

Writing with Incarcerated Students Towards Humanization:
A Christian Critical Perspective

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Abstract

This thesis centers on the intersections between critical pedagogy and writing instruction in a prison college program with the aim of humanization. A theoretical framework is constructed that relies on the pillars of tenets from Liberation theology, critical pedagogy, an anti-racist and multicultural praxis, and generative culture-making. Writing as the foundation of education is the medium for supporting a humanizing and liberatory education.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to first and foremost my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. You are the one who breaks every chain, creates and re-creates new life, and inspires the spilling of ink. Let every word of my mouth and meditation of my heart be pleasing to you and a sweet-smelling incense. Second, to my life partner T. J., For the last 22 years, you have reminded me to always give it my best effort with what I have and leave the rest to God. Thank you to listening to my ramblings and always considering me the smartest one.

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Introduction

True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

As of 2016 there were 206,268 people in the United States serving life or “virtual life” sentences with 2.2 million total people incarcerated (Sentencing Project). In a system that is largely void of effective rehabilitative programs for incarcerated people, faith-based ministries provide a significant way to fill the void. This research study centers on the intersections of critical pedagogy and writing as a generative method of humanization through a liberal arts Christian college program for incarcerated students. Scholars disagree on the definition and purpose of “correctional education” programs (Castro and Gould 2). Traditionally, “corrective education” encompasses a wide variety of programs available to incarcerated people which focus primarily on rehabilitation, vocational readiness post-incarceration, and follows a “medical model of penology” (3). In contrast, the emerging field of higher education in prison rejects such terminology and the carceral relationships between “rehabilitation, safety and security, or preventing recidivism” (4). McCorkal and DeFina evaluate the current liberal arts higher education program of Villanova University as different than “vocationally oriented models” of prison education and seek to add to the growing scholarship on redefining higher education in prison programs. They argue this program enables students to contribute in a democratic society “through the shared knowledge base, enabling students to develop and expand their capacity for empathy and civility, and providing students with the skills necessary to engage in rational discourse, critical analysis, and rigorous, informed debate” (McCorkal and Define 6). Writing is

the cornerstone of higher education because it involves critical thinking and a naming of the world through specific academic genre requirements. Furthermore, writing offers a therapeutic and healing method for the re-telling of harmful and hurtful narratives. As with all higher education programs, faith-based prison educational programs should carry the dual purpose of “collective mobilization and intellectual autonomy” (Erzen). Considering this, how should Christian practitioners apply a critical pedagogy in order to contextualize the writing process and balance personally restorative and redistributive justice purposes? This points to the larger issue of how to critically overcome inherent hegemonic rhetoric and teaching methods in the classroom that destroy liberatory educational objectives, whether these issues might stem from systemic dehumanizing language, internalized prejudice and bias, or inappropriately applied contextualization. Therefore, Christian educators in college-in-prison programs must balance critical pedagogical instruction and restoration of humanity by enabling students in community to generate redemptive liberatory narratives through writing. Goals of this thesis are three-fold: build a theoretical framework for a critical pedagogical methodology that blends with a solid Liberation theology; show how writing as foundational to the educational model can meet restorative and political objectives; and identify and challenge potential internal and external oppressive structures and systems that could hinder the goals of a Christian college-in-prison program.

Review of Relevant Scholarship and Chapter Descriptions

This study originated with the researcher's personal involvement and work in a college - in-prison program, specifically The Nash County Field Minister Program (NCFMP) as part of The College at Southeastern in North Carolina. Since the program's inception in 2017, no other researchers have studied the program. This thesis was originally designed to encompass two

parts, a thorough discourse analysis and a qualitative research study in which the incarcerated students would be the sole participants. Following institutional protocols, the researcher began the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval processes for all three required institutions in October, 2018. However, though the researcher gained IRB approval from both Liberty University and The College at Southeastern early in 2019, final clearance from the Department of Public Safety of North Carolina came too late for the originally proposed study to be completed within the time frame of my degree. The qualitative analysis will not be included as part of this thesis however, the researcher plans to complete the study later this year. This project will focus on providing a theoretical framework and application through writing.

The research depends on foundational concepts and relevant scholarship to frame the argument regarding dehumanizing effects of mass incarceration, higher education in prison, critical pedagogy, and the writing instruction/writing programs in the prison context. Chapter I provides an introduction and background information of the NCFMP. Additional examination of the convergence between dehumanization and critical pedagogy will be discussed. Paolo Freire and bell hooks [sic] provide the critical pedagogical methods to address the underlying problem of dehumanization within prisons, but also serve as an instrument of measurement to evaluate the educational and felt needs of the students. Chapter II sets up the primary problems and presents a thorough discourse analysis. Chapter III develops a theoretical framework with pillars from Liberation theology, Freire and hooks' educational models, Castro's educational "anti-racist praxis" blended with a multicultural model and founded on writing as a generative and restorative application as a possible solution. Chapter IV seeks to address possible application of a liberatory education through writing as space, praxis, and process. Discussion, implications, and future research needs are included in Chapter V.

Education and the pursuit of knowledge are basic human rights and writing provides a needed communicative outlet for growth in all areas of human development. Christian educators in prison college programs must seek to deliver quality education that both empowers and restores humanity. Critical pedagogy enables this type of liberatory education while at the same time humanizing students that live within a controlled and oppressive environment. Christians offer both a model of love and justice but serve students by helping them find their voice in a system that seeks to destroy it. This research project hopes to build toward a framework of liberatory education through writing that is both redemptive and communal.

Chapter I: Background

Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but an historical reality.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Nash County Field Minister Program Introduction and History

Tanya Erzen author of *God in Captivity* argues that “prison ministry is now a legitimate rehabilitative program” (4). However, identifying the underlying purposes of such programs and agreement on their necessity varies widely between ministries. In contrast, education programs with no religious ministry focus, can often display open hostility toward programs that seem to offer inadequate, inappropriate, or even unethical strategies. In her assessment of several faith-based ministry programs, Erzen criticizes the seminary education programs of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) in Angola Prison in Louisiana and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) in Darrington Prison in Texas for their failure to connect individual transformative goals with communal political purpose (183). Erzen’s analysis of faith-based ministries did not include the NCFMP in her research as this was a new program at the time of publication. The importance is that the NCFMP presents several unique qualities that differ from the NOBTS and SWBTS seminary programs. Due to the NCFMP expanded mission, curriculum, and inclusive nature, it is possible to blend both purposes as Erzen rightly contends is the best method for a truly humanizing education.

Partnered with “Game Plan for Life,” Nash Correctional Institution (NCI) located in Nash County, North Carolina, and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS), this four-year degree program offers incarcerated students a 127-hour Bachelor of Arts degree

with the dual emphasis of pastoral ministry and counseling (The College at Southeastern). The program is inclusive to all religious faiths and students represent varied religious backgrounds. However, the program is currently only offered to incarcerated men located in a men's prison and has not been expanded to include women at this time. For admission, students must be serving a life or long-term sentence with more than 12 years remaining on their term. This varies from other educational programs in prison which primarily serve students on shorter sentences who will be released in the future. In fact, access to other nation-wide higher education programs for incarcerated people is often highly racialized in that DPS usually determines participants based on race and prejudiced notions of educational ability (The Sentencing Project). The NCFMP in contrast, works together with DPS to establish admission qualifications, then hand selects candidates. The Kingdom Diversity initiative is a central component to the mission of The College at Southeastern. Through educational promotion, targeted initiatives, and scholarships, Kingdom Diversity endeavors to "equip groups that have been historically underrepresented on [the] campus to serve the church and fulfill the Great Commission" (Kingdom Diversity SEBTS). The same mission applies for admission to the NCFMP. DPS identifies eligible candidates each year and a NCFMP recruitment team visits the prison for an initial interest meeting. Once admission applications are received from candidates, they are scored based on specific criteria: current involvement in ministry, service, and/or education, sense of external calling or purpose, leadership potential, drive for improvement of self and others, communication potential, and recommendation scores. The top candidates are transferred to NCI for the personal interview process by the NCMFP admissions board. Once complete, 30 students are nominated for admission to the program. Those who accept admission are

transferred to the NCI and begin the freshman year in the summer. It is throughout this process that the admissions team works conjunctively with the same diversity objectives of the college.

The program seeks to empower and equip incarcerated students toward valuable life work though they will most likely remain in prison for life (Bible Transformation). Those who graduate will be transferred to other prison facilities across North Carolina to serve as “NCDPS field ministers.” Their ministry roles within the prisons will be varied including “community service, mentoring, intake orientation, personal improvement, tutoring, crisis ministry, hospice and hospital care, grief counseling, discipleship classes, preaching, worship services, and funerals” (The College at Southeastern). Currently, there are 51 male students enrolled: a sophomore and freshman class. Students receive additional tutoring online through the on-campus Writing Center. The Writing Center Consultants assist students with a specific role to “offer feedback and assistance with the crafts, drafts, and conventions of composition for all research writing projects.” Furthermore, consultants foster “instructive dialogue and feedback to help writers improve writing projects by improving critical skills” (The Writing Center Southeastern). Consultants serve as a crucial component of the educational process for incarcerated students. Due to the newness of the program it is important to critically assess how the mission and goals of the NCFMP are being accomplished as well as address concerns as they apply to providing a quality liberal arts education.

