

## ABSTRACT

### A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Correctional Education: In the Absence of Humanizing Pedagogical Praxis Among Incarcerated Men

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Incarcerated men look to the classroom as a refuge to learn, grow, and develop, departing from their typical, everyday environment where devaluation is the norm. Unfortunately, the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of the classroom's inability to restore human dignity, implicitly perpetuating incarcerated men as less than human beings. Despite the abundance of literature about how correctional education lowers recidivism, attributing to its effectiveness, research finds "no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education" (Kline & Tolbert, 2017, p. 287). Among incarcerated men, undependable findings limited addressing emotional wholeness and restoring human dignity as the shortcomings.

In two separate focus groups, six formerly incarcerated men explored correctional education to understand better how incarcerated men learn best, absent of a humanizing pedagogical praxis. The chosen method for this qualitative, phenomenological case study encompassed a purposeful criterion, maximum variation sampling strategy, complimentary of a snowball approach. Intentionally drawing from the research

questions separately, the design's strength in methodological congruence with the Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories frameworks led to the key findings.

This research argued that correctional education in its current state contributed little to self-actualization. Instead, many incarcerated men found themselves struggling with their emotional selves, inhibiting their full learning potential. Furthermore, not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings, recognizing their learning needs as essential, social interaction, personal identity formation, trust, and respect led to not realizing their inherent possibilities as their human right to learn, grow and develop. Though PourAli et al. (2016) suggested that education systems should focus on positive outcomes for all students when "limiting the student's opportunities" (p. 313) became a psychological deficit. But when correctional education compromised their learning experiences by making incarcerated men feel undeserving of an education because of their prison attire, it failed to meet the mark to ensure learning in humanizing ways. For incarcerated men, dignity represented the most fundamental aspect of their human spirit, anchoring them to the center of their being in recognizing their goals and needs in the totality of reaching their full potential as a human being's fundamental right.

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A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Correctional Education:  
In the Absence of Humanizing Pedagogical Praxis for Incarcerated Men

by

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A Dissertation

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEA: Correctional Education Association

GOB: Good Old Boy

TIFA: Texas Inmate Families Association

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to Alvin Dwayne Dobbin, “Wilbert Mosley” (Moon), and all incarcerated men in Texas towns in your honor and for your struggle. I want you always to remember there is power in believing in yourself. Even when faced with challenges, never allow anyone or anything to interfere with what you value most. To my beautiful daughter, Aenea. Every word written is with visions of you cheering me on. Thank you for the love, understanding, and genuineness of your heart. You talked with me, comforted me, and encouraged me through it all. I love you dearly. To my beloved late Grandmother, in your memory, I honor all that I am to you. To Mommy, thank you for your love and support. You carried me under your heart where I remain as the best part of you. To Denita, Rochelle, Shunda, and Jacqueline, your encouragement through the most challenging accomplishment of my life meant everything. A million thanks to my brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, cousins, uncles, and aunts.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction to the Problem of Practice

#### *Introduction*

Humanizing education honors the distinctive dignity and inalienable rights of incarcerated men as human beings. Most essential to humanizing education is that it promotes them as fundamentally good, free-will capable of achieving their best in an ideal learning environment (Crain; 2009; Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016; Vuegelers, 2011). However, recognizing incarcerated men as such requires including them in one's moral scope, free from evaluating past discretions diminishing their character, self-esteem, or value. "These men are not perfect; they are complicated and have made mistakes—they are human" (Smith, 2007, p. 97) and deserve a humanizing education to complete their fullness in life. To balance humanizing education and morality, every individual must consider what is right irrespective of social pressure, compelling historical conformity based on indifference barriers.

Correctional education is central to this study. The exploration thereof seeks to understand better how incarcerated men learn best and how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis plays a substantial role in their learning experiences. This study collects data from the perspectives of six formerly incarcerated men in two separate focus group sessions. All participants earned degrees of merit, having completed correctional college courses for two or more years while incarcerated. Most distinctive among the participants is that in group one, these participants entered a program where they continued as professional mentors and coaches to post-release initiatives involving newly

released men; whereas, group two were released into society and did not. Collectively, their reflective views build awareness about the effectiveness of correctional education programs and the role it plays as its responsibility in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways. Further, this study guides correctional educators in developing new knowledge relevant to the humanizing element needed in multicultural learning environments, supporting incarcerated men through their evolutionary journey.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The U.S. Bureau of Justice of Statistics (2019) reports that between 1995 and 2000, the percentages of college courses offered to incarcerated individuals decreased, from 31% to 27%, with less than 10% participating in college courses today. Most disturbing about this report is that 52% of Texas's nearly 1.5 million prison population participates in correctional education, while 48% does not. But "the only recent surveys of prisoner participation in education and training programs are from 1991 and 1997" (Coley & Barton, 2006, pp. 15–16), which identifies statistical gaps in the success of Texas correctional education programs. Kline and Tolbert (2017) affirm "there are no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education" (p. 287) or addressing the emotional wholeness contributing to restoring human dignity among incarcerated men. Adding to the literature gap, correctional education in its current state contributes little to self-actualization, denying their freedom to pursue their most tremendous potential, explaining how the absence of a humanizing pedagogy exposes the danger of correctional classrooms' inability to restore human dignity among incarcerated men. Kilbane and Milman (2014) believe that praxis "combines the best teaching methodologies of old and new" (p. 309), but old teaching

means utilized throughout correctional classrooms today often include oppressive practices. Freire (1993) states that “many of these leaders have ended up using the educational methods employed by the oppressor” (p. 68), akin to culturally-driven ideologies about indifference and low expectations, owing to incarceration. A study conducted by Blake and Sackett (1975) finds that “a prison education program’s success influences a person’s values and attitudes in authority positions” (Vacca, 2004, p. 300). One might ask to what degree is the influence of authority’s positions when the absence of a humanizing pedagogy exposes the danger of the classroom’s inability to restore human dignity in a system design of indifference, disguised as rehabilitation coined as education? Smith (2017) explains that “if prison educators would more fully consider how such spaces serve as intellectual communities that restore human dignity within an institution built on the premise of taking that dignity away” (p. 1). Then, perhaps an actual measurement of success will accurately display current statistical reporting on educational attainment, addressing emotional wholeness and contributing to restoring human dignity among incarcerated men. Except, correctional education programs cannot be aware of, realize, or understand the value of a humanizing education until the sphere of influence to which abstracted states collectively convene its resoluteness in divergence—leaving the success of Texas’ correctional education programs by its metrics distorted.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study seeks to understand better how incarcerated men learn best absent of a humanizing pedagogical praxis by exploring correctional education through the perspectives of six formerly incarcerated

men's lived experiences. Although differences exist among their views, interest in this research lies in the lack of a humanizing pedagogy in correctional education programs that overlook human potential due to incarceration. In its commitment to incarcerated men, correctional education programs should abandon the current system's design and reimagine new ways of learning in the name of humanizing education. Envisioning their right to intellectual freedom in tandem with a whole intact person without restriction culminates in defining creative expression as foundational. In turn, society benefits from productive membership beyond recidivism or employment opportunities as the new measurement. Previously confined to the different units throughout Texas' correctional institutions, the selection of six formerly incarcerated men, all diverse in age, race, and time, participated in college courses for two or more years. Contributing to this research in defining ways, group one entered a program where they continued as professional mentors and coaches to post-release initiatives involving newly released men; whereas, group two were released into society and did not. Although both groups are free from physical, institutional confinement, their reflective educational experiences persist, holding them captive to their unrealized potential, struggling with social and emotional well-being, still seeking the fullness of their being. The research employs a qualitative, phenomenological case study from the perspectives of six formerly incarcerated men. To better understand the most crucial aspect of how they learn best absent of a humanizing pedagogy in their lived educational experiences, the researcher explores the following research questions:

1. What is correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways?

2. What value does correctional education bring to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem?
3. How do teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men?

Several considerations exist when addressing how incarcerated men learn best, absent of humanizing pedagogy. First, moral fortitude is crucial because it “involves a sense of how things matter concerning a person’s value reference systems” (Hunt & Carnevale, 2011, p. 659). Second, the essence of a humanizing learning experience must become infused into a functioning whole that empowers incarcerated men through better decision-making, agency, and well-being. Finally, at hand, the beauty of humanizing pedagogical praxis, realized as key to correctional education’s effectiveness, shapes incarcerated men’s core contributing to the wholeness most needed in their lived educational experiences.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories are the frameworks guiding this research study. Humanistic Learning Theory is a “constructivist school of thought resulting from Erikson (1950); Rogers (1959); and Maslow (1943)” (Khatib et al. 2013, p. 45). They combine their social and interactionist views of humanistic principles and interpret them through affective processes representing human values distinction. Erickson’s (1950) contribution, derived from the psychosocial constructivist perspective, emphasizing social significance as the staple of all humanistic learning and development. The influence of this viewpoint lends to the thoughtfulness of Rogers’s (1959) stance on relevance supporting incarcerated men’s advancement towards realizing their potential, aiding in the meaning-making process of human development. Maslow’s (1943)

Hierarchy of Needs symbolizing value and worth affirmation and expressing basic human needs in reaching self-actualization. Knowles et al. (1998) explain that Humanistic Learning Theory leads to “a process by which behavioral changes occur, shaped, or controlled” (p. 13). The motivation that drives behavioral change rests within one’s individualism, residing in an understanding of oneself and the surrounding world. Stryker and Burke (2000) refer to Identity Theory as the external social structure and the self, the core of one’s being, guiding discovery of how one views oneself, others, and society. Ahonen (2010) attributes “psychosocial well-being constructive to learning, includes social factors and close relationships, emotional and cognitive development” (p. 23) as part of one’s evolutionary journey towards the path to self-actualization. These frameworks support human education, social and emotional needs, and self-esteem as fundamental to realizing what is unrealized. Thus, emphasizing the role of correctional education, its value, and how teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change as most significant to incarcerated men’s lived educational experiences.

### *Research Design*

A qualitative inquiry begins this research study, providing a better understanding of how incarcerated men learn best absent of a humanizing pedagogy by exploring correctional education from six formerly incarcerated men’s perspectives. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain that “qualitative research is an approach that honors an inductive style for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider qualitative inquiry the catalyst to a naturalist approach to interpretative meaning. For incarcerated

men, an interpretative meaning involves making sense of how they view the world around them and who they are as human beings.

The researcher employs a phenomenological approach, complimenting the meaning of qualitative inquiry, exploring the essence of incarcerated men's lived educational experiences rooted in literature from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated men. Moustakas (1994) supports the belief that "extracting themes common across interviews or unique to an interview and then creating a conceptual link" (p. 16) establish interpretive meaning. Stewart and Mikunas (1990) relate philosophical phenomenology to reality, while Van Kaam (1966) considers human behavior's richness as meaning. Applying a phenomenological perspective to the meaning-making process illuminates the depth in the essence of incarcerated men's lived educational experiences otherwise obscured.

The utility of this research approach, essential for case study inquiry, follows Stake (1995) and Yin (2009, 2012, 2014) for its efficacy of theoretical propositional development and framework construction across multiple social science inquiry processes. Exploring two groups of formerly incarcerated men who have completed college courses, each from different Texas areas with varying degree attainment, informs the researcher's data collection method. Moreover, a qualitative, phenomenological case study establishes the basis for understanding how incarcerated men learn best. Further, exploring correctional education's role and responsibilities and how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis serves as a barrier to learning, exposing the danger of the classroom's inability to restore human dignity among incarcerated men.

The data collection and analysis protocol encompass structured and semi-structured interviews and observations in two separate one-hour focus group sessions. Observations consist of behaviors, attitudes, and activities during the focus group. The preparation and organization of data for analysis involve reading and preparing transcript notations, essential to interpreting the data. Reading and reviewing all the data collected for themes, cross-checking for errors, categorizing, and winnowing allow describing and classifying codes into themes. The process uses thick, rich descriptors to detail coded data collected while developing and assessing interpretations representing and visualizing the data, ensuring the validity, complimentary to this qualitative, phenomenological case study's exploration.

#### *Definition of Key Terms*

*Anticipated Stigma*: “expectation of personally experiencing discrimination of consequences due to having a stigmatized identity” (Moore, et al., 2015, p. 3).

*Barriers*: “something immaterial that impedes or separates” (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

*Culturally Relevant Pedagogies*: “recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 1).

*Humanizing Pedagogies*: “a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ humanism in all aspects of learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 1).

*Implicit Bias*: refers to “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats, 2014, p. 16).

*Incarcerated men*: “adult men confined in jail or prison” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

*Identity Theory*: “deals principally with the components of structured society and self” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225) and “the internal process of self-verification” (p. 284).

*Intersectionality*: “having multiple stigmatized identities” (Moore et al., 2015, p. 25).

*Moral Experience*: “encompassing a person’s sense that values that he or she deems important are being realized or thwarted in everyday life, and includes a person’s interpretations of a lived encounter, or a set of lived encounters, that fall on spectrums of right-wrong, good-bad or just-unjust” (Hunt & Carnevale, 2011, p. 660).

*Perceived Stigma*: “a process through which stigma impacts individual behavior” (Moore et al., 2015, p. 1).

*Stereotype Threat*: “is being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797).

*Stigma*: “an attribute that is deeply discrediting that reduces someone from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3).

### *Conclusion*

Correctional education is essential to incarcerated men. Although barriers of indifference and low expectations interfere with their learning experiences, owing to their prison attire. Imparting new teaching and learning approaches equip educators with a better understanding of what incarcerated men need to place them on a path to self-actualization for the fullness of their being. Providing educators with an opportunity to reflect on the humanizing aspect of educational practices aids in minimizing barriers, promoting well-being, and restoring human dignity, leading to sustained behavioral change after release. When correctional educators connect new knowledge and transferable skills relevant to the humanizing element of learning, the value of education becomes the balance in the wholeness incarcerated men seek to realize their full potential.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

Society's opinion that incarcerated men receive what they deserve is a matter of interpretation of what is deserving. When the walls of justice tip the balance of who should learn in a dysfunctional educational system latent of the value of a humanizing pedagogical praxis. It places incarcerated men at the heels of injustice in their pursuit of acquiring what they need to reach their full potential. The following literature review argues that correctional education contributes little to self-actualization in its current state, adding to the literature gap, explaining how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of the classroom's inability to restore human dignity among these men. The predominating system design of indifference, disguised as rehabilitation, though coined as education, implicitly perpetuates incarcerated men as less than human beings. The ensuing argument unfolds in four steps, addressing an accumulation of inherent environmental constraints as barriers, contributing to the complexities of learning realities for incarcerated men. First, their struggle with forming their stigmatized identities and the impact of fear driving their desire to learn, grow and develop. Second, the exploration of correctional education, highlighting its importance and the benefits, painting a picture of what successful correctional education programs resemble subscribes to the hope for influencing the restoration of human dignity. Third, educators' impact on their learning and how fostering positive teacher-student relationships accomplish an understanding of the expectations of their teacher's

responsibilities. Finally, behavioral unawareness among correctional educators solidifies the realism of educational priorities and how cooperative and collaborative classroom environments center the well-being of these men. The literature review concludes by drawing out the implications of how correctional education misses the mark in realizing the value of a humanizing pedagogical praxis to improve the learning experiences of incarcerated men worthy of the right to learn.

### *Identity*

Before incarcerated men begin to experience correctional education, they must first resolve themselves and their place in the world. To accomplish self-discovery's adjustment to the mind's recognition of their environment as an enterprise of "mass incarceration designed to warehouse a population deemed disposable" (Alexander, 2012, p. 18). An environment where society sees them as expendable, replaceable, and tossed away can become a frightening experience for these men. With new rules and assimilation into norms and culture, they lose sight of who they are. Their minds play tricks on them, and depression, self-doubt, embarrassment, shame, and even suicidal thoughts consume the psyche; one can easily fall prey to the mind without much to do.

In the minds of incarcerated men, prison, the perfect playground for deceit, pretends to offer solace through three meals a day and a cot. Yet prison's reality epitomizes cunning underground regimens, often rendering them powerless to control and incapable of feeling whole. The absence of wholeness represents the grounds for falling prey to the mind. Burke and Stets (2000) explain the mind, which develops in conjunction with the self, is part of a social process. The social process involves "social psychology because it deals with various phases of social experience from the

psychological standpoint of individual experience” (Mead, 1934, p. 2). Their individual experiences express the need for social interaction to maintain sanity and to feel connected to something. For these men, letter correspondence, telephone conversations, visitation with family or friends, or connecting with those who share commonalities serve as a bridge to tangible meanings. In addition, learning new technological advances, automation, current events, and even fashion brings them forward into 21st-century learning and beyond. The point is, understanding themselves and where they fit in society empowers meaning as essential to the validation of their existence as human beings, securing their self-worth and their places in the world.

Incarcerated men learn how their minds work in coordination with the self, but understanding the formation as the meaning of their identities remains a challenge owing to the sense-making process in the struggle to control the conscious mind. Burke and Stets (2000) explain, “the self originates in the mind of persons and is that which characterizes an individual’s consciousness of his being or identity” (p. 9). In other words, incarceration has a way of dismantling a man by forcing him to second guess himself, become paranoid, and doubt his existence and purpose in life. As a powerful force, the conscious mind allows the self to see “itself as an object, regarding and evaluating itself” (p. 9). For these men, sense-making has everything to do with checking themselves, as if their behaviors reflect a mirror image providing governance over itself. Consistent with this explanation, McCall and Simmons (1978, p. 52), as cited in Burke and Stets (2000), refer to selfhood as the moment they learn to make sense of their world through self-reflection. Talking with themselves in the process of self-regulation and hearing themselves speak to their conscious selves is where “the self can be both the

subject and the object” (p. 9). Thus, self-reflection facilitates identity formation, and where the mind governed by the self serves as the behavioral self-regulatory instrument. When self-esteem and the authenticity of one’s identity diminish, these men need humanizing education to address social and emotional inadequacies, promoting behavioral change.

Behavioral change encompasses identity formation as the capacity to accept oneself, others, and their views. Cinoğlu and Arıkan’s (2012) “concept of identity refers to the giving of oneself and others as a balanced exchange in understanding because it hinges on self-governance and the ability to preside over oneself in public” (p. 1114). In this space, they struggle here most not because testosterone levels make their struggles difficult but because self-regulation or self-correction requires deep reflectiveness to see beyond the surface of one’s true self. In many ways, revealing unknown truths, such that a person may feel ashamed to admit, requires vulnerability concerning one’s state of being.

Though not easily accomplished due to lack of awareness and pride, the ability to reckon with oneself is part of behavioral change in identity formation. In general, most men stand proud in their manhood, although most men find themselves clueless about what manhood means. Many admit to growing up fatherless, despite having a father reside in the home. Yet, most agree that a flawed understanding of the meaning of manhood existed. Instead, many repeat what they saw in the home or winged it based upon what they learned in the streets. Research points to the ideology of traditional masculinity, which Levant and Richmond (2008) define as “an individual’s internalization of cultural belief systems and attitudes toward masculinity and men’s

roles” (p. 131). From this perspective, the meaning of manhood began from earlier constructed learning experiences as the sociological and psychological state. Accordingly, literature explains manliness as “the dominant view of the male role” (p. 131), which could explain why many incarcerated men find it challenging to display human vulnerabilities. Connell (1995) goes a bit further when referring to masculinity ideology as hegemonic, underscoring power and control as its role in the dominance of white heterosexual men over women and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. The literature’s explanations provide the context in which these men draw consistency in ways most understand manhood. When Lavent (1996b) explains role-sharing as a consequence of masculinity ideology’s influence on the fathers’ participation in child care, he refers to the father’s puffery in having a son and discipline and correction solely as his role. One significant consequence is the duplication of learned behaviors passed down from generation. Noteworthy is the mother’s passivity, knowingly and unknowingly, allowing behaviors and practices learned from ages to continue as the norm. Though faultless, for her private submissions rendering her mute in defiance of the rule of male dominance, she often suffers in silence as a witness to brutality in the role-sharing that gave way to conflicting inaction from which she also learned in becoming a woman. From her experience, she, too, teaches her son the power of male control. Earlier experiences shape ideologies in the way many incarcerated men see manhood. As a result, their experiences run counter to everything they now understand of being a man and why they struggle with their identities. Gruber and Borelli (2018) also find that “boys grow up in a world inhabited by a narrower range of emotions—as men, they experience higher depressive symptoms and resort more often to physical violence” (p. 1). Rather

than displaying human vulnerabilities, most learned manhood characteristics representing strength, toughness, and violence as the natural order in commanding respect. Normative male alexithymia could explain this behavior:

Normative male alexithymia refers to the fact that traditional masculine role socialization has channeled many men into ways of being such that their masculine identity conflicts with many emotions they feel and what they feel they are allowed to express (i.e., they will be shamed and will feel as if they are not real men if they express feelings of vulnerability, dependency needs, weakness, etc.). (Henriques, 2014, p. 1)

Social interaction concerning traditional maleness shapes behavioral experiences among incarcerated men. In the identity formation process, social interaction involves understanding how one's role fits society. Thoits (1983) explains that "social interaction is essential to normal psychological development and ordered social conduct in producing the social self as part of the personality which links the individual to society as an important intervening variable in human behavior" (p. 175). Often, these men identify with and work to establish their roles within groups most similar to themselves. Similarities or commonalities result from interests, culture, ethnicity, or general likenesses. Cinoğlu and Arıkan (2012) suggest that when "interaction identities start recognizing the existence of other identities as occupants of social roles just like themselves and a constructive relationship begins, the new self establishes itself with its new identity" (p. 1118). Social interaction becomes increasingly essential by conforming to the group's new norms and rules to shape experiences. For instance, those who convert to Islam pray five times daily, only eat fish on Friday and commit to not consuming pork. In competing roles, praying five times a day might conflict with other norms or rules of a different group when incarcerated men elect to eat with others, play chess, or engage in conversation with diverse groups of people. The repetition of these roles translates into

multiple identities over time because they learn that the process of identity formation is an even exchange of value. In other words, moving from identity formation into transformation relates to behavioral change and is part of social interaction that involves the measure of giving and taking. Cinoğlu and Arıkan (2012) find the giving aspect of this exchange involves an “active display of interest and interaction with social groups that follows the reciprocal exchange as acceptance and more involvement with social groups” (p. 1119). As a result, incarcerated men learn from one another and begin to consider other perspectives, recognize communication styles, learning to respect and trust one another in the process. These experiences provide an equal exchange of ideas, concepts, and support from one to another that guide them through problem-solving and decision-making. The process involving a “direct relationship would demonstrate the influence of reciprocity and exchange norms” (Holmes & Rempel, 1989, p. 202). While every experience brings new learning opportunities, the meaningfulness in the moments of experiences matters most.

In traditional maleness, essential to shaping behavioral experiences, the most significant advantage of social interaction defines the moment when incarcerated men begin to feel a part of something, a sense of belonging, such that a family or kinship provides. However, as the uncertainty of social groups’ rejection occurs, many look to find new fulfilling interactions with others. As a result, fear of rejection and social and emotional embarrassment can arise, causing the withdrawal from any group membership. The effect deteriorates group experiences to the degree that the “power of self over society, gives way to the power of society over the self” (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012, p. 1115). In other words, the feeling of rejection from group memberships renders them

powerless against the way others see them, not just viewing themselves the same but disconnect, detach, or disengage from the social interaction exposing vulnerabilities essential to shaping experiences.

Although the experiences of incarcerated men, engendered by identity formation and transformation, may explain their roles and group memberships, personal identity speaks to a man's core, reflecting things most valued as meaningful constructs. Research in this area distinguishes between sociology and social psychology in the meaning of personal identity theory related to behavioral change. In the manner of behavioral choices, Hewitt (1989) defines personal identity as "a sense of continuity, integration, identification, and differentiation, constructed by the person not concerning a community and its culture but specific to the self and its projects" (p. 179). For these men, personal identity relates to finding purpose in themselves. As Hitlin (2003) argues, values produced through personal commitments change over time, driven by situations, allowing for transformation and reform (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012), as meaningful paradigms reflective of one's behavioral choices. The utility of learning about oneself and others relates to life experiences, shaping beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Controlling thoughts, words, and actions central to behavioral change represent personal identity formation, defining their character as valued.

As incarcerated men learn more about who they are, their purpose in life, and how it aligns with their value systems, personal identity formation becomes increasingly essential. The significance extends to which they "find themselves in a state where they need to change and consistent with reflexive images of themselves in their minds" (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012, p. 1128). Learning how to self-regulate the mind increases

self-esteem in exploring a changing world's nuances. Adjustment occurs in reorganizing their psychological preparation to integrate into society as part of their value system. Otherwise, they remain unprepared for the stigma they face both in and out of the classroom.

