

HOW TEACHERS PERCEIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

FACILITIES: CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study was to understand teachers' perspectives of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities. This information is valuable in assessing the needs of incarcerated juveniles and strengthening the educational programs provided to them. This case study utilized John Dewey's social learning theory, which states that learning occurs through social interactions and hands-on approaches. This theory supports the case study of the interactions between the students and teachers while they are participating in academic and career and technology education (CATE) courses. The study sought to answer the following question: What are the teachers' perceptions of online learning, core academic programs, the GED program, and the CATE program in a juvenile justice facility? To answer these questions, the perceptions of 12 teachers in the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice schools were discussed. The data sources were teacher interviews, focus groups and participant letters. The results showed positive teacher perceptions of academic programs in juvenile justice facilities.

*Keywords:* juvenile, recidivism, recidivism rate, juvenile justice, long-term facility, intensive supervision officer

### **Dedication**

In loving memory of my parents, Bishop Jessie L. Mitchell, Sr.  
and Annie Mae Sanders Mitchell.

### **PSALM 23**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art  
with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with  
oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house  
of the LORD for ever.

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**List of Abbreviations**

South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ)

Career and Technology Education (CATE)

General Education Diploma (GED)

Intensive Supervision Officer (ISO)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

In the South Carolina juvenile justice system, several factors affect juvenile offenders and their ability to succeed in school, work, and life. Juveniles enter the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ) with a 2-year or more educational deficit and offenses such as assault and battery, shoplifting, public disorderly conduct, simple possession of marijuana, and disturbing schools (SCDJJ, 2017). While the students are enrolled in school, they can participate in career and technology programs (CATE), receive special education services, attend social work treatment and religious services, and develop relationships with mentors and community organizations who support them. Approximately two percent of the juveniles receive high school diplomas, while over 75% receive their GED and can enroll in online college courses. However, students' success in the programs is determined by their behavior and interactions with the teachers.

The purpose of the study was to seek the teachers' perceptions of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities. Exploring teacher perceptions in online education, core academics, career education, and an alternative education program is mandatory when attempting to gain insight into understanding them. The more a researcher can explain how or why a social phenomenon works, the more the case study is relevant (Yin, 2018). Included in the chapter are the background of the study, situation to self, problem and purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, and the sub-questions. The research questions are supported with relevant data. This case study examined teacher interviews and reviewed information from focus groups.

## **Background**

In the United States, 10% to 18% of young adults between the ages of 16 and 21 have been arrested (Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2017). State law requires young adults incarcerated in juvenile justice facilities to receive an education and to be placed in appropriate educational programs that allow them to improve skills and address areas of need and concern (Blaik Hourani et al., 2020). The educational system in the juvenile justice system mimics local school systems and provides similar course offerings, including core academics, GED, special education, and career and technology training. This case study reported the educational experiences and perspectives of personnel employed in education in the juvenile justice system (Strnadová et al., 2017).

## **Historical Context**

Historically, children in juvenile jails in the United States have received grossly inadequate education (Leone, 2015). These adolescents face emotional or behavioral problems that put them and their teachers at risk. However, without an education, they are more likely to struggle to find employment as they seek a normal life (VanderPyl, 2019). Teachers are tasked with many roles as they instruct these students. They must try to focus on educating these students as well as on their mental health and rehabilitation (Leone, 2015). There is a lack of research providing a firsthand understanding of how juvenile corrections teachers understand and emotionally respond to their experiences at work (Murphy, 2018a). Typically, there is no professional development to support or assist teachers with navigating classroom issues. These teachers must receive professional learning opportunities over a sustained period and allow for interactive learning from experts among colleagues (Murphy, 2018a). Teachers of incarcerated youth are often isolated and do not have access to either typical district/local education agency

in-service opportunities or training targeted to the unique situation in which they teach (Gagnon et al., 2012). It is important to understand how these educators view and plan educational programming at the facilities where they teach while considering students' overall behavior and academic ability.

### **Social Context**

Two important issues relate to societal backgrounds. First, research shows that Black students who violate school rules are more often subject to out-of-school suspension, which heightens their risk of arrest and increases the odds that they will be detained, formally processed, and institutionalized (Hirsfield, 2018). Second, the recidivism rate among youth who spent time in juvenile facilities is between 55% and 75% within 3 years (Carter, 2018). According to the Pathway Study, those involved in the juvenile justice system frequently encounter significant additional difficulties with this system as they move into adulthood (Brame et al., 2018).

These issues impact the effectiveness of teachers and programs because teachers are the link between the two. Therefore, teachers should have access to specific training on educating at-risk students. Specific training would change the teachers' perspectives on education. Their job satisfaction or need to feel they have accomplished their goals affects their perceptions of educational programming (Houchins et al., 2017).

### **Theoretical Context**

From a theoretical educational psychology perspective, human interaction plays a vital role in the learning process. Progressive educational theories, as proposed by John Dewey (English, 2016), state that learning occurs through social interaction and hands-on approaches. If Dewey is correct, positive interactions with teachers will have a lasting impact on students

(English, 2016), and positive student-teacher relationships should be evident in these individuals' experiences.

Educational programming varies by location. The goal is academic progress. Educational assistance should help students with their schoolwork during the school year. With that in mind, this study examined the experiences of current and former teachers in an educational setting within a juvenile justice facility and the social relationships between incarcerated students. Bronfenbrenner supports the idea that people are a product of their environments. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that students' positive interactions with their teachers yield teachers' positive perceptions. Moreover, there are concerns about how negative behaviors affect academic achievement and teachers' perceptions. Utilizing a structured interview process, the researcher examined the participants' perspectives on educational programs. These participants described experiences regarding the academic programs offered at their facilities.

### **Problem Statement**

The SCDJJ operates a fully-accredited school district year-round for agency-involved youth (SCDJJ, 2019). In 2017, the average daily population in the long-term facility was 112, with an average stay of 160 days. According to South Carolina Code of Laws, Section 63-19-380, juveniles placed in the justice system must receive an education. They have the opportunity to attend school daily. The SCDJJ's school district also offers School-to-Careers, a challenging academic and CATE curriculum on career exploration with counseling initiatives. The state's business and education partnerships are the foundation of the School-to-Careers system and connect SCDJJ's classroom to the world of work (SCDJJ, 2019). Teachers are trained to link classroom learning to the world of work, along with providing apprenticeships and mentoring.

Juvenile jails are secure residential treatment facilities that provide long-term supervision, rehabilitation, and planning to aid adolescents as they leave the institutional setting and return to their communities (Yan & Wilkerson, 2017). The problem in juvenile justice facilities is students' negative behavior in the school setting and its impact on teachers' perceptions of educational programs. These behaviors are often due to a lack of socialization skills, which results in inconsistent academic achievement. Educational programs have a positive impact on socialization, and this impact is becoming an area of increasing interest (Wolff et al., 2017). This research discussed the teachers' perceptions of the impact of education in juvenile justice facilities.

Juvenile justice teachers have high expectations of their students (Reed & Wexler, 2014). Thus, when students leave the system and enroll in public schools or higher education programs, they have the same expectations of those teachers as the juvenile justice teachers (Morales-Doyle, 2017). However, when they do not receive the same level of support from the new education entity, their trust in the education experience is eroded. Addressing the problem will allow the students to adjust to the new educational setting. Despite these findings, there is a current gap in the literature describing teachers' experiences in juvenile justice facilities and how students' attitudes and behavior may affect how teachers perceive the educational programs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to understand 12 teachers' perceptions of the educational programs in a long-term juvenile justice facility. The teachers' perspective is defined as their perceptions of the educational programs and their experiences with the students. The theory guiding this study is John Dewey's social learning theory of education and teacher education (English, 2016). Based on this theory, school is a social interactive learning process.



During this time, juveniles question who they are, how to fit in, and where they are going in life. Students usually decide to join groups that foster positive relationships, seek support from gangs, or develop other negative relationships (Farn & Adams, 2016). This theory provided a framework for exploring how teachers seek to connect educational programs and prior experiences to improve lifelong learning for their students.

### **Significance of the Study**

When juveniles complete their sentences and are released, the transition between schools, agencies, and family placements is inconsistent. This combination makes it difficult for young adults to understand why they cannot overcome obstacles when returning to public school. The significance of this study lies in empirical, theoretical, and practical perspectives. The educational system provides advances toward academic achievement. Therefore, studying the teacher's perspectives and the impact of education on students is imperative to improving educational programs. Data collected and analyzed assisted school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders who work within the juvenile justice educational system. This case study could benefit current and future educators in identifying educational strategies to implement in school districts with similar characteristics.

### **Empirical Significance**

As juvenile justice reform programs are developed, the education of the special needs population must also be included (Hess & Verhine, 2017). This development may require increasing the number of intensive supervision officers (ISOs). Without ISOs, family support, and coordination structures for that transition phase, students never re-enroll in schools, and they often commit other crimes and return to the criminal justice system (VanderPyl, 2019). This study was significant because it allowed juvenile justice facilities to examine their educational

programs' structures and adjust based on the students' needs. It also allowed the education division to develop and implement strategies of their own to reduce recidivism, which helps the students and the agency overall (Miller et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical**

According to Dewey, positive school interactions catalyze change in behavior and attitude (English, 2016). If students feel teachers assist them, they are more likely to work hard to earn the teachers' trust while changing the teachers' perspectives on adjusting academic programs. According to Dewey, education should build on life experiences and interactions at school, home, and work (English, 2016). Dewey was a proponent of teacher-student experiences and interactions in the classroom. Dewey's philosophy of education theory was chosen for this study because of possible positive and negative teacher-student classroom interactions which may influence the teacher's perception of the educational programs in the juvenile justice setting.

### **Practical**

The mission of juvenile justice is to educate and protect the students and community from harm (SCDJJ, 2020). From an educational standpoint, teachers need to cultivate an environment conducive to learning. To do this, implementing positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS) will help the teachers and students with a new way of thinking and interacting within the educational setting (Gagnon et al., 2018). The significance of this case study is that it generated insight into the teachers' perceptions of the academic programs. Teachers have innovative strategies to provide for their students' educational needs, but the students may not always be receptive (O'Neill et al., 2018). Educators strive to meet the students' needs to maximize their skills for postsecondary education (Osborn & Belle, 2019).

## **Research Questions**

Research questions emerged from the problem and purpose statements. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that the researcher utilize several sources to study and understand the phenomenon under investigation. The research for this study was built on one central question and four sub-questions.

### **Central Question**

How do teachers perceive academic programming in the juvenile justice facility?

This question was designed to examine how teachers perceive the subject areas for which they are responsible. Teachers may use interventions to support their students' educational efforts and promote their college aspirations. Their efforts may help reduce the adverse effects of behavior on educational attainment (Kim, 2012).

### **Sub-question 1**

What are teacher perceptions of online instruction in the juvenile justice facility?

Students who take online courses are separated from the instructor and other students, but they engage with each other through discussion boards and online technologies (Scoppio, 2016). Repositioning instructors and students in online courses results in different approaches to course design and instructional design support (Scoppio, 2016). The students maintained passing grades with the Edmentum program (SCDJJ, 2020).

### **Sub-question 2**

What are teacher perceptions of the core academic program in the juvenile justice facility?

The teachers' expectations for students' academic performance were higher when the teachers' perceptions of the students' engagement were higher (Timmemans, 2016). The core academic programs offered were English, math, science, and social studies (SCDJJ, 2020).

### **Sub-question 3**

What are teacher perceptions of the GED program in the juvenile justice facility?

According to the DOE (2014), a young person is considered at risk of academic failure, substance abuse, early pregnancy, juvenile justice involvement, truancy, and early school dropout (Free, 2017). The general education diploma (GED) is offered to students at least 16 years old with fewer than 10 high school credits (SCDJJ, 2020).

### **Sub-question 4**

What are teacher perceptions of the CATE program in the juvenile justice facility?

The CATE course offerings vary. College and career readiness support helps youth prepare for life after secondary school in various areas, including employment, independent living, postsecondary education, leisure/social activities, and self-advocacy. Currently, welding, carpentry, keyboarding, and business education courses are offered (SCDJJ, 2020).

### **Definitions**

1. *Juvenile* - A minor under a certain age, usually 18 (Cavanagh, 2017).
2. *Recidivism* - The relapse into criminal activity, measured by a former prisoner's return to prison for a new offense (Kretschmar et al., 2016).
3. *Rates of recidivism* - the degree to which released inmates have been rehabilitated and the role-structured programs play in reintegration into society (Wolff et al., 2017).

4. *Juvenile Justice* - The network of juvenile courts in the United States. These courts pass judgment for crimes committed by children and adolescents, usually under age 18 (Carter, 2018).
5. *Long-term facility* - A secure placement where juvenile delinquents reside after a court sentences them for crimes committed (Lively et al., 2019).
6. *Intensive Supervision Officer (ISO)* - An officer who promotes community safety, reduces victimization, and helps in the successful reentry of young offenders back into the community (Chamberlain et al., 2018).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into teachers' perspectives on educational programs at the SCDJJ. In 2017, the average daily population in the long-term facility was 112, with an average stay of 160 days (SCDJJ, 2019). Recent research shows that the average teacher in juvenile justice facilities is not trained or skilled in the academic areas, yet all students in the department of juvenile justice are taught by highly skilled certified educators. The SCDJJ operates an accredited school district year-round for agency-involved youth (SCDJJ, 2019). The underlining issue is how the students' application of the educational skills assisted them with remaining home and decreased their chances of reoffending. This outcome relies on how much they learned about changing their behaviors and attitudes.

This case study sought to describe the teachers' perspectives of the educational programs in the SCDJJ. Through interviews with teachers in juvenile justice schools, the researcher examined the question, "How do teachers perceive their educational programs and experiences?" The participants for this study were 12 teachers who work in a long-term juvenile justice facility. The case study design was the best approach. The study provided an understanding of the

experiences shared by each teacher. As the comparison of the teacher interview is developed, there were commonalities between the experiences. The time each teacher has worked with the juveniles determined their overall perspective of the educational program. According to Dewey (Latasha, 2020), the participants' ability to interact positively or negatively with each other will affect each person's perspective on the program's effectiveness.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Outside of the family, schools are often considered fundamental social and educational institutions where youth are socialized, taught, and instilled with the fundamentals of moral and civic norms, as well as establishing fundamental parameters of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Peguero, 2017). Students who receive schooling in juvenile justice facilities have unique lived experiences. Their prior environmental influences cause their negative interactions with others. According to John Dewey, the object of education is to expose students to various teaching methods through social interactions (Sikandar, 2015). Teachers should make a conscious effort to provide a positive learning environment, as classroom interactions develop relationships between students and teachers; students' education and behavior are always connected. Dewey (Latasha, 2020) understood that the human mind is ever-changing, and educators have a critical role in that change. If Dewey is correct, the positive interactions with the teachers will have a lasting impact on students (English, 2016). With that in mind, this study examined the experiences of current and former teachers in an educational setting and the social relationships between the students (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

A detailed review of the literature helped to identify studies of teachers' perspectives of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities. This chapter's first section discusses educational theories and provides connections to the theoretical framework. The second section discusses teachers' experiences working with at-risk youth, teacher preparedness, appropriate certifications, and professional development (Larkin, 2019). The teachers' experiences provide an understanding of how student placements are determined, student engagement in the classroom, and their social interactions in schools (Murphy, 2018b).

This chapter also discusses the students' traumatic challenges, and relationships with their school districts (Wolff, 2014). Subsequently, a discussion about school climate, school discipline, behavior interventions and effectiveness in juvenile justice facilities is also included. The last section of the literature review details teacher identity, teacher-student relationships, education programs, and teachers' perceptions of core academics, GED, and CATE programs (Osborn & Belle, 2019). The literature review revealed a gap in research that led to this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks of social learning were used to assist me in understanding the positive and negative experiences of teachers in juvenile justice facilities. Human interaction plays a central role in the learning process. Social interaction is the ability to learn by sharing thoughts and ideas through hands-on direct interaction. Thus, this qualitative study is supported by a theoretical educational psychology perspective. The base of the theoretical framework for this study was John Dewey's social learning theory and education (Sikandar, 2015). This theory argues that the school is a social institution in which education and learning take place (Sikandar, 2015).