Critical Pedagogy and Prison Education

A liberatory framework borrows from Paolo Freire’s critical pedagogy which focuses on the “concern for humanization” in the face of oppression (Freire 17). Oppression includes “any situation in which “A” objectively exploits “B” or hinders her or his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (Freire 55). He views people as subjects in their environment rather than

objects to be oppressed. John Elias explains the fundamentals behind Freire's theory require a "conscientization of the oppressed," that cultivates a transformation away from oppressive conditions towards liberation and transformation (10). Freire based his pedagogy on a Christian-Marxist Humanism which centers on the relationship of humanity between themselves and a "transcendent Being" (Elias 47). Elias notes, "While a Christian humanism or personalism is at the heart of Freire's philosophy, he has combined this with existential, phenomenological, and Marxist elements" (47). Borrowing from Teilhard de Chardin and Karl Marx, Freire describes the humanization process as the combination of "reflective activity with praxis to create meaningful history and culture" (49). He proposes a dialogical approach, formed while fighting for educational reform against the standard "banking-model." Within the traditional hierarchy of education, the teacher "deposits" information as the dominant "narrative" or "narrator" into student's minds who passively absorb. Freire argues it is the set-up of binary opposites which positions the oppressor endowing the gift of knowledge on the oppressed. However, the purpose of liberatory education "lies in its drive towards reconciliation," reconciliation that mends the divide by making both parties, teachers, and students (Freire 45). Each learns from the other, through the practice of critical reflection and co-investigation thereby destroying the hegemonic practices in education. This dialogical model serves as the catalyst of liberation where students engage "education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination" (Freire 80). Through mutual and democratic classroom practices, the teacher is no longer the only authority, but teacher-student and student-teacher learn together which becomes consciousness raising.

Freire describes the results of a liberatory education through the process of transformation. As people engage and critically assess their existence both in and part of the

world, they find a dynamic reality that is transformative. In the classroom, students and teachers “reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action” (Freire 56). It is through this “process of becoming” that “education is thus constantly remade in the praxis” (57). Through this communal relationship, the dehumanization of being oppressed is exposed and full humanity is restored. To overcome oppressive educational practices, Freire argues it requires cooperation, a unification of liberatory purpose, organization, and “cultural synthesis” (153). The process is dialogical because of the intrinsic relationship between student and teacher engaging in critical praxis which is founded on love, humility, faith, and hope (64). Dialogue both engages in and generates critical thinking. Freire explains that authentic and liberatory education is sustained only by “A *with* B” (66). The efforts between teacher-student and student-teacher are collaborative and collective.

Building from Freire’s methodology, bell hooks asserts education *is* liberation: “To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn” (13). Teachers not only “transgress the boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning” but they also “teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of [their] students (13). *Transgress* in this sense is meant as a method of overcoming, to go beyond the bounds of traditional restrictive and oppressive educational methods. Defined as “engaged pedagogy,” she argues teachers participate in a process first of “self-actualization” in order to foster individual flourishing that promotes both a personal wellness but also liberates students. hooks contends:

Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are

empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if [teachers] refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. (21)

Vulnerability requires that both student and teacher offer and receive in ways that open possibilities for growth and exchange but are also intrinsically humble and loving. This echoes Freire's foundation of love, humility, faith, and hope, all of which are core Christian values.

Chapter II: Discourse Analysis

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Presentation of the Problem

There are several problems to overcome in addressing how Christian practitioners in college prison programs can provide a liberatory education that is both personally and communally restorative. Faith-based educational programs in prison seem to lack the convergence of specific purposes among higher education, communal and personal awareness, and political engagement. The motivation of faith-based education programs can often be focused on individual conversion and rehabilitation only. Systemic and societal problems are often neglected and dehumanizing systems are reinforced. Historical pedagogy does not address the multicultural perspectives and needs of incarcerated students. Additionally, there are educational barriers inherent in the prison system that prevent a purely critical praxis.

Erzen's analysis of current faith-based ministry prison programs, in an "age of mass incarceration," critiques what she views as gaps between higher educational purposes and programs that focus selectively on individual transformation and conversion. Erzen's primary question seeks to understand the underlying motivation of faith-based groups in prison, especially as it relates to translation of the overall connection between education and rehabilitation. Is a group focused simply on evangelization and individual transformation or are there deeper purposes that seek to determine why people end up incarcerated? She notes:

To recognize that prisoners' lives matter means that we force ourselves to look at the purpose of prisons and the purpose of faith-based and other groups within them. The

language of theology and morality, central to faith-based work, is often absent from discussions of mass incarceration. In focusing on individual conversion, many faith-based prison ministries neglect the broader issues of how people came to prison and end up fortifying the prison's rationale of control, surveillance, governance, and vengeance.

(182)

Erzen's concerns are vitally important to any analysis of a prison educational program but especially one with a religious basis, founded on a Christian worldview. Because the NOBTS and SWBTS programs primarily train students for the task of Christian preaching and evangelism, other scholars such as Priscilla Perkins argue that connections between Christian education and critical liberatory pedagogy seem impossible. The seeming rigidity of Christian thinking and fundamentalism runs contrary to empowered and transformative higher thinking (Perkins 586). A secular education program then becomes the only true source of change aimed at these dual purposes. Scholars such as Bryan Johnson argue however, that a focus on religious and spiritual transformation does in fact change the inside culture of prison as well as provide positive social effects for people returning home. Erzen rightly asserts then that "education programs can have explicit political goals: educational access for those living on the inside is a human right, and education programming in prison is one tactic among others seeking redistributive justice" (183). These goals supersede the secular/religious divide in education since they seek basic human rights and dignity lies at their core. A quality liberal arts program does not need to be ashamed of its Christian lens but rather, working with liberatory purpose, it can bring together both political and religious goals.

The dehumanization process that occurs with incarceration serves as another primary problem (Ross America's Dehumanizing Prisons). Incarcerated people face the "stigma of

criminality” (Alexander 141). No longer simply another human being as part of society, they are forever branded as criminal, offender, convict, and inmate. All freedom and rights are stripped away during incarceration; people are modern slaves in a system of dehumanization (Perkel). Freire describes the dehumanization of oppressed people as any action “that is destructive of true human nature and dignity” (Elias 49). Incarceration in the American system oppresses people emotionally and psychologically, treating them in the same manner as simple animals (Human Rights Watch). Freire believes “persons cannot be truly human unless they have proper freedom. Human freedom is the condition which enables the completion of the person. Humanization is not primarily an individual goal but rather a social one. Individuals become truly human by their participation” (Elias 49). Yet society no longer considers incarcerated people viable contributors (Human Rights Watch). Furthermore, incarcerated people lose their right to name the world while their humanity is systematically dismantled. Daniel Graves, incarcerated student, explains the dehumanization process in prison as a metaphor:

Amongst long-term convicts, of which I am one, there is a universal feeling that we don’t count. We have been forgotten. This landfill (prison) is where our America throws its trash, and simply hopes it never has to look upon that rubbish again. Because society tends to rid itself of things that are no longer useful—trash, we trapped bodies, men of all hues, have been placed here, thrown here, discarded, forgotten, or as one of my friends says, consciously dis-remembered. (Castro et al. 19)

Within the carceral space, the system perpetually dehumanizes those who are incarcerated. This is accomplished physically by restraint and control including other dehumanizing acts such as strip searches, withholding any physical contact of any kind, and even the refusal to call people by name. One of the most pervasive acts of dehumanization is the language with which people

are referred. The system at large redefines a person upon conviction stripping them of the title “human being” and instead bestows the title convict or criminal. Once incarcerated, people are now inmate, offender, or prisoner. Even after a person serves their sentence and returns to life outside of prison, they are forever labeled as ex-convict or ex-felon. It is not uncommon for one to be branded even more specifically by the crime that was committed like convicted rapist or convicted murderer. As people struggle against such oppressive norms, Schwan considers higher education a primary method for moral rehabilitation (1). Though removed from a society that stands on “freedom for all,” incarcerated people in college programs are offered new forms of independence. Education can become a practice of liberation where students build and create community through humanizing activity rather than stay trapped by the dehumanizing system (Erzen 183). Students begin to re-name the world even though they remain incarcerated.

Additionally, hooks presents multiculturalism as another problem for education within a system of inherent oppression. Multiculturalism is a particularly important narrative as it exists extensively in the carceral setting. The limits of historical pedagogy restrict liberatory practice simply because the tradition originates from the dominant cultural monologue which fails to consider multicultural perspectives and norms. Furthermore, multiculturalism, forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases of any kind . . . When we, as educators allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve. We can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression that is the essence of truly liberatory liberal arts education. (hooks 44)

Within the NCFMP, the total student population is approximately 60% African American and 20% Latino. Multicultural competence is not limited to other fields such as psychology or

sociology but as educators in a multicultural setting, programs must identify and address possible inherent systems at work historical or currently in student's lives. These include racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and other pre-incarceration conditions such as socioeconomic factors, abuse, or poverty (Hays and Erdford).

Along with these multicultural issues resultant from life before incarceration, historic racialized education is central. Bounds, Washington, and Henfield present various educational challenges for African Americans. Black children were historically viewed as possessing lower intellectual ability and disproportionately subjected to special education programs based on lower socioeconomic class (263). They conclude that the high number of incarcerated Black men in the U.S. today is in direct correlation to the lack of "educational and employment opportunities and social services to support Black residents" (262). Concurrently, Latina/o children face severe stigmas in school as a result of language barriers, immigration status, and lower economic class (Villalba). Villalba attests to similar patterns of neglect within the educational system for Latinas/os in that immigrant parents often lack the resources to navigate the system which then leads to "lower levels of education . . . contribut[ing] to higher poverty and limited earnings" (378). Both Black and Latina/o populations are affected by the deficiencies of a system that has failed to address resulting consequences stemming from poverty, systemic racism, and political suppression. This history as it relates to the incarcerated population is significant in addressing prison education programs.

Critical educators such as Erin Castro offer critique of the specific educational prison context. The environment itself challenges educators to provide a truly liberatory education, particularly because prison is ultimately an oppressive institution that physically and psychologically restrains those who are incarcerated. Critical educators face challenges in the

prison setting from logistical and prison administrative conditions to the possibilities of reproducing the power dynamics of oppression inside the classroom (Castro and Brawn 103). Castro and formerly incarcerated student Michael Brawn rightly assess the primary risks for critical educators in carceral settings in that “nonincarcerated instructors . . . may run the risk of reproducing the very power structures they seek to expose by neglecting to consider incarcerated students’ unique positionalities—specifically, their inability to freely access information and to exist in the world as independent thinkers” (103). These issues may not be completely resolved as long as the system of mass incarceration exists as it is today. However, Castro and Brawn critically examine the positionality between teachers and students trying to operate in a democratic or liberatory space for education in the classroom while at the same time still subject to the myriad restrictions within the prison itself. Furthermore, as Brawn correctly addresses, the free access to information that builds the foundation for critical praxis is severely hindered within prison (108). Incarcerated students lack the same ability as students on the outside to obtain everything they need for critical application in their education.