### *Stigma*

Stigma serves as the existential threat in the breakdown of how society views incarcerated men, undermining their entire existence. Goffman (1963) explains that stigma “deeply discredits and reduces someone from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3), belittling their significance as human beings. The power of stigma, experienced in everyday life, from prison's environmental constraints, violations of personal and social shame from correctional staff, to ignored classroom needs. The breakdown occurs when society's attitudes towards them cause internalized self-acceptance, placing them at risk for failed relationships and group dissociations. The all too familiar experiences of stigma's human emotion disproportionately impact them in ways that impede their value system's ability to rediscover themselves and their existence as human beings.

Stigma, associated with stereotypes' harmful effects, create barriers to learning among incarcerated men. Dudley (2000) explains that stereotypes “interfere with people's opportunities to succeed and hinder their efforts to become more normalized” (p. 449). For these men, stereotypes occur when correctional educators assume all they learn the same or pretend to ignore their questions during class and dismiss their contributions in a discussion as insignificant. Stereotyping causes them to lose interest in learning, often feeling undeserving of an education. Especially troubling for these men is

that stigma operates as a label and a permanent reminder of their imprisonment. People only see criminality and not the individual. As a result, society demonizes them as flawed, a menace, and often unworthy of life, employment, and education. As a barrier, stigma, associated with stereotypes' harmful effects, inhibit their abilities to reach their true learning potential, undervaluing their existence as human beings.

### *The Impact of Stigma*

The impact of stigma accompanies assumptions that stem from negative attitudes and deeply rooted beliefs among those who see incarcerated men as less than the respect due to a man owing to incarceration. Alexander (2012) explains, the “stigma of criminality functions in much the same way that the stigma of the race once did” (p. 18). History reminds us that a person’s race was once the channel for conveying fear rooted in indifference and defined by society’s treatment of people of color. Society denied people of color access to quality education, legal representation, and housing because of fear and indifference. In this case, criminality is the channel for conveying the same beliefs as defined by society’s treatment of these men. Lemert (1974) establishes that formal labeling as an offender causes one to internalize stigmatized attitudes, withdraw from conventional society, and conform to a deviant identity. Eventually, they begin believing societal views, shutting down any possibility of advancement having resigned themselves to failure. The assumption that all incarcerated men are inadequate and undeserving of education creates responses to the stigma that can hurt learning. The reason is that “once labeled, individuals are subject to uniform responses from others” (Scheff, 1966, p. 82). The stigmatization of labeling replays unauthorized events of past experiences in their minds, becoming the universal norm for taunting, social shaming, and public humiliation.

At the same time, unauthorized accounts affirm how stigma plays many roles, shaping how they view themselves and how others view them. Instead, incarcerated men revert to the pre-identity formation, resulting from stigmatized assumptions, negative attitudes, and beliefs influenced by fear.

### *Fear*

Fear disrupts how one regulates natural responses or reactions to attitudes and beliefs that cause people to feel uncomfortable. Though fear is a valid and human emotion, unfortunately for incarcerated men, these ideologies centered around fear begin in the minds of many who interpret what they view as fearful as part of the stigma. While many assumptions drive fear, Pogorzelski et al. (2005) agree that “the label criminal elicits fear and invites social distance” (p. 1724), as the mind responds to that which it interprets fear.

The interpretation of fear establishes the context from individual experiences or learned behaviors. Westermayr (1915) asserts that fear is “the great force that prompts to acts of self-preservation regarded with contempt” (pp. 250–251) and considered as “the earmark of cowardice naturally produced by ignorance” (p. 254). Based on individual experiences, fear could trigger a previous negative encounter causing an individual to fear all incarcerated men, which a crime victim would experience. Other instances could involve the origins of “the conditioning of the individual to his culture, the direct effect of learned beliefs and values about others often revealed through behaviors” (Feibleman, 1970, p. 134), otherwise known as cultural conditioning. Despite how one interprets fear or its origins, fear is a natural and powerful emotion with lasting implications in how incarcerated men experience education.

Many correctional educators experience deceptive danger or threat due to incarcerated men's mere presence in the classroom. These misleading deceptions represent fear without concrete facts that produce uncertainty, presumptions, or mind tricks that dominate reality. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) refer to fear's trickeries of "visual perception as mind bugs, explaining how the eye receives, the brain registers, and the mind interprets visual information" (p. 4). In this case, correctional educators see incarcerated men dressed in prison attire entering classrooms in single file, one after the other. Many of whom, barely old enough to hold voting rights, others resemble in age their fathers, and with all varying degrees of diversity and culture as representative of who they are. The brain automatically assembles an instant connection to fear, reducing human beings to the stigmatized label of convicted felons. Fear is a natural human response resulting from the mind's interpretation of visual information, causing behavioral changes to feel threatened. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) remind us that "visual mind bugs are ingrained habits of thought that lead to errors in how we perceive, remember, reason, and make decisions" (p. 4). Although legitimate reasons exist as to why and how fear operates, fear alone is not the only contributor.

### *Stigma, The Likely Cause of Fear*

The likely cause of fear has everything to do with perceived stigma. Moore et al. (2015) define perceived stigma as "a process through which stigma impacts individual behavior" (p. 1). Perceptions of stigma could explain why some correctional educators elect to distance themselves by remaining seated behind their desks when leading the classroom. The conscious decision to disconnect from incarcerated men in this way signals an absence of humanism and reluctance to engage actively, reflective of

“ingrained habits of thought” (Benaji & Greenwald, 2013, p. 4), unconsciously operating through negative behaviors. Pre-judgement and untrustworthiness often emerge, sending a solid message conveying disinterest in incarcerated men as valued and capable human beings deserving of an education. These negative signals surrender to fear as the integrated and conditioned nature of individual action that leaves them bound by “the conscious, reflective processes of the mind that accept the illusion unquestioningly” (p. 5). As the likely cause of fear, perceived stigma simultaneously relates to indifference as the probable cause, often exhibited through correctional educators’ behavioral practices.

Most incarcerated men anticipate prejudicial distinction attached to the stigma. Moore et al. (2015) define anticipated stigma as “the expectation of personally experiencing discrimination of consequences due to having a stigmatized identity” (p. 3). In this space, incarcerated men experience multiple stigmatized identities; imprisoned individuals, inmates, offenders, and criminals (Tangney, 2015), all of which carry a wide range of adverse life experiences that never entirely disappear from their psyches. Instead, incarcerated men live with the oppressive reminders when cut off, held back, and isolated amid fading ambitions and youth. They are aware that their imprisonment signifies negative connotations unfavorably deemed by society, causing them to live daily with the shame and degradation of being incarcerated. With needs ignored, voices silenced, and the absence of humanness restricted, anticipated stigma often triggers them to withdraw from themselves and society. Many find it easier to avoid situations that evoke aggressive or defensive behaviors among those who see them differently from others who choose to engage. However, hiding from oneself and the world, following rules, being respectful, and controlling anger undoubtedly contributes to situation

avoidance, but no man can live in isolation. At some point, every man desires more; to learn, improve, and grow.

### *What is Correctional Education?*

A correctional education, facilitated by the criminal justice system, is how incarcerated men build knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) while in prison. Klein et al. (2004) affirm that correctional education "provides inmates with the academic knowledge, technical skills, and credentials needed for workplace success" (p. 16). Correctional education offers academic and vocational programs, from secondary and post-secondary education to skills training, such as welding, truck driving, diesel mechanics, agriculture, and cabinet making. Although a wide range of educational opportunities exists, not all incarcerated men participate. For instance, the U.S. Bureau of Statistics (2019) reports that 52% of Texas's nearly 1.5 million prison population participates in correctional education, while 48% does not. Thus, priorities appear statistically misplaced; when educating individuals weigh less than incarceration itself. However, interests could factor into the differences across the population.

Incarcerated men have many interests, different needs, and motivations that drive their desire to pursue educational opportunities. Many follow a learning track aligned with their interests and goals, from talented entrepreneurs to barbers and carpenters, culinary arts, and business concentrations. While the desire to learn comes from within, they must be willingly open to the learning process. Ormrod (2020) provides that "when learners are starting from scratch, they must replace existing misconceptions with more accurate explanations as part of the conceptual change" (p. 283); unlearning and relearning how and what to learn can be a frightening experience. Adult learners yearn

for immediate applicability that addresses their most urgent felt or expressed learning needs. Still, needs often go unaddressed mainly because an individual's human right to education and the purpose are up for interpretation. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2012) affirm the expression of this right leaves the right to education unprotected (Czerniawski, n.d.):

It requires every signatory to guarantee that individuals can take advantage of existing educational institutions, but it does not guarantee an education of a particular kind or quality or that the education will be provided by a particular institution. (Equity and Human Rights Commission, 2012, p. 425)

In concert with the criminal justice system, correctional programs can interpret the meaning of the right to education by redefining what constitutes education. This understanding explains the decline and lack of interest in correctional education, negating the guarantee of a humanizing pedagogical praxis as a kind of quality, affirming why the classroom's inability to restore human dignity is in peril. Most evident is that the structure of correctional programs guides the educational debate among governing authorities without considering incarcerated men's interests, needs, and motivations. Instead, their deflecting argument centers on whether resources used to educate them are worth the investment, despite the saturation of literature supporting correctional education as the primary source of reducing recidivism to which they have invested. Though contradictory in meaning, these conversations now spark a new dialogue centered around the emotional well-being of these men. The concern assesses much more than whether they violate the conditions of parole or obtain employment after release, as the waning literature suggests is the staple of correctional education. Instead, the question becomes, what learning experiences or missed opportunities exist for them when actively participating in higher education classes absent of a humanizing pedagogical praxis?

Although Smith (2017) finds that “correctional education programs serve as a more considerable discussion to facilitate community building” (p. 1), what is the impact on their lives or communities when they continue to struggle with understanding who they are post-release? To what degree do those with lingering social and emotional challenges benefit employers or families when the interpretation of the kind of quality education alters the classroom’s inability to restore human dignity equal the effectiveness of correctional programs? The answer to these questions rests with correctional programs’ responsibility to address emotional wholeness indicative of a humanizing pedagogical praxis, certifying the need to explore correctional education fully.

### *The Need to Explore Correctional Education*

Correctional education in Texas needs exploring because vague contradictions exist between the human right to education granted to every individual in America and the balance between who gets to learn—with 48% of Texas’ prison population disengaged and idle. With the benefits of correctional education in abundance, the two dynamics contradict one another. Depending on where one sits on the political stage, one can determine who gets to learn, who does not, and how the interpreter interprets education’s meaning. The influence of these clashing paradoxes stifles incarcerated men owing to oppressive structural practices, historical in nature, obstructing the intellectual mind from the soul of consciousness, leaving many questioning their value as human beings and their places in the world.

The significance of the need to explore correctional education is to awaken the minds of incarcerated men, reminding them of why they exist, their importance in the world, their families, and the communities left behind. Most critical is the humanizing

component of their learning experiences. Losing oneself to the realities of the most extensive prison industrial complex in America tarnishes the emotional state of these men for a lifetime. They need a connection to themselves in reorganizing the security of their well-being. While not much literature exists on their lived educational experiences, this qualitative, phenomenological case study focuses on the essence of those experiences. By addressing the needs of incarcerated men in their totality, an opportunity affords correctional educators to examine the application of teaching and learning practices related to a humanizing education. Finding new ways to incorporate meaningfulness strengthens the well-being of these men beyond the prison walls' reality, demonstrating the importance of correctional education as the primary responsibility.

### *The Importance of Correctional Education*

Correctional education is a vital component of incarcerated men's educational experiences. Not merely because it expands an understanding of themselves and others, providing knowledge, sense-making, and the unification of acceptance among differences in people or groups, but for its liberation in the value of earning an education as a human right worth celebrating. Freire (1993) states that "the struggle begins with men's recognition of having been destroyed. Propaganda, management, manipulation—all arms of domination—can not be the instruments of their rehumanization" (p. 68). In other words, correctional education should not expect different outcomes using the same old practices and approaches to teaching and learning. Incarcerated men, the oppressed, broken from the inside out, cannot repair themselves solely. Correctional education has work to do in its responsibility to them, as its importance. Freire suggests "the only effective treatment is a humanizing pedagogy" (p. 68) as the most vital correctional

education component in learning today. As a lasting benefit, humanizing pedagogy encourages agency through praxis as its priority for these men.

### *Benefits of Correctional Education*

Many benefits of correctional education exist. However, incarcerated men view the benefits of correctional education differently. Throughout Texas, some view correctional education as therapy, a process of healing oneself through engaging with other learners and discovering new words or concepts that satisfy their immediate needs. For others, the benefit allows temporary freedoms enjoyed by escaping the constraints of the prison environment. While some may never experience the privilege of applying learning outside prison walls, the utility of teaching and learning one to another is the greatest gift. Finally, some incarcerated men need more, those who struggle with literacy, or other learning needs, such as dyslexia, causing depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem. Regardless of how they view correctional education, the journey begins with the self, where competence, awareness, and control serve as their internal motivational compass in the balance of self-directed learning. The desire to improve, learn, and grow must exist as the starting point of all human development and where “certain motives and values regarding desirable and productive behaviors” (Ormrod, 2020, p. 503) reside. In essence, the benefits of correctional education when applying a humanizing pedagogy motivate behavioral change. Although the advantages vary among incarcerated men for various reasons, recognizing the need for individual improvement is the most significant gain attributed to successful correctional education programs.

### *Successful Correctional Education Programs*

Correctional education programs' success rests not in the number of students enrolled each semester but rather in the effectiveness of unleashing human potential. Successful correctional programs recognize an individual's value as unique, their experiences as personally exclusive to them, and their needs a priority. More importantly, success hinges on hearing students' voices, understanding, and the investment of solid educators who care. The measurement of success lies in the connections and meaning of value to all students. For incarcerated men, success "enables inmates to see themselves and be seen in roles other than that of prisoners" (Paul, 1991, p. 285), granting humanness permissions as fundamental. They focus on the whole person rather than superficial assumptions, driving negativity, and fear where society still holds them hostage. In the balance, the success of correctional education programs "engage and motivate learning" (Vacca, 2004, p. 302), especially when learning needs and interests differ. Teaching practical reading skills and providing positive feedback inspires academic achievement, define successful programs for incarcerated men.

Much like other learners, incarcerated men enjoy studying issues that matter to them. For instance, current events place them at the center of the moment, providing a reconnection to society that opens them to engaging dialogue. Historical, literary works, as another example, and stories inspired by fellow incarcerated individuals overcoming prison challenges offer opportunities to reinvent themselves through entrepreneurship or higher education, redirecting reflective thinking towards long-term behavioral change. However, most appealing to their impetus represents the opportunity to advance learning beyond what they already know. The point is, successful correctional education programs

recognize an individual's value as unique, their experiences as tangible, their needs as a priority, and key to leveraging human potential.

The ability to leverage human potential converges around the mastery of people skills that define the humanizing aspect of learning central to successful correctional education programs. Communication, interpersonal, social, and soft skills represent the staple and characteristic of successful programs. However, correctional education programs find it challenging to claim success without abilities that encourage human relationships in praxis. Vacca (2004) explains that "a recurrence of negative outcomes exists when all the key players-policymakers and instructors do not treat prisoners as whole people who have value and who have potential to improve" (p. 301). The consequence discourages the human probabilities' achievement, allowing self-doubt and diminished self-esteem to remain.

Inclusive of abilities to leverage human potential, part of correctional education's success consists of committing to incarcerated men's learning experiences. Unfortunately, many correctional educators enter classrooms with concealed interests or motives reflective of undesirable attitudes and beliefs about the very students they stand before. As explained, Vacca (2004) submits that the reason has to do with the "attitudes and values of prison's governing officials" (p. 300) that determine whether or not improvement warrants the investment of their time. Far too often, painful reminders exist for incarcerated men when correctional educators only see groups of imprisoned men dressed in prison attire. Without commitment, the learning experiences of these men diminish any possibility of improving. Thus, the educator's impact on incarcerated men's learning highlights the importance of dedication and correctional programs' success.

### *Educators' Impact on Incarcerated Men's Learning*

There is something uniquely special about educators who reach beyond themselves to make learning meaningful. Those who have a calling for or conviction to rebuild, renew, and reorganize self-images of broken students possess a remarkable gift when “students who experience a history of school failure” (Frelin, 2015, p. 590) find it challenging to see learning as meaningful. These are the forgotten students, left behind and ignored “over the school year through a complex intersection of student and teacher beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with one another” (Hamre & Pianta, 2006, p. 59). With the process of learning interrupted, these are the same students that the state of Texas welcomes into the body of mass incarceration. As a result of their experiences, many incarcerated men lose faith in the educational system—judgment and marginalization defeat aspirations and dreams, creating a negative self-image. Frelin (2015) believes that only when educators turn negative experiences into positive ones can incarcerated men find value in the meaning of learning. Meaning becomes increasingly essential for these men when correctional educators positively impact their learning experiences.

The meaning of learning can resemble different things to different people, but to incarcerated men, the most impactful is the awareness of knowing that educators care. Caring educators bring warmth to the classroom by first inviting students to learn. Hamre and Pianta (2006) explain that “forming strong and supportive relationships that allow students to feel safer and more secure in the school setting” (p. 59) opens the door to meaningful learning. Human-centered values often disavow the encouragement to accept differences that consider individuality’s uniqueness an admirable quality in the prison environment.

The classroom is the balance between acceptance and difference, and correctional educators have the most significant impact in this space. The influence of caring educators ensures incarcerated men “feel more competent to make more positive connections with peers, and more significant academic gains” (p. 59). Caring educators help reduce environmental tensions and stress that serve as barriers to positive teacher-student relationships. The ability to make learning meaningful is an internal, all-consuming testament to character, residing within oneself that allows correctional educators to “distance themselves from a stereotypical teaching role” (Frelin, 2015, p. 589). The pedigree of these kinds of educators, incomparable and extraordinarily memorable in knowing who their students are, care enough to ensure meaningful learning. In this way, all “students are recognized as people and not as the (failed) students they are used to identifying themselves with” (p. 596). The influence of caring is the balance between acceptance and indifference, and where correctional educators foster positive teacher-student relationships and trust.

#### *Fostering Positive Teacher-Student Relationships and Trust*

The ability to foster relationships is a distinct characteristic that embodies rare individuals’ extraordinary qualities mindfully connected with themselves. Frelin (2013) finds the degree to which “the relational dimension of teaching is a central feature of the teaching process that goes beyond the teacher’s knowledge of her or her students” (p. 2). The depth to which one uses competencies fueled by a higher power resides within oneself. When teacher-student relationships are at center stage, incarcerated men feel accepted and appreciated as individuals, exuding assurance and safe-keeping. Baier (1986) observed that “we notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or

polluted” (p. 234) do we then notice it missing. In this space, incarcerated men sense a human connectedness that permeates the classroom environment, contributing to the motivational attributes of confidence, individual identity, feelings of belonging, and competence.

There is no greater satisfaction for incarcerated men than the balance of internal well-being attributed to positive teacher-student relationships. Ahonen (2010) explains that “psychosocial well-being constructive to learning, includes social factors and close relationships, emotional and cognitive development” (p. 23). While numerous variables distort thinking, causing them to feel disconnected from themselves and others. Still, positive connections within their social environment aid in the steady, well-adjusted symmetry desired of enriched learning experiences. For these men, positive teacher-student relationships serve as the bridge to feeling a part of something once lost in the process of discovering the newness of themselves.

Meaningfulness builds internal and mental strength, confidence in their readiness prepares incarcerated men for life beyond prison. As they become more self-aware, exhibiting more self-control of their emotions, improve relationships, and better decision-makers, incarcerated men attribute their sense of well-being towards positive teacher relationships. Decker et al. (2007) affirm that “having a positive relationship with one’s teacher may be a factor that promotes positive outcomes and ameliorates risk for students considered at-risk for negative outcomes such as school dropout” (p. 85). While many benefits exist in positive relationships, some correctional educators’ most significant advantage stems from observing the transformation of at-risk students to self-directed

learners who excel in higher education, mastering coursework better than students outside correctional education.

The beauty of positive experiences exhibits an unbridled commitment and the extraordinary sacrifices of both teacher and student to see and think beyond themselves. Making learning a priority, such that the impact builds confidence and motivation that “parallels in the shadow of direct instruction” (Frelin, 2013, p. 2) is an essential piece in how incarcerated men positively experience correctional education. In other words, fostering relationships build trust and conviction by creating a sense of knowing that one can learn and be successful. The mastery of fostering relationships rests with “the relational conditions that schools provide that carry important implications in terms of what students learn” (p. 2), how they learn, and why. To supply one with knowledge is one thing, but to do so in a way that exudes commitment and care is quite another. In an environment as raw as the criminal justice system, incarcerated men become accustomed to distortions of the truth, inauthenticity, and manipulation. Judgmental people abide in this domain, and the absence of humanism follows an environment where time is unforgiving and confinement is cruel. Powell (1996) offers that trust provides “a greater expectation of shared interests and goals, a higher level of effectiveness, and greater flexibility regarding changing demands and environmental pressures” (p. 58). Most notably, incarcerated men need committed educators who believe in them, who see students with promise, hopes, and dreams rather than merely convicted criminals dressed in prison attire.

It is perfectly natural for some correctional educators to show empathy, display kindness, and welcome new thinking and experiences into the classroom. However, what

is perfectly natural for some resembles something entirely different for others. Cultural barriers exist within correctional classrooms that play a significant role in how educators think, feel, and believe concerning incarcerated men. Ricci and Su (2013) explain that “culture is passed down in society throughout generations and focused on attitudes, opinions, and values” (p. 48). Culture is only half of this discussion; the other half is how culture affects positive teacher-student relationships and trust. The delineation accounts for the compelling nature that drives one to choose to see others through a different lens, which most incarcerated men immediately reject. Bidney (1944) confronts this discussion by connecting cultural conditioning with the “now imitated members of a new generation as a given form of culture once originated and practiced by members of a given society” (p. 35). Society’s origin birthed a new generation of members who chose to think, feel, and believe, the same as its patronage bestowed on its legacy. Yet, those who parade the halls of justice and lead correctional classrooms across Texas’ jurisdiction, very few incarcerated men embrace. As evidence of this understanding, culture surfaces as part of traditional classroom practices affecting positive teacher-student relationships and trust among incarcerated men in many forms.

Culture drives thoughts and actions, affording an intriguing insight and reflection into the souls of individuals. Still, a person’s soul can evolve from old ways of feeling and believing, propelling new understandings. Ricci and Su (2013) highlight a crucial point in “settings applicable to the time and place of people’s lives” (p. 35), indicating an evolution, a shift, growth, or change that moves away from normative understanding. Cultural awareness can make a difference when teaching in multicultural learning environments and where the mind’s windows allow new knowledge and practiced beliefs.

One way to achieve new perspectives is by acknowledging truths, having the desire for new knowledge, and immersing oneself in continuous learning designed to raise cultural awareness.

Teaching in caring ways, for some, comes easily despite cultural differences. One's inherent and intuitive nature unconsciously drives the instinct of those who can connect with students at a higher level and in ways that bring incarcerated men closer to a constructive learning experience. The gift, unmistakably, is not an acquired skill that renders one competent in knowledge domains or one that requires accolades. Indeed, an inherent and intuitive nature comes from within. Knowing how to challenge, without challenging, and instinctively understanding what incarcerated men need to succeed even before they know they need it indicates an inherent and intuitive nature. Ricci and Su (2013) remind us that "cultural forms of behavior differ from natural, instinctive forms in that the cultural expressions are not uniform, even though they have implicit, universal functions" (p. 35). Not all correctional educators possess the automatic, spontaneous quality of attention to care. Caring teachers become all the more critical in the process of fostering teacher-student relationships and trust owing to the unique ability to guide incarcerated men through the process of learning and towards that which Perkins (2014) provides as the "building blocks of life-ready learning" (p. 68). The method of fostering teacher-student relationships and trust becomes the principal of meaningfulness through which others aspire.

A natural flow to fostering teacher-student relationships and trust is neither inherited nor purchased but rather internal, abiding in the depth of souls who give first of themselves for good with the promise of inspiring learners across the domains of life. The

garnering of a more natural flow matters to incarcerated men because they need correctional educators who care about how they learn as much as what they learn. In addition, the importance of seeking guidance from others who demonstrate a long-standing commitment to the teaching profession and those who need instruction the most yields a greater understanding of what authenticity and endearing sacrifice resemble, but behavioral unawareness can complicate the process.