Educational theories, as proposed by progressive pragmatist John Dewey (English, 2016), allowed educators to develop educational instruments to support academic achievement. Pragmatic progressives commit to (a) problem-solving as the method of school improvement, (b) democracy as the means of educational improvement, (c) a focus on improving education at the local level, and (d) consideration of the subject, the student, and the society as complementary sources for educational experience-together (Wraga, 2019). Also, the work of the pragmatic progressives reflects progressivism in education, including relating school to the life of the student and of society and viewing the school as a social institution and as a vehicle for social



progress (Wraga, 2019). These collective ideas are important today as we identify various behaviors as challenging or disruptive in the classroom. It is vital that we understand the role that school systems and others involved in the educational process have on others (Latasha, 2020). The focus on individual behavior was especially important because, as a philosophy of democracy, experimentalism judges the effects of schooling against some standard of betterment or progress in the life experience (Latasha, 2020). For children to succeed, all their needs, including social ones, must be met.

### **Related Literature**

One of the key tasks of schools and formal education systems is to help create citizens able to participate in forging workable consensus upon which to act through conversation and debate across diverse positions, interests, cultures, and discourses (McCormack, 2019). Dewey's theories of education have been influential in the field of education. The ideas presented by Dewey support teacher outcomes related to academic delivery, experiences, and expectations. Dewey's (Latasha, 2020) theory of hands-on learning was the framework for this study. According to Dewey's constructive interaction (Sikandar, 2015), maintaining a positive learning environment promotes the students' ability to learn and teachers' perceptions of what they need to teach. Dewey's theories allow students to find personal interests, which lead to independent thinking and lifelong learning (Kett, 2017). Like Dewey, Urie Bronfenbrenner also believed that people are a product of their environment, which is made of the people and the culture they interact with. The work of both theorists helps to define and support the state of people in criminal justice facilities.

Developed in the 1980s, solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) is one modality that has been implemented into alternative school settings and is effective in addressing academic issues,

dropout rates, and behavioral and emotional issues among at-risk students (McGrath, 2016). The SFBT model is an appropriate fit for school and youth-centered settings because of its brief nature and flexibility when working with diverse groups and populations (Franklin, 2016). From this training, contributions to the SFBT model and its effects are determined by the expectations and preparedness of the teacher. Staffing classrooms with ill-prepared teachers is detrimental to students and novice teachers (Arzo, 2015). The study explores the influence of these efforts, along with how students' sense of place and educational upbringing might be related to pre-service teachers' perceptions of preparedness for teaching in a rural school (Arzo, 2015).

An examination of education in criminal justice facilities requires an understanding of its various components. Toward that end, the following sections discuss central aspects of education in general and juvenile justice facilities. The first sections discuss school climate, school discipline, behavior intervention development, and PBIS. Later sections address factors specific to teachers: identity and perceptions of online instruction, core academics, general education, and CATE. Lastly, this chapter discusses juvenile justice facilities, their education programs, and the students in them.

### **School Climate**

School climate refers to the quality and character of a school that reflects the norms, goals, values, relationships, practices, and structures within a school affecting all students (James et al., 2018). Establishing a healthy school climate is important because the classroom and school environment have become important to social and academic success. The experiences of teachers who work with at risk youth includes providing support for them to develop despite their perceived hopelessness and despair. Some risks students may encounter include poverty, high risk family and community affiliations which compromise the capacity of students to participate

and achieve in education. Often, these adolescences feel that there is a divide between how they live and learn and how the rest of the world live and learn. However, they often develop internal risks which causes them to be expelled from school. These negative actions may cause disengagement from school includes disrupting classes and skipping school. The academic challenges of court-involved youth may encounter are more than other students (Crosby,2015a) and the reading achievement gaps are often wider among these adolescence. Juvenile justice system–involved youth are at least 1 year behind in math and reading than noninvolved peers, are twice as likely to drop out of school, and up to 40% face grade retention (Stone, Zibulsky, 2015).

While each student’s experience is different, they must attend school to receive academic support. Some recent work has indicated a positive impact on educational connectedness from the provision of additional educational supports (Sanders, 2016). Teachers of at-risk students seek different approaches to teaching because of a change of mindset. They must think outside the box to reach the students and to see the possibilities of each student individually. Teachers are encouraged to build positive relationships with students to provide an environment for reengagement. Environments that are not safe do not promote or create positive perceptions for students.

The concept of successful schools is based on studies of schools in which student performance is good despite their coming from an unfavorable social background (Sandahl, 2016). However, most research on PBIS Tier 1 has been at the elementary and middle school levels (Noltemeyer et al., 2019). Thus, there is a need to examine high school implementation literature, particularly given the differences associated with age and setting (Flannery et al., 2018). For example, in a study of PBIS in high schools, Flannery and colleagues noted

contextual features such as (a) school size, (b) organization and culture, and (c) students' developmental levels that could affect implementation efforts (Flannery, 2018). Therefore, students' behavior and academic success depend on their ability to adjust to the school setting. Maintaining a positive consistent culture requires systematic communication and collaboration among all administration, faculty, and staff in schools.

According to Gelbar et al. (2015), four elements are the focus of a school's planning and implementation. Specifically, the following should be included:

1. Obtaining leadership of schoolwide practices from an administrator who creates and serves as a member of an implementation team.
2. Obtaining district-level support for training, policies, and expectations aligned with SW-PBIS.
3. Defining three to five schoolwide expectations for appropriate behavior.
4. Actively teaching the schoolwide behavioral expectations to all students.
5. Monitoring and acknowledging students for engaging in behavioral expectations.
6. Correcting problem behaviors using a consistently administered continuum of behavioral consequences.
7. Gathering and using information about student behavior to evaluate and guide decision-making.

### **School Discipline**

Discipline is an important issue in public schools in the United States, and effective discipline practices are necessary to maintain classroom order, promote student learning, and ensure the safety of students and teachers (Mayworm, 2018). There are times when barring a student from attending school is warranted, such as when the student is putting the safety of

others at risk or is severely impeding the ability of students to learn. At those times, districts should have processes and procedures in place to ensure those students continue their education. Educators have the professional imperative to provide all students with an appropriate education (Mayworm, 2018).

Students in juvenile justice facilities have committed various crimes within their communities and schools. When it comes to safety in schools, Congress passed the Guns Free School Act (GFSA), which expanded to include other infractions of school policies that impact student achievement and school climate (Underwood, 2017). The GFSA ensures the safety and welfare of all its students and employees. According to the GFSA, students may not possess a firearm on any school property or at any school-sponsored activity or event (Underwood, 2017). If so, they will be expelled for no less than one calendar year and referred to local law enforcement (Underwood, 2017). It is important to include this information in the study because these policies have an impact on a disproportionate number of students who are incarcerated annually. Other items in the policy are that no student will handle, use, or give someone else a weapon. Weapons include a knife, razor, ice pick, explosive, loaded pistol, rifle, shotgun, pellet gun, or any other object capable of causing injury, harm, or death. Schools have hired security officers, installed metal detectors, and placed students in alternative settings to enforce these disciplinary policies (Underwood, 2017). The alternative settings offered by each district are still developing because they should meet the needs of the students. Those students who participate in these negative infractions or who do not display positive behaviors contribute to negative school climates (Underwood, 2017). This information is important to this study because it provides background policy information and insight into negative experiences encountered by students in

juvenile justice facilities. These types of experiences affect their education and relationships with the teachers and other school personnel.

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is at the forefront of a collaborative initiative to reduce the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system for school-based behaviors through the establishment of judicially led school justice partnerships (Cohen et al., 2018). In addition, during the past few years, districts have created disciplinary alternative education programs to assist with behavior issues (Dunning-Lozano, 2018). These programs often isolate, discipline, and reintegrate students into their mainstream schools (Dunning-Lozano, 2018).

One such program is Restorative Justice Education, which was first developed in late 2000. This program is designed to repair harm to victims and aid offenders while creating a Culture of Care within the schools. The principles of Restorative Justice Education focus on building relationships with students, collegial relationships, and teacher-student relationships (Cavanagh, 2012). The bases for RJE are building inclusive relationships involving all staff in the school. It also focuses on community building circles and norm setting circles. The RJE is divided into four tiers; Tier 1- Principles of Restorative Justice and Proactive Restorative Practices; Tier 2- Reactive Restorative Practices for Minor Behavior Problems; Tier 3-Reactive Restorative Practices for Major Restorative Problems and Tier 4- Creating a Culture of Care. It is important for all stakeholders to complete training prior to implementation. Each tier has a prescribed objective which helps develop positive relationships. The objective of Tier 1 is to identify and explain the principles of RJE and the focus on all relationships. Tier 2 objective is to learn how to respond restoratively to minor misbehavior problems. The objective of Tier 3 is to

learn to respond restoratively to major misbehavior problems, while Tier 4 is creating the plan for the Culture of Care.

The discussion of the RJE program is necessary to this study because implementation in a juvenile facility allows the students to develop and maintain appropriate relationships while focusing on repairing the harm they have caused. When the school develops a Culture of Care, it is possible to blend other programs such as PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Systems) and social emotional learning. Participation in RJE by the teachers and students gives insight into the teacher perceptions of individual students.

### **Behavior Intervention Development**

With the increase of behavior issues in the school setting and the rise of disciplinary problems, the PBIS framework was developed. Various responses to the PBIS program require a deeper understanding of grade levels, as adolescents find greater social, emotional, and behavioral motivation from their peers than adults as they enter high school (Romer et al., 2017), and schools typically shift from adult-provided supports in elementary and middle school to independent and peer-driven supports (Bohanon et al., 2006). As a result, teachers should be mindful of the developmental level of their students. Freeman et al. (2016) indicated that schools with high PBIS implementation fidelity had increasing trends in academic achievement. Childs (2010) reported a 1% increase in reading scores.

PBIS has been shown to enhance the climate in the school setting in ways that allow students, both as a group and individually, to feel safer and more engaged (Caldarella et al., 2011). The key practices of PBIS include (a) clear definitions of expected appropriate, positive behaviors provided for youth and staff members; (b) clear definitions of problem behaviors and their consequences; (c) regularly scheduled instruction and assistance in desired positive social

behaviors to enable youth to acquire the skills for the desired behavior change; (d) effective incentives and motivational systems provided to encourage appropriate behavior; (e) staff members committed to staying with the intervention over the long term to monitor, support, coach, debrief, and provide booster lessons for youth as necessary to maintain the achieved gains; (f) staff members who receive training, feedback, and coaching about effective implementation of the intervention; and (g) established systems for measuring and monitoring the intervention's effectiveness carried out regularly (Sprague & Horner, 2012; Sprague et al., 2014). PBIS has been applied for over 2 decades in public schools to assist the special needs population throughout the country (Scheurman, 2019). Traditional schools that implement PBIS typically use office discipline referrals as an index of major and minor student behavior and disciplinary consequences (Putnam, 2016). Those schools also could submit data to a national PBIS database, the Schoolwide Information System, from which descriptive data are available regarding patterns of behavior reflected in office discipline referrals (McIntosh et al. 2020).

FW-PBIS is a three-tiered framework adapted to match the contextual variables inherent within juvenile corrections and is an outgrowth of schoolwide PBIS (Center on PBIS, 2020). Within the framework, systems are put in place to support staff members in the implementation of policies and procedures, real-time data are used for decision-making purposes across the tiers, and practices are tiered within an all (Tier 1), some (Tier 2), and few (Tier 3) logics of support provision. The specific practices at each tier detail their different entrance or exit criteria, dosages, intensities, and progress monitoring requirements, with Tier 1 providing universal supports for all youth, the additive Tier 2 targeting supports for some youth needing additional supports, and the additive Tier 3 for intensive supports for a few youths with the most intensive needs.



## **Juvenile Justice Facilities and Education**

Between 1970 and 2009, the rate of incarceration in the United States increased significantly, making the United States the most incarcerated nation in the world (Wacquant, 2009; Western & Muller 2013). This growth disproportionately affected poor and non-White communities (Bobo & Thompson, 2006, 2010). This information is critical when juvenile justice facility reforms are discussed. The behavioral issues exhibited by these students are not new; however, the ways in which districts respond to them vary.

According to Murphy (2018b), on average, young people under supervision were convicted of up to 11 types of crimes before the age of 18, fewer of which were violent than nonviolent offenses. The minimum age at first conviction was 10, and the maximum was 18. Students who are enrolled in these schools face several challenges. School personnel often interact with students who have previously experienced trauma. Prevalence rates indicate that traumatic childhood events are commonplace. Over 25% of children experience trauma, including physical, sexual, emotional abuse, and witnessing substance abuse or violence within their household. Among court-involved students, exposure to trauma is even more substantial, making the odds of encountering traumatized students dramatically higher for school staff working in residential settings (Snodgrass, 2020). The teachers who work with these juveniles must take their previous behaviors into consideration (O'Neill et al., 2018). Often, these young people exhibit prior behavior issues such as anger and aggression. Also, information about the crimes students committed is available to teachers and the community. This information is relevant and gives insight into the behavioral problems a student may exhibit. However, according to McCray (2018), teachers in juvenile corrections schools do not believe

they have the tools and support to meet their professional goals or student needs due to these students' behavioral problems.

The rationale behind prisoner education is the theoretical path from increased education to decreased recidivism (Brown, 2015). This rationale is supported by the study at The Oak School, which found strengths in developing positive teacher-student relationships, the power of pedagogy, and establishing a supportive environment (Free, 2017). The study also identified weaknesses in responses to negative behavior and poor transition into adulthood (Free, 2017). However, the CSG Justice Center (2015) found that only 13 states offer “incarcerated youth with access to the same types of educational services available to youth in the community, including credit recovery programs, GED preparation, and postsecondary courses” (p. 3). Additionally, only nine states admitted to “providing the same types of vocational services available to youth in the community, including work-based learning opportunities, career and technical education courses, and the opportunity to earn vocational certifications” (CSG Justice Center 2015, p. 3). On average, less than 20% of the entire population of adjudicated youth earn a diploma or a GED (Farn & Adams, 2016).

Young people who find themselves in the juvenile justice facility are academically behind by 3 to 4 years (VanderPyl, 2019). According to Stone and Zibulsky (2015), when students leave the school system to enter a detention facility, their school records must follow them so that the mandated education program at the facility can be tailored to their individual needs, particularly if they receive special education services. When students return to their school setting, it is as necessary for these records to return with them. However, these educational records are not always available. While some of these students may need emotional help and lack socialization skills (O'Neill et al., 2018), they are not excluded from the pressures

of standardized testing, placing stress on student and teacher performance, the outcomes of which are felt by the school leadership (Warren, 2015). Also, justice-involved youth, many of whom are also youth with disabilities, are at higher risk for negative school and post-school outcomes (Cavendish, 2014).

Teaching in this type of facility requires specific coping skills, patience, and genuine concern for the wellbeing of the students (McCray, 2018). A challenge with providing education to incarcerated juveniles, regardless of disability status, is the structure of the education system within facilities (Koster, 2019). Today's juvenile justice system encompasses facilities that house juveniles in prison-like settings or in residential settings like group homes and care facilities, where education is consistently recognized as a productive component of any juvenile justice facility (Koster, 2019). In these facilities, to assist the students academically, teachers and facilitators work together for instruction.

Students who attend juvenile justice schools are enrolled for 6 to 9 months and many, having been truant for lengthy periods, are academically behind (SCDJJ, 2020). To address those deficits, class sizes in a juvenile justice facility are small—up to 16 students (SCDJJ, 2020). These lower ratios allow for more intensive approaches than traditional settings, such as a larger continuum of behavioral strategies, as well as more opportunities to provide group and individual counseling (Gelbar et al., 2015). The mission of the district is to provide academic assistance through technology use while placing an emphasis on accountability to the community and developing positive social skills to redirect lives (SCDJJ, 2020). Overall, students are transferred to these settings for a variety of behaviors, including physical or verbal aggression, drug use, academic failure, truancy, and possession of weapons (Gelbar et al., 2015). Each student is assessed at the beginning of the school year using an online assessment. The data from these

assessments were used to identify the strengths and needs of all students and were the basis for establishing individual learning plans for each student. This helped to establish a baseline to measure academic improvement each year. While this information is relevant, it is only useful if the students are in juvenile facilities for at least a year to measure their academic achievement.

When incarcerated students enter the classroom, they have failed in their public school education (Powers et al., 2016). Typically, students are consistently further behind their academic grade level than their non-incarcerated peers (Miller et al., 2019). The limited information about the context of reading intervention in juvenile corrections settings means that educators have little evidence upon which to base their decisions about intervention implementation. From an educational standpoint, many personnel are ill-equipped to properly serve the needs of students in juvenile facilities (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). The prevailing message is that typical students in juvenile corrections descriptions are clear: as a group, they have a disproportionately high prevalence of academic, behavioral, and mental health concerns (Miller et al., 2019).

