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Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How Educational Resilience
is Fostered and Cultivated in an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Welfare

by

Charles Herbert Lea III

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How Educational Resilience
is Fostered and Cultivated in an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults

by

Charles Herbert Lea III

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Laura S. Abrams, Chair

Formerly incarcerated youth often have low educational attainment following incarceration, leaving them at high risk for unstable employment and contact with the adult criminal justice system. Once they age out of traditional high school, community-based alternative schools are often the last option for these youth to earn their high school diploma or GED or receive vocational training. While commitment to conventional activities (i.e., school and work) is known to prevent recidivism, less is known about how community-based alternative schools facilitate community reintegration among formerly incarcerated youth.

Guided by an educational resilience framework, this case study explored the elements of a community-based alternative school that provides education and vocational training to formerly incarcerated young adults aged 18 to 25. The research focuses specifically on young Black men as they are disproportionately pushed out of traditional schools and into the juvenile

justice system, and are at high risk for school failure and recidivism. Data collection consisted of 12 months of observational field research, semi-structured interviews with four school employees and eight Black men students, one focus group with program case managers, and a review of school, classroom, and student documents. Each data source was analyzed and interpreted thematically using a three-step coding procedure that included initial, focused, and axial coding. Constant comparisons and memoing were also used to establish analytic distinctions and to generate meanings.

Study findings point to several important areas: (1) subjective definitions of successful community reintegration based on organizational goals and formerly incarcerated young Black men's personal philosophies of survival; (2) culturally-relevant curriculum as a vehicle for academic achievement and social-emotional development; and (3) supportive services as a factor that influences academic engagement and persistence. Findings from this research highlight the important role relationships and space and place play in bolstering students' resilience during their school reentry process. This knowledge is also significant given the move to shift the incarcerated population into community-based alternatives, and it is timely given bipartisan support to reverse the trend of mass incarceration.

The dissertation of Charles Herbert Lea III is approved.

Todd M. Franke

Ian W. Holloway

Tyrone C. Howard

Laura S. Abrams, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the young Black men, instructors, school administrators, and students at the participating alternative school site, and the many young men and women of color who are attempting to rebuild their lives while overcoming obstacles as they reenter society from a period of incarceration. It is my hope that your stories of resilience contribute to the creation of a criminal justice system that is equitable and acknowledges your unique needs and strengths.

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- Holloway, I. W., Winder, T., **Lea, C. H.**, Tan, D., Boyd, D., & Novak, D. (2017). Technology use and preferences for mobile phone-based HIV prevention and treatment among Black young men who have sex with men. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 5(4): e46.
- Abrams, L. S. & **Lea, C. H.** (2016). Becoming employable: An ethnographic study of life skills courses in a men's jail. *The Prison Journal*, 96(5), pp. 667-687.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) juvenile penal population has decreased by over 41% since 1995 (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2015). Despite this major shift, successful community reintegration is often a difficult process for many formerly incarcerated youth, particularly in regard to education. Research has found that juvenile incarceration derails the educational progress of young offenders, and many formerly incarcerated youth reenter society with educational deficiencies, including low literacy and math skills (Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006; Quinn, Osher, Poirier, Rutherford, & Leone, 2005; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). Juvenile incarceration can also slow psychosocial development; many young offenders may therefore also lack employment skills as they transition into adulthood (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Osgood, 2005a; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004; Synder, 2004). Formerly incarcerated youth also typically return to their socially and economically marginalized communities of origin, where they face additional environmental obstacles to successful reintegration such as unstable housing, limited employment options, and racial profiling (Abrams & Freisthler, 2010; Grunwald, Lockwood, Harris, & Mennis, 2010; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Mennis et al., 2011).

The aforementioned reintegration obstacles are typically exacerbated among formerly incarcerated young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, particularly Black men, as they are disproportionately incarcerated compared to other racial and gender groups (Carson & Golinelli, 2013; Justice Center, 2015; Sickmund et al., 2015). These young men are also concentrated in marginalized communities of color; where zero tolerance policies and practices are cited as a key mechanisms influencing their disproportionate incarceration and low academic achievement (Advancement Project, 2010; Fowler, 2011; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011).

Commitment to conventional activities, such as school and work, following a period of incarceration can be a positive turning point for formerly incarcerated youth (Hoffmann & Cerbone, 1999; Uggen, 2000; Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2011). In particular, studies have found that school engagement and completion can prevent repeat involvement in crime (Blomberg, Bales, & Piquero, 2012; Bullis, Yovanoff, Mueller, & Havel, 2002). Yet, while education can help to buffer the barriers and challenges associated with community reintegration, many formerly incarcerated youth, especially those who are “overage and under-credited”ⁱ (Justice Center, 2015, p. 4), often experience educational discrimination in their attempts to reenroll and remain engaged in traditional school settings (Balfanz, Spiridakis, Neild, & Legters, 2003; Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009; Mears & Travis, 2004; Rios, 2006, 2011; Stephens & Arnette, 2000; Sullivan, 2004). These youth are therefore placed at increased risk of dropping out of school, a factor that is linked to recidivism (Balfanz et al., 2003; Foster & Gifford, 2005; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Pettit & Western, 2004).

Research Problem

While educational discrimination can push formerly incarcerated youth out of mainstream high schools, many find themselves in alternative educational settings (referred to as alternative schools from this point forward), as these schools are often the last option these young people have available to earn their high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2014). Aron and Zwig (2003) suggest should that alternative schools be defined by four concrete dimensions, including: (1) target population; (2) setting; (3) service components; and (4) admin/funding source. These schools primarily serve students who are failing academically, over the age of a mainstream high school, pregnant or

parenting, seeking vocational and technical education, disabled, and/or display behavioral and emotional problems that place him/her at risk of dropping out of school (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Coles et al., 2009; Lange & Sletten, 2002). In addition to offering high school diploma and GED programs, alternative schools often also offer a range of nonacademic supports, including life skills and vocational training, employment opportunities, and sometimes counseling and mental health services (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009).

Given their comprehensive approach, alternative schools might be an optimal setting to help formerly incarcerated youth, including Black men, with successful community reintegration and educational advancement. Some research has suggested that these educational settings are failing to educate and meet the varied needs of its students (California Legislative Analysis Office, 2011, Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995). However, other studies have also found that students who attend alternative schools succeed just as well, academically, as students who attend non-alternative schools (California Legislative Analysis Office, 2011, Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Hair, Ling, and Cochran, 2003; Ruiz et al., 2008). Moreover, literature regarding the quality of alternative schools have identified several protective factors (e.g., low student-teacher ratio, student-centered instruction, life skills training, adult mentors, etc.) that positively influence the educational success of students facing significant adversity (Ruiz et al., 2008; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). Additionally, research has identified several school and classroom factors, such as teacher qualifications, curriculum, school climate, and pro-social peers, that support the educational success of students who are at high risk for school failure (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). However, little research has examined how alternative schools support formerly incarcerated young adult Black men.

Purpose of the Study

This purpose of this study is to examine the influence an alternative school on community reintegration and educational reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated young Black men between the ages of 18 and 25. Due to the knowledge gap in this area, resilience, which can be defined as the “dynamic process of effectively mobilizing internal and external resources in adapting to or managing significant sources of stress or trauma,” serves as a guiding theoretical framework for the study (Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012, p. 2; see also, Fraser, Kirby, & Smokowski, 2004; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Studies have found that school and classroom settings that include caring and supportive relationships, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities for participation foster protective environments that promote positive educational and psychosocial experiences among students facing significant adversity (Benard, 2004, 1995; Brooks, 2006; Ungar, 2013; Wang et al., 1997). Resilience in the context of a school setting is otherwise known as “educational resilience,” referring to “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, p. 46).

Research questions. Building on this framework, this exploratory study addresses the following research question: How is educational resilience fostered and cultivated in the context of an alternative school that serves formerly incarcerated youth between the ages of 18 and 25? Within this this broad question, the following sub-questions were also explored:

1. How is successful community reintegration defined in this educational setting?
2. What contextual features, practices, and processes within this educational setting facilitates successful community reintegration among formerly incarcerated young Black men?

3. Do formerly incarcerated young Black men perceive this educational setting to serve as a protective environment against community reintegration obstacles? Why or why not?

Overview of Study Design and Methods

To answer the proposed research questions, an exploratory case study approach was employed. This methodological approach was useful in answering the research questions because it seeks to explore or describe a complex phenomenon within its real-life context, as well as cultivate an in-depth understanding of meanings, experiences, and actions (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). New Directions, a community-based alternative school that provides arts, education, vocational and employment programs, and social supports to formerly incarcerated youth and young adults in Los Angeles County served as the case site for this study. Data collection consisted of 12 months of participant observations of New Directions school site and education program, and semi-structured interviews with school personnel (i.e., school administrator, academic instructors, case manager) and formerly incarcerated young Black men. One focus group was also conducted with case managers, and a review of New Directions' organizational documents (e.g., program design, policies, procedures, reports) class handouts, and student work was also completed. Data analysis and interpretation consisted of a range of inductive techniques, including coding, constant comparison, and memoing (Bernard, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2009).

Significance of Study

The study is significant because it helps to fill a knowledge gap regarding the elements within alternative schools that can improve the educational and life trajectories of formerly

incarcerated young adults who are overage and under-credited (Justice Center, 2015). Study findings also enhance our understanding of how the structure, culture, and practices within an alternative school setting can support these young people's academic achievement and criminal desistance. This knowledge is important given increased efforts to address the social and economic effects of mass incarceration, such as public safety issues in marginalized communities of color (Baker, 2015; Petersilia & Cullen, 2014; Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015; Romero & Holden, 2015; The Editorial Board, 2015). Additionally, because the subjective experiences and voices of boys and men of color are often absent from the research literature, their perspectives concerning the elements of an alternative school that supports positive community reintegration experiences is essential, because we may be missing a critical piece in understanding of how to address the social issues impacting their life goals and chances.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 summarizes the mass incarceration phenomenon in the U.S., and the disproportionate incarceration of boys and men of color. Next, it explores the literature base that cites education as a turning point for formerly incarcerated youth, and the discrimination these youth experience as they attempt to reenroll and remain engaged in school following a period of incarceration. This chapter also documents the history and student characteristics and outcomes of alternative schools that highlight the limited knowledge available regarding the elements of these schools that can foster successful reentry experiences and outcomes.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the guiding theoretical framework for the study, Educational Resilience, and the protective factors within school settings that can meet students' development needs and bolster their resilience.

Chapter 4 describes the study's methodological design, data collection procedures,

including sampling approaches and participant characteristics, data analytic techniques, and an overview of the strategies used to enhance rigor and trustworthiness.

Chapter 5 reviews the study's findings concerning the ways in which successful community reintegration is subjectively expressed and experienced throughout the case site

Chapter 6 reviews the study's findings with regards to the elements of an alternative school that fosters and cultivates educational resilience among formerly incarcerated youth, particularly young Black men.

Chapter 7 discusses the study's findings, including a discussion of the its implications future research, social work practice, and theory.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of mass incarceration and reentry in the U.S. and its impact on communities and individuals of color, and Black men in particular. Next, relevant literature that identifies the important role of education in the lives of formerly incarcerated youth is reviewed, followed by a discussion of educational discrimination and alternative school settings. This review concludes with historical background of alternative schools and the influence of alternative educational settings on student achievement.

Mass Incarceration, Reentry, and Boys and Young Men of Color

For decades, the U.S. has served as the world's leader in incarceration. The "Tough on Crime" and "War on Drugs" policies and practices from the 1970s onward fueled what many have termed decades of "mass incarceration" (Alexander, 2010). Between 1980 and 2008, the adult penal population nearly quadrupled from 500,000 to 2.3 million (Carson, 2014), and the juvenile penal population reached its peaked of 107,637 youth in 1995 (Sickmund et al., 2011; Smith, 1998). People of color, particularly Blacks, have bared the burden of mass incarceration, as they comprised 12.6% of the U.S. population in 2010, for instance, yet accounted for 39% of the jail and prison population. Additionally, among the 60,000 youth (18 and under) who are incarcerated on any given day in the U.S., approximately 39% are Black (Justice Center, 2015). Equally troubling, Black men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than White men, and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic men (Carson, 2014). Researchers have therefore projected that one in three Black men will be spend time behind bars at some point during his lifetime (Mauer, 2011).

The “school-to-prison pipeline,” a term that refers to the perpetual pattern of pushing students out of school and into the juvenile justice system, is a principal mechanism influencing the disproportionate incarceration of boys and young men of color, especially Blacks (Advancement Project, 2010; American Civil Liberties Union, 2008; Children’s Defense Fund, 2007; Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2015; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). In particular, school discipline mechanisms such zero tolerance policies and practices were adopted by many traditional schools nationwide following the he enactment of the 1994 Gun-Free School Act (GFSA). This contributed to the school-to-prison pipeline, as these schools increased the use of punitive methods (Dupper, 2010; Fabelo et al., 2011; Fowler, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003). Consequently, Black boys and young men disproportionately enter this pipeline as early as elementary school as elementary schools tend to rely on zero tolerance policies and practices to address school climate issues and student misconduct (Krezmien, Leone, Zablocki, & Wells, 2010; Losen & Martinez, 2013; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Verdugo, 2002). Studies have also found that early contact with the juvenile justice system derails educational progress, which poses additional challenges when they later transition into adulthood (e.g., unemployment, incarceration, etc.) (Bullis et al., 2002; Foley, 2001; Steinberg et al., 2004).

Although federal law requires correctional facilities to offer educational programming (Twomey, 2008), incarcerated youth are frequently released from placement with a number of educational deficits, including low reading and math skills (Holman & Ziedenbeg, 2006; Osgood, 2005a; Steinberg et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2005). The risk of dropping out of school upon being released is therefore increased for young Black men because they are more likely to attend schools in high poverty communities that graduate fewer than half of their students in four years (Bryant, 2013). Formerly incarcerated young men without a high school diploma also

often have an increased risk of coming in contact with the adult criminal justice system (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins, & Richie, 2005). The release of young Black men from juvenile and adult correctional facilities therefore raises questions about public safety, how the release of youth and young adult offenders should be managed, and the ability of marginalized communities to absorb and successfully reintegrate them.

The latter two questions mentioned above are of particular importance in current discussions about de-incarceration in the U.S. (c.f., Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015). In particular, scholars have argued that individuals released to marginalized communities have an increased risk of recidivism (Clear, 2007; Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Sampson & Loeffler, 2010). Specifically, Morenoff and Harding (2014) posit that mass incarceration and prisoner reentry should be viewed as a “linked dynamic process,” as both negatively affect the social and economic structures of these communities and the reentry experiences of individuals returning from secure confinement. They state:

Communities with high rates of incarceration and reentry ... are less and less able to provide supportive environments for those leaving prison, leading to greater reintegration difficulties at the individual level. In turn, as individuals leaving prison have trouble finding employment and avoiding crime, the social and institutional foundations of their communities are further weakened (p. 14).

Morenoff and Harding (2014) further assert that the decisions and behaviors of “institutional actors” (i.e., police, community corrections agents, and service providers) and formerly incarcerated individuals themselves also influence post-release outcomes at the individual-level, such as employment and recidivism. They therefore draw close attention to the influential role that social systems and organizations (e.g., schools, families, peer groups, political groups, etc.)

play in causing, sustaining, and eradicating the varied social problems affecting marginalized communities, especially communities of color.

Education: A Positive Turning Point

The literature on reentry and recidivism has found that commitment to conventional activities, such as school and work, can serve as a positive turning point for formerly incarcerated youth (Elder, 1985; Hoffmann & Cerbone, 1999; Sampson & Laub, 1990; 1993; Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2011). For instance, in their five-year longitudinal study that examined the facility-to-school transitions of 531 youth released from juvenile correctional facilities in Oregon, Bullis, Yovanoff, and Mueller (2002) found that youth (53% aged 16 or older at release) who were engaged in school or work were 2.38 times less likely to recidivate. Blomberg, Bales, and Piquero (2012), also examined if academic achievement (i.e., school engagement) served as a protective factor against recidivism among a sample of 4,147 formerly incarcerated youth (average age of 16.8, 86% male, and 57% non-White). They found that formerly incarcerated youth who had “above average attendance” in school following a period of incarceration were less likely (40.8%) to be re-arrested within the first year of release than youth with “below average attendance” (52.3%). This finding was also statistically significant when controlling for race and gender, suggesting that school reentry and engagement may be one key component that can redirect the life trajectories of all formerly incarcerated youth, including young Black men.

Qualitative studies also point to school as a key context that supports positive community reintegration among formerly incarcerated youth. Todis and colleagues (2001) found that formerly incarcerated youth (n = 15) who were committed to school and/or work full-time upon being released to not recidivate or require drug treatment services. The researchers characterized

this group of youth as the “succeeders” (p. 132), as they were determined, had a “strong future orientation,” and made a “conscious choice to change their lives – some to avoid reincarceration” (p. 135). They characterized another group of youth as the “drifters,” as they consistently used drugs, lacked stable employment, and had low self-confidence and motivation. The last group was characterized as the “strugglers” (p. 136), because they abused substances, grappled with mental health issues, and were often re-incarcerated. Nevertheless, despite these groupings, the authors found that the succeeders experienced just as many reintegration obstacles as the drifters and strugglers. However, the succeeder’s commitment to school and/or employment helped to cultivate their “resilience” (e.g., cooperation, self-efficacy, optimism, etc.) and buffer the reintegration challenges they faced.

Commitment to conventional activities, particularly school, is also critical to the post-release success of many formerly incarcerated youth, because early contact with the juvenile justice system can also slow their psychosocial development (Osgood, 2005b; Steinberg et al., 2004). If unaddressed, these psychosocial deficits can make it difficult for these youth to adjust to adult roles and responsibilities, such as obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment. The risk of recidivism is therefore increased among formerly incarcerated youth who are transitioning into adulthood with limited “psychosocial capacities” (i.e., abilities, competencies, resources), as their ability to take advantage of positive developmental turning points, such as education or employment, is often constrained by internal and external factors (Steinberg, Cauffman, & Monahan, p. 25, 2015).

According to Steinberg and colleagues (2004), the development of psychosocial maturity (i.e., mastery and competence, interpersonal relationships and social functioning, and self-definition and self-governance) can assist formerly incarcerated young adults with creating and

taking advantage of opportunities that support their life goals, such as education (see also Steinberg, Cauffman, & Monahan, 2015). The authors also build on an ecological perspective of human development to posit that the development of psychosocial capacities involves an interactive process between individuals and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Schools are thus a key context that can influence the development of psychosocial maturity. It is therefore important that formerly incarcerated youth reenroll and remain engaged in school as they negotiate community reintegration obstacles, because youth who develop psychosocial maturity also develop skills that enable them to manage their environments and make decisions that are socially and personally responsible.

Eccles and Roeser (2011) also believe that school is an important context that facilitates healthy developmental trajectories among youth facing significant adversity. They identify three levels of school and schooling that can influence positive educational and psychosocial development. The first level, *teachers, task, and classroom environments*, pinpoints teacher qualifications (e.g., certifications, years of teaching), curriculum and academic work (e.g., design of instruction, content), teacher beliefs (e.g., student expectations and abilities), and teacher-student relations and classroom emotional climate (e.g., feelings of belonging) as important contextual features that facilitate positive development. The second level, *school-wide characteristics*, includes school culture, school climate, and peer influences as facilitative factors. The third and last level consists of *district-wide policies* that influence interactions within school and classroom settings, such as grade configurations, school size, hours and tracking policies, and extracurricular and service learning activities.

While literature points to several multilevel contextual features, practices, and policies within educational settings that can positively influence the educational experiences and

outcomes of students facing adversity, little is known about which school-level factors are most beneficial in supporting formerly incarcerated young Black men. Moreover, although the aforementioned studies highlight the important role education can play in closing the revolving door of incarceration, they are limited in scope. Specifically, the quantitative studies focused primarily on school engagement, which was broadly defined by the students' enrollment status (Bullis et al., 2002) and attendance (Blomberg et al., 2012). Additionally, while Todis and colleague's (2001) qualitative illustrate the important role school and work played in cultivating resilience among formerly incarcerated youth, they gave little attention to the protective mechanisms and processes within the educational settings that can facilitate successful reintegration. Additionally, while 89% of participants in the Bullis et al. (2002) study were young men, the majority was White (83%). This study thus lacks generalizability to settings such as Los Angeles where most formerly incarcerated young men are Black or Hispanic. An understanding of the ways in which community-based educational institutions and organizations can facilitate positive turning points among formerly incarcerated young Black men is therefore needed.

Educational Discrimination and Formerly Incarcerated Youth

Available evidence suggests that reentering and remaining engaged in traditional schools following a period of incarceration is often a problematic and a challenging process (Balfanz et al., 2003; Feierman et al., 2009; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Ramaswamy & Freudenberg, 2012; Stephens et al., 2000; Sullivan, 2004). There is often a lack of collaboration and communication among justice and educational systems, as consequently formerly incarcerated youth often arrive to school without the necessary documents required for reenrollment, such as academic transcripts and identification cards (Balfanz et al., 2003; Stephens et al., 2000). Schools also

frequently fail to accept the academic credits that these youth may earn in a correctional education program, and correctional facilities do not always provide accurate academic records to the schools these youth return to, if provided at all (Mears & Travis, 2004; Stephens et al., 2000).

Studies have also reported that formerly incarcerated youth are typically reenrolled during the middle of an academic term; and as such, they have limited time and support to catch up on course material that was previously covered, increasing the likelihood of school dropout (Balfanz et al., 2003). In the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there was a concerted effort among school administrators to ensure that their school achieves a benchmark known as “adequate yearly progress”ⁱⁱⁱ (AYP). Given the negative stigma that is often associated with having a juvenile record, schools are often reluctant to admit formerly incarcerated youth, as they fear their criminal status and low academic performance will adversely affect performance on state-wide standardized tests (Sullivan, 2004; Mayer, 2005; Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2010).

The inability to reenroll in school following incarceration often negatively affects a young person’s ability to successfully reintegrate back into society. For instance, using qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the facility-to-community transition experiences of 50 male juvenile offenders aged 14 to 17, McGlynn (2003) found that about 1/5 of the group were unsuccessful (i.e., not enrolled in school, re-incarcerated, etc.). Among study participants who were enrolled in school, many expressed they often felt unwanted and were not supported by school personnel in the school to which they reentered. In contrast, Johnston (2003) examined the successful engagement (i.e. working or in school) of 53 youth with disabilities who were released from a juvenile facility. The study found that those who were connected to a “caring adult,” including school personnel, were more likely to remain engaged in school. Given

the small sample sizes of both of these studies, their findings cannot be considered generalizable. However, both studies highlight the fact that formerly incarcerated youth who receive support and guidance following his/her release tends to have more positive academic outcomes than those who do not.

Due to the educational discrimination surrounding formerly incarcerated youth in traditional schools, alternative schools are often the last option they have to earn their high school diploma or GED. In these settings, they may also receive nonacademic services and supports (e.g., legal and case management services) that help to buffer the reentry barriers and challenges they face (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Flower et al., 2011; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2014). This is especially the case among formerly incarcerated youth who are between the ages of 18 and 25, as they are over the traditional age for his/her grade level (Justice Center, 2015). Yet, while alternative schools are often the last educational option for many formerly incarcerated youth, little is known about the ways in which these educational settings can help to buffer community reintegration obstacles and support their educational progress.

Alternative Schools

Historical background. Alternative schools, which Aron and Zwig (2003) suggest should be defined in terms of who they serve, where they operate, what they offer, and how they are structured, emerged during the early 20th century (1918 – 1930) to provide flexible educational settings for working students who did not have time for traditional schooling (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). By 1920, nearly 20 states, including California, passed legislation that established alternatives schools for working students, serving approximately 8% of all public school students (Beales, 1941). Between 1929 and 1939, the alternative school model expanded

to roughly 40 states, as many working students were leaving traditional school settings in order to enter the workforce (Kelly, 1993). Vocational training also became a key focus of the curriculum, as there was a concerted effort among states to ensure working students were adequately prepared for the workforce, and to address low wages, dangerous working conditions, and limited opportunities for economic mobility (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013).

Despite the nationwide expansion of alternative schools, these flexible educational settings nearly diminished by 1965 because the Great Depression led to a lack of employment opportunities across the U.S. (Kelley, 1993). Thus in addition to academics, traditional schools also began to offer multiple educational tracks that included vocational training (i.e., career and technical education); a key focus of alternative schooling (Nygreen, 2013). However, California was one state where alternative schools remained, as the state passed legislation that expanded the target population criteria for these schools to also include unemployed students who were at risk of academic failure (Williams, 2008). As a result of their unemployment status, this new target population was required to attend school for a minimum of 15 hours per week, as opposed to the four to eight hours that was required of working students (California Department of Education, 2015). In addition to expanding the target population, alternative schools were also subjected the accountability measures imposed on traditional schools, because these educational settings began to allow students to earn credits towards a high school diploma (Nygreen, 2013). Now operating as smaller versions of traditional schools, alternative schools were viewed as a viable educational option, particularly for students who were unable to “adjust” to the traditional school setting (Nygreen, 2013, p. 36).

Following California’s lead, by the 2007-08 school year, 40% of school districts across the U.S. were offering alternative schools as an educational option for working and non-working

students (Carver et al., 2010). In addition to district-administered alternative schools, approximately 35% of school districts administered their alternative school through an outside entity, such as a charter management organization (CMO) (i.e., non-profit organization), education management organization (EMO) (i.e., for-profit organization), or freestanding school not connected to a CMO or EMO (NAPCS, 2016). More specifically, 81% of school districts administered an alternative school through a public entity (e.g., regional program, consortium, cooperative, another school district, 26% through a private entity contracted by the district, and 8% through a partnership or contract with a post-secondary institution (i.e., 2- or 4-year) (Carver et al., 2010). As such, in the 2007-08 school year, alternative schools served approximately 646,500 of all public school students.

Districts where youth of color comprised 50% or more of the entire student population (73%), and those with high poverty concentrations (68%) were more likely to offer an alternative school as an educational option. Additionally, students in grades nine through twelve (88% to 96% of districts) who were at-risk of dropping out of school, particularly due to physical attacks or fights (61%), academic failure (57%), disruptive verbal behavior (57%), possession or use of a weapon (51%) or firearm (42%), and arrest or involvement with the criminal justice system, were more likely to be transferred to an alternative school from a traditional school (Carver et al., 2010). Moreover, because alternative schools typically enroll students who are on the margins of society with multiple risk factors, many alternative schools offer a range of nonacademic supports (e.g., life skills and vocational training, post-secondary linkages, employment, etc.), and collaborate with a range of institutions and organizations, such as the criminal justice system (80%), community mental health agencies (78%), child protective services (77%), drug/alcohol clinics (60%), and job placement centers (46%). It is argued that these services can help buffer

the risks that impede these students' ability to excel academically (Cable et al., 2009; Carver et al., 2010).