### *Behavioral Unawareness*

Correctional educators' unawareness can impact their classroom behaviors. Many become accustomed to unknowingly minimizing the learning experiences of incarcerated men when existing cultural ideologies surface. Assuming incarcerated men learn the same or that imprisonment renders them incapable of learning at all. These assumptions can rob incarcerated men from reaching their true potential, sending a message of mediocracy and indifference. Consequently, many incarcerated men tend to view correctional educators' behavioral unawareness from the perspective of Freire et al. (2017) when stating, "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those they consider knowing nothing" (p 72). The tainted lens from which many correctional educators have traditionally operated translates as good enough for incarcerated men because of incarceration. Rather than building on their experiences affirming confidence and abilities without assumption, behavioral unawareness can result in incarcerated men viewing correctional "education as an act of depositing" (p. 72). Learning thus becomes pointless when behavioral ignorance causes these men to withdraw socially. Then, they leave classrooms feeling empty, questioning the

knowledge and behaviors of the educator's authentic ability to maximize their learning experiences.

Behavioral unawareness diminishes incarcerated men's interest in college course participation, reducing momentum in their desire to learn. According to Freire et al. (2017), "the capability of banking education to minimize the students' creative power, stimulating their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed" (p. 73). Still, some correctional educators view themselves in power roles over those who they view as powerless. Power reigns supreme throughout the corridors of correctional education, hiding behind behavioral unawareness but surfaces through the attitudes and beliefs evident in classroom practices. Thus, the responsibility of correctional educators becomes most crucial.

### *Correctional Educator's Responsibility*

The role of a correctional educator is to understand incarcerated men, their needs, and how and when to apply humanizing pedagogical praxis in a multicultural learning environment. Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) state that "individual needs and trajectories that require differentiated instruction and support to enable optimal growth in competence, confidence, and motivation" (p. 3) is a teaching and learning imperative. Recognizing that incarcerated men go through tremendous change when making sense of the world around them and understanding themselves and others helps them adjust to the prison environment. In addition, correctional educators' responsibility requires self-awareness of their beliefs, actions, and behaviors and how unflattering opinions of incarcerated men with whom they share classroom space covertly disrupt learning. Different approaches to teaching and learning, specific to individual needs as a priority,

establishes the importance of correctional educators' roles, ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways.

Finding the correct teaching and learning approach in correctional environments is not an all-inclusive endeavor. Differences in culture, language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality, interests, and experiences challenge correctional educators to connect with learning needs. Instead, finding the right approach to teaching and learning requires correctional educators to get close enough to incarcerated men to understand who they are and what they need. The strategy begins by developing new ways of thinking, creating comfort in learning that shifts the learning process from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered focus.

Focusing on the student conveys an individual interest and includes the humanizing aspect of teaching and learning. Humanizing relevance gives voice to incarcerated men. Pedagogical praxis invites the space to create independence, self-assurance, and an enthusiasm to learn. From asking questions to debating and solving problems, communicating with others, learning from one another, and formulating new perspectives opens incarcerated men to a new world where they now have a membership. When incarcerated men see value in correctional educators, trust builds akin to their responsibilities, a commodity not quickly earned. Incarcerated men become the “defining indicator of the new identity of the self” (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012, p. 1118). By permitting themselves to feel safe moving from the self into identity formation, self-validation occurs.

As a bonus, cultural competencies build self-awareness and self-esteem owing to a level of confidence residing in a person's ability to know themselves, which is

necessary for incarcerated men to satisfy their need to belong. Mead (1934) professes that “while minds and selves are essentially social products of the social side of human experience, the psychological mechanism underlying experience is far from irrelevant” (pp. 1–2). Thus, cultural relevance is at stake. The core of a person’s being by restoring self-worth gives meaning to self-identification, allowing incarcerated men to see themselves as they begin to take responsibility for their learning.

Correctional educators, therefore, should understand incarcerated men and their needs to employ suitable learning approaches that leverage their best selves. As incarcerated men begin to balance themselves, understanding others becomes easier when working in groups. For instance, in role-play, incarcerated men can argue and debate effectively, think critically, reflect on other perspectives, and reasonably articulate solutions. Engaging one another in these exercises becomes especially useful. Stets and Burke (2000) explain that “understanding self and in competing roles of where self belongs” (p. 225) is part of their experience. As a result of these experiences, incarcerated men can “flex across identities to find one identity that fits the group, environment, or situation” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Their flexible identities allow them to value other perspectives by placing themselves in the center of the discussion. In this way, incarcerated men absorb new learning across different contexts, learn to think differently, build a stronger relationship over time, connect, communicate, and share knowledge. Simultaneously, correctional educators can observe interactions and learning effectiveness through engagement levels to understand how to apply a cooperative and collaborative learning experience. The benefit “helps students achieve academically, socially, and emotionally, while simultaneously developing 21st-century learning skills”

(Kilbane & Milman, 2014, p. 309). Part of a correctional educators' responsibility lies in practicing a unique pedagogy that recognizes the true potential of incarcerated men's growth and development.

### *Cooperative and Collaborative Learning*

Cooperative and collaborative learning applied encourages communal participation, guiding incarcerated men through the learning experience. The usefulness of both recognizes that not all excel at the same levels. For example, while some are good at managing processes, others are good at math, some lie somewhere in between. The beauty of this approach allows "teachers to help students structure roles within the group and provide questions and tasks that guide the group's discussion" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, p. 18). In this way, incarcerated men all learn together, but the guided process permits making sense of what and how they learn.

A cooperative and collaborative learning experience leverages involvement by inviting incarcerated men to contribute to the discussion. Brophy (1999) explains that in correctional classrooms, "students are expected to strive to make sense of what they are learning by relating it to prior knowledge and by discussing it with others" (p. 49). For instance, some may act as jurors in a debate, others as defense counsel, while others serve as prosecutors. With each having a specific role of importance, incarcerated men learn where their strength lies, and they leave the classroom feeling complete having learned more about themselves and others. Kilbane and Milman (2014) refer to this learning approach as a "two for one deal because it provides students something they need and something they want" (p. 309). In exchange, incarcerated men begin to value their

learning experiences guided by the correctional educator's ability to connect meaning to learning.

Cooperative and collaborative approaches transform learning in ways that make sense to incarcerated men by aligning their interests with their experiences. Regardless of their learning styles, they are more likely to openly share, communicating individual perspectives about exciting topics, such as politics or social issues, in learning other viewpoints. Most importantly, this learning method provides the needed safety and security among incarcerated men to feel supported through their learning experiences. The advantage is the motivation toward academic achievement. Darling-Hammond (2019) provides that incarcerated men are more "likely to undertake new learning, tackle difficult tasks, and take risks" (p. 27). By unleashing human potential while building confidence and minimizing barriers, they begin to view themselves as successful learners.

### *Conclusion*

Understanding how incarcerated men experience education absent of a humanizing pedagogy requires correctional educators to see beyond prison attire by focusing on the whole person. Regardless of who students are, where they come from, or where they are in life, correctional education plays a significant role in their learning experiences. Their perspectives matter. Making sense of the world can be a terrifying experience that causes incarcerated men to second guess themselves and their abilities. When they lose sight of who they are, correctional educators have an opportunity to examine the humanizing aspect in correctional education, addressing the absence of praxis that contributes to the wholeness of incarcerated men. The fullness needed to

humanize learning experiences helps incarcerated men manage prison's environmental pressures and the imbalance of classroom practices.

Incarcerated men carry the weight of the environmental constraints of prison into the classrooms. The concealed source of abandonment and social shame as the self's internalized identity overshadows the meaning of their learning experiences. Employing humanizing pedagogical praxis serves as a surplus and the most significant defense correctional education can bring to ensuring positive learning experiences that address their social and emotional needs while building their self-esteem.

In contrast, the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis creates barriers to learning, impeding behavioral change for incarcerated men. Assumptions stem from negative attitudes and deeply rooted beliefs among those who see incarcerated men as less than second-class citizens owing to fear. Often incarcerated men interpret the reconciliation of fear among correctional educators as behavioral unawareness. Rather than building on their experiences, many tend to view correctional education as merely depositing knowledge. Learning thus becomes pointless when unacknowledged experiences, needs, and behavioral unawareness contribute to lasting consequences that leave these men feeling empty, primarily in debt to themselves.

Incarcerated men need to belong, feel a part of something tangible that enriches the humanness of their being. Unfortunately, many incarcerated men cling to experiences of unpreparedness in confidently solving problems, developed through critical thinking and social skills, self-directing their learning in connection to the real world. Correctional educators' responsibility should promote inclusivity, community, agency, and understanding of their students to know what they need to become successful learners.

While the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis as a barrier may take some time to convert into action and fully realized as a teaching and learning imperative, incarcerated men must find ways to motivate themselves by becoming better stewards to themselves and others. Part of this understanding recognizes that a change-resistant environment, where power and control still tip the balance in historical significance, allows deeply held legacy-old beliefs to remain challenging for these men, stifling their learning experiences.

Correctional education programs must ensure educators reckon with themselves, fully realizing that incarcerated men are human beings rather than merely criminals undeserving of the positive benefits of a humanizing learning experience. Recognition of teaching and learning approaches designed to humanize learning encourages behavioral change, lessening the life-long scars of trauma unencumbered by a system's malice structure intended to avert success. Thus, correctional educators can better understand how to connect their roles to a more profound meaning most valuable for all students by exploring how their current classroom practices disturb the balance of learning when the benefit of a humanizing pedagogy remains unrealized.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

The previous chapter's literature review highlighted how incarcerated men began their journey of self-discovery, understanding who they are, where they fit in the world, and the value placed on their need to learn, grow and develop, attributing to a humanizing pedagogical praxis. Despite the barriers faced, incarcerated men are human beings first. With real-life experiences that matter, but stigma, "an attribute that deeply discredits and reduces someone from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3), serves as a social and emotional deficit. For these men, finding purpose in life begins with examining themselves and includes their lived experiences that make an individual most valuable. The lifetime experiences shaping beliefs, feelings, attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions become central to the character that defines a person's most authentic self.

This chapter emphasizes the basis for qualitatively exploring correctional education. The goal is to understand better the meaning of how incarcerated men learn best, absent of a humanizing pedagogical praxis as the established need. The phenomenology's case study distinguishes the essence of lived experiences developed through the framework and thematic analysis with analytic induction using Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories. The research questions guiding this study's design follows:

1. What is correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways?
2. What value does correctional education bring to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem?
3. How do teacher-student relationships influence behavior change among incarcerated men?

The researcher employs a naturalistic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to enrich the diverse perspectives of six formerly incarcerated men when previously serving time in various correctional units located throughout Texas. Exploring their lived educational experiences that collect data contributing to future studies aimed at helping correctional educators reflect on the humanizing aspect of learning. The researcher's positionality, theoretical framework, design, data collection, and analysis strategies support methodological congruency.

#### *Researcher Perspective and Positionality*

Attempting to learn in the criminal justice system can become almost as hard as doing time, especially when educators play with the idea of education. Dumbing down instruction and marginalizing incarcerated men to fit societal perceptions of good enough, despite their need to grow, learn, and develop. Yet, in one of the most diverse educational environments across Texas' jurisdiction, incarcerated men are under-experiencing what it must resemble to feel whole. When classroom barriers of indifference, limitations of society, unencumbered by a system's malice structure intended to avert success, further denies the freedom of self-discovery even in the sacred classroom space.

The researcher's first-hand knowledge of correctional education programs exposes substandard classroom practices when teaching in this multicultural learning environment. Her perspective and positionality encompass shared experiences of a

brother in the criminal justice system, a former employee, and a correctional educator since 2018. The exploration of this topic, combined with the researcher's understanding, provides insight into ensuring all incarcerated men receive a fair chance to improve themselves, as their right to quality education, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or where they are in life. In addition, her perspective affords correctional educators a teachable moment to self-reflect on their classroom practices, enhancing the humanizing aspect of learning in this most diverse educational environment.

The researcher believes that untrained educators in the humanizing aspect of learning lack interaction with incarcerated men in correctional classrooms, not fully meeting their expectations in leveraging learning experiences meaningful. Gehring (1981) affirms the researcher's belief when stating that "many are untrained, unprepared, and unwilling to separate themselves from their identities and roles, concealing their attitudes and beliefs by exerting their prowess" (p. 20). In other words, some correctional educators desire to show themselves as knowledgeable, using their credentials to validate their worth, all while concealing their beliefs and attitudes about incarcerated men. These behaviors could explain why some educators knowingly and unknowingly create barriers that convolute the goals and purpose of correctional education, further diminishing their self-esteem, a construct of Identity Theory, by undervaluing incarcerated men as human beings. In addition, their behaviors bring attention to the program's effectiveness through a broader lens concerning the commitment to facilitate classroom instruction in humanizing ways. However, research supports the researcher's perspective in that correctional educators appear more interested in demonstrating their knowledge (Gehring, 1991) rather than centering attention on the learning needs of their students.

Instead, their focus should rest on improving how they interact, creating an ideal learning environment (Morgan, 1975), integrating emotional wholeness into praxis as an essential component of a humanizing learning experience.

The complication, however, involves the researcher's belief that the historical unencumbered prison structure of malice serves as a significant barrier contributing to how incarcerated men experience learning. Research finds the influences of "the good old boy (GOB) system a factor because under GOB rule, or in a GOB-infiltrated school, learning becomes an incidental benefit instead of the primary goal" (Gehring, 1981, p. 21). Thus, the educational structure of the program extends to subtle toxicities permeating the classrooms environment casting a troubling and critical shadow over the program's goals, purpose, and effectiveness, amplifying why this study needs exploring.

The image of Texas's correctional classrooms, filled with a plethora of backgrounds, captures moments of reflection for the researcher when stringent and prejudicial guidelines remanded young boys into custody and where its history continues in holding incarcerated men hostage today. Many have limited or no knowledge of participating in America's democracy; uneducated, unwise in various realms, in the magnitude of injustices committed inside prisons. These accounts depict a mirror image for the researcher intimately known of her brother, who grew up in the criminal justice system like many.

Still, these experiences are only part of the load incarcerated men bring into the classroom and why a humanizing pedagogical praxis remains central to their wholeness. The researcher's beliefs propel her curiosity into the exploration of correctional education programs. The long-term effects of the prison's industrial complex combined with the

lived educational experiences of incarcerated men inform her positionality and why she conducted this research study and continues to teach in today's criminal justice system.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

The two theoretical frameworks used in this qualitative phenomenological case study are Humanistic Learning (Khatib et al., 2013) and Identity Theories (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Humanistic Learning Theory is a “constructivist school of thought resulting from Erickson (1950); Rogers (1959); and Maslow (1943)” (Khatib et al. 2013, p. 45). Their social and interactionist views of humanistic principles are where the researcher draws from the framework's universally spoken personal language of humanism, interpreting it through its affective processes representing human values distinction. Thus, Gage and Berliner (1991) explain that “the value of students rests on awareness of their dignity and rights as unique human beings, with each person being on the path to self-actualization” (as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 46). Thus, the researcher's socially constructed worldview that all men are good in humanistic value complements the framework in understanding her teaching style.

The connection to the constructs of human education, social and emotional needs provides the method whereby she explores correctional education in the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis. The attributes capable of achieving their best, free will, fundamentally good, and an ideal learning environment establish the humanistic principles of this theory. When considering its totality in substance, Humanistic Learning Theory reaches across the domains of knowledge where the “desire for immediate application, internal motivation, and the need to know” occur (Merriam & Bierema, 2018, p. 60). Unfortunately for incarcerated men, current standards in correctional

education offer curricular goals prescribing what they must know while denying their freedom and dignity (Brown, 2014). This understanding leads to the realization that learning is a process-driven classroom pedagogy. Therefore, learning needs become central to their being by supporting both interests and needs while strengthening their abilities as successful learners. Rogers (1959) asserts that “relevance, participation, negotiation, self-assessment, the centrality of the self-actualizing potential, and the reach for personal manifestation and creativity in fulfilling individual learning needs” (as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 47). This understanding supports incarcerated men’s advancement towards fulfilling potential in their development. Knowles et al. (1998) explain that learning is “a process by which behavioral changes occur” (p. 13). In essence, Humanistic Learning Theory is about growth, learning, and development, guiding rather than directing knowledge that drives change. The utility of this pedagogical praxis gives incarcerated men the freedom of choice, ownership, and autonomy over their distinct learning styles.

As facilitators of instruction, correctional educators’ role should seek to harness the goodness from incarcerated men who strive to improve themselves beyond measure. In character with moral fortitude, where their “psychosocial well-being constructive to learning, includes social factors and close relationships, emotional and cognitive development” (Ahonen, 2010, p. 23) keeps incarcerated men at the center of teaching in less than an ideal learning environment. The researcher recognizes that not all incarcerated men learn equally by traditional means in connection to humanizing education. Some require a more tempered, structured, step-by-step method in the sense-making process. Wlodkowski (2008) reminds us that “their involvement will diminish if

they cannot find learning meaningful” (p. 109), such that they value incarcerated men as human beings. These pedagogical approaches promote the emotional security needed for a positive, enjoyable, richly responsive, and purpose-driven learning experience as the primary staple to humanizing education.

Social and emotional needs are essential to this framework’s application of purpose and why correctional education’s role remains central to ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways. When determining their goals and needs, a humanizing learning experience requires an understanding that “learning is a holistic process involving our body and our spirit as well as our rational mind” (Merriam & Bierema, 2018, p. 145). In essence, holistic learning begins with the self, based on one’s meaning and expectations from which identity becomes known.

Identity theory for this research study comprises the social and personal components of categories or groups and roles, of which the self, in essence, is an appendage of both. Hogg et al. (1995) recognize this distinction, along with the activation, salience, depersonalization processes, self-verification, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Stryker and Burke (2000) refer to identity theory as the external social structure and the self, embracing the connection between the social and personal identities. The critical components identified in Identity Theory for this research study focus on self-esteem as the theory’s construct and essential to the motivational attributes of confidence, individual identity, feelings of belonging, and competence.

The characteristics expressed proportionally align with the theoretical framework’s exploration in the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that help shape their self-esteem. First, the reflective self traditionally categorizes itself as

an object or name (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Second, identity formation, determined by the situational nuances of classroom practices, the industrial prison environment, family, or life in general, the self then resolves or reconfigures itself to function independently or socially. Finally, these distinctions of identity accompany every incarcerated man into correctional classrooms somehow, affecting an idea of the self-constructed beliefs they hold about themselves, the responses of others (Merriam-Webster, n.d), and that of their learning experiences. Thus, the rationale for exploring the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis is an ideal framework for this research purpose.

The researcher relates this framework's connection to the belief that incarcerated men's basic psychological needs go unmet, much like their learning needs. For example, Taormina and Gao (2013) find that "feelings of social rejection, isolation, loneliness, and depression" (p. 158) cause incarcerated men to question their value and worth, obstructing the process of learning affecting emotions' efficacy. From a social constructivism perspective, the researcher further links the framework's categorical representations to her socially constructed worldview aligned with Identity Theory, that social interaction satisfies the need to belong.

Incarcerated men live in a different reality, secluded from society, where self-abandonment becomes their existential threat owing to suppressed needs and goals. Henriques (2014) reminds us that in "traditional masculine roles, socialization has channeled many men into ways of being such that their masculine identity conflicts with many emotions they feel and what they feel they are allowed to express" (p. 1). Rather than expand beyond what they see as their reality, many instead learn from one another. Through social norms or recreational activities, incarcerated men view themselves in

terms of meanings imparted by a structured society (McCall & Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980; Turner et al., 1987) as insignificant. Their identity's reality evolves from a sense of inaccessibility to security, safety, belonging, and esteem, components of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs symbolizing value and worth affirmation. Thus, Identity Theory becomes essential to this research study owing to the balance needed for human well-being and the link between persons, one to another.

Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories shape primary and secondary research questions. Relationally, the frameworks address the questions, using an open-ended, evolving, and non-directional approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in a series of structured and semi-structured interviews, including two separate, one-hour focus group sessions. Each research question connects with the research study's purpose, framework, rationale, and title. Keywords used as themes established congruency throughout the research study and provided the context that helped structure the research questions supporting the researcher's data collection and analysis approach.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the conceptual, theoretical relational frameworks.

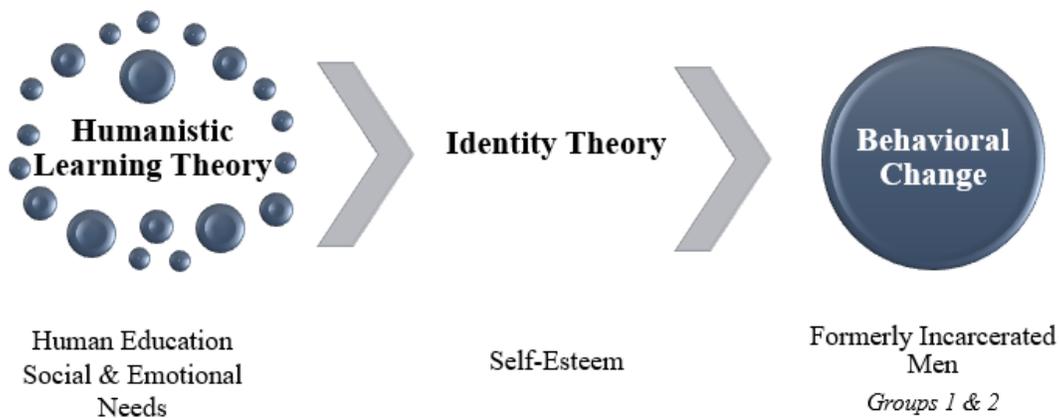


Figure 3.1. Theoretical relational framework.

Combined, both Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories comprise four complementary components, also critical to this research study: a positive learning environment, self-motivated students, teacher as the facilitator, and self-evaluation. Each of the components constitutes part of the larger whole, adding conceptual support to the research frameworks. Research finds, “it is vital that our education systems utilize frameworks that are the most effective in producing positive outcomes for all students, based on empirical evidence” (Pour Ali et al., 2016, p. 313). When a positive learning environment exists in correctional education, incarcerated men feel safe exploring new knowledge and engaging in the connections that shape behavioral change. A positive learning environment’s strength encompasses the humanizing facet created when collaborative and deliberative efforts produce trust between the teacher and the student. The advantage focuses on the value of participatory teaching and learning to bring about behavioral change contributing to the wholeness incarcerated men seek, inspiring college course participation. Therefore, “an individual’s concept of education is fundamental for both students and teachers because of safe, reflexive, tolerant, non-judgmental and responsive environments” (pp. 312–313) as the foundation in the humanization of feeling valued and motivated towards continued learning achievement.

Student motivation is essential to incarcerated men because it serves as a predictor of continued learning and achievement. When humanistic education addresses social and emotional needs, incarcerated men learn to handle conflict better. Constant put-downs, referring to inmates or offenders rather than their names akin to social shaming, render incarcerated men detached emotionally from the learning process. This experience produces lowered self-esteem, questioning their authentic identity development. The

motivation and wholeness needed for incarcerated men to thrive in correctional classrooms begin with humanizing education, yielding better academic outcomes in promoting well-being. Research finds that “students learn positive self-esteem, have a better understanding of their abilities, gain experience in making choices, build self-esteem, and a sense of intrinsic motivation” (Pour Ali et al., 2016, p. 320). When incarcerated men feel socially and emotionally secure, the confidence needed to thrive academically produces behavioral changes, encouraging them beyond what they thought possible. In essence, the evolution of behavioral change provides the essential wholeness for incarcerated men, mainly contributing to higher quality effort and deeper learning ensuring teacher and student’s relational closeness.

As the facilitator, the teacher holds a powerful place in guiding incarcerated men through the process of learning. When teachers take the time to get to know incarcerated men, their learning needs, and interests, a relationship ensues. Expectations in the teacher-student role enable purposeful meaning, contributing to a trusting affiliation that enhances self-confidence. Frelin (2015) states that “establishing trust repairs the students’ self-image to view themselves as successful learners” (p. 489). Teachers as facilitators contribute to increased self-esteem, and authenticity relates to positivity and motivation as a natural evolution towards academic achievement. In addition, the process causes incarcerated men to self-evaluate the educational program’s effectiveness attributable to positive relational outcomes leading to increased college course participation.