In 2014, the joint Departments of Education and Justice released guiding principles for providing high-quality education in juvenile justice secure care settings, including creating a climate and conditions conducive to learning; providing necessary resources to support education opportunities; recruiting, training, and retaining qualified staff; implementing rigorous and relevant curricula, and supporting successful community reentry (Gagnon et al., 2018). Administrators and officials in these facilities have a moral and professional responsibility to ensure these policies are implemented. Nonetheless, the long-term effects of the overall achievements of students in juvenile justice facilities are still unknown.

As researchers and practitioners working with juvenile justice youth returning to school, we must attend to not only what happens inside the school doors but also the interactions among the other institutional contexts in which these youth are involved (Snodgrass, 2020). Building relationships with public school districts are very important for students transitioning back into public schools. There are various ways that school leadership teams within and outside of the juvenile justice system can support young people in educationally re-engaging, including enrolment in traditional neighborhood schools, at alternative and online education settings, community colleges, or in vocational and career training programs.

A growing body of research from the US shows that when transitions into and out of juvenile justice centers (JJC) are well planned and resourced, the likelihood of a return to education is increased, and the likelihood of recidivism is decreased (Gonsoulin & Read, 2011; Griller Clark, Mathur, & Holding, 2011; Unruh, Gau, & Waintrup, 2009). The principal and school executive at the receiving school must convey in actions and words that the school is welcoming of new students, regardless of their histories, and that they are available to help them achieve their immediate and postschool goals (O'Neill, 2018).

### **Effectiveness of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports in Juvenile Justice Facilities**

Recently, multiple state and local jurisdictions have undertaken initiatives to establish PBIS in state or county secure care facilities, including those in Arizona, West Virginia, California, Kentucky, Montana, Illinois, and Nevada (Schuermann, 2019). PBIS provides high-quality learning environments via school- or facility-wide systems and practices that include (a) developing a behavioral support team and plans for staff professional development; (b) procedures for collecting, monitoring, evaluating, using, and reporting behavioral data; (c)

consistent expectations and consequences and a plan for reinforcing appropriate behavior and discouraging inappropriate behavior; and (d) procedures to ensure all staff implement PBIS components with fidelity (Gagnon et al., 2018). Approximately 84% of principals of schools in juvenile justice facilities that implemented PBIS reported that their school implements practices consistent with a multi-tiered framework for behavior support (Schuermann, 2019).

Juvenile justice secure care settings also have several features and working conditions distinctly different from the public school settings in which most teachers work (Larkin, 2020). These settings have adopted PBIS, which incorporates specific outcomes. “Schools adopting [SW-PBIS] identify outcomes (observable and measurable goal statements), used data to make decisions, select and implement evidence-based practices, and develop systems to ensure that practices are implemented with fidelity across time (Scheuermann, 2019).”

The PBIS framework with systems, data, and practices is appropriate and needed for incarcerated youth because (a) they have the same rights to a free and appropriate public education as do their same age-peers; (b) they must be afforded all the protections and services under the law that their peers with and without disabilities receive in general education schools; and (c) they need access to a comprehensive curriculum that emphasizes both academic and social skill instructional supports (Sprague et al., 2020). FW-PBIS implementation “maximize[s] all programming time with youth to help remediate skill deficits and promote skill-building so youth can transition successfully back into and remain in their communities” (Jolivet, 2015).

Implementing the PBIS will ensure the students are achieving academically, and the teacher-student interactions will produce a positive school climate. The benefits of improved secure care conditions for youth and staff are reduced rates of major and minor behavior incidents, increased time involved in academic instruction and other programming, greater

perceived safety, and improved rates of program completion (Schuermann, 2019). Therefore, school climate is an important consideration within a PBIS framework because PBIS aims to promote a positive school experience for all students (James et al., 2018). Implementing the PBIS program assists teachers and other school personnel with monitoring and encouraging changes in the school climate (Scheuermann & Nelson, 2019).

In addition, evidence indicates that PBIS is effective in improving behavior (Bradshaw, 2009; Horner, 2010), with emerging evidence for improving academics. Overall, PBIS takes a proactive approach to school discipline by developing, monitoring, and reinforcing schoolwide expectations and procedures for teaching (James et al., 2018). Therefore, implementing the PBIS in a juvenile correction setting correctly determines its overall effectiveness on student behavioral change within the agency. PBIS improves the quality of education, instructional time and influences teachers' perceptions. Sharing PBIS-related data with all staff is a recommended enabler for sustained implementation (Coffey & Horner, 2012).

Secure care is characterized by multiple programs for treatment, education, security, vocational training, and other purposes, each with different goals, priorities, and practices (Lipsey et al., 2010). Three state juvenile justice systems (Texas, Georgia, and Arizona) that have reported positive impacts of PBIS described potential challenges in staff training, such as distance between facilities, large numbers of staff to be trained (e.g., Lopez et al., 2015), and the need for ongoing training (e.g., Alonzo-Vaughn et al., 2015; Fernandez et al., 2015). In contrast, (Jolivette et al., 2020) data, gleaned from assessing youth perceptions of climate and culture within facilities implementing FW-PBIS, can produce actionable and tangible changes. A study conducted with several juvenile justice facilities revealed that 71 participants stated that since the implementation of the PBIS framework, a positive culture change was observed, with most

comments focused on the interactions of youth and staff (Kimball, 2017). Several stated that FW-PBIS had led to “improved staff and youth relations” and a “gradual change in staff, how they interact with youth” was evident since FW-PBIS was implemented (Kimball, 2017). Responses related to youth behavior included how FW-PBIS had led to a “reduction in adverse incidents” and a “change in facility incidents after FW-PBIS started.” In addition, a respondent stated that FW-PBIS led to “improved engagement of youth and staff in treatment (Kimball, 2017).” Lastly, one participant stated that PBIS – “truly can change culture if done right and we see it in incident data now (Kimball, 2017).”

Despite consistencies in the approach and nature of PBIS supports within public schools and secure juvenile justice facilities, it is increasingly recognized that implementation may require some process-related adaptations to address the intensity and diversity of youth characteristics (Gagnon et al., 2018). The PBIS model may help them understand the importance of both behavior and academic interventions and recognize the need for teacher-student relationships built on respect and fairness (Lampron & Gonsoulin, 2013). However, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding teachers’ perceptions of academic programs in these settings, which needs future studies. Much of the research evidence was student-centered, not teacher-centered. The data and findings needed for the support of this study were important because teachers in these settings need input into what instruction and academics should look like.

Despite success with efforts like PBIS, Kamrath (2018) expressed that high levels of job-related stress, working conditions combined with limited preparation, and inadequate support, contribute to short-lived careers for many correctional educators. Even though federal monies are used in the jails, teachers are rarely paid appropriate salaries. However, most prefer to work in



the facilities than in public schools (Kamrath, 2018). Six of the 19 participants in Kamrath's study perceived they were making a difference in the lives of their students. Nonetheless, little research examines these teachers' experiences, resulting in a gap in the research. Therefore, the following sections focus on the teachers themselves.

### **Teacher Identity**

The purpose for discussing teacher identity in this study is to connect its effects on the classroom, school environment and student achievement. As part of teacher identity, researchers reported that to be successful, teachers of students in juvenile justice settings required more support, more resources, more training, and more knowledge than traditionally prepared or alternate route teachers (Larkin,2020). Given what we know about the demographic characteristics of students in juvenile justice settings, teacher preparation and teacher learning should include competencies around culturally relevant/responsive pedagogies in addition to the development of teachers' critical consciousness and sense of themselves as cultural beings (Larkin,2020). The qualities that teachers possess which are a part of their identity are good listening, empathy, and patience. These self-awareness qualities of teachers empower students academically and enhances lifelong learning. Teachers' perceptions of academics begin with their perceptions of their ability to deliver classroom instruction. This is important to this study because while working in a correctional environment, teachers engage students with real-life issues and provide support to them to overcome academic struggles. Therefore, it is likely the positive interactions and the useful strategies provided can be used for a wide range of out of school situations.

Credentialing teachers with alternative and correctional education endorsements reinforces the idea that students in these environments require teachers to have more specialized training, support, and knowledge than what is offered through teacher certification programs for other settings (Larkin, 2020). As teachers gain experience, they focus more on expectations because of who they have become. In relation to this study, identity construction is the process individuals go through to define who they are. According to Ashforth and Schinoff (2016), identification is the key outcome of this process, pertaining to the extent to which individuals internalize an identity (e.g., a professional identity as a teacher) as a part of their self-definition. Positive feelings toward an identity signal a match and may lead to an internalization of the identity as a partial definition of self (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016).

Teacher identity has been an important issue in education research because how teachers define themselves may determine their attitudes and behaviors in teaching (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, education researchers have studied how teacher identity is formed and transformed to recommend teacher professional development (Nagro, 2020). As presented in this study, research has been done to develop innovative programs to assist teachers in the classroom and to support student learning. The design of each program and course offering is determined by the needs of the students (Barbour, 2016). When teachers know who they are, they can support the transformation of positive school environments.

### **Teachers' Perception of Online Instruction in Juvenile Justice Settings**

Gold (2019) claimed that teachers must have the actual experience of online learning before they can be expected to be online teachers; otherwise, they simply map traditional practices onto the new medium with little of the transformation necessary in the teaching process. The learning environment has changed due to technology. The use of technology has

expanded instruction into a no-boundary classroom. In contrast, the no-boundary classroom did not ensure the academic success of students. Without proper pedagogical training and online experience, teachers will continue to replicate their best existing practices in the online medium (Gold, 2019).

The U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education partnered with the Universities of Florida and Virginia, Graceland University, and Iowa Learning Online to create TEGIVS (Barbour, 2016). The study focused on three roles: virtual school designer, teacher, and facilitator (Barbour, 2016). Teachers who teach online are being challenged to rethink their underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, and the roles they take as educators (Wiesenberg & Stacey, 2008). Barbour (2016) supported that exposing learners to K–12 online learning through a facilitator's role was a first step in preparing them for the other roles of K–12 online learning. While educators and organizations around the world are becoming more involved in online learning, the student growth significantly affects overall achievement (Barbour, 2016).

Online learning, by nature, changes the way teaching responsibilities are performed (Kornbluh et al., 2016). Research has found that teaching presence is a significant predictor of students' perceptions of learning, satisfaction, and sense of community (Gorsky & Blau, 2009; LaPointe & Gunawardena, 2004; Russo & Benson, 2005). The online environment changes the fundamental nature of the interaction between the teacher, student, and content, requiring a re-examination of the roles teachers take in enhancing students' learning (Borup & Stimson, 2019).

Online students are expected to take greater control of their learning process and be more active in stimulating their peers' learning; facilitation of online learning emerges as an important role in guiding these student-centered approaches (Fedock, 2019). Learners described the

benefits to teachers as falling into two specific areas: freedom and the capability to customize instruction for their students (Barbour, 2016). The negative aspect of the various populations of students was the perceived lack of socialization and interaction between the students and instructor in the online environment (Barbour, 2016).

Akyol et al. (2009) compared students' perceptions of developing a community in a blended and a fully online course and found that sense of social and teacher presence was much higher in the blended course due to face-to-face interactions. Thus, schools are increasingly providing their students who are enrolled in an online course with an on-site facilitator to increase academics (Borup & Stimson, 2019). Online teachers and facilitators work to support each other and the online students. The Adolescent Community of Engagement conducted research and identified three elements of teacher engagement: (a) organizing and designing the online course and environment, (b) instructing students by providing individualized tutoring and constructive feedback, and (c) facilitating students' interactions with the content and others (Borup & Stimson, 2019). According to the study, students' success is reached by fostering nurturing caring relationships, monitoring, and motivating student engagement, and encouraging communication (Borup & Stimson, 2019). This study is supported by Dewey's social learning theory in terms of the elements of caring relationships that assist in improving academic success. Communication is often shared by the on-site facilitator, who serves as a liaison between the student and teachers. The teacher's feedback to the students affects the learner's perception and may reinforce either the learner's sense of ability to complete the task or not (Zilka, 2019).

Online instruction has become one of the newer educational tools used in juvenile justice facilities (SCDJJ, 2020). Technology changes the way students learn, but it has no impact without teacher support, and one of the most important reasons for the lack of faculty support is

the lack of faculty preparation, and they must be trained in using this new technology (Gold, 2019). The blended learning models assist and serve students and teachers with instruction. The virtual environment makes it possible for learners to enhance the learning process and provides fertile ground for exploration learning, using multimedia by combining texts (visual, audio, verbal) and integrating tasks that require high-order thinking (Zilka,2019). These self-paced programs allow students to focus on remedial areas in language arts, math, science, and social studies (Arzano, 2015). However, according to Zilka (2019), these blended learning environments encourage coping with issues of interpersonal communication. Time limits are often placed on the students to keep them focused. Teachers are usually nearby to assist and monitor and can notice students who request assistance and who are serious about the program (Borup & Stimson, 2019). Effective Tier 1 practices reduce minor behaviors and allow teachers and staff to focus on youth needing more intensive levels of support (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010).

Miner (2017) suggested that online instruction has been widely acknowledged as beneficial in meeting students' diverse needs, and online programs serve students who are geographically diverse and of many age groups. This information is relevant because students who cannot read proficiently are at serious risk of referral to special education, grade retention, dropping out of high school, and entering the juvenile justice system (VanderPyl, 2019).

Many scholars and educators agree that experience and active participation can help students connect theory to practice, develop higher-order thinking skills, and enhance the educational environment (Burke & Bush, 2013). Also, establishing and maintaining a community of learners helps students stay engaged and motivated in online classes (Bowers, 2015). Brown (2015) noted that a virtual learning environment constitutes a space loaded with feelings in

which students report frustration, anger, rage, joy, excitement, satisfaction, boredom, jealousy, hate, love, and affection regarding the nature of learning.

History has established that good interactions between the teacher and the student bring about change and creates an ability to interact with the environment. Also, maintaining a positive climate refers to a school's overall culture and specific practices that are predictable, safe, positive, and consistent (Benner et al., 2013). According to Parks Ennis and Gonsoulin (2015), many students cited examples of positive relationships and interactions with staff because of PBIS implementation, such as the increased confidence that staff members have shown regarding their success.

### **Teachers' Perception of Core Academics in Juvenile Justice Settings**

Schools are classified as either traditional or alternative based on information posted on their websites, information gleaned from educators in the jurisdiction, or communication with administration or staff at each school (Fine et al., 2018). Regardless of format, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), later updated to the Every Student Succeeds Act, insisted on educational accountability. Once Congress refocused its attention on K–12 education legislation, it elected to replace rather than reauthorize NCLB (Heise, 2017). Years of legislative inattention, combined with an unusually aggressive use of waiver authority, fueled ESSA's enactment (Heise, 2017). This act was used to ensure students receive the appropriate educational services. Although these legislations were enacted in K–12 education, it does not exist for higher education which will affect any juvenile seeking postsecondary opportunities.

Students' academic, behavioral, and mental health needs affect the social-emotional climate of the school. Research on teachers' perspectives on working with at-risk students found several prevalent themes related to teacher uncertainty about roles and the core academic

offerings (McCray, 2019). Teachers also indicated a desire for greater skills, information, and support. The experiences of core academic teachers start with the understanding that all students are not on the same academic level. Also, many teachers are not supplied with appropriate curriculum materials and technology (McCray, 2019).

Crosby (2015) noted that educators in their first and second years of teaching reported that behavioral problems were one of the most challenging issues when working with students in the system. They desired more support from supervisors, training on intervention strategies for classroom behavioral issues, and knowledge on interacting with families (McCray, 2019). It is relevant to discuss the perception of teachers with 3 or more years of teaching experience, which was not previously examined.

Teaching the core academics to students who may be delayed academically by several years may pose difficulties in the core courses. Allen et al. (2019) posited that students with higher pre-high-school academic achievement are more likely to take challenging courses in high school and earn higher grades. Positive school climates are also critical and associated with better teaching efficacy and teacher job satisfaction, which impacts teacher confidence, and improves student behaviors, academic performance, and achievement (Crosby, 2015).