Impact on student success. Given their comprehensive approach and partnerships, alternative schools have become a key dropout prevention strategy for many states, including California (Reimer & Cash, 2003). According to Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues (2008), approximately 115,000 or more of all California public high school students will at some point enroll in one of the state's 519 alternative schools. Although alternative schools have become a key dropout prevention strategy, available data on student success are dismal. For instance, while a meta-analysis of 57 evaluations found alternative schools to positively affect students' attitudes towards school (49%), self-esteem (28%), and academic performance (27%), these effect sizes were small, and the schools had no effect on delinquency (23%) (Cox et al., 1995). Additionally, another study found that alternative schools in California have a dropout rate that is 2.5 times greater than the statewide dropout rate (California Legislative Analysis Office, 2011).

Despite these poor outcomes, some studies have found that alternative school students perform just as well, academically, as non-alternative school students. For instance, Hair, Ling, and Cochran's (2003) examination of 12ⁱⁱⁱ rigorously evaluated youth development programs for older youth (16-24) revealed that among the seven programs offering a high school diploma or GED, four produced positive effects on degree attainment. They also reported that 33% of all JOBSTART participants (n = 988), a community-based program that provides education, occupational training, job placement assistance, and support services to economically disadvantaged out-of-school youth, earned a high school diploma or GED, compared to 17% of non-program participants. Additionally, in California, Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues (2008) found that repeat 11th and 12th grade California High School Exit Exam-takers (CAHSEE)

enrolled in alternative and traditional schools performed identical on the language arts component of the exam (31% among 11th graders and 24% among 12th graders). For math, CAHSEE passage rates differed slightly, in that 25% of all 11th grade and 22% of all 12th grade alternative school students passed the exam, compared to 31% and 26% of all traditional high school students, respectively.

In addition to finding some positive academic benefits of alternative schools, scholars concerned with the characteristics of alternative school settings have documented several contextual features and practices that effectively enhance the educational progress, behaviors, and life circumstances of their students. For instance, Tobin and Sprague (2000) identify eight practices within alternative schools that can positively influence students' academic and social performance, especially among those with emotional and behavioral disorders. These eight practices include:

1. Low student to teacher ratio (i.e., 20:1);
2. Highly structured classroom with behavioral classroom management;
3. Positive methods to increase appropriate behavior (e.g., behavior-specific praise);
4. School-based adult mentor;
5. Functional behavioral assessments (i.e., identifying antecedents and consequences for behaviors);
6. Social skills instruction (e.g., conflict resolution, work readiness training, etc.);
7. High quality instruction (e.g., academic remediation; small group or individualized);
and
8. Parent involvement.

Nelson and colleagues (2009) also argue that Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports^{iv} (PBIS) should also be incorporated within alternative school settings, as the practices associated with this framework can help to prevent and lessen problem behaviors.

Ruiz de Velasco and colleague's (2008) descriptive study of alternative schools in California also identify several school and classroom characteristics that are associated with student success. In particular, they assert that students who attended alternative schools that had empathetic and positive school leaders who viewed students as resilient were motivated to learn and more likely to pass the CAHSEE. Additionally, high student and teacher expectations, and instruction that is tailored to students' needs influenced strong attendance and high graduation rates. Schools that had deliberate and well-designed partnerships with external institutions and organizations, such as community colleges and local employers, also offered meaningful learning opportunities and support services that helped to buffer the obstacles interfering with educational success. Furthermore, qualitative research examining students' perceptions of their alternative school has also found that teachers-student relationships, home-school connection, school climate, flexible rules and consequences, education and support services, and strength-based approaches to improve students' academic performance and pro-social behaviors (c.f., Amin, Browne, Ahmed, & Sato, 2006; Darling & Price, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011).

Conclusions

Although research has suggested that alternative schools are failing to educate and meet the many needs of at-risk students, these conclusions are indeed mixed. Moreover, studies examining the impact of alternative schools on student-level outcomes often rely on state/policy-driven definitions of success (i.e., completion of high school diploma), and are typically descriptive in nature. Little is known about the contextual features, practices, and processes

within these educational settings that are most influential in mitigating the community reintegration obstacles many formerly incarcerated youth and young adults experience.

Given this knowledge gap, an important question for research is: How should alternative schools, be structured to facilitate positive community reintegration experiences and outcomes among formerly incarcerated youth, particular young black men between the ages of 18 and 25? The knowledge developed from such research is important given increased efforts to de-incarcerate America, racial/ethnic disparities in incarceration and prisoner reentry within disadvantaged communities of color, and the need for evidenced alternatives to incarceration and community reintegration supports and interventions. Moreover, because the subjective experiences and voices of young Black men are often absent from literature, research examining their experiences within a community-based alternative school can elicit important knowledge about the ways in which they identify and cope with community reintegration obstacles.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Research has identified several protective factors within schools that can enhance the educational progress, behaviors, and life circumstances of students at risk of educational failure. These protective factors build resilience, which may be one component of these schools that can facilitate successful community reintegration experiences and outcomes among formerly incarcerated young Black men. As such, this chapter begins with a review of seminal studies uncovering resilience as a construct, and builds on studies examining resilience within educational settings. The Educational Resilience Framework is then presented as the guiding theory to explore how the elements of an alternative school for formerly incarcerated youth aged 18 to 25 meets their development needs and bolster their resilience.

Resilience

An established body of research points to the concept resilience as important improving the life chances and outcomes of children and youth experiencing significant adversity (c.f., Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013a, 2013b; Waxman et al., 2003; Wayman, 2002; Williams & Bryan, 2013). With roots in psychology, the concept of resilience emerged from studies focused on the effects of risk factors (e.g., poverty, alcoholism, mental illness, pre- and perinatal complications) on child development (e.g., Anthony, 1974; Garmezy, 1971, 1974; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976, Rutter, 1979, Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992). For example, one of the earliest resilience scholars, Garmezy (1971), examined the developmental patterns of children who had parents with schizophrenia. He found that 90% of the children in the study did not develop schizophrenia, despite their increased risk.

He also asserted that the children were developing positively as evidenced by “good peer relations, academic achievement, commitment to education, and purposive life goals, [and] early and successful work histories” (p. 114). Based on these findings, Garmezy (1971) encouraged scholars to shift their research away from a focus on risk factors that lead to negative outcomes (e.g., mental illness, unemployment, criminal activity, substance abuse), and towards factors that enable children facing significant adversity to positively adapt to their circumstances.

In his seminal, 10-year epidemiological study that examined the impact of maternal deprivation on child development, Michael Rutter (1979) also uncovered elements of the resilience concept. Specifically, in conducting extensive interviews with children who had a mentally ill parent, he found that roughly half did not become mentally ill or develop maladaptive behaviors despite the adversity they faced. Subsequent studies by Rutter and colleagues (c.f., Rutter & Quinton, 1984; Rutter, 1987, 2000; Rutter, Maughn, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979) also identified school as an important setting that can enhance positive adaptation among children despite the presence of adversity. In particular, they found that children from disadvantaged families who attended schools that fostered a sense of achievement and enhanced their personal and social development through positive relationships, sports and music, were more likely to demonstrate resilient characteristics (e.g., bonding, competence, optimism, self-efficacy, etc.). He therefore concluded that while individual characteristics can protect against the adverse effects of stress or disadvantage, characteristics of a child’s environment (e.g., family, school, community, peers) can also serve as important protective factors against adversity.

Werner and Smith’s (1982) longitudinal study of children (n = 698) from Kauai, Hawaii further revealed the importance of internal and external protective factors for children and youth

experiencing significant adversity. Specifically, they found that while one-third of their sample was considered “high-risk” (i.e., had four or more risk factors present in their life), one-third of these high-risk youth demonstrated positive developmental outcomes by adolescence.

Additionally, two-thirds of the youth who demonstrated problem behaviors during adolescence were leading healthy and productive lives in adulthood. These individuals were therefore labeled “resilient” because they positively adapted despite experiencing consistent stress and disadvantage. As such, Werner and Smith (1982; 1992) identified personal attributes (i.e., intelligence, coping, self-efficacy, self-worth), affective ties with the family, and external environmental supports (i.e., caring & support relationships, external resources, extended social supports) as internal and external protective factors that can bolster the resilience of children and youth in adverse situations.

While early studies of resilience have helped to identify the important role internal and external protective factors play in the developmental processes of children and youth from high-risk environments, there is still no unilaterally agreed upon definition of resilience. Despite this, literature identifies two major conditions of resilience: “(1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process” (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543). Advances in resilience research has also led scholars to acknowledge that resilience is not a universal, categorical, or fixed attribute. Rather, it is a “dynamic process” (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543) that is dependent upon the interactions between an individual and his/her environment (c.f., Masten, 2001; Padron, Waxman, & Huang, 1999; Ungar, 2011). According to Fraser and colleagues (2004):

Individual behavior, whether resilient or not, is the result of continuous transactions between children and their experiences in their families, schools, and neighborhoods.

This has important implications for intervention because we cannot dismiss children who have poor developmental outcomes as children who lack resilient dispositions. Indeed, it is the environment that appears most important for planning prevention and intervention services. When resilience in children is observed, exceptional interpersonal and environmental resources are almost always found. (pp. 23-24).

Resilience can therefore be fostered and cultivated, because it is viewed as an alterable set of processes. Masten (2001) thus refers to resilience processes as “ordinary magic,” because she argues that most individuals who experience significant adversity will still demonstrate normal developmental outcomes throughout the life course.

Studies examining resilience processes therefore assert that internal factors, such as optimism, perceptions of control, self-efficacy, and active coping, promote psychological and social resilience (c.f., Lee, Cheung, & Kwong, 2012). Lee and colleagues (2012) also summarize four critical components of external protective factors (i.e., caring relationships, high expectation messages, and opportunities to participate and contribute) that can strengthen the abilities and capacities of children and youth to recognize and utilize social supports that are available and accessible in their sociocultural environments. These external protective factors include:

- Bonding (i.e., emotional attachment and commitment to mature and supportive adults and pro-social and rule abiding peers);
- Competence (i.e., cognitive, emotional, moral, behavioral, and social);
- Optimism (i.e., manifested self-efficacy, spirituality, positive identity); and

- Environment (i.e., organized home environment, socioeconomic advantages, effective schools, neighborhood collective efficacy, public safety, social and health services). (Lee, et al., 2012, p. 3).

Bolstering internal and external protective factors among children and youth facing adversity can help to cultivate individual resilience, enhance their adaptation processes, and improve their life chances and outcomes. Yet, according to Waxman and colleagues (2003), the development of resilience must be understood in context. Thus, as noted above, schools represent a context whereby resilience can be fostered and cultivated in ways that enhance learning processes and the development of essential skills and competencies that improves academic achievement and healthy development among youth at-risk of educational failure (Rutter et al., 1979; Waxman et al., 2003).

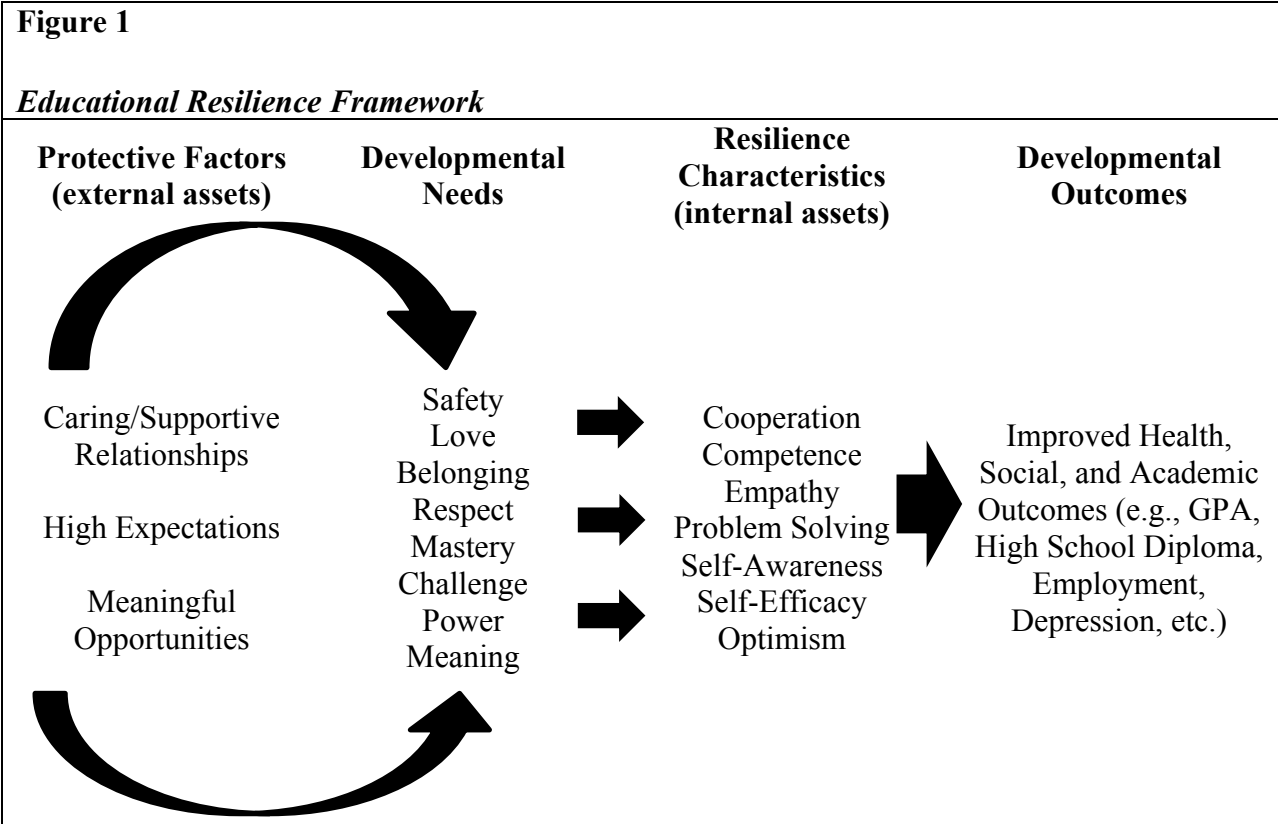
Educational Resilience

In the context of schooling, “educational resilience,” can be defined as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1994, p. 46). Studies investigating educational resilience have identified three critical external protective factors within school and classroom settings that help to bolster students’ resilience and facilitate educational success. These external protective factors include: (1) supportive and caring relationships; (2) high expectations; and (3) meaningful opportunities for participation (Benard, 1995, 2004; Brooks, 2006; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2013a; Waxman et al., 2003).

As such, using an adapted version of the Resilience Youth Development Module (see Figure 1), a theoretical and youth development framework of resilience as a construct, I discuss how these three external protective factors can be fostered and cultivated in educational settings

that serve high-risk youth (WestEd, 2011). I particularly aim to highlight how educational settings rich in external protective factors can perhaps increase these youths access to protective mechanisms and processes that help to decrease their risk factors and increase their resilient characteristics.

Figure 1. Educational Resilience Framework



Caring and supportive relationships. Literature identifies several schoolwide and classroom-specific features, practices, and policies that help to foster and cultivate caring and supportive relationships. Specifically, schools that hire adults professionals who are trustworthy, attentive, empathetic, available, affirming, and respectful role models, can positively influence students’ schooling experiences and outcomes (Benard, 1996; Drennon-Gala, 1995; Wang et al., 1998; Werner & Smith, 1982). For instance, school personnel, such as teachers and counselors,

can enhance their students' academic achievement by knowing their names, encouraging class participation, listening, and intervening to address school and non-school related issues (Laursen & Birmingham, 2003). Teachers can also help to build pro-social relationships among their students by utilizing cooperative learning strategies, such as small groups, and employing class rituals that help to build community (Battistich & Horn, 1997).

Educational settings that provide students with opportunities to build caring and supportive relationships with adults and their peers can help to prevent at-risk students from dropping out, because caring and supportive relationships helps students to bond to the school environment. School bonding is important with regards to academic achievement, as it helps to meet students' developmental needs of safety, love, respect, belonging, and mastery of essential skills and competencies that bolsters their resilience characteristics (Benard, 2004; Haggerty, 1996; Stipek, 2006; Werner & Smith, 1982; Williams & Bryan, 2013).

High expectations. Benard (1996; 2004) posits that schools that perceive students as resilient, regardless of the barriers and challenges they face, can help to enhance their educational progress and improve their problem behaviors (e.g., delinquency, substance use, etc.). Schools that develop and sustain positive and high expectations are structured to reinforce messages that are both positive and student-centered (Learning First Alliance, 2001; Wang et al., 1997, 1998; Williams & Bryan, 2013). School and classroom settings can communicate these expectations by providing clear and consistent rules that students perceive as fair, employing rigorous and equitable curriculum (i.e., thematic, experiential, challenging, comprehensive) that accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities, and developing opportunities for students to participate in class activities and decision-making processes. Thus, schools and classrooms that convey positive and high expectations help to meet their students' developmental needs of

belonging, challenge, meaning, and power. This in turn bolsters opportunities for student resilience, as it creates opportunities for ongoing self-reflection, problem solving, cooperation, competence, and self-efficacy (WestEd, 2011).

Meaningful opportunities for participation. According to Bernard (2004), schools that include caring and supportive relationships and communicate high expectations can directly maximize opportunities for meaningful participation. She deems opportunities that help to build a students' social competence, problem-solving skills, sense of self, and optimism/future orientation, as meaningful. These opportunities include activities that are participatory (e.g., cooperative learning, extracurricular and after school programs), contributory (e.g., school and classroom governance, service learning), and those that are empowering and provoke critical thinking (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, Learning First Alliance, 2001; Wang et al., 1998, Zimmeraman & Arunkumar, 1994). For instance, Rutter and colleagues (1979; 1984; 1987; 2000) resilience studies found that schools where students have responsibilities, actively participate, and treated as responsible individuals had lower levels of delinquency and school failure. These meaningful opportunities thus helped to meet these students' development needs of belonging, power, respect, and mastery, which bolstered their individual resilience.

Educational Resilience and Black and System-Involved Youth

Reentry obstacles are often exacerbated for formerly incarcerated young Black men based on their race and vulnerabilities. As such, additional contextual features, practices and policies within the school and classroom settings are important to consider in examining the ways in which educational resilience can be fostered and cultivated. The literature identified cultural adherence (i.e., positive sense of one's racial/ethnic identity) and social emotional learning activities in school and classroom settings as essential external protective factors for

fostering and cultivating educational resilience among Black and system-involved youth (c.f., (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003; Dudley-Grant, Comas-Diaz, Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Rivas-Drake D, 2014; Todd-Bazemore, & Hueston, 2004; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2008, 2013b; Zins & Elias, 2006)

Cultural adherence. Literature argues that schools and classrooms that adhere to the cultural norms and expectations of students, specifically in terms of their racial/ethnic identity and culture, are situated to bolster their resilience and academic achievement (Dudley-Grant, Comas-Diaz; Howard, 2015; Kim & Esquivel, 2011; Rivas-Drake D, 2014; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2008, 2013b). Specifically, Dudely-Grant and colleagues (2004) posits that connectivity (i.e., relationships within social circles, connections at places of worship, association to a community), plays a critical role in cultivating resilience in people of color. This is because cultural values, such as Afrocentrism and positive racial/ethnic identity, are important aspects of the lived experiences for people of color. The ways in which people of color cope with adverse situations (i.e., racial discrimination) such as by having an awareness of racism, a positive view of their racial/ethnic group, and relying on spirituality, can be viewed as protective factors (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, & Zimmerman, 2003; Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008; Dudley-Grant, Comas-Diaz, Todd-Bazemore, & Hueston, 2004; Hughes, Kiecolt, Keith, & Demo, 2015; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Smalls, White Chavous, & Sellors, 2007).

Within the context of school, literature points to racial and cultural socialization as important elements that can enhance the academic and social development of students of color (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Chavous et al., 2008; Nasir, 2011; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Wakefiled & Hudley, 2007; Wang & Huguley, 2012). According to King (2013), the

“ways that young people are innovatively using their cultural expression to transform music, sports, and other global popular industries could transform curriculum and pedagogy” (p. 242). Culturally responsive teaching, that is, instruction that reflects the cultural heritages, experiences, and perspectives of students of color, is identified as an external protective factor that can foster and cultivate resilience among students of color, and enhance their academic achievement (Gay, 2010).

Studies examining disadvantaged, Black students’ perceptions of school also suggest that developing and enhancing school-based assets and resources can bolster educational resilience. For example, Williams and Bryan (2013) examined factors in the school context that influenced the educational resilience and success among eight Black students aged 18 to 21 (four men and four women). They found that the students perceived caring and supportive school-based relationships with school personnel (i.e., teachers, counselors, administrators) as contributing to their development of educational resilience. These students also perceived several school characteristics that support their academic achievement, including: (1) high standards and expectations; (2) challenging curriculum and instruction; (3) extending after-school learning opportunities and activities; (4) positive relationships with other resilient students; and (5) well-qualified teachers (p. 296). Scholars therefore argue that fostering resilience in educational settings that primarily include low-income Black students can help to increase their academic achievement as well as cultivate their resilience (Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010; Waxman, Gray, Padron, 2004; Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007).

Moreover, strengthening a schools’ capacity, such as by promoting supportive relationships among school personnel and offering ongoing professional development and training opportunities, can help to create and sustain culturally-relevant protective mechanisms

and processes within the school context. These mechanisms and processes can include strategies such as rites of passage programs (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010; Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009) and “Beats, Rhymes, and Life, Inc.,” a community-based, hip-hop therapeutic intervention for boys and young men of color (BRL, 2015) These empowerment-based practices and interventions in turn can bolster the educational resilience of students of color who are at risk of dropping out, including formerly incarcerated youth (Balfanz & Mac Iver, 2000; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Travis & Leech, 2013).

In examining how alternative schools foster and cultivate resilience among formerly incarcerated young Black men, it is important to consider the ways in which alternative school teachers consider and are sensitive to the ways in which risk factors, such as poverty, culture, and race/ethnicity influence how these young men identify and manage adversity. This is important because research finds that young Black men’s perceptions of school-based support (e.g., caring and supportive relationships), is positively associated with academic-self-esteem; a factor associated with academic achievement (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Payne & Brown, 2010; Prince & Nurius, 2014).

Social emotional learning. In addition to cultural adherence, research has found that social emotional learning (SEL) activities within the context of school can bolster students’ resilience and facilitate healthy development throughout the life course. According to Zins and Elias (2006), “social and emotional learning (SEL) is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others” (p. 1). SEL practices and interventions therefore aim to build youths’ social-emotional competencies in five areas, including:

- Self-awareness – Identification and recognition of one’s own emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence;
- Social awareness – Empathy, respect for others, and perspective taking;
- Self-Management – Impulse control, stress management, persistence, goal setting, and motivation; and
- Relationship skills – Cooperation, help seeking and providing, and communication. (CASEL, 2003 as cited in Zins & Elisa, 2006, p. 3)

The development of social-emotional skills is thus important for life-long success, as studies consistently find these skills to be associated with positive developmental outcomes, such as academic achievement, prosocial behaviors, and work readiness (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczk, & Hawkins, 2002; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Larson & Tran, 2014, Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Schools are therefore a setting where SEL can be taught, practiced, and reinforced, because in addition to educating students, they are often charged with enhancing students’ social-emotional competences, health and civic engagement (Roser, Eccles, & Samoroff, 2000).

Literature documents student-focused, relationship-oriented, and classroom and school-level organizational changes as effective school-based strategies that foster and cultivate SEL skills among students, especially those facing significant adversity (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003). For instance, Durlak and colleagues’ (2011) meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal SEL programs revealed that students (n =270,034; grades K – 12) who were engaged in SLE programming demonstrated increased social-emotional competencies (mean ES = 0.57; CI = 0.48 to 0.67) attitudes towards self and others (mean ES = 0.23; CI = 0.16

to 0.30), and prosocial behaviors (mean ES = 0.24; CI = 0.16 – 0.32), compared to control groups. They also found significant improvements in academic performance (mean ES = 0.27; CI = 0.15 – 0.39) among SLE program participants. They conclude that in order for school-based SEL programs to be effective, they must include “SAFE” practices, which include “a *sequenced* step-by-step training approach, use of *active* forms of learning, focus on *sufficient* time on skill development, and have *explicit* learning goals” (p. 408) (emphasis added).

Wilson and colleagues (2001) also conducted a meta-analysis of 165 studies of SEL interventions (grades K – 12). Their analysis of 216 interventions included seven student-focused programs (e.g. counseling, mentoring, self-control, social competency instruction, etc.) and four universal interventions that aimed to address the school environment (e.g., establishing norms or expectations for behavior and schoolwide discipline management strategies). They found cognitive behavioral and behavioral instruction interventions that aimed to enhance students’ self-control and social competency skills to reduce alcohol/drug use (mean ES = 0.05; CI = 0.01 – 0.09), conduct problems (mean ES = 0.17; CI = 0.09 – 0.25), and school dropout (mean ES = 0.16; CI = 0.05 – 0.27). Another important finding from this meta-analysis is that interventions targeting “high-risk youth” (i.e., those with histories of delinquency) demonstrated larger effects (mean ES = 0.20; CI = 0.14 – 0.21) than those targeting the general population (mean ES = 0.07; CI = 0.14 – 0.10). This finding suggests that SEL interventions can be beneficial for youth experiencing significant adversity, especially formerly incarcerated youth.

Although limited, some studies have examined the role of SEL activities in enhancing positive outcomes for system-involved youth. For instance, Feinstein and colleagues (2008) conducted a qualitative study concerning the strategies in a low-security correctional facility that foster and cultivate resilience among incarcerated young men (n = 18). They found several

external protective factors, including consistency, structure, support, and positive adult-youth relationships to foster and cultivate resilience. Study participants also believed that teachers and frontline staff members in the facility valued education, helping others, and having a job. These observed and perceived factors thus played a role in enhancing these young men's resilience, particularly their problem solving and SEL skills.

