting and has obtained his GED while being incarcerated. John stated that he had to walk in a straight line with peers with his hands behind his back in both the alternative setting and in jail. Wes and Brian, who both described a very positive alternative school experience, stated that their experience in incarceration has had nothing in common with the alternative setting. Matt summed up the difference in the two settings when he said,

Well, the alternative setting can’t really compare to jail besides being taken apart from the free world of public school, but at the end of the day, you can go home. It gets ‘real’ I guess in jail...my experience with alternative school was a joke. Jail made life real because you don’t just go home at the end of the day.

Brian agreed by stating, “Jail sucks. Being locked down 20 hours a day will break a person’s will to live. I have over 10,000 hours of lock down in a 10x12 cell.” Tyler said of the alternative school setting, “It’s kinda like the jail. Once you’re in here, you start to appreciate all the little things you didn’t appreciate where you were.” Chris shared, “Just that jail has really made me think of the consequences more than alternative school.” Nicole stated:

I am still confined. I also still try to fight as well. People will still try to fight with me. There still aren’t people on the outside who make me feel supported. I feel like incarceration and alternative school has made me rebellious and gave me a stronger need to stick up for myself.

During the focus group discussion, she shared that being on “lockdown” at a young age conditioned her to a life of being on “lockdown” and made her feel as though that was the only appropriate setting for her. She stated:

I, myself think there should be the least lockdown as possible. Because it made me to where lockdown is where I'm supposed to be. From 14 to 44, I'm still in the same place, but now it is adult lockdown. Get it to where they have to dig into their past, to see what's making them act out. It helped me so much now at 44 years old to know why I was unruly. If I had found out or went back to childhood, I could have really understood more at a younger age. That might have turned me around, or help me to understand why I was different. Your childhood, raising, etc. make a lot of difference when you know and start to understand. I went through a lot between 12 and 14 years old and even from toddler to 12. Once I found out why I had blocked that age out or didn't remember.

Nicole's words are powerful. She believes that her experience in the alternative school could have positively impacted her future if she had been given the counseling she so desperately needed after suffering through years of abuse and abandonment. Perhaps, given these services, she may have never spent her entire adulthood in jail.

Summary

Participants shared an array of rich life experiences that gave insight into their lives in a way that makes it possible to see the world through their eyes. Heartbreaking stories of youth from broken families, making poor decisions, and having a lack of positive role models led to an adult life of crime and incarceration. Both the alternative school setting and incarceration provided for the participants a setting that was predictable and stable, the antithesis of their home lives and upbringing. Because of the chaos and lack of security from birth, these individuals long for structure and rules to provide safety for them.

To summarize overall experience, the alternative setting provided teachers that were supportive, but the physical environment and behavior of student peers created a very negative

experience for many participants. Interestingly, for those same participants that detested the alternative school, life as an inmate was somewhat comfortable. Several spoke of becoming leaders and positive influences on other inmates, and all of them discussed spending a large amount of time while incarcerated reflecting on past mistakes and planning future goals. Though several participants expressed their readiness to return to freedom, nearly all had experienced multiple incarcerations in the past, setting them up for repeated poor choices once they were outside the safety that incarceration provides them. The responses to questions about being incarcerated indicated a feeling of comfort and welcomed predictability in jail, and many feared that they would revert to old habits if released.

The relationship between alternative school enrollment and incarceration was not very strong. Rigidity of rules and enforcement by teachers and guards seemed to be the main shared aspects between the two settings. The major difference identified between the two settings was that alternative school did not force personal reflection in the same way as incarceration since the participants went home each night. It was not until they were incarcerated and not allowed to go home that the seriousness of their actions and consequences was evident. They also were not allowed to fully escape their chaotic home lives until they were fully contained in a setting all day and all night. The hours spent alone in jail allowed them much time to think about mistakes they had made, ways they can improve, and the life they wish to have once granted freedom once again. The alternative school was a punitive setting that isolated them from peers, but it did not force self-reflection because the students still had freedom outside of that setting each day. One participant, Nicole, shared in great detail how she felt that the restrictive setting in the alternative school prepared her for a life of restriction and confinement. Incarceration was comfortable for her because, like the alternative setting, it provided structure and was predictable. She was not

required to make difficult decisions, have any real responsibilities, or face real life problems. It was an escape because she did not know how to function as a responsible adult.