According to SCDJJ (2020), juvenile justice schools offer the same core courses traditional public schools offer. However, Domina et al. (2019) found that some schools offer only two distinct eighth-grade mathematics courses (algebra and pre-algebra), and others offer as many as seven, including a remedial general mathematics skills course, pre-algebra courses in English and Spanish, algebra courses in English and Spanish, an honors algebra course, and a doubly advanced honors geometry course. Overcoming resistance to subjects was accomplished by providing conducive classroom environments. This was achieved by making all students feel

accepted and by setting high expectations. A study by Allen et al. (2019) focused on the rigors of the academic courses needed to pursue postsecondary education. In particular, the academic rigor of a student's high school experience depends on the type and sequence of courses taken, intensity and difficulty of the courses, alignment to postsecondary expectations, quality of instruction, and level of student engagement and effort (Allen et al., 2019).

Teachers often experience the challenges of students attempting to complete courses for which they are not prepared. With a reduction in disruptions, educators who teach within secure settings can make academics a priority (Parks, 2015). Preparation for rigorous course success begins before high school years. However, if students are not attending school during an academic year due to negative socialization with their peers, it slows their progress. Bang and Vossoughi (2016) posited that social change “involves the interweaving of structural critiques with the enactment of alternative forms of here-and-now activity that open up qualitatively distinct social relations, forms of learning, and knowledge development, and contribute to the intellectual thriving and well-being of students, teachers, families, and communities.”

Morales-Doyle (2017) noted several themes emerged with implications for teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers who wish to engage with science education as a catalyst for social transformation. The key themes in this study were the importance of teachers' experiences and their perceptions of the science pedagogy as its relationship to their own accountability to the students, families, and communities they serve (Morales-Doyle, 2017).

### **Teachers' Perception of General Education Diploma in Juvenile Justice Settings**

The GED is a viable avenue for many students who have not earned enough credits for a traditional high school diploma. Teachers perceive this program as necessary for the academic



success of the students because once the GED is attained, they could transition into higher education courses. The teachers are supportive of the program and often provide afterschool assistance. However, they feel it would be helpful to have the students continue to work on the GED after hours when they are in their dormitory. The students must take pre-tests to assess their level of comprehension in the GED subjects (SCDJJ, 2020). Through these rigorous academic programs, students and teachers interact positively to reach a common goal. However, teachers perceive there should be more time to collaborate and address students' individual needs. The GED test consists of four separate exams: mathematical reasoning, reasoning through language arts, social studies, and science (GED, 2020). The mathematical reasoning exam features basic math, geometry, basic algebra graphs, and functions. Because students struggle with various subjects the teachers feel they must spend a significant amount of time on each section. The reasoning through language arts exam includes reading for meaning, identifying, and creating arguments, grammar, and language. The social studies exam tests reading for meaning in social studies, analyzing historical events, and arguments in social studies, and using numbers and graphs in social studies. The science exam includes reading for meaning in science, designing, and interpreting science, and experiments using numbers and graphics in science (GED, 2020). The teachers perceive the success rate of this program is validated at the end of the year during a commencement program. The teachers are proud because of the over one hundred graduates who participate (SCDJJ, 2020).

### **Teachers' Perception of Career and Technology Education in Juvenile Justice Settings**

Only 38% of ex-offenders report participation in an educational or vocational program while incarcerated (McCray et al., 2018). This low participation rate may result from the voluntary nature of these programs, a lack of basic reading and writing skills, and/or negative

attitudes toward employment and education (O'Reilly, 2014). However, the teachers perceive the CATE program as a necessity for students to obtain work place skills. To increase that rate, SCDJJ's school district offers students a variety of career and technology courses with supporting career development activities. According to the teachers, more programs are still needed which provide current training and allows the students to earn specific certifications.

This system integrates schools and workplaces, academic and CATE programs, and secondary and postsecondary education and provides connection among educators, students, parents, and business leaders (SCDJJ, 2020). The teachers perceive all these components as necessary for the students to receive transferable academic and workplace skills. Career education includes a rigorous, relevant academic curriculum, collaboration among employers, schools, colleges, universities, and agencies, career interest assessment, exploration, and preparation. Career and technology education also addresses the needs of all students to prepare them for entry-level employment and/or postsecondary education (SCDJJ, 2020). According to the teachers, students who participate in CATE have developed the personal and interpersonal skills for them to become successful and add value to their communities.

Career training serves as a necessity for students in the juvenile justice setting. Incarcerated high school students are highly unlikely to return to school (Aizer & Doyle, 2015), which places them at the highest risk of being unemployed and receiving the lowest income, often resulting in welfare dependency (Sampson & Laub, 1990). The teachers discussed how obtaining higher level skilled programs will give the students an opportunity to earn an income and keep them from re-offending. Educational achievement is related to employment outcomes, with salaries increasing and unemployment decreasing as one obtains additional education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Osborn & Belle, 2019). Many teachers encourage the students

who have earned a GED to also enroll into CATE courses. Thus, completion of high school is an important predictor of one's future earning capacity and employability (Osborn & Belle, 2019). As the students prepare for courses in CATE, teachers are focused on the rigors of their educational experiences. The supportive teachers advocate for students who are provided skills and training for employment in their local communities.

According to the department of juvenile justice, the focus of career education is to develop a system structured for all students (SCDJJ, 2020.) Nonetheless, the needs of youth in juvenile justice settings are complex and spread across multiple domains. One critical argument from the teachers pertains to the challenges students face in becoming career and college ready. Evidenced-based programs and interventions that consider career readiness specific to youth in juvenile justice settings are scarce, yet the high unemployment rate for this group demands attention to help these individuals find meaningful employment and contribute back to society (Osborn & Belle, 2019). Those working with youth in juvenile justice settings should assess their capability to make effective career decisions within the context of these complexities and work to enhance the one while mitigating and, hopefully, working to change the negative impact of the other (Osborn & Belle, 2019).

Larkin (2019) discussed the importance of teachers integrating personal culture into CATE and knowing the students who are served. Larkin implied that teacher preparation programs should be restructured to adjust to the changes in the world and the changing culture. To improve teacher responsiveness to these programs, CATE instructional courses are taught as a method infused into teacher preparation programs, not as a one-time enrollment course. Because overcoming cultural barriers and transformations takes time, doing this increases the teacher's chances of having positive responses to all students they teach. According to SCDJJ (2020),

students who attend its CATE courses can select from auto collision repair, carpentry, computer applications, culinary arts, digital desktop publishing, framing and ceramics, horticulture, parenting education, and welding. However, the teachers perceive some of the course offerings as limited in certifications and are advocating for CATE courses relevant to today's society, and possibly researching other juvenile facilities CATE offerings. This information is relevant because students do not succeed when the barriers they face hinder academic achievement.

While comparing Florida's DJJ to SCDJJ, the programs in Florida are set up differently. Programs with contracted lengths of stay of less than 9 months may not be required to provide career education courses that lead to pre-apprentice certifications and CATE industry certifications. If the duration of a program is less than 40 days, the educational component may be limited to tutorial remediation activities, career employability skills instruction, education counseling, and transition services that prepare students for a return to school, the community, and their home settings based on the students' needs (Florida DJJ, 2020).

### **Summary**

Historically, students in juvenile justice facilities are labeled as problematic. Juvenile corrections schools are situated in locked jails where students are confined and attend school. Across the United States each year, teachers in these schools work with half a million students who come to their classrooms with significant academic, behavioral, and mental health needs that far exceed proportions in general public school settings (Quinn et al., 2005; Shippen, Patterson et al., 2012). Teachers engage in work that comes with challenges not found in typical public schools (Gagnon et al., 2012; Houchins et al., 2009; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). There are unique challenges related to the setting itself, in addition to the staff and student population (Gagnon & Barber, 2010; Gagnon et al., 2012; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). Although these

teachers are likely to experience more challenging working conditions, little is known about how these teachers cope with such experiences. Researchers have primarily collected large-scale survey data addressing their working conditions, and therefore the resulting knowledge base consists of broad information that does not necessarily represent teachers' voices, opinions, understandings, or interpretations of their experiences (Murphy, 2018b).

A review of the literature on teacher perspectives on educational programs in the juvenile justice setting and what happens within the school setting led to the discussion in this study. Therefore, focusing specifically on the teachers provided insight into their experiences in juvenile justice facilities. It was a necessary action to take to meet the academic needs of the students. Additionally, the review of the literature revealed that students in juvenile justice facilities need a positive learning environment to meet their full potential. Specifically, the common themes in this study facilitated an understanding of teacher perception and student academic success.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), when research is done, the increased access may provide the qualitative researchers with a "close-proximity" advantage as they "strive for 'understanding,' that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meaning." The study was relevant because it answers the questions "how" and "why" this social phenomenon works (Yin, 2018). The focus is on the real-world perspective as it relates to attitudes and behaviors, school changes, and organizational processes.

Current literature explains the path of at-risk students and how they became involved in the justice system. However, little research was done about the educational system, what happened in the school setting, and the teachers who worked in the system. As criminal justice

reform unfolds, teachers play an important part in the educational system due to their role in improving the delivery of academic services. Therefore, this study focused on those teachers. The following chapter discusses the methodology used to examine their perceptions.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

Case study research is a linear process that requires a researcher to plan, design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share components (Yin, 2018). This approach allowed me to uncover processes between teachers and students and how teachers engage students in an educational environment. The beginning of this chapter discusses the design, setting, and participants in this case study. The chapter also examines the procedures, the role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter discusses the trustworthiness of the case study and its ethical considerations. The purpose of Chapter Three is to detail this study's methodology.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative methods focus on the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One reason to conduct qualitative research is to provide insight into specific settings and allow for shared experiences. This qualitative study explored teachers' perspectives on educational programs. Conducting this study originated from a desire to explain teachers' perceptions in South Carolina juvenile justice facilities. For this research, I used a single case study, which Yin (2018) defined as an approach involving studying real-life settings. A single case study was the best method for exploring shared educational, social, and community experiences through individual interviews, focus groups, and participants' written analysis letters. The study's design has five components: case study questions, propositions, cases, logical link to data to propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings (Yin, 2018). In this study, I investigated teachers' perceptions of the juvenile justice system and what happens in that school setting. I also examined how student behavior affects these perceptions.

## Research Questions

**Central research question:** How do teachers perceive academic programming in the juvenile justice facility?

**Sub-question 1:** What are teacher perceptions of online instruction in the juvenile justice facility?

**Sub-question 2:** What are teacher perceptions of the core academic program in the juvenile justice facility?

**Sub-question 3:** What are teacher perceptions of the GED program in the juvenile justice facility program?

**Sub-question 4:** What are teacher perceptions of the CATE program in the juvenile justice facility?

## Setting and Participants

This section will discuss the setting and participants for this study. Pseudonyms are used for the setting and participants. The following paragraphs also explain the organizational makeup and reason for the study. They also present the criteria for participation and the teachers' characteristics.

### Setting

I conducted this case study at Mitchell's Juvenile Justice Facility (MJJ), which is located in a large city in South Carolina. Pseudonyms are used here for the school district, county, and participants. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accredits the MJJ (SCDJJ, 2019). The long-term facility houses young people convicted of serious offenses who attend Wood High School in Grades 6 through 12. While the students are enrolled in school, they can enroll in career and technology education (CATE) programs, receive special education services,



attend social work treatment and religious services, and establish relationships with mentors and leaders of community organizations who support them. Approximately two percent of the juveniles receive high school diplomas, while over 75% receive a GED and can enroll in online college courses (SCDJJ, 2019). The certified educational staff members working with the students have at least a bachelor's degree, and some hold doctorates (SCDJJ, 2019). All courses follow the South Carolina Department of Education's standards. When students return to the agency, teachers sometimes question whether they provided the students with the educational foundation needed to succeed.

This research included 12 current or former long-term facility teachers. I selected this setting because it contrasts with the local public schools due to its different educational programs. This location was suitable for this study because of the teachers who work there. This school operates year-round, and the students cannot leave until they complete their sentences. The long-term facility offers online instruction, core academics, GED, and CATE programs.

In 2018, the average daily population at the facility was 160, with an average stay of 160 days (SCDJJ, 2019). In the 2018 school year, the facility enrolled over 200 students: 14 were age 13 and younger, 97 were ages 14 and 15, 72 were age 16, 37 were age 17, and four were at least 18 years old (SCDJJ, 2020). Forty-eight percent of the students receive special education services. Regarding race, 65% are Black, 30% are White, 3% are Hispanic, and 2% are of another race (SCDJJ, 2020). The agency's teachers provide instruction for lifelong learning. The teachers also attend various professional development sessions to stay abreast of current trends. Criminal justice reform is at the forefront of issues in each community. Juvenile Justice and student educational programming needs are also an issue of concern in the community, which is why this study focused on this topic.

According to the agency's organizational chart, an executive director appointed by the governor leads the agency (SCDJJ, 2019). The first branch of the structure includes the senior strategist and the executive assistant to the director. They oversee policy management, public information, planning, and evaluation. The executive director supervises five directors for the divisions of investigative services, education and workforce development, legal services, rehabilitative services, institutional services, and community services. Collectively, the five directors supervise those who provide direct services to the students. The executive director also supervises the senior deputy director, who manages five associate deputies of professional standards, support services, institutional programming, fiscal affairs, and human resources. The five associate directors manage the agency's compliance, building, grounds, institutional programs, and employees (SCDJJ, 2019).

### **Participants**

I used purposive sampling for this study. Purposive sampling combines sampling strategies that allow for comparing multiple needs and interests (Cohen, 2018). The sampling strategy fits the purpose of the case study and the participants (Yin, 20119). The primary participants for this research were current and former teachers at juvenile justice facilities. All the participants either worked at MJJ or retired from a long-term facility. The participants provided information about their experiences based on the subjects they taught, either at the time of this study or during prior terms. Participation in the case study was voluntary, and the teachers maintained the right to recuse themselves at any time.

I selected the 12 participants based on years of experience working in the juvenile justice setting. They had worked for the agency for at least 3 years in the online program, core academics, GED, or CATE courses. I selected the participants because they could best provide

the information necessary to answer the case study questions. I assigned them pseudonyms to protect their identities and to ensure the final case study did not affect the information the participants provided. Upon receipt of institutional review board approval, I sent the teachers invitations to participate in the study via email. I chose these recipients because they make up an interdisciplinary group. I encouraged the email recipients to invite other colleagues who might have been interested in taking part in the study.

I selected the participants because of their unique experiences and talents working in the juvenile justice system. I interviewed teachers from various grade levels regarding their interactions with students of various ages. Also, the four-member focus group elicited a deeper understanding of the teachers' perceptions of educational programs.

The sample for the case study consisted of 12 participants. The size allowed for gathering narratives and letters from enough teachers of multiple disciplines to examine their experiences throughout the school. The participants wrote letters to provide administrators with suggestions for improving educational programs. The number of participants supports the credibility of the case study and strengthens the data's trustworthiness. The data collected included information on gender, subject area taught, years in the educational profession, and degrees earned.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I began my career as an educator in the public school system. However, after earning a bachelor's degree, I became interested in the juvenile justice system. While in graduate school, I worked as a transition specialist in a juvenile justice facility's school-to-work office. There, I learned that the students' life experiences were vastly different from most adults. I conducted interviews with these students. As I listened to their stories, I noticed their views of the system were similar. Most students expressed interest in completing their education and discussed that

attending school helped them pass the time while incarcerated. However, some students wanted to earn a GED, while others wanted a high school diploma. Some of the students liked their teachers but most interacted negatively with teachers daily. Lastly, they all shared their experiences of loneliness while in the institution. To help navigate their lives in the juvenile justice system, they signed up for a mentoring program that provided additional support and negated their social and academic issues.

After listening to the students' experiences, I reflected on my interactions with them and the teachers. I have worked as a school counselor in the juvenile justice system for 20 years. One of my goals is to help students achieve their potential through individualized instruction, career preparation, and postsecondary opportunities. Being the counselor allowed me to view the experiences of others in the facility. As a counselor, I also worked with the students on peer mediation and supported the teachers when requested. The teachers trusted me because they saw me as a peer who had no authority over them.

Through these experiences, I can reflect on why I became interested in teachers' perceptions of educational programs in the juvenile justice setting. I realized there were aspects of student success that needed to be examined. Also, because I have been persistent in supporting juvenile justice reform, I related to the experiences of the teachers and students. I believe the interviews had a significant impact on the juvenile justice system as it prepares productive citizens.