While Feinstein and colleagues (2008) study is limited to a correctional setting, their findings help to improve our understanding of the important role external protective factors can play in cultivating resilience in system-involved youth. In particular, this study highlights the important role adults can play in the lives of system-involved youth, wherein relationship-oriented programs, such as mentoring and therapeutic and case management strategies might be an effective strategy for building social-emotional skills that aid in healthy development (Abrams, Mizel, Nguyen, & Shlonsky, 2014; Marsh & Evans, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, scant research has examined how alternative schools can facilitate positive community reintegration among formerly incarcerated young Black men. As such, this study will use the Educational Resilience Framework as the guiding framework as it encompasses several school and classroom factors that are critical to improving the life experiences and outcomes of students facing significant adversity, including system-involved young Black men. Identifying both internal and external protective factors within alternative schools serving formerly incarcerated young Black man is therefore critical to uncovering the elements of community-based educational interventions that can assist these young men with responding to the adversity they face upon reentering society (Benard, 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Freire, 1973; Larson, 2000; Masten & Douglas, 1998; Wolin & Wolin, 2010).

CHAPTER 4

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological procedures used to examine how educational resilience is fostered and cultivated in an alternative school for formerly incarcerated young adults. This chapter begins with an overview of the study's research design, followed by a description of the data collection procedures and analytic process. Additionally, because the researcher is a primary instrument in qualitative inquiry, this chapter concludes with a reflexive statement of the researcher's positionality.

Research Design

This study employed a case study design to explore how an alternative school facilitates community reintegration among formerly incarcerated young Black men (c.f., Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Michael, 1999; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). With roots in anthropology, sociology, and psychology, this methodological approach was best suited to answer the research questions posed because it seeks to explore or describe complex phenomenon within its real-world context. According to Creswell (2007):

Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes. (p. 73)

Merriam (2009) furthers this definition by identifying three “special features” that characterize case study methodology (p. 43). First, she asserts that case study methodology is

“particularistic” because it focuses on a “particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (p. 43). Second, this approach is “descriptive” because it produces a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study” (p. 43). Lastly, the case study approach is “heuristic” because it “illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 44). The knowledge gained from this case study research is therefore critical to enhancing our understanding of a specific phenomenon in context, because it is concrete, contextual, interpretive, and based on a reference population, rather than abstract (Stake, 1995).

The unit of analysis is also critical to case study research because it defines the case or cases under investigation (Merriam, 2009). Typically, a case is selected for investigation because it is “an instance of some process, issue, or concern... [or] because it is intrinsically interesting” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 41 – 42). As such, because this dissertation study examined one alternative school, an embedded, single case study design served as the investigative frame. Creswell (2007) also states that a single case study “focuses on an issues or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue” (p. 74). This case study was therefore embedded as well, because the analysis not only describes and interprets the ways in which an alternative school facilitates community reintegration among formerly incarcerated young Black men, but also how these young men experience and perceive the alternative school as they manage their reintegration obstacles (Creswell, 2007).

Sampling and site selection criteria. A purposive sampling approach was used to identify an alternative school site for this case study, as this study aimed to develop a rich, thick description of a cultural phenomenon, and involves a hard-to-reach population (i.e., overage and under-credited formerly incarcerated youth) (Bernard, 2006). Specific site selection criteria included:

- Located in Los Angeles County;
- Offers a high school diploma/GED program;
- Serves formerly incarcerated young adults between the ages of 18 and 25;
- Provides vocational training; and
- Utilizes a strength-based approach.

New Directions, a nonprofit organization and community-based alternative school in Los Angeles County was purposefully selected for this case study. This is because its target population, strength-based service approach, and geographical location positioned it as an “information-rich case” to describe and interpret how educational resilience is fostered and cultivated among formerly incarcerated young Black men in the context of an alternative school (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

Case study site. Since its founding in 2004, New Directions has provided mentor-based arts activities, education and employment programs, and social supports to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and young adults (13 – 25) throughout Los Angeles County. Born out of a passionate group of artists, New Directions began offering its first program, VOICES, a writing, poetry and music program to youth in foster care group homes. Based on the California Common Core Standards^v, VOICES uses a project-based learning curriculum where students taught the structure of poetry and learn how write their own poems, create musical “beats,” record their poetry to the music created. Once recorded, students learn how to edit and engineer their own compact disc. At the end of the module, students participate in an assembly showcasing their work.

Given its success with youth in the foster care group homes, a county organization invited New Directions to offer VOICES to youth at one of their juvenile camp facilities. By

2011, New Directions was offering VOICES programming at 10 juvenile camps and detention facilities throughout Los Angeles County, serving over 700 youth per week. As a result of their work in juvenile camps and detention facilities, New Directions staff members observed that many young people were cycling in and out of the system. They therefore began offering post-release supports (i.e., case management and wraparound services) to VOICES alumni released to the community, as a way to help prevent them from falling back into the system. Because the need for post-release supports were great, New Directions sought out means to launch alternative school that offered education, employment and vocational training, and case management and wraparound services to formerly incarcerated young adults aged 16 - 25.

In 2015, New Directions partnered with a charter organization to launch a community-based alternative school that serves formerly incarcerated young adults (16 – 25) who are seeking a high school diploma, vocational development, and other services. The partnership is an education reform effort that emerged from The Charter School Act of 1992 (JMCS, 2014). Specifically, this charter organization provides educational programs to more than 2000 California students enrolled at 57 sites and satellites. New Directions' alternative high school follows a programmatic approach that encompasses five key areas of development, including: (1) Academic Education; (2) Counseling and Leadership Development; (3) Community Service; (4) Vocational Training; and (5) Post-Secondary Placement. The school also operates year-round, Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM, and is designed to serve over 100 young people aged 17 – 24. In order to graduate, students must earn a total 210 credits in core (i.e., English, history, mathematics, science) and elective courses (i.e., health/P.E., economics, vocational education)

Upon enrolling, the staff develop an “action plan” with each student. In particular, New Directions’ case management team conducts a full assessment with each student to identify their goals, risk and protective factors, and other obstacles that might stand in the way of their success. Case managers also offer full wraparound services and trauma-informed care, wherein each student has access to supportive services such as, counseling and trauma support, college and career development training, job search assistance, transportation, daily meals, legal advice and financial literacy, and referrals to housing and substance abuse treatment programs.

As Table 1 displays, 117 students were enrolled in New Directions as of March 2017. Approximately 67% of students were male, and more than half (53.8%) identified as African American/Black. The average age was 18.7 (range: 15 – 26), and approximately 60% were between the ages of 18 and 26. In terms of criminal justice characteristics 74% of students had been involved in some aspect of the criminal justice system prior to enrolling in New Directions, and 34.5% were currently on probation. With regards to education, approximately 55% of students reported being suspended/expelled prior to enrollment, and 18% had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Additionally, 21% of students reported that they were employed as of March 2017, and 73% was seeking employment. Students also reported experiencing traumatic life events, such as losing a close friend or relative (82%), witnessing domestic violence (36%), and/or experiencing some form of neglect (23%). Moreover, more than half of students (55.3%) were currently using a substance, commonly marijuana (<50%). Thus, given its geographic location, strength-based approach, and student characteristics, New Directions served as an optimal site to explore the research questions posed.

Table 1***Summary of New Directions' Student Characteristics***

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Gender		
Female	78	66.7%
Male	39	33.3%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American/Black	63	53.8%
Hispanic/Latino	50	42.7%
White/Mixed/Other	4	3.4%
Age		
15 – 17	45	39.9%
18 – 20	46	40.7%
21 – 25	20	17.8%
26+	2	1.8%
Criminal Justice Characteristics		
Past Criminal Justice Involvement	83	73.6%
Current Probation	39	34.5%
Education and Employment		
Suspended/Expelled	56	55.4%
Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	21	18.0%
Employed	24	21.1%
Seeking Employment	82	72.6%
Traumatic Life Events		
Physical Abuse	20	17%
Neglect	27	23%
Domestic Violence (witness)	43	36%
Loss of Close Friend/Relative	97	82%
Rape or Sexual Assault	13	8.0%
Substance Use		
Current	62	55.3%
Past	102	84%

To gain access to New Directions, the researcher's dissertation chair facilitated a meeting with New Directions founder, school administrators, and case managers. During this meeting, the researcher provided an overview of the case study's aims, data collection procedures (discussed below), and use of the data collected. The researcher also answered questions these individuals had about the study, and discussed potential observations days, times, and activities that was available to the researcher. Upon agreement of the research plan, the researcher began the study with New Directions in March 2016.

Data Collection Procedures

Participant observation. The main mode of data collection for this study was observational field research. The key premise of this data collection approach is that the researcher seeks to understand a social setting or culture through naturalistic observations (Bernard, 2006; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005). Typically, over a period of time, the researcher immerses himself or herself within the natural setting, in an attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of the actions and meanings surrounding a specific phenomenon, and their influence on the lived experiences and outcomes of individuals within that setting. In conducting naturalistic observations, the researcher can take on three distinctive roles, including: (1) "complete participant" (i.e., deceptively observe); (2) "participant observer" (i.e., observe or participate in some aspect of life); and 3) "complete observer" (i.e., directly observe with little, if any, interaction) (Bernard, 2006, p. 347). For this study, the researcher drew upon the role of participant observer.

Recruitment. To recruit participants for the observational component, the researcher met individually with New Directions academic and VOICES instructors to provide an overview of the study, and to review the informed consent and answer any questions he/she had about the

study (see Appendix A). All instructors (n = 5) that were approached agreed to participate. Students were not individually consented. Rather, at the beginning of the class session, the researcher obtained oral consent by reading a script aloud to the students that provided a summary of the study and informed them that their participation in the observation session is voluntary (see Appendix B). Students who agreed to be observed indicated their choice by raising their hand. The researcher then documented the date and names of the students who consented to participate on the oral script. Once the names of those who agreed to participate were recorded, the instructor who witnessed the oral consent presentation and verbal consent and the researcher signed and dated the oral consent script to document each student that consented to be observed. The researcher then proceeded with recording information only on students who agreed to be observed.

Furthermore, because participant observations occurred over multiple class sessions, after the first month of observing a class, the researcher orally consented new students on a one-on-one basis. The researcher also committed to memory each consenting participant, as approximately 30 to 40 students attended the school daily, with a five to 15 students in each class session. Additionally, the researcher also consulted with the instructor occasionally to confirm consenting and non-consenting students. Students who initially agreed to participate were also informed throughout the study period that they can opt out of the observations in future sessions by contacting the principal investigator directly.

Participant observations of New Directions' Educational Program were conducted one to two times per week over a 12-month period. As the study progressed, the researcher scaled down the observations to one to two times every other week in order to complete the other data collection components discussed below. The researcher was also unable to conduct observations

between each trimester (approx. 2-3 weeks), as well as on observed U.S. holidays. Table 2 provides a summary of the participant observations. Specifically, between March 2016 and March 2017, the researcher conducted 33 observations for a total of 97.1 hours. On average, each observation session lasted 3.5 hours, and an average of 14 students, five formerly incarcerated young Black men, and five school personnel participated in each observation session.

Table 2
Summary of Participant Observations (n = 33)

Date	No. of hours	Instructor(s)	Class/Activity	Approx. No. of students	Approx. No. of school personnel	Approx. No. of young Black men
3/15/16	5.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown	Morning Circle, Health/P.E., History, English, meet with case manager	18	9	7
3/17/16	2.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown	Health/P.E., History, English	18	6	6
4/13/16	4.3 hrs.	Mr. Brown Ms. Santos	Morning Circle, Health/P.E., History, English, VOICES open mic session	20	8	11
5/20/16	3.8 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mr. Turner	Campus clean up	27	10	14
5/27/16	3.0 hrs.	Ms. Parks	Police brutality workshop, complete volunteer application	28	8	10
6/2/16	3.0 hrs.	Mr. Turner	Mathematics, Science, English, History	18	5	6
6/8/16	2.5 hrs.	Mr. Turner	Science, dance battle, Youth Council graduation meeting, call vendors for donations	20	6	5
6/17/16	2.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	New Directions' Graduation	26	10	7
7/25/16	4.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown Ms. Santos Mrs. Jennings	English; History, Math, meet with volunteer coordinator, VOICES music and poetry	21	4	9
7/29/16	6.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown	Morning circle, hiking Trip	18	5	8
8/17/16	1.5 hrs.		Volunteer meeting	9	5	6
8/18/16	5.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	English, History, U.N.I.T.E., Meet with case manager	45	2	12
8/31/16	1.0 hrs.		Meet with case manager	1	1	1

9/9/16	2.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	Credit recovery; VOICES music studio, U.N.I.T.E.	28	4	14
9/15/16	3.5 hrs.	Mrs. Jennings	Mathematics; Science	18	3	7
9/23/16	2.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	Staff Meeting	0	15	1
10/7/16	1.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	Academic instructor planning session	3	2	2
10/15/16	2.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	U.N.I.T.E.; school potluck	19	4	5
10/17/16	2 hrs.	Mr. Brown	Interview academic instructor	0	3	1
10/18/16	1.5 hrs.		Meet with volunteer coordinator	0	4	1
10/21/16	5.0 hrs.		Interview young Black men	3	5	3
10/28/16	3.0 hrs.	Mrs. Jennings	Interview young Black men; interview academic instructor	1	3	1
1/21/17	1.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	Meet with case manager	3	7	1
2/1/17	2.5 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	History, Science	19	5	7
2/3/17	5.0 hrs.	Mr. Brown Mrs. Jennings	Trip to Museum; Tour of UCLA	14	2	3
2/27/17	1.5 hrs.		Completed FAFSA application with student	6	1	2
3/1/17	3.5 hrs.		Interview school administrator, case manager focus group	8	2	3
3/10/17	2 hrs.		Interview case manager	5	3	2
3/17/17	4.0 hrs.		Interview young Black men	12	5	4
3/24/17	2.0 hrs.		Interview young Black men	7	3	2
4/21/17	2.5 hrs.		Interview young Black men	9	5	3
4/24/17	2.5 hrs.		Interview young Black men	18	7	4
4/27/17	3.0 hrs.		Interview young Black men, Meet with academic tutor	14	3	3
<i>Total:</i>	<i>97.1</i>	<i>5</i>				
<i>Average:</i>	<i>3.5</i>			<i>13.8</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5.2</i>

Throughout the observation period, close attention was paid to the school's physical setting, schoolwide and classroom activities and discussions, and interactions and conversations among and between the various actors (i.e., students, school administrators, teachers, counselors, community partners, etc.) engaged and concerned with the community reintegration processes of young Black men. Given New Directions' strength-based and arts and leadership approach, observational activities also included visual and performing arts programs and performances,

vocational and employment activities, staff and student meetings, field trips, and a graduation ceremony.

To record the observations, the researcher developed unstructured field notes using a pen and notebook. Within two days of each observation, the unstructured field notes were expanded into a Microsoft Word document. Typed field notes included a description of the researcher's direct observations, reflective impressions, experience as a researcher, and future observation activities. Participant observations helped the researcher answer all four research questions.

Semi-structured interviews. In addition to participant observations, the researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews. Specifically, one-on-one interviews were conducted with key school personnel, including a school administrator, case manager and academic instructors, as well as with students who identified as a formerly incarcerated young Black men. Each interview was conducted in a private room at the New Directions, and audio recorded with participants' permission. Sampling and recruitment procedures and participant demographics are discussed below in detail. All names are pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality.

School personnel. As Table 3 displays, four school personnel, including a school administrator, case manager, and two academic instructors participated in a semi-structured interview with the researcher. A convenience sampling approach that included a purposive selection process was used to identify key school personnel to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview (Bernard, 2006; Merriam, 2009). This sampling strategy was selected because the participant observations allowed the researcher to identify school personnel who were deeply embedded within New Directions throughout the study period, and could speak to the various components available to students. These individuals were therefore instrumental in providing in-depth description of the contextual features, practices, processes, and policies

within New Directions that are critical to supporting formerly incarcerated young Black men as they negotiate community reintegration (Merriam, 2009).

Table 3

Name	Title	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	No. of years working with youth offenders?
Ms. Moore	School Administrator	Female	Multi-Racial	13
Ms. Murphy	Case Manager	Female	White	14
Mr. Brown	Academic Instructor	Male	African American/ Black	5
Ms. Jennings	Academic Instructor	Female	Multi-Racial	15

Recruitment. To recruit school personnel, the researcher made an announcement about the interviews at a New Directions staff meeting. During this recruitment activity, the researcher provided school personnel with an overview of the study and his contact information. The researcher also allowed individuals participating in the recruitment activity the opportunity to ask questions about the study. He also requested that those who are volunteering to participate, to offer their contact information to allow him to schedule a date and time for the interview session with him/her directly.

Upon identifying school personnel for the study, the researcher conducted a one-on-one recruitment presentation. Using the informed consent, the researcher provided each potential participant with an overview of the study, his contact information, and explained what it means for them to participate (see Appendix C). Potential participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and any information they provide will be kept confidential. If a potential participant agreed to take part in the study, the researcher proceeded with scheduling and conducting the interview.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct each school personnel interview. Specifically, the school administrator interview explored New Directions organizational history, mission and vision, leadership and staffing structure, budget and funding sources, and student characteristics (see Appendix D). Also discussed was New Directions service model and approach, in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which educational resilience is fostered and cultivated in this school setting, and the organizational and subjective definitions of success. The case manager interview guide focused on the structure of case management services at New Directions (see Appendix E). This included a discussion of the case management leadership/management structure, service approach, community partnerships, and the ways in which students' needs are determined and met. A subjective definition of successful community reintegration was also discussed. Interviews with academic instructors explored the structure of New Directions Educational Program, and each instructor's teaching philosophy (see Appendix F). Instructors were also asked to provide their own definition of successful reentry, describe their teaching and classroom management strategies, and the impact these strategies have on students schooling experiences and performance. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and a \$25 gift card was provided as compensation.

Collectively, school personnel interviews helped to answer all research questions posed. In particular, each participant was asked to describe New Directions service model and their specific role and approach, which helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how educational resilience is fostered in this school setting. Academic instructors and case managers were also asked to provide examples of the ways in which formerly incarcerated young Black men responded to New Direction service model, and the specific strategies and support provided

to address their needs. Each school personnel also provide their own definition of what successful reentry means in this alternative school context.

Formerly incarcerated young Black men. Given that a key goal of the study is to develop a better understanding of the ways in which New Directions facilitates community reintegration among formerly incarcerated young Black men, a purposive selection process that included convenience and snowball sampling approaches were used to recruit potential young Black men for a student interview. Inclusion criteria included:

- Identifies as African American/Black;
- Between the ages of 18 and 25;
- Has not earned a high school diploma or GED at the time of the first interview;
- Enrolled in New Directions for at least three months; and
- Released from a correctional facility within the past five years.

Recruitment. To recruit formerly incarcerated young Black men, the researcher provided school personnel with a recruitment flyer to post throughout the school that provided a summary of the study, eligibility criteria, and the researchers contact information (see Appendix G). The researcher also consulted with a case manager at New Directions regarding eligible, potential participants, in order to ensure a diverse group of young men were identified for participation. Specifically, the case manager identified eligible participants using the school's data tracking system, and met with them on a one-on-one basis to provide them with an overview of the study and the researchers contact information. Young men who expressed an interest in participating in the study were instructed to contact the researcher directly by phone or in-person to learn more about the study and what it meant for them to participate.

Once identified, the researcher conducted one-on-one recruitment presentations with interested potential participants. Using the informed consent, the researcher provided potential participants with an overview of the study, his contact information, and explained what it means for them to participate (see Appendix H). Potential participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and any information they provide will be kept confidential and not affect their educational or criminal status. If a potential participant agreed to take part in the study, the researcher proceeded with scheduling and conducting the interview. He also obtained multiple forms of contact to ensure the participant could be reached for a second interview. If a potential participant did not agree to participate, an interview was not conducted. A total of 11 formerly incarcerated young men were identified as a potential participant for the study, however, three refused to participate for unknown reasons.

As Table 4 displays, a total of eight formerly incarcerated young Black men participated in a semi-structured interview, and a total of 12 interviews were conducted. The average age of the young men was 20.7, and had nearly completed the eleventh grade prior to enrolling in New Directions. In terms of their living arrangement, three were renting a house or apartment, three were living with family, one resided in a sober living home, and another was homeless (i.e., couch surfing). Additionally, two participants were employed and four were unemployed at the time of their first interview. Three young men also reported current involvement with a gang and one was affiliated. Participants were also released from a correctional facility between February 2015 and March 2017, and enrolled in New Directions between August 2015 and November 2016.

Name	Age	Date of last release	Date enrolled	Grade prior to enrollment	Living arrangement	Employed?	Gang involvement?
Chris*	25	2/2015	8/2015	10 th Grade	Sober living home	Yes	No
Erick	18	3/2017	10/2016	11 th Grade	Family member's house	No	Yes
Joshua*	20	1/2017	8/2015	11 th Grade	Homeless	No	Yes
Kevin*	20	7/2015	12/2015	11 th Grade	Renting a house/apartment	No	No
Michael	21	10/2016	11/2016	11 th Grade	Family members house	No	No
Paul	21	3/2015	1/2016	11 th Grade	Renting a house/apartment	No	No
Robert*	19	4/2015	2/2016	11 th Grade	Family member's house	Yes	Yes
William	18	6/2015	8/2015	11 th Grade	Renting a house/apartment	No	Affiliated
* = <i>Completed two study interviews</i>	<i>Avg. 20.7</i>	<i>2/2015 through 3/2017</i>	<i>8/2015 through 11/2016</i>	<i>10th = 1 11th = 7</i>	<i>Family = 3 Homeless = 1 Renting = 3 Transitional = 1</i>	<i>Yes = 2 No = 6</i>	<i>Yes = 3 No = 4 Affiliated = 1</i>

A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate each interview session (see Appendix I). Questions focused on the young men's schooling experiences prior to and during their enrollment at New Directions, as well as their individual definitions of successful reentry. The first interview was designed to explore how these young men perceived their life experiences prior to enrolling in New Directions, including their family, neighborhood, school and incarceration experiences. The second interview was designed to explore the ways in which these young men perceived New Directions' contextual features, practices, and process to influence their school and community reentry processes.

While all eight participants were contacted for a second interview, only four young men participated in two interviews, including Chris, Joshua, Kevin, and Robert. Nevertheless,

because the interviews were semi-structured, the researcher was able to questions nearly all participants about their experiences and perceptions of New Directions prior to and after enrolling. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, was audio recorded with participants' permission, and conducted in a private room at New Directions. Participants received a \$25 gift card for completing the first interview, and a \$35 gift card for completing the second. These interviews helped the researcher answer all of the research questions posed, as these data captured an in-depth account of the young men's alternative school experiences and the mechanisms they perceived to buffer their reentry obstacles.

Focus group. One focus group with New Directions case managers was also conducted. A convenience sampling approach was used to identify and recruit case managers for the study. Specifically, the researcher attended a case manager meeting to provide an overview of the study along with his contact information. The researcher also answered any questions potential participants had about the study, and requested that those interested in participating in the focus group provide their contact information.

Among the five case managers, four agreed to participate in the focus group. The researcher also worked closely with the case managers to confirm a date and time for the focus group. Prior to conducting the focus group, the researcher reviewed the informed consent with each potential participant in group setting, to provide them with an overview of the study, his contact information, and an explanation of what it meant for them to participate (see Appendix J). Potential participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and any information they provide will be kept confidential. Once potential participants agreed to participate in the study, the researcher proceeded with conducting the focus group.

With regards to participant characteristics, three of the four case managers identified as a White female, and one identified as a multi-racial female. All four participants held a bachelor's degree, and were currently enrolled in a masters-level social work (MSW) program. Given their student status, each case manager was completing their MSW internship at New Directions, and had only worked at New Directions for six months at the time of the focus group. Additionally, three participants began working with system-involved youth upon being placed at New Directions, and one reported working with system-involved youth for more than one year.

A semi-structured focus group guide was used to conduct the group interview session, as this approach enabled the researcher to devote time to issues that emerged from the discussions (see Appendix K). Topics focused on the case manager's service approach, including the ways in which they determine student's needs, as well as the types of supports and resources most commonly provided to formerly incarcerated young Black men. Participants were also asked to describe their best practices and challenges in working with formerly incarcerated young Black men, and to provide their own definition of successful reentry in the context of the alternative school setting. The focus group lasted approximately one hour, was audio recorded with participants' permission, and conducted in a private room at New Directions. Each participant received a \$25 gift card for their participation.

This data collection method helped the researcher answer all three research questions, as it sought to better understand how case managers in this educational setting define success in terms of education and community reintegration, and the ways in which they foster and cultivate strength-building resources during and outside the school setting. Case managers also discussed how formerly incarcerated young Black men engage with and interact with them as they contend with community reintegration.

Document review. A document review was also employed as part of the study. This included a review of New Directions’ organizational documents (e.g., program design, policies, procedures and reports and newsletters), students’ recruitment and enrollment documents, school and class handouts, and student work. Online and hardcopy media documents and news clippings were also reviewed, and digital images of the schools physical setting was captured and reviewed. This process helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of New Directions’ organizational and educational program objectives and approach, prior to and throughout the data collection period. This also allowed the researcher to triangulate the other data that was collected as part of this study.

Analytic Procedures

Data analysis paid close attention to the grand tour and three sub-research questions as a whole. Prior to data analysis, all written field notes were compiled into a Microsoft Word document, and all audio-recorded interviews and focus group sessions were professionally transcribed. Observational, interview, and focus groups data were then uploaded into Atlas.ti, a computer-based program that assists researchers with organizing, managing, analyzing qualitative data. Given that the development of a rich, thick description of a case and its setting is a key goal of case study research, the following analytic methods were utilized: (1) coding; (2) constant comparisons; and (3) memoing (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Lofland et al., 2005). While these analytic methods are typically associated with a grounded theory research design, they are nonetheless “*inductive* and *comparative* and has been widely used throughout qualitative research without building a grounded theory” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175).