Another important assessment by Castro and Brawn is the possible prejudice or preconceived notions about incarcerated people by nonincarcerated professors or staff working with student. These could stem from “indoctrination” to specific ideologies or political positions or unchecked bias that affects professors’ ability to offer “transformative education” (Castro and Brawn 112). Specifically, Brawn critiques, some teachers may lack important contextual information as it relates to living conditions and systemic oppression. As a reminder of the oppression of the mass incarceration system, Freire provides a poignant reminder of why such educational evaluation is necessary:

We simply cannot go to the laborers—urban or peasant—[or the incarcerated] in the banking style, to give them “knowledge” or to impose upon them the model of the “good man” contained in a program whose content we have ourselves *organized*. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed. (67)

These scholars highlight considerable problems that must be overcome for the application of critical praxis specifically through writing as a catalyst for transformative and liberatory learning.

Chapter III: Framework Pillars for Critical Methodology

The leaders must *incarnate* it, through communion with the people. In this communion both groups grow together; and the leaders, instead of being simply self-appointed, are installed or authenticated in their praxis with the praxis of the people.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

There are four primary pillars that stand on the foundation of writing as a liberatory practice within higher education. Key Liberation theology tenets explain that the oppressed matter to God and as such our life and work as Christians must seek social justice both for individual people as well as the larger community. Critical education liberates through awareness, reconciliation, and humanization. “Anti-racist praxis” directed towards uncovering inherent racism works to provide equal educational opportunity while at the same time finding appropriate solutions to multicultural issues. Participation in culture while generating new forms, enables students to both balance love and justice from a Christian worldview while humanizing towards restorative purposes which are innate to all human beings.

Liberation Theology

Since the NCFMP is founded on a Christian worldview, a robust theology is key to assessing the praxis and purpose of the educational program. Latin American theologian and Catholic bishop Gustavo Gutierrez, a contemporary of Freire, developed Liberation theology in response to ongoing conversations by the Catholic church to address the systemic oppression and extreme poverty all over Latin America. Where Freire, a Brazilian Catholic educator, relied on educational reform as an uplift from poverty and destructive force against oppression, Gutierrez focused on the theological solutions. In serving the Catholic church among the poor in Peru,

Gutierrez made three judgments. 1) Poverty destroys. 2) Poverty is structural in nature in that it is systemic to keep people oppressed for the gain of the rich. 3) Those affected by poverty live at the lowest social class which meant to further subjugate people. In response to his findings, he proposed four basic tenets of Liberation theology: *compromiso*, hope for change, God's presence among the poor and God's preferential care of the poor. The idea of *compromiso*, commitment to action and reflection, employs hope that change is possible even in the midst of horrific oppression. Hope for Gutierrez stems from the understanding that the oppressed realize they are not alone, that God's presence is among them working to overcome the bad. The final tenet is founded on God's *preferential option for the poor*. God's love for all people through the gospel must be seen through the eyes of an unjust system where the rich benefit most widely from "God's blessings" therefore creating the need for balance. The bible provides numerous examples of God's preference for the poor and those that are most severely disadvantaged. Gutierrez insisted on a *praxis of the poor* which creates relationship between theory and praxis in that: "Liberation theology reflects on and from within the complex and fruitful relationship between theory and practice" (Gutierrez "Emergent" 247). Reliant on a Marxist framework, it is only "revolutionary" praxis that meaning is restored to life.

Liberation theology emphasizes three crucial purposes. 1) People must be liberated from unjust social conditions and structures. Brown explains, "The liberation message on this first level is the invitation to work for change, for reform, or if necessary, for the destruction of social structures that are evil rather than good" (62). In other words, idly standing by or waiting for injustice to self-resolve is in of itself unjust. 2) People must be liberated from a fatalistic worldview. The idea is that those captive to oppressive systems are led to believe that change is never possible and oppression is unchangeable. 3) People must be liberated from personal "sin

and guilt.” Again, Brown elaborates, “The liberation message on this third level is the reality of the gratuitousness of grace—the assurance that the resources of divine mercy and forgiveness are always at hand, gifts ready to be bestowed on all who ask for them” (63). Though Gutierrez’s work focuses on the world of poverty, his theological perspective addresses similar problems for incarcerated students. Specifically, Gutierrez’s ideas contribute to answering Erzen’s problem of underlying motivation that encompasses personal and communal restoration. In short, Liberation theological focus is how a program begins to move away from a sole focus on conversion only.

Within a system of oppression, the motivation for a Christian program should embody liberation from injustice, from constant suppression, and be grace-filled towards reconciliatory purposes. Liberation theology provides a fuller understanding of critical pedagogy as they are inexorably linked. Sharon Welch argues “Liberation theologians interpret scriptural traditions from the perspective of those ‘who have not yet named the world—the marginal, the silenced, the defeated.’” Sin is “the denial of solidarity” and the hope of resurrection “is the hope for the power of solidarity to transform reality, a hope that human identity is found in relation to others, in participation in the formation of a community that transcends us now and after death” (45). Shari Stenburg echoes this communal transcendence in that “liberation depends upon ‘communion’ among human beings, who in coming together to understand and teach one another also liberate one another” (274). Christianity is both individual and communal and contains the necessary balances to transform holistically and completely. Liberation theology addresses many of the problems with faith-based ministries that are motivated only by individual conversion and eschatological triumphant narratives. When embodied through a critical pedagogical approach, the needed space for both action and reflection, love and justice is created.

The ideology of Liberation theology is tied intrinsically to the work of Freire who developed his theories of literacy during the same time and in the same locations, Latin America, as Gutierrez. For Freire, the idea of *conscientization* or “consciousness raising” exposes the systemic evils present within the structures that oppress the poor while at the same time revealing the possibilities of change communally (Brown 45). Where Gutierrez focused on liberation theology as a *praxis of the poor*, which was strategically located not in “ontological reflection but in the midst of the poor,” Freire applies this praxis in the educational setting centering on both “theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot . . . be reduced to either verbalism or activism” (Freire 119). Verbalism as the “blah” of abstract theory, fails to do anything towards productive change. Conversely, activism strives toward action without necessary contextual reflection. Reducing Freire’s praxis to an either/or decision or abandoning them completely, produces suffering. Brown suggests, “it is out of this praxis [the balanced equation of reflection and action] that empowerment comes” (69). Saint Loyola describes this balance as “consolation and desolation” (Welch 287) Consolation comes when students explore and experience moments of life-giving, nourishment, hope, or joy whereas desolation occurs in the moments of despair or confusion. By embracing some of the primary Liberation theological tenets which endeavor to balance the gospel with active social justice efforts and applied along with critical praxis, students are raised up to expand their own consciousness. This in turn enables liberatory education.

Critical Pedagogy

Freire’s critical methodology is dialogical in approach. It is through dialogue, “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teachers” (80). The historic “banking” model of education only

leads to mechanical memorization, an oppressive environment which does not allow for free thought and critical thinking. Freire contends, “Worse yet, it turns [students] into “containers” into “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The more completely, she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is” (72). However, dialogical critical education leads to the act of inquiry and critical assessment.

This movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization—the people’s historical vocation. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore, it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so. Attempting *to be more* human, individualistically, leads to *having more*, egoistically, a form of dehumanization. (Freire 85-86)

The idea of teacher-students and student-teachers both prevents further oppression while simultaneously creating communal liberation. Freire argues, true dialogue does not exist without critical thinking. Dialogue which requires critical thinking creates more critical thinking (93). Communication is the true source of all education. Dialogue also requires a deep love for people and the world. Dialogue centered on love prevents fear because as humans come into salient relationship toward the end of learning and growing together, liberation occurs.

Critical praxis creates democratic classroom processes that build toward individual and communal transformation. Freire argues, “problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (84). As people explore the ways in which they are “becoming” both individually and communally, they find liberation. As educators working to re-create democracy

in the classroom, the motivation behind teaching is vital. Freire notes in response to leaders or educators whose primary focus is applying a reductive or an inappropriate traditional educational model that there is danger in perpetuating the oppressive system. He cautions, “this task implies that revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of ‘salvation,’ but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation” (95). It is through the awareness and dialogue that brings consciousness raising, where true salvation and reclamation can occur.

Fisher, Jocson, and Kinloch discuss the concept of *literocracy*, “the intersection of literacy and democracy” which “emphasiz[es] that language processes exist in partnership with action” (92). This echoes Freire’s concept of dialogical education. In providing a democratic space for engagement in the classroom, educators must seek a commitment of humility that moves beyond traditional authoritative leadership. Stenberg understands that deconstruction of traditional models of critique is the first important step, but this cannot be divorced from reconstructive possibilities (285). In other words, dialogue must involve praxis in order to develop truly critical methodology. She contends, “imagination and transformation; compassion and action” these come from the prophetic model of critical education (286). The prophetic teacher “begins from a place of compassion and solidarity with students and at the same time engages in ongoing self-reflection about those aspects of oneself and one’s pedagogy that hinder liberatory goals” (284). Transformation is not only focused on the student, but applying a critical pedagogy relies on teacher transformation as well.

Similarly, critical practitioner bell hooks works toward an “engaged pedagogy.” She explains teaching as a “performative act” that seeks to offer the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each

classroom” (11). Everyone benefits through engagement of reciprocity and vulnerability, and what results is more active participation and self-actualization (11). What this means for engaged Christian educators is that critical assessment, vulnerability, and open feedback loops with students opens the door for this type of self-actualization especially as it applies to non-incarcerated educators. This type of humility, whether it is the “missional” mindset, servant leadership model, or sisterly and brotherly love that should define our Christian faith, destroys any false conceptions that can lead to pride. Yet, when faced with new situations of growth inside the classroom or students that fall outside the traditional educational paradigm or student demographic, it may be tempting to abandon the constant evolution of self-realization that should accompany a Christian educator who is both growing in faith and seeking to live a life of humble honor for others.