This year, I worked in various school settings. While at a public high school, I noticed the interactions between the teachers and students. Each interaction was positive, and each student was receptive to the educational process. These students were the same age as the students in the

juvenile justice facility. I thought about Dewey's theory of social interaction (Latasha, 2019), where the public schools failed incarcerated students, and what could have been done differently.

Now that I have worked in several locations, my focus is on improving juvenile justice educational programming. This ontological case study was important because teachers who work in juvenile justice facilities are viewed as not believing in or caring about the students. Those who do not work in these facilities either do not know those facilities exist or think teachers who work there are not certified. I would like teachers to gain a perspective of how their specific program or course works and whether they think the current educational system is impactful. I hope to restructure the educational system by adding new teachers, course offerings, and a parent support group.

### **Interpretive Framework**

I hold an ontological view of the research. I believe in following logical steps and gathering necessary data. A good researcher must obtain information from the subjects by asking good questions, being a good listener, being adaptive, having a firm grasp on the issues being studied, and conducting ethical research (Yin, 2018). While my assumptions are that interactions with students influence the teachers' perspectives, I attempted to minimize my influences and experiences in this study.

The desire to conduct this study was based on the perceptions of teachers in juvenile justice facilities compared to mine and how these teachers' perceptions can improve instruction at these facilities. The paradigm used to guide this study was pragmatic. Since I am a school counselor, I have experienced teacher perceptions, but I relied on the experiences and expertise reported by the teachers in the school setting. However, due to their unpredictable situations at the school, the data helped to understand changes in their viewpoint. The themes discovered after

conducting the interviews, focus groups, and analyzing the participants' letters allowed the best interpretations of the teachers' responses. This study focused on actions, situations, and the consequences of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### ***Philosophical Assumptions***

The philosophical assumptions consisted of evidence obtained from the participants. This assumption comes from the need to understand teachers' perceptions of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities and to distinguish between my own opinions and beliefs. This section addresses the philosophical assumption through which I view the world to present my positionality and how I approached this research. My ontological assumption is based on my Christian belief in God as He orders our steps in our daily lives.

My epistemological assumption is that experiences build knowledge. Finally, I discuss my axiological assumption, where my experiences as an educator helped shape this study.

### ***Ontological Assumptions***

Ephesians 4:4-6 explains my Christian belief in God as a single entity:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

I believe that God is the sole provider for this universe. I believe in Revelation 22:13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." My reality of life is having faith in God and how I depend on God for everything. The entire Psalms 23 describes how He guides and protects us. These scriptures remind me that His truth and knowledge guide us daily as we interact with each other. As a researcher, I reported different themes developed in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The ontological assumptions showed the relationship

between the teachers' perceptions of instructional programs and various student behaviors, which allowed me to comprehend the teachers' insights.

### *Epistemological Assumptions*

My epistemological assumption is based on my experiences as an educator. I believe experiences build knowledge. As an educator who has worked in various locations, I know that working with students in juvenile justice facilities is challenging. However, I value education and am knowledgeable about the students' capabilities for academic success. For these reasons, the relationship between what is being researched and me allows me to gain insight into real-life teacher experiences and student behaviors in juvenile justice facilities.

### *Axiological Assumptions*

Researchers' axiological assumptions are characterized by making their positions obvious in their studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Working closely with the participants provided an opportunity to gather information based on their experiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The axiological assumption is the study of the research's value, how teachers perceive educational programs, and how student behavior affects their academic achievement. My values and beliefs are that, as educators, we have new opportunities every day to interact positively with those around us. I believe teachers and students desire the same educational outcomes. However, some students in juvenile justice facilities face difficulties with communication and displaying positive behaviors to allow for academic success. As a result of my experiences in the juvenile justice facility and my values, the axiological assumptions align with my study. It was imperative for me to remove and bracket my biases to effectively execute this research. Bracketing is a method used by some researchers to mitigate the potentially

deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and to increase the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

### **Researcher's Role**

I am a former school counselor who received a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and a Master of Education in Counselor Education from South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, South Carolina. I also received an education specialist degree from Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, and am a certified elementary teacher, high school counselor, and principal who served for 20 years as a school counselor in juvenile justice. In that line of work, I was responsible for creating parole reports, which included information about the student's behavior and academics while incarcerated. The teachers viewed her as a peer, and I had no authority over them. I obtained information from teachers and administrators and submitted reports to the juvenile parole board.

The assumption was that the students used the information they received and that their reintegration plans were being followed. Therefore, I became interested in reviewing the data to determine what academic improvements were made and how teachers perceived the educational programs available to incarcerated students. This research is important to academe because it reveals a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities. Nonetheless, I bring a few biases to the research. As a former counselor interested in improving the educational system in juvenile justice, I believe the system does not recognize the talent and educational strength required to be a teacher or student. Teachers need more support and innovative programs to improve academics, while students need more hands-on courses such as electronics or health-related programs to aid the students in becoming assets to their communities.



## **Procedures**

The following sections explain the research phases for planning, conducting, and analyzing the research. I solicited participants through email to locate educators with at least 3 years of experience. Twelve qualified teachers participated in this study. Each provided informed consent. The institutional review board (IRB) approved this study.

### **Permissions**

Interviews, focus groups, and participant letters provided insight into participants' perceptions. The first step in conducting this research was to seek approval from the superintendent of education of the SCDJJ (Appendix A). Next, I applied and received permission to conduct the study through the Liberty University IRB. Upon IRB approval, I sent email invitations to 12 teachers inviting them to participate in the research (IRB, 2019; Appendix B). I selected the teacher participants using the sampling criteria, which required that they be current or former teachers of online instruction in the core academic areas of English, math, science, or social studies.

## **General Education Diploma or Career and Technology**

### **Recruitment Plan**

Following approval by the superintendent of education, he instructed his secretary to provide me with a list of teachers to email to explain the details of the study after I received IRB approval. I then contacted MJJ teachers in a different location to conduct a five-member pilot test for appropriateness. Data collection began after the administrators received full disclosure of the procedure. To produce diverse data, I selected teachers of all genders and different ethnicities to participate. I emailed the teachers an invitation to participate in the case study. After they

returned the invitation electronically, teachers had the opportunity to select the date and time for their interviews.

### **Data Collection Plan**

The participants signed consent forms before the digitally recorded interviews. I conducted the individual and focus group interviews via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. The open-ended questions elicited information such as the number of years taught, subject area of certification, number of students taught per year, rating of the current educational program, and an overall average of student success in their subject area. The final question concerned how to improve educational programming.

When the interviews ended, I invited the teachers to participate in a focus group. The focus group yielded insight into the teachers' common experiences interacting with the students. At times, a person's answers in the individual interview differed from their answers in a focus group. This discrepancy allowed them to reflect on their perceptions and feelings. Finally, I asked the teachers to write a letter to the superintendent of education to suggest academic improvements. I secured a comfortable and private environment for the interviews, digitally recorded them, transcribed them into a Word document, and analyzed the data.

Upon approval by the IRB and the superintendent of education at the MJJ, I collected data sequentially to explain the case study. During the collection phase, I assembled evidence from three sources: interviews, focus groups, and letters (Yin, 2018). None of these sources revealed identifiable information about the participants or the facilities. I stored all data electronically in a Word document or email on password-protected flash drives. I will delete the files on these drives 3 years after completing this study.

Qualitative research consists of building relationships with the participants. I gathered data in a non-threatening manner to encourage participants to answer interview questions openly and honestly. I protected the integrity of the research by following professional ethics, as detailed by Yin (2018). During the study, I obtained a signed informed consent form from each participant. The informed consent form explained the nature, purpose, and implications of the study and informed participants that their responses would remain confidential and secure and that they could withdraw from the study at any time (Yin, 2018).

Upon receipt of the email confirmation, I scheduled each participant for an individual interview via Zoom. I transcribed the information from the interviews into a Word document and stored it electronically. Four teachers participated in the focus group via Zoom. I also transcribed this session and stored the transcript electronically. I invited the participants to write letters of analysis regarding their perception of education in a juvenile justice facility. I transcribed these letters, stored them electronically, and submitted them to the superintendent of education upon the conclusion of this case study.

### **Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach**

An interview in a case study is a conversation between the participant and researcher wherein the researcher asks the participant to answer specific questions. Interviews allow a researcher to collect valuable information for a study. I interviewed each participant via the Zoom videoconferencing platforms. We discussed the procedures and the rationale of the study before the interviews. The more a case study contains specific questions and propositions, the more it will stay within feasible limits (Yin, 2018). I obtained all required signatures before the interviews. I allotted each interview 60 minutes.

The interview questions (Appendix C) were open-ended, which allowed the teachers to express themselves freely and allowed me to gain an understanding of their perceptions of the juvenile justice system's educational programs. The literature supports the interview questions, which align with the research questions. I asked each participant the same questions.

### ***Individual Interview Questions***

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
3. Why did you choose to work in a juvenile facility?
4. Please walk me through your daily interactions with your students.
5. Of the experiences you identified, which would you say were the most significant?
6. What subject do you teach?
7. What improvements, if any, would you make to online instruction?
8. How does the use of technology make teaching more simple or difficult?
9. What improvements, if any, would you make to core academics?
10. What improvements, if any, would you make to the GED program?
11. What improvements, if any, would you make to the CATE program?
12. What makes a "good day" at school?
13. Thinking about a student who was academically successful, how was your rapport with them?
14. What questions, if any, came up for you as you watched changes in academic programming?
15. How do you expect your thoughts on juvenile justice educational programs to change or develop over the next several years?

16. What else do you think would be important for me to know about your perspective of educational programs in juvenile justice?

Questions 1 and 2 are knowledge questions, which allowed me to delve into whom the teachers work with and why. They also provided an opportunity for the participants to talk about themselves. Enosh (2015) opined that participants might be oriented toward self-understanding, personal development, or self-presentation.

Questions 3, 4, and 12 elicited information about the teachers' experiences with students in the education setting. The behavior and daily interactions in a juvenile justice setting are related to positive educational outcomes. Teachers become frustrated quickly when forced to manage youth with complex mental and behavioral problems if they have no training on how to do so (Hoskins, 2019). Questions 5 through 8 elicited responses on teachers' feelings, experiences, and opinions about students enrolled in their specific courses. According to Murphy (2018a), teachers display different attitudes when students return to these facilities. Criminal justice reform forces change to the juvenile justice system and its education programs and administrators.

Questions 9, 10, and 11 were probing questions about how the educational changes affected the teachers professionally and emotionally (Carter, 2018). Questions 13 through 16 allowed the participants to become experts on educational programming and student needs. As hands-on, front-line workers, teachers often discover issues of which administrators are unaware. Answering this question gave teachers a voice in changes at the division. Lastly, the focus group questions helped gather information from several participants at once. The information may contribute to service improvements.

### ***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan***

I processed, sequenced, and presented the data using charts and tables. During data collection, I looked for trends and common themes, patterns, or concepts (Yin, 2018). I analyzed data from interviews and focus groups by identifying common themes in the participants' responses. To establish this study's credibility, I audio-recorded all interviews and used Otter.ai software to generate a transcript. Doing so allowed me to become familiar with the information. I took the following steps, as outlined by the data analysis spiral approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Manage and Organize Data.** I transcribed the interviews and focus group recordings verbatim, anonymized them, and analyzed them using the constant comparative approach, which meant that I generated themes inductively using a data-driven approach (Coast et al., 2012). As I completed each interview, I transcribed and categorized it to determine patterns and common or recurring themes using a checklist. I categorized this information to answer the four research questions. I checked, labeled, matched, and created each participant file using a pseudonym. I noted relevant information using bold font and italics. Bolded denotations were relevant, while italics were irrelevant. I followed this same process of description and analysis for the focus group.

**Read and Memo Emergent Ideas.** Researchers can use memos to analyze information. To ensure credibility, I accumulated reading memos of reflective writings and recorded notes. I used memos to record relationships between data and categories. I used the analysis by reading the text and then listing each teacher in numerical order, notating emerging ideas. I assigned numbers to protect their identity and to ensure the individual interviews' accuracy and focus group transcripts. I reviewed the interviews, focus groups, and analysis letters for common

themes. I noted relevant information using bold font and italics. Bolded denotations were relevant, and italics were irrelevant.

**Describe and Classify Codes Into Themes.** I searched for common answers or themes in the data to place them in categories and address the four research questions. I noted relevant information using bold font and italics font. Bolded denotations were relevant, while italics were irrelevant. I discarded vague answers or answers that did not fit into a category.

**Develop and Assess Interpretations.** Using the interviews and focus group information, I used categorical aggregation to establish themes and patterns. Categorical aggregation involves collecting emerging themes from the data (Merriam-Webster, 2021). I began this process by forming and developing codes and themes, which I then organized to make sense of the data. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During categorical aggregation, I further coded the bolded or italicized information using specific colors. I used a purple font for the information for Research Question 1, red for Research Question 2, green for Research Question 3, and orange for Research Question 4.

**Represent and Visualize the Data.** Based on the data, I created a visual image through charts to present the information. The categories were subject area taught, curriculum and teaching, teachers, and influences.

### **Focus Group Data Collection Approach**

The second data source was a focus group. Focus groups can be used alone or with other methods and can help to confirm, extend, or enrich understanding and provide alternative insights (Gill & Baillie, 2018). I conducted the four-participant focus group session via Zoom. Teachers were able to freely express their perceptions of educational programs. During the session, I presented discussion questions to elicit the participants' feelings and perceptions about

the juvenile justice system. I designed the questions to gain insight from the individual teachers. As the group moderator, I guided the active discussions.

The focus group questions were open-ended and in a semi-structured format. The questions allowed the teachers to talk among themselves. I posed the questions and allowed time for each teacher to express his or her feelings. Moderating a focus group requires considerable management skills and good interpersonal skills to help guide the discussion along, and, where appropriate, keep it sufficiently focused (Gill & Baillie, 2018). The focus group questions (Appendix D) mimic the teacher interview and are supported by the literature. The focus group lasted approximately an hour.

### ***Focus Group Questions***

The focus groups answered eight questions, presented below.

1. What subject(s) do you teach?
2. How do you think your specific program/course has impacted the students?
3. How long have you worked here?
4. Describe your average school day.
5. How does the school climate affect your ability to teach?
6. How does student behavior impact your class or program?
7. What do you see as “unmet” educational needs of the students?
8. What else could you change or add to make education better?

Questions 1 and 2 built rapport between the participants and me and gave veteran teachers an opportunity to discuss their accomplishments (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016). Questions 3 and 4 provided an opportunity for a lively discussion about recidivism.



The purpose of Questions 1 and 2 was to gain insight into the teachers' firsthand experiences (Yin, 2018). The courses had a positive impact on the students. Students at risk of negative relationships benefit the most when the courses are positive (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). The teachers' methods of reinforcing academic achievement could increase participation in the classroom setting. Question two examined the teachers' ideas about how student participation affected the teachers' ability to reach each student academically (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Teachers often want to know if their course had an impact on their students as lifelong learners. This information allowed them to seek best practices for their courses. Questions seven and eight allowed the real experts in the group to emerge. Since criminal justice reform is at the forefront of discussions around the community, there are plans for its development. Some who aspire to positions of authority at the agency have plans to reconstruct it (Carter, 2018). Questions 3 through 6 asked the teachers to think about what kind of input they would offer to develop or restructure academic programs (Kett, 2017).

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis Plan***

I used the same analysis plan for the individual interviews and the focus groups. I processed and sequenced all data and presented them using charts and tables. During the data collection process, I looked for trends and common themes, patterns, or concepts (Yin, 2018). I analyzed the interview and focus group data to identify common themes in the participants' responses. To establish credibility in this research, I audio-recorded the focus group and used NVivo software to generate a transcript. This allowed me to become familiar with the information.

### **Participant Analysis Letter Approach**

The crucial factor throughout the study was the need for the teachers to express how they perceived the current educational program. The climate of an academic setting is important. In the juvenile justice setting, students often exhibit undesirable behaviors in the classroom. However, the courses in which they are placed or select for themselves affect their behavior. Fostering positive teacher-student interaction assists in how each perceives the other. I asked the 12 participants to write a letter to the superintendent of education to express their ideas about educational programs. Each letter contained information about the writer and their experience at the agency. The writer described positive and negative observations and experiences in the school setting and suggestions for improvement in the educational programs (Appendix E):

I collected the analysis letters after the focus group. The letters did not include identifying information. I scanned the documents and saved them electronically. I shared the letters with the superintendent of education upon the conclusion of this research.