Coding. Coding is an emergent process that involves the categorical aggregation of multiple data sources for the establishment of key themes and patterns (Creswell, 2007). During

the coding process, the researcher categorizes “segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Coding is therefore one of the initial steps to facilitating data analysis and interpretation, as it helps to illuminate concrete statements in the data. While coding can be used to analyze data from nearly all types of qualitative research designs, Corbin and Strauss (2008) posit that coding is especially appropriate for qualitative studies that seek to discover “ongoing actions/interactions/emotions taken in response to situations, or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem” (pp. 96-97). As such, a three-stage coding procedure guided data analysis and interpretation for the case study. These stages included: (1) initial coding; (2) focused coding; and (3) axial coding. However, prior to beginning the coding process, the researcher first reviewed each field note, interview and focus group transcript, and school, class and student documents for familiarity. Data sources that were audio recorded were reviewed with the audio to ensure accurate transcription.

Initial Coding. Initial or open coding is a fundamental step to the analytic coding process. This coding process helps to identify the bones of the data, as the researcher is required to remain open to what he/she can discover and define (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam, 2009). The researcher therefore coded segments all data sources to ensure his own ideas or bias did not cloud or extend beyond what the data was saying.

Because describing, rather than analyzing is a key goal with initial coding, the researcher developed “in vivo codes,” which are words or short phrases taken from the data during this coding phase (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). In vivo codes assisted the researcher in describing and analyzing the events and interactions that occurred at New Directions, as these codes represent “symbolic markers” that can help a researcher with understanding the assumptions of study

participants (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). As such, in coding from the perspective of all study participants, the researcher paid close attention to the language New Directions school personnel, instructors and students used. This process helped him to better understand the implicit meanings this alternative school plays in the community reintegration experiences of formerly incarcerated young adult Black men, and the ways in which these individuals constructed and acted upon those meanings.

The researcher also developed “process codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 77). With process coding, the researcher develops codes from the data using gerunds (i.e., words ending in “ing”), to identify action, including what is happening in a setting, what people do, how people act and interact, and the emotions surrounding their actions and interactions (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Process coding was useful to the analytic process because it assisted the researcher to remain attentive to the context (i.e., antecedents) and consequences (i.e. results) of the behaviors in this setting that relate to the community reintegration experiences of formerly incarcerated young Black men.

Focused coding. While initial coding helps to identify and describe the bones of the data, focused coding involves a deeper analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006). During this coding phase, the researcher identifies and arranges frequent/significant initial codes into multiple categories of codes (Charmaz, 2006). This process moves the researcher away from describing towards synthesizing and explaining large segments of the data, as the codes developed during this phase are “directed, selective, and conceptual” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). As such, following initial coding, the researcher reviewed each data source again in its entirety, marking areas in the data where frequent/significant initial codes were present. The researcher then grouped all initial and focused codes by their similarities, and displayed them in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to

compare among and between the codes and the collected data. Once focused codes were refined, the researcher descriptively defined the meaning of each code for the development of a codebook.

Axial Coding. The third coding phase involved collapsing the focused codes into thematic categories to establish patterns across the multiple data sources. According to Charmaz (2006), “axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). To identify the relationship between categories and subcategories, the researcher asked “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” throughout this coding phase, as this active involvement with the data helped him to develop a rich, thick description of the ways in which educational resilience is fostered and cultivated in New Directions’, particularly among formerly incarcerated young adult Black men (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). The researcher also diagramed the categories and subcategories, including segments of the data, in order to draw linkages.

Constant Comparisons. In order to establish analytic distinctions that allowed the researcher to make comparisons across all data sources and categories, the researcher constantly compared all data sources, codes, and categories throughout all three coding phases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Specifically, the researcher developed data matrices and diagrams to compare data to data and data with codes, in order to illuminate key similarities and differences. This process included a comparison of statements and incidents that occurred within or between interviews and focus groups data, and observations of routine interactions and events at New Directions that occurred on different days and times, and across classrooms. Furthermore, I compared categories to categories to characterize and dimensionalize the categories that

contributed to emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Because coding and constant comparisons are an iterative process, the researcher immediately began to compare the data sources once he typed at least one unstructured field note, and transcribed and reviewed at least one interview and focus group data.

Memoing. In addition to coding and conducting constant comparisons, the researcher also developed memos to facilitate data analysis and interpretation. Memoing is crucial to generating meaning, as this analytic tool allows researchers to document, track, synthesize, and reflect upon their analytic decisions, thoughts, hunches, and questions about the data (Charmaz, 2006, Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It also provides a venue for the creation of charts and diagrams of concepts and relationships between concepts. Memoing thus offers researchers the opportunity to try out his/her ideas in relation to the focused codes developed, a newly forming a category, or a basic social process (Charmaz, 2006).

As such, the researcher wrote a memo following each observation, focus group and interview session, as well as following a review of each interview and focus group transcript. This process helped him to capture his initial impressions of the case site and each study participant throughout the study period. Additionally, following the initial coding phase, the researcher wrote another memo that described what he thought was happening at New Directions, particularly in relation to formerly incarcerated young adult Black men's community reintegration experiences. Throughout the focused and axial coding phases, he also developed advanced analytic memos that compared within and across all data sources, codes, and categories, to draw and verify emerging interpretations (Charmaz, 2006).

Rigor and trustworthiness. Regardless of the epistemological assumptions inductive and deductive research designs have about the development of knowledge, both pose threats to

the merit of its studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Yet, due to their varied epistemological assumptions, different criteria should be used to judge the soundness of the methods employed, and the reliability of a study's findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four specific criteria qualitative researchers can use to judge the rigor and trustworthiness of their research: (1) credibility; (2) dependability; (3) confirmability; and (4) transferability. The researcher used this framework to ensure the case study is of high quality.

Credibility. The credibility criterion used to judge the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research aims to ensure that a study's findings are believable and hold value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, because the study's findings depend largely on observational data he used three credibility strategies to increase the rigor of the methodological procedures and the credibility of the study's findings. These strategies include: (1) prolonged engagement; (2) triangulation; and (3) peer debriefing.

Prolonged Engagement. Prolonged engagement requires that a researcher spend adequate time in the field collecting data (Lincoln & Guba). This strategy increases the credibility of the data collected, as the researcher takes a sufficient amount of time to better understand the culture, social setting, or phenomenon under investigation. The researcher therefore addressed the credibility criterion by conducting persistent observations of New Directions (i.e., 1 – 2 days per week) over a 12-month period.

Triangulation. Triangulation is a strategy in which a researcher uses multiple sources of data to investigate a phenomenon of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy improves the credibility of study because it helps to reduce the bias that is present during the research process (i.e., researcher, respondent, reactivity), as the researcher can compare many different data sources to assess the collected and analyzed data (Padgett, 2008). The researcher therefore

relied on participant observations, interview and focus group data, and reviews of school, class, and student documents to confirm and verify consistency with regards to the data collection and analytic procedures.

Peer Debriefing. Peer debriefing refers to the process of allowing your colleagues and/or external experts in the fields of study to scrutinize the data collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This credibility strategy helps to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of a study as it offers a researcher to refine his/her methodological decisions, and challenge any assumptions that is being made about data. As such, the researcher met with a group of doctoral-level students who are engaged in qualitative research and writing and his dissertation chair at least once per month throughout the research process. During these meetings he discussed his ongoing research activities, including any accomplishments and challenges he was experiencing, and documented any feedback he receive regarding his methodological and analytic decisions.

Dependability and Confirmability. Two additional standards used to judge the credibility of a qualitative study includes *dependability* and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability refers to the stability of a study, particularly pertaining to how it was conceptualized, and a researchers' consistency in carrying out the data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures. Confirmability refers to the neutrality of a study's findings; that is, the degree to which a researcher's bias, motivations, and interest influence the conclusions drawn. To address these two credibility criteria, the researcher used two strategies: (1) audit trail; and (2) reflexivity.

Audit Trail. An audit trail describes of the steps a researcher takes to conceptualize and conduct a study, including his/her rationale for the methodological and interpretive decisions that were made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, all of hand-written field notes were developed in a

notebook, and each field note was labeled with the date, time, and goals of the observation activity. Using Atlas.ti to store, manage, and analyze all of the data sources and memos, the researcher was able to develop a comprehensive trail of his methodological and interpretive decisions and intentions and dispositions throughout the research process. For instance, someone interested in judging the dependability and confirmability of the proposed study could use Atlas.ti to search for specific words within and across data sources that sufficiently represent the conclusions drawn, or identify excerpts from that data that are assigned to specific codes and categories.

Reflexivity. Given the researcher plays a critical role in developing knowledge from a qualitative study, his/her personal background, motivations, and interest must be attended to throughout the research process, to ensure the findings are based on the experiences and perspectives of the study participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As noted above, the researcher developed memos in Atlas.ti that described, in detail, the context and background of the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). Specifically, he explored how the context (e.g., social issues, cultural issues, geographic issues), the situation (current or past as appropriate), and the background (knowledge of the situation) may have influenced the data that was produced, constructed, or co-constructed during an interview, focus group, or observation session. To do this, the researcher questioned himself about the elements of the context and the ways in which they may have affected how things that were said or done in an interview, focus group, or observation session. The memos were also data-based and analytical, as the researcher included excerpts of data, codes, and an analysis of these codes. The researcher also attempted to remain analytical and critical during the memo writing process, in order to help him better understand if what he was analyzing and interpreting was actually happening in this alternative

school setting. Additionally, the researcher was reflexive in his memos by identifying and naming his own potential bias that might affect his analysis and description of the participants and context.

Transferability. Transferability, which refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to other contexts, is the fourth criterion for judging the rigor and trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish transferability, the researcher provided *thick descriptions* of the studies context, setting and participants, research methods, and examples of raw data, including direct quotes from focus group and interview data and excerpts from the observational field notes. This technique helped to show how and why the researcher arrived at the conclusions he did, which allows readers to determine if the study's findings are transferrable.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

Given that incarcerated individuals and those on parole/probation face restrictions on liberty, autonomy, and limited privacy, it is essential that research studies involving this population provide specific protections. As such, prior to launching the study, the researcher obtained approval from the University of California, Los Angeles' (UCLA) Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. He also ensured that the rights of formerly incarcerated young Black men were retained with a sampling approach that allows eligible participants the free choice to participate in and withdraw from the study at their discretion. In addition, the researcher provided written descriptions of confidentiality to study participant, and specified the limits to confidentiality during recruitment presentations, such as the intent to harm self or others and child abuse. Interviews and focus groups were also conducted in a private room at New Directions, and participants who successfully completed an individual or group

interview was compensated in the form of a gift card. Questions included in the interview guide also posed minimal risk to the emotional health of the respondents, and pseudonyms were developed prior to disseminating the studies finding to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Reflexivity Statement

To clarify my background, perspectives, and to account for my potential bias, it is essential that I disclose that I am Black, male, and come from a poor inner-city community. However, while these identities are fundamentally who I am, they have not determined what I am. Nevertheless, collectively, these identities continue to play an influential role in shaping how I view the world and those around me. More specifically, in believing that I am what most people would consider “at-risk,” and given my practice and research experience with youth at risk and involved with the criminal justice system makes me, in some ways, an insider to this community and population. I was therefore attentive to my various identities and lived experiences throughout the data collection, analytic, and interpretation processes, to ensure that my own thoughts, experiences, emotions, and biases did not cloud the actual experiences and perspectives of those under investigation. Conversely, because I have never experienced physical incarceration, I also consider myself as an outsider, as I do not fully understand the lived experience of having a criminal record. Nevertheless, by being aware and reflective of these potential biases helped to increase the quality of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as well as my accountability to the target population and intellectual audience invested in these issues.

CHAPTER 5

DEFINING SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION

Introduction

For me, I was raised with a definition of success being, you go to high school, you graduate from high school, you go to college and you graduate from college, and you get a good paying job. That's what success meant for me and for my community. I've been really fortunate to be able to be in a community [New Directions] where I learned that everyone has different definitions of success, and different meanings. And being able to face my biases. First of all, realizing that I had them, and second of all moving them away and shedding them.... Success for them [students] means getting what they want in life. It doesn't mean my definition of success.... It's taken a really long time for me to grasp that and to continue to use that in my meetings, because oftentimes I realize I get frustrated easily when things aren't going the way in my head... I'd be like, 'You're so close to doing this, why are you just gonna go back and ruin this for yourself?' But, it's not about my definition of success and it's not my life. It's about helping them get what they want, obviously in a safe and healthy way. – Julie, Case Manager

The key goal of this case study is to develop a better understanding of how educational resilience is fostered and cultivated in an alternative school for formerly incarcerated young adults. Yet, in order to do so, this case study will first describe how successful community reintegration was defined at New Directions. Identifying how success was defined at New Direction was important because as Julie, a case manager, stated in the quote above, some school personnel often had to face and shed themselves of their biases concerning what they thought success should look like for the students. As such, by triangulating the data collected, this case

study identifies four themes that describes the ways in which successful community reintegration was defined at New Directions, including: (1) “Educationally Advanced;” (2) “Jobs Are a Big One;” (3) “Emotionally Stable;” and (4) “Off Probation.”

“Educationally Advanced”

One way in which successful community reintegration was defined at New Directions was “educationally advanced.” To be educationally advanced in this school setting generally meant that a student has earned his/her high school diploma. It’s not surprising that the school defined earning a high school diploma as a marker of successful reentry at New Directions, as a key goal their educational program is to serve as a “site for youth who have been suspended or expelled or dropped out of high school”. Young Black male interviewees, such as Robert, stated directly that earning a high school diploma was the first step to achieving successful reentry:

At New Directions, success is one, achieving a high school diploma. That’s like the first step of being successful. That’s opening up the gates. Like the first seed that you do plant to be successful... And then you get this diploma, and this diploma can lead you down any path you want it to lead.... So I feel like you have to be successful in education in order to be successful in life.

As Robert expressed, earning a high school diploma is the initial step to achieving success, as it “can lead you down any path you want it to lead.” Meaning, a high school diploma creates endless possibilities.

Earning a high school diploma was of particular importance to the young men, because they perceived a high school diploma to hold more value than a GED. For instance, during my interview with Joshua, he explained that attending an alternative school that offers a high school

diploma is a “huge benefit” for him, because he perceived this opportunity to increase his chances of obtaining legitimate employment. He stated:

[Attending New Directions is a] huge benefit for me because I haven't graduated high school, and I'm going to be 21 in a few months.... For me, that's a huge benefit because I wasn't able to do it then in high school. And the reason also because it's not a GED that I'm obtaining here, it's a high school diploma. So to me that's a benefit just by the name 'cause it sounds different.... The name makes a big difference just because of how people will look at it like, 'Oh ... he didn't graduate high school or he didn't pass so he had to stay further and continue and do this, or he was either incarcerated too many times or in jail.' They [employers] see the diploma, they're gonna be like, 'Oh, okay. He went to a regular high school or whatever and he got a diploma.' So the name sounds better, and looks better.

From Joshua's perspective, aging, having a criminal record, and employer perceptions are important factors to why earning a high school diploma is more valuable than earning a GED. Specifically, his statement, “The name makes a big difference just because of how people will look at it” highlights his belief that employers will perceive him as motivated towards legitimate employment, given his age and involvement with the criminal justice system. All of the other stakeholder groups interviewed also agreed that a high school diploma is an important marker of successful community reintegration because of its tie to other pro-social opportunities, namely employment.

The perception that education plays an important role in increasing opportunities for legitimate employment was apparent throughout the study given the use of multiple modes of data collection. For instance, in the following field note, I provide a description of an interaction

I had with two young Black men while facilitating the IRB oral script in Mr. Brown's history class:

Given the number of new students in this class, I mentioned to Mr. Brown that it would be good for me to facilitate the IRB script again for the new students. Like the first class, all students agreed to participate in the study. I also allowed the students to ask me questions, wherein many were interested in what school I attended and where I attended prior to moving to Los Angeles. I explained to them that I am current student at UCLA, and previously attended UC Berkeley for my bachelors and the University of Michigan for my masters. After stating the schools I attended, two young Black men with University of Southern California hats on laughed, and one asked jokingly, 'Why are you here?' Being that I'm a current UCLA student. We all laughed at his question given the rivalry that exists between the two universities. Once the room calmed down a bit from laughter, the other young Black man then expressed aloud, 'you can have any job you want going to those schools. They'll just walk you in the door.' While this interaction reminded me of my privilege as an educated Black man with no criminal record, I wondered if the young man would have made the same comment had I listed universities with less prestige. – Field Note, 4-13-16

The young man's comment, "you can have any job you want going to those schools," in many ways points to the important role individuals in this school setting perceives education can play in one's life chances, particularly employment. Additionally, in saying, "they'll just walk you in the door," shows how some students at New Directions believed that the type of school one attends can influence of his/her chances of obtaining employment.

This finding was reinforced during my interview with Robert. Specifically, while providing a definition of successful reentry, Robert discussed the difference between obtaining a high school diploma from a correctional education program versus a community-based educational program. He explained:

School in there [correctional facility] is dumb founded. In there you learn like you slow or something. I wouldn't want to learn from there, it's not somewhere where you'd want to have your education come out of. It's like a dude saying he went to SC [University of Southern California] and then another went to this off the brand D2 [Division II] or D3 [Divisions III] college. Who's gone get the job? The guy at USC.

My direct observations and interviews with the students highlighted the connection that New Directions reinforced between education and employment. This was especially the case with regards to the type of degree earned and the awarding educational institution.

Having expanded employment opportunities was not the only benefit of earning a high school diploma at New Directions. In particular, young Black men who participated in a study interview explained that earning a high school diploma will help them to address their reentry obstacles. For instance, Chris, who was living in a sober living home at the time of his interview explained:

A lot of people [at the sober living home] who don't have no education really don't talk as much, because they don't have anything to talk about. They just kept with the same conversation over and over and over, and I was like, I don't wanna grow up, or I don't want to see myself going in that type of direction where I didn't have that education to get me up out of there. I felt like education was the only way to get me up out of that

sober living home. Not saying that I didn't want to be there, but in order for me to be out of there I knew education was the key.

Observing the life trajectories of other residents at the sober living home who did not have an education played a key role in motivating Chris to reenroll in school. He expressed that “education was the key,” because earning a high school diploma will help him to address his obstacle in finding stable housing. Being able to address reentry obstacles, especially housing, was important for Chris, because if unaddressed, his ability to “educationally advance” was challenged. Additionally, as Amber, a case manager suggested: “If you got crazy things going on in our life you're not gonna do well in school. You're not gonna care about school. I know I wouldn't.”

“Being on time to the game.” While earning a high school diploma was the most common way that “educationally advanced” was defined at New Directions, it was also defined as “being on time to the game.” To be on time to the game generally meant that students are attending school regularly and participating in the learning process. Attending school regularly and participating in the learning process were considered important elements of “educationally advanced” because study participants believed that if a student is attending regularly, then he/she should be earning credits towards graduation. For instance, in the following field note, Mr. Brown, an academic instructor, demonstrated the meaning of “being on time to the game” while using students' tardiness as an example to get the class working on a group assignment.

Before I grabbed a seat, Mr. Brown informed me that the students had recently read an article titled, “How to Be Like Mike: 21 Life Lessons from Michael Jordan,” and were working in groups of three to develop their own list of 21 life lessons that could include a combination of rules, quotes, and short summaries. I thanked him again for allowing me

to observe his class and proceeded to a small desk located on the right side of the classroom. In the short time I had to observe this activity, I noticed that students were walking in and out of the classroom, and sitting down talking to each other. Additionally, the laptop storage station was in Mr. Brown's class, so students from other classes would also frequently interrupt the class to ask Mr. Brown to sign them out for a laptop. Students who were late, and unaware of which class they belonged also interrupted the class by asking Mr. Brown which class they belonged in. It seemed as if Mr. Brown didn't have much control over the classroom, because only a few students seemed to be engaged in the learning process. However, I wasn't sure if this was part the structure or culture of the class being that it was my first day observing.

Nevertheless, because some students were struggling to develop life lessons Mr. Brown used the students who were tardy as an opportunity to display an example of a life lesson. He mentioned that because students are frequently late and constantly interrupting the class, an example life lesson could be, "Be on time to the game." The students laughed at him and went back and forth about how that life lesson was unrealistic because some students travel really far to get to school on time. Despite this, Mr. Brown responded that there are many students that face numerous barriers to getting to school on time, and further expressed, "the students who are here are serious about their education. They are the cream of the crop. – Field Note, 3-16-16

According to Mr. Brown, students who are on time to school and participate in the learning process received positive messages and labels, such as, "they are the cream of the crop." These messages and labels, in many ways, points to "being on time to the game" as an important element of the concept of educationally advanced, because attending regularly and participating

in the learning process helped students to earn high school diploma. Young Black male interviewees echoed this belief, because, as a result of their past schooling experiences which often resulted in suspension, expulsion, and in some cases, incarceration, they, like other students, arrived at New Directions over-age and under-credited.

The concept of “being on time to the game” was also seen in school and classroom rules and expectations. Specifically, the walls in New Directions classrooms included posted signs that read, “No Cell Phones,” and “Smoking is Strictly Prohibited on the Premise.” These expectations were also promoted throughout the entire school, so as to remove potential distractions that would prevent students from engaging in the learning process. The young Black men also described that academic instructors often attempted to maintain these rules and expectations throughout the learning process. For instance, when asked to describe the expectations teachers have for students, Joshua stated:

Expectations that teachers have for us is just to come to school and do our work and not to be on our phones, and to be in class on time, and when we’re in class to just focus and just do our work, and respect them and respect others in this class.

In all, to be “educationally advanced” at New Directions generally referred to a student earning a high school diploma. Earning a high school diploma is important because study participants perceived this achievement to expand students’ employment opportunities, which in turn can help them address reentry obstacles. Yet, while earning a high school diploma was identified as the key element of “educationally advanced,” those who were earning credits and on track to graduating were also deemed a success.

“Jobs Are a Big One”

“Jobs are a big one” is another way that New Directions defined successful community reintegration. This concept refers to students obtaining and maintaining employment. For instance, when describing the supportive services available to students at New Directions, Ms. Moore, a school administrator explained:

We work with [West Coast Counseling Solutions] and they provide therapy and substance abuse, and we have case management, and all these other things, which is awesome, and they’re all supportive services. But at the end of the day ... jobs are a big one.... At the heart of it all, it’s getting them [students] prepared to work. Employed to the point where they cannot just get a job, but keep a job!

While Ms. Moore describes supportive services, such as therapy and substance abuse treatment, as essential to students’ school reentry processes, she expressed that obtaining and maintaining employment is “at the heart” of how New Directions defines successful reentry.

“Jobs area big one,” was also evidenced during field observations. For example, while observing a Mr. Turner’s mathematics class, I recorded the following:

As I sat in one of the small desk, Kevin, a slender, dark skin young black man who had a short fade haircut and wore blue jeans and a white shirt shared with Mr. Turner that that he had a job interview. Mr. Turner acknowledged him by saying, “wow that’s great. Congratulations.” As the other students began to arrive, the room started to get a little loud as the students were talking amongst each other. While I was recording my observations of the physical space of the classroom, I overheard Kevin share several times with other students that he had a job interview tomorrow. Because students were talking loudly, and class was about to begin, Mr. Turner asked everyone to sit down and

to get started on the “Do Now” activity that was written on the white board. Once the students began to work on their ‘Do Now’ assignment, Juan, a Latino student who appeared to be in his late teens walked in late to class. Within the first few minutes of arriving to class, Juan made a loud announcement that he received a job offer with McDonalds. Upon hearing this news, Mr. Turner responded to Juan by saying, ‘that’s great,’ and gave him a hi-five that could be heard from the other classrooms. However, because Juan was disrupting the class, Mr. Turner instructed him to grab a seat as they were just beginning the ‘Do Now’ assignment and were already behind schedule. Juan then sat at the table next to Kevin, the young Black man who stated he had an interview tomorrow. Once Juan sat down, Kevin made another announcement to the class that he has an interview tomorrow after school. It seemed as if Kevin was mentioning this again because there were a few other students, including Juan, who did not hear this news earlier due to their late arrival. Over the next 30 minutes, Kevin repeated aloud at least eight more times that he had a job interview the following day. I found Kevin’s announcement to the class about his job interview to be interesting, as he was unaware of the name of the company he was interviewing with when Juan asked him where he was interviewing. Instead of saying the name, Kevin replied, say ‘man I forgot the name, but it’s that one with the commercial that says, Nationwide is on your side.’ –
Field Note, 6-2-16

In the example above, Mr. Turner’s response to Kevin and Juan shows how students are celebrated for their employment-related success. This is also evidenced in the case of Kevin and Juan who both expressed their sense of accomplishment by making a group announcement. Additionally, Kevin, who constantly repeated to the class that he had a job interview, even

though he could not recall the name of the company further highlights how being in a position to potentially obtain legitimate employment was important to the post-incarceration schooling experiences of students at New Directions.

Young Black men also perceived obtaining and maintaining employment to be a critical aspect to achieving successful reentry because they considered this marker as a means to becoming self-sufficient, legitimately. For instance, when asked to provide a definition of successful reentry, Robert stated, “Successful for me is living a life where I don’t have to worry about bills being paid.” Additionally, when asked what does it mean to “be a man,” Erick, an 18-year-old Black man also expressed:

Somebody that's able to take care of their self. Somebody that don't need their mother.

Don't get me wrong, mothers can always be a mother, they're always gonna... I'm always gonna be a baby boy to my mother. But, me, as a man, I'm ready to just get my own place, start living my own life, maybe start my family, all type of stuff. That's me becoming a man. Paying bills, having responsibilities.

Moreover, given their criminal histories, some aspired to own their own businesses to support themselves, legitimately. For instance, Michael, who was a graduate of the program explained:

My little frame of success is, for me, I don’t see money as being everything, I see it as a necessity, needed. But I feel like me, I just want to live comfortably, just wanna be a middle-class person. I wanna have my business oriented, my film, my video production.... Have everything in line so I don’t need nobody ... you feel me? I really want to be self-employed, one day owning my own film business, selling cameras too, fixing them cameras and stuff like that.

In addition to achieving self-sufficiency and owning a business, New Directions students and staff defined obtaining and maintaining employment as a means to address reentry obstacles. In particular, Joshua, who shared he was homeless at the time of his first interview, had been accepted into transitional housing program at the time of his second interview. However, in order to remain in the housing program, he was required to obtain employment. He explained:

I'm enrolled in a [transitional housing program] and ... the requirements are for you to have a job and to be a foster child.... One of the requirements I don't have, and that's a job. So they were okay with me enough to get me in the program, but they'll always tell me to find a job, find a job, find a job, and find a job. I found a few jobs but they want me to find a long term job so they can see that I'm making consistent money so they could be able to tell the landlord, because the program is free. And that's why I'm having a little bit of trouble right now just finding jobs.... [The biggest trouble is] being able to hold one job and then finding a good one that's close to me.... I've had a few jobs, but I haven't been able to hold 'em. But just by me having those few jobs it helps me to get somewhere, and just being in school and having a job will help me to stay out the way of getting into any kind of trouble or anything that I'm not supposed to be getting into. It just kind of focuses me on a straight path to do the right thing.