The utility of self-evaluation, both developmentally and motivationally driven, links to Identity Theory. Building confidence over time, enhancing critical thinking skill development, enabling decision-making, and better prepares incarcerated men for

investing in themselves related to behavioral change. Stets and Burke (2000) find that people “feel confident about themselves when their authentic identities are verified” (p. 234). The verification process serves as the internal stamp of approval needed of these men, validating their existence as individuals and students worthy of accomplishing something valued.

For incarcerated men, the completion of degree attainment is the ideal measure of accomplishing something highly regarded. Many are acutely aware of the assumptions of societal expectations, such that include failure, the inability to learn, and self-governed by becoming productive citizens through inherent acceptance and restored sense of self. The usefulness in the motivationally-driven realm of self-evaluation affirms the belief in competencies and individual abilities most observable when learning becomes intentional for incarcerated men owing to humanistic education inspired by self-esteem in behavioral change production (See Figure 3.2.).



*Figure 3.2.* Humanistic learning and identity theories’ complementary components. Photograph by Mark Mirko. Copyright © 2021. Hartford Courant. Used with Permission.

Far too many incarcerated men experience education in dehumanizing ways. The devaluing reality of unacknowledged needs and stereotyping, beliefs, and prejudices that convey unworthiness as human beings seem to weave its way into correctional classrooms where weakened trust and lack of confidence raise insecurities. An interpretative framework informs this research study from a social constructivism worldview. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the worldview of social constructivism as “multiple realities constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others” (p. 35). From this perspective, the researcher’s worldview explains how the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis in correctional education devalues incarcerated men’s educational experiences, diminishes self-esteem, and undervalues incarcerated men as human beings.

Correctional educators often play a significant role in the dehumanizing aspect that shapes the realities of incarcerated men’s lived educational experiences. With outdated learning materials, conditional library access for study time, rather than holding them responsible for the barriers they face. Educators could instead engage incarcerated men in collaborative discussions to enhance the meaning of conceptual understanding. The role of dehumanization involves pretentious, sanctimonious educators who also rely on threats or punishment, a systemic practice throughout the environment, to maintain classroom power and control. They allow their one-dimensionality to perpetuate the teaching space, intensifying an indefinite, undesirable situation with unfounded beliefs and assumptions. Instead, correctional educators should regard incarcerated men as students desiring to learn. Crotty (1998) recognizes that “knowledge emerges through the individuals’ interaction with the environment in the course of experience” (p. 42),

explaining how devaluing occurs. Although the training received by correctional educators hardly covers the study of humanizing pedagogical praxis as foundational to reaching incarcerated men where they are. Recognizing incarcerated men as dialogical human beings is the first step towards advancing better methods in furthering their teaching and learning knowledge is the advantage. Still, humanism is neither inherited nor acquired. Instead, humanism lies within an individual's core and reflects outwardly as the character needed when leading these men through the learning process as the most urgent need.

Teaching incarcerated men is no different than teaching in any other higher education environment. The difference between correctional and traditional classrooms is that one school consists of incarcerated students while others do not. Both environments' role is to secure wholeness by ensuring students experience learning in humanizing ways. Although "the current state of correctional education and issues associated with its uses, implementations, and outcomes fail to adhere to best practices" (Pryor & Thompkins, 2012, p. 477), the awareness of missed opportunities exists in both settings. The lesson learned should rest in the realization zone, but the takeaway is corrective action.

Correctional education must extend beyond mere recognition of improvement areas and move towards the humanizing aspect as central to well-being and preparedness separate from which they continue to function today. Preparing incarcerated men to succeed helps them become productive citizens in life because of their strengthened selves. Osberg (1986) affirms this ideology when stating that "higher education leads to internal changes that will steer inmates towards greater success when they return to the community" (p. 140). Essential to the researcher's social constructivism perspective as

the psychological paradigm between incarcerated men's social needs and the link to increased participation, "prison education courses should enhance attitudes towards self, life, and society" (p. 140). Humanizing pedagogy's praxis is the foundation of incarcerated men's completeness and fundamental to their value as human beings and the gateway to discovering who they are and where they belong in the world. Ensuring they experience learning with the same purposeful intensity as any other higher learning environment requires extensive training and higher standards abiding within correctional education programs as its responsibility.

An opportunity exists to explore the humanizing aspect of correctional education programs. Unfortunately, the idea of incarcerated men earning an education is somehow dumbed-down and marginalized to the extent that it fits the visual perceptions of what many educators believe to be good enough owing to imprisonment. Hunt and Carnevale (2011) view this philosophy as consistent with moral experience, asserting that it "includes a person's interpretations of lived encounters that fall on spectrums of right-wrong, good-bad, or just-unjust" (p. 657). Thus, classroom practices should encompass the individuality of learning needs for incarcerated students because their environment as determinants of lowered expectations minimizes their self-worth. By incorporating the humanizing aspect of correctional education, educators can reshape individuals from the inside out. Furthermore, the alignment of teaching and learning methods achieves sustainable knowledge-sharing initiatives to understand better how their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors could alter learning experiences. This research study's perspectives inform the researcher's social constructivism worldview and provide fundamental implications for practice.

### *Research Design and Rationale*

The research design selected for this qualitative, phenomenological case study provides the researcher's rationale for exploring six formerly incarcerated men's lived educational experiences. Exploring correctional education to understand better how incarcerated men learn best absent of a humanizing pedagogical provides a representation of experiences of given persons, and the knowledge gained from their unique perspectives remains grounded in research. As appropriate for this research study, Stake (1995; see discussion in Yin, 2009, 2012, 2014) find that "case study inquiries complimentary to qualitative, phenomenological research allows the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis of a case bounded by time and activity" (p. 187). Formerly incarcerated men, having completed higher education courses while detained in the justice system with varying experiences, establish the rationale for this case study's design. The researcher selected this design to understand better diverse perspectives of meaning concerning the essence of lived experiences when participating in college courses. Following Creswell and Creswell (2018), this research "design of inquiry comes from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the essence of the lived experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 13). Specifically, the researcher's planned inquiry includes a structured and semi-structured interview and observations in one-hour focus group sessions. The timeline of these activities expands over a three-to four-week period. The purpose is to understand how incarcerated men learn best, providing educators with new teaching and learning approaches to help incarcerated men reach their full potential.

The design's strength intentionally draws on the research questions separately, addressing Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories in methodological congruence

with the research framework. The primary research questions emerge from inquiry specific to human beings' value and social and emotional needs respective of Humanistic Learning Theory. Identity Theory relates the secondary research questions by addressing self-esteem. The importance of methodological congruency occurs from "extracting themes common across interviews or unique to an interview and then creating a conceptual link" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 16). The third research question converges on both in behavioral change production. Combined, these techniques to inquiry provide the path to answering the research questions, allowing attention to the meaning of perspectives relating to fulfillment.

Most significant to this research study's design are the themes captured inductively, better preparing the researcher to understand the lived educational experiences from diverse perspectives. The utility of this conventional approach followed Giorgi (2009) and Moustakas (1994) through a series of structured and semi-structured interviews in two separate focus group sessions and observations inclusive of formerly incarcerated men. The research design contains the qualitative elements of the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The methods used analyze components independently and interpret the results observable through a small sample size, and where qualitative data alone avail.

In phenomenology, the essence of lived educational experiences represents incarcerated men's realities as a unique focus in this research design. The researcher follows Stewart and Mickunas' (1990) "phenomenology's method as a human science and for the philosophy that considers anything appearing to consciousness as a legitimate inquiry field" (pp. 128–129). Consciousness relates to one's reality in that it serves as the

psychological awareness of one's being. For incarcerated men, education, the environment, and the stigma attached to imprisonment psychologically shape what they learn to believe of themselves and others. Regrettably, the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis permits assumptions based on societal views to discount their existence as insignificant quietly.

When correctional educators' unpredictable behaviors reveal distinctive classroom practices exposing their beliefs about incarcerated men, the reality of lived educational experience diminishes. From this perspective, phenomenological research supports human behavior in whole meaning and richness (Kaam, 1966). Therefore, the lens through which these men view reality is the essence of authenticity experienced in their conscious state. Exploring the perspectives of formerly incarcerated men follows Stake's (1995; see discussion in Yin, 2009, 2012, 2014) theoretical propositional development and framework construction across multiple social science inquiry processes. The literature's contribution establishes the urgency for exploring correctional education. Specifically, the design's strength demonstrates flexibility across interviews on conveying the richness of realities, clarifying the researcher's rationale for addressing correctional education in the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis.

In terms of reflexivity, the grounds for site selection allowed the researcher to draw upon institutional knowledge and her direct teaching experience in correctional classrooms. Though Creswell and Creswell (2018) find knowledge "is more than merely advancing biases and values in the study, but how the background of the researcher actually may shape the direction of the study" (p. 182), potentially discrediting the

research. Since correctional education often misses opportunities to advance knowledge contributing to behavioral change, the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis exists.

Learning how to engage in healthy conflict resolution, self-acceptance, communication, and recognizing areas for improvement are part of the fundamental challenges within the structure of correctional programs that limit growth and development for incarcerated men. Still, the researcher's perspective and positionality offer credence to understanding the core of these men and how they experience education as her strength. Although "aware of connections between the researcher's role, the participants, and the research site, that may unduly influence the researcher's interpretations" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 184), as presenting potential limitations. The researcher's use of bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018) simplifies the process by separating the researcher's knowledge and understanding of incarcerated men to ensure the focus remains on their lived educational experiences. Van Manen (1990) describes bracketing and reduction as a phenomenological reflection. Gorgi (2009) explains bracketing through a two-fold lens of not forgetting incarcerated men's experiences and not letting past knowledge persist in the engagement efforts while determining experiences. The researcher's understanding of reflexivity and where she draws upon institutional knowledge and direct teaching experience in correctional education remains essential to this research. However, most critical is the recognition of lived educational experiences as the capstone of phenomenology's merit.

#### *Site Selection and Participant Sampling*

The researcher chose video conferencing as the site selection for this research study. With little disruption as possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), this cloud-based

technology's functionality provides a comfortably convenient, dependable, and trustworthy environment for audio-video conferencing across various communication domains. Further, video conferencing facilitated focus group sessions through mobile devices, desktops, laptops, or landline telephone systems through its delivery of network servers. The advantage aids in protecting both participants' and the researchers' safety amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The chosen site selection and the participant sampling strategy captured the essence of formerly incarcerated men's perspectives concerning their lived educational experiences.

Respective of the current COVID-19 environment, the complete personal protective equipment (PPE), such as face masks and gloves, became inessential to video conferencing technological capabilities. In addition, the research site and participant selection strategy imposes ethical considerations as part of the researcher's responsibility to ensure this study's credibility. Though video conferencing provides safety and security, the researcher's awareness of professional decorum explains how formerly incarcerated men could contribute to the research when obtaining consent as the first step in granting permission. Creswell and Poth (2018) find that "in a phenomenological study in which samples include individuals who have experienced a phenomenon, it is important to obtain participants' written permission to be studied" (p. 156). The required approvals included the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for "providing evidence to the review boards that the study design follows their guidelines for conducting ethical research" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 151). The researcher ensured the same ethical considerations for each group selected to participate in this research study, purposefully choosing six formerly incarcerated men to participate in two separate focus

group sessions. These two groups, demographically include one Caucasian: Morgan, age 58, married, earning an Associate, Bachelors, and Masters degrees; one Indian-American: Nelson, age 38, single, earning an Associate, Bachelors, and Masters degrees; two Black men: Freddie, age 42, single, earning an Associate degree; and Willie: age 45, single, earning two Associates degrees; two Hispanic men: Hubert, age 54, single, earning an Associate, Bachelors, and Masters degrees; and Earl, age 31, single, earning an Associate degree while incarcerated in the Texas state prison system. All men enjoy gainful employment (See Table 4.1).

The selection criteria for group one included two factors. First, each had entered a program where they continued as professional mentors and coaches to post-release initiatives involving newly released men. Second, each had completed correctional college courses for two or more years before release from the Texas state prison system. The ages of this participant group varied from 42 to 58.

The selection criteria for group two included two factors. First, each had completed correctional college courses for two or more years before release from the Texas state prison system. Second, none had participated in a post-release program. While all three of these participants range from ages 31 to 45, the criteria for both groups were not limited to age, religion, employment, or marital status.

Video conferencing, as the site selection, provided a comfortable environment for participants. The researcher scheduled “timed visits, so that little intrusion minimized the participants’ flow of activities” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 93); allowing participants a choice of available dates and times for their convenience helped to establish trust and credibility. The sampling criteria provided differing perspectives from six formerly

incarcerated men in how they experienced correctional education. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain that “when a researcher maximizes differences at the beginning of the study, it increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives” (p. 158). The research site and participant selection, also required permissions as part of the researcher’s responsibility, ensured credibility. The following section provides the researcher’s sampling design for this research study.

The researcher selected a purposeful, criterion, maximum variation sampling strategy, with a snowball approach as the chosen method for this qualitative, phenomenological case study design. A level-based planned implementation sampling strategy compliments this research study. Creswell (2018) finds the research site, the interview process level, and the participants level helps the researcher understand the problem that addresses the research questions by “intentionally sampling participants who best inform the researcher about the research problem under exploration” (p. 148). Detailed accounts of lived educational experiences unique to every individual remain a vital component as the strength of this research study’s path.

To complement the purposeful sampling strategy, the researcher employed a criterion typology that selected six formerly incarcerated men who had completed correctional college courses in the Texas state prison system for two or more years before release. Most valuable to qualitative researchers, the criterion typology sampling strategy helps “when all individuals represent people who have experienced the phenomenon, and in seeking cases that meet some criterion and quality assurance” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 157, 159). Thus, using a criterion typology for this research study adds to the richness of shared experiences through identified commonalities as the standard for all participants.

In addition, the benefit helps identify correctional education areas specific to the meaning of humanizing relevance and educational practices when barriers alter the learning experiences among formerly incarcerated men.

When researchers employ a maximum variation sampling, the small number of participants maximize diverse perspectives concerning their humanizing educational experiences, explaining how formerly incarcerated men experienced correctional education. In addition, how it connects to their meaning of human education, social and emotional needs, and self-esteem related to the frameworks of Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories answering the research questions. Creswell (2018) finds that the process “documents diverse variations of individuals or sites based on specific characteristics” (p. 159), ensuring “thick and rich data, leveraging the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences” (p. 158) across groups of differing viewpoints. The utility of this sampling strategy allows participants free from institutional confinement, each with diverse backgrounds and unique experiences, to bring a wealth of knowledge and outlooks concerning their educational needs and desires.

The combined groups of formerly incarcerated men add an abundance of information concerning their correctional education experiences, enriching the discovery of how incarcerated men learn best absent of a humanizing pedagogy and the desire to learn more. When uncovering human values distinction, the usefulness of the snowball approach helped the researcher by “identifying cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). The rationale represents the researcher’s sampling strategies as appropriate for this qualitative, phenomenological case study, preparing the researcher for data collection.

### *Data Collection Procedures*

The data collection procedures consisted of two steps, interviews and observations (See Appendix B.2—Research Data Collection Matrix). The two steps involved two separate, one-hour focus group sessions where six formerly incarcerated men participated. Two-phased sequences of the interview occurred, preparation for the Focus Group Interviews and the actual Focus Group Interview sessions. The focus group sessions included in-depth structured and semi-structured interview questions over three weeks, beginning February 28, 2021–March 14, 2021. Thus, the procedure involved a “series of interrelated activities in gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). A snowball approach followed the qualitative, phenomenological case study methods, consistent with a purposeful criterion and maximum variation sampling strategy.

The focus group interview sessions provided detailed accounts of formerly incarcerated men’s lived educational experiences. Though achieving methodological congruency remained highly important throughout this data collection strategy, the researcher found meeting quality assurance criteria (Creswell, 2013), reliability, validity, and establishing credibility among participants as critical. Detailed data collection procedures identified below represent the activities conducted in this research study.

#### *Phase One: Preparing for Focus Group Interviews*

The participants returned e-mailed responses indicating their level of agreement or disagreement in participating in the research study. The researcher piloted the research questions in advance by conducting a mock focus group session with six peers to ensure familiarity with the interview process, interview questions, duration, and comfort level in

the focus groups' facilitation. To ensure a smooth focus group session, the researcher verified each participant's email address, reconfirming the time and dates by emailed reminders with requested responses.

### *Phase Two The Focus Group Interview Live Session*

The first step of the qualitative data collection procedure began on time by welcoming the participants to the interview focus group session. The researcher explained the study's purpose, acknowledging ethical rights and considerations, the researcher's role and expectations, and the participant's involvement. Next, the researcher engaged the participants in an ice breaker conversation to alleviate any existing tension or anxiety, providing ease for a conversational flow through Socratic discussion, setting the researcher's tone and the participant's expectations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Disclosing the researcher's positionality and worldview helped ease anxieties, freely allowing participants to share their lived educational experiences. The researcher asked each participant to utilize paper and pencils to capture their thoughts and perspectives as a courtesy not to interrupt others' shared experiences. The interview format proceeded with a standardized open-ended interview of carefully worded questions (See Appendix B.1—Focus Group Interview Questions).

Focus groups provided a significant advantage in this research study, which helped guide participants through the in-depth interview process. Concerning the essence of lived educational experiences and needs, in-depth interviews allowed the participants to engage in a conversational dialogue while reacting, responding to, and observing other group participants' shared perspectives through a series of questions relating to Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories. Each of the interview questions asked of

participants prompted emotion, reflection, and personal experiences. As an additional benefit, in-depth interviews helped the researcher identify humanizing education and self-esteem, theoretical components of Humanistic Learning (Khatib et al., 2013), and Identity Theories (Stryker & Burke, 2000) as preliminary themes. While continuously recording data, humanizing education, recognized learning needs, social interaction, personal identity formation, trust, and respect emerged. The emergence of themes created categorical preliminary sub-themes, inductively answering the research questions consistent with a framework and thematic analysis approach in code development.

In step one, the researcher hand-recorded the data collected during the in-depth interview and focus group sessions. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend “a pre-designed form used to record information collected during an interview or observation, involving field notes, and interview write-ups” (pp. 169–170). The researcher used a printed spreadsheet, complete with interview questions, and a free-flow comment section to record data when capturing participant perspectives, the researcher’s thoughts throughout the process, lessons learned about concerns or difficulties experienced throughout the interview, including the observational method. During the focus group interview sessions, follow-up questions provided reliability and validity in the accuracy of information flow, allowing additional data collection.

The second step of the qualitative data collection procedure involved observations during the focus group session. The video conferencing environment ensured proper social distancing, safety, and protection. Based on the research purpose and questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher observed the participants’ behaviors, attitudes, and activities to explore the perspectives of lived correctional education experiences. The

researcher observed participants' responses to their recollection of old correctional education practices related to culturally-driven ideologies about indifference or untrained educators who viewed incarcerated men as criminals rather than students. As a complete participant in the observation process (Angrosino, 2007), shifting from participant to the observer (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher used probing and memoing to capture the depth of experiences through expressed feelings and emotions. Body language and eye contact, comfort, discomfort, or difficulty in addressing sensitive topics related to answering the research questions. The reactions to research questions or responses to other perspectives and interactions contributed to the meaning of lived educational experiences, also addressing the research questions.

Observations from the focus group interview sessions, found instrumental in qualitative data collection, helped establish an observation protocol (See Appendix C.1—Interview Observation and Recording Protocol). The researcher observed behaviors, hand gestures, body language, tone, facial expressions, and emphasis of words when describing feelings, opinions, and deep emotions concerning their lived educational experiences. The researcher intentionally built five-minute breaks into the interview session after the first thirty minutes to allow participants to regroup from reflections or respond to personal matters. The researcher avoided commenting on observational behaviors that could bias the process, allowing participants to articulate their perspectives freely. The researcher found recording data in chronological order helpful in exploring the case study of formerly incarcerated men's views while minimizing field issues. The researcher minimized field issues activities by immediately transferring hand-recorded data collected into NVivo, ensuring the data collection process's accuracy.

Upon concluding step two, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the research study by reconfirming the accuracy of responses captured during the focus group interview and observation session. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that “in phenomenology, sharing minimizes the bracketing that is essential to construct the meaning of participants and reduces information shared by participants in case studies” (p. 174). Bracketing helped the researcher focus on the significance of the participants’ lived experiences rather than the researcher’s personal experiences, enabling relevant information captured during the interview and observation steps to prepare the analysis and interpretation of data collected (See Appendix C.2—Data Collection and Analysis Protocol).

Though helpful in qualitative research, step three of four of the data collection procedures (documents) adds little significance to this study, owing to attainability and accessibility concerns or constraints related to incarcerated men’s post-release status. Audiovisual materials, however, as the fourth step, added significance to exploring their educational perspectives by capturing the richness of viewpoints in real-time. To establish reliability, ensuring trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000), the researcher elected to conduct a balanced data collection strategy to guarantee the validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), minimizing the probability of limitations that may exist. In addition, the researcher understood the importance of capturing the affluence of experiences during the interview focus group sessions and observations, establishing the data collection procedure’s criteria as credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

The criteria for collecting data from multiple data sources began with a small sample size, six formerly incarcerated men. The sample size facilitated saturation, which Charmaz (2006) described as “the point one stops collecting data concerning the categories or themes” (p. 39). Rather than collecting a single data source, multiple data sources add to rich experiences by giving voice to once silenced incarcerated men. The selected participants bring current knowledge and understanding of the meaning of how they experienced correctional education. Socratic discussion and open-ended data forms in many layers add to the importance of self-discovery and learning that connects to their lived educational experiences. The researcher’s data collection method involved “writing notes during the study, observations about the process, and concerns about participant reactions” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 184), adding depth, leading to an abundance of lessons learned when capturing collected data, guiding the data analysis process.

The lessons learned about the data collection procedures allowed the researcher to reflect on enriching the value of human experience, giving voice to formerly incarcerated men interpreting emerging themes, coding, and findings during the data analysis process. In essence, the data collected in the preceding steps highlighted the effectiveness of humanizing correctional instruction, motivating achievement, addressing social and emotional needs, teacher-student relationships, and the value to incarcerated men, positively shaping self-esteem. Consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2018), the researcher “sought to build an understanding based on the voices heard” (p. 27) as essential for triangulation, enabling the researcher to establish themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher’s data collection methods meet qualitative research

characteristics based on various sources, complementing the data analysis and interpretation of findings through emerging themes.

Establishing themes, as a process, remains critical to qualitative research and across the data collection procedures. Charmaz (2006) helped the researcher understand how to utilize adapt language and meaning while recording data, emphasizing that raw data alone requires interpretation, placing conceptual frames on the language and understanding of the world. The explanation connects a broader understanding central to the research purpose and questions, exploring the perspectives of the participant's lived education experiences in the absence of humanizing praxis.

Through the qualitative data collection procedures, research questions addressed the purpose of asking: What is correctional education's role to ensure incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways? What value does correctional education bring to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem? How do teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men? For the researcher, "reviewing all the data, making sense of it, and organizing it into codes and themes that cut across all the data sources is the measure of good data collection" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). Both participant groups' conceptual understandings about themselves and the world surrounding incarcerated men constitute the measure of meaningfulness.

The focus of this research study aims to understand better how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of correctional classrooms' inability to restore human dignity in a system design of indifference that perpetuates incarcerated

men as less than human beings. Understanding the meaning of different perspectives aligns with the theoretical frameworks for this research study.

An ordered series of inter-related activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in the flow of data help provide a better representation of the process involved in decision-making, planning, and strategizing in the stages of data development, helping to identify areas for improvement. In addition, the utility offers a visual account of how the sequenced activities flow. Figure 3.3 illustrates an abstract data collection flowchart.