For future generations, the participants suggested that counseling services be provided in the alternative school setting. They stated that their actions were often the result of a lifetime of chaos that they were not equipped to be able to process. The lack of positive role models in their lives and constant negative influences created in them coping strategies they used to survive that often caused them to get into trouble. When they reflected back on their younger selves in the alternative school, several stated that they just needed someone with which to talk through their problems to help them understand why they were angry. Several participants suggested that, if they had counseling services in the alternative setting, they might have never been destined for an adult life of incarceration. Perhaps this information can better guide future school and political leaders to provide counseling services in an attempt to reach these individuals while they are still juveniles and before they can establish a feeling of comfort in an incarcerated setting that makes them want to escape life and hide in that setting to regroup.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility. Research questions explored centered on life experiences of currently incarcerated inmates in the alternative school setting and in incarceration and the relationship between the two settings, according to participants' reflections. Chapter five includes a summary and discussion of the findings, implications for current practices and future research, and limitations experienced throughout the research process.

Summary of Findings

When examining life experience of currently incarcerated participants in the alternative school setting and in incarceration, several themes emerged. The structure of both facilities was formal, and those overseeing them (teachers or guards) strictly adhered to all rules and procedures. Both settings allowed participants to reflect on consequences; however, it was not until they were incarcerated that the severity of their offenses became clear. Once they were no longer able to return home at night, self-reflection began at a deeper level and consumed much of their time. While one participant stated that the alternative school prepared her for a life of incarceration by making her feel that "lockdown" is where she belongs, others felt as though there were few or no similarities between the two settings. Several participants were incarcerated prior to attending school in the alternative setting, and they stated that neither setting was great but that incarceration was a much stronger consequence for them. Themes that emerged were: Dysfunctional family environments, stability and security found in institutions, and institutionalization during the formative years in life. Basically, the home lives of the

participants were so chaotic and unstable during their formative years that institutions, such as the alternative school or jail, offered structure and stability, thus providing safety and security for them. The institution was trusted because it was consistent and organized, the antithesis of the homes in which they were raised.

Research Question 1

How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school?

Alternative school seemed to just be a place the participants spent time while in the midst of a daily lifestyle of chaos and rebellion. Most of the participants described the setting as negative overall, but nearly all of them said that their teachers attempted to create positive experiences for them. They felt as though their teachers cared but that the lack of positive role models among peers made the setting impossible to be conducive to learning or rehabilitation to prepare them to return and be successful in the regular school setting. Being segregated from the regular school population for several participants was beneficial and provided them a small setting with fewer distractions and a lower student-teacher ratio in which to learn and receive assistance.

Participants identified counseling as a necessity in the alternative setting if students are going to undergo a change that makes them able to return to the regular school. Most of the participants expressed a need for someone to listen to them and offer support during their troubled youth. They did not suggest that this would have changed their paths in life, but they

did feel as though the addition of counseling services would give students a better chance for success in the alternative school.

Research Question 2

How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility?

Incarceration took away many of life's distractions for participants and allowed them time to reflect on their previous decisions and future plans. Redemption resounded throughout the participants' discussion of both the alternative school setting and incarceration, in that they all expressed that they were going to be different in the future, a result of time to reflect on life choices and future plans while isolated. None of the participants indicated that they were bad people, just that they had made poor choices in life. They all believed that their jail experience was temporary and that they could manage once free to not become incarcerated again.

Research Question 3

How do participants' lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility?

The alternative school was a daily setting to which participants attended during the school day and then returned to their homes each evening. Incarceration took away the freedom of going home, and that is what made the inmates more self-reflective and remorseful for past poor decision making. Both settings shared a rigid enforcement of rules and strict consequences for not adhering to those rules. While participants could compare and contrast several aspect of

each setting, overall, they did not feel as though the alternative school setting prepared or institutionalized youth to a life of incarceration. It became clear through the data analysis that these participants were institutionalized very early in life, prior to being confined by the alternative setting or jail. Their lack of stability during their upbringing caused them to long for structure and a rigidity that is provided by jail or, to a lesser extent, the alternative school.