As noted in the above examples, employment was perceived as critical to helping the young men achieve self-sufficiency and address their reentry obstacles. Joshua also points out that pro-social activities, such as employment, can “help [him] to stay out of the way of getting into any kind of trouble.” This statement highlights his belief that employment can support his process towards crime desistance, as he further expressed that having a job keeps him “focused” and “on a straight path.”

“Employable.” The concept of “employable” was also a component of “jobs are a big one.” In particular, throughout the observation period, to be “employable” typically referred to a student developing pre-job skills (e.g., resume, cover letter, interviewing skills). Developing work readiness skills and documents was an important element of “jobs are a big one,” because it was believed that students who accomplished these tasks had an increased chance of obtaining an interviewing and receiving a job offer.

Given the important role participants placed on employment, case managers spent the majority of their time helping students to become “employable.” For instance, when asked to describe their perceived role at New Directions, case managers stated:

Our role varies, I think, depending on the member [student].... There are a lot of students who are a lot more focused, because so many of them are looking to graduate as quickly as possible and get jobs.... So we’re really trying to help them hone in on those resumes and interviewing skills. – Amber, Case Manager

I would say a huge chunk of our time is spent with job applications and resume and cover letter writing.... The majority of the verbiage I’ve been using [to engage students] is, ‘do you need help with a job?’.... Or, ‘do you need help with a resume? Do you need help figuring out what credits you need?’ I’d say those are the main questions I’ve been asking the past six months I’ve been here. – Denise, Case Manager

Case management is definitely about jobs, and how’s your credit situation going. – Crystal, Case Manager

Young Black men also typically sought out case managers for help with job applications, resume and cover letter development, and preparing for interviews, because perceived this support to improve their own chances of obtaining legitimate employment. For instance, Robert explained:

We also have a case management group. That's their job is to always find things in the community that we can participate in. Like I have worked with them on creating a resume and getting a job outside of school activities.... That's how I got my first legit job with them.

As demonstrated in the examples above, interactions between case managers and students at New Directions primarily focus on employment. Denise, for example, found interactions with students that centered on employment to be an effective strategy to engage them in case management services. Young Black men also perceived case managers as a pathway towards legitimate employment, as Robert stated, "that's how I got my first legit job with them." Additionally, as illustrated by Amber, even the possibility of obtaining legitimate employment motivated some students towards earning a high school diploma, "quickly."

In addition to enhancing students work readiness, to be employable at New Directions also meant having work experience. Given that many students had little to no work experience, New Directions was intentional about connecting them to internships. According to Ms. Moore, a school administrator, placing a student in an internship is important because it helps them "to get a foot in the door." She stated:

We have a partnership with [West LA Vocational Services] ... and they're able to place young people at a job for 200 hours as an internship. Paid internship! And then if they do well, that place of business is required to hire them, essentially, so it's like a foot in the door.

Getting a "foot in the door," was important for students at New Directions, because they often arrived at New Direction with limited work histories, and some experienced employment discrimination given their race/ethnicity and/or criminal status. The young Black male

interviewees therefore perceived their participation in an internship as valuable to their community and school reentry processes, because they felt they were more prepared to enter the workforce. For instance, Michael, who worked an internship with New Directions expressed:

I've been with New Directions [since being released], and the internship experience here has taught me a lot and I gained a lot of knowledge, skills, and a lot of getting familiar with the workplace. How to conduct myself at a job place and collect money and save and spend and budget.

Participating in an internship not only helped Michael to feel more “familiar with the workplace,” he also highlights how this experience enhanced his life skills, particularly in terms of saving and budgeting.

“Emotionally Stable”

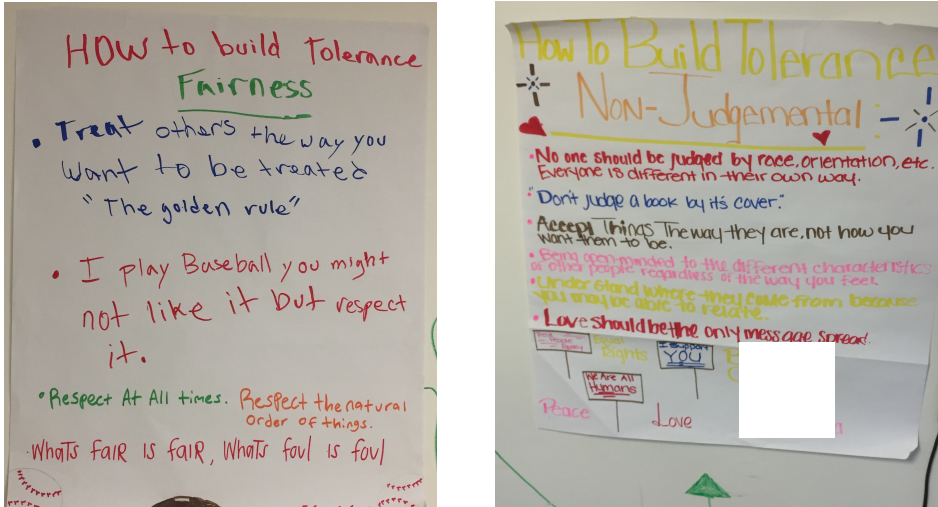
In addition to “educationally advanced” and “jobs are a big one”, New Directions also defined successful community reintegration as “emotionally stable.” Emotionally stable was defined in terms of social-emotional development, including intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development. Intrapersonal skills refer to a student’s experience, expression and management of emotions, and interpersonal skill development refers to a student’s ability to develop positive and rewarding relationships.

This marker of successful community reintegration was shown in posters and photos that were posted throughout the school environment. These displays often included a description of behaviors and/or strategies and words and phrases that are associated with the development of social-emotional skills. Specifically, I observed posters and photos titled “10 Ways to Love,” “21 Suggestions for Success,” and a handout titled, “Emotional Bank Account,” which was photo copied from the book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The “Emotional Bank

Account” handout, for instance, included two columns, one with emotional withdrawals, and the other with emotional deposits that countered each withdrawal. For example, the first row of withdrawals read, “Assume you understand,” and the counter deposit on the same row read, “Seek first to understand.”

Emotionally stable as marker of success was also displayed in student work posted throughout the classrooms. For instance, in Mr. Brown’s class, there were a number of large poster boards pinned to the wall with the title “How to Build Tolerance” (see Figure 2). For this activity, students were tasked with developing tolerant strategies for words such as “Fairness,” “Non-Judgmental,” and “Acceptance (Love).” Some of the students’ tolerant strategies included, “treat others the way you want to be treated: The golden rule,” “don’t judge a book by its cover,” and “the world doesn’t revolve around you.”

Figure 2. “How to Build Tolerance” Class Activity



Additionally, the windows and walls in Ms. Jennings class were also covered with student classwork, which included definitions of words associated with social-emotional development, such as “introspection” and “externalize pain.” Thus, the display of student work, in many ways, points to the social-emotional learning activities instructors engaged them in. In most cases,

these activities appeared to help students with developing empathy, practicing ways to be more understanding, and respecting and appreciating diversity in their daily interactions.

Interviews with study participants also raised issues associated with social-emotional skills as a marker of success. Ms. Murphy, a case manager, describes the importance of students being able to recognize, label, and regulate their feelings. She stated:

I think having a student come in and say, 'I'm having a really bad day,' is a success. Because I don't know that they do that usually. For me, having student come in and say, 'I cannot be in class today, can we please go on a walk?' That's a huge success. They noticed how they were feeling and they asked for help, and they are trying to utilize a coping skill.

Additionally, during the case manager focus group, Amber expressed:

I think we struggle to connect with a lot of students because they don't know how to communicate properly, how they feel. And then that lends to them losing jobs. Or it can lead to that. A lot of the mental health focus that we have here is trying to show them that when you have a safe space and you talk about what's going on in your mind and you kind of shed that, it allows you to live and do whatever it is that makes you happy, that is safe and hopefully legal.

As demonstrated in the quotes above, case managers perceived the development of social-emotional skills as essential to students' success in education and employment. Additionally, by encouraging students to "talk about what's going on in [their] mind and you can kind of shed that," Amber highlights how the development of social-emotional skills was also believed to support students with making decisions that are support their criminal desistance processes.

Young Black men also identified to “emotionally stable” as an important marker of successful community reintegration. For instance, during my interview with Robert, he mentions that developing a positive self-identity was considered an important marker of successful reentry. He explained:

You find success in who you are... Once you identify yourself that will help you to become more successful.... Being who you are is like what is your purpose. When they say find your purpose on this earth, you have to find out who you are in order to find your purpose.

From Robert’s perspective, gaining a deeper understanding of your own potential and qualities is critical to achieving success, because “when you find out who you are,” you are able to identify your life’s purpose.

Moreover, given the young men’s previous schooling experiences that often consisted of fighting, and their negative interactions with gangs, they identified building positive relationships with adults and peers as an important element of “emotionally stable.” For example, in the following conversation, Paul explains how developing relationships with others in society is considered a marker of successful reentry for him:

Interviewer: What does successful reentry means for you?

Paul: Success means for me to get everything I need to accomplish basically, and all those downfalls I had, I can bounce back off them basically.

Interviewer: What are the things you feel you need to accomplish in life?

Paul: Just learning to exist in society. Cause it’s hard for me, just like ... as far as adjusting to society. It’s like talking to more people. I try to talk to more people now. Just trying to put myself out there.

In this example, Paul perceives that he can “bounce back” from his “down falls,” which included dropping out of high school and being incarcerated, if he can learn to “exist in society.” This further illuminate “emotionally stable” as an important concept of success for young Black men, because developing interpersonal skills, such as “talking more to people,” was an important marker of success for Paul.

As part of building positive and rewarding relationships with others, respect and cooperation was also viewed as a key element of being “emotionally stable. Specifically, Ms. Murphy, a case manager, expressed:

I think success is when I see them [students] helping clean up the kitchen because they feel like this is their community.... I think I feel it’s a success when two students who, if they were outside here [New Directions], would be enemies, but in here they’re working on a project together. Or I’ve had a student say to me, ‘Oh, I saw so and so at the park, and normally, I’d like say, that’s my enemy, but now I saw him and just said that’s that annoying kid in [U.N.I.T.E.] every day.’ That’s a success. He’s starting to see him as a person and not his color, neighborhood or whatever.

Overall, the guiding philosophy of New Directions was that students’ intrapersonal and interpersonal skills can help them to become “emotionally stable.” Becoming emotionally stable was an important marker of success, because students who developed these skills were more likely to humanize their peers who they may have previously viewed as enemies, given their gang or neighborhood affiliations. Moreover, becoming emotionally stable was believed to serve as a protective strategy against factors outside the school that can influence a student to drop out, such as limited employment opportunities and gangs.

“Off Probation”

The three themes discussed previously were important markers of success at New Directions because they support students with getting “off probation.” As an organization, New Directions defined this concept as being “formerly free from system involvement.” The identification of getting off probation as a marker of success at New Direction was not surprising, as this concept aligns with the organization’s overall mission in all of its various activities (the school being one part). This commitment to keeping youth free from formal systems involvement was also observed throughout New Directions school site, as there were posters and photos posted on the walls throughout the school that included phrases such as, “The truth is prison are modern day slavery,” and the hashtag “#BeyondPrisons.”

Becoming formerly free from system involvement was an important aspect of students’ community and school reentry processes, as study participants perceived the release from formal probation to reduce their likelihood of recidivating. According to Ms. Moore, a school administrator:

When we were seeing [the young people] come out [of a correctional facility] and then seeing them cycle back in, were like, ‘Why? Why are they going back in?’ They were not off probation, and so they had a bunch of different conditions of probation that they usually violated because, A, they didn’t meet with their probation officer ... or didn’t know something and just got violated and ... they were ending up back in camp or worse.

In this example, Ms. Moore describes that many students, given their probation status, often remained involved in the justices’ system because they either violated for not meeting with their probation officer or for some other reason due to their lack of knowledge regarding the conditions of their probation. Assisting students with becoming free from formal system

involvement was therefore identified as a key marker of success at New Directions, because this achievement not only supported their criminal desistance processes, it helped them with excelling academically and obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment because it would limit them from experiencing gaps in their participation due to being re-incarcerated.

As such, throughout the study period, the concept “off probation” as a marker of success at New Directions was illuminated through the legal advocacy and support students received from school personnel. For instance, during my interview with Joshua, he explained that he was able to avoid being incarcerated for violating his parole by receiving a letter of support from a staff member at New Directions. He stated:

Joshua: I had a lot of court problems ... [and] my judge was giving me a hard time and my parole officer was giving me a hard time because they were not happy with me. I guess I wasn't meeting certain standards, so they were trying to lock me up and give me some time for parole violation and all this other stuff because ... I was supposed to check in, but I didn't check in. I had missed a week. So, I ended up getting a good letter from someone here [at New Directions] ... and I had a progress report and things to show that I was in school, doing something and making progress.

Interviewer: How did that affect your experience in court when you brought the judge those documents?

Joshua: Oh, it was a big change! It was really drastic how it happened because the judge just looked at the paper and said, 'Come back to me in six months, you're fine.' At first, she was trying to give me house arrest and if I

violated the house arrest, I would have went back to jail and it would have been more years than I have ever got before.

Interviewer: How did you feel after receiving that news from the judge?

Joshua: I felt relieved. I told a lot of my friends, I told everybody because I was so happy to know that I don't have to worry about that burden because before then I was really stressed out about it. I really worried about it. Every time I would see a cop I would think, like, 'Man, maybe they're coming to get me now,' or something, I don't know. But not that I did anything. I just always had that thing in the back of my head.

The above conversation shows the concept “off probation” as a key marker of success at New Directions, because legal advocacy and support played an important role in supporting formerly incarcerated youth with moving towards being free from formal system involvement. As Joshua perceived, without the letter of support from the New Directions staff member, he would have been facing house arrest and/or additional time behind bars for violating his parole. This legal advocacy and support also helped to relieve him of the stress being on probation caused, as often felt that the police were “coming to get [him]” prior to receiving news from his judge that he didn't have to return to court for another six months.

The concept “off probation” was also a key marker of success at New Directions through an open door/return policy. Specifically, throughout the study period, students who were re-incarcerated often returned to New Directions following their release to reenroll. Those who were graduates of the program were also encouraged and allowed to return to New Directions if they were in need of supportive services, such as job search assistance, and/or to volunteer. Black male interviewees perceived New Directions' open door/return policy to support them in

moving from probation, to liberation, as they viewed the school site as a space that helped them to avoid engaging illegal activities and victimization. For instance, according to Michael, a graduate of the program:

Me, personally, I'm trying to still be involved [with the school]. I left New Directions on my own just because I felt like I wanted to go to college ... and have time to learn. Cause I see myself being somewhere broadcasting something like either the news or having my own business. But I came back because I was having some trouble and this organization right here, they got programs here. So, I rather feel like I'm just out the way from the streets and doing some good. Helping these kids here get their mind straight and stuff like that. That's why I'm up here.

As demonstrated, New Directions open/door return policy helps to highlight the concept “off probation” as an important marker of success, because this opportunity provided students with an educational option following a period of re-incarceration, and afforded program graduates with the opportunity to engage in prosocial activities beyond graduation. The young Black men also perceived this opportunity as critical to them avoiding further contact with the criminal justice system and/or being victimized, because their neighborhood conditions, which included racial profiling, gangs, and drug use and proliferation, served as a challenge to them with being and remaining free of formal system involvement. Thus, as Michael expressed, being able to attend New Directions, regardless of his graduation status, helps to keep him “out of the way of the streets.”

Interviews with school personnel support this finding, as they perceived students to lack social support outside of the school setting. They therefore believed that New Directions served as a safe space in the community where students could come to avoid neighborhood risks that

posed a threat to them being formally free from probation and remaining crime-free. For instance, during my interview with Ms. Murphy, a case manager, she explained:

I think the main reason why students come ... is because there's someone here they have a relationship with. Like there's something that the young people get out of being [in a school setting]. I know a lot of our students come because they don't really know where else to go and they feel this is a good safe option for them. I've heard them say, 'I don't really know what else to do today,' or, 'I was pretty sure I was gonna go and get in trouble today, so I came here. So [New Directions] has become a safe place and like a go to place that they can fall back on.

As Ms. Murphy describes, "having a place to fall back on" in many ways supports students with moving towards being free from system involvement. This is because while in the school setting, students have access to caring and supportive adult and peer relationships, and they are provided with the opportunity to engage in prosocial activities that support them with remaining crime-free.

The theme of "off probation" as part of successful reentry was also found in New Directions' policy advocacy activities. For instance, as discussed previously, the interviewees perceived legitimate employment as out of reach given their race and criminal status. School personnel therefore expressed that New Directions' often supports efforts such as "Ban the Box"^{vi} initiatives and programs that help formerly incarcerated youth with expunging their juvenile records. According to Ms. Moore:

We focus on students with a criminal record because that's our target population. But a major barrier to serving this population, and we work around it anyways, is employment. There's a new 'Ban the Box Initiative,' so employers are not allowed to ask on the job

application whether or not there's a criminal record. Now, they could, once the job is offered, as there is sometimes a background check that happens. But through that process of supporting these efforts, they can get in the door.... And with the juvenile record, prior to 18, some youth do have the opportunity, in certain circumstances, to have it expunged. So, we help support with that as well.

As Ms. Moore highlights, being engaged in such efforts as an organization was important to New Directions in serving students with a criminal record, because these efforts, in many ways, helped to increase their chances of obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment. Legitimate employment was seen as important, because the process of working, in many ways, helped to reduce students need to rely on illegal activities for survival, which supported them with moving towards being free from formal system involvement.

Conclusions

In sum, this case study identified four themes that explain the ways in which successful community reintegration was defined at New Directions. These four markers of success were important in this school setting because participants perceived them to serve as protective mechanisms against the reentry obstacles many students faced, such as low academic achievement, anti-social peers, and limited employment and housing options. These findings also align closely to the ways in which New Directions is attempting to measure successful reentry as an organization. Specifically, during the interview with Ms. Moore, she described an outcome system they were in the process of developing throughout the study period. She explained:

One of the things we're starting to work on ... is an outcome system.... This is something that is just in the beginning phases but we're measuring five different markers

to track change. The [first marker] is formally free of system involvement, so off probation. The [second marker] is regularly housed. The [third marker] is educationally advanced, so moving forward in their educational process. The [fourth marker] is employable, not necessarily employed, but ready to work. And then the last [marker] is emotionally stable. I think that those have been the barriers to success for our young people. And those are the things that we've been able to see as barriers to success since we started this work, and specifically, since we started the post-release piece of our work. Although this case study did not uncover the second marker, “regularly housed,” as a key way in which successful reentry was defined at New Directions, it is still an important marker to consider, given that some students, such as Chris and Joshua, faced several challenges with due to lacking stable housing. As such, now that an understanding of how New Directions defines successful community reintegration has been established, the Chapter 6 will discuss the ways in which this alternative school fosters and cultivates educational resilience among young Black men.

CHAPTER 6

FOSTERING AND CULTIVATING EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE

Introduction

The key goal of this case study was to explore and describe how educational resilience is fostered and cultivated in an alternative school for formerly incarcerated young adults. Using the Educational Resilience Framework as a guide, this study sought to identify the contextual features, practices, and processes within an alternative school that facilitates successful community reintegration. Additionally, given that young Black men are disproportionately incarcerated than any other racial/ethnic and gender group, this study specifically sought to discern elements within the case site that served as protective factors against their reentry obstacles. The analytic process yielded three themes that describes how New Directions fosters and cultivates educational resilience, including: (1) “Traditions are just not for me;” (2) “The Inside Wants to Come Out” (3) “I try to go as far as I possibly can.”

“Traditions Are Just Not for Me”

The theme, “traditions are just not for me,” refers to New Directions academic curriculum as one element that fosters educational resilience. Specifically, New Directions’ non-traditional curriculum offered students several opportunities for meaningful participation and time to build caring and supportive relationships. For instance, in the following quote, Chris, who attended multiple schools prior to enrolling in New Directions identifies the important role a non-traditional curriculum plays in his school reentry process. He stated:

I was sitting in my bed [at the sober living home], and I knew I wanted to do better for myself, but I didn’t know how to ... So one day, one of my housemates gave me the brochure to New Directions and was like, ‘you need to go back to school.’ So I called

New Directions, but I was kind of skeptical because I was 24 and I didn't really know if this was for me.... I'm like this might be a traditional school, and I'm not with traditions because over the years, experience let me know that traditions are just not for me ... so school for me, anything that was traditional I couldn't do. That's probably what had me feeling stuck over the years.... I need something that was more with me.

As such, described below are two elements of New Directions' non-traditional curriculum that fostered and cultivated educational resilience among formerly incarcerated young Black men, including a (1) multicultural education and an (2) individualized academic approach.

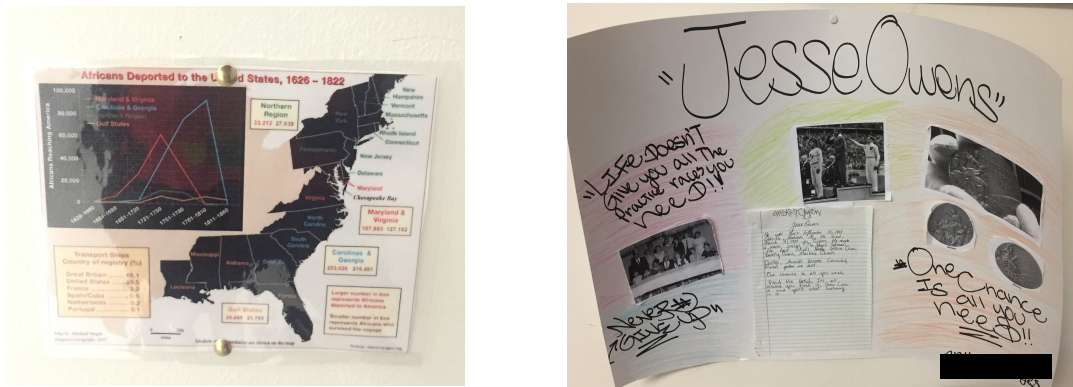
Multicultural education. A multicultural education, which refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, is one example of how New Directions fostered opportunities for meaningful participation. For instance, when describing his teaching philosophy, Mr. Brown, a Black teacher, explained that he intentionally integrates content concerning the history and experiences of racial/ethnic groups in his class activities. He stated:

I come with a great deal of humility and an understanding that I don't know everything.... The second thing I do is that I try to make sure that I'm always teaching the truth. I get away from the standard text, and the standard way of doing things, and try to get into why things have become standard. Why are these test so standardized? Why is Columbus Day, Columbus Day? ... You can tell me that Thanksgiving is Thanksgiving, and then we can all eat turkey, but you're not going to tell me it was a massacre. So I'm talking about the massacre in my classes.

As such, throughout my observations, I witnessed Mr. Brown engage the students in a range of learning activities that included a cultural component. For example, Figure 3 displays images of

students' project-based learning history project that were posted throughout Mr. Brown's classroom. For one activity, students developed timelines that traced the deportation of African slaves to the U.S. Additionally, during the 2016 summer Olympic games, Mr. Brown had students develop poster board size profiles of prominent racial/ethnic minority gold medalist who participated in the 1936 Olympic games, such as Jesse Owens.

Figure 3. Culturally Relevant History Class Project



These reflective and hands-on multicultural activities appeared to address the students' needs for meaning, belonging, and mastery, which kept them engaged in the learning process. For instance, in the following field note excerpt, I describe an interaction I observed between Mr. Brown and two young Black men in his history class that involved a critical discussion of how they might approach their anti-oppression history project.

When I arrived at the class, the students were working on research projects that were based on a historical anti-oppression person, group, or event. Instructions to the assignment were written on the white board, and read, 'Do Now: Project based on historical anti-oppression person, group or event.' In particular, students were to: (1) 'Discuss who/why you'd like to research;' (2) 'Write it down;' (3) 'Grab a computer and research the group, person, or event;' and (4) 'Discuss who, what, when, where, how,

and why in the research project.’ I got the sense that not many students worked on this project over the past week, as students were still asking Mr. Brown how to approach the assignment.

To help the students, Mr. Brown used Martin Luther King as an example of a person who was against oppression. Sam, a 25-year-old young Black man added to Mr. Brown’s example by stating that he might conduct his project on the untraceable gun that killed Martin Luther King. Mr. Brown redirected this conversation to get the students to think in terms of his birth and death, why he was killed, and the many issues surrounding why he protested. This conversation soon led to a discussion about race, slavery, and mass incarceration, wherein Sam further expressed, ‘It’s all about the poor,’ meaning that the issues Martin Luther King attempted to address were focused on poor people. Sam also pointed to the issue of race by saying, ‘Why can a White man get a job better than a Black man even if he doesn’t have a PhD?’

The conversation about Martin Luther King, race, and mass incarceration soon led to a discussion about the prison industrial complex as a potential research project. Mr. Brown asked the students to explain what they knew about the prison industrial complex.

Another young Black man, Victor, explained ‘Prisons are like a Wing Stop franchise.’

Mr. Brown and the students then began to talk about prison conditions, such as overcrowding, wherein Victor said, ‘people sleeping on the floor is against human rights.’ Following the student’s comments, Mr. Brown asked them to develop an argument for their anti-oppression project, based on their discussion. Sam, replied aloud ‘Prisons only target people of color.’ Mr. Brown nodded and verbally agreed by saying, ‘yes, that would be a good topic to pursue.’ – Field Note, 4-13-16

As noted in the above field note, multicultural learning activities appeared to play a key role in the schooling experiences of young Black men at New Directions. In particular, in this example, Mr. Brown incorporated a culturally relevant activity that was built on the students' interest and knowledge regarding incarceration. This not only kept the students engaged in the learning process, yet, in many ways appeared to enhance their understanding of the issues affecting their life chances and opportunities. The discussion between Mr. Brown and the two young Black men also appeared to evoke a process of critical thinking, which seemed to bolster the young men's, particularly Sam, problem solving skills and self-efficacy concerning his anti-oppression project.