Critical pedagogy for hooks also seeks communal vulnerability. Teachers express vulnerability by “providing [students] with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply” (22). This is not a secular thought but grounded and stabilized by a Christian ethic that seeks to establish and make right the injustices of the world not just as individuals but communally as the body of Christ. hooks argues for a mutual vulnerability in that, any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. (21)

This is especially true within a carceral setting where true vulnerability may fail to exist simply because of the inherent dehumanizing environment and structured hierarchy. Without reciprocal

vulnerability, addressing the unique student needs and hegemonic rhetoric will remain difficult. Furthermore, educational purposes are thwarted. Western education developed from this lens of hierarchy stemming from systemic and historic racism. As such, to address the problem of hegemony within the carceral educational setting, the pillar of “anti-racist” praxis is also needed.

Anti-Racist Praxis and Multiculturalism

Because the carceral setting is highly racialized, it requires a targeted identification and destruction of any racist paradigms specifically in the classroom and among higher education in prison advocates. Inherent racism is still as pervasive today as it was after slavery and during the Reconstruction and Civil Rights eras. Michelle Alexander, in her book *The New Jim Crow*, catalogs the historical development of “racialized social control” from slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow laws, through the structural mass incarceration system (16). Her extensive analysis reveals a systemic oppression and evolution of a racial caste system which has resulted in the incarceration of people of color comprising “56% of all incarcerated people in 2015” (NAACP). Even though African Americans make up 34% of the total population, African American men are five times as likely to be incarcerated than white men, and African American women are twice as likely to be incarcerated than white women (NAACP). Alexander goes on to address the problems of living in a *colorblind* society. She contends:

The deeply flawed nature of colorblindness, as a governing principle, is evidenced by the fact that the public consensus supporting mass incarceration is officially colorblind. It purports to see black and brown men not as black and brown, but simple men—raceless men—who have failed miserably to play by the rules the rest of us follow quite naturally.

The fact that so many black and brown men are rounded up for drug crimes that go largely ignored when committed by whites is unseen. Our collective colorblindness

prevents us from seeing this basic fact. Our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persist in society: the segregated, unequal schools, the segregated, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse—a public conversation that excludes beyond individuals to institutions and social arrangements. (241)

College-in-prison scholar Erin Castro presents an “Anti-racist praxis” that addresses some of the problems resulting in dehumanization and racist education that occur within the mass incarceration system. Because education has been founded primarily on a “white dominant” narrative, Castro argues,

Anti-racist praxis requires that we—as directors, instructors, supporters, and stakeholders of college-in-prison programs, recognize and call out patterns of racial subjugation that may appear fair or logical. As part of this work, it is on us to fortify the racially colorblind outcomes conversation with more meaningful and accurate descriptions of the power of college-in-prison, including the power to reduce racial inequality. (13)

With the acknowledgement of an inherently racist system, comes the responsibility for Christian educators to evaluate the extensive differences between non-incarcerated people’s understanding of systemic racism and the incarcerated students living within such a system. Alexander describes this in that, “the notion that a vast gulf exists between ‘criminals’ and those of us who have never served time in prison is a fiction created by the racial ideology that birthed mass incarceration, namely that there is something fundamentally wrong and morally inferior about ‘them’” (216). This directly contradicts a Christian’s understanding of the *imago Dei* and the transforming power of the gospel, that all human beings are in need of redemption. The results of sin and the complete distortion of the whole world necessitates a savior. Therefore, any attempt to separate oneself from another as superior either because of race or “criminal activity” opposes

the overarching message of the gospel. Destruction of systemic racism begins with first acknowledging as educators that racism still occurs, seeking to destroy it when found, and working toward bringing anti-racist practices into the classroom setting.

The primary goal of Castro's praxis relies on developing the knowledge of prison education as a "positive good" (13). Central to other anti-racist methods, these practices stimulate "social healing, civic engagement, and human flourishing" (13). Determining how to facilitate anti-racist practices in college prison programs centers on several key questions:

- How should college-in-prison programs function in the broader context of white supremacy?
- In what ways do college-in-prison programs tacitly endorse racial colorblindness and how can they work against it?
- How can college-in-prison programs contribute to a more robust and accurate understanding of measuring impact and experiences in a context of racial discrimination?
- If and to what extent do college-in-prison programs replicate racial bias and privilege, and how they can work against the forces of systemic racism? (13)

Asking difficult questions in order to challenge racism in positive ways that benefit incarcerated students should be a primary objective to developing a liberatory education.

Castro's primary target for advancing an "anti-racist praxis" moves beyond the most common primary motivation of higher education in prison, education as a means to reduce recidivism. She argues "when the primary purpose of higher education in prison is reduced recidivism, that stated purpose necessarily fuels a racially prejudicial system because college-in-prison programs must rely on mechanisms of the state to prove themselves worthy" (13). The

dominating focus on reduced recidivism only means to make students productive and this productivity is still rooted in a hegemonic system that seeks to deprive. Ultimately, by seeking reduced recidivism as the only goal in education and perpetuating this ideology as primary, educators can participate in the ongoing violence of the state against people of color (Castro 3). Castro concludes, “The language of anti-recidivism as the rationale for higher education in prison, thus, individualizes the deeply systemic problem of mass incarceration. One of the consequences of an individualizing narrative is the ability to narrow the scope of what is possible, of ultimately what is seen” (5). Moving beyond the language of recidivism then relies on building an anti-racist praxis which seeks not only individual but collective redemption and justice.

Educator and expert on “whiteness” studies Robin DiAngelo, situates an anti-racist education on the foundation of how white privilege has led to the pervasiveness of racism in America. The idea of an anti-racist education lies in the educational discoveries of white people developing “white racial literacy” for the purpose of becoming allies and helping to eradicate racism. The basic tenets of an anti-racist education understand that:

Racism exists today, in both traditional and modern forms. All members of this society have been socialized to participate in it. All white people benefit from racism, regardless of intentions. Our racial socialization occurred without our consent and doesn’t make us bad people. [And] we have to take responsibility for racism. (289)

Understanding and accepting these facts and taking action to change is the only way to begin the process of destroying hegemonic norms in the classroom. DiAngelo defines an anti-racist education as “an educational approach that goes beyond tolerating or celebrating racial diversity and addresses racism as a system of unequal power between whites and people of color” (290).

These norms are even more prevalent with incarcerated students whose lives intersect not only with systemic racism but also with the dehumanizing systemic oppression of mass incarceration.

Building an anti-racist education relies on crucial practices:

- Being willing to tolerate the discomfort associated with an honest appraisal and discussion of our internalized superiority and racial privilege.
- Challenging our own racial reality by acknowledging ourselves as racial beings with a particular and limited perspective on race.
- Attempting to understand the racial realities of people of color through authentic interaction rather than through the media or through unequal relationships.
- Taking action to address our own racism, the racism of whites, and the racism embedded in our institutions—e.g., get educated and act.
- Continually challenging our own socialization and investments in racism.
- Challenging the misinformation, we have learned about people of color.
- Striving for humility and being willing to not know.
- Following leadership on anti-racism from people of color.
- Educating ourselves about the history of race relations in our country.
- Building authentic cross-racial relationships.
- Becoming media literate and building the capacity to identify and resist racist images.
- Getting involved in organizations working for racial justice.
- Breaking the silence about race and racism with other whites. (291-292)

These factors apply to Christian educators and can be used to develop an anti-racist praxis in the classroom. Educational programs should be reliant on “liberatory frameworks that seek to raise

critical consciousness and cultivate humanization,” which identifies inherent racism intent on interrupting its power both individual and communally (Castro et. al. 29). Educators not only must work toward an anti-racist praxis but should comprehend the challenges related to various multicultural perspectives.

Though focused on culturally competent counseling, multiculturalism and social advocacy are important forces which “create space for counselors [or educators] to focus on cultural diversity, privilege, oppression, and the resilience strategies that clients [and students] have” (Hays and McLeod 2). Christian educators, though not professional counselors, are inherently “pastoral” in their role of shepherding students through education. Multicultural counseling competence can be adapted for Christian educators just as missionaries learn to modify culturally and contextualize for their ministry. Developing multicultural competence then, is a way to further enhance classroom learning that is designed to be liberatory. Neville et. al. explains that multicultural competence endeavors “to contextualize problems . . . consider social and other environmental causes of [people’s] problems, and to have increased empathy for [people] of color . . . and be more in tune with racial dynamics” (456). Understanding and applying multicultural competence results in positive social and behavioral shifts that occur both inside and outside the prison walls by participants in college programs. Baranger, Rousseau, Matrorilli, and Matesanz found that participation in higher education programs while in prison provided the “development of coping skills and [can] foster transformative self-inquiry and personal development” (510). Through this study, researchers discovered that participants “believed that learning how to become critical thinkers gave them confidence to take a more active role in their lives to overcome poverty, discrimination, and violence” (p. 494). Addressing

the multicultural issues of students along with situating the classroom for “anti-racist praxis” opens the gateway for addressing larger scale systemic oppression.

Critical educator Joe Kincheloe explains the necessity of multicultural competence in that, “[with]in critical pedagogy, teachers must not only understand subject matter in a multidimensional and sophisticated manner but must also be able in diverse settings to view such content from the vantage points of culturally and psychologically different students” (8). Relying on the pillar of “anti-racist praxis” and multicultural competence not only acknowledges the inherent problems of the system but seeks to destroy rhetoric that dehumanizes. Once conscientization occurs, the oppressed are enabled to move into more humanizing reflection and action. As Freire contends, this is accomplished as one embraces their identity as a culture-maker. Comprehending one’s culture and their participation in a multicultural environment, leads to creative acts that can continue the growth towards true liberation. Christian education then contains a vital component of this reflection and action in the discovery of one’s created image as a child of God, imprinted with the *imago Dei*.