Discussion

While the majority of the research on the alternative school setting had at its core the belief that these schools were places of rehabilitation that could transform troubled students (Schargel & Smink, 2005; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Kubik, Lytle, & Fulkerson, 2004; Kallio & Sanders, 1999; Acker, 2007), the results from this study indicate that this setting was just a place students spent time between stints in incarceration. Very few participants expressed positive thoughts on the alternative setting, and most described it as violent, not academically appropriate or challenging, and driven by a sense of fear due to the nature of the volatile students placed there.

Theoretically, Dewey (1922) believed that the educational setting should be one that is hands-on and meaningful to students. Experiential learning and problem solving should lead to deeper understanding of content as it relates to real-life experience, previously learned content, and other subject areas. For this study, there was a lack of this quality instruction in the alternative setting, though participants believe this is not a product of poor teachers. They felt strongly that their teachers were positive influences and had the necessary knowledge and skill set to teach; however, student behaviors in the classroom were so disruptive that they could not apply these less structured learning experiences with their students. Control of student behavior consumed much of the teacher's time and effort, resulting in fewer options for meaningful

learning experiences.

Skinner's (1974) research discusses the effect of peer influences on behavior of students. His work seems to be resounded throughout the responses of the participants in the study when they speak of having few or no positive role models or peer influences in the alternative setting. Though they speak of their teachers as positive influences, the power of peer pressure seems to be much stronger, resulting in students trying to prove to each other who are the most deviant. Deviant behavior is the norm with these students, and to stray from this norm would cause the student to be ridiculed and rejected by peers. Because this behavior has become the norm in this setting, Bandura (1969) would argue that this behavior must continue, as supported by his social cognitive theory. The negative behaviors that govern life in the alternative school are modeled by each student who spends time in this setting, as it is what peers expect of them.

Components of Successful Alternative School Programs

Two of the participants spoke of alternative school experiences that were positive and had an impact on their lives. Several other participants articulated aspects of the alternative school that were beneficial despite an overall negative experience for them. Interestingly, none of the alternative schools in the study had all of the characteristics identified by the research as necessary for a successful program (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Watson, 2011; Farkas, Simonsen, Migdole, Donovan, Clemens, & Cicchese, 2012) . Supportive teachers were available, and class sizes were smaller than in the regular school setting. However, there were no additional services to help the students improve their mental state or behavior. Negative peer influences were strong, and very little guidance was offered as to ways to overcome this pressure to conform to the delinquent behavior that was the norm.

According to most participants, relationships with teachers in the alternative school were

usually positive and supportive. Barr, Colston, and Parrett (1977) showed through their research that teachers were an integral part of the success of an alternative school. The setting itself, with smaller class sizes and more attention for each student, was described as helpful to several of the participants. This supports Acker's (2007) research that found that students in smaller school environments that are isolated from the regular school population benefitted from the reduced distractions that allowed them more time to work on skills that they were lacking.

Kim and Taylor (2008), Kubik, Lytle, and Fulkerson (2004), and Kallio and Sanders (1999) stressed the need for student support services to meet student needs outside of the academic realm, such as mental health services, mentoring programs, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs. Many of the participants expressed a desire for some type of counseling and/or behavior modification classes while in the alternative setting to help set them up to be successful when leaving that environment. Several talked about the need to just have someone to talk to that could listen and provide some guidance. While many of the participants talked of teachers who were caring and kind, they did not feel as though these teachers were equipped or even had the time to provide any type of counseling or rehabilitative services for them. Perhaps if they were given appropriate counseling and mentoring during their schooling, these participants may have overcome the institutionalization caused by years of being neglected.

The alternative school exists to provide an educational setting conducive to learning for at risk learners. Participants in the study found that this setting, because it is designed for these learners, had few, if any, positive peer influences. Peer relationships were hostile and violent for most participants, and there was competition to determine who could be the worst behaved and/or most feared amongst students. Van Acker (2007) discussed the importance of addressing aggressive and antisocial behaviors within the alternative school setting, but for the participants

in this study, those behaviors were fostered in the alternative environment rather than addressed as inappropriate. Johnson and Taliaferro's 2012 study found that students who attended school in an alternative school remained at-risk later in life for addiction, dropping out of school, unhealthy risk-taking, and mental health issues. When considering backgrounds of this study's participants, many of these at-risk behaviors were present prior to placement in the alternative setting. Since all of the participants are currently incarcerated, they continue to exhibit at-risk behaviors. The question remains whether the alternative school is a contributing factor to those continued behaviors since those behaviors are the cause of the alternative school placement. It appears from this study that the participants were already at-risk of negative outcomes long before they attended school in the alternative setting.