The interviewees also pointed to New Directions multicultural approach to education as a key element of the non-traditional curriculum that supported their school reentry processes. For instance, Robert expressed that he is "a better individual" because he now attends a school where he learns about his history and culture. He stated:

I'm a better individual because my mindset is different. Back then I didn't even know a lot about my history ... and now I know that. But one thing that New Directions did is that I got to learn about the things in my culture.... Like, in a regular unified school district I feel like a kid loses. One he loses because he gets to be taught what the government wants him to. Not the truth. But at my school [New Directions] we dig deeper into the subject than just Africans being slaves. We go way deeper than that. We get to learn about Egyptian history. Like, I didn't' really know anything about Egyptian history. I knew that we was Black kings, but I never had the encouragement to go deeper into finding out who I am, and that's what our school does. We learn about who we are and why we are special.

This example helps to illuminate how teaching the “truth,” that is, education that incorporates the histories and beliefs of racial/ethnic groups, helped to enhance some young Black men’s self-awareness concerning their cultural background and history. In Robert’s case, engaging with a curriculum that incorporates his cultural background not only motivated him to participate in the learning process, it also enhanced his sense of self, particularly regarding his racial/ethnic identity. This was emphasized when he stated, “...I never had the encouragement to go deeper into finding out who I am, and that’s what our school does. We learn about who we are and why we are special.”

Critical to keeping the young men motivated and engaged were instructors who also reflected their cultural backgrounds. In particular, interviewees felt that the instructors’ racial/ethnic background and shared interest in the arts helped them to feel “comfortable” in the class setting. For instance, when asked to describe the teachers at New Directions, Paul expressed:

Paul: The teachers here, they're cool. They care. That's all I can say about them.

Interviewer: What makes them cool?

Paul: Well, they’re cool because mostly they try to relate to us, and ... like Ms. Jennings, she makes music herself ... and she’s in a band. And Mr. Brown, you know, he's Black. He can relate.... Like he's a cool older Black man. I can relate to bro ... he vouch for me all the time, you know? Ms. Jennings vouched for me all the time so I'm cool with him.

Interviewer: Like, how do they relate to you?

Paul: It's because Mr. Brown talk about stuff like I’ve been through. He told me about his life. Like he was young and he told me, ‘I was young at a point

in time and doing this and doing that.' He told me he'd been through some crazy stuff. Sounded like what I've been through and then Mrs. Jennings, with the music, it's like, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, I feel you. Well, how would you say being able to relate to them impacts your schooling experience?

Paul: It's because I feel more comfortable around them... Because how do you learn from a person that you don't like? That's hard, that's why I didn't pass geometry for so long ... cause I didn't like that teacher, I had As, all As in algebra and then when I got to geometry, I failed every class.

Additionally Joshua expressed that having instructors with similar lived experiences was relevant to keeping them engaged in the learning process. He explained:

Some teachers have similar stories to as mine, teaching-wise, and as far as school-wise like going through school, growing up ... doing work, having problems ... and not coming to school and not showing that I wanna be in this school. They tell me a lot about, and right there ... that's more important because you learn from your life experiences. You learn from it more because ... I had similar situations, not all the same but similar things as far as school. Like, when I didn't wanna go to school, or I don't feel like going to school, or I feel like ditching or whatever, they tell us why not to do these things and why we should stay in school so that we could obtain and get to a level that they are at or higher.

As noted in the examples above, the inclusion of instructors who reflected the young men's cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds, were interest in the arts, and had similar life experiences to the overall emphasis on multicultural education. This was important to the young

men who learned from both their academic and lived experiences. Thus, because they had the opportunity to include their cultural and life histories as part of the learning process, they perceived their post-incarceration schooling experiences to be more meaningful. Yet, although the young men perceived that including instructors who mirrored their racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds to be critical to delivering multicultural education, participant observations and interviews revealed that the availability of instructors that reflected these young men's racial/ethnic identity and cultural backgrounds are limited.

Individualized academic curriculum. New Directions also fostered and cultivated educational resilience by using an individualized academic approach. The young Black men viewed the schools' individualized approach to education as an opportunity for meaningful participation, because it allowed them to participate in the learning process at their own pace. For example, in the following quote, Kevin, who checked out of his traditional high school in the twelfth grade, expressed that having the ability to work his own pace was a key motivating factor that influenced his decision to enroll at New Directions. He stated:

I checked out of my high school and came here, because at the rate I was going, I wasn't going to graduate.... I needed 260 credits to graduate and I had 88. It wasn't no way in hell I was going to graduate ... I was in the 12th grade, and I was like I need to get the fuck up out of here, cause I'll be damn if the rest of my class walk across this stage and I'm sitting on the sideline. I'd rather be at another school going at my own pace. Graduate with everybody else at my own pace.

Due to New Directions' individualized approach to education, the young men appreciated that they were allowed to complete their class work in different spaces throughout the school.

This served as a meaningful opportunity for several young men, such as Paul, who reported that he often has a difficult time remaining focused and engaged during class. He explained:

Ms. Jennings helped me because like I said I don't like to be around a lot of people sometimes, it's cool to be around a lot of people, but sometimes I get trippy ... like I start getting anxious and unfocused. So I told her that and she was like, 'Well, good that you let me know that, we can set up something where you can work in the TA's room.' And that was around the time I was actually doing my work. Because I was able to focus. I'm in that class and I'm hearing a whole bunch of ignorant shit, and I'm laughing with it, and I'm making jokes myself so much that I can't even focus on my own work. So it's like, that helped me out a lot.

As described above, the individualized academic approach fostered a meaningful opportunity for Paul to participate in the learning process. This was important to him because being around a lot of people in the classroom sometimes made him "anxious and unfocused." Yet, New Directions individualized approach to education afforded him the opportunity to work outside of the classroom setting, which helped him to remain engaged in the learning process. The ability to work at their own pace and outside the class setting, in many ways, helped to motivate the young men, which in turn appeared to positively influence their academic self-efficacy.

In addition to offering meaningful opportunities to participate in the learning process, the individualized academic approach also serves as an example of how New Directions fostered and cultivated caring and supportive relationships. Specifically, given the self-directed approach, academic instructors generally viewed themselves as facilitators of learning, wherein they guided and assisted students in learning for themselves. For instance, during my interview with Ms. Jennings, she explained that she sees herself as a coach rather than a teacher:

I'm more of a coach than a teacher. These students are between 16 and 24 years old. We are talking about folks that have kids, folks that have jobs outside of here, and folks that are married.... So I'm really big on choice culture. I ... ask them what do they you want to do? How fast do they want to move? How productive do they want to be? ... I tell them what their options are, and that my job is to support them and that I'm also going to push them a little bit.... So I'm like a constructivist.... I can show them the different pieces, but, at the end of the day, they have to construct their own knowledge and skill set.

As Ms. Jennings describes, the students' characteristics, particularly their ages and the reality that some are parenting and have other financial responsibilities, the individualized approach to education is suiting, in many ways, for them to balance their educational and personal responsibilities. Moreover, given New Directions' "choice culture," power struggles between students and teachers were limited during each observation session, which seemed to help students with developing caring and supportive relationships with instructors.

This "choice culture" also helped to increase opportunities for academic instructors to communicate messages of high expectations. Specifically, throughout the study period, instructors and other school personnel frequently spoke encouraging and affirming messages, such as "you can do this," to students who were struggling with a particular assignment or activity. These positive messages were also displayed throughout the physical environment of the school, wherein the walls in classrooms and throughout the common areas of the school were covered in various phrases and quotes such as, "never give up," "Be Awesome Today," and "In order to succeed we must first believe that we can" (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. High Expectation Messages



These positive messages, whether spoken or written, seemed to foster a school climate of belonging, as I observed instructors and students repeat these message as they interacted throughout the learning process. Interviewees also typically described instructors and school personnel as “caring” and “cool,” which highlights that some viewed them as non-authority figures. The young men also expressed that they felt loved and respected by some of the instructors and other school personnel. Feeling a sense of belonging in the school setting and loved and respected by instructors and schools personnel was important to the young men because some perceived the New Directions’ climate and their interactions with adults and their peers in the school setting to positively influence their optimism, problem solving skills, and academic self-efficacy. For instance, Chris explained:

They [academic instructors] push me. One day Ms. Jennings gave me a packet of work for algebra. I thought I got all of them wrong because I’m not good in math, so I’m like man this is not good. And I read through the package and I got majority of my work done right. I was kind of like shocked, like man I did this right? I haven’t did math in

like forever. That was a push factor for me because ... she would tell me like she's proud of me. You don't really get that at most schools. Teachers can care less.

As Chris explained, receiving high expectation message from Ms. Jennings served as a "push factor" for him because he had previously experienced minimal success in math. Additionally, in comparing the level of care he received from Ms. Jennings to teachers in other school settings, he highlights New Directions individualized academic approach as a key element that influences caring and supportive relationships among instructors and students.

While the young Black men perceived the individualized academic curriculum to enhance their academic self-efficacy and optimism, it also appeared to motivate them throughout the learning process. This was important because, given their previous schooling and incarceration experiences, they, like other students, arrived at New Directions with low academic skills and competencies. This therefore served as an obstacle to some young men participating in the learning process and persisting academically. For instance, in the following field note excerpt, I provide an example of Kevin, who enrolled in New Directions so he could work at his own pace. However, he faced some challenges when attempting to test out of math.

I recorded the math problem that was written on the whiteboard as the students were sharpening their pencils. While I was writing, Kevin, a slender young Black man who appeared to be 19 or 20, began to negotiate with Mr. Turner, a White instructor, for more credits in math. He asked, 'what type of agreement can we come to for my credits? Yall give us like .2 credits a day.... If I would have stayed at my high school, I would have graduated yesterday.... I thought I would have been done by now.... Can I test out of math?' Mr. Turner responded by informing Kevin that he can test out of math, however, he has to pass the 13 exams with 75% or better. Kevin agreed that he could do this,

grabbed a book, and began to work. About 30 to 45 minutes into class, Kevin yelled aloud, ‘Oh my gosh, this is only chapter 5?’ He began to flip through the pages of the book to get a sense of how much he would have to complete. Mr. Turner noticed what Kevin was doing and explained to him that this would likely take several days to complete, even if he worked on it relentlessly. I noticed Kevin his head as if he felt defeated, and he then expressed aloud, “damn that just crushed my spirit.... I’m going home.... I’m going to be honest, I don’t even think I can do it. – Field Note, 6-2-16

Chris, Joshua and Paul, also described their ability to remain engaged in the learning process as a challenge, given their low academic achievement. Specifically, these young men expressed that that being disconnected from school for a long period of time sometime caused them to feel frustrated and resentful as they participated in the learning process, as they often struggled academically or with sitting in class for long periods. Paul, for example, expressed, “I feel like I’m so set back.... I’ve been in high school for so long.... I really let my past plague my life.”

New Directions’ school personnel and instructors also perceived students’ previous schooling and incarceration experiences to negatively impact their academic self-efficacy and self-esteem. They also believed that these past experiences often deterred them from the opportunity to engage with an individualized curriculum that is designed to help address their school and community reentry obstacles. For instance, while describing the strengths and challenges of students’ enrolled at New Directions, Ms. Moore, a school administrator stated:

I think a lot of times they're ... just coming from failing schools and systems that have failed them to where they are not at the same level, academically, as the other students. I think that has an effect on their self-esteem at times. And when they're not able to achieve or not being given the opportunity to achieve in the way that they can, they shut down.

And so, you'll find them wandering the hall, they're talking to staff, you've seen it, hanging out.

Additional field observations reinforced this theme. In the excerpt below, I describe a discussion I had with Ms. Jennings about the specific challenges she perceives to serve as an obstacle to academic achievement for formerly incarcerated youth.

Today was Friday, so most students were working on credit recovery, while others were either in the music studio, on their phone, or sitting around talking with their friends. Because I had not seen Ms. Jennings in several weeks, I decided to stop by her class during lunch, as most of the students walked to the store to grab food. Ms. Jennings and I caught up for a bit, and somehow ended up talking about New Direction credit recovery process and the educational approach. She expressed, 'One of the flaws of our educational model is that we are taking them [students] from a highly dependent setting [correctional facility] and putting them in a self-directed, choice-based school.... In correctional education programs, students show up and learn because they are always being told what to do. However, in a choice-based school setting, students are forced to learn.... This has been a flaw of the educational model, because they [the students] are so dependent given their experiences in camp.... Camp creates a sense of socialized dependency where students believe they are doing good because they are doing what everyone tells them to do.... Here, students have to take the autonomy with their education, but this is hard for some students given the correctional settings they are coming from.... Society says it's a character flaw if they are unable to achieve successful reentry. But in most cases, the odds are against them. – Field Note, 9-9-16

As Ms. Jennings explains, some formerly incarcerated youth who participate in a self-directed, choice-based academic curriculum will likely experience some obstacles to academic success. This is because, as a result of their highly structured incarceration experiences, some students are unable to fully take advantage of New Directions individualized curriculum because incarceration, in many ways, stifles their ability to utilize their personal agency as they have frequently been told what to do, when, and how.

Throughout the study period New Directions began offering tutoring services for students who needed additional academic support. However, this strategy was implemented towards the end of the study period, wherein the researcher was not able to examine how this element helped to address some students' challenge with engaging with an individualized approach to education. Nevertheless, New Directions individualized approach to educating formerly incarcerated young adults appeared to foster meaningful opportunities for students to participate and build caring and supportive relationships. This element also helped foster a school culture of high expectations, which appeared to bolster students resilience.

“The Inside Want’s to Come Out”

I also noticed a poster in her [Ms. Moore] window that read, “The Inside Want’s to Come Out.” This poster grabbed my attention because I remember hearing the phrase being spoken many times that various spoken word performances I observed. Viewing this poster made me think about the role self-expressive activities play in the post-incarceration schooling experiences of students at New Directions, especially for the young Black men. I’m also recalling the many traumatic stories the young men shared during their interviews. However, when watching them create music in the studio it seemed as if they forget about those experiences. Maybe the self-expressive activities are

a key way in which they cope with the adversities they may be facing. – Field Note, 3-1-2017

As described in Chapter 4, a review of New Directions organizational documents and interviews with students and staff revealed that many students experienced traumatic life events prior to enrolling. With regards to the young Black male interviewees, Chris, Joshua and Michael, reported being placed in foster care as children, and others had been exposed to violence, such as William, who was caught in the middle of two separate drive-bys at ages four and nine. Other young men were victims of violent crime, such as Brandon, who had been stabbed several times by a stranger while navigating his neighborhood, and Robert who was jumped by a rival gang. Erick was raised by a parent who abused substances, and all of the young men described their incarceration experience as “traumatizing.”

Given these young men’s traumatic life experiences, they reentered school feeling “stressed,” “anxious,” “depressed,” and in some cases, “hopeless.” For example, when asked to describe his school reentry process, Chris said:

I came in here bro with, to be honest with you, with shackles bro, you know, and I really mean that, like I came here like ... just stressed.... I wanna say being hopeless that's another shackle too, I was at hopeless state of mind.

Paul, who was racially profiled by law enforcement, also expressed, “I just started getting these flashbacks [in class]. I don’t know if it’s anxiety or whatever ... but that’s the feeling I get when I get around cops ... and a lot of people.” Additionally, as a result of Erick’s family being displaced from their home due to his father’s substance abuse issues, he expressed, “I was feeling broken, like I was depressed.... When you holding in a lot, you take it out on people ... so that’s how I was feeling.”

In addition to feeling stressed, anxious, and depressed prior to enrolling in New Directions, some young men, given their traumatic life experiences and system-involvement (i.e. correctional and/or child welfare), had a difficult time trusting adults in the school setting. This was mostly with case managers, as they perceived that some young Black men in the school setting often avoided meeting with them. For instance, when providing her perspective as to why some young men avoid meeting with case managers, Ms. Murphy explained:

You have students I think that because of probably trauma or just system involvement, and mistrust of the system, they are not eager to sit down and work with their case manager cause like, ‘Who are you? ... it would be weird if they didn’t mistrust the system ... because it’s like you’re [clinical case manager interns] the 12th person that has offered them help. If 11 out of the 12 didn’t come through, why the hell would they believe you? Or maybe some of the other ones did but then it also was mixed in with punishment or whatever it may be.

Other case managers believed that their Black male students avoided meeting with them because their role as a case manager in the school setting and the fact that they did not reflect their racial/ethnic identity, caused some to hesitantly and selectively engage given their previous experiences with adults in professional roles who made decisions about their lives. For instance, Julie expressed, “I feel like we’re an additional representation of the system and institutionalization. Sort of these White girls trying to come in and be like, “Here’s representation of a better life.”

In understanding the impact of the traumatic life events many students at New Directions had experienced, school personnel were intentional about engaging them in a range of arts and self-expressive activities that were designed to support the development of social-emotional

skills and capacities. These arts and self-expressive activities were important as they afforded students with opportunities to examine their own mental and emotional processes as they earned credits towards graduation. As such, the theme, “everybody here is an artist, really in their own way,” which is a sub theme to “the inside wants to come out,” provides additional evidence of how New Directions fostered and cultivated students’ educational resilience through arts and self-expressive activities.

“Everybody here is an artist, really in their own way.” Throughout the study period, instructors commonly incorporated arts and self-expressive activities as part of the learning process. These activities appeared to help all students at New Directions with building and caring and supportive relationships, which motivate students to participate in the learning process and provided a space and opportunities for them to heal. William, for instance, shared that he often relies on the arts to cope with his life challenges:

[New Directions] is a whole completely different experience from enrolling to regular schools, because at this school, you see a lot of diversity between people and their mental intellects, but you notice you see that everybody here is an artist, really in their own way. Art is a universal way of speaking to people. I noticed that 'cause my whole life people already knew me for how I used to draw. I'm a really good drawer. I draw very, very, very, very well. That's how I met a lot of my friends as a kid. And I would just draw, draw, draw all day. It's what kept me occupied.... Shit, that's what really kept me going. That's really what take me out of my head from a lot of things, is drawing. When I came here [New Directions], they were really on me about art, and I seen a lot of things posted around, like the little pictures and shit. So they told me I had to do this mural right here.... We helped make that whole mural and it was crazy 'cause it didn't really take that

long to make something that actually has a lot of meaning to it, and that was a great experience for me coming to the school. That's what made me feel like I should just stay here, because there was a lot already going on here for me. I could really express myself the way I wanted to without people looking at me weird.

As William expressed, New Directions' arts and self-expressive activities, helped to engage him in the learning process and provided him with a platform for healthy self-expression. Music and poetry specifically served as an important element that helped students at New Directions with participating in the learning process, as well as unite students, instructors and school personnel amid their various identities (i.e., racial/ethnic, gender, neighborhood or gang, and sexual orientation). For instance, Ms. Moore stated:

When we first started, the mission and vision of [New Direction] was about the power of expression and about ... creating a platform for people to be able to be free to express themselves and to tell their stories, and ... at the very end of the day, I think that heart of it, that soul of it is still there, and it's exhibited through VOICES.... I think at the bottom line, at the heart of it all, it's about being able to be witnessed and being able to have that platform to express and to be listened to with no judgement.

Expressing themselves without judgment was critical to allowing the inside come out. As such, below is a description of the ways in which New Directions VOICES program fostered and cultivated educational resilience throughout the study period.

VOICES music and poetry class. As described in Chapter 4, VOICES is New Directions' self-expressive, arts-based program that is based on the California Common Core Standards.^{vii} Specifically, this program explores all methodologies of expression including writing, theater, music and arts, where students learn the mechanics of poetry, how to write their

own poems, and create and record music. As the VOICES brochure states, a key aim of the program is to “instill a sense of self-confidence and empowerment in students by teaching them to think outside of their current predicament and inspiring them to make positive choices in their everyday lives.”

The VOICES program was as an important element of the New Directions arts and self-expressive activities because it appeared to engage students in the learning process as well as build their social-emotional skills. For instance, in the following field note excerpt, I describe the first VOICES music and poetry class I observed in Mr. Brown’s English class. The class was facilitated by Ms. Santos, a multi-racial VOICES instructor. She began the class by saying:

‘[VOICES] is an English class that is designed to help us with being one with ourselves and true to our story.... The class might trigger some things ... so I want to remind you that this is a safe place, and you can talk to me if something is going on.’ She also informed that students that they would be discussing immigration in today’s class, and proceeded with playing YouTube videos of Denice Frohman, an award-winning poet, reciting two of her poems, called “Borders” and “Accents.” After we viewed the videos, students were asked to recite lines from each poem that stuck out to them. One student recited the line, “They know divisions, but they don’t know long division,” from the “Borders” poem, and another student recited, “My mom holds her accent like a shotgun,” from the “Accents” poem. Mrs. Santos engaged the students in a discussion about the lines students recited aloud, which centered a lot around the students’ cultural and family backgrounds.

She ended the activity with a creative writing prompt to the following questions: (1)

What borders in your life did you have to cross, and how did you cross them? (2) What is

something about your culture that you hold onto and value? Why? (3) How can you hold onto who you are and be confident in that as you move through life? (4) How does your identity shape your experiences? Students were informed that they could simply answer the questions or write a poem. However, they were told that they needed to put something on paper in order to receive credit. While the students responded to the questions, Ms. Santos played a song by Jon George titled, “Three Wishes.” After about 10 minutes, she stopped the music, and asked the students to share. Everyone looked around hesitantly, yet no one volunteered. Ms. Santos then said aloud, ‘Sometimes we have to say things out loud to get free from them.’ – Field Note, 7-25-16.

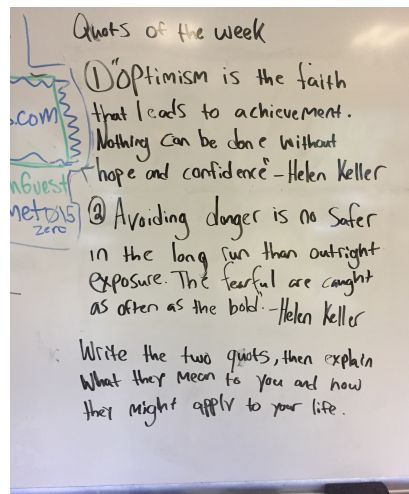
Although no students volunteered to share during this observation, the creative writing questions Ms. Santos posed, and her statement at the end, illustrates how New Directions’ VOICES music and poetry classes intentionally seeks to help students gain a deeper sense of self-awareness and self-worth. Question four also points to the ways in which New Directions’ arts and self-expressive activities aim to positively influences students’ self-identity. This question also highlights how New Directions provides students with the opportunity to emotionally release in a creative, non-destructive way. The poems Ms. Santos used to facilitate a group discussion also highlights how New Directions attempts to enhance students’ cultural awareness.

Observations of the school setting also helped to uncover how New Directions’ sought to enhance students social-emotional skills. For instance, while waiting to conduct a study interview with Mr. Brown, I documented creative writing questions a VOICES instructor posed to students during a recent music and poetry class session that was held in his classroom

While Mr. Brown went to the restroom, I took a moment to observe and take photos of student work that was posted throughout his classroom. I assumed a VOICES music and

poetry class had recently been facilitated in his class, because, on the white board, someone wrote two quotes by Helen Keller, the first deaf-blind person to earn a bachelor's of arts degree, under the activity title, 'VOICES 10/13/16, Quotes of the Week.' Following these quotes was a writing prompt that read, 'write the two quotes, then explain what they mean to you and how they might apply to your life.' – Field Note, 10-17-16

Figure 5. VOICES Music and Poetry Class Reflective Questions



While specific instructors facilitated VOICES music and poetry classes, academic instructors also allowed students to use music and poetry as a way to keep them engaged in the learning process and to foster meaningful opportunities for them to develop social-emotional skills. This occurred during one observation of Mr. Brown's English class, where he and his students critically analyzed a quote from an American rapper, Inspectah Deck's song, "Assassination Day."

When I took my seat in Mr. Brown's class, I recorded that 16 students were present, of which six were young Black men. To start the class, Mr. Brown mentioned to the students that they would begin by talking about revenge, and directed them to a quote he

wrote on the white board which read, 'I move through the third world, my third eyes the guiding light, I invite the fight, we all die tonight.' To facilitate a discussion, he asked the students to share their thoughts about the quotes meaning. One young Black man responded by stating, 'going through the world seeing life for what it really is. He want's revenge, and is willing to die.' Mr. Brown then got more specific, and asked students their thoughts on each line of the quote. They talked about 'third eye' and how it refers to seeing things with spiritual eyes, and how the artist believed that he embodied the power of God when he stated, "I invite the fight."

Following the discussion, Mr. Brown said, 'revenge is not always a harmful thing,' to further shed light on the quotes meaning. He also expressed that he likes to start his classes with a quote because he understands that the students come to class with different ideas and interpretations. For students to obtain credits, he then required them to write a personal response to the quote. Some students complained, wherein he allowed them to write a poem if they preferred, instead of a summary. Following the writing exercise, one student, a young Black woman, asked if she could recite her poem. Mr. Brown said, 'sure,' the class focused in, and she began by saying:

'Floating through this world all three eyes wide open

Seeing the world through the eyes of a baby.

Still connected to the spirit,

But still awake trying to find out how in the world when to sleep.

When did we find out that submission was the fastest way to freedom?

When did fitting in when the ones who will never like us become worth more than our souls?'

As these examples illustrate, arts and self-expressive activities offered meaningful opportunities for students to participate in the learning process. These activities appeared to meet students' needs of belonging, meaning, respect, and mastery, as they allowed instructors to accommodate their diverse learning styles, and view them as resilient. Instructors also designed their arts and self-expressive activities in ways that seemed to help expand students' critical thinking and literacy skills, as well as create a climate where students felt comfortable when speaking and performing their art in a group setting.

Young Black male interviewees viewed the VOICES music and poetry classes as an element at New Directions that helped them to cope with the adversity they faced. For instance, Chris, who was residing in a sober living home and working multiple jobs while attending New Directions, explained:

When I came here it was just that relief I used to feel. I used to walk through them doors, I'll never forget man, I used to be like just dragging myself in here from work.... But you can find peace here with yourself man, I found peace here with myself so many times.... To be honest with you one of the classes they have here is VOICES.... [the instructor] would put on music and we would write how we felt according to the music ... we'd just spill ourselves out on that piece of paper, and that was just like an icebreaker for me. It was a relief of all the stress and toxic-ness I had to suffocate.... I'm being honest, that class actually helped me find peace with myself. I couldn't find peace nowhere else.... I would come here and I would find myself again, and I could be myself. That's one thing I liked about this school is you can be yourself. People don't really judge you based on your criteria, age.