Generative Culture-Making

Participation in culture as well as generating new culture with the intent to liberate concentrates first on understanding how cultures develop. Because students are incarcerated and participate within a specific oppressive culture, culture-making that is transformative becomes a place to experience liberatory education. Makoto Fujiumura explains that “cultures are not created overnight. We are affected by layers of experiences, personalities, and works of previous generations” (21). In order to become generative, one must practice reflection and action. Kincheloe describes critical pedagogy as “enacted through the use of generative themes to read the word and the world and the process of problem posing—generative themes involve the

educational use of issues that are central to students' lives as a grounding for the curriculum”

(10). This is the process of critical thinking which is one of the ultimate purposes of higher education. Fujimura goes on to describe that we know generativity by its opposite, degeneracy.

This is the state of loss, where positive and valuable qualities are absent. In other words, “what is generative is the opposite of degrading or limiting. It is constructive, expansive, affirming, growing beyond a mindset of scarcity” (22).

Freire calls the degenerate state “limit-situations” (76). In this sense, situational oppression invariably limits one’s ability to generate new culture or participate fully and equally within culture. He argues that to effectuate humanization, “it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which people are reduced to things” (76).

The prison system persists on the dehumanizing characteristics and activities that reduces incarcerated people to modern slaves of the state. However, people are not goods to be consumed or objects to be exploited but rather makers and participators in culture. This is a basic human right. Living with this understanding necessitates what Fujimura describes as living according to “generative principles” (24). This depends on a life of gratitude and stewardship in that “thinking and living [in ways] that are truly generative make possible works and movements that make our culture more humane and welcoming and that inspire us to be more fully human” (24).

Becoming more human is the key constituent in liberatory education as it applies to incarcerated students.

Christian author Andy Crouch proclaims that the ideas of generative themes and culture making are unique and inherent human characteristics. He contends that culture is ultimately the “relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it’s given to us and make something else” (23). This effort not only creates the world or defines the world, every human being is designed to make culture in and of itself. Crouch postulates that “the beginning of culture and the

beginning of humanity are one and the same because culture is what we were made to do” (36).

When this ability to participate in and generate new culture is forcefully detached from a human’s right, dehumanization and oppression occur. Humanity is reduced to animalistic instinctual habit and action where one is tamed and made to submit to the will of the oppressor. Prison is such an environment which purposefully removes these inherent human rights in the name of “rehabilitation.” Freire uses the concept of *naming* and *reclaiming* for those who have been denied the basic right to “speak their word” (61). As one names and reclaims their own world, they construct a new culture, one that is inherently humanizing. For Christian educators this can simply begin with the language one uses to describe incarcerated students. For incarcerated students, these human efforts to generate new culture become liberatory as they build a world within a world, a place of safety and respite for learning and freedom, both individually and communally.

Freire understood becoming a culture-maker as the ultimate humanizing action. When one is oppressed, they lack the knowledge of their own ability to be a participant within the culture by making new culture. Freire expresses the concept this way: “To exist, humanely, is to *name* the world, to change it” (61). This is a generative process balanced between action and reflection. Reflection uncovers the world of the oppressed as part of history, part of a culture. In other words, they “discover each other to be ‘in a situation’” (Freire 82). By *emerging* from their *submersion*, the *conscientization* or awareness reveals both a specific culture with which one is participatory, and the liberation to discover the ability to generate new themes or become a culture-maker.

Within education, “generation” and constructing new culture centers on writing that both expresses and instructs. It is through this type of writing that one is connected to the past,

present, and future spaces simultaneously. As one writes, they participate in a shared cultural history and a future communal possibility (Yagelski). This revelation ultimately leads to a humanizing awareness and power to transform. Creating a liberatory methodology that overcomes the problems of lack of political purpose coupled with personal and communal awareness, dehumanizing systems, dominant culture pedagogy, and prison educational barriers requires generative narratives in imaginative spaces, “spaces for the transmission of our ideas” (hooks 13). For hooks, this occurs through both speaking and writing. Students become culture-makers through liberatory writing, writing that makes this liberation possible.

Chapter IV: Liberatory Education Through Writing

The oppressed, in order to become free, also need a theory of action.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Within a higher education program, writing is the most obvious vehicle with which to uphold the framework pillars. Based on James Britton position on the invention process of writing, Jane Lauer argues that “writing itself is heuristic” (Lauer 86). Rather than writing solely as a skill, Lauer defines heuristics as the “modifiable strategies or plans that serve as guides in creative processes. Writing heuristics try to prompt thinking, intuition, memory, inquiry, and imagination without controlling the writer’s strategies, which can be taught” (154). With this perspective then, three specific components encompass how writing can be used for liberatory purposes. *Writing as space* provides the physical as well as the psychological place for students to build creative power. *Writing as praxis* becomes transformative as students process the world around them while at the same time pursuing deeper and more holistic ways of living in the world. Finally, *writing as process* moves students through the educational discourse spaces with fluidity, creating both individual and communal learning opportunities.

Writing as Space

Writing creates a space to explore, evaluate, and exchange oppressive norms for freedoms that work to liberate education and the pursuit of knowledge. Space is an important concept in the discussion of prison education because physically, students are trapped within spaces of confinement and restriction. Every aspect of an incarcerated student’s life is controlled by space. However, Patrick Berry examines how his incarcerated students created a “third space” of existence through their writing beyond the real “institutional worlds and personal agency” and

a re-imagined space “that affords them a greater sense of agency” (39). This “third space” provided a way for incarcerated students to not just write about their literal confined space but re-imagine prison as a space with transformational possibilities both institutionally and communally. One example explains how Berry witnessed the development of this “third space” through the writing assignments themselves, the growth of individual writers, and the development of skill. Berry notes:

I saw literacy narratives that took place off the page, bound by memory, hope, and compassion. This attention to the *contextual* now— that is, those classroom spaces wherein students use writing to share their stories with others—is a payoff in and of itself . . . [Furthermore,] rather than simply forgetting about the all-too-real material conditions in which they lived, students in my class began to reimagine literacy and, more broadly, education, in prison. They become mindful of pedagogical problems with the prison, wrote about them, and began to develop proposals, poems, and essays that would be shared with prison administration. The entire activity of writing, from inspiration to sharing the work, contains space of possibility where what was lost in some way can be regained, re-told for the purpose of growth and knowledge. (38)

Rather than seeing only the negative effects of the carceral space and how these affect a student’s ability, writing can provide a space or “crossroad,” “where differences intersect and communicate” (Meachum 188). In discussing the use of spoken word as an ideological literacy practice, Desai and Marsh argue at the “crossroads,” students find a space to “manipulate language and where students are encouraged to use expressive forms not often found in more conventional venues” (76). Within the carceral space, the college classroom serves as that “crossroad” with its focus on writing as central to both information processing and dialogical

expression. Life intersects among home, prison, and classroom. Even though students cannot leave the prison, even the existent and available physical differences of the classroom from the rest of the prison setting such as technologies, access to outsider interactions, or something as simple as sitting in a carpeted room, affect the liberatory nature of writing. Berry argues through his research on literacy narratives in carceral spaces, that “we cannot ignore the situated ways in which incarcerated writers compose within and across carceral spaces, for it is through such accounts that we can see efforts to disrupt the totalizing rhetoric of the prison-industrial complex” (23). The intersections of these spaces matter because the lives of the students matter.

Transformation of the mind and heart occurs when writing as a space embodies liberation and critical development. Within the space, students are empowered to write metamorphically. In describing the liberatory space of writing Amy Lee contends:

Writing is one of our most powerful and effective processes for unpacking, and rearticulating this “common sense” as a social construction, as “the political” . . . In writing we set down and are made to represent many of the assumptions, values, ideas that inform our everyday thinking about the world, but that might otherwise go un-noted, un-acknowledged. In reading these texts critically, the writer and readers can make visible the unspoken, the invisible—as they impact the form of the text as well as the ideas and relations represented by it. A writing class, then, might aim to make visible the cultural and political work of our reading and writing practices. Ideally we are working toward revision. (10)

Writing as a space with liberatory purpose also becomes the space where community building, identity development, and cognitive liberation can occur (Smith). Through personal reflection of his time as a writing teacher in a prison program, Smith explores “how we

[educators] might be able to create more holistic and humane educational infrastructures in incarcerated spaces, programs that move beyond instrumentalism and vocational preparation and instead toward cognitive liberation and a reclamation of human dignity” (81). The practice of writing within a space that offers freedom to grow and change echoes Cooper’s sentiment: “To be human is to know oneself, to read one’s world, to think and act critically” (68). Space allows for the convergence of processing, expression, and sharing that is both personal and communal. As Freire notes, space for the process of continually “becoming” is necessary in order to overcome oppressive structures (152). Though higher education in prison seeks to educate toward both self-determination and communal purpose, writing becomes the space with which to sort out the world of knowledge, question and inquiry, and generate new themes of learning. Writing in a transformative space as an ontological act is the medium to understand our humanity on a deeper level (Yagelski). It is within this powerful space of reshaping that the practice of writing generates literal change.

Writing as Praxis

Writing is not only a space of genesis and transformative creative power, but writing can be in and of itself transformative praxis. Freire notes, “The peasants now see themselves as transformers of reality (previously a mysterious entity) through their creative labor. They discover that—as men—they can no longer continue to be ‘things’ possessed by others” (142). Writing as the source of this creative labor, though still entrapped by an oppressive system, can liberate the mind, administer healing for the self-loathing and self-depreciation that occurs as a result of the dehumanization process in prison, and ultimately provide a soul-guide back to the innate understanding as a human created in God’s image. The practice of writing is generative when one discovers their true humanity, even if it has been concealed by oppression. Christians

believe that it is through God's image one practices creativity, growth, and flourishing. In a prison classroom, critical Christian educators model these liberating practices while simultaneously participating in them. The modeling of critical praxis and invitation to collaborative learning through writing provides the critical application in one's life. It is restorative in nature.