Because of the strong influence of peers in the alternative setting, Sussman, Arriaza, and Grigsby (2014) suggest that this setting is most conducive to positive results in student behavior modification if support groups are formed and led by counselors to help these students work through issues that are keeping them from being successful. Through teamwork and fostering a sense of empathy, peers can become positive influences for each other. In giving suggestions that their experience in the alternative school could have been improved, several participants shared that they would have liked to be taught how to interact with others and how to have healthy, positive relationships. There were no such groups for the participants as students, and their alternative school experience overall was very negative, particularly when considering peer interactions and relationships.

Institutional Effects on Education and The Phenomenon of Incarceration

There was very little research found on the concept of institutionalization, though it does appear to exist. I expected to find in the results of this study a description of ways in which the

alternative school setting mirrored jail and thus, prepared students for a life in which they need to be controlled and contained. Basically, my belief was that the students in the alternative setting were forced to give up certain freedoms and power, which lessened their ability to function outside of such a restrictive setting. What I found, however, was that many of the participants were already conditioned for a restrictive setting, through being in group homes or in youth detention centers, before they were ever placed in the alternative school setting. From their descriptions of life in general, the alternative setting, and incarceration, it appears as though the participants welcomed the more restrictive setting because they had been exposed to such chaos and instability in their upbringing. Alternative school and jail both offer a setting that is segregated from the free world, a slower paced environment that allows time to escape the reality of their chaotic lives. Jail was a place to go to sober up and re-evaluate life. Several participants stated that the alternative school setting provided this as well.

The major difference in the alternative setting and incarceration is what happens at the end of the day. Several participants stated that the alternative setting did segregate them from their regular school peers but that it was not enough of a consequence to make a strong impact on them because they were able to leave and go home at night. Reality of consequences was not fully realized until they were incarcerated and were no longer allowed to go home at night. At that point, they all became more reflective and focused. The problem is that all of the participants in the study are currently incarcerated; they reflect and refocus and then return to the free world just long enough to find themselves back in the same chaotic environment as before they were incarcerated the last time. Jail becomes a comfortable escape, where life is predictable and orderly, a calm in the storm of life.

Smith and Silverman (1994) found that prison educational programs were most successful when completed by younger inmates that have not had a lifetime of incarceration. Participants in this study would agree that they were impressionable in their youth while in the alternative school since they stated that they needed counseling and guidance at that point in their lives. Perhaps, if the participants had the opportunity to be taught how to interact with others and how to create a life for themselves that does not center on chaos, they may not be incarcerated at this point in their lives.

This study adds to the current body of research on the alternative school setting by giving input from those who seem to be most conditioned for a life of restriction. It also gives insight into the upbringing and influences that led to alternative school placement and future incarceration.

Implications

This study, like others in the body of research on the alternative school setting, serves as a reminder of a somewhat forgotten population. Students are often discarded from the regular school setting to the alternative school based on prohibited behaviors and then receive a marginal education, at best, but one that is not really appropriate for them.

School systems need to examine their alternative school programs to ensure that counseling and support groups are provided and created to foster a culture of empathy. Students need to be able to bond with each other to provide positive support for each other as they learn how to interact with others. Because they typically are not from supportive homes, positive role models are crucial, and efforts must be made to teach these students how to have constructive relationships with others.

The state department could benefit from reading the participants' stories and reviewing

their practices in taking children into custody and placing them in group homes and/or foster care. These individuals had terrible experiences while in the state's custody and did not feel safe. They were often made to feel as though they were not wanted or were a burden on others. There was little support provided for these students to help them learn to cope with their tragic pasts nor their uncertain futures. Mental health and counseling services are crucial for these individuals to work on social and coping skills in a safe environment before they are released back to try to fend for themselves in the free world again.

Limitations

As would any study containing human subjects, there are many limitations that impact this study.

Study participants were individuals who were incarcerated who volunteered to be a part of the study. Their motivation behind this willingness to participate may have had an impact on the manner in which they answered questions. For example, if a participant wanted to prolong the interview process to avoid going back to his/her cell, some stories may be elaborated upon to an exaggerated extent.