Chris highlights New Directions' VOICES music and poetry class as an element that supported his development of social-emotional skills. In particular, having the opportunity to release his emotions on paper allowed Chris to find a sense of "peace," which helped him to gain a deeper sense of self-awareness. Chris also perceived the opportunity to meaningfully participate in arts and self-expressive activities to bolster his self-efficacy, problem solving, and optimism, as he stated, "[VOICES] was a relief from all the stress and toxic-ness I had to suffocate ... I would come here and I would find myself again."

VOICES music and recording studio.

When we got really clear about what our mission was, things really started expanding on their own. It was all of a sudden, camps started calling us, saying, 'Oh, you guys are doing amazing work. We want you here.' So pretty soon, by 2010, we were probably in about ... 10 probation camps throughout LA county. And by 2011, we were realizing that great programs in jail were not enough.... We're programming, and we're like, 'Wait, hold on' ... we're seeing the same kids cycle in and out.... And that was the best case scenario. Worst case scenario is we get a call and get an invitation to a funeral of an 18-year-old or a 17-year-old. And he [New Directions' founder] was coming and he would literally be the voice of the young person because he would come in with a CD that he recorded of their music, and then that CD would be played during the funeral. And that's the last time anyone heard that young person's voice. So we realized we had to do something more. – Ms. Moore, School Administrator

In addition to music and poetry classes, the VOICES program also includes a music and recording studio. This programmatic component incorporates all of the same vision and goals of VOICES music and poetry classes, yet the studio session is where students are provided the

opportunity to create music and record the poems or raps they've developed. Typically, the studio is open in the afternoons and after school, and each student is encouraged to bring their own lyrics ready to record. As a formal class, students are taught advanced concepts on recording software and professional studio equipment that allows them to easily create, play, mix and record their music. However, in some cases, students with knowledge and skills using recording software and equipment were allowed in the studio during the afternoons and after school.

Since its opening in 2015, the VOICES music and recording studio has been a staple program for students at New Directions. Ms. Moore stated:

So one thing I found, and it's across the board, even when we work with them in camp, they love music, they love hip-hop. That's their thing. That's the thing that moves them. I think that's their language and what they relate to. And so they love being in the studio. They love that we offer [VOICES]. That's one of their strengths, and I think that's why they're here. I think that's the reason why they're here.

The student interviewees also used music and poetry as a way to cope with their life challenges. For instance, when describing why he has a love and passion for music, Paul explained:

I forget everything that I'm going through when I listen to music ... it's like a safe haven for me ... from like the outside world, like what I gotta deal with, ... and as a Black man. What I went through when ... I went to jail, like all that shit. Music really helped me get through that.

Now at New Directions, having access to the music and recording studio has helped Paul to remain engaged in the learning process, because for him, "It's the only way I'm able to cool

down and relax. I can go use a computer, download a song, or when my homie comes, have him make me a beat.” These meaningful opportunities thus gave Paul a sense of safety as he participated in the learning process, which he perceived to influence his academic self-efficacy.

The VOICES music and recording studio also afforded students the opportunity to build caring and supportive relationships. For instance, throughout the study period, it was not uncommon to witness students from different neighborhoods or gangs, and of different racial/ethnic backgrounds working together in the studio making music. These interactions show how New Direction’s VOICES music and recording studio helped to foster a school climate of belonging and safety. It also highlights how this element helped to cultivate students’ resilience, particularly in terms of the skill of cooperation.

The music and recording studio also helped to foster and cultivate caring and supportive relationships by allowing students to perform their music during the school day. For example, in the following field note excerpt, I describe an open mic session Ms. Santos held during a lunch break, to allow students the opportunity to perform the music he/she created.

During lunch, Ms. Santos, a VOICES instructor, stood on the small stage in the common area that’s placed in front of the mural on the wall. She spoke on a mic that was connected to a small speaker, and stated that they were starting a bi-weekly lunchtime open mic series. She explained, ‘The open mic sessions are an opportunity for you to express yourself ... use this as practices to letting your voice be heard.’ She then instructed the students who were interested in participating in the open mic to sign up on a sheet she waved left to right at the front of the stage. The first student who performed was a young White man who played a guitar. He played and sang a song called, ‘promised land.’ The second student to perform was a young Black man. He recited an

original poem titled, 'I have a dream I have a dream.' He didn't explain what motivated him to write the poem, yet shared that he wrote it one night when he woke up out of his sleep when he was incarcerated in [Camp Morgan]. As he performed, I was able to record a few lines from the poem he recited. One particular line he repeated through the poem includes, 'Martin had a dream. Is it out on the streets? He seen Whites chasing Blacks, now it's Blacks chasing me.'" This line stuck out to me the most, because I could hear students snap their fingers, and murmur with their mouths as he recited the poem.... When he finished his poem, students and school personnel stood to their feet and gave him an applause. Some also patted him on the shoulder as he walked by to his seat. –
Field Note, 4-13-16

This excerpt exemplifies how New Directions' arts and self-expressive activities helped to foster caring and supportive relationships. Throughout the study period, students and instructors often shared very personal and traumatic life experiences as they performed their art, which in many ways appeared to promote empathy. The development of caring and supportive relationships through arts and self-expressive activities, in many ways, also appeared to help students feel connected to the school setting, which supported them with building social-emotional skills.

Although New Directions' arts and self-expressive activities fostered meaningful opportunities for participation and caring and supportive relationships, neighborhood conditions, such as gangs, followed some students to school, making it difficult for some to build and sustain these social-emotional skills outside of the school setting. Specifically, as Chapter 4 described, Erick, Joshua and Robert were actively involved with a gang, and William was affiliated. Observations of visible tattoos and clothing attire also revealed that a number of students (of all ethnicities) at New Directions were also part of or affiliated with a gang. Gang membership and

affiliation seemed to have a profound impact on some young men, because its culture, which often included crime and crime-related activities caused them to often feel unsafe as they navigated social settings. For instance, Joshua stated:

When I was about 15, I ended up joining a gang. And then, ever since then I was a totally different person. The way how I move, the way how I talk, the way how I think, it was different.... I would always look over my shoulder, looking over my back, making sure nothing will happen to me, because innocent people get killed, innocently.... So I know by being in a gang, you have to be more aware and be more on your toes.

Despite a students' status concerning gang membership or affiliation, many identified neighborhood conditions as a factor that challenges their ability to build of social-emotional skills. Specifically, during my interview with Ms. Murphy, she stated that many students often said, "I can't get caught slipping," while navigating their neighborhoods. This stance, in many ways, challenges their developmental need of safety, because, as Ms. Murphy explained:

When I'm talking to some of the youth they always say when they are walking around their neighborhood, 'I can't be caught slipping, can't be caught slipping.' And I always ask, 'What is that?' [They explain,] 'you just can't be caught without making sure you know who's around you, and keeping your guards up' ... all that stuff. And that is exhausting, I think. If you have to think about going to the store, but making sure you know what side of the store the town's on.... That gets really tiring. So I would imagine that having... to look over their shoulder every time, before they get into the door, and a little bit when they get here if there's issues. But I think for the most part, they feel like a little, 'Whew, okay I can breathe' [when they get to school].

As Ms. Murphy described, neighborhood conditions often negatively impact students sense of safety as they travel to and from school. This reality, in many ways, limits their ability to develop essential social-emotional skills, as they are constantly navigating social spaces in their communities with emotional and physical guards. Nevertheless, as Ms. Murphy suggested, New Directions offers a school climate where students, at least some, can “breathe” when they within the schools’ four walls.

“I try to go as far as I possibly can”

I take students home from time to time, if they have a place to stay. Give them some food, dig in the closet, hand out some clothes I don't wear, help students get prepared for a job interview, have dinner with students outside of work. Like I said, with students, it's a three-pronged community: It's home, it's church, if you are religious or if you have that, and its school. So, they spend the majority amount of their time with us, and I try to go as far as I can possibly can to get them to understand that it is imperative for you to walk out of these doors with a high school diploma. It's imperative that you do that. – Mr. Brown, Academic Instructor

The statement, “I try to go as far as I possibly can,” highlights the important role that supportive services played in students’ post-incarceration schooling experiences. Case managers were primarily responsible for providing and connecting students to a range of supportive services. Yet, as Mr. Brown stated, all school personnel, regardless of their title, contributed, in some way, to providing and connecting students to services that helped to keep them engaged in school. Among these services, employment and work readiness training were elements of New Directions’ supportive services that fosters and cultivates educational resilience.

Employment. Employment was an important element of New Directions supportive services component because it served as a meaningful opportunity for to participate in the learning process. In particular, the young men expressed that obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment was meaningful to their post-incarceration schooling experiences, because it helped to bolster their self-efficacy and optimism. The process of working, therefore, in many ways, provided the young men with some reassurance or indication that they were being responsible. For instance, Erick stated:

I was a dude that didn't go to school, I was in the streets more than school. Now, I just got out. I've been applying for jobs. I'm back in school. Basically, I'm conducting more business than me being in the streets, just sitting up doing nothing. If I'm sitting up doing nothing, I'm applying for jobs now. I don't have time to be just letting time fly by.

Joshua also perceived employment to serve as a meaningful opportunity, because it helps him to remain crime-free. He stated:

I've had a few jobs. But I haven't been able to hold 'em. But just by me having those few jobs it's helping me get somewhere and just being in school and having a job is helping me stay out of the way of getting into any kind of trouble ... or anything that I'm not supposed to be getting into. It just kinda focuses me and keeps me on a straight path to do the right thing.

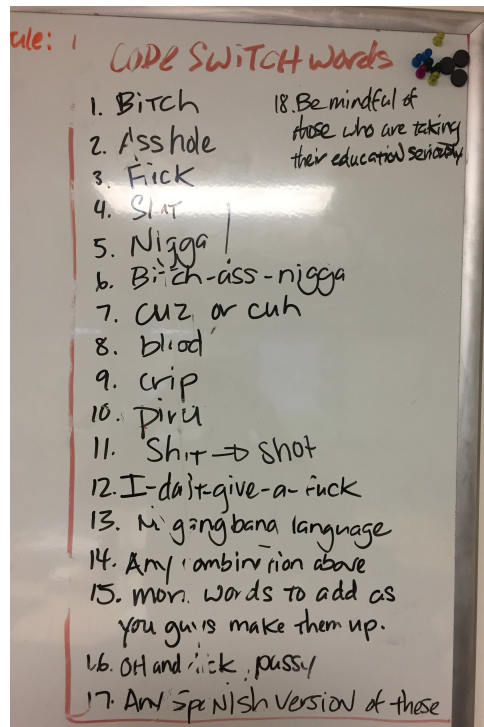
Given the important role of employment to their community and school reentry processes, the young men often pursued case managers for assistance with their employment needs. This was illustrated in Chapter 5 when Crystal, a case manager, expressed, "Case management is definitely about jobs." New Directions also had a designated job wall, where they posted information about job fairs and employment opportunities for students.

Work readiness training. While students viewed employment as a critical support service, case managers also spent a large amount of time helping students build their work readiness skills. This support was critical to students' success with obtaining legitimate employment, because many students entered New Directions with limited work experience. For instance, one case manager, Amber, explained:

That job stuff is critical because they don't know how to interview, they don't know how to talk to someone that is interviewing them.... So, it's kinda cool, we get to be on the front lines in a way with them and do little mock interviews or have conversations about questions that are gonna be asked, and how would you respond to this question in an interview? Someone needs to help them with that. I know those services are offered at certain organizations, but as far as them seeking that out once they're out, if they don't go to a school like this, if they just go back to normal high school, I don't see them getting those services. And then they're just gonna end right back up in the system.

The importance of helping students develop work readiness skills was observed throughout the school setting. In particular, the whiteboard in each class included a boxed-out section titled, "Code Switch Words" (see Figure 6). Essentially, the display of these words supported students with identifying and using alternate words, as those listed in the box were deemed inappropriate for educational settings. In addition to including such strategies to foster a school climate that is centered around respect, these visible "code switch words" also appeared to support students' with becoming work-ready, as instructors sometimes explained to students that the language they use is also inappropriate for the workplace. Instructors commonly relayed these messages to students after asking them to "code switch" when they used a word or phrase that was included on the list.

Figure 6. "Code Switch Words"



In addition to interviewing, students also worked closely with case managers to enhance their work readiness skills by developing a resume. Case managers perceived this process to be meaningful because it seemed to meet the students' needs for power and mastery. For instance, Amber stated:

When I build resumes ... they'll make up a whole list of all of these things they've done, and once they actually have it on paper they can be like, 'Oh, I've actually done quite a few things.' I like the confidence that comes out of that. Not always the case if they haven't had any job experience, but lots of times they've had jobs here and there, and on a resume you can list it out and swing it so it looks really impressive and cool. They get to talk about themselves and why they should be hired and they get to brag a little bit. I've always really enjoyed those sessions just because they kind of get to be in charge in

what's being said about them. They can dictate how they want this employer to potentially see them, which I always think is pretty cool.

As Amber explained, visibly seeing their accomplishments and skills on a resume, helped to build student confidence concerning their employability. Amber also perceived the process of developing a resume to allow students to “dictate” how they are being presented to employers, as they were primarily responsible for deciding what information they shared about themselves on this professional document.

As part of building work readiness skills, New Directions also fostered meaningful opportunities by placing students in internships. The interviewees viewed the internship as an important element at New Directions because it supported the goals of obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment and provided direction for the future. For instance, Chris explained:

This [internship] actually gave me direction. It gave me a sense of oneness and acceptance.... I remember when we came here, I would never think I would be an intern, I wouldn't even think I would ever have that type of position. I was just a regular student trying to get his diploma, and now they got me here as an intern and that's my job for right now and I love it. Like I said, I ain't look back since. I have no reason to look back. So, New Directions really ... just brought me back to a new direction. It gave me a sense of direction, so I'm good.

Michael also participated in an internship through a partnership between New Directions and a philanthropic foundation. This experience was meaningful for Michael, as it afforded him the opportunity to gain necessary skills that supported his future career goals. He stated:

The [internship] experience here taught me a lot. I gained a lot of knowledge, skills, and a lot of getting familiar with the workplace, how to conduct myself at a job place and

collect money and save and spend and budget.... When I came up here with my resume, I was talking about film and they already said they have something that has to do with cameras. So I gained a lot of camera training.... Then, it just was like, it made me build experience with something different, but my main experience is like, being the film maker.... But I'd rather be more in the field. So, New Directions they taught me something as far as like being more diligent with the camera controls and being more creative and stuff like that.

From Michael's perspective, having an internship was meaningful because it helped to support his interest and career goals in filmmaking. To Michael, the internship also afforded him the opportunity to build positive and rewarding relationships. He stated:

[My supervisor] he like a role model.... He just showed me, how consistent he can be, just working towards his goal. And seeing him and doing what he do just motivated me.... The diverse side of me came out, like, 'Alright, I wanna learn this, I wanna learn that, I wanna put this under my belt.'

As a result of his internship, Michael was able to connect with an adult who he describes as a "role model." This relationship motivated him to enhance his skill sets in various areas, as he saw how beneficial the behaviors he was modeling were to his supervisor in achieving his goals.

While employment and work readiness training served as a positive support to the young men's school and community reentry processes, the process of working and attending school simultaneously served as a challenge to some young men remaining engaged in the learning process. As described in Chapter 5, demanding school and work responsibilities forced some young men, such as Joshua, to choose between school and work. Due to their need for economic survival, employment was commonly pursued over schooling, as this opportunity assisted them

with addressing their reentry obstacles. Ms. Murphy, a case manager, who discussed her perspective concerning students' challenge with attending school regularly. She explained:

I think there's a lot of challenges with attendance. I think there's a lot. I think, one, you're dealing with 16 to 24-year-olds. So I think a lot of 18 to 24-year-olds, it is a real need to make your own money, and not that every student is working, but that's why they're not here. So, I do think that their focus is on getting money, having a job, all of that stuff is a factor. I think it makes it hard for them to prioritize school.

Black male interviewees also identified working and going to school as a barrier to their ability to engage and persist academically. As mentioned, Joshua explained that working and attending school simultaneously was necessary for his survival, yet difficult to balance:

When I got out [of jail], and I came back to school, my first jobs were doing mostly warehouse jobs.... Between two cities, I had three or two jobs, and they were so far. I'm not driving so I had to catch the bus there every day, and I worked graveyard shift and sometimes I would work morning shift.... It was mixing with school so I wasn't able to do both. So I had to focus on one thing, and when I was able to, I had got other jobs. But after getting a job, I was right back in the same position. I was not able to focus on school. But every time I didn't have a job I got to the point where I needed money so I would get other jobs and that's how I'd get my money. I didn't want to put myself back in jeopardy to go back to jail or anything like that so I try to do it the right way.

Here, while Joshua describes school as an important goal, employment, while a distraction, was viewed as necessary for economic survival and remaining crime free. However, when balancing school and work responsibilities became overwhelming, Joshua had to quit his job because it challenged his ability to excel academically. While he perceived quitting his job to support his

academic achievement, this decision caused him to struggle financially, wherein he often found himself in the same situation of having to choose between work and school.

Although New Directions' intentionally targets formerly incarcerated youth, students with a criminal record also posed a challenge in providing employment as a support service. This was observed in the case of Paul, who described that he doesn't check "yes" on employment applications when asked if he has a criminal record. When asked to explain why he doesn't check yes, Paul expressed, "I feel like they ain't going to hire me. 'Cause most places don't." School personnel also identified students' criminal status as a barrier to providing employment as a supportive service. For instance, Ms. Moore, a school administrator stated:

We focus on students with a criminal record because that's our target population. The only barrier, I think, that could be there, and we work around it anyways, is employment. But now, there's a new 'Ban the Box initiative'. So, employers are not allowed to ask on a job application whether or not there's a criminal record. Now, they could, once the job is offered, there is a background check that happens, and that still can happen. But through that process, they can get in the door.

Although Ms. Moore points to more supportive hiring policies and practices for formerly incarcerated individuals as one factor that can help to address this barrier, she still highlights it as a barrier when she states, "there is a background check that happens" once students are offered a job.

Conclusions

In conclusion, New Directions appeared to foster and cultivate educational resilience among students, including the Black male students, through a range of elements, including a multicultural education and self-directed academic curriculum, arts and self-expressive activities,

and work readiness training and job search assistance. These contextual features, practices, and processes appeared to meet a number of the student's developmental needs, which seemed to enhance their academic self-efficacy, optimism, and self-awareness. These elements also afforded students with opportunities to build social-emotional skills and caring and supportive relationships. They also appeared to serve as protective mechanism against the reentry obstacles that the Black male students experienced, as New Directions' case managers and supportive services kept them motivated and engaged in the learning process. Although neighborhood conditions, such as gangs, and student's criminal status served as obstacles to school and community reentry, these elements, in many ways, still allowed some to experience success in many domains of their lives.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This case study sought to understand of how an alternative school for formerly incarcerated youth between the ages of 18 and 25 facilitates community reintegration. Specifically, using the Educational Resilience Framework, this study explored the elements of New Directions, an alternative school in Los Angeles County, that fostered and cultivated the resilience of formerly incarcerated young Black men as they navigated and negotiated their school and community reentry processes (Bernard, 1995, 2004; Brooks, 2006, Ungar & Liebenerg, 2013a; Waxman et al., 2003; WestEd, 2011). This study also examined how the educational setting defined successful community reintegration. This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to relevant literature, and identifies implications for theory, future research, policy and social work practice. This chapter also discusses study limitations, and concludes with a summary statement of the findings.

Defining Successful Community Reintegration

A key goal of this case study was to examine how New Directions defined successful community reintegration. As the themes “educationally advanced” and “jobs are a big one” demonstrated participants perceived academic achievement and employment as key markers of success. The concept “educationally advanced” refers to earning a high school diploma. However, because remaining engaged and persisting academically was a challenge for many students, they also identified “being on time to the game,” meaning attending school regularly and participating in the learning process, as an important component of “educationally advanced.”

“Jobs are a big one,” refers to students successfully obtaining and maintaining legitimate employment. “Employable,” which refers to the development of pre-job skills (e.g., resume, cover letter, interview skills), was a key component of this concept as participants perceived these skills to increase students’ chances of obtaining legitimate and meaningful employment. This was especially important given students limited work histories, criminal status, and marginalized racial/ethnic positions.

Academic achievement and employment as markers of successful reentry is consistent with previous literature that identifies commitment to conventional activities, such as school and work, to serve as a positive turning point for formerly incarcerated youth (Blomberg, Bales, & Piquero, 2002; Bullis, Yovanoff, & Mueller, 2002; Elder, 1985; Hoffman & Cerbone, 1999; Todis et al, 2001; Uggen, 2000; Visser et al., 2011). Specifically, these studies also find that youth who are committed to school and/or work and have regular attendance are less likely to come in contact with the criminal justice system following release than youth without these commitments.

These findings also contribute to the body of literature concerning post-release schooling and employment. In particular, the findings uncover the nuances surrounding formerly incarcerated young Black men’s experiences and perceptions regarding their ability to successfully commit to school and/or work following release. For instance, as Joshua’s experience relayed, Joshua, a high school diploma appears to hold more value than a GED because “the name” helps to remove employers’ biases concerning their motivation towards legitimate employment. Additionally, while the young men believed that working and going to school would support academic achievement and reentry, balancing these responsibilities

simultaneously was often difficult. This therefore challenged some young men's ability to commit to school, as employment helped them address financial and other immediate needs..

New Directions also defined the development of social-emotional skills as a key marker of successful community reintegration. The major theme "emotionally stable," refers to intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development. Participants identified emotionally stable as a marker of success because they assumed that the ability to recognize, label and regulate feelings, develop a positive identity and empathy, make positive decisions, and build positive relationships would support students with excelling academically, obtaining and mainlining employment, and having a more successful reentry. This finding concurs with scholars that posit that the development of psychosocial maturity can enhance formerly incarcerated youths' ability to take advantage of positive turning points, such as education (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Steinberg, Cauffman, & Monahan, 2015). More specifically, Eccles and Roeser's (2011) argument that schools can facilitate healthy developmental trajectories among students facing significant adversity through academic curriculum, teacher-student relationships, and classroom emotional climate was shown through New Directions' non-traditional curriculum that incorporated students' cultural backgrounds, histories, and beliefs. The VOICES self-expressive and arts-based learning activities also provided students the opportunity to examine their on mental and emotional processes and build positive and rewarding relationships.

The last way in which New Directions defined successful community reintegration was "Off Probation" This concept refers to students' being formally released from system involvement, or rather, off probation. This marker of success, while not surprising, was important because it aligned with New Directions' organizational goals as a whole, including several of their initiatives beyond the school setting. Study participants perceived being free from

formal system involvement to serve as an important marker of successful reentry, because they believed this achievement could help to address the students' reentry obstacles, which, in turn, reduced their likelihood recidivating. New Directions staff therefore provided students with a range of supports, such as writing letters to judges to help prevent a young person from being re-incarcerated. They also had an open door/return policy for students who were re-incarcerated, graduated, or needed to dis-enroll due to personal responsibilities, and also supported initiatives, such as "Ban the Box."

Interviews with Black male students reinforced the aforementioned strategies as key elements that helps to move them from probation to liberation. Joshua, for example, perceived the legal advocacy and support he received from New Directions to influence the judge to not give him additional time in camp for violating his probation. He also perceived this to support his academic achievement and mental health. The young men also described New Directions support services and efforts to move them from probation to liberation, to position the school as a safe space in the community they could access to avoid being victimized and to protect them from engaging in crime and crime-related activities.

These findings are important because they contribute to previous literature on alternative schools concerning the characteristics of schools and classrooms as contexts that can positively influence student success (Amin et al., 2008; Darling & Price, 2004; Lagana-Riordan et al, 2011; Nelson et al., 2009; Tobin & Sprague, 2001; Ruiz de Velasco et al, 2008). In particular, these findings point to legal advocacy and support and school reentry policies as potential strategies within alternative school settings that can positively influence school, community, and criminal desistance processes of formerly incarcerated young Black men. They also highlight the important role micro contexts and relationships play in enhancing their post-release success.

Fostering and Cultivating Educational Resilience

Another goal of this case study was to explore how an alternative school for formerly incarcerated young adults facilitates community reintegration. As part of this goal, this study also sought to better understand if formerly incarcerated young Black men perceive the elements of an alternative school to serve as a protective environment against reentry obstacles. As such, due to the exploratory nature of the study, Educational Resilience served as the guiding theoretical framework. As described in Chapter 3, studies find educational settings that are rich in external protective factors (i.e., caring and supportive relationships, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities for participation) to bolster the resilience of students facing significant adversity. Several elements at New Directions therefore served as important external protective factors to formerly incarcerated young Black men throughout their community and school reentry processes.

Caring and Supportive Relationships. New Directions' fostered and cultivated caring and supportive relationships through their individualized academic curriculum, arts and self-expressive activities, and internships. Specifically, the self-directed approach of the individualized academic curriculum, which allowed students to work at their own pace, influenced academic instructors to view themselves as coaches, or rather, facilitators of learning. In seeing themselves as coaches, instructors were able to provide one-on-one support to students to help them address their school and non-school related challenges. This, in many ways, lessened the power dynamics between instructors and students, as young Black men often expressed feeling loved and respected by instructors. This also appeared to positively influence the school climate at New Directions, as the young Black men often described feeling a sense of safety and belonging as they participated in the learning process.

New Directions also fostered and cultivated caring and supportive relationships through arts and self-expressive activities. In particular, through the VOICES program, the young men collaborated with their peers from rival gangs in the recording studio, and displayed empathy upon witnessing instructors and students share personal, and in some cases, traumatic life stories through spoken work and musical performances. This, in many ways, helped to foster a school climate of belonging, which met the young men's stated developmental needs of respect and safety. New Directions also connected students to internships, which appeared to help meet the young men's development needs for love and meaning. They therefore believed that an internship would not only enhance their ability to obtain legitimate employment, but also allow them to build positive and rewarding relationships with adults and peers in the school setting. This was evidenced in the case of Michael, who felt motivated to pursue a career in filmmaking after observing and modeling the behaviors of his supervisor whom he defined as a "role model."