### ***Participant Analysis Letter Plan***

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANT ANALYSIS LETTERS**

As a participant in this study, and as a part of data collection, you are asked to submit suggestions for improving the SCDJJ educational program. Please read the instructions listed below to complete the participant analysis letter.

1. Think about your perception of the current SCDJJ educational program.
2. Using the template below, please write a letter to the superintendent of education with recommendations/suggestions for improving the current educational program.
3. Do not write your name on the letter. Do not sign the letter.
4. After completion, submit the letter directly to me via email.

5. Your name and email address will not be included in my study documents nor shared outside of my study, including with the superintendent of education.
6. This data will be shared with the superintendent of education as recommendations/suggestions for improving the SCDJJ educational program.  
(Appendix F).

### **Data Synthesis**

The purpose of this case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of educational programs in the juvenile justice setting. When collecting and analyzing data, trustworthiness must be established. According to Morse (2015), the steps outlined in the following sections help to establish trustworthiness in a study.

#### **Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation**

Producing thick, rich data requires prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Spending more time with the participants yields more information by building strong relationships. These trusting relationships occur when the researcher is actively involved. More information is revealed as the participants share their experiences. The relationships established during the interviews yielded a quality study.

#### **Triangulation of Data**

Data triangulation requires using two or more sets of data or methods to answer one question. It is often used to categorize data by common themes and assess the consistency of the findings. The process may produce several sets of data that may be used in different studies. These studies may be published separately, allowing the reader to judge the results. In this study, I used individual interviews, a focus group, and participant analysis letters. These sources helped to ensure the validity of the research.

**Peer Review or Debriefing**

Peer review or debriefing is intended to prevent bias and aid in the study's conceptual development. It helps to reveal patterns in the study. Peer reviews and debriefing require the researcher to work with an impartial group. These groups could either have experience with the topic or not. These impartial viewers' insight and feedback enhance credibility and validity.

**Negative Case Analysis**

Negative case analysis often provides the key to understanding the norm, or the most commonly occurring cases. In a negative case study, the participants' views of the participants differ from the main topics of the research. The analysis refines the new negative cases until the study can explain the data in the research. These norms can be compared to the established norms to create additional data. Negative case analysis gives the researcher a better perspective of the study's outcomes.

**Member Checking**

Member checking is a validation technique that requires a researcher to give the transcribed interview or the completed analysis to the participant to provide additional information or correct data. Member checking is conducted throughout the research for clarification and understanding. The participants check for accuracy in the reports of their experiences. These reports should reflect accuracy and honesty.

## **Development of a Coding System**

After developing the interview questions, I created a coding system and designed a template to define the codes. This template consisted of words and phrases I assigned. Participants were free to answer each question as they wished, but the questions' stems restricted answers, which became patterned quickly. Coding helped to better analyze the data and summarize the study's results.

## **Trustworthiness**

This section describes the methods that established the trustworthiness of the research. This section addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. A researcher must triangulate the anonymous data to ensure the trustworthiness of the case study. Triangulation, or collecting data from multiple sources, ensures that a study is valid and reliable (Yin, 2018). This study's data sources were interviews, focus groups, and participant letters. I built the participants' confidence by explaining the documents they signed.

### **Credibility**

A researcher must establish credibility to assist in the validity of the information presented. Credibility establishes the research's dependability and trustworthiness. I collected data and discussed each procedure with the participants throughout the study. These efforts increased the credibility of the information received.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability are like reliability in quantitative studies and deal with consistency, which is addressed by providing rich detail about the study's context and setting (Morse, 2015). Data should be dependable and reliable to increase the trustworthiness of the research. Credibility and overlapping methods ensure dependability (Morse, 2015). An audit trail

to organize the data helped to maintain this study's confirmability. The study's setting allowed for overlapping methods to triangulate data obtained through face-to-face interviews and focus groups. These methods and participant letters produced reliable outcomes to support this study's conclusions.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is another aspect of qualitative research that should be considered; it refers to the possibility that what was found in one context applies to another. Thick and rich data refer to the entire data set, so data quality is associated with the number of interviews or participants. To have a thick and rich data set, a researcher must select an appropriate sample (Morse, 2015). The number of participants was appropriate, and to achieve transferability, I examined how the data were collected and could be used in future research. Through this examination, I developed a thorough description of the case study. Transferability was achieved in this case study because the participants' data were recorded and reported accurately.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The case study approach begins with a specific case to be described and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There is a specific strategy when using this approach, including the type of group or person studied and the location and time of the study (Yin, 2018). Ethical considerations concerned informed consent, confidentiality, agency data, and teacher responses. Liberty University's IRB approved this study before the interviews were conducted. The participants were informed about the process and purpose of the case study. They were also informed about the data security and collection procedures. The participants provided informed consent and knew of the study's requirements for participation. Their names were not used in the study to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Instead, each was assigned a pseudonym. The

participants could access their files upon request; however, I stored the data in a locked, secured location. The MJJ has a stand-alone website for public use that presents the students' demographics and the number of students in each location. I retrieved some information from the site; however, I obtained proper approval. I saved data stored in a Word document or email on a flash drive, which I will secure in a locked location for 3 years.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the methods used for this qualitative case study. The purpose of the case study was to examine teachers' perceptions of online instruction, core academics, GED, and CATE programs in a juvenile justice facility. This case study took place at MJJ. Included in this chapter were the research design, research questions, setting, and the researcher's role. I used purposive sampling to select the 12 current and former teachers who participated in this study. The chapter also discussed instrumentation and data collection. I used teacher interviews, a focus group, and participant analysis letters to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions of the educational program. The chapter also discussed the study's trustworthiness, dependability, credibility, and ethical considerations alongside the findings' transferability.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This case study explored teachers' perceptions of educational programs in the juvenile justice system. The purpose of this chapter was to present the study findings. The chapter describes the participants, presents the results, and concludes with a summary. The data analysis involved collecting data through interviews, focus groups, and participant analysis letters. I sequenced all data and presented them using charts and tables. During data collection, I looked for trends and common themes, patterns, or concepts (Yin, 2018). The data analysis revealed common themes in the participants' responses.

The analyzed data came from teacher interviews, focus groups, and participant analysis letters. The participant analysis letters advised the superintendent of education on improvements in academics in the juvenile justice system. The teacher interviews were conducted one-on-one via Zoom and professionally transcribed using Otter.ai software. I also conducted a focus group with the teacher participants. I have carefully reviewed the documentation and read the transcripts. I used pseudonyms for all participants to maintain their confidentiality. The knowledge gained from this case study might assist others in improving education and understanding teachers' perspectives of education in the juvenile justice system.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study are current or former DJJ teachers with at least 3 years of experience in core academics, online instruction, CATE, or GED. The participants were males and females over the age of 21 of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Due to the small population of teachers and to keep their identities unknown, all teachers' experience is listed as advanced.



**Mary**

Mary is an advanced-level teacher who has mostly taught high school students. When she received her invitation to participate, she was excited and expressed her excitement through an email. Her favorite part of teaching is being able to share her experiences with the students. She expressed that greeting the students in the hallway and at her doorway every day helps to set the tone for her lessons. She loves to use direct projects with the students based on what they are studying. She believes that direct experiences, as well as life experiences, assist the students in understanding the work. She gives the students time to discuss classwork and believes in helping them get to where they need to be.

**Isabella**

Isabella is an advanced-level teacher who has had a variety of life experiences, including in the military. She was incredibly open about her teaching experiences and how she was able to begin working in the juvenile justice system. Isabella feels that her employment in juvenile justice was inevitable because of how the opportunity was presented to her. She sees her students in a different light because she collaborates with them in various capacities. She stated that when she began working in juvenile justice that it was easy for her to make a shift in her mindset and to be able to assist in rehabilitating the students. She tries to instill in the students that there are better ways to achieve their accomplishments. When asked about her thoughts on juvenile justice educational programs, she stated that kids are committing crimes, and they must be here. She thinks that exposing the students to things outside the box is the key to getting a better return from the students, getting them involved and engaged.

**Terry**

Terry is an advanced teacher who always spoke about how he loved working with the students. He began his career in a different department than education and decided later that he would become a teacher. He talked about how he likes to greet his students at the door. He enjoys seeing the students' daily accomplishments. Terry stated that greeting the students in the mornings and the afternoons helps them realize that people do care for them regardless of incarceration. When asked about his perceptions of his subject area, he stated,

If the students understand that I am the teacher and they understand that they are the student, we have mutual respect. I have a good rapport with the kids. And if the kids understand that you believe that they can accomplish the task, they will complete the assignment.

Terry was asked about his perception of educational programs. He stated that improvements are needed to meet the educational needs of the students. He is not certain about how to make these improvements, but he would like to brainstorm with a group of teachers to figure out how they continue to make improvements for the students they teach.

**Cierra**

Cierra is also an advanced teacher who served in various capacities. She stated that her goal is to help at-risk children. The students come from various backgrounds, with passion and heart. She hopes that these children, once they go back out into their communities, know that they can be a success if they choose to. When asked about her perception of academic programming, she stated, "My thoughts are to have everybody on one page ... so you can move the educational department forward. I would like to see more technology used with the students. ... Education should have more positive reinforcement, more student-focused."

**Helen**

Helen's favorite part of teaching is watching the children succeed. The students she teaches deserve and need the most qualified, strongest teachers. She is enthusiastic about her students' learning. She stated that her classes are typically multilevel. She also stated, "You just have to be on point when it comes to making sure that you can meet the educational needs of each one of those students." When asked about her perception of her program, she said she is doing her best to accommodate students at different sites. They are "building it as they go and tweaking it as they go." She also stated that her program is better than it was last year.

**Erica**

Erica was extremely excited about the interview. She repeated that she loved her job and greeted the students at the door every day. Erica is an advanced teacher who witnessed changes within the agency. She stated, "This is one of the best-kept secrets because they had no idea of remarkable things we were doing behind the fence. It was not what I pictured it to be and certainly not what others thought." She also thought any teacher would say the number one thing they had a problem with or questions about was how to hold students accountable and what to do about discipline. Some days, she would have 12 students in class and might have to send four students out to teach the other eight, but she would have loved to have kept all 12 in class.

About her perceptions of her classroom, Erica stated, "I think that and know that I always felt that my classroom was a safe environment but with just the ability to be able to teach the students." When asked about her perception of the educational system in juvenile justice, Erica stated that discipline comes before anything. "If we do not have controlled discipline, then it defeats everything else. The teachers would like for the students to be held accountable for their actions." Erica also thinks that every teacher is a great teacher, and they would love to be able to

teach the class. She thinks the educational setting has wonderful offerings but cannot get around to it without discipline and holding students accountable.

### **Lauren**

Lauren is an advanced teacher who has taught for years. She was very honest throughout her interview. When I asked her about her background, she admitted that she never wanted to be a teacher. She stated that once she began teaching, she fell in love with the students because she felt they needed her. She loved teaching and often thought of her students as her family members, like little brothers or cousins. She stated that students learn by doing things, whether right or wrong. She often had an open-door policy for her classroom, and she requested the students who were having issues in her class or throughout the school. When asked about her perceptions of education in the juvenile justice setting, Lauren stated that education should focus on students' needs.

### **Lisa**

Lisa started her career in juvenile justice in the mid to late seventies. She began her career when the agency was under a different name. After she graduated college, she had several options for employment. However, the only job she wanted was in the juvenile justice setting. When asked about her daily interactions with the students, she stated that at the beginning of her career, the students thought of her as their older sister, but as she ended her career, they saw her as their grandmother. She said that in her daily interactions with the students, she jokes with them and tries to include them. When asked about her perceptions of education in a juvenile justice setting, she said that students need to learn from teachers. She stated that teachers have had to stand with education, and the students are human beings; the focus should be on them as children.

**Chris**

Chris is a former public school teacher. She began her career in juvenile justice in the early 2000s. She has always been interested in working in the juvenile justice system. She said she interacts with the students in a positive manner. She stated that the youngest students have a problem focusing on school because of what they are dealing with socially. She stated that educators still expect them to thrive academically while having unmet needs. She feels that there is no consistency throughout the school year. There is no smooth transition from the start of the school year to the end because the leadership is constantly making changes. Chris stated that education reform is taking place in all parts of education. Chris feels that leadership needs to incorporate the right people to get things done. If there is no reform, then everything will continue to get worse. However, she does feel that reform and changes are possible if it is a change in leadership.

**Onea**

Onea is an advanced teacher who has taught for more than 20 years. She was very funny as we conducted her interview. I asked her why she chose to work in a juvenile justice setting, and she stated that she should have retired a long time ago. I asked what she loved about working in a juvenile justice setting. She stated that she loved working with the students and teachers. She likes to assist the students in trying to change their lives. I asked about her perceptions of the educational system in the juvenile justice setting. She commented that she started in the agency with people who were more focused on the students. The agency needs to take its time to figure out what is best for educating the students.

**Neffie**

Neffie is a diligent teacher who has served in several capacities. She was enthusiastic throughout the interview. She believes that building relationships with the students and teachers is important. She stated that the students are with her for various amounts of time, so she tries to make an impact on them in a brief period. Neffie stated that she treats each student the same and that every day is a new day. When asked about her perception of academics in the juvenile justice facility, Neffie stated, “We try to reach each student and provide them with what they need. We are doing our best.”

**Neill**

Neill has worked with the students for several years. She has seen several changes in how the students behave and achieve academically. Neill loves to teach and has taught in various locations. She was very enthusiastic throughout the interview and stated that she loves working there. When I asked Neill about her perception of education, she stated, “We are no different than any other district. We work hard with the students we get. The question is, are the students accomplishing anything?”

**Results**

The research focused on teachers’ perspectives, student attitudes, and school climate. The purpose of this case study was to describe teachers’ perceptions of the juvenile justice educational system. Qualitative methods allowed me the opportunity to understand their perspectives. The data sources were one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and participants’ analysis letters. Several themes emerged from the data analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

The documents collected for this study were participant analysis letters. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the teachers to express themselves freely so that I could gain an understanding of their perceptions. Questions 1 and 2 were designed to give them an opportunity to explore their personal development and self-understanding. The questions also included discussions about students' behavior and daily interactions, data related to their classwork, and their positive outcomes. Teachers also discussed their experiences with the students enrolled in their courses. They explained and described the daily interactions with students who may have had behavioral issues. The focus group questions were designed to allow the teachers to talk among themselves. As I listened to their conversation, the teachers felt that the students were struggling with their behavior. During the focus group, the teachers also spoke freely about their classroom management skills and rapport with students. The participant analysis letters were written to give insight into improving the educational system in the juvenile justice setting. The teachers' perceptions were included in their explanations of how to move forward and improve the educational system.

## **Theme Development**

The data analysis revealed many themes. The data were checked to make sure that I had appropriate correlations. I conducted 12 one-on-one interviews and one focus group. The participants also wrote participant analysis letters. All interviews were conducted via Zoom due to COVID-19. Zoom was a readily accessible platform for the participants and me. All the interviews were digitally recorded to ensure accurate transcription. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes each.

Each participant was asked 16 interview questions. Each question was related to the topic, and I gained insight into the teachers' perspectives on the courses they taught. Following the one-on-one interviews, I invited five teachers to participate in the focus group. However, four teachers participated. The participants were two current and two former teachers with more than 15 years of experience. I asked eight questions grounded in the literature. The focus group took approximately an hour. The last four questions presented great discussion and in-depth information shared among the participants. After the focus group, the participants expressed that they enjoyed comparing notes and explaining their perceptions of their interactions with the students. The last source of data was the participant analysis letters. I used the qualitative research software NVivo 12 to identify recurring themes and codes. Table 1 provides the emerging themes and codes from the interviews and focus groups.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Code Appearances in Themes*

Codes	Code appearances	Themes
GED	15	Teachers' perceptions of curriculum and teaching
Academics	11	
CATE	20	
Technology	26	
Experiences	10	Teachers' perceptions of experiences/environment
Environment	22	
Behavior	14	Teachers' perceptions of behavior and student needs
Student Needs	5	
Perception	27	



## **Curriculum and Teaching**

The teachers indicated that the curriculum needs adjustments. These adjustments will impact students' academic success and outcomes for their futures. The teachers do their best in their classrooms while using the current resources. However, some participants feel they need more diverse additions to the curriculum.