Writing as praxis is ontological rather than merely teleologically text driven (Yagelski). Yagelski argues for writing as praxis that goes beyond productive, communicative, and constructive goals in the classroom. Though important parts of the writing process, these objectives are both "limited and limiting" (190). Writing teleologically does not have the transformative power to engage the world around the writer in ways that touch the soul, personally and collectively. In fact, it stifles growth when the writer is subject to the oppressive and rigid structure of output only. Yagelski offers instead, "writing as a way to understand ourselves and the world we share, as a way of living lives more fully . . . as a way of being in the world, as an act of living . . . [as] a step toward living together more peacefully, more humanely" (190). Ultimately, this reflection and action through writing as praxis upon the world empowers one to transform it (Freire). Writing helps claim control of life by understanding self and community which for incarcerated students are necessary humanizing practices.

Berry discusses literacy narratives within the prison classroom space and argues "that writing and the sharing of writing are valuable in and of themselves. That is, reading and writing construct a *contextual now* that we all can inhabit" (15). Drawing from Yagelski, Berry defines the *contextual now* as "those acts of composing and becoming that lead to deeper engagement with the world and one's place in it as well as to describe the value of being present" (15). Within the carceral setting, this is vital for students. The power of the narrative provides the

space and practice to reimagine individual worlds of existence as well as the world surrounding them within the prison. Reimagination through story begins by the telling process but culminates in the activity of reshaping. By generating liberatory themes, incarcerated students reconstruct a culture in which they are empowered to live humanized, though the world around them dictates otherwise. Essentially, the power for liberation begins as one practices culture-making through writing.

Writing as Process

Two applications can guide the specific writing process in a prison college program that strives for liberatory and humanizing purposes. Narrative storytelling drawn from Narrative counseling therapy theories and technique provide a framework and afford the opportunities to generate new narratives by the telling and re-telling of stories. Everyone needs to tell their story, and the stories we tell and the stories we re-tell move us toward liberatory purpose. Generating narrative is primarily an individual act though it acknowledges the surrounding community's role in one's personal story. More communally, writing across the disciplines with a focus on *writing-transfer* focuses on increasing skill and ability in writing that produces and generates new knowledge. This writing takes place in community between students and educators dependent on the discourse community moving with liberatory purpose.

Narrative Therapy Techniques

Narrative therapy works from a strengths-based perspective for the task of destructing harmful and hurtful stories in effort to reconstruct toward a more productive life. It offers a unique counseling approach that minimizes disparities between counselor and counselee by providing a non-judgmental foundation to explore one's life stories. This echoes critical teaching methods that rely on mutuality and vulnerability between teacher-student and student-teacher.

The focus on personal stories and life skills enable participants to identify narrow definitions of past stories, deconstruct harmful metaphors, and work towards reconstruction of new and positive narratives. The specific methodological structure operates in stages: story-telling, naming, problem deconstruction, remembering, and re-telling the stories of one's life (Payne). The counselor maintains a respectful and non-judgmental demeanor in order to provide a safe location for exploration. In the first stage, story-telling, the client begins telling their story. This is referred to as the "problem-saturated description" which "embodies the person's present 'dominant story' of their life" (Payne). The naming stage culminates with the client and help of the counselor if needed, specifically naming the prominent problem/s which define and externalize them outside the person. By utilizing "externalizing language" a person's identity is separated from their problems in order to identify them as products of a situation rather than defects. Examples of externalizing language focus on giving specific names to the problems, "frustration invading your quiet times" instead of "I was frustrated" or "you were dominated by a belief that violence is acceptable" rather than "I believed violence is acceptable" (Payne) In the deconstruction phase, the counselor centers discussion on contradictions to the "problem-saturated description." The client is then invited to process the wider story of experience and gain a new understanding from this lens. Through the remembering phase, clients expand their memories to include positive components of their story while isolating hurtful or harmful people and situations. The final stage, re-telling, moves the client to generate new narratives and share them within a communal setting.

Adapting Narrative therapy techniques for use in the classroom through writing requires educators to first address significant factors that affect students, including the stigmatization of incarcerated people and the systemic historic Westernized effects of colonialization and how

these relate to the primary prison demographic. Challenges related to multiculturalism are not unique to the field of counseling. Contending with the diverse social and cultural issues is an ever increasing need in higher education settings as well. Specifically, Akinyela (2014) posits that “cultural democracy” serves as the best articulation of multicultural social justice. He defines “cultural democracy” as an ideology valuing the personal communication of those outside the dominant culture, to remain connected to their individual culture and language as a viable expression. The traditional methods of inclusion within the either therapeutic community on a college campus often perpetuate the colonialization of a hegemonic system. Rather than simply including other cultures in participation, “cultural democracy” de-colonizes as people “reclaim their own voices and speak their own special truths about therapy and healing . . . our own voices and our own practices are mediated through our own traditional cultures” (48). Akinyela contends therapy, particularly Narrative therapy, should instead understand and include the value of indigenous voices in the process of healing in order to promote this “cultural democracy.” This provides “healing methods to our own communities that are received as familiar and authentic” (48). This is especially helpful in the classroom setting for the incarcerated students with unique multicultural issues that include effects from systemic racism, prejudice, and stigmatization.

Writing as a narrative therapeutic process has been used in various prison settings toward a humanizing purpose whether in a formal writing courses or other prison programs. Ross evaluates narrative writing in a women’s prison through a non-profit organization. The incarcerated participants experienced several beneficial outcomes such as “insights into factors that lead to incarceration, comfort with selves and better ability to express themselves, restorative justice . . . [and] better relationships” (Ross 184). Ross notes that the narrative writing

provided significant psychological benefits through the creative, confessional, and restorative nature of the program (191). Beyond individual purpose, narrative writing offers communal benefits especially in a prison setting. Smith comments on his experience as a writing instructor in a prison program and how the students' writing becomes a "means of personal liberation and reclamation of dignity" (96). His reflections highlight the interrelatedness between teacher and student that occurs through critical practices as teacher and student explore the liberatory nature of education and writing together.

Utilizing narrative therapy writing techniques in the prison classroom provide a way for students to process past traumatic experiences towards healing. Yue Gu argues,

The process of healing through life writing can occur in the classroom setting as well as the clinical setting, in which the teacher functions as an active facilitator who not only provides an environment of openness and empathy but also guides students to explore, negotiate, and re-account their stories. (481)

Other advocates such as Michelle MacCurdy, echo Gu in that life writing or the use of narrative writing in the college classroom "demonstrate[s] clearly how life writing can be a healing activity in which authors may experience emotional behavioral changes" (Gu 482). These lead to a renewed sense of wholeness (MacCurdy 197). In Gu's own research conducted while teaching a nonfiction Creative Writing course he notes regarding the vulnerability experienced among students while participating in life writing activities, "students reported an increased willingness to expose themselves, to write about feelings and emotions that they tended to conceal in the past, and to re-validate themselves as unique and valuable human beings" (482). This is especially important within the prison college classroom which can exist as a space for liberatory practice.

The teaching of writing goes hand in hand with writing as process towards liberatory purposes. After conducting a creative writing course in Attica Correctional Facility, Doran Larson reflects on the emotional development of the students that had less to do with the actual writing content and more to do with environmental factors inside the classroom. Larson explains that “the problems [students] faced in keeping the sense of the whole in their minds, and in seeing their efforts to completion, were shaped less by their disparate experiences as writers than symptomatic of their common experience of incarceration” (4). It was the results of a humanizing pedagogy centering on the consistency of the writing course, “emotional relief and reassurances through valuable feedback,” and a supportive environment to learn that improved the students writing as much as gaining new knowledge and vocabulary (Larson 5). For the students generating liberatory narrative, led them to engage within their limited prison context with greater issues facing the entire prison system. Their writing moved outward to communal purposes because of the emotional support inside the classroom.

Teaching Writing and Writing Transfer

Moving into more specific writing as process applications, incarcerated students often arrive to the college classroom with serious practical challenges that could range from educational gaps related to their incarceration to the oppressive environment in which we are asking them to learn. Ponsot and Deen offer insights on new college writers that are helpful in thinking about how writing as process could be affected in the carceral space, while avoiding traditional discriminatory language aimed at “remediation” (Rose 381). Describing Rokas theory on modes of rhetoric, Ponsot and Deen explain that “abstract and concrete are polar powers that interplay in thinking and writing . . . we can teach writing as an art, teach it inductively to a community of individual writers, and give a course of writing an intellectual structure” (Ponsot

and Deen 182). These “polar powers” exist also between teacher and student where initially, the teacher possesses the abstract and the student the concrete. Concrete structure determined through each unique writer’s experience or perspective. They postulate that new or “green” writers do not “recognize that one has to *give* a structure to writing” (188). Over time, and through concrete structural mimicry, the student absorbs the abstract because they are “embodying” them (189). Critical thinking develops as a result of writing through practice that is both individual and communal (183). Through Ponsot and Deen’s methodology, they argue that rather than the traditional “banking” model of education, the practical work of writing together enables students to “becom[e] more individual, realiz[e] their identities. And that is, finally, what brings them to consciousness” (191). This ultimately is the goal of both critical pedagogy as well as writing as a process for liberation.