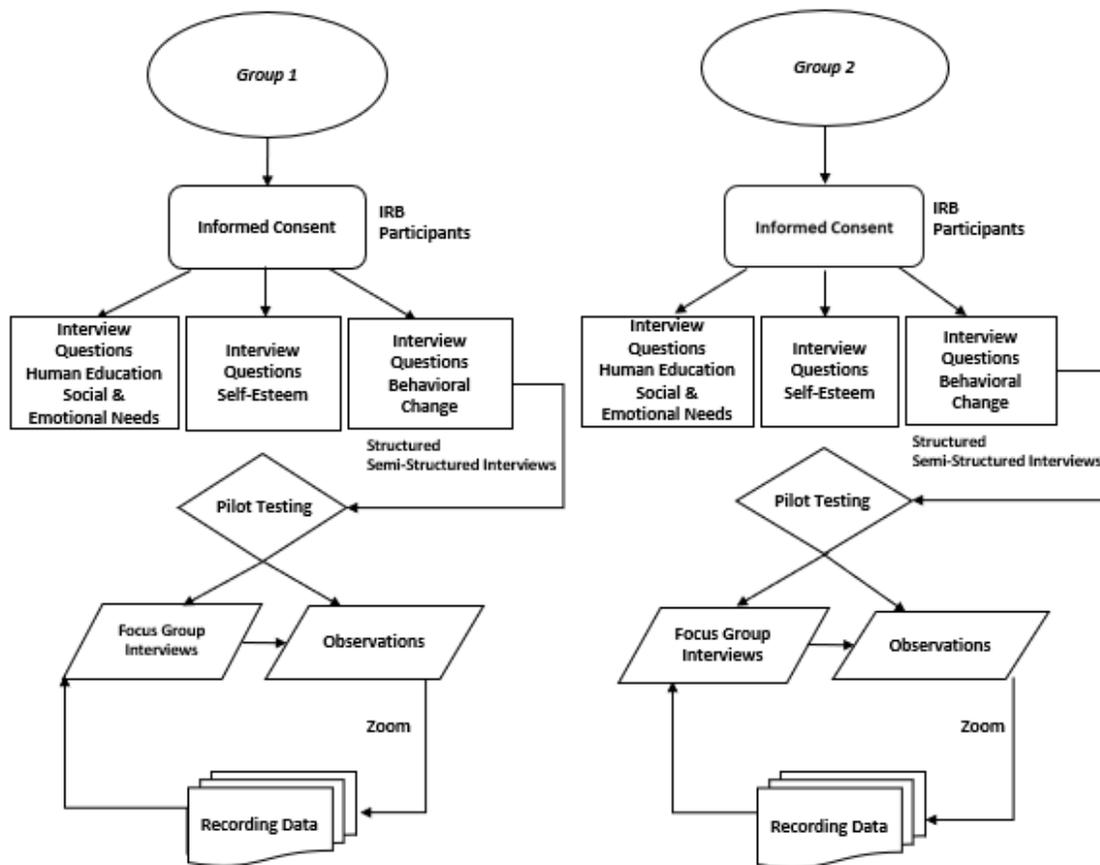


Figure 3.3. Data collection flowchart.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The researcher's data analysis procedures involved five steps (See Appendix C—Data Collection and Analysis Protocol). The researcher employed pattern matching, coding the data to identify individual augmentations of the research participants' voices, using Tesch's (1992) Eight Steps of Coding as data points to categorize the data collected, then isolating those data points. The process began with coding categorization procedures, informing the research questions, leading to constant comparative analysis. Specifically, the pattern matching techniques' actions involved applying an *a priori* theoretical framework, following Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral and developing the theoretical statement, creating a category from constantly comparing data collected. The steps outlined below explain the data analysis organizational path.

Step one involved preparing and organizing data for analysis by reading and preparing transcript notations. The researcher used NVivo as part of the preparation process for which to manage data. Data analysis procedures, simultaneously process-driven, "proceeded hand-in-hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2012, p. 192). The process entailed transcribing words into text gathered through the interview focus group sessions and observations and organizing them into group categories, name, topic, and theme. The utility in this step allowed the researcher to accurately visualize the keywords used, including the annunciation, frequency, and meaning.

In the second step, reading and reviewing the data collected for themes provided the precision needed when cross-checking for errors, categorizing, and winnowing. Guest et al. (2012), as cited in Creswell and Creswell (2018), define winnowing as a process of focusing on some and disregarding other parts of the data, with a specific focus on

“cataloging all of the visual material and sorting and arranging data into different types” (p. 193). In this step, the researcher captured emerging themes consistent with correctional education’s role, feelings of inadequacy, disrespect, lack of enthusiasm for learning, and classroom practices through NVivo’s auto coding feature. In addition, the process helped the researcher analyze and organize transcribed data from the first data collection step, guiding the researcher in deep reflection of observed behaviors during the focus group interview sessions, emphasizing differing perspectives. However, Guest et al. (2012) explain that “transcribing data from in-depth interviews and focus groups of typically 1 to 2 hours” (p. 11). Therefore, the researcher anticipated and planned for the entire process of addressing the reading and reviewing all the data collected for themes, consistent with the data analysis spiral.

In the third step, describing and classifying codes into themes, the researcher utilized NVivo to capture thick, rich descriptors to detail or code the data collected following each session. The process of this step involved “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code, assigning a label” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190). Then, condensing the data down from broad categories to a lean coding approach of meaning. Six broad categories developed from the two focus groups across the data collected and consistent with exploring the perspectives of the participant’s lived education experiences: experiences, acknowledgment, social interaction, accomplishment, mindset, and trust. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend no more than five to six themes to write the narrative. Three condensed themes emerged from broad categories: personal beliefs and values, assumptions, encouragement, care, and interest in their learning. The identified themes

created a codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018), representing the distinct boundaries for each code in assessing inter-rater reliability among multiple coders. The primary reason for this process helped the researcher to make sense of the data collected as interpreted.

In the fourth step, developing and assessing interpretations, data analysis involved understanding the meaning in all data collected in relational congruency. Creswell and Poth (2018) define the interpretation in qualitative research as “abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the broader significance of the data” (p. 195). The following condensed codes emerged, not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings, recognizing their learning needs as essential, social interaction, personal identity formation, trust, and respect, as interpreted by NVivo. In the frequency among both participant groups, the conveying of multiple perspectives across the data collected, confirming the relational connection to the theoretical framework. This step helped determine the research findings’ conclusions, significance, and implications, consistent with the qualitative data analysis spiral’s interpretative process.

In the fifth and final step, representing and visualizing the data served as the capstone of this data analysis process and the bridge to the research study’s validity through conceptual understanding. NVivo’s word cloud feature supported the final step’s utility, providing the clarity needed to understand better how analysis and data interpretation occurred, comparing and contrasting the study’s process to account for the findings, confirmability, and peer reviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) explain the use of visuals, graphics, or tables enable the representation of data that “assess completeness and readability, note patterns, and possible comparisons” p. 197) as essential to this step.

However, implications exist that could obscure results. Therefore, the researcher chose to use the following validation strategies to mitigate against the inaccuracy of conclusions.

Validation strategies, crucial to the researcher's credibility and confirmability, contributed to the accuracy of findings. Research finds that "validation is a judgment of a research strategy" (Angen, 2000, p. 387), confirming the research study's congruency by theoretically connecting themes related to the purpose and questions, consistent with qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider qualitative inquiry akin to a naturalist approach to interpretative meaning. The researcher outlines below the following validation strategies employed during this final step, represented in a three-stage sequence:

First, the researcher's peer-review method for corroborating evidence triangulates multiple data sources that led to the inductive analysis in discovering negative case analysis or disconfirming evidence. In data accuracy validation, rigor involved member checking, triangulation, participant authentication, and peer auditing of differing accounts to legitimize the research study. The process followed the analysis of data using multiple levels of abstraction (Creswell, 2018), where coding and themes may indicate "expected and surprising ideas" (p. 49). Second, as part of the validation strategies, the researcher understood the value of reflexivity, disclosing biases, past experiences, prejudices, and orientations (Creswell, 2018). Relevant to this research design's approach, this strategy allowed the researcher to immerse herself "within the study to reflect on her history, culture, and personal experiences" (p. 49), shaping the choice of questions addressed, data collected, interpretation, and expectations. Third, the researchers' positionality explicitly addresses any reference that may disproportionately affect this research study.

Finally, the researcher employed all ethical considerations throughout the data analysis process.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The researcher upholds the ethical considerations for this research study. The researcher “honored the dignity, well-being, and self-worth of individuals, acknowledged the influence within and across groups, contributing to the common good and equity” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 152) of fairness and justice for all and recognizing the diversity among participants. Before the study, the researcher obtained the university’s Institutional Review Board’s necessary permissions and the participants’ informed consent. Ensuring integrity, without pressure, respecting all persons, and honoring full disclosure and transparency with the participants’ protection as the primary ethical consideration (Creswell & Poth, 2018) remained the researcher’s responsibility. The researcher respected each participant as a human being by establishing “evidence of awareness of relevant issues for the study and plans for addressing ethical issues related to respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consistent with qualitative research, the pre-planning process’s preparation allowed the researcher to secure and properly store data as part of this research study’s ethical considerations.

The researcher saved all data on two separate flash drives using her laptop, ensuring data and participants’ security and confidentiality. In addition, the transcription of data to the flash drives and onto NVivo served as a third backup measure (Davidson, 1996), allowing the researcher to secure data in a locked home safe for five years (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the researcher takes excellent care to ensure the data

storage, security, confidentiality of participants for this research study, limitations and delimitations exist.

### *Limitations and Delimitations*

The researcher acknowledges the existence of limitations and delimitations throughout this research study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain data collection as an opportunity for participants to share their reality allowing the researcher to obtain the language and words of participants and written evidence, capturing the essence in the meaning of lived educational experiences. However, the researcher recognizes that learning needs may exist among many formerly incarcerated men, posing a limitation in the research distinguishing that “not all people are equally articulate and perceptive; therefore, transcription is a requirement” (p. 188). Expressly, difficulties in interpreting words in slang or prison jargon used during focus group interview sessions can affect the interpretation based on the reality of the prison environment, culture, beliefs, and differences across participant groups.

Notwithstanding, the focus group interviews may require greater scrutiny concerning the vocabulary used to describe formerly incarcerated men’s lived educational experiences. The most significant limitation participant-wide when coordinating audio-visual interviews through online platforms involved time and date, respectively. Both participant groups have busy schedules, including parole visits, employment, or pre-scheduled community and family obligations. Other limitations included traumatic institutional experiences causing emotions to run deep during reflection or participant avoidance in allowing deep thought to surface.

Among the existing delimitations in this qualitative, phenomenological case study relate to participant characteristics. While the researcher intended to include formerly incarcerated men having completed college courses, the researcher did not differentiate between groups, culture, race, age, or religion. The researcher's intent excludes correctional educators, any member of authority in the criminal justice system, or state government officials as part of this research study.

### *Conclusions*

The structure of correctional programs needs exploring to understand the power of human potential within incarcerated men. Far too many men struggle with social and emotional depletion related to unaddressed learning needs dehumanizing educational experiences. The absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis, low self-worth, and authenticity originate from diminished self-esteem. At the same time, relational behaviors suffer from untrained correctional educators and lack of interaction as the source of devalued correctional education for incarcerated men. Correctional education's effectiveness necessitates exploration when they miss opportunities to contribute to incarcerated men's wholeness. The perspectives of formerly incarcerated men matter in understanding the positive contributors of behavioral change as the prism through which humanism exists, attributed to the meaning they seek in quality learning programs designed to rebuild incarcerated men from the inside out.

The implication of this research study's exploration brings attention to correction programs' effectiveness, specifically, the lack of humanizing praxis, leading to improved teaching and learning for all students. Thus, an opportunity exists for educators to examine the humanizing aspect of correctional education programs that explain their role

in ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways. The qualitative research methodology aligned the theoretical framework, research design, data collection, analysis protocols affirming ethical considerations, and validation strategies, identifying existing limitations and delimitations. The following chapter study's the results and discusses the implications of the research findings established by procedural connection.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Implications

#### *Introduction*

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology, design, and rationale for this study. Included in the last chapter were participant sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis protocols congruent with the theoretical framework most useful in a qualitative, phenomenological case study design. The researcher conducted two separate focus groups using structured and semi-structured interviews from six formerly incarcerated men in the data collection phase. This chapter addresses the research study's findings, where the voices of six formerly incarcerated men provide their perspectives concerning the essence of their lived educational experiences. Their narratives speak to the power of human potential and humanism in the absence of pedagogical praxis as the need to explore correctional education, which answers the following research questions:

1. What is correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways?
2. What value does correctional education bring to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem?
3. How do teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men?

This chapter utilizes the frameworks of Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories and the constructs of human education, social and emotional needs, and self-esteem to contribute to the findings, answering the research questions. This research study aims to provide correctional educators with new teaching approaches to help

incarcerated men reach their true potential. In addition, this study adds to the literature gap by exposing the danger of correctional classrooms' inability to restore human dignity in a system design of indifference that perpetuates incarcerated men as less than human beings.

This qualitative phenomenological case study explores correctional education in the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis through two groups of formerly incarcerated men's perspectives. The most distinguishing feature among the two groups includes extended support in the transition of newly released men. The framework provided by Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories informs the research questions concerning the constructs of human education, social and emotional needs, and self-esteem. The exploration of two different groups adds thick and rich data for analysis. The data analysis process revealed that incarcerated men could learn, despite the lack of an ideal learning environment. Their free will and capacity of achieving their best produced fundamentally good, confident feelings of belonging and competence as the final categories for proper winnowing of the data. This chapter represents the results of each group's perspectives.

Chapter Four begins with a detailed description of each group's demographics and current career status. Next, the Results Section conveys each group's perspective by research question with a supporting narrative, and then the researcher shares framework analysis results. The framework analysis examined themes, identifying similarities and differences across cases as part of the data analysis procedures. The results from each group further analyzed provide the essence in the meaning of lived educational experiences as interpreted for more profound contributions to the research. After the

Results Section, the Discussion Section addresses the groups’ findings from the case study’s framework and thematic analysis’ emerged themes. Next, the Implications Section allows this researcher to convey the significance of the study to identified stakeholders. Finally, a Conclusion and Summary Section captures the main findings and the relationship to the theoretical framework and literature review. Participants’ group descriptions begin in the following section.

*Group Participant Descriptions*

The participants for this study include two bounded cases of three formerly incarcerated men each; one White Caucasian, one Indian-American, two Black, and two Hispanic men (See Table 4.1). Having completed college courses, each earning degrees of attainment before release, using a small number of participants to maximize diverse perspectives concerning their humanizing education, these men possess a personal affinity for improving correctional education reflective of their lived experiences.

Table 4.1

*Group Descriptions*

Group 1	Age	MS/ Race	ES	CE Program/ Degree(s) Earned	Group 2	Age	MS/ Race	ES	CE Program/ Degree(s) Earned
Freddie	42	S/ B	Yes	Yes/ A	Willie	45	S/ B	Yes	Yes/ A, A
Hubert	54	S/ H	Yes	Yes/ A, B, M	Earl	31	S/ H	Yes	Yes/ A
Morgan	58	M/ C	Yes	Yes/ A, B, M	Nelson	38	S/ IA	Yes	Yes/ A, B, M

A=Associates; B=Bachelor’s; M=Master’s. B=Black; H=Hispanic; C=Caucasian; IA=Indian American MS=Marital Status. ES=Employment Status. CE=Correctional Education.

Group one participated in a program where they continued as professional mentors and coaches to post-release initiatives involving newly released men, and group two did not. Both groups offer reflective experiences about correctional education. These men each

lend insight to the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis as the existential threat to the fulfillment of human potential and the restoration of human dignity as part of the wholeness they seek. The Results Section begins by identifying the results, followed by each group's perspective by research question with a supporting narrative.

### *Results*

The data collection procedures allowed the researcher to reflect on enriching the value of human experience, giving voice to formerly incarcerated men interpreting emerging themes, coding, and findings. The researcher conducted two separate focus group sessions to yield the results during the data analysis process, where three formerly incarcerated men participated in each group. Structured and semi-structured interviews and observations provided the data needed for this research study. Field notes organized and recorded the researcher's thoughts, enriching the meaning of the essence of the lived educational experiences among formerly incarcerated men. The researcher's decision to employ a purposeful criterion, maximum variation sampling strategy, complimentary of a snowball approach strengthened this qualitative, phenomenological case study design. The design's strength intentionally drew from the research questions separately, addressing Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories in methodological congruence with the research framework.

The results of this study revealed six key findings, addressing the research questions by groups. First, in group one, not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings undermined their dignity and rights to realize their true potential despite their faith in correctional education to place them on the path to self-actualization consistently. This finding affirmed that correctional education did not fully meet their expectations to

ensure learning in humanizing ways. Further, the indicator points to the value of “awareness of their dignity and right as unique human beings” (Gage & Berliner, 1991, as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 46) remain compromised. Second, in group two, not recognizing their learning needs as essential did not fully meet their expectations. Although recognizing learning needs shows respect for human dignity as relevant and central to self-actualization potential, conveying the existence and reality of fulfillment is part of meeting expectations. When the purpose of education is to exist beyond social and vocational utility (Smith, 2007), their human dignity as a right and realized fulfillment should have begun in the classroom. Therefore, thwarting the commitment to ensuring the discovery of their true potential as a human right has everything to do with incarceration itself. This understanding highlights a much deeper concern in the effectiveness of correctional education, exposing the danger of the classroom’s inability to restore human dignity in a system design of indifference, disguised as rehabilitation, but coined as education and why it cannot fully meet their expectations.

Third, in group one, the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shapes their self-esteem depends on their perception of the meaning of value and how interaction is socially constructed. Thoits (1983) explains that “social interaction is essential to normal psychological development and ordered social conduct” (p. 175). For example, when teachers socially interacted in their learning experiences, all three men credited their teachers for influencing their self-esteem, whether through acknowledgment, empowerment, or inspiring confidence by motivating their self-worth. In addition, Routman (2005) states that “students learn more when they talk to one another and become actively involved” (p. 207). In contrast, when teachers are not

socially interactive with students, the richness of learning about oneself and others extends to latency. Arnold (1999) explains that “social interaction can facilitate and support the affective factors: reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, fostering the development of positive attitudes toward learning, promoting self-esteem, supporting different learning styles, and encouraging perseverance in the process of learning” (p. 227). Therefore, formerly incarcerated men showed a high value in developing their sense of connection through interactive classroom experiences. Fourth, in group two, the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem depends on their sense of self as the basis of life experiences. Hewitt (1989), aligning with Thoits (1983) in conception, defines personal identity as “a sense of continuity, integration, identification, and differentiation, constructed by the person not concerning a community and its culture but specific to the self and its projects” (p. 179). This understanding affirms why incarcerated men need to prove themselves as independent beings, attributing to their distinctive identities in feeling competent towards re-establishing their existence in the world as their individual selves’ project. Thus, further realizing that their development rests with their need to validate worth, prove themselves as independent beings to others, and reckon with themselves in self-acceptance.

Fifth, in group one, the teacher-student relationship’s influence on behavioral change among incarcerated men extends to developing a collaborative learning culture built on trust. The element of trust is the hope of influencing the restoration of human dignity, the common denominator linking human learning, and the anchor placed between one and the other. Zand (1971) reminds us that “trust is not a feeling of warmth

or affection but the conscious regulation of one's dependence on another" (p. 229). For incarcerated men, the closeness and shared attitudes fulfilled by positive classroom experiences establish the element of trust as essential to human learning. This understanding explains why "a greater expectation of shared interests and goals, a higher level of effectiveness" (Powell, 1996, p. 58), yields the earned authenticity needed as the foundation of trust, establishing positive, respectful teacher-student relationships. The sixth and final finding in group two revealed that formerly incarcerated men found the teacher-student relationship influences behavioral change in a reciprocal mutual give and take process, attributing to respectfully honoring their dignity as independent learners. Arnold's (1999) belief that "educators should create social relations together with a positive atmosphere in the class" (as cited in Khatib, 2013, p. 50), creating a community of practice built on supporting teacher-student interaction. Therefore, the facilitation of a practical correctional classroom atmosphere can only exist through openness. Stets and Burke (2000) as "identity theorists regard the group as a set of interrelated individuals, each of whom performs unique set integrated activities, sees things from their own perspective, and negotiates the terms of interaction" (p. 228). In recognition, respect, therefore, maintains a practical correctional classroom atmosphere.

*Research Question 1: What is Correctional Education's Role in Ensuring Incarcerated Men Learn in Humanizing Ways?*

The purpose of this research question was to determine whether formerly incarcerated men experienced learning in humanizing ways and their expectations of correctional education. Further, the interview questions related to this topic were to identify a humanizing pedagogical instruction designed to combat indifference, stereotyping, and assumptions by encouraging more humane classroom behaviors that

honor dignity, equity, and inclusion. Finally, the intent was to discover new teaching and learning methods in correctional environments, identifying what is working and what is not. Group one begins with humanizing education, followed by group two with recognizing learning needs.

*Group one: Humanizing education.* Among the participants in this group, discussions on correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways involved a humanizing education. Participants also discussed experiences of the teachers not treating incarcerated men like human beings, feeling invited to learn, and demonstrating low expectations of success, relating their understanding of what is a humanizing learning experience and what is not. Still, they all concentrated on achieving their best, despite an ideal learning environment consistent with the framework's categorical representation. Thus, in relational congruency, Humanistic Learning Theory and the construct of human education best align with the research question. Each individual contributed meaningfully to this discussion, beginning with Hubert.

Hubert expressed his perspectives about correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways as follows. "Humanism is not being called an offender." When asking him to elaborate on his statement, he responded by saying, "So, when you call me an offender, it just makes the ability to learn like this small because it shuts everything off." As interpreted, Hubert's perspectives indicate that he tuned out the entire learning experience when referred to as an offender, questioning the importance of learning because, in his mind, he sees little value in the effort. Freddie then commented by stating, "A humanizing education is not treating me like a child—for one thing, a

humanizing education to me is treating me like a human, and you address me as one.” Freddie seemed to share Hubert’s view of the meaning of offender, akin to treating him like a child, relating the inference to offensive and derogatory connotations, often used in their everyday environment. Moreover, his reference to being treated like a child signifies inferiority, idiocracy, and disrespect. Both men expressed how the term devalues incarcerated men personally, even to the degree of affecting their learning and sacrificing their human dignity.

Morgan addressed the question from his perspective, contributing to the discussion by offering a different viewpoint on the meaning of a humanizing education. He stated, “Expecting me to fail, and comparing me to other students outside bothered me because I felt reduced and not expected to succeed at their level. That did not feel very humanizing.” Morgan’s views garnered agreement within the group, evident of nodding heads, further indicating similar experiences of other participants. When asking Morgan to explain how lowered expectations and comparisons to other students outside made him feel reduced and contributed to a humanizing learning experience. He responded by stating:

A humanizing education is where your value as a human being is respected. It provides examples of how to do things positively and adequately—addressing everyone by their first name, shaking everyone’s hand when they walk into the classroom. Looking each person in the eye makes a person feel welcome.

As interpreted, Morgan says that correctional classrooms should operate in ways that value, respect, and protect students’ human dignity, teaching cooperatively as a standard practice, welcoming students into the learning space. Hubert commented by saying, “I almost always felt invited to learn once I got to class. There were only a few instances where they let you know that either you’re too stupid to learn or you’re wasting

your time.” Hubert’s comment highlights instances of negative classroom behaviors involving the teacher’s humiliation, rendering learning discouraging. Freddie chimed in, saying, “Yeah, some of them were great but not all, and I was fortunate never to have been put out of class like some of the guys for simple things. So, I didn’t see much of that kind of thing as inviting.” Freddie’s experiences also indicate instances of negative classroom behaviors, resulting in the embarrassment and dishonor of students, disruptive to the process of learning.

Formerly incarcerated men looked to the classroom as a refuge to learn, grow, and develop, departing from their typical, everyday environment where devaluation is the norm. Unfortunately, the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of correctional classrooms’ inability to restore human dignity. Therefore, correctional education’s role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways did not fully meet their expectations, placing them on a path to self-actualization.

*Group two: Recognizing learning needs.* In this group, participants’ conversations on correctional education’s role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways remained centrally on recognizing learning needs. However, other discussions contributed to the conversation, namely preconceived notions and learning needs. Thus, Humanistic Learning Theory aligns the constructs of social and emotional needs, the categorical representations of the capacity of achieving their best, and an ideal learning environment to the research and interview questions.

When asking Willie for his perspective, he expressed himself by stating the following. “I needed most for them [teachers] to get to know me as a person, give me a chance, and not just group me into what they thought based on what they’ve learned or

because of my incarceration.” Willie’s expression conveyed the necessity of his teachers’ obligation to ensure his learning experience as essential, further requiring an unconditional course of action to view him as a human being. However, when asking Willie to explain his meaning of giving him a chance. He stated, “I needed them to care about my learning, addressing those untapped needs.” From Willie’s viewpoint, he needed support by placing his learning needs at the center to identify and meet him where he is, drawing from professional expertise in developing a student-centered mindset. Nelson remarked, “They seem to have preconceived notions of what we needed and didn’t need. Needs are very different for every person.” Nelson’s shared perspective earned nods of agreement from the group, leading to communal assumptions akin to a one-size-fits-all approach to learning because of incarceration.