Another limitation of this study is a lack of diversity within its participants and setting. All participants were volunteers, and all were white. Of the ten willing participants, only one was female. All were from the southern United States and had a worldview limited to that small region of the world. They all were also incarcerated in the same facility, so their present experience was shared. Though this does limit the description of the current incarceration setting, it also helps to show the diversity of their previous alternative settings, which were not shared.

The transferability and replication of this study are limited do to the difficulty accessing a

correctional facility and the rules that govern any secure facility of its type. Gaining the access to inmates in the facility is tedious and once that access is given there are limitations to overcome within the facility. A couple of the limitations once inside are maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the inmates themselves. It is not likely you can maintain this element of the study given that they are under constant surveillance and inmate guards are close by when interviews are being conducted. This will almost certainly have an affect on the responses you receive from those being interviewed under those conditions. Journaling and questionnaires are some potential remedies.

The original research proposal included the interviews and focus group discussions to be recorded and transcribed to better collect the participants' own words describing their experience. The IRB prison consultant would not approve the study in the facility if recording the inmates was part of the process. The recording had to be eliminated from the study, resulting in the researcher scripting by hand the participants' thoughts. Participants' responses were read back to them at the end of the interview to clear up any mistakes that may have been made in scripting, and they were given a chance to provide further clarification of their thoughts. This member checking ensured that, despite the limitation of not being able to record the interactions, the participants' experiences were still dictated accurately.

Recommendations for Future Research

The available body of research on alternative schools has very little information on long-term outcomes for former students. This study follows up with former students who are currently incarcerated, a specific group that has not experienced overall positive outcomes in life decisions. A similar study with successful adults would be helpful to compare the experience of

these who continue to struggle and those who found redemption and overcame obstacles to find success. The data in this study is useful and contributes to the body of research on alternative schools, but it can be even more useful in the future if similar studies are conducted with adults who have differing outcomes.

Since many of the participants in the study described a life of turmoil and chaos leading up to their placement in the alternative school, more information would be helpful to determine at what point these students made the change from victims of circumstance to delinquents. It appears as though, at a point in their youth, they all decided to embrace a lifestyle that has very negative consequences.

Because of the limited demographics in this study, it would be beneficial to have similar studies conducted with more variation in gender, ethnicity, and region of the country. The participants in this study were all white, only one was female, and all were raised in the Southeastern United States. They also are all currently incarcerated in a county jail. Examining the experiences of those in state and federal prison might give another diverse account, since those inmates have typically been convicted of more serious crimes and will be incarcerated for a longer period of time.

When studying the alternative school program, outcomes are crucial. The success of the program can be judged by the ability of former students to function in the real-world setting as adults. Gathering information from a vast array of former students can only strengthen the data. Participants from differing socio-economic levels, communities, professions, etc., can add a rich set of data to the discussion of the aspects that do or do not constitute a beneficial alternative school program.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility. Data collected from participants show a diversity of experiences and opinions of the benefits of the alternative school program. All of the participants are currently incarcerated, which means they continue to make poor life decisions that result in negative consequences.

Opinions varied on the alternative school and the appropriateness of the setting for helping at-risk students. Most of the participants reported a negative overall experience in the alternative setting, but they remembered having teachers that were supportive and encouraging. Peer relationships were often strained, creating an environment of unhealthy competition, fear, and pressure to conform to the negative behaviors that were the norm. This study sheds light on the chaos these participants experienced in their lives prior to being incarcerated and reveals that nearly all of them found incarceration as a time to reflect on previous decisions, find redemption, and emerge with a renewed sense of purpose centered on success in the free world and not returning to a life of incarceration. The alternative school, to a much lesser degree, provided the isolation and time for students to reflect on actions and plan for future positive experiences, but participants felt as though they were not forced to truly examine their lives until they were no longer free to return home at night.