Writing for the purpose of liberatory education is not limited to required composition courses but should encompass every course and every class. Within the NCFMP, students are asked to produce writing projects which meet the same criteria as on-campus students: to develop critical thinking skills, learn to write effectively, and foster appropriate decision making based on biblical principles (The Writing Center Southeastern). As such, every classroom should be a writing classroom. Drawing from frameworks for writing in the disciplines (WID) and teaching for *transfer writing* enables those outside the English fields to incorporate writing that supports liberatory purposes. Carter argues that the “learning [in WID] is largely social; learning is an act of being socialized into disciplines . . . writing to learn by learning to write in the disciplines” (280). Teachers aim not to teach a student to engage one particular discourse community but rather participate in whatever discourse community is required as part of their educational journey. In this way, as Carter et al. suggests, we are teaching students to “grow as

participants (emphasis mine) in the ways of knowing of their disciplines” (299). This is a critical component for incarcerated students of the NCFMP who must constantly balance between two differing cultures, prison and the college classroom, oppressive systems and liberatory spaces of learning. The differences required to “code-switch” whether through communication variables or physical setting, require an educational purpose that seeks to afford a space where liberatory practices can enable this fluidity and critical thinking. Blake et al. echoes these same ideas by promoting “writing transfer” as teaching students to “repurpose, or transfer, writing knowledge and practice for use in many writing contexts” (42). They argue three primary components promote transfer:

- 1) A conceptual vocabulary . . . for articulating writing knowledge.
- 2) An ability to draw on that knowledge to frame new writing tasks in multiple contexts.
- 3) Access to [various] writing contexts. (43)

These lead to one primary result, “a sense of agency” that is both “specific *and* contextual” (43). Writing in the disciplines using transfer through writing techniques can better equip students not only in production but participation within the various discourse communities. Incarcerated students differ from on-campus students in that they operate in competing cultures that determine their self-worth and challenge their identity as humans. As such, the ability to move fluidly between these structures can be promoted by how one transfers information and communicates between the carceral space and college classroom. It is the educators’ role to build confidence and employ teaching that both guides and encourages students to learn appropriate and necessary discourse language. Students can never separate themselves from the carceral culture. Yet, their ability to “code-switch” between the classroom and prison setting, relies on effective transfer skills. In this way, students participate in building community both in the larger academic

discourse setting as well as their personal and communal spaces in prison. This then serves to enhance the liberatory and humanizing purposes of education.

These are vital elements for teaching writing as a space, praxis, and process that awakens consciousness towards more liberatory pedagogy. The space to reflect, imagine, and create through writing must motivate Christian educators “from [simply] claiming a pedagogy. We must move to reflecting on the challenges and possibilities of actualizing it. For it is not enough to *have* visions, we need also to consider the contexts and conditions that foster or constrain our efforts to *realize* them” (Lee 5). Writing as space opens the possibilities for growth both in and through specific humanizing spaces. Writing as praxis “is more than communication. It is a vehicle for sustained inquiry into our experiences, a means of understanding who we are. Ultimately, writing is a deeply human act that can help us better understand what it means to be human” (193). Once one begins to more fully develop their comprehension of their humanity as it is expressed individually and communally, this leads to communicating in ways that are deeply freeing. When writers participate in purposeful writing process for the sake of building liberatory education, writing becomes a “meaning-constructing activity” (Gu 479). It is by nature generative which ultimately serves the purpose of humanization and liberatory education.

Chapter V: Discussion

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world: it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people.

—Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In applying this theory of critical pedagogy through writing as a method for generating liberatory and humanizing education, several implications should be addressed. First, as Christian educators, understanding the uniqueness of teaching students who are incarcerated must drive how teaching is contextualized. Second, because education is within a specific system of historic oppression and dehumanization, the language used by educators communicates a clear message that is either oppressive and dehumanizing or liberatory and humanizing. Third, differences between nonincarcerated and incarcerated people could affect the applications of a liberatory methodology. Finally, internalized prejudice and bias might continue hegemonic rhetoric and oppressive systems.

The gospel is the primary message that drives a Christian education. The underlying mission of the college revolves around preparing students to go into the world and fulfill the Great Commission. This requirement is another way in which Christian educators seek to prepare students for a greater calling and purpose in life. Their professed mission is “to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by equipping students to serve the church and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)” (SEBTS.edu). What this means practically is that education is not only founded on Christian principles but that every classroom is a “Great Commission classroom.” Professors seek to enable students for future work in the world that prepares them to both live

out and share the gospel. Part of the education within the classroom demonstrates the unique role professors have in modeling for and teaching students how to contextualize. This is important to Christians living in among people that have different worldviews, cultures, and ethnicities. Contextualization seeks to apply a message, namely the gospel, to every unique situation one encounters. How this is communicated and the advancement of a specific mission must also be contextual for the situation in which students are being asked to “go.” Like the concept of enculturation, it is the application of a different form in a different setting, culture, or environment. Professors both teach students in the college how to contextualize the gospel message and engagement of the world while simultaneously modeling this contextualization by adapting their message or teaching for the unique needs of the students. Adaptation does not mean haphazardly changing the curriculum, moving beyond the core values of higher education, or altering courses away from the school’s mission of education. However, every professor adjusts each course, each semester, as needed for each group of unique students. What is important here is the understanding that students come to the college from all walks of life, from various distinct environments or cultures. Comprehending this and having the ability for modification is part of the basic requirements for educators. Adaptation and constant reevaluation are in fact a part of applying critical thinking and a necessity for learning. Moving inside the carceral space as the location and environment in which the students of the NCFMP learn requires the same evaluation and revaluation that educators carry out every new semester. In other words, courses offered to incarcerated students must be evaluated for the messages they send through their teaching, the language they use to communicate, and tailored to meet the specific needs of incarcerated students while at the same time ensuring education is both

humanizing and liberatory. This type of contextualization is different than how an educator might adapt and contextualize in an on-campus course.

The system in which incarcerated students live and learn, is profoundly dehumanizing. As such, Christians educators must challenge some of the basic dehumanizing structures that continue to perpetuate a horrific system of oppression. When Christians succumb to using dehumanizing language, using the same labels as the system uses for incarcerated people, it mocks the gospel and perpetuates the lie that these human beings are unworthy or unable to be redeemed. Using dehumanizing language such as inmate, offender, or convict, does not further the call to love nor does it speak to the immense power of the God Christians claim to serve. Humanity was created in God's image and we scorn this image when we steal one's humanity simply by the words we choose. Because the system strategically uses this language to define, it is this very reason why Christians can and should stand in opposition to direct systemic acts of dehumanization. Scripture teaches every human being is unable to be free from the distortion of sin. But freedom is available through the blood of Christ. When the Pharisees dragged the woman who had been caught in adultery before Jesus, he did not call her an adulterer. He called her "woman." One of the most basic ways in which Christian educators must bring humanizing acts to engage in liberatory education within a prison, is refusing to accept the systemic dehumanizing language. This needs no apology to the system as even those who work within the system are humans as well. Christian educators are not overlooking a person's crime, pardoning their sentence, or claiming a person should not be required to pay for their crime within the criminal justice system of the nation. They are simply following through with the message that they preach and live by. Every human being is precious to God, created in God's image, and worthy of love. The students in the NCFMP deserve this love because they are people too.

Though incarcerated students and Christian educators are united by and in the same humanity, there are also important differences that affect providing a liberatory education. Incarcerated students live within the confines of a place that removes them from society, philosophically rejects their citizenship, and dehumanizes their very lives. Not only is the physical space important to comprehend, the emotional and psychological space matters as well. Christian educators in the NCFMP teach behind prison walls yet they leave the prison each day, returning to a normal life as a full participant and citizen. In fact, most of those working within the prison educational setting do not know anyone personally who has been or is incarcerated. Beyond that, most will not ever be incarcerated themselves (Slater). Incarcerated students are limited as to how education can become a liberatory process. Scholar and incarcerated student Andra Slater, echoes the need for increasing awareness of significant differences within prison education:

The way that non-incarcerated people see and understand prisons, then, even the most enlightened among them, may uncritically bring with them perceptions and stereotypes about who inhabits these spaces. They may believe that incarcerated people, even if implicated in a discriminatory system of mass incarceration, are not smart, let alone, intellectual. Notions of race, ethnicity, and class likely tie into why educators underestimate the intellect of incarcerated minority students. (25)

This is an immense challenge when discussing differences between educators and incarcerated students and how these differences may affect learning and a humanizing education.

Underestimating students' abilities directly correlates with decreased performance requirements for completing college-level work. These could include things such as "dumbing down" assignments, failing to insist on appropriate and consistent academic discourse requirements, or

failing to contextualize material and curriculum that seeks to fulfill higher learning and specific institutional goals.

Though the classroom space exists as a separate place where students are empowered to learn, without discernment and preparation, instructors or other administrative staff may unwilling bring their own misconceptions into the classroom. This in turn prevents the type of learning that is liberatory and humanizing. One common misconception may be the idea that these student's background has stunted their learning so that they enter the college classroom operating at a lower level of educational ability than "normal" students. Though incarcerated students may begin programs such as the NCFMP with learning challenges due to gaps in education, the language of remediation as a result of illiteracy perpetuate oppressive norms rather than work toward a liberatory education. Mike Rose argues that when educators focus on terms like "skill" or "remediation" especially as it relates to writing instruction in college, it "reveals a reductive, fundamentally behaviorist model of development that use of written language, a problematic definition of writing, and an inaccurate assessment of student ability and need" (381). He cautions that until educators "rethink it, we will misrepresent the nature of writing, misjudge our students' problems, and miss any chance to effect a true curricular change that will situate writing firmly in the undergraduate curriculum" (382). Intersecting critical pedagogy and humanizing writing then focuses on "a pedagogy of reciprocity" that, provides an educational environment in which everyone is both teacher and learner; by empowering students as teachers with their own base of knowledge and experience, and by giving them the responsibility of communicating this knowledge effectively to others within a participatory learning environment, programs can create classrooms that give students both the tools for literacy and the reasons and desire to use them. (Lawston).

Rethinking how we teach writing especially as it relates to prison education necessitates redefining the dominant narrative of what is “normal” against the theoretical framework of liberatory education.