In weighing in, Earl offered a different take on the discussion by saying, “I missed the opportunity to explore a deeper learning experience that could have helped me see where I needed improvement.” As interpreted, Earl could have benefitted from understanding his learning style and how he learns best. However, when asking Earl to elaborate on what he considered as missed opportunities. He stated, “I needed my teachers to encourage growth and self-determination, their positive outlook in willingness to provide the challenges that I needed to be an elite student, inspiring me to be the best.” Further interpretation indicated that Earl needed cooperative learning through an inspiring model, promoting self-knowledge, creativeness, supporting the need to know through feedback.

In this group, the urgency to learn rested in a deep commitment to fulfilling their true potential. Yet, the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis designed to meet

students where they are through a student-centered approach that honors learning needs as an obligation to supporting dignity, equity, and inclusion exists. Therefore, correctional education did not fully meet their expectations of its role, owing to the classroom's inability to discover new ways of teaching and learning, identifying what is working and what is not.

*Research Question 2: What Value Does Correctional Education Bring to Incarcerated Men That Positively Shape Their Self-Esteem?*

The purpose of this research question was to determine how formerly incarcerated men attributed the value correctional education brought to incarcerated men that positively shaped their self-esteem. Specifically, the interview questions related to this research question intended to elicit responses expressing their confidence in the mastery of knowing themselves as valued beings and how correctional education aids in their self-discovery. Further, the interview questions sought to understand the impact of their decision-making process, emotional health, and overall well-being, inspiring their full potential. Group one begins with social interaction, followed by group two with personal identity formation.

*Group one: Social-interaction.* Among participants in this group, the discussion on the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men positively shaping their self-esteem centered around social interaction. In addition, participants also discussed acknowledgment, empowering teachers, and inspired confidence. Thus, the construct of self-esteem aligns with the categorical representations of confidence, feelings of belonging, and competence, congruent with the framework of Identity Theory and consistent with the research and interview questions.

When posing the questions concerning the value correctional education brings that positively shaped his self-esteem. Freddie responded by stating, “Acknowledgment makes a person feel good, especially when having a task, accomplishing the job, and being successful in things assigned to him.” As interpreted, Freddie felt that acknowledging him for completing tasks contributed to his self-esteem because it validated his self-worth through confidence. When asking Freddie to provide an example of how acknowledgment contributed to his self-esteem, he stated:

When it was question and answer time, the teacher would give the floor to all the students. If a person got up in front of the room and all made good grades on their test, they acknowledged their accomplishments.

Freddie’s interpreted response compares and contrasts the validation of his self-worth to the prison environment, where voices go unheard, contributing to devaluing humanness. For Freddie, authentication by his teacher and before his peers made him feel heard as a valuable human being, thus, influencing his self-esteem. Hubert emphasized that “Empowering teachers made the difference.” Essentially, Hubert attributes empowering teachers to a positive classroom environment, producing a feeling of belonging, encouraging individual thinking, self-management supporting competence, and action-oriented behaviors centered around meaningfulness. In follow-up, the researcher asked Hubert to explain how empowering teachers contributed to his self-esteem. He stated, “Allowing me to challenge myself, to prove that I could compete in college and do well. So, it’s what you’ve accomplished, who you are, how you’re perceived, and how you react that affects your self-esteem.” Hubert’s response indicated feelings of confidence, alluding to his perceptive awareness and how he chooses to respond, relating to his

overall sense of personal value and self-worth as a motivating factor that positively shaped his self-esteem.

In Morgan's contribution to the discussion, he added the following statement. "It was my motivation through one great Professor that increased my self-esteem. If it were not for her, I would not be in this mindset. She opened my eyes." As interpreted, the one great Professor extended a hand to help Morgan recognize his value, pulling him from the darkness into the light. When asking Morgan to explain how the Professor opened his eyes, he stated, "She gave me a book to read. I'll never forget it. It helped me think differently. It was inspiring." As interpreted, that attuned Professor recognized that Morgan needed something different. By offering the book, Morgan began to think about his purpose in life and set achievable goals increasing his self-esteem, attributing to how he views himself and the world around him. Then Hubert emphasized, "That teacher comes in and makes that person feel valuable." Hubert's statement is the staple of social interaction. The interchange of communication or behavior rooted in the socialization process makes people feel valued, increasing participatory actions that lead to a deeper understanding of oneself and others.

The value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem depends on their perception of the meaning of value and how interaction is socially constructed. For example, when teachers socially interacted in their learning experiences, all three men credited their teachers for influencing their self-esteem, whether through acknowledgment, empowerment, or inspiring confidence by motivating their self-worth. In contrast, when teachers are not socially interactive with students, the richness of learning about oneself and others extends to latency. Therefore, formerly

incarcerated men showed a high value in developing their sense of connection through interactive classroom experiences.

*Group two: Personal identity formation.* Participants' discussions concerning the value correctional education bring to incarcerated men positively shaping their self-esteem centered around personal identity formation. This group also deliberated on their mindset, doing something rewarding, and accomplishments during the interview. In alignment with the framework of Identity Theory, the construct of self-esteem and the categorical representations of individual identity and feeling of competence apply.

When asking Earl to offer his perspective concerning the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men positively shaping their self-esteem? He stated, "I do not know of anything that education could have given me to shape how I felt about myself; all education did was to put in the mindset." As interpreted, Earl already has an established understanding of who he is, to a degree. Still, his reference to mindset indicates that he has re-established his beliefs about himself and others. In follow-up, the researcher probed more about Earl's mindset to understand how he places value on correctional education, contributing positively to his self-esteem. He responded by stating, "I respected it as a place of higher education, higher learning." As interpreted, Earl's choice of words showed deep admiration or regard for the institution of learning, further characterizing his mental attitude as solid and positive, establishing his sense of pride as most unique to his identity formation.

Willie's contribution to the discussion began with a comment. "Doing something rewarding that I could share with my family, and they would be proud of how far I've come." Willie's comment indicated a need to feel deep satisfaction from his

achievements with family members he shares a close connection. When asking Willie, in follow-up, to explain how that increased his self-esteem? He stated:

I was able to walk the stage with the students on the outside; they treated me the same. They called me by my name. They said my grades. Everything is as if I had gone to the college outside and graduated. So, being eligible to take college courses helped me reestablish a relationship with myself.

When reflecting on Willie's comments, it was clear that he had great respect for correctional education, much like Earl. But, more importantly, Willie seems to have learned to respect himself, attributing the value of correctional learning to the opportunity to earn an education, providing the chance to share his new self with his family in self-acceptance.

As Nelson began to speak on this subject, he first paused, reflecting, then offering a different take. He responded by saying, "They did not. I was lacking and unable to make decisions. I doubted myself a lot, my self-esteem shattered." As interpreted, Nelson described indecisiveness resulting from the predominating system design. In follow-up, asking how correctional education could have increased his self-esteem positively. He responded by stating:

Correctional education focuses on teaching courses you need to graduate. It does not focus on your emotional well-being. I should have been able to recognize myself when I was taking those classes. My teachers should have made sure I knew who I was.

While Nelson's reflections sparked high sensitivities among the group, in almost code-like imagery, their faces reflected the reminiscence of the system's design, disconfirming fundamental psychological needs as a human right. Unfortunately, correctional education did not aid Nelson's self-discovery, leaving him to grapple with life experiences that undermined his ability to recognize his unique identity as valuable.

This group analysis reveals that the value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem depends on their sense of self as the basis of life experiences. Further realizing that their development rests with their need to validate worth, prove themselves as independent beings to others, and reckon with themselves in self-acceptance. Finally, the researcher's field notes show that their distinct identity and feeling of competence were never more personal than re-establishing their fulfilled place in the world.

*Research Question 3: How Do Teacher-Student Relationships Influence Behavioral Change Among Incarcerated Men?*

This research question aims to understand better the relational component between the teacher and the student and how trust and respect foster a positive classroom environment, enhancing students' learning experiences. The design approach further seeks to establish positive influences on academic achievements, encourage active listening, and acknowledge students' feelings. Finally, the interview questions aim to determine whether open communication exists, where students can freely speak, ask questions, and feel valued. Group one begins with trust, followed by group two with respect.

*Group one: Trust.* The teacher-student relationships' influence on behavioral change among incarcerated men centered around the discussion of trust. Participants also expressed their perspectives concerning self-awareness, connection, positive interaction, encouragement, and inspiration. Identity and Humanistic Learning Theories contributing frameworks include self-esteem, social and emotional needs in relational congruency to feelings of belonging, competence, confidence, and individual identity.

When asking Morgan about his perspective concerning the teacher-student relationship's influence on behavioral change among incarcerated men, he responded as follows. "You have to be able to trust your teacher." As interpreted, Morgan highlights the importance of trusting teachers to build a collaborative learning culture, which he attributes to communicating belief in incarcerated men. In a follow-up question, the researcher asked Morgan to elaborate on the importance of trust from his perspective. He stated, "The aspect of trust is everything. Trust makes learning mean something inspiring. Restorative." Morgan's interpretation of trust meant that trust is about reliance, value, and belief in a person's integrity to do what they say they will do. The significance of Morgan's expressed view, relating "reliance, value, and belief in a person's integrity to do what they say they will do," lends to dependency needed between the teacher and the student in building a collaborative learning culture together. Thus, when Morgan talked about "trust making learning mean something," he referred to feelings and belonging and confidence garnered from the connection between the teacher and the student. Moreover, his sentiments express appreciation through meaningful words described as "inspiring" and "restorative." The significance of the two words relates to influencing the restoration of human dignity as explicitly hopeful; thus essential to trust.

Freddie commented by emphasizing the following. "Trust provides a personal connection to help them [incarcerated men] learn some things better." The researcher interpreted Freddie's statement relating trust to a personal connection implying a unique bond between persons. The researcher then asked Freddie how trust facilitates a personal connection. Freddie spoke from his experiences, disclosing moments where a teacher

shared inspirational stories and showed incarcerated men videos to encourage growth and determination, honoring their budding relationships as a matter of belonging.

Hubert then remarked with the following comments:

Some did go out of their way to inspire us, but I knew what I had to do to make those changes for myself. For me, positive teacher-student relationships are vital to the education process, promoting goodwill between teacher-student, knowing that each will do their best in their roles.

Although Hubert affirmed his experiences with inspiring teachers as vital to the learning process, recognizing their shared moral duty one to another, encouraging friendly, cooperative feelings as the foundation to self-directed learning. Further, Hubert related his meaning of the teacher-student relationship's influence to his internal motivation producing behavioral change. Namely, self-awareness in knowing what he wanted for himself secured his feeling of competence and confidence as part of his unique identity.

The teacher-student relationship's influence on behavioral change among incarcerated men extends to developing a collaborative learning culture. The bond developed through personal connection enables incarcerated men to work together while learning to trust. Most significant is the hope of influencing the restoration of human dignity. In essence, this group considers trust as the common denominator to their classroom experiences and the anchor placed between one and the other. There is no connection or relationship without trust for this group, owing to their human need to trust as essential.

*Group two: Respect.* In this group's conversation, the participants discussed how teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men concerning respect. However, the discussion also expressed their perspectives around

positive relationships, interaction, and indifference. As the theoretical framework and the self-esteem component, Identity Theory aligns with the categorical representations of confidence and feeling of belonging.

The researcher asked Nelson for his perspectives concerning the discussion. He said, “Through knowledge, presentation, and interactiveness with the class.” Nelson’s interpreted meaning represents his conceptual understanding, attributing knowledge sharing, openness, and whether the teacher demonstrates interactiveness with the class. The researcher then asked Nelson why those elements were essential. Nelson explained, “I was a poor listener at one time, only hearing what I wanted to hear, but now I have grown to respect people enough to practice listening all the time.” From Nelson’s view, the attributes mentioned earlier aided his developing active listening skills to facilitate two-way communication, which he practiced in class, influencing behavioral change.

Willie, entering the conversation, offered the following remarks. He stated, “They [teachers] were willing to provide the challenges that I needed to be an elite student.” As interpreted, Willie’s response indicates that his teachers provided feedback and rigor in learning and study to construct understanding. When asking Willie to explain his meaning, he stated, “I strongly believe that if there were not mutual respect or a positive relationship between me and the teacher, I would not have exceeded as a student.” Willie refers to his diligence in making good grades, meeting deadlines, studying hard, and earning degree attainment, attributing mutual respect to how teacher-student relationships influenced his behavior. More importantly, Willie established the significance of mutual respect in the teachers’ willingness to provide the challenges needed in becoming an elite student when celebrating what they each shared in common.

Earl entered the discussion, offering a different perspective related to indifference. First, he stated, “Never treating them [incarcerated men] any different than other students on the outside when they’re trying to learn to get on an equal footing in the world.” As interpreted, Earl meant that treating incarcerated men differently than other students in the free world alters the supportive foundation needed for incarcerated men to reach their full potential. Further, allowing societal perceptions of indifference about incarcerated men discredit their abilities that impact students’ learning. For Earl, reciprocity of respect is central to establishing teacher-student relationships. However, Earl does not explicitly say that respect has not always aligned with society’s perception of incarcerated individuals relating to his experiences. Next, the researcher attempts to draw more context concerning the effects of treating students differently. Earl added, “Well, they feel less interested in their education.” Though Earl established the meaning of what is most significant to him in teacher-student relationships as a positive, communicative process, encouraging continued learning and development, he refrained from going deeper into his meaning. His reserve suggests that such discussions may be painful or that he would feel more comfortable discussing them privately.

Formerly incarcerated men found the teacher-student relationship influence as a reciprocal mutual give and take process, resulting in behavioral change. The subject provided insight into the relational component of fostering a positive classroom environment, enhancing students’ learning experiences involving academic achievement, and encouraging active listening. For this group, teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change attributes to respectfully honoring their dignity as independent learners.

Upon analysis, participants in each group expressed their perspectives concerning their lived educational experiences. In the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis, indifference, stereotyping, and assumptions occurred, dishonoring human dignity, causing incarcerated men to question the value of correctional education. Their sense of identity relied on the teacher's ability to leverage learning in the space of intellectual community (Smith, 2017), where knowledge building provided the confidence needed to know themselves as valued beings. In their self-discovery, social interaction played a significant role in connecting incarcerated men to understand themselves better and their places in the world. Therefore, their teacher's commitment to helping incarcerated men reach their most tremendous potential became realized. Only when trusting teacher-student relationships and respect recognized that incarcerated men possess a unique value intrinsic to their worthiness as human beings. Utilizing a constant comparison analysis, the evidence, across cases, compared both groups as part of the data analysis procedures.

### *Framework Analysis*

In this framework analysis, the researcher used a constant comparison analysis to analyze themes, similarities, and differences across cases as part of the data analysis procedures. Across cases, the frameworks of Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories connected the emerging themes. The researcher provides evidence in three separate instances demonstrating how she linked the frameworks to the groups' emerging themes.

First, the researcher determined that the participants' perspectives concerning correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways revealed two different themes; humanizing education and recognizing learning needs. Both themes aligned with the framework of Humanistic Learning Theory and the

constructs of human education and social and emotional needs. Evidence of the connection was when Hubert expressed how he felt when referenced as “An offender, it just makes the ability to learn like this small because when you treat somebody like that, it shuts everything off.” This expression echoed Morgan’s sentiment when he explained how he “Felt reduced and not expected to succeed.” Even Earl expressed how he “Missed the opportunity to explore a deeper learning experience that could have helped” identify where he “Needed improvement.” Earl’s expression prompted Willie when he shared, “I needed them [teachers] to care about my learning, addressing those untapped needs.” More importantly, Willie most needed “Them [teachers] to get to know me as a person, give me a chance, and not just group me into what they thought based on what they’ve learned or because of my incarceration.” Although the groups’ emerging themes showed differences, they similarly connected correctional education’s role to learning. Thus, participants’ responses further indicated their clear understanding of what they consider a humanizing learning experience and what they do not, based on their human right to learn and deep commitment to fulfilling their true potential. Consistent with the framework and constructs, the categorical codes represent their capacity to achieve their best despite an ideal learning environment. Among the differences, neither group responded precisely the same. However, the similarities identified that correctional education did not fully meet their expectations, placing incarcerated men on a path to self-actualization.

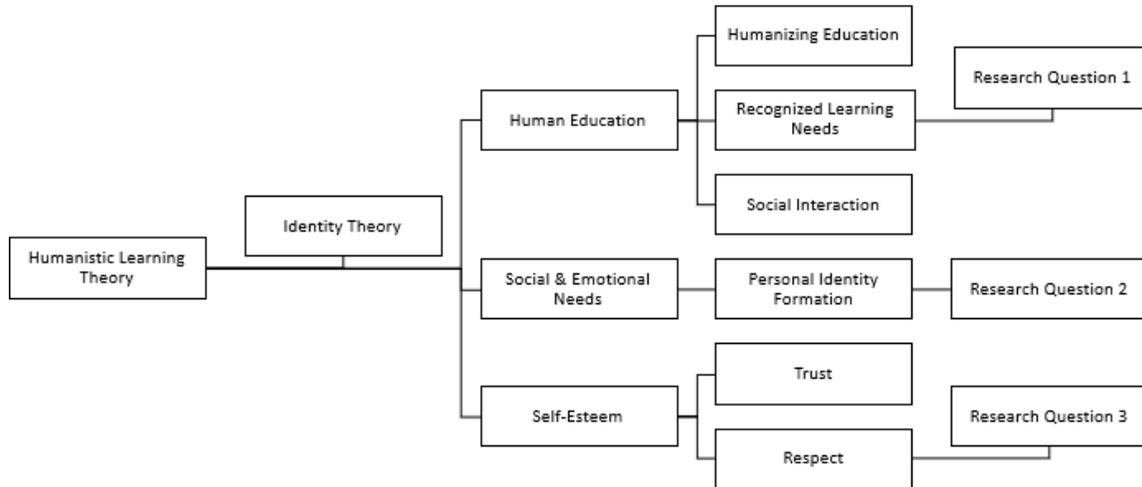
Second, the researcher analyzed the participants’ responses about the value that correctional education positively shapes their self-esteem. Social interaction and personal identity formation emerged as themes consistent with the Identity Theory’s construct of self-esteem. Participants attributed the value correctional education brings to doing

something rewarding and inspiring confidence. Freddie illustrated his point when stating, “Especially when having a task, accomplishing the job, and being successful in things assigned to him,” demonstrating how “Acknowledgment makes a person feel good.” Freddie’s point prompted Hubert when he expressed that “Empowering teachers made the difference,” allowing him “To prove that I could compete in college and do well.” Most significant was Willie’s point that “Doing something rewarding that I could share with my family, and they would be proud of how far I’ve come” is the staple of identity formation. As best expressed by Earl, it “Shapes how I felt about myself.” While similarities and differences exist across the groups, doing something rewarding and inspiring confidence relates to the value of fulfillment as their need to belong. Interactive, positive classroom experiences resulted from personal identity formation. Thus, their perspectives aligned with the categorical representations of feelings of belonging and confidence. Among the differences, neither group responded precisely the same. The similarities identified interaction as the social connection to identity formation.

Finally, the researcher analyzed participants’ perspectives regarding the teacher-student relationship’s influence on behavioral change among incarcerated men. As emerging themes, trust and respect developed, congruent with the constructs of self-esteem, human education, and social and emotional needs, categorical codes, confidence, feelings of belonging and competence, and the frameworks of Identity and Humanistic Learning Theories. Although differences and similarities emerged, the connection among groups provided the foundation for the influence of the teacher-student relationship. As evidenced by Morgan’s point, “The aspect of trust makes learning mean something inspiring, restorative” affirmed Freddie’s perspective, in that “It provides a personal

connection.” Hubert attributes the “personal connection” as “Vital to the education process, promoting goodwill between teacher-student, knowing that each will do their best in their roles,” establishing the connection needed to build trust confidently. Nelson makes the distinction that “Through knowledge, presentation, and interactiveness with the class, I have grown,” attributing understanding, knowledge sharing, and openness. Allowing Willie to point out that “If there were not mutual respect or a positive relationship between the teacher and me, I would not have exceeded as a student,” establishing the significance of respect through reciprocity. According to Earl, it helps “When they’re [incarcerated men] trying to learn to get on an equal footing in the world.” Thus, as predominant themes, trust and respect became essential to facilitating the classroom’s environment. However, neither group responded precisely the same in their perspectives concerning the connection needed to build trust, as differences, but similarities among groups aided in identifying the importance of reciprocity, in mutual dependence on the other as unique to influencing behavioral change.

In conclusion, this thematic analysis provided helpful information connecting emerging themes to the theoretical framework. In addition, the researcher’s use of the participant’s responses in narrative from interviews, memoing, field notes, and observations informed this thematic analysis. A theoretical discussion of the emerging themes follows in the next section. Finally, Figure 4.1 conceptually illustrates the connection to the frameworks, aiding the researcher’s analysis.



*Figure 4.1.* Framework analysis.

### *Discussion*

This section converges the results and findings in discussion with the emerging themes, integrating the literature review with the theoretical framework for more profound contributions to the research. Further, this section addresses the gap in the literature explaining how implicitly perpetuating incarcerated men as less than human beings grants the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis, exposing the danger of the classrooms' inability to restore human dignity. In addition, the researcher highlights recidivism as the primary purpose of correctional education and how society views incarcerated men. Finally, the researcher draws insight from the literature review, guided by the research questions as the basis for discussion and interpreting the findings using structured and semi-structured interviews where two groups of formerly incarcerated men participated. The identified emerging themes discussed in this section include humanizing education, recognized learning needs, social interaction, personal identity formation, trust, and respect.

### *Humanizing Education*

The findings indicate that not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings undermine their dignity and rights to realize their true potential, not fully meeting their expectations. Ladson-Billings (1994) affirms that “humanizing pedagogy recognizes the importance of including students’ humanism in all aspects of learning” (p. 1). The framework of Humanistic Learning Theory recognizes one’s true potential and human rights as a testament to honoring dignity, the desire to learn, and teaching how to learn. This understanding supports Gage and Berliner’s (1991) assertion that student’s “awareness of their dignity and rights as unique human beings, with each person being on the path to self-actualization” (as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 46) rests in the meaning of a humanizing education. The researcher rejects not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings have become the staple of correctional classrooms, to which Smith (2007) posits, “policy circles tend to predict the purpose of education singularly on reducing recidivism and increasing post-release employment opportunities” (p. 1). This understanding suggests that society has already determined the path to self-actualization for incarcerated men rests with staying out of prison and securing a job as the purpose of education, undermining their dignity and rights to realize what they view as their true potential. The researcher believes that their dignity and realized fulfillment begins in the classroom.

The researcher’s certainty echoes Wang’s (2005) research, validating the value of multiple students’ perspectives occurring within humanistic classrooms. In this instance, formerly incarcerated men viewed the classroom as a refuge to learn, grow, and develop, departing from their typical, everyday environment where devaluation is the norm.

However, PourAli et al. (2016) posit that “current theoretical perspectives are limiting and do not allow for each student to follow their own unique pathway to self-actualization” (p. 320). Therefore, incarcerated men cannot reach their actual potential in the absence of humanizing pedagogy, ensuring the fulfillment of their learning experiences.

Not fully meeting their expectations and realized potential indicates an imbalance in meaning and commitment to ensuring consistency across classrooms as valuable, and employing a humanizing pedagogy would result in more significant gains. Khatib et al. (2013) argue that the aim, instead, should “optimize the student’s potential towards the goal of inherent purposes, internal organization, and infinite creativity, facilitating the achievement of the full potential of students” (pp. 47–48). Subsequently, when teachers do not acknowledge incarcerated men as human beings, it negates the purpose of humanizing education and the goal of learning. The impact dismisses their self-discovery, rendering incarcerated men to life-long underdevelopment affecting their well-being. Their human right to learn, grow and develop requires a commitment to ensuring “a social and intellectual climate defending students against intellectual oppression, physical punishment, and dishonor” (Aloni, 2007, as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 45). The staple of ensuring incarcerated men learn in ways that acknowledge their humanness, honoring dignity and rights in realizing their true potential, and recognizing learning needs as essential is a matter worth exploring. According to (Crain; 2009; Duchesne & McMaugh, 2016; Vuegelers, 2011), the most effective method is a student-centered approach where incarcerated men feel supported by their fundamental goodness, the capability of

achieving their best, free will, and included in an ideal learning environment. Only then can correctional education fully meet their expectations.