While it seems as though the alternative school setting, with its strict rules and highly structured environment, would prepare students for a life of incarceration, participants did not make this connection. Most of them felt as though the alternative school was just a setting they attended when they were no longer allowed in the regular school population, but they did not feel as though it was a defining time in their lives. They did not begin to truly reflect on their

situations until they were incarcerated and no longer allowed to return to the comfort of their homes at night. Even after much time spent reflecting and making future plans, these individuals still find themselves in trouble. It would be very helpful in the future to determine the aspects of reform that are lasting and can set these students on a path to success before they become so conditioned to a life of chaos and crime that it is all they know.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A IRB Approval

Appendix B
Site Permission

Appendix C Recruitment Letter

Date: 05/10/2015

Inmate Volunteer

Dear Inmate Volunteer:

As a graduate student in the education department at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in education and I am conducting research to better understand a process or phenomenon. The purpose of my research is to describe lived experiences in a type II alternative school, from the perspective of former students who are now in a correctional facility. Three research questions will guide the study: How do former students who are now incarcerated describe their experiences in a type II alternative school? How do former students of a type II alternative school describe their experiences in a correctional facility? How do participants' lived experiences in the alternative school compare and contrast with their lived experiences in a correctional facility? Data will be collected through individual interviews, journaling, and focus group discussions. Interviews will be conducted after surveying the entire inmate population and identifying 15 incarcerated participants. Questions will be guided, addressing their lived experiences in the alternative school they attended and in their correctional facility. Research will begin using the survey instrument distributed to the entire inmate population not only to select the candidates for interviews but for the collective information gathered through the responses to the questions in the survey document. The research will be completed through extensive interviews and journals of the incarcerated participants, selected based on their answers to the survey questions, and having attended a type II alternative school. Focus group discussions will also be included, based on the results of the individual interviews, to gather further pertinent information about their experiences. The information gathered through these interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and along with the journals,

will be sorted based on common themes, and coded for further analysis and interpretation of any shared experiences or phenomenon, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are an inmate in this facility and you are 18 years of age or older, and while in school you attended a type II (punitive) alternative school, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in this study. This will consist of individual interviews, group discussions, and the keeping of a journal over the course of two weeks. It should take approximately two to three weeks to complete the procedures listed and each interview should take approximately an hour each. Your, much needed participation in this study will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

To participate, complete and return the survey and consent document to detention center officer who provided it to you and make them aware of your willingness to participate by checking the appropriate boxes in the document.

Sincerely,

Joseph Patrick Garner
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D
Survey of Participants

Survey:

Name _____

Age _____

Home Town _____

Middle School Attended _____

Did you at any time attend an alternative school while you were in middle school?

_____ Yes _____ No

How would you characterize your alternative school experience? _____ Good _____ Bad

_____ Neither

Do you think alternative schools can be improved? _____ Yes _____ No

Do you think alternative schools have a useful function? _____ Yes _____ No

For the purpose of research are you willing to talk about your alternative school experience?

_____ Yes _____ No

Appendix E
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of an examination of students lived experiences in a Type II alternative school.

Joseph Patrick Garner Liberty University Department of Education

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study of the perceptions of students lived experiences in a Type II alternative school. You were selected as a possible participant because you attended a Type II alternative school and are currently incarcerated. We request that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Joseph Patrick Garner, Doctoral candidate, School of Education, Liberty University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of students in a Type II alternative school who are now incarcerated.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in an individual question and answer session as well as a group question and answer session.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has minimal risks which should not exceed more than what you would encounter in everyday life. Your identity and the identity of your facility and circumstances will be kept confidential.

The benefits to participation are the potential for improvement of Type II facilities and a greater understanding of the impact these facilities have on individuals who participate in them.

Compensation:

Participation in this study is purely voluntary. No compensation will be paid for participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In the event that this project is published, no information will be used to indicate the identity of the participants. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All interviews and

observations will be anonymous, and no names will be reported. Printed interviews will be kept in a locked location and shredded after seven years. Interviews will be identified only by a numbering system.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the facility where you are housed. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Joseph Patrick Garner. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Liberty University Attn. Institutional Review Board Green Hall, Suite 1837 1971 University Blvd. Lynchburg, VA 24515 Email: irb@liberty.edu Phone: 434-592-5530 Fax: 434-522-0506

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F Interview Questions

Individual Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself, like where you grew up, school experiences, family, and anything else you would like to share.
2. You indicated on your survey that you experienced school in the alternative setting. Describe this experience.
3. What kind of relationship did you have with your peers at the alternative school?
4. Why did you have to attend the alternative school?
5. How did the alternative school program impact your behavior?
6. What kind of relationship did you have with your teachers at the alternative school?
7. If you participated in any kind of character education program in the alternative school, what impact did that have on you?
8. Describe your experience the first time you were incarcerated.
9. Describe your current experience in incarceration.
10. Describe your interaction with fellow inmates.
11. How has incarceration impacted your behavior?
12. Have you participated in educational or rehabilitative programs while incarcerated, and what impact did that have on you?
13. What experiences did you have in the alternative setting that was similar to experiences as an incarcerated inmate?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the alternative school and as an inmate in the correctional facility?