## ***GED***

I asked the participants about the improvements made to the GED. They stated that it is important for the students to complete the GED program. Students who qualify to earn their GED must be at least 16 years old and have their parents' permission. Other participants indicated that the students want to learn, and they are in a place where they are excited about learning. However, there is an issue with having enough of a workforce to reach each student. The GED is so individualized that it is hard to work with a group of students at one time. So, the teachers can collaborate more because all the teachers are not in the same area. There should be more time to collaborate and address students' individual needs. Cierra stated that she would place restrictions on eligibility and ensure those most familiar with the program work on making improvements. She said, "I would have a committee of those who know for sure that when selecting students, it is for the best interest of the child."

Isabella stated that the GED program is one of the strongest programs they have. She thinks that if they keep doing what they are doing and give the students study and prep time, everything will be okay. She also said that it would be helpful to have the students continue to work on the GED after hours when they are in their dormitory. However, overall, she feels that the GED program is extremely strong. In Erica's analysis letter, she added, "I am proud of our students' GED success rate. I would recommend that upon recommendation for release/parole

from SCDJJ that students must provide documentation of certificate of professional training in at least one Career and Technology class.” Lisa stated that the GED is “push, push, push,” and most students want their diploma. She supports the GED program and stated, “The students will do anything to go home, but they do not see the importance of learning for the sake of learning.”

### *Academics*

According to Cierra, students are usually two to three grade levels behind in reading and math when they come in. Teachers like the specialist who tries to get them caught up before they are released to go back home. Other participants indicated that core academics need districtwide improvement or differentiated instruction. Onea revealed that in her classroom, students show little concern for completing assignments. Cierra indicated that the students struggle academically, especially in reading, English, and math. Interventions provided by resolute tutors in reading and English will transfer to other subjects like math, social studies, and science. However, Terry stated,

Teachers in the classroom need to use differentiated instruction, scaffolding instruction, and make sure that the students have appropriate time within the class period to understand the material. If class time is too short, the kids do not will get the content, but if it is too long, it will bore the kids. Although teachers may use incentives or rewards to get the students to study the material, once the students leave their room, it is up to them.

### *CATE*

Another code that came up regarding curriculum and teaching was the CATE program. Incorporating or improving the CATE program was important to the participants. According to Lauren, the CATE program offerings are extremely limited, so more course offerings are needed.

She stated, “You must work on your programs. You know you have them. We are going to need a program to entice those persons to want to come there.” Isabella stated that bringing in more CATE teachers to replace people who retire is a good thing. Often when people leave, those programs are not replaced, or at least not timely. She also said there is a need for more elements of the CATE program so that the students could have more choices. Currently, the CATE courses are business finance, welding, carpentry, horticulture, and music. She feels there is a need for more programs for work-based learning for young people. She suggested bringing in more people like cosmetologists and barbers to give our students more options and opportunities. So, once they leave, they can have additional certifications that will benefit them.

### ***Technology***

The participants agreed that technology is an issue that makes teaching and learning difficult. However, with the additional issue of COVID-19, teachers and students had to adjust. Helen stated, “I like to look my students in their eyes. I like to look over their shoulders. I read their body language. That is a little bit more challenging through the computer because you can miss things.” In addition, Helen’s analysis letter stated, “Over the past couple of years, due to the Covid pandemic and teacher shortages across the state, our division has had to make innovative changes to accommodate the changes.”

Cierra stated, “Sometimes, when it rains, you do not have a good internet connection. So, it does interrupt the online instructions when you do not have the right type of strong internet connection. So, with, that would need to be improved.” Teachers faced other technology issues that were not in their control. Erica felt that creating a calm, positive environment helped the students focus. However, she said,

We always had his issues with pornography. If you had internet access or the possibility of internet access, you had to be careful with pornography or the possibility of somebody getting access to Facebook or finding a backdoor into other programs that they should not have. So, that has always been a problem, and that is why the internet is blocked, but it always worked well in my classroom.

In Terry's analysis letter, he agreed with Erica: "We need consequences for students that abuse (unauthorized websites, games, etc.) the use of technology during class sessions."

### **Teachers**

All the participants shared that feeling safe and having positive relationships in the school environment affects academic achievement. The rapport with each student can also have an impact on the student's willingness to learn. Students and teachers must have mutual respect for academic success.

### ***Experience***

The focus group provided an opportunity for the participants to discuss how they learned to navigate working in a juvenile justice education program. Laurin stated,

It takes a special person and special people to work out there. It really does. And for as long as each one of us has worked out there, that's a testament, you know. We have 17 years, we have over 23 years, we have 35 years, we have 25 years, and the people and this focus group, we were there, or have been there, because we wanted to be there.

Laurin also added,

I think that we can get back on track. We can get back morale, [and] the appreciation will come back once you start putting the kids back up front. And the teachers and learning to

appreciate what everybody has done and continue to do in this type of setting as we see change each day.

In Isabella's analysis letter, she wrote that some incentives need to be implemented to boost morale. Chris shared her long-term interest in working with juveniles. She stated she first became introduced to the agency in the year 2001. She left and went to public school, and she returned in 2015 as a teacher. Chris shared an interesting view: "It's all based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If the student's needs are not met, how can we as educators really expect for the student to thrive academically."

Lisa has over 45 years of experience. She stated, "I was like the big sister when I first started, then I ended my career as the grandmother." During her teaching career, she maintained three basic rules. She said, "We have school rules and classrooms, but my basic rules were respect yourself, respect your peers, respect the materials, and respect me." Onea stated she shared similar class rules. She said all her students had the same opportunities to develop academically.

### ***Environment***

The participants indicated they understand how to work in a juvenile justice environment. They discussed how the work environment support for the teachers is necessary for motivating the students. Isabella shared, "The atmosphere for me, I enjoy it. It is about the people, for me, that I work with. It makes it good, the common denominator of the fun and engagement of dealing with my colleagues."

Cierra stated,

If the environment is not conducive to learning, the child will not learn whatever you want him or her to learn. They will not get it unless you have some creative ways to keep

your kids' attention. You may have a kid in there that acts up. It is all in one approach people must be on the same page, administrators, teachers, counselors must be a united front.

Cierra added, "Where I stand right now, the morale and the climate are nonexistent. There is no morale. ... It is just a cold climate." However, Mary added her thoughts on the importance of good behavior and motivating students: "Oftentimes, you just have to build a relationship, and then you can accomplish what you deem is your mission."

### **Influences**

The participants indicated that there is a difference between teaching students from diverse backgrounds because they are from different areas of the state. Some participants felt that the student behaviors in the building made it challenging to maintain a positive academic environment where students can learn.

### ***Behavior***

The participants indicated that students' behavior had a great deal to do with their ability to teach and rapport and daily interactions with the students. The students' behavior was a common theme among the participants. During the focus group, Isabella stated, "Sometimes, students' behavior can become aggressive. Some days it can be a wrestling match." Lauren added, "There was no such thing as an average day in the classroom." When I asked Erica to describe a good day in school, she discussed student behavior in her classroom. She discussed how students would interact positively with her. However, she also stated,

A good day at school is when there is no fighting. And you have been able to reach, honestly, 50% of your students. ... On a good day, I have been able to say that there have

been able to reach at least 50% to 75% of my students, and I thought it made a difference for that day.”

When asked about the school climate, she said, “I think when ... they started holding students less accountable for their actions, they did a disservice to the students and to the teachers.”

Isabella added,

The truth of the matter, the kids that we were dealing with are kids that were coming from the public schools and everywhere else throughout the state. ... The nature of the beast of where we are dealing with ... some of those children who have committed some heinous crimes. It is not for the faint of heart on a day-to-day basis.

### ***Student Needs***

The participants spent some time discussing the importance of the students’ unmet needs. During the focus group, the participants were asked about these. Isabella shared her concern regarding the lack of family involvement. She mentioned that many of the students’ parents are unavailable or have no sense of discipline. Cierra mentioned, “These kids come in with issues. Problems at home, mental issues, trauma. If we dove into that, and really see what is going on and help with that.” Isabella supported Cierra’s statement by saying, “By the time ... they come to us, it’s almost like we are trying to do a brand-new thing and reimagine a kid, and that is complex by itself.” Erica stated that the old-fashioned discussions about student behavior during treatment team meetings with social workers, teachers, and psychologists were important. The teams met to discuss the students’ needs. Erica also felt that the “treatment teams need to be in full force and effect in the future. All the different disciplines can come together and discuss that student.”

### ***Perception***

Participants noted that their perceptions of academics in the juvenile justice setting are affected by the rapport with students and other educators. Even though the participants tried to find diverse ways to positively describe their perceptions, most were able to walk a narrow line. When asked about perceptions of academics, Terry stated, “I think they are going to change. They are going to try to continue to reach all the needs of the students that we teach.” Mary stated,

My perspective is that instead of veering away from programs where kids are less involved, if we go back to bringing in outside professionals and that sort of thing so that they would be able to see others doing things that they would perhaps not get exposure to. I really think that that would help.

During Chris’ interview, she stated that having the correct leadership is key to the development of education. Chris stated that there could be no reform and that current methods will deteriorate without the right people ensuring that students are prepared for college or careers. From Lisa’s viewpoint,

They’re human beings, and they are children. They might act like they are the dog of the world, but they are still children trying to make it in an adult-like setting. ... You must work with the child first and then try to get them to see other things.

Neill and Neffie both agreed with Lisa. Neffie added, “These children belong to all of us.”

### **Research Question Responses**

This study’s research was focused on the central question of how teachers perceive education in the juvenile justice facility. The data collected from interviews, focus groups, and participant analysis letters were used to create codes that helped develop themes. Applying this



question sought to examine how teachers perceive the subject areas for which they are responsible. Teachers may use interventions to support delinquent students' educational efforts and promote their college aspirations. This may help reduce the adverse effects of behavior on educational attainment (Kim, 2012).

### **Sub-question 1: What Are Teacher Perceptions of Online Instruction?**

In an online course, a student is separated from the instructor and other students, but they engage with each other through discussion boards and online technologies (Scoppio, 2017).

In the curriculum and teaching theme, the participants all felt that online instruction was important and became even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lisa shared that "it really benefits the child." Orea shared that she liked the online instruction because it allowed everyone to be safe. Helen discussed the similarities between SCDJJ and other locations. She stated, "This facility is having the same challenges any other organization is having in that we are short-staffed." However, according to many of the participants, the technology needed for online instruction was not dependable. Cierra shared that the students did not have reliable internet access. She also shared that "it does interrupt the online instructions when you do not have the right type of strong internet connection. So, that would need to be improved."

Chris shared the following about online instruction:

I believe it could be much better if we did a trial run of the virtual instruction because right now, with having teachers in person and online, there is a significant discrepancy between the schedule and when the classes are actually taught. So, it is leading to a lot of frustration with the teachers as well as the administration at different sites.

Technology was at the forefront of the teachers' perceptions of curriculum and teaching. Participants agreed that online instruction and adequate technology were important. Lauren had a

unique perspective on online instruction. She felt that the instruction could not truly be considered online instruction because, early on, “it was nothing more different than emailing assignments over the network. So, there is room for improvement.” Chris thought there should be a separate virtual online school: “I believe DJJ’s educational divisions should have a school within a school for those students that are capable and motivated to manage virtual instruction.”

### **Sub-question 2: What Are Teacher Perceptions of the Core Academic Program?**

According to Timmemans (2018), teachers’ expectations for students’ academic performance are higher when their perceptions of the students’ engagement are higher. The core academic programs offered at MJJ are English, math, science, and social studies (SCDJJ, 2020). Participants shared their perceptions of academic programs. Mary stated, “The improvements would be to include more activities in which the kids would be able to interact. ... Perhaps an example of that would be if we were covering slopes and things of that nature.”

Ensuring that students receive what they need academically influences what they are taught. Cierra shared,

If we could have tutors dedicated to reading and English, it will transfer to other subjects like math, and social studies, and science. But our kids tend to be two to three grade levels behind in reading and math when they come in. Also, we have the majority of more than half of our students, especially if they need services, those services for students in special ed will also help regular ed students because with them coming in so far behind, they need the services just like our special education students to try to get them caught up if they can be caught up.

The theme of teacher perceptions of behavior and student needs was the most-frequent code. The teachers agreed that they wanted to improve students’ core academics. However, the

students enter the facility with deficiencies. Isabella supported Cierra's thoughts. She stated that teachers often have to start with the basics. She noted that some might feel ashamed because they are several levels behind. She said that teachers must be creative to ensure the students catch up on their coursework.

### **Sub-question 3: What Are Teacher Perceptions of the GED Program?**

According to the DOE (2014), an at-risk youth is considered to be at risk of academic failure, substance abuse, early pregnancy, juvenile justice involvement, truancy, and early school dropout. The GED is offered to students who are 16 years old and have fewer than 10 high school credits (SCDJJ, 2020). Helen said she is dedicated to making the GED program successful. Helen added, "Because GED is a little different than a content course, is more individualized, is harder to do a whole group of students." Isabella stated, "That is one of the strongest things we have gotten going. ... Overall, our GED program is extremely strong." Erica shared an experience while she spoke with her students about the GED. She feels that the timing for students entering the GED program should be postponed. She stated,

I would prefer that entering the GED program be put on hold and let them go through core classes and complete some of the classes and have some longevity learning. And depending on the guidelines, toward the end of the guideline, then introduce them into the GED program and let the students start working toward it. Because there is so much learning left to be done. And they assume that once they get the GED, there is nothing else in the world that they must learn.

### **Sub-question 4: What Are Teacher Perceptions of the CATE Program?**

The CATE course offerings vary. College and career readiness support can help students prepare for life after secondary school. Career and technology education (CATE) teachers

acknowledge the importance of developing students for the world around them. The teachers' perceptions of the CATE program theme appeared as the second highest frequency under curriculum and teaching. Lisa discussed teacher involvement in developing a CATE program: "They need to really sit down with the instructors and listen to what they really need in those classes. They need more classes, more concrete classes." Neill stated that there are skills the students need to know for future careers. Some of this training may lead to certifications that may be used for employment. Cierra saw a need for a CATE director and more instructors. She felt that students in the program might become bored and that stronger efforts were required to retain CATE teachers.

According to Isabella, "Whatever we can do to help these students leave with additional certifications, that is one step closer for them being able to secure real jobs that, you know, that can benefit their overall wellbeing." Helen stated, "The CATE program is a great program. I am always excited, and I love to share about their program to other people out in the community because they do not realize the opportunities our students have." The teachers' perceptions of experiences and environment support the need to improve and expand the CATE program.

### **Summary**

I conducted this case study to examine how teachers perceive educational programming in the juvenile justice facility. I conducted teacher interviews and a focus group via Zoom. The participants were also asked to write analysis letters to the superintendent with suggestions for improving education within the facility. To protect the participants' privacy, I assigned them and the location pseudonyms.

The data were compiled, dissembled, and then interpreted. All the data were transcribed using the NVivo and Ott.ai software. Three themes emerged regarding curriculum and teaching,

teachers, and influences. The data were used to answer the four research questions, which focused on understanding teachers' perceptions in the juvenile justice facility. The results indicated that many participants had a great understanding of the students' educational needs and how their care for interacting with each student affected their perceptions. Teacher participants had a variety of suggestions and ideas on how to fix the problems within the education system. The knowledge gained from this case study will give an insight into the perception of the educational programming within juvenile justice facilities.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities. The study examined the importance of rapport with students, academic offerings, and peers' influences on teacher perceptions. This chapter summarizes findings, implications based on current research, and practical and methodological implications. Lastly, the chapter presents the study's limitations and delimitations as well as recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion**

Previous research on education in juvenile justice systems has mostly focused on students, not teachers. Limited research focuses on the teacher's perspective but has not examined the insights of teachers who work in juvenile justice facilities. I interviewed 12 educators who teach in juvenile justice facilities, conducted a focus group, and asked them to write participant analysis letters. Table 1 in Chapter Four presents information on the participants. I compiled, disassembled, and reassembled the data on several occasions to ensure that I had a detailed understanding of the data collected. I also transcribed and coded data to determine the themes. The findings are in Table 2 of Chapter Four. It summarizes the frequency of codes and themes. The following sections discuss the study's theoretical and empirical results.

### **Interpretation of Thematic Findings**

The data analysis revealed three themes and several sub-themes in the participants' experiences. The themes pertained to curriculum and teaching, teacher experiences, and student behavior. These themes were followed by related sub-themes, which expanded and connected the research. Regarding the sub-themes of behavior and student needs, the participants generally

agreed that their rapport and relationships with the students were necessary to achieve academic success.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The study's findings were developed from the central research question. The central question was how teachers perceive educational programs in the juvenile justice setting. I used sources of data: teacher interviews, a focus group, and participant analysis letters.