### *Recognizing Learning Needs*

The findings indicate that recognizing learning needs shows respect for human dignity as relevant and central to self-actualization potential, conveying the existence and reality of fulfillment is part of meeting expectations. Rogers (1959) asserts that “relevance, participation, negotiation, self-assessment, the centrality of the self-actualizing potential, and the reach for personal manifestation and creativity in fulfilling individual learning needs” (as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 47) rests in the framework of Humanistic Learning Theory. As a matter involving humanizing education “emphasizing the importance of the inner world for incarcerated men, placing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions at the forefront of all human development” (p. 45) positions them towards reaching their true potential. The researcher finds the framework consistent, affirming the idea that “individual needs and trajectories that require differentiated instruction and support enable optimal growth in competence, confidence, and motivation” (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 3). However, the researcher contends that preconceived notions yield concern for their learning when society’s ideologies misconstrue the need to educate incarcerated men. This understanding explains the classroom’s inability to leverage their learning needs as essential in discovering new teaching approaches, identifying what is working and what is not.

The researcher supports Smith’s (2007) position when comparing societal ideologies with the human right to learn. “Providing education to incarcerated individuals should not be based on a myopic conception of efficacy but instead on their collective

learning project as a human right” (p. 1). The danger, however, lies in the effects of not just how society views incarcerated men as members of the learning community but without the benefit of a classroom pedagogy that considers the whole person in their totality as essential. The idea of current standards in correctional education offering “curricular goals prescribing what they must know while denying their freedom and dignity” (Brown, 2014, as cited in Khatib et al., 2013, p. 48) suggests normative pragmatic teaching models that the researcher dismisses as maladaptive intent. The function of humanizing education is to mirror reality in what matters most to incarcerated men, but the existential threat continues. This understanding leads to the realization that learning is a process-driven classroom pedagogy sustainable by meeting students where they are, rather than mere unquantifiable measurements based on short-sightedness.

Correctional education’s role in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways is by supporting interests and learning needs, strengthening their abilities as successful learners. The process involves “identifying and attempting to meet the individual learner’s needs within the context of the classroom group” (Khatib et al., 2013, p. 48) in mind. Changing the trajectory of preconceived notions that recognizes learning needs is the best approach to ensuring incarcerated men function at their most tremendous potential towards reaching the wholeness they seek. Thus, honoring their dignity as human beings becomes fundamental to self-actualization. Social interaction serves as the vehicle to realize their fulfillment.

### *Social Interaction*

The findings indicate that correctional education’s value to incarcerated men positively shaping their self-esteem rests in the teacher’s ability to leverage learning

around social interaction. In this space, these men place a high value on developing their sense of connection through interactive classroom experiences relating the process of social interaction to how they make sense of themselves through the behaviors of others. Thoits (1983) explains that “social interaction is essential to normal psychological development and ordered social conduct” (p. 175). The researcher supports this understanding, describing why “students learn more when they talk to one another and become actively involved” (Routman, 2005, p. 207). From this perspective, the researcher further links the Identity Theory framework that satisfies the need to belong.

Correctional classrooms serve as a place where social interaction occurs as most meaningful. As appropriate and consistent with the researcher’s understanding, Thoits (1983) distinguishes the application of Identity Theory by reminding us that the “interaction produces the social self; that part of the personality that links the individual to society and is an important intervening variable in human behavior” (p. 175). In essence, the meaning value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem requires an understanding of social interaction as a process of influence. From this perspective, the researcher affirms Arnold’s (1999) position when stating that “social interaction can facilitate and support the affective factors: reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, fostering the development of positive attitudes toward learning, promoting self-esteem, supporting different learning styles, and encouraging perseverance in the process of learning” (p. 227). Social interaction thus becomes increasingly crucial, especially when conforming to the group’s new norms and rules essential to shaping experiences.

The researcher contends that social interaction, as a process of influence, involves classroom experiences that incarcerated men attribute to acknowledgment and empowering teachers who inspire confidence. Notably, these men are well aware that social interaction is “part of everyday life in the real world; it makes little sense for classrooms to be social interaction-free zones where the teacher talks while students listen” (Hurst et al., 2013, p. 377). As an educator, the researcher welcomes incarcerated men socially interacting, connecting one to another, as the vehicle to accomplish a mutual identification (Rawls, 1987). Their placement of high value, necessary for interactive classroom experiences, supports their need to belong and their unique identity formation.

#### *Personal Identity Formation*

The findings indicate that incarcerated men’s life experiences, depending on their sense of self as their identities, are the value to positively shaping their self-esteem. Consistent with the researcher’s comprehension, Thoits (1983) convey that combining recognition and distinction in discovering purpose in oneself involves personal identities that provide life experiences and a sense of continuity. Hewitt (1989), aligning with Thoits (1983) in conception, defines personal identity as “a sense of continuity, integration, identification, and differentiation, constructed by the person not concerning a community and its culture but specific to the self and its projects” (p. 179). This understanding affirms the researcher’s knowledge of why incarcerated men need to prove themselves as independent beings, attributing to their distinctive identities in feeling competent towards re-establishing their existence in the world as their individual selves’ project. Hogg and Abrams (1988, as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000) coin the term social identity as “a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group” (p.

225). In this case, correctional classrooms represent the social group to which incarcerated men belong. Within the social group, the categories of gender, age, race, and time comprise the identification of the social group. Hogg and Abrams (1988) make clear that “the social categories in which individuals place themselves are parts of a structured society and exist only concerning other contrasting categories” (as cited in Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). This explanation certifies Identity Theory as consistent with their uniquely valued experiences in positively shaping incarcerated men’s self-esteem, attributing to the self-categorization component, implying the “impossibility of perceiving the untested feasibility, which lies beyond the limit-situations” (Freire, 2000, p. 93). In addition, their reflective experiences facilitate identity formation, contingent upon a named and classified world (Stryker, 1980). Developing their experiences and sense of self akin to personal identities rests with their need to validate worth, prove themselves as independent beings, and reckon with self-acceptance.

While life experiences involve a situational context, every individual’s circumstances dictate how those experiences unfold. Therefore, the researcher agrees with Hitlin’s (2003) argument that values produced through personal commitments change over time, based on conditions. According to Alexander and Wiley’s (2017) view, situated identity is a process. The researcher affirms this notion as the utility of discovering oneself through life experiences that shape beliefs, feelings, and attitudes. Thus, attributing the value that positively shapes their self-esteem begins with understanding the emergence of identity formation as a process. When mindset, doing something rewarding, and accomplishments define the “relationships between the actor and the environment” (Alexander & Wiley, 2017, p. 274). Relevance becomes significant

to their social realities as part of their life experiences, providing the progression that integrates acceptance or appreciation as distinctive in the realm of self-discovery, leading to trust.

### *Trust*

The findings indicate that teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men when developing a collaborative learning culture. The element of trust is the hope of influencing the restoration of human dignity, the common denominator linking human learning, and the anchor placed between one and the other. Smith (2007) states that trust is not “merely something that attains its value through its presumed social utility—or, worse, something that society can take away from an individual convicted of breaking the social contract” (p. 1). The meaning of trust is much more for incarcerated men. In an environment as raw as the criminal justice system, they become accustomed to distortions of the truth, inauthenticity, and manipulation. Judgmental people abide alongside incarcerated men in an unencumbered structure of malice as part of their everyday lives. Powell (1996) offers that trust provides “a greater expectation of shared interests and goals, a higher level of effectiveness, and greater flexibility regarding changing demands and environmental pressures” (p. 58). This understanding explains why formerly incarcerated men attributed trust to a personal connection, influencing internal motivation and relieving uncertainty that often compromises their safety in their typical environment.

The element of trust in the classroom should begin with the teacher’s willingness to provide opportunities to explore new ways of thinking and believing through a collaborative environment. Kilbane and Milman (2014) refer to this learning approach as

a “two for one deal because it provides students something they need and something they want” (p. 309). In exchange, incarcerated men begin to value their learning experiences guided by the teacher’s ability to connect meaning to learning in the process of building trust. The beauty of this approach allows “teachers to help students structure roles within the group and provide questions and tasks that guide the group’s discussion” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, p. 18). In this way, incarcerated men all learn together, but the guided process permits making sense of what they learn.

When considering how teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men, building a collaborative learning culture and communicating belief in incarcerated men has tremendous significance. However, Zand (1971) reminds us that “trust is not a feeling of warmth or affection but the conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another” (p. 229). Instead, trust produces feelings of belonging, competence, and confidence. It strengthens unique identities supporting social and emotional needs as central to the frameworks of Identity and Humanistic Learning Theories.

The researcher asserts there is no connection or relationship for incarcerated men without trust, though their fundamental human need to trust remains essential to their integrity as human beings. “These men are not perfect; they are complicated and have made mistakes—they are human” (Smith, 2007, p. 97). Most urgently, however, incarcerated men need committed teachers who believe in them, who see students with promise, hopes, and dreams rather than merely convicted criminals dressed in prison attire. The remedy lies in a cooperative and collaborative classroom environment that provides the restoration needed for incarcerated men to learn to trust. At the same time,

trust is the most critical factor in building a cooperative and collaborative learning culture, communicating value and belief in students' abilities to achieve their full potential. Serva et al. (2005) remind us that "reciprocity may be necessary for the systematic evolution of trust, it does not guarantee it" (p. 643). The author's assertion explains why the element of trust is the hope for influencing the restoration of human dignity, anchoring one and the other in respect.

### *Respect*

Teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men in a reciprocal process of mutual give and take. According to Stets and Burke (2000), "identity theorists regard the group as a set of interrelated individuals, each of whom performs unique set integrated activities, sees things from their own perspective, and negotiates the terms of interaction" (p. 228). Respect, therefore, maintains a practical correctional classroom atmosphere. The researcher draws from the constructivist perspective. Precisely, that "humanistic education serves to engage students in interactional practices" (Khatib et al., 2013, p. 50). Interactional practices involve treating each other with dignity and respect, supporting active listening, and honoring learning experiences.

The importance of humanizing learning experiences leads to respectful, positive classroom environments. The researcher affirms Arnold's (1999) belief that "educators should create social relations together with a positive atmosphere in the class" (as cited in Khatib, 2013, p. 50), creating a community of practice built on supporting teacher-student interaction. Therefore, the facilitation of a practical correctional classroom atmosphere can only exist through openness. Arnold (1999) asserts that only through their

willingness can they “foster the growth and development of the learners’ knowledge” (pp. 123–124). The moment exists where teachers should reflect on their emotional and cultural awareness, ensuring they are up for the challenge of maintaining an interactive and practical correctional classroom atmosphere. Khatib et al. (2013) explain that interaction “consist of sharing, caring, acceptance, and sensitivity, facilitates understanding, genuineness, support and interdependence” (p. 47), consistent with the framework of Identity Theory aligning confidence and feeling of belonging. Unfortunately, not all teachers are up for the challenge.

Historically, respecting incarcerated men in a space where they have agency in shaping their learning experiences did not always align with societal beliefs. It is not that it entirely garners comfort in discourse today, but people are at least more open than before. The topic of respect relating to incarcerated men is akin to discussions about race. Smith (2007) explains that “discussing race means discussing history, discussing history means coming to understand your place in the prison differently because doing so disrupts previously established notions of authority and moral supremacy” (p. 90). Still, the subject of respect appears to cause discomfort. Smith (2007) expands on this idea by stating “these types of conversations represent something that might lead to the sort of rebellion that is not singularly defined by physical resistance but, perhaps more importantly, by a new sense of sociopolitical wherewithal and sense of self” (p. 90). While the historical significance of race, in comparison to respect, seemingly more effortless to avoid, perhaps—but “when student’s feelings and ambitions align with attention to the emotional side of their learning” (Khatib et al., 2013). Incarcerated men benefit from understanding who they are and how they fit in a world envisioned as

respectfully committed one to another. More importantly, incarcerated men deserve good teachers who respect them as the independent learners they are. The goal is to help them view themselves through their lens of change. Embracing Khatib et al. (2013) when reminding us that “humanistic education recognize and respect the psychological and emotional states of their students” (p. 50). Thus, teaching, nurturing and building them from the inside out. Creating the kind of teacher-student relationships that influence behavioral change among incarcerated men through reciprocity, respectfully honoring dignity, fostering a positive classroom environment, enhancing students’ learning experiences, and increasing academic achievement.

In conclusion, the results and findings from emerging themes integrated the literature review in a robust discussion. The significance of this section contributed to the body of knowledge and practice, connecting the theoretical framework confirming, challenging, or augmenting the findings of other studies or postures in the research study. By interpreting the results, the researcher described the significance of the findings, highlighting the literature that contributes to the theoretical frameworks and emerging themes. Further, this section provided a new understanding that explains how the absence of a pedagogical praxis inhibits incarcerated men from learning in humanizing ways and why restoring dignity among incarcerated men is a fundamental right. Building knowledge that socially connects incarcerated men to understand better themselves and where they fit in the world matters. Their humanizing learning experience is the lifeline to the wholeness they seek in their totality as human beings. Table 4.2 shows an overview of the findings by the framework and literature review, followed by the implications in the next section.

Table 4.2

*Framework Analysis Findings*

Findings	Literature Review	Humanistic Learning Theory	Identity Theory
1. Humanizing Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings.</li> </ul>	Self-Actualization (PourAli et al., 2016; & Gage & Berliner, 1991). Humanistic Learning (Khatib et al., 2013; Aloni, 2007; & Wang, 2005). Correctional Education (Smith, 2007).	Human Education Social & Emotional Needs	
2. Recognized Learning Needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing their learning needs as essential.</li> </ul>	Humanistic Learning (Khatib et al., 2013). Student-Centered Approach (Rogers, 1959). Myopic Conceptions (Smith, 2007). Enabling Growth (Darling-Hammond, 2019). Correctional Standards (Brown, 2007).	Social & Emotional Needs Human Education	
3. Social Interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The teacher's ability to leverage learning.</li> </ul>	Social Interaction (Thoits, 1983; Routman, 1995; Hurst et al., 2013; & Rawls, 1987). Affective Factors (Arnold, 1999).		Self-Esteem
4. Personal Identity Formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depends upon one's sense of self and life experiences.</li> </ul>	Identity Formation (Alexander & Wiley, 2017; Hitlin, 2003; Hewitt, 1989; & McCall & Simmons, 1978). Social Identity (Stets & Burke, 2000; & Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Stryker, 1980). Personal Identity (Thoits, 1989).		Self-Esteem
5. Trust <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing a collaborative learning culture.</li> </ul>	Trust (Kilbane & Milman, 2014; Serva et al., 2005; Zand, 1972; Baier, 1986; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; & Powell, 1996).	Human Education Social & Emotional Needs	Self-Esteem
6. Respect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reciprocity is a mutual give and take process.</li> </ul>	Respect: (Khatib et al., 2013; Arnold, 1999). Identity Theory: (Stets & Burke, 2000). Human Education (Smith, 2017).	Human Education Social & Emotional Needs	Self-Esteem

### *Implications*

The purpose of this section identifies the implications as significant to the exploration of correctional education in the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis among incarcerated men. This section will highlight changes in professional policies, practices, and settings resulting from this study in substance. In addition, this section offers improvements to the study's unexpected findings, confirming, disconfirming, or augmenting thereof, leading to future research and recommendations where necessary, presenting the implications identified through this work.

### *Correctional Education Misses the Mark in Ensuring Incarcerated Men Learn in Humanizing Ways*

Formerly incarcerated men's expression of not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings address how they interpret the meaning of a humanizing learning experience and the need for more exploration contributing to literature gaps. From their perspectives, referring to incarcerated men by name, offering a genuine smile, looking them directly in the eye when speaking, or shaking their hands demonstrating a natural persona are the simple acts of kindness representing humanism. It is impossible not to think of oneself as unworthy when unacknowledged as a human being. It appears that correctional education and its educators ignore the affective factors discussed by Arnold (1999) relevant to a humanizing learning experience. As such, the researcher affirms Smith's (2007) assertion that "it is precisely this humanity that demands a space where they can ask questions and create and grapple with all that makes the world what it is" (p. 97). This understanding explains the need for more research, addressing how correctional education misses the mark in ensuring incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways, beginning with reliable data. However, reliable and accessible data limits the response to

the urgency needed in contributing to the research. Recognizing Kline and Tolbert's (2007) proclamation that "there are no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education" (p. 287), more investigatory measures must mitigate the absence of reliable data and the literature gap's threat.

A longitudinal study should commence, using formerly incarcerated men as subjects to gathering needed data. At present, "state correctional databases are often isolated from other state databases, making it difficult to assess an ex-offender's reintegration into the community by way of employment, earnings, education, military service, and similar measures" (Kline & Tolbert, 2007, p. 290). Addressing data needs should not rest with correctional education officials, owing to trustworthiness in reporting accurate, reliable data collection and analysis measures.

Therefore, an independent source should conduct the study to determine emotional well-being and self-actualization factors, correlating correctional education's role and value as the focus. However, "by coordinating their data collection strategies, states can develop the capacity to share exemplary practices, track trends in educational programming and inmate participation, and identify gaps in services and areas needing improvement" (Kline & Tolbert, 2007, p. 290). The strategy would yield more answers leading to addressing limited literature and statistics.

The study will lead to future research, garnering reliable data, resulting in transparency and legislative policy changes that extend to creating a space "where social and intellectual community might restore human dignity, reestablishing an individual's agency" (Smith, 2007, p. 97). Finally, the researcher compliments Kline and Tolbert's (2007) contributions to identifying accurate correctional education data limitations

specific to the lack of standardization, detailed information, availability of correctional education, outcomes, and tracking.

A humanizing pedagogical praxis is the foundation of incarcerated men's completeness, fundamental to their value as human beings, and the gateway to discovering who they are and where they belong in the world. Therefore, ensuring incarcerated men experience learning with the same purposeful intensity offered in the free world, higher learning institutions outside of correctional environments require extensive training and higher standards above or equal to those which abide within current correctional education programs as its responsibility.

#### *Correctional Classrooms Are in Peril, Absent of a Humanizing Pedagogy*

Correctional classrooms are in peril, absent of a humanizing pedagogy that restricts incarcerated men from reaching their full potential. Correctional programs should equip their teachers with the knowledge and resources to facilitate meaningful instruction in multicultural learning environments. The researcher agrees with Smith's (2021) account that "education can and should be a means by which we liberate ourselves from the myth that we are unable to move beyond the social constructs of the world as they currently exist" (p. 85). Most fundamental is keeping in mind that the actual value of education is to advance beyond what we already know, shaping our thoughts and actions for the greater good.

Correctional programs should rid themselves of current and traditional classroom practices, moving towards a more socially connected and interactive learning culture. The world is changing every day. It is the responsibility of correctional programs to value change in ways that extend fundamental transformation to incarcerated men, other than

the traumatizing rehabilitative experiences indicative of customary norms. Specifically, correctional programs should view their current initiative as “a means by which we engage in the emancipatory power of empathy and disabuse ourselves of the notion that the nature of our experiences is singularly our own and unrelated to anyone else’s” (Smith, 2021, p. 85). Doing so equips incarcerated men with the power of transformation, relieving themselves of past discretions and learning to live beyond their engrained experiences intended to bind them to themselves.

Correctional education programs should give students more autonomy over their learning, using new technology that socially connects incarcerated men to the real world, supporting meaningful learning. It is vital to understand how to build communities within a community, facilitating identity development and cognitive liberation (Smith, 2021). Building communities with a community shows commitment and promise to incarcerated men desiring to learn.

Learning needs go unmet, and lowered expectations are the norm when the potential for incarcerated men to reach fulfillment becomes unrealized. According to Smith (2007), “often, studies that attempt to measure the efficacy of prison education programs fail to take into account that individuals who elect to participate in educational programs may have unmeasured differences as compared to those who choose not to participate” (p. 86). This understanding explains why educators should not assume they all learn the same or that dumbing down instruction is best, given lowered expectations of what they consider as success. There is nothing dignified about that!

Correctional programs must do better in the value it brings to incarcerated men. Rather than appearing to hide behind the education banner to justify the production of an

education program, finding little value in incarcerated men as real people desiring to learn is counterproductive to the true intent of humanizing education. A humanizing education values every individual with dignity. Despite traditional conciliatory practices, the road to the fulfillment of incarcerated men is through classroom approaches supporting learning through a humanizing pedagogy. A humanizing pedagogical approach speaks to incarcerated men in ways that guide them to view themselves as capable learners, helping to rediscover who they are in their search for fulfillment. At the same time, a humanizing pedagogical approach brings value to the program by building a community of practice inside the classroom, extending to others outside of correctional education through collaboration. Correctional education should make significant strides in considering a pedagogical praxis that places incarcerated men at the center of the programs as a priority. Distinguishing incarcerated men as human beings and demonstrating action-oriented measures that lead to structural change for the program's integrity are the first steps towards making learning meaningful.

### *Correctional Programs Compromise Teacher-Student Relationships Themselves*

Teacher-student relationships become a concern of risk when incarcerated men lose out on the full benefits of meaningful learning experiences—the kind of experiences that help incarcerated men realize their worth, viewing themselves and the world as changed. Instead, correctional programs should create a space honoring experiences not because all the students possess a certain level of intellectual insight but by encouraging the collective projects of self-exploration (Smith, 2021). Doing so provides the connection needed between the teacher and the student, bringing incarcerated men forward, together in the newness of their newfound selves in learning from one another.

The advantage is “building together a world that might reclaim what others have sought to take away” (p. 88). What a shame that we as a body of ourselves contend that a lifetime of punishment, denying dignity and freedoms, places us above the fray. Each of us, supposedly committed to our humanness, is no different than those who sit behind prison walls. If we hold a mirror to our faces, we see good, bad, and ugly because the reflection of humanity has no disguise. The point is, each of us must reckon with ourselves to better understand who we are. Only then can we, as a body of people connected by the space we share in this world, ensure promise and hope to incarcerated men through improving teacher-student relationships, keeping it central to the meaning of education.

In conclusion, the suggestions offered in this section serve to improve correctional education, not just to reduce recidivism or increase employment opportunities, but because it is the right thing to do. Our nation-building duty is to create a better world, rather than denying freedoms and liberty, committing to one another unreservedly. Incarcerated men are inclusionary beings deserving of the right to learn and contribute to society. Correctional education has much work to do, but with the help of future research, we will learn the data needed to aid our discovery. Collectively, human dignity is not inherited or conjured up as something imagined. Instead, it is part of the soul of humankind, which completes us in our quest of fulfilling our rightful places in the world. Interpretation of findings follows in the next section. Table 4.3 illustrates the identified implications in this work, leading to the chapter conclusion and summary.

Table 4.3

*Implications of Correctional Education*

1. Correctional Education Misses the Mark in Ensuring Incarcerated Men Receive a Humanizing Learning Experience.	2. Correctional Classrooms Are in Peril, Absent of a Humanizing Pedagogy.	3. Correctional Programs Compromise Teacher-Student Relationships Themselves.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address the danger of correctional classrooms' inability to restore human dignity.</li> <li>• A longitudinal study should commence, using formerly incarcerated men as subjects.</li> <li>• An independent source should conduct the study to determine psychological well-being and self-actualization factors correlating the effectiveness of correctional programs.</li> <li>• The study will lead to future research, garnering reliable data, resulting in transparency and legislative policy changes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equip teachers with the knowledge and other resources needed to facilitate meaningful instruction in multicultural learning environments.</li> <li>• Rid themselves of traditional classroom practices, moving towards a more socially connected and interactive learning culture.</li> <li>• Give incarcerated men more autonomy over their learning, using new technology that socially connects them to the real world, supporting meaningful learning.</li> <li>• When learning needs go unmet and lowered expectations are the norm, the potential for incarcerated men to reach fulfillment becomes unrealized.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When teacher-student relationships become a concern of risk, incarcerated men lose out on the full benefits of meaningful learning experiences.</li> </ul>

*Conclusion*

Far too many incarcerated men do not experience correctional education in humanizing ways. The shortcomings lie in evaluating the effectiveness of the classroom's inability to restore human dignity in a predominating system that implicitly perpetuates incarcerated men as less than human beings. In the absence of a humanizing pedagogy, incarcerated men struggle with learning needs, emotional well-being, inhibiting their full potential. At the same time, an abundance of literature exists about how correctional

education lowers recidivism, attributing to its effectiveness. But, unfortunately, there are “no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education” (Kline & Tolbert, 2017, p. 287) or addressing the emotional wholeness contributing to restoring human dignity among these men. Thus, the future of correctional education must continue with further exploration of its effectiveness.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Distribution of Findings

#### *Introduction*

The U.S. Bureau of Justice of Statistics (2019) reports that between 1995 and 2000, the percentages of college courses offered decreased, from 31% to 27%, with less than 10% participating in college courses today. “The only recent surveys of prisoner participation in education and training programs are from 1991 and 1997” (Coley & Barton, 2006, pp. 15–16), explaining statistical gaps in Texas’s correctional education programs’ success. Kline and Tolbert (2017) further affirm “there are no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education” (p. 287) or addressing the emotional wholeness contributing to restoring human dignity among these men. A study conducted by Blake and Sackett (1975) finds that “a prison education program’s success influences a person’s values and attitudes in authority positions” (Vacca, 2004, p. 300). One might ask to what degree is the influence of authority’s positions when the absence of a humanizing pedagogy exposes the danger of correctional classrooms in their inability to restore human dignity when the predominating system implicitly perpetuates incarcerated men as less than human beings?