Appendix G Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. What were the positive aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience?
2. What were the negative aspects of the alternative school, if any, when you look back on your experience?
3. What would you do to improve the alternative school program if you had the power to change it?
4. How did the program help you or change the direction of your educational experience?
5. Is there anything you would like to add or change about the comments you have made in this or the other interview?

Appendix H
Excerpt from Participant Journal

door to get on the bus. ~~It~~ It was an everyday battle ~~for~~ for my grandparents to try to get me to school. ~~They~~ For Back up my grandparents called my step dad. He would get me to school and made sure I was in the building. After he left I would sneak out the back door of the school. I hid in the woods ~~that~~ and would get in cars with people that would stop. ~~In the woods~~ I stayed in Duluth middle school until '83 when my grandmother died. I was taken away from my grandfather and forced to live with my mother who gave me away. I moved to Spout Springs Buford. ~~At~~ I moved schools to Buford Middle School. ~~My mom~~ I was only there for a year and that year my mom made me go to school.

Before I was born my mom had three girls. They are my half sisters. I always felt my mom was hiding something from me because her husband's name was on my birth certificate, but he was not my real father. Although he was never my ~~real~~ biological father I saw that he cared

Appendix I Excerpt of Researcher's Bracketed Thoughts

I have observed, on numerous occasions, students in the alternative school and how their behaviors would change with time from “acting out” to a more compliant demeanor. These observations have concerned me and caused me to wonder if they are being institutionalized at an early age. I discovered that these students often seem to prefer the alternative school setting to a traditional classroom and could not understand why, specifically, but it always seemed related to a response to more consistent routines and rules. I became curious if these behaviors are the same behaviors, or at least similar to, those I observed in jails and prisons when I was in law enforcement. I want to find out more about these behaviors and their relationships to each other and the shared experiences of alternative students and inmates. I want to understand the phenomenon that exists, or if these behaviors are just symptomatic of another issue.

I have observed behaviors that would indicate they have some feelings of comfort within their surroundings, where one might expect it to be an uncomfortable situation for them. I have noticed they bond rather quickly with the other members of the group, not sure if that is healthy, and there also seems to be a pecking order or seniority status within the group dynamic. I've noticed how they will look for the approval of the assigned teacher and ask permission for almost everything they do while in this environment, similar to that in a jail or prison setting. I have also observed how they seem to compete for the attention and approval of their teachers more so than in the regular education environment. I am interested in finding out more about the relationships, experiences, and meanings of these observations, and how they relate to their experiences in the jail setting.

I kept positive easier to concentrate
with, had w/ peers fewer distractions
and adults. The routine made
easier to self correct easier for me to
w/ a strict environment.

2. You indicated on your survey that you experienced school in the alternative

setting. Describe this experience. When I made it to middle school, I didn't have as many problems, but I got into trouble for skipping school so I had to do a few days in the STAR 5 program which is like boot camp other than that I had I.S.S. for half the school year for speaking my mind to a few teachers so I sat in a cubicle all day. With me being in that cubicle I concentrated on my work so my grades came up. By 8th grade I skipped so many days I failed 8th grade that summer I was locked up and put in G.R.Y.D.C and I was put through classes there I had good grades because I could concentrate on my work they sent me to S.R.C.P. Savannah River Challenge program in there I also had to attend school I passed 8th grade

3. What kind of relationship did you have with your peers at the alternative school?

I have a good sense of respect to my elders don't get me wrong. The times I spoke out of line, was to me a good reason. I did what I was told to do and I kept a positive attitude with my peers. Because of everything distraction wise was removed I passed 8th grade in three months. When I was there I was taught in an environment with about 20 students or really more like 15 students to a teacher so I got the attention I required to do my work. Besides there was nothing else to do. So my relationship with my peers was I respected them so they respected me very professional and I think they were very helpful, and had positive attitudes so all around it was good. very seldom did I get out of line and if I did, I corrected my self.