Another misconception is the idea that incarceration itself affects one’s ability to learn. This is mitigated by the fact observed by some scholars on prison education that most educators experience the “wow factor” once they begin interacting with and teaching incarcerated students (Slater). Slater describes the phenomenon:

The assumption that we are in some way inadequate will affect your engagements with us. You may tend to take a less rigorous approach in providing instruction. You may uncritically project your ignorance upon us because you haven’t acknowledged your own biases. In order to authentically teach and learn within these spaces, I encourage prison educators to critically reflect upon their “Wow!” moments and how it might feel to witness these expressions as an incarcerated student. (25)

Christian educators especially need this type of evaluation in order to truly see their students as fully human so that the ways in which they teach and interact do not contradict the desire to truly love. Reflecting on one’s perception of incarceration both systemically and individually offers educators a new perspective for seeing how their interactions with students could either be life-giving or life-taking. For people incarcerated, they will feel the difference on a deeper level simply because of the oppressive system in which they must live results in extreme loneliness, low self-worth, and self-deprecation.

An additional barrier to liberatory education is the misconception that prison culture can be laid aside when students enter the classroom. Just as on-campus students are expected to arrive in the classroom ready and willing to learn, professors might falsely believe that

incarcerated students should aim towards this as well. However, the prison culture and complex issues surrounding incarcerated students is vastly different than non-incarcerated students. When students arrive in the classroom or even sit down to study in another location inside the prison, they can never escape the emotional and psychological realities of being incarcerated. Larson notes, “each day is a challenge to [incarcerated people’s] skills in physical and psychological defense. Prisons are horribly loud environments, full of unceasing talk, bells, [and] shouting” (5). These components challenge the way in which students learn and the effectiveness of teaching methodology.

Furthermore, professors might carry internalized bias and prejudice into the prison unidentified and unnoticed. Whether this is inherent and unidentified racism or prejudice against incarcerated people because of criminal activity, educators must reflect on these deeper issues of heart before teaching inside a prison classroom. Again Slater explains:

It has been my experience that prison educators share some common characteristics. Most often they are white, politically liberal, and come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Naturally, they enter the prison with a set of assumptions and must adjust to this setting and its residents. Many come from a university, a predominantly white space, to the prison, a predominantly black and brown space (with the notable exception of people who are in positions of power). Upon entering prisons, white prison educators come into contact with people and communities of color who have radically different backgrounds than their own. I wonder if they have ever grappled with their own deeply held ideas and assumptions about those of us who are incarcerated. I am not sure if prison educators wrestle with coming into this environment or if they reflect upon their own preconceptions about who we are. When witnessing their consistent moments of surprise,

I am inclined to think that they don't. I encourage prison educators to take a thoughtful look inward and reflect upon the implicit biases that they bring into the prison. (25)

Though most Christian educators are not “politically liberal,” Slater’s critique is necessary considering the faculty of most Christian colleges are still predominately white. Unless educators assess and critique the ways their inherited racism or prejudice against incarcerated people might be affecting the ways in which they teach, liberatory education is not possible. Lee argues, “hegemony is working best precisely where we begin to perceive the world as given, natural, or just common sense” (9). Developing multicultural perspectives and building an “anti-racist praxis” can work to destroy internal and external bias that affect classroom learning and instruction.

One other possible misconception is the false perception that students have similar types of boundaries for learning and growth as non-incarcerated students. Brawn argues that lack of access to information directly affects the effectiveness and potential for a critical education. He notes:

The central tenets of critical pedagogy are challenged in prison spaces because these classrooms are enwrapped within a network of power imbalance and control . . .

Information in prison is provided to us as it is deemed necessary by authorities in charge of the facility. As one can imagine, living in this kind of informational vacuum can be very frustrating. Unintentionally replicating this power dynamic in the classroom creates an oppressive space that works against the spirit of critical pedagogy. (21)

If access to information that is need to reflect critically is unavailable to incarcerated students, then their ability for consciousness raising is severely restricted. To counter this naturally occurring oppression within the prison setting, educators critique both internally and externally

while at the same time empowering students with a “sense of agency” that allows for truly liberatory practices (Brawn 22).

Another example of the misconception of similar learning boundaries analyzes variances between on-campus Writing Center Consultants and incarcerated Writing Center Consultants. Recently, the NCFMP began its own Writing Center in the prison which utilizes incarcerated students as consultants. The two Writing Centers work in conjunction to provide feedback and critical review for incarcerated students. Their roles are similar but in major ways intrinsically contrastive to that of on-campus Writing Center consultants. The incarcerated Writing Center consultants live with the students they work with twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This role varies from on-campus consultants who have the boundary of returning home after consultations and time to work on their own school work. With appropriate boundaries, incarcerated consultants are available to their fellow students in an ongoing basis because they live and study together. This example reveals that care must be taken to ensure incarcerated students both anticipate the needs of other students in applying a critical praxis and simultaneously protect themselves from intrusive learning environments that may affect learning and further dehumanizes.

There are several liberatory potentials in seeking to apply a critical pedagogy that humanizes while addressing the challenging implications. When Christian educators contextualize material and message for the uniqueness of the students and space, students stand to gain new knowledge while at the same time experiencing a consciousness raising that can be healing and restorative. By addressing and refusing to participate in the historically oppressive and dehumanizing system simply by the language educators choose to use, students do not encounter repeated forms of dehumanization. This communicates the Christian message of love

and enables reciprocity and vulnerability in ways that build community and generate new culture. Seeking to learn from the inherent differences between incarcerated and non-incarcerated people towards the goal of liberatory education, becomes a humanizing act instead of one that fails to identify resultant challenges. Christian educators that seek to destroy internalized prejudice and bias, directly challenge existent hegemonic rhetoric and oppressive systems.

The most obvious future research needs include undergoing and completing the qualitative analysis. The research should seek to determine incarcerated students' perceptions of the overall program as they relate to the current pedagogical methods employed by professors and the application potential of the theoretical framework. Research should be guided toward the three intersections presented in this paper: critical praxis, writing instruction, and humanization. Obtaining the voice of the students themselves could reveal further constructions that are not challenged by this theory. Additionally, the research could uncover whether this theoretical Christian framework has potential to provide a liberatory education through writing that is both redemptive and communal.

Conclusion

Christian educators stand poised to facilitate a balance between love and justice, restoration and healing, in ways others cannot. By balancing critical pedagogical instruction and enabling students in community to generate redemptive liberatory narratives through writing, humanity can be restored. This thesis presents a theoretical framework for a critical pedagogical methodology which relies on the pillars of Liberation theology, critical pedagogy, an anti-racist and multicultural praxis, and generative culture-making. Writing is not only foundational to the educational model but can introduce restorative and political objectives. Challenging potential internal and external oppressive structures and systems that hinder Christian college-in-prison program goals relies on internal and external reflection and purposeful action.

Students and professors, administrators, Writing Center consultants, and all others that interact with the NCFMP have one vital thing in common, their humanity. As humans sharing life together in a specific space and time, how that humanity is reflected in the classroom is essential to a critical education. As Christians, honoring the *imago Dei* in those around us is part of understanding and living out the gospel. Just as Jesus loved and ministered to the hurting and oppressed, Christians are called to the same life. John reminds believers that they will be known by their love. Love entails action. As Freire defended, “dialogical cultural action does not have as its aim the disappearance of the disappearance of the permanence-change dialectic . . . it aims, rather at surmounting the antagonistic contradictions of the social structure, thereby achieving the liberation of human beings” (152). When Christian educators seek not only higher educational purposes but strategically confront the political systems through “collective mobilization and intellectual autonomy,” love and justice come together in ways that secular education cannot connect (Erzen). Liberatory education humanizes through critical praxis and

writing that heals and restores. Perhaps this liberation is best articulated by one who may never be free from prison, yet this generative form of writing opens the door for his full participation in humanity.

Readin', Writin', 'Rithmetic

Readin', Writin', 'Rithmetic
 This'll be fun so watch for the trick!
 Been readin' these books for 16 years
 More words, different meanings, same old fears
 "I know now nothing save for the fact of my ignorance"
 Something Socrates said, in a toga – no pants!
 Got a lifetime to go, so what to read next?
 Grisham, Patterson, or Dutch Part 6?
 Well, if my ignorance is all I know
 Let me open up my Qur'an and turn off the radio
 Surah 2 and verse 62
 Have a few good words to benefit you
 "Those who believe in God and have good faith
 Will receive their reward" in a heavenly place
 And is that a Bible over there open quite wide?
 Does that say Hebrews 13 with verse 3 on the side?
 "Remember the prisoners as if you were one too"
 Do you see sincerity in me like I see it in you?
 I think about these things and many others
 I think about New Zealand, heartbroken for my sisters and brothers
 I need more paper now, not 'cause I'm petty
 These pages, stained by my tears, are getting quite heavy
 I wanna write more but I need some strength
 I need to know why I'm writing at length
 Do I write for the love of an audience abroad?
 Do I write for my scholarship and tuition cost?
 I have talents that can take the world by storm
 So watch me gain my freedom and embarrass the norm
 Funny thing, that freedom; is it closer today?
 Am I going home now? Am I one poem away?
 Hate to burst your bubble but freedom's an illusion
 It's a foolery of the mind, like wall-eyed vision
 Listen to what Rousseau had once claimed:
 "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains."
 So even if I'm free and I'm still in chains
 With my readin', writin', 'rithmetic, what have I gained?

—R. O.

Educational Feelings (Knowledge, Writing, & Freedom)

I feel like knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is the key
To strengthening the weak, so I seek
And then speak or write about it
Because learning and the expressing it makes me free
My past consisted of different forms of recreation
That kept me in the system, and on years of probation
My medication was everything but an education
But after further investigation
I came to the realization that my life is the education
Everyday new things are learned; it is what we call knowledge
Which is wisdom, or the academics of philosophy
I feel like knowledge is there, but is always lost to me
Maybe because there is so much, that comes at one main velocity
So when I write it is never from clear understanding from the mind
Which is designed, in this point of time
To dissect, relate, and then imitate
With formulations written to procreate
What is learned from my education
But I stay stuck in a state of procrastination and hesitation
Because I am confined to a prison away from loved ones
And as bad as I miss them, and want to see them
I am not sure of how or what of knowledge and writing
Will grant me freedom
But I am human, and as long as I am breathing
I will keep reading, writing, and seeking
“knowledge”
Because it has meaning and reason
Which just might be my freedom...

Darrell J Lavine

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