After analyzing the data, several themes were developed. All teachers felt that education in the juvenile justice system was important. They felt that the education the students receive is also important. They reported that the academic offerings at the school were appropriate. All teachers thought that the daily interactions with the students varied. Students could come in ready to learn, but behaviors could change instantly, which could lead to fights due to other negative interactions. Some teachers felt that greeting students at the door and saying good morning would assist them in engaging the students throughout the day. Teachers reported that some of the significant experiences they had were helping the students focus on school because they had many social issues. These issues may have caused the students to fall behind academically. One teacher gave an example of a 17-year-old student who might have earned only four high school credits. This student would be eligible to enroll in the GED program. One teacher described her heart and passion was allowing students access to a college education. However, according to the participants, the students could receive additional practice and support if they were allowed to work on assignments in their dormitories.

The teachers discussed using technology for online instruction during COVID-19, which was inadequate. They felt that technology use in online instruction needed improvement and that the offerings in the CATE program were minimal and needed additional courses for

certifications. During the discussion of students' unmet needs, the teachers stated that students' needs should be the driving force behind education.

The participants discussed student behaviors in school and in the classroom. They indicated that a good day at school would include no fights and students' presence in class. One teacher described a good day at school as a "continuous learning environment and an interrupted day with no walkouts." She indicated that they are around the students and want them to be better and succeed: "So, they pour into them because they want to be poured into, and they want to be successful."

About their perspective on the educational program in juvenile justice, the participants said they would like to rehabilitate them all. However, some students will forever change, and some will come in and remain the same. The teachers stated that they must know the difference and give everybody a chance. However, as these students come in, the teachers realize they did not get this way overnight. Another perspective from a teacher was that they deal with the students adjudicated by the court. When the students enter the school, the teachers do not know what crimes they committed: "Most of the time, they do not know what they have done because they must work with the child. They meet them where they are. They are somebody's child. They treat them with the utmost respect." A teacher stated, "And when we take a step back, you keep going for another day."

The teachers find teaching in the juvenile justice facility rewarding and fun. One teacher said they have a wonderful team: "this is one of the most challenging jobs to work on because [it] is not only physically exhausting, it's mentally exhausting." She also stated, "Nobody else can tell us how to do this job unless they have done it themselves." One of the teachers felt they had some "dedicated teachers, administrators, a dedicated leader, and a superintendent who has



an amazing vision for our organization.” As the researcher, I deemed four interpretations significant in this study.

First, online instruction is important, but it is necessary to upgrade technology for student use while setting restrictions and guidelines for computer use. The participants felt that providing students with the opportunity to work online was good. However, some felt the students needed a person in the classroom to provide additional support. Other participants felt it was imperative to have adequate internet connections and other technology.

Second, increased support and focus on academic programs will improve student viability and success in alternative programs. The teachers shared how the core academics support other programs within education, including the GED and CATE. Each program builds on the other. Academic support is necessary for the other programs to succeed.

Third, support for alternative educational avenues is important. Research is needed to secure additional avenues. Teachers felt that the students were two to three grade levels behind. Most participants shared their support for the GED program. It is an effective program and a viable alternative for those who otherwise might not earn a high school diploma.

Fourth, there is a dire need for additional CATE offerings. The students require certifications that are applicable to their lives. The teachers felt there were inequalities in the CATE program. They agreed that more programs should be added to CATE and that the vacancies should be filled with knowledgeable directors who can take the program to the next level.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

The literature for this research supports the importance of positive interactions between students and their teachers in juvenile justice facilities. However, the burden is often on the

teachers to make academic instruction relevant for students interested in academics while addressing inappropriate behaviors. Thus, administrative policies must be evaluated, and practices must be updated to address student behavior and academic success. The following section articulates the implications for policy and practice.

### **Implications for Policy**

Justice-involved youth are at higher risk for negative school and post-school outcomes (Cavendish, 2014). This study's practical implications focused on how school systems and teachers can create a positive environment conducive to learning. The concept of having a positive learning environment is not new, but these environments are limited in some juvenile justice facilities. These findings affect policies because teacher-student relationships and the impact of all aspects of education on teachers' perceptions are important. Teachers must be intentional with course assignments, interactions, and expected behaviors in the school. There is much research on teachers who work in public schools, but research on teachers in juvenile justice facilities is limited.

School districts must provide adequate training for teachers when new programs or ideas are implemented. This training ensures that the programs are used effectively. Administrators can use these findings to understand the teacher's perspective, student educational needs, and potential problems in program offerings. Administrators can also use these findings to find solutions for filling vacant positions. These findings provide further literature on this topic because of the specific focus on educators in juvenile justice facilities. These findings can also provide other teachers with firsthand knowledge of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings affect practice because the participants felt that students' behavior improved when they focused on their education. The study also revealed that teachers felt their classroom made a difference for the students. They felt that the students did what they were supposed to do, and, as teachers, they did what teachers were supposed to do. Teachers and students learned from each other by sharing and building rapport. They felt that showing the students respect ensured they showed the teachers respect. The study found that the participants increase their abilities as educators to ensure that all students can learn.

## **Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

This section discussed both theoretical and empirical implications. Subheadings were provided for each implication. The theoretical implications provided the foundation of this study. I discussed how this study is supported through the empirical implications. This study contributes to the field of education and extends previous research because it provides teacher perceptions of academic programs in juvenile justice facilities. It sheds new light on the seriousness of social interactions in these facilities and their effects on academic success.

### ***Theoretical Implications***

John Dewey's social learning theory (Sikandar, 2015) was used to understand this study's results. This theory argues that the school is a social institution in which education and learning take place (Sikandar, 2015). Along with education and learning is Dewey's contribution to the curriculum and its relevance to students' lives. This case study supported this theory in that the participants realized that establishing rapport with the students motivates them to succeed academically. In addition, the participants shared how the school's climate and culture affect students' classroom performance. One aspect of Dewey's theory connects the relevance of the

educational system to student lives. If students do not see the connections, they will not do well academically. The participants shared how intentional they were in addressing student needs and how conscious they were in making the connections the students needed after leaving the facility.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Hawkins, 2017) and solution-focused brief therapy are based on Dewey's theories. Even though Bronfenbrenner's theory includes layers of systems, its foundation includes the links of social interactions. Research indicates that students need an engaging environment and positive reinforcement throughout the day. The participants suggested that the students' attitudes and behaviors in the classroom influenced their perceptions of the students. On several occasions, participants indicated that students need assistance to focus on school because of their social issues. Ecological systems theory (Hawkins, 2017) suggests that establishing positive relationships increases student achievement.

Solution-focused brief therapy was implemented in alternative school settings and effectively addresses academic issues, dropout rates, and behavioral and emotional issues among at-risk students (McGrath, 2016). According to one participant, students in the juvenile justice setting are often victimized and traumatized. The participants felt that although they viewed the students as people first. Participants viewed their job as providing support to the students while educating them. The participants also felt that because these students had suffered academically, there was a need to address specific academic issues. Two identified the need to properly place the students in the diploma or GED track. These placements are based on the students' prior academic records. The teachers must work with each student individually and on their specific academic level. Instead of placing all students into one category, teachers personalize student learning.

This study was an extension of previous studies because it focuses on the perception of teachers who specifically work in juvenile justice facilities. It allowed the participants to reflect on their feelings about the positive and negative interactions with students. The participants indicated significant experiences that allowed them to assist students with many social issues. The study also focused on the benefits and barriers of teaching in a juvenile justice facility. This study supports Dewey's educational theories and how interactions in the classrooms assist in shaping a collaborative environment. Previous research focused on the students' behavior but did not consider how the teachers interpreted or perceived their behaviors. It also did not examine the teachers' perception of the benefits or barriers of teaching in this environment.

This case study also offers insight into educational program offerings in juvenile justice facilities. The participants indicated the need for students to participate in academic courses. However, one participant expressed that the curriculum could be delivered to the students in a variety of ways, including virtually and via the school within a school concept. The participant felt that offering various educational platforms to the students would ensure their academic success.

### ***Empirical Implications***

I analyzed the data to determine if the results were consistent with the literature reviewed. The literature focused on teacher interactions with the students and how teachers perceived their specific content areas. Teacher perceptions of student behavior can affect student success (Crosby, 2015). Teachers must respond to student behavior either by re-directing it or offering praise or support for positive behavior.

According to Bronfenbrenner, effective communication is needed when instructing students in alternative settings. The findings in this case study indicated that teachers understand

that student behavior influences their perception of the effectiveness of their programs. The participants discussed the negative and positive behaviors of the students they teach. They realize that the behaviors may be caused by prior traumatic experiences. They also were knowledgeable about changes that could be implemented to support and advance the educational programs. The changed programs should include increased social interactions, where the students would participate in hands-on or direct interactions.

The evidence from the interviews, focus group, and analysis letters showed that the teachers are dedicated to educating their students and offering them opportunities to succeed academically. The teachers expressed that the daily interactions with the students would assist in rehabilitating the students. This constructive interaction allows the students to maintain control of the learning while the teachers serve as facilitators. The analysis letters suggested that the teachers wanted a thorough hiring process to ensure the correct teachers could offer various curriculum experiences. It also revealed that incentives should be used to promote positive student interactions in class. They also recommended establishing consequences for misuse of technology during class sessions. The study results also suggested that some teachers do motivate their students.

As teachers continue to interact with the students, they naturally influence the students' social skills (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). The teachers felt that one important aspect of academic achievement was ensuring that each program offered would assist the students with their plans after they return to the community. Their CATE experiences should increase through expressive and art interactions supported by real-life experiences. If changes to educational programs are necessary, teachers want to be actively involved. Because of the work environment, teachers felt that the relationships between them and their co-workers were as important as the

teacher-student relationships. Teachers provided their understanding of their challenges in the classroom and how they felt students reacted to school or classroom rules and policies. These findings focused on the teachers and their ability to teach and express their perceptions of education programs in juvenile justice facilities.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

I chose to only use educators with at least 3 years of teaching experience in the juvenile justice facility because that is the minimum required to fill these teaching positions and because it takes time to develop an understanding of how to work in these facilities. The teachers in this study had an average of 25 years of experience. They indicated that their years of working in the facility were a testament to their perceptions of educational programs and their desire to provide love and support for the students. They had built a strong background of knowledge and resources to assist with working in this specific area.

One limitation of this study was that it happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the students and teachers to fully incorporate technology. The facility shut down, and the teachers were allowed to provide instruction from home. The students attended class virtually while living in the dormitories. The remnants of the pandemic, mask mandates, and other COVID-19-related decisions caused me to conduct the interviews and focus groups via Zoom.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research on the topics covered here could be conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study's data could be useful for future research. Instead of focusing primarily on the teachers, a future study could include all employees in the education division. In addition, several topics could stem from this case study. Instead of focusing on the education division, additional research could include perceptions of security staff and social workers. The expansion

of the research project may help provide insight and understanding of the perception of the entire juvenile justice facility.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to understand the teachers' perceptions of academic programming in juvenile justice facilities. The findings indicated that overall, the teachers have a positive perception of academic programming and a sincere desire to help the students become successful. However, they felt that the current academic model needs to be revamped. They also felt that the students and staff would benefit from consistency across the board regarding the curriculum. The teachers want to have input, training, and practice before the implementation of educational program changes. There is some concern about facilitators and teachers of record. The participants felt that both needed training and collaborative opportunities throughout the school year. The collaborative opportunities would allow facilitators and teachers of record time to build camaraderie and address concerns. The participants also felt that recognition or a bonus program for teachers and staff should be implemented as an incentive and morale booster.



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**Appendix A**  
**IRB Approval Letter**

IRB-FY21-22-207Review

IRB, IRB

Tue 2/1/2022 3:35 PM

1 attachments (30 KB)

Good afternoon,

The IRB has completed its review of your research application, and you will receive your approval notification shortly. Some minor edits were identified on the attached document, and we wanted to make you aware of the edits, but you do not need to return the document to the IRB. Feel free to contact the IRB if you have any questions.

## Appendix B

### Invitation to Participate

Dear Participant:

*As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand teacher perceptions of educational programs in juvenile justice facilities, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.*

*Participants must be a current or former teacher in the following areas: core academics, online instruction, CATE, or GED. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview via Zoom, a five-member focus group via Zoom and write a participate analysis letter to the superintendent of education. It should take approximately 60 minutes to complete the procedure[s] listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.*

*To participate, please contact me for more information/to schedule an interview/etc.*

*The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me via email prior to the time of the interview.*

## Appendix C

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself.
2. Please walk me through your daily interactions with your students.
3. Of the experiences you identified, which would you say were the most significant?
4. What subject do you teach?
5. What improvements, if any, would you make to online instruction?
6. What improvements, if any, would you make to core academics?
7. What improvements, if any, would you make to the GED program?
8. What improvements, if any, would you make to the CATE program?
9. Thinking about a student who was academically successful, how was your rapport with them?
10. What questions, if any, came up for you as you watched changes in academic programming?
11. How do you expect your thoughts on juvenile justice educational programs to change or develop over the next several years?
12. What else do you think would be important for me to know about your perspective of educational programs in juvenile justice?

## **Appendix D**

### **Teacher Focus Group Questions**

1. What subject(s) do you teach?
2. How do you think your specific program/course has impacted the students?
3. How long have you worked here?
4. Can you describe your average school day?
5. How does the school climate affect your ability to teach?
6. How does student behavior impact your class or program?
7. What do you see as “unmet” educational needs of the students?
8. Would you like to add anything?

**Appendix E**  
**Participant Analysis Letter**

Date

Dear Mr. XX,

I am writing today to share my recommendations/suggestions for improving our educational programs at DJJ. As you know, I am a teacher in the juvenile justice system. Throughout my time here I have observed and experienced students with positive and negative responses to my course.

Upon analysis, I think our academic program offerings

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Please consider my recommendations. Thank you.



## **Appendix F**

### **Instructions for Participant Analysis Letters**

As a participant in this study, and as a part of data collection, you are asked to submit suggestions for improving the DJJ educational program. Please read the instructions listed below to complete the participant analysis letter.

1. Think about your perception of the current DJJ educational program.
2. Using the template below, please write a letter to the superintendent of education with recommendations/suggestions for improving the current educational program.
3. Do not write your name on the letter. Do not sign the letter.
4. After completion, submit the letter directly to me via email.
5. Your name and email address will not be included in my study documents, nor will be shared outside of my study including with the superintendent of education.
6. This data itself will be shared with the superintendent of education as recommendations/suggestions for improving the DJJ educational program.

## Appendix G

### Consent Form

Title of Project: HOW TEACHERS PERCEIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE FACILITIES: A CASE STUDY

Principal Investigator: Connie Mitchell Liberty University School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study:

You are invited to be in a research study. You were selected as a participant because you are a current or former educator in the juvenile justice system who has worked at least three years in either the online program, core academics, (General Education Diploma) GED or (Career and Technology Education) CATE courses. Each teacher will be over the age of 21, and of a diverse racial group which includes males and females. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this case study is to describe the teachers' perspective of the educational programs in the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice. Through a series of interviews with teachers in the juvenile justice schools, the researcher will examine the question "How do teachers perceive their educational programs and experiences?" The study will provide an understanding of the experiences shared by each teacher. The theory guiding this study is John Dewey's theory on philosophy of education and teacher education (English, 2016). Based on this theory, school is a social interactive learning process. During this time, juveniles' question who they are, how to fit in and where they are going in life. Students usually decide to either join groups which foster positive relationships, seek support from gangs, or develop other negative relationships (Farn,2016). This theory provides a framework for exploring how teachers seek to find ways to connect educational programs and prior experiences to improve lifelong learning for the juveniles.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in an interview. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, we will record our session via Zoom. (60 minutes)
- Participate in a Focus Group. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, we will record the session via Zoom. (60 minutes)
- Write a analysis letter for the superintendent of education. (60 minutes)
- Review your interview transcript. (30 minutes).

Benefits:

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include improving the overall juvenile justice educational system.

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Risks:

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter and must report any disclosure of child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others to the appropriate authorities.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. We will conduct the interviews via Zoom due to Covid 19 restrictions in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. The focus group will be conducted via Zoom due to Covid 19 restrictions.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

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

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher. You may ask any questions you have now. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair.

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Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Statement of Consent:

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record & video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature of Participant Date

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