Correctional programs cannot be aware of, realize, or understand the value of a humanizing education until the sphere of influence to which abstracted states collectively convene its resoluteness in divergence. Smith (2017) explains that “if prison educators would more fully consider how such spaces serve as intellectual communities that restore human dignity within an institution built on the premise of taking that dignity away” (p.

1). Then, perhaps an actual measurement of success will accurately display current statistical reporting on educational attainment, addressing emotional wholeness and contributing to restoring human dignity among these men. Otherwise, the success of Texas' correctional education programs by its metrics will remain distorted. The purpose of this Problem of Practice research study explored correctional education in the absence of humanizing pedagogical praxis among incarcerated men. The contribution to the gap in the literature explains the danger of correctional classrooms' inability to restore human dignity to incarcerated men and their freedom in the pursuit of their most tremendous potential.

#### *Overview of Data Collection and Analysis Procedures*

The procedures for data collection involved two steps, interviews and observations. The two steps encompassed two separate, one-hour focus group sessions, where six formerly incarcerated participated. A snowball approach followed the qualitative, phenomenological case study methods, consistent with a purposeful criterion and maximum variation sampling strategy.

The data analysis procedures involved five steps. Step one began with preparing and organizing the data, reading and formulating transcript notations. Second, reading and reviewing all the data collected for themes, cross-checking for errors, categorizing, and winnowing. Third, describing and classifying codes into themes, describing detailed or coded data collected. Fourth, developing and assessing interpretations to understand the meaning in all data collected. Fifth, representing and visualizing the data, establishing validity through conceptual understanding.

The research methodology, framework, and design began with a qualitative, phenomenological case study. The goal is to explore correctional education to understand better how incarcerated men learn best, absent of a humanizing pedagogical praxis. Humanistic Learning (Khatib et al., 2013) and Identity Theories (Stryker & Burke, 2000) were the two theoretical frameworks used throughout this research study. The design's selection sought to understand the essence in the meaning of lived educational experiences, intentionally drawing on the research questions separately in methodological congruence with the research framework. The researcher utilized the Focus Group and Framework Analysis processes to identify the key findings.

### *Summary of Key Findings*

The findings identified in this Problem of Practice research study determined that not acknowledging incarcerated men as human beings undermine their dignity and rights to realize their true potential. Moreover, not being accepted as human beings, coupled with assumptions, lowered expectations, and indifference, contradicted their personal beliefs and value systems, resulting in not fully meeting expectations. In addition, formerly incarcerated men reported that they needed their teachers to recognize their learning needs to reach their full potential.

The value correctional education brings to incarcerated men that positively shaped their self-esteem depended on their perception of the meaning of value and how the teacher's ability leveraged learning around social interaction. For example, when teachers socially interacted in their learning experiences, incarcerated men credited their teachers for influencing their self-esteem, whether through acknowledgment, empowerment, or inspiring confidence by motivating their self-worth. In addition, the findings also

indicated that the value correctional education brings to shape their self-esteem positively depends on their sense of self as the basis of life experiences. The development, thereof, rested with their need to validate worth, prove themselves as independent beings to others, and reckoning with self-acceptance.

The findings concerning the influence of the teacher-student relationship extended to developing a collaborative learning culture. The bond, they believed, developed through personal connection, enabling incarcerated men to work together while learning to trust. In addition, formerly incarcerated men further attributed teacher-student relationships to a reciprocal process of mutual give and take. In this instance, they related the relational component to fostering a positive classroom environment, enhancing their learning experiences involving academic achievement, and encouraging active listening. Based on these findings, the researcher organized recommendations for changes in professional policies, procedures, and practices in correctional education.

### *Informed Recommendations*

To ensure incarcerated men learn in humanizing ways, coordinators of correctional education should first be aware of the meaning of a humanizing pedagogical praxis. Second, enabling its teachers with new knowledge in culturally responsive approaches across multicultural environments. Third, incarcerated men need to rebuild themselves from the inside out, releasing themselves from the bounded chains of dehumanization, abstracting the goodness of “an ideal model of a good man” (Freire, 2000, p. 93), transformed into that which they aspire as their most significant value.

Fourth, promoting relational equity between teacher and students, influencing behavioral change rests with the teacher's ability to connect meaningfully, model behaviors, and create safe spaces to engage and enrich human learning experiences.

When incarcerated men experience inconsequential learning, it highlights the literature gaps in addressing the emotional wholeness they seek. First, rather than measure the efficacy of programs by reducing recidivism or increasing the likelihood of post-release employment (Smith, 2017), a more effective measurement would examine the program structure for emotional wholeness indicators related to the humanizing aspect specific to self-actualization. Second, this recommendation should begin with a longitudinal study with formerly incarcerated men as subjects. Third, an independent source should coordinate the survey to determine emotional well-being and self-actualization factors, correlating the role of correctional education and the value to incarcerated men as the focus. Fourth, the study will lead to future research, garnering reliable data resulting in transparency and legislative policy changes. Then, correctional education should extend beyond mere traditions, demonstrating its role as responsible program leaders by closely probing how best to entirely meet incarcerated men's expectations. There, the metrics should focus more on well-being, independent from quantitative outcomes, as mentioned. Instead, addressing the "gap in the literature concerning how these programs facilitate community building, identity development, and agency" (Smith, 2017, p. 81) is a much better use of quantifiable information to learn that which is not yet known. Finally, doing so helps incarcerated men reach their most significant potential to become more productive in their citizenry, with their families, and themselves.

Building self-esteem while confined to imprisonment is no easy feat. The environmental system's structure has a way of dismantling a man, isolating him to his unrecognizable self. Notably, this distant space is where incarcerated men rely on their teachers for help in gaining confidence and belief in themselves. Unfortunately, not all teachers are helpful, owing to "the implicit social function of a prison meant to render the incarcerated person as someone different than other members of society" (Smith, 2017, p. 88). A paradox worthy of discussion is the idea that morals and intellect serve as dividing an us-and-them column as the measurement that determines who gets to learn, when, and how.

To facilitate learning in any multicultural environment requires specialized training and knowledge, particularly with oneself. The funding partners of correctional programs should require state licensure and national accreditation standards for educators who desire to teach in these environments—assuring the competence, emotional intelligence, and commitment to connecting the environmental structure to learning. The advantage is creating a learning culture within correctional institutions as the new norm to ensure a humanizing learning experience for incarcerated men. Acquiring mastery in multicultural learning environments builds on current skills and those needed to impart knowledge in culturally responsive ways by leveraging awareness about how the system's structure impacts social and emotional well-being. Making learning a priority within correctional environments should resemble the same precedence level as working in prison for free. Only then can educators of incarcerated men fully realize the value correctional education brings to positively shaping their self-esteem resulting from new teaching and learning approaches centered around their well-being. Further, raising the

quality standards of educators establishes respect for the profession and increases the importance of their learning experiences. Finally, giving incarcerated men more autonomy over their reflectiveness, socially connecting to the realities of how incarcerated men live in their world and how to support meaningful learning throughout their journey of self-discovery in correctional education and beyond.

Human connectedness is the bridge to bringing people together. Incarcerated men need to feel part of something tangible in the social interchange of belonging. Still, when trust and respect for teacher-student relationships lose sight of the actual value of education, the human connection is lost. In this space, correction education must become intentional by realizing the relational component bridging reciprocity as most influential. Instead, correctional programs should embrace communities of practice within the classroom, creating a safe space for shared knowledge. The mixture of different groups of all backgrounds, ethnicities, races, and cultures come together and learn from each others' individual and unique experiences in hopes of reaching common ground in understanding and valuing differences. Doing so openly welcomes and validates their conceptual ideas, thus, creating a genuine and inclusive melting pot of shared beliefs and inspiration. Only then can incarcerated men view themselves and the world as changed through a collaborative culture of mutual give and take. The findings distribution proposal follows in the next section.

### *Target Audience*

Correctional Education Conferences, the Prison Radio Show, and members of the Texas legislature comprise the target audience in the criminal justice field, providing an excellent opportunity to bring awareness to the findings identified in this Problem of

Practice research. These audiences typically include correctional officials, lawmakers, educators, education program administrators, current and formerly incarcerated men, and their families.

The Correctional Education Conferences held annually in Huntsville, Texas, and across states discuss advances in correctional programs led by select speakers attuned with program changes. Some of the discussion topics range from newly implemented legislative laws affecting parole, time served, or other initiatives related to safety measures. However, the issues missing from those discussions have not included a humanizing pedagogy, teaching approaches, or the restoration of human dignity, but rather how correctional education has influenced recidivism and increased employment opportunities. The researcher will continue to frequent these conferences to learn where the interest lies in discussing these issues to change the current state of correctional education, focusing on the humanizing aspect.

The Prison Radio Show typically airs every Friday from 9:00 pm–11 pm, Central Time on KPFT FM 90.1. Callers routinely dial into the show to voice concerns about mistreatment, offer advice and support, or discuss newly legislative initiatives. Among other topics, discussions range from overcrowding, COVID-19, commissary, and medical issues. The listeners include a broad audience. From incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, families, state and federal officials, and other organizations, namely TIFA (Texas Inmate Families Association). TIFA offers resources and actively engages in petition drives, bringing awareness across Texas and throughout the states. The panelist typically ranges from family members, writers, formerly incarcerated men, to lawyers.

While the topics on The Prison Radio Show serve many purposes, rarely, if at all, does the matter of education become the central theme of discussion. However, the exception is that most listeners, panelists, and callers all agree that incarcerated individuals should undergo some form of education. The researcher plans to become a panelist to discuss the absence of humanizing pedagogy in correctional classrooms, addressing previously mentioned statistical and literature gaps. The researcher believes that awareness will serve as a vehicle to encourage college course participation while providing the realistic challenges that place correctional programs and classrooms in peril. The researcher intends to use this platform to drive change in restoring dignity as a human right.

The Texas legislative body comprises 31 Senate and 150 House of Representative members. All of whom convene in Austin, Texas, but each member represents their respective district offices throughout Texas. The most significant advantage to the researcher is that Texas Legislators understand the nuances of the criminal justice system and correctional education. Members are also supportive of reducing recidivism and increasing employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. However, the influence of each member's constituent groups dictates how they vote on legislation related to criminal justice matters. In addition, the impact affects funding their campaigns and the distribution of monetary resources to state agencies and other organizations. Thus, persuading them can pose challenges depending on their constituency. However, the matter addressing the urgency must outweigh the challenge.

Nonetheless, most members remain open to hearing testimonies outside of their constituent groups. In this manner, the researcher intends to frequent available sessions

that allow testimony concerning specific topics and garner a place on the agenda to speak freely. The researcher will discuss statistical and literature gaps and how to “facilitate community building, identity development, and agency” (Smith, 2017, p. 81), restoring human dignity in the predominating system design disguised as rehabilitation, though coined as education. The researcher believes that bringing awareness will lead to legislative changes to improve correctional education and the classroom’s ability to leverage the full potential of incarcerated individuals.

Since correctional education reform and other initiatives encompass both state and federal funding sources as critical stakeholders, the best venue for 15–30 minute professional presentations is in Austin, Texas, Washington, D.C., and before the legislative branches in each government. The goal is to highlight the urgency of how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of correctional classrooms in their ability to restore human dignity. In addition, the researcher will specifically discuss the shortcomings in evaluating the effectiveness of correctional programs that contributes little to self-actualization.

#### *Proposed Distribution Method and Venue*

The distribution and venue for reaching the targeted audiences include industry publications and professional presentations for critical stakeholders, adding to the literature gap as new knowledge-worthy information. The Correctional Education Association (CEA) comprises a unique distribution method relevant to this Problem of Practice research. The timeline for publication submittal is January 2022.

The researcher will submit an article addressing the literature gaps identified in this Problem of Practice research by the due date for industry publications. In addition,

the researcher plans to utilize the current study and available resources offered through Baylor University's EdD Writing Center. Finally, the goal is to build on a more profound submittal to The CEA's headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. Should successful acceptance occur, the CEA will notify the researcher electronically for further instructions that may require additional communication with its Region V affiliates covering Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. In addition, The CEA also offers the opportunity to host a conference. According to CEA National (2020), potential hosts must review the online conference planning guide and the slides from the conference hosting a workshop. After reviewing each, the potential host must complete a short form for submittal to the site selection committee, where a member will respond within 72 hours.

### *Distribution of Materials*

The most effective distribution of materials encompasses presentation slides that aid in telling the stories from the perspectives of formerly incarcerated men about their experiences, better understanding why the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis is worthy of exploration in correctional education. In the slide presentation, the researcher will include an overview of the shortcomings in evaluating the effectiveness of correctional programs. In addition, the researcher will relate the limitations, where "no reliable figures on the educational attainment of inmates participating in correctional education" (Kline & Tolbert, 2017, p. 287) exist, and in its current state contributes little to self-actualization, as the gap in the literature. Further, the researcher will explain how the absence of a humanizing pedagogical praxis exposes the danger of correctional classrooms in their inability to restore human dignity. Then the researcher will share the

key findings, clearly outlining the importance of each. Once shared, the researcher will provide informed recommendations to The Correctional Education Conferences, The Prison Radio Show, and the Texas Legislative body. Finally, the researcher will allow time for questions from the audience.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, this section provided a synopsis of the Problem of Practice research, exploring correctional education without a humanizing pedagogical praxis among incarcerated men. In highlighting the shortcomings of evaluating the effectiveness of correctional programs, lending to recidivism as the sole contributor to its efficacy, the researcher established the following. Correctional education in its current state contributes little to self-actualization, adding to the literature gap explaining how the absence of a humanizing pedagogy exposes the danger of the classroom's inability to restore human dignity among incarcerated men. An overview of the data collection and analysis led to a summary of the key findings, detailing the significance of the study. The researcher then provided informed recommendations for changes in professional policies, procedures, and practices, identifying the target audiences, methods for reaching the audience, distribution, and materials.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

Baylor University  
Department of Education

#### Consent Form for Research

A Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study Exploring Correctional Education: In the  
Absence of Humanizing Pedagogical Praxis

Debra A. Canady

You are invited to be part of a research study. This consent form will help you choose whether or not to participate in the study. Feel free to ask if anything is not clear in this consent form.

#### **Research Purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to explore correctional education through the perspectives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men's lived experiences. Should you elect to participate in this study, you will contribute to Texas's correctional education programs' improvement. Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may cease participation at any time. Participants will not receive any form of compensation for participation in this research study.

#### **Participation:**

To participate, you must be currently participating in correctional college courses or have completed them. If you choose to participate, signed consent is needed, found at the end of this form.

#### **Research Study's Details:**

The research study will commence in two three-hour interview focus group sessions in Huntsville, TX, and Houston, TX, beginning January 2021 through May 2021, consisting of three subjects per group in a single day. The principal investigator requires masks and social distancing to protect all subjects participating in this research study. In addition, completing a pre-focus group questionnaire is needed to elicit interview questions concerning your college courses' experiences. The principal investigator will notify all interested subjects 30-days in advance of the scheduled research dates through mail and phone (where feasible).

#### **Audio/Video:**

An audio/video recording of formerly incarcerated men's focus group is desirable of the principal investigator during this study. However, audio/video recording is optional. You may indicate your preference for an audio/video recording at the end of this form.

**Confidentiality:**

The principal investigator ensures safe-keeping of all records obtained throughout this study confidential by protecting participants' anonymity, masking names in the data, and if a master list is needed, ensuring to store it separately. This study's findings may be useful for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. Should this study lead to professional discussions, protections are in place to safeguard your identity through the use of code numbers or pseudonyms rather than your name or other identifying information.

**Disclosure:**

Should you become ill or injured due to your participation in the study, you should seek medical treatment from your doctor or treatment center of choice. There are no plans for Baylor University to pay you or give you other compensation for your injury or illness. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free not to take part or to withdraw at any time for any reason. Should you elect to withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:

Debra Canady

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [Debra\\_Canady1@Baylor.edu](mailto:Debra_Canady1@Baylor.edu)

Sandra Cooper, Ph.D.

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [Sandra\\_Cooper@Baylor.edu](mailto:Sandra_Cooper@Baylor.edu)

Should questions arise concerning your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Baylor University Institutional Review Board

Office of the Vice Provost for Research

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [irb@baylor.edu](mailto:irb@baylor.edu)

**SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:**

By signing this document, you agree to take part in this study. We will provide a copy of this document for your records, retaining a copy with the study records. Should you have any questions about the study after signing this document, you may contact the study team using the above information.

*I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study*

Signature of Subject

Date

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questionnaire

#### Pre-Interview Research Questionnaire Items

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Respond to the questions best describing your educational experiences.

1. Please rate the quality of correctional education in ensuring your learning experiences in humanizing ways.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

2. Please rate how correctional educators positively contributed to your emotional well-being.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

3. Please rate how correctional education encouraged your self-worth.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

4. Please rate how correctional educators constructed trusting teacher-student relationships.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

5. Please rate how correctional education and educators motivated your academic achievement.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

6. Please rate how correctional education contributes to your behavioral change.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

7. Please rate your human feelings of value in correctional classrooms.

1     2     3     4     5

Disappointing

Exceptional

**COMMENTS:** Indicate your comments below.

Table B.1

*Focus Group Interview Questions: Formerly Incarcerated Men (Groups 1 & 2)*

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Research Question 1	
<p>What is correctional education's role in ensuring incarcerated men experience learning in humanizing ways?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you define a humanizing learning experience in correctional education?</li> <li>2. Discuss how your correctional education experience includes the classroom practice of humanism?</li> <li>3. Define the meaning of correctional education and explain how your expectations are met or not?</li> <li>4. Explain how a humanizing learning experience can contribute to who you are?</li> <li>5. Discuss whether you feel invited to learn or not?</li> <li>6. Discuss what you need most in correctional education programs that contribute to your wholeness?</li> </ol>
Research Question 2	
<p>What value does correctional education bring to incarcerated men that positively shape their self-esteem?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In what ways does correctional education motivate your academic achievement?</li> <li>2. How well does correctional education prepare educators to recognize your individual needs?</li> <li>3. Explain how your participation in college courses increases your self-esteem?</li> <li>4. In what ways does correctional education help encourage the development of your most authentic self, contributing to who you are as a person?</li> <li>5. What recommendations would you suggest to enhance the effectiveness of correctional education programs that shape the way you think, feel, or believe about yourself?</li> <li>6. Explain how correctional education contributes to the value of your emotional well-being?</li> <li>7. How do correctional educator's attitudes, behaviors, and classroom practices affect your self-concept?</li> </ol>
Research Question 3	
<p>How do teacher-student relationships influence behavioral change among incarcerated men?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If you were the teacher, how would you inspire behavioral change among incarcerated men?</li> <li>2. Explain the significance of trust in correctional educator's ability to foster teacher-student relationships?</li> <li>3. How do you define the meaning of positive teacher-student relationships?</li> <li>4. How do you propose that correctional educators best manage themselves, their beliefs, and perceptions, to ensure positive teacher-student relationships?</li> <li>5. Discuss how positive teacher-student relations influence changes in your behavior?</li> <li>6. Compare and contrast your educational experiences with caring and non-caring correctional educators.</li> </ol>

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Table B.2

*Research Data Collection Matrix*

Research Questions	Theoretical Framework & Key Concept	Data Collection Protocol (Group 1)	Pre-Interview Protocol & Interview Questions	Data Collection Protocol (Group 2)	Pre-Interview Protocol & Interview Questions
Research Question 1	Humanistic Learning Theory (Human Education, Social & Emotional Needs)	Interview & Observation Protocol, & Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-7	Interview & Observation Protocol, & Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-7
Research Question 2	Identity Theory (Self-Esteem)	Interview & Observation Protocol, & Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-7	Interview & Observation Protocol, & Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-7
Research Question 3	Humanistic Learning and Identity Theories (Behavioral Change)	Interview & Observation Protocol, and Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-6	Interview & Observation Protocol, and Videoconference	Phases 1 & 2, Interview Questions 1-6

## APPENDIX C

### Protocols

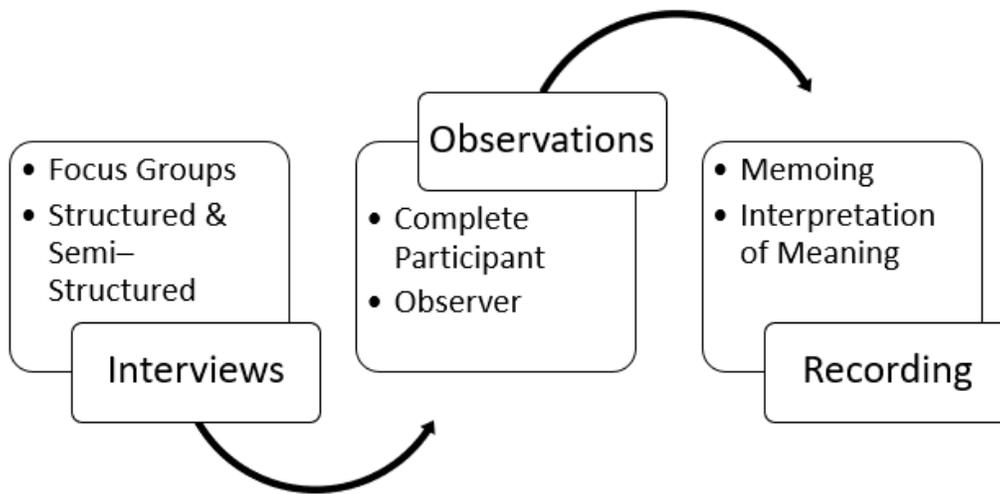


Figure C.1. Interview and Observation Protocol

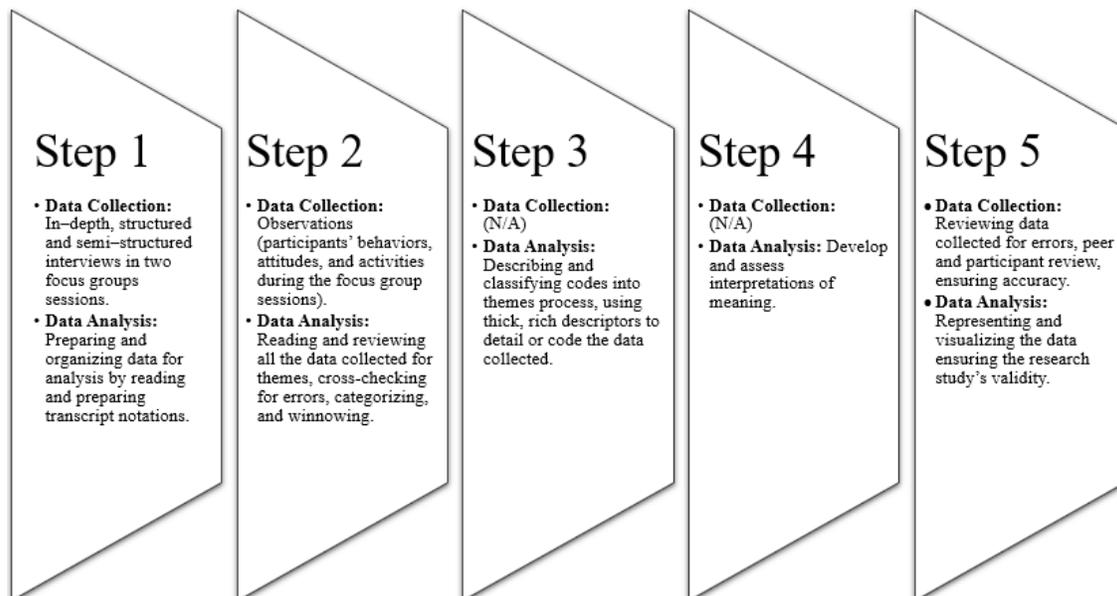


Figure C.2. Data Collection and Analysis Protocol

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