These findings are consistent with studies that point to positive adult-youth relationships as essential to promoting resilience among youth facing significant adversity. In particular, this literature base finds that schools that include adults who are trustworthy, attentive, empathetic, available, affirming, and respectful role models can positively influence students' schooling experiences and outcomes (Benard, 1996; Drennon-Gala, 1995; Want et al, 1998; Werner and Smith, 1982). Laursen and Birmingham (2003) also argue that school personnel can bolster students' resilience by intervening to address school and non-school related issues. This was observed in New Directions' individualized curriculum, wherein Ms. Jennings allowed Paul to work outside of the classroom due to the social anxiety he often experienced. The interactions of the case managers and other school personnel with the young men also offer a window into how

New Directions intervened to help students meet their needs outside the classroom, such as housing and employment. Additionally, Feinstein and colleagues (2008) examination of individual and environmental factors of resilience in a low-security juvenile correctional facility for males, found that adults who were consistent and provided emotional and counseling support to the young men enhanced their problem solving and social-emotional skills. This was the case with new the VOICES program, wherein instructors intentionally engaged youth in arts and self-expressive, social-emotional learning activities that supported their development intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

An individualized academic curriculum, arts and self-expressive activities, and internships may be important elements to the school reentry processes of formerly incarcerated young Black men. This is because these elements supported their development of caring and supportive relationships between and among students, instructors, and school personnel, which, in many ways, helped them to bond to the school setting. School bonding was therefore likely important to ensuring positive reentry experiences among the young Black male interviewees. Indeed, prior literature has documented school bonding as a key element of academic achievement (Benard, 2004; Haggerty, 1996; Stipek, 2006; Werner & Smith, 1982, Williams & Bryan, 2013).

While these three elements fostered and cultivated caring and supportive relationships at New Directions, the analysis found that some young Black men only interacted with school personnel, namely case managers, to address their academic and employment-related needs. For instance, the case managers revealed that some young Black men were reluctant to engage with them beyond academics and employment because their previous schooling and incarceration experiences likely influenced them to mistrust individuals who were a “representation of the

system.” It is unclear from the data if this was true among the remainder of the student body, or just particular to the Black male students. While these case managers’ perspectives hold value in the context of this study, the young Black male interviewees never mentioned this barrier directly. Rather, they commonly described school personnel’s cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds as important to their post-incarceration schooling experiences, because they believed this to help them with bonding to the school setting. Nevertheless, these findings, in many ways, points to race and culture as factors that can play an important role in fostering and cultivating caring and supportive relationships among young Black men throughout their school reentry processes. Based on the scope of this study, however, further research would be necessary to examine this point.

High Expectations. New Directions also fostered and cultivated high expectations through their individualized academic curriculum. As discussed earlier, the school’s self-directed approach influenced instructors to view themselves as facilitators of learning. They therefore coached the students throughout the learning process by communicating positive messages and encouraging students who struggled academically to remain engaged. These messages were also displayed on the walls throughout the school setting, such as “never give up,” and “be awesome today.” Young Black men who participated in a study interview perceived these positive and encouraging messages to bolster their academic self-efficacy, optimism, and problem solving skills, as these messages and their interactions with instructors met their developmental needs of challenge, love, and mastery. They therefore described staff as “caring” and “cool” because the messages they relayed helped them to believe in their own skills and abilities, which motivated them towards academic achievement.

This finding aligns with the results of other studies that show that positive and student-centered messages fosters and cultivates a culture of high expectations (Bernard, 1996, 2004; Haggerty, 1996; Stipek, 2006, Werner & Smith, 1982; WestEd, 2011; Williams & Bryan, 2013). These studies also find that schools that employ a rigorous and equitable curriculum (i.e. thematic, experiential, challenging, and comprehensive) fosters and cultivates high expectation messages, as they accommodate students' diverse learning styles and abilities. This was evidenced in New Directions' individualized curriculum, which increased opportunities for instructors to convey positive and encouraging messages to students as they participated in the learning process. Studies also find that high expectations are important to youth who are returning to school after dropping out (Wayman, 2002).

Meaningful Opportunities for Participation. With regards to meaningful opportunities for participation, New Directions fostered this protective factor through a range of elements, including a multicultural education, individualized academic curriculum, arts and self-expressive activities, and employment and work readiness training. New Directions' multicultural education is a component of the school's non-traditional curriculum. Academic instructors provided this opportunity by developing and guiding students through a range of culturally-relevant learning activities, such as Mr. Brown's anti-oppression history project. Instructors and young Black men also described this form of education as the "truth," as they believed that it met the young men's developmental needs of belonging, meaning, mastery, and respect. The Black male interviewees therefore perceived the instructor's culturally-relevant learning activities to enhance their academic self-efficacy and problem solving skills, as they incorporated their histories, values, and beliefs throughout the learning process. These activities also appeared to enhance the young men's sense of self-awareness and identity, as Robert, for example, expressed

that he is “a better individual” because he attends a school that teaches him about his history and culture.

This finding is consistent with previous research finding that learning activities that are participatory, empowering, and provoke critical thinking to bolster the educational resilience of students who face significant adversity (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Learning First Alliance, 2001; Wang et al., 1998; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). This was observed through academic instructors’ project-based, multicultural learning activities that motivated and empowered the young men as they participated in the learning process. Instructors’ culturally responsive pedagogy also concurs with perspectives on cultural adherence as an important factor in the racial and cultural socialization processes for people of color in education (Chavous et al., 2008; Dudley-Grant et al., 2004; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2010, Hughes et al., 2015; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Smalls et al., 2007; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2008; 2013b).

New Directions’ individualized academic curriculum, employment and work readiness training activities also fostered meaningful opportunities for young Black men. Specifically, the young men perceived the individualized model as important because, given their low academic achievement, age, economic pressures (i.e., housing, food, parenthood), and in some cases, mental health status, working towards a high school diploma at their own pace was critical. Employment and work readiness training, such resume development, mock interviews and internships also fostered meaningful opportunities for the young men, because these elements also helped them address their reentry obstacles. The young men also perceived legitimate employment to support their criminal desistance processes, as it enhanced their ability to abstain from crime and crime-related activities. Employment and work readiness training opportunities

therefore met their development needs of mastery, meaning, and power, which bolstered their competence, optimism, and self-efficacy towards legitimate employment.

As discussed above, school-based activities that are empowering provide meaningful opportunities for students to participate in the learning process. Seminal studies of resilience find that schools that give students responsibilities, allow them to actively participate, and are treated as responsible individuals had lower levels of delinquency and school failure (Rutter et al., 1979; 1984; 1987; 2000). New Directions' individualized academic curriculum and employment and work readiness training activities appear to be empowering. Moreover, the young Black male interviewees felt that simultaneously participating in school and work enhances their ability to excel academically and support a crime-free lifestyle.

Additionally, New Directions arts and self-expressive activities offered meaningful opportunities for the students including the Black male students. Specifically, the VOICES program, which included music, poetry, and spoken word and musical performances, helped to meet the young men's developmental needs of belonging, mastery, respect, and safety. As discussed above, these activities accommodated their diverse learning styles, expanded their critical thinking and literacy skills, and allowed them to cope with their traumatic life experiences and stressors. Incorporating these activities as part of the learning process therefore motivated the young men and bolstered their self-awareness, empathy, problem solving skills and self-efficacy.

The literature supports as the notion that social-emotional learning activities motivate students and enhances their academic achievement (Benard, 2006; Elias, 2008). A meta-analysis of school-based social-emotional learning programs found that effective interventions are those that target "high-risk youth," such as those engaged in crime and crime-related activities, have a

sequenced step-by-step approach, use active forms of learning, focus sufficient time on skill development, and have explicit learning goals (Durlak et al., 2011). Several studies also find the development of social-emotional skills is to be associated with positive development outcomes, such as academic achievement, prosocial behaviors, and work readiness (Catalano et al., 2002; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Larson & Tran, 2014; Wins et al., 2004).

Implications

The findings from this study have several implications for how educational resilience can be fostered and cultivated in the context of an alternative school. This section discusses these theoretical, research, policy, and social work practice implications.

Theory. Early resilience research primarily examined individual level risks factors that lead to negative outcomes among youth facing adversity. More recently, resilience studies have found that some youth develop positively despite the presence of adversity. Scholars therefore posit that resilience should be viewed as a dynamic process that is dependent upon the interactions between individuals and his/her environment. This study's findings support this notion because participants' perceptions, or rather definitions of successful reentry were heavily influenced by the environmental factors that New Directions offered. This includes a high school diploma program that offered a multicultural and individualized curriculum, social-emotional learning activities that included arts and self-expressive activities, and employment and work readiness training. Young Black men perceived these elements to bolster their resilience, because they met their developmental and cultural needs. This therefore motivated them towards education, legitimate employment, and pro-social (legal) activity as they navigated and negotiated their school and community reentry processes.

Using Educational Resilience as a guiding framework also helped to uncover school-based opportunities that allowed the young Black men to bolster their resilience in the face of adversity. This was demonstrated in several cases where the young men expressed that New Directions non-traditional curriculum, which included a multicultural and individualized approach to education, to enhance their academic self-efficacy and optimism despite that they arrived to school with low academic achievement. This finding thus supports the argument that resilience occurs even when risk factors are plentiful (Ungar, 2011). The Educational Resilience framework is therefore likely a key framework that considers formerly incarcerated youths' social-ecological environments, which can help researchers with uncovering these young people's internal and external assets that can predict successful developmental and post-release outcomes in the face of adversity (Stokols, Lejano, & Hipp, 2013; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). This can also help to prevent research from pathologizing certain groups of youth as resilient and non-resilient based on individual characteristics.

The study findings also identify cultural adherence as an important external protective factor in fostering and cultivating educational resilience among formerly incarcerated young Black men. Specifically, while the young men described New Directions' instructors and school personnel as caring and supportive, and school and classroom activities as meaningful, the individuals and school and classroom activities they identified adhered, in some way, to their cultural beliefs, norms, values, and racial/ethnic identity. This was important because New Directions' multicultural education accommodated the young men's diverse learning styles and interest, which helped to bolster their resilience. This study therefore adds to the literature on educational resilience, in that the findings highlight how culture and race influence young Black men in their reentry processes. The findings also identify cultural adherence as a factor that can

enhance alternative school's ability to foster and cultivate caring and supportive relationships, high expectations, and meaningful opportunities among formerly incarcerated young adults of color.

In addition to cultural adherence, the findings point to social-emotional learning as additional protective factor essential to fostering and cultivating educational resilience among formerly incarcerated young Black men. In particular, New Directions arts and self-expressive activities, which were student-focused and relationship-oriented, were essential to teaching and reinforcing students' development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. This is important, because studies also find that social-emotional learning activities are important to bolstering the resilience of system-involved youth (Durlak et al., 2011; Feinstein, 2008). These findings also expand this knowledge from correctional to community-based educational settings that serve young adults, as very few studies have explored social-emotional learning as a factor in bolstering the educational resilience of youth who return to school following a period of incarceration.

The qualitative approach of this study contributes to methodological implications for resilience research. In particular, Ungar and Liebenberg (2009) assert that use of qualitative methods in researching resilience helps investigators to “discern the culturally diverse understandings of positive development under adverse circumstances” (p. 104). The inductive data collection methods therefore helped to uncover the subjective ways in which participants as New Directions defined and experienced successful community reintegration. They also helped with better understanding the role culture and race played in the school reentry processes of young Black men, and the unique ways in which they navigated and negotiated their community and school reentry processes.

Research. In terms of research, additional studies pertaining to educational reentry and success among young Black men is needed. Specifically, with regards to conceptualizing and measuring successful reentry, it is well established that education and employment serve as important turning points for formerly incarcerated youth. However, less is known about the ways in which successful reentry is subjectively defined in the context of an alternative schools. Future studies might therefore explore effective ways to measure growth development in terms social-emotional skills and capacities, as emotional stability was identified as a key marker of success at New Directions. Examining the role social-emotional learning in cultivating young Black men's psychosocial capacities will also be important once effective ways to measure growth development is established.

Studies concerned with the social and economic determinants of academic achievement among Black boys and young men can also be beneficial. Specifically, Morenoff and Harding (2014) argue that communities with high rates of incarceration and reentry should be viewed as a linked dynamic process, as these factors weaken these communities' social structures and influence the decisions of public service professionals, such as law enforcement, and formerly incarcerated individuals. This is evidenced in literature that documents high-levels of police surveillance in disadvantaged communities of color, and the adoption of zero tolerance policies in schools the primarily serve low-income youth of color (Alexander, 2010, Dupper, 2010, Fabelo et al., 2011, Fowler, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Losen & Martinez, 2013). Future research might therefore examine the role social systems and organizations play in sustaining and eradicating mass incarceration and recidivism in marginalized communities of color. Specifically, research that examines disciplinary policies and practices in school settings

that disproportionately impact young Black men, and what it means in terms of incarceration, reentry, recidivism, and second chances is needed.

An analysis of system approaches to educating formerly incarcerated young Black men is also needed. Specifically, as Chapter 6 describes, New Directions curriculum, arts and self-expressive activities, and internships played an important role in fostering and cultivating young Black men's resilience. However, incorporating components of the young men's cultural backgrounds and racial/ethnic identity as they participated in the learning was critical to developing positive and rewarding relationships. Future research might therefore examine specific cultural activities and interactions among and between adults and youth within educational settings for emerging adults, to uncover how these mechanisms can support the development of caring and supportive relationships. This research should also extend our understanding of the ways in which these activities and interactions can positively influence the academic achievement and reentry processes of formerly incarcerated young Black men. Given the mixed evidence concerning the effectiveness of mentoring programs for this population (Abrams, Mizel, Nguyen, & Shlonsky, 2014), future research might consider these relationship building interventions as a key unit of analysis.

Moreover, while employment served as a key element that kept the young Black men engaged in the learning process, little is known about the ways in which they experience and perceive education and employment in the face of adversity. As such, additional research that enhances our understanding of how formerly incarcerated young Black men navigate and negotiate school and work responsibilities simultaneously and the characteristics and perceptions of young men who are "successful" at managing these responsibilities is needed. Findings from such studies are important because they can influence the development of school-based practices

and interventions that promote healthy developmental trajectories among youth in the process of reentry.

Additional research is needed to enhance our understanding of how these alternative school elements can enhance young Black men's life trajectories over time. Specifically, while this study found that New Directions offered a range of meaningful opportunities for young men to participate in the learning process, it only examined these phenomena through observational and interview methods. Future research should therefore use both qualitative and quantitative methods to develop a better understanding of how these elements can improve formerly incarcerated young Black men's developmental outcomes. Based on this study's findings, future research might investigate how curriculum that aims to enhance student's racial/ethnic identity can bolster their academic achievement. This research might also examine the role social-emotional learning activities play in addressing internal and external barriers to successful reentry. This research should consider multicultural education as a conceptual and guiding framework, as this approach can help to accommodate for young Black men's diverse learning styles and the roles their race, culture, language, gender and class play in their post-incarceration schooling experiences (Howard, 2015).

Along this line of thinking, future research that develops and implements criteria for educational-reentry interventions for formerly incarcerated young Black men can also be beneficial. Currently, the literature concerning recidivism reduction programs is scant and has provided modest effects (c.f., Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015). A better understanding of the quality and characteristics of educational-reentry interventions that aim to enhance academic achievement and reduce recidivism among formerly incarcerated young adults can therefore help with identifying school-based reentry models that are effective and sustainable.

Policy. In addition to theory and research, this study’s findings also point to important legislative shifts. Specifically, because the young men experienced systemic barriers, such as offender and racial discrimination, which challenged their ability to obtain legitimate employment, policymakers at federal, state, and local levels should develop legislation that helps to remove system barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated young Black men from experiencing success as they reenter society. As Ms. Moore, stated a “ban the box” policy is one effort that can address the discrimination young Black men experience in their attempts to obtain and maintain legitimate employment. Moreover, policy reform efforts that shift resources to community-based prevention and youth development interventions that are age-appropriate, culturally-relevant, and evidenced-based are also needed. These policy efforts are important, because they can, in many ways, help to limit the amount of time an individual spends behind bars as well as and reduce future contact with the criminal justice system. Examples of policy reform efforts that attempt to address mass incarceration and recidivism at the state level- includes Proposition 47 in California, and the adjustment’s to New York’s Rockefeller Drug Laws offer. At the federal level, the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 and reductions in excessive sentences for individuals serving time for federal drug offenses are additional criminal justice reform efforts in the U.S.

Furthermore, legislation that is focuses on cross-system coordination should also be developed. In particular, these policies should ensure that social service agencies, such as education, employment, child welfare, and mental health, can provide a range of resources that can buffer the systemic barriers that prevent these young people from getting their needs met as they reenter society. For instance, these policies can ensure that eligibility requirements across agencies are consistent, and that service approaches are aligned to meet specific outcomes.

These policies should also aim to meet the specific needs and interest of these youth. In terms of education, legislation that better aligns correctional and public school system standards regarding graduation requirements, credit hours, and program components can help to improve the school and community reentry experiences, trajectories and outcomes of youth following a period of incarceration.

Social Work Practice. The study findings also have important implications for social work practice. As discussed above, employment and work readiness training and arts and self-expressive activities helped to enhance the young men's post-incarceration schooling experiences and bolstered their resilience. Case management, therapeutic, and mentoring strategies might therefore serve as effective service approaches that can ensure healthy development trajectories among formerly incarcerated young Black men who are in the transition to adulthood. More specifically, the inclusion of school social workers in educational settings that serve system-involved youth can likely support their academic achievement and reentry success. This was evident throughout many aspects of the study findings. Moreover, because race and culture was critical to the ways in which the young men experienced and perceived school, social workers and adults serving in helping roles in educational settings that include system-involved young Black men, should consider their cultural backgrounds and life experiences as they implement universal and culturally-specific strategies as part of their service approaches. These individuals should also closely represent the lived experiences and cultural and racial/ethnic backgrounds of these young men, as this was important to engaging Black male interviewees in programming.

Additionally, the study findings demonstrate that supporting young Black men with becoming employable is important to their school and community reentry-processes. However,

Black male interviewees at times perceived legitimate employment to be out of reach because of their criminal status and racial/ethnic identity, despite the support they received from case managers. Training modules that enhances school-based social workers knowledge and skills on how to coach young Black men in addressing racial barriers to legitimate employment following incarceration can likely support their criminal desistance and social-emotional development.

Last, the young Black men perceived their re-enrollment in school following incarceration to positively influence their self-efficacy, optimism (i.e., future goals and plans), and ability to see and pursue life without crime. The development and implementation of multidisciplinary practice models that include school-based social workers and criminal justice and educational professionals can play a key role in identifying and connecting formerly incarcerated youth and young adults to viable community-based educational options prior to release. Specifically, school social workers and criminal justice and educational professionals might work closely to seamlessly coordinate the youths' transitions from correctional to community-based school. The development and implementation of these multidisciplinary teams can thus help to increase a young person's chances of arriving to school upon being released. This is especially important in the era of mass de-incarceration, as there is a need for service models that can effectively address mass incarceration in the U.S., as well as reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Limitations

The proposed dissertation study has several limitations. First, the unit of analysis for this case study was the alternative school. The design did not allow the researcher to observe the young men's experiences outside of the school setting. While it is likely that these external factors, such as neighborhood and family conditions, may have influenced the young men's post-

incarceration schooling experiences, this design limitation prevented the researcher from developing a rich thick description of the influential role these external factors played. Moreover, while the study focused specifically on how the elements of New Directions facilities positive reentry experiences of young Black men, the findings may have been transferable to all youth in the school setting. It may therefore be difficult to discern which elements are unique to Black men.

Second, given that the study relied primarily on observational data, it is prone to researcher bias, as I was only data collector and analyst. Additionally, because I participated in the activities being observed, it is likely that my presence and involvement influenced the behaviors of those being observed (i.e., reactivity bias). While these factors pose threats to the transferability of the study's findings, as detailed in Chapter 4, they were accounted for by using multiple strategies to improve the rigor and trustworthiness of the study.

Third, the purposive selection process that included convenience and snowball sampling strategies makes the study subject to selection bias. This threat can further skew the study's findings, as the data collected may not fully represent the experiences and perspectives of all individuals in this alternative school setting. Moreover, although all eight young Black male interviewees were contacted for a second interview, only four (i.e., Chris, Joshua, Robert, and Kevin) participated in two interviews. It is therefore likely that the perceptions of the young Black men are skewed towards the experiences of the four young men participating in two interviews. Nevertheless, the researcher attempted to account for this by using multiple strategies to improve rigor and trustworthiness, as outlined in Chapter 4. This limitation also points to the difficulties in engaging "hard-to-reach populations" in research, and the need for effective strategies that can address this threat in conducting qualitative, empirical research.

Fourth, although the research site selected for the case study offered a unique opportunity for knowledge development, it had only been in operation for eight months at the start of data collection. Given its brief history, it is likely that the study's findings may not fully determine which contextual features, practices, and processes might actually be influencing the post-incarceration schooling experiences of formerly incarcerated young Black men. This is because New Directions service approach was refined occasionally throughout the study period.

Lastly, while generalizability was not a focus of this study given its exploratory nature, the study's findings cannot be generalized across settings and populations as it only examined one alternative school setting in Los Angeles, and focused specifically on the experiences of young Black men. Nevertheless, while there are a range of community-based educational programs for young adults who are overage and under-credited, such as YouthBuild USA, very little research still exists concerning programs that reduce recidivism and improve the educational and life trajectories of formerly incarcerated young adults aged 18 to 25, especially Black men (Justice Center, 2015). The study therefore helps to fill this knowledge gap.

Summary and Conclusion

Using Educational Resilience as a guiding theoretical framework, this study sought to develop a better understanding of the ways in which an alternative school for formerly incarcerated young adults facilitates successful community reintegration among young Black men. This study also describes how actors within the school setting defined successful reentry, and the contextual features that aligned with these definitions. In uncovering participants' subjective definitions and identifying contextual elements, practice, and processes that served as external projective factors for formerly incarcerated young Black men at New Directions helps to

fill a gap in knowledge concerning how the structure and culture of an alternative school can support their academic achievement and school and community reentry processes.

This knowledge is important because there are increased efforts to identify practices and interventions that can address the social and economic effects of mass incarceration, such as public safety issues in marginalized communities of color, and improve healthy developmental trajectories among boys and men of color (Baker, 2015; Petersilia & Cullen, 2014; Pettus-Davis & Epperson, 2015; Romero & Holden, 2015; The Editorial Board, 2015). An inductive approach to exploring the ways in which alternative schools foster and cultivate resilience among young Black men was also important, because the subjective experiences and voices of boys and men of color are often absent from the research literature. The Black male interviewees offered insightful perspectives concerning the elements of an alternative school that supports positive community reintegration experiences, as well as the strategies they use to address their reentry obstacles. Their narratives were essential to this study, because it improves our understanding of the approaches that might effectively address the social issues impacting their life goals and chances.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTOR INFORMED CONSENT

“Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Exploratory Case Study of How an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults Facilitates Community Reintegration”

Charles Lea, a doctoral student from the Department of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an instructor in a community-based, alternative education program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how community-based, alternative education programs help formerly incarcerated young adults obtain a high school diploma and supports their community reintegration process.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researchers will observe your class session today and possibly others you may facilitate in the future. The researchers will record notes on course content, curriculum, instruction, and group discussion.

How long will I be in the research study?

This study will last for a period of approximately 12 months. During this time, the researchers will observe course sessions two to three times per week. You may be involved in one or more observations.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for this study, except that you may feel slightly uncomfortable at first with an observer in the classroom.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study; however, we do intend to donate books to your program upon our completion of the study. In addition, the results of the research may contribute to a better understanding overall about how this intervention works to help formerly incarcerated young adults with obtaining a high school diploma and following a period of incarceration.

Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?

There is no risk of a breach of confidentiality. We will not link your name to anything that happens in the class or anything that you say, either in the notes we record today or in the text of any reports we write as a part of this research project.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact the Principal Investigator: Charles Lea, MSW at 323-212-5945 or via e-mail at chlea@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

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

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

 Name of Participant

 Signature of Participant

 Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

 Name of Person Obtaining Consent

 Contact Number

 Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

 Date

APPENDIX B

STUDENT ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT

“Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Exploratory Case Study of How an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults Facilitates Community Reintegration”

Hello, my name is Charles Lea, and I am a graduate student in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at UCLA. I am conducting research on the post-incarceration schooling experiences of formerly incarcerated young adults who return to alternative school settings. The purpose of our research is to better understand how alternative schools like New Directions help formerly incarcerated young adults with obtaining a high school diploma, and the features of this school that supports community reintegration. I feel like it is really important to find out more about how programs like this are working, so that many more formerly incarcerated young men and women can be helped. To do this, I will observe your class session today and possibly others that you may attend in the future.

While I understand your participation in New Directions may not be voluntary, your participation in my observation session is voluntary. If you agree to be observed during this session, I will record notes on what happens in the course in both what is taught and how you might respond to the class. There is no risk of a breach of confidentiality. I will not link your name to anything that happens in the class or anything that you say, either in the notes we record today or in the text of any reports we write as a part of this research project.

If you decide not to be observed during this session, I will not record notes on your participation or the things you say, and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits either with probation or any aspect of the New Directions program.

If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, I am happy to provide you with follow up information on how to contact me or the human subjects office at UCLA.

“Do you have any questions about the research or what we are doing today?”

[PAUSE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS]

At this time, I will ask if you would like your comments in class recorded to please raise your hand so I will know.

- Document the date and names of the students who consent to participate on the oral script.
- Sign and date the oral consent script document with the names of each study participant that consented to be observed
- Have the instructor who witnessed the oral consent presentation and verbal consent to sign the dated oral consent script document as well.
- Proceed with recording information only on those students who agreed to be observed

Thank you.

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL PERSONNEL INFORMED CONSENT

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Exploratory Case Study of How an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults Facilitates Community Reintegration

Charles Lea, MSW a doctoral student from the Department of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a staff member in a community-based, alternative education program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experience as a staff member in an alternative school that provides services to formerly incarcerated young adults.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 60 to 90 minute one-on-one interview or focus group with approximately five to seven (5-7) other staff members at this alternative school. During the group you will be asked a series of questions to respond to and discuss with other members.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take approximately 60-90 minutes, including signing forms, participating in the interview or focus group and receiving your compensation.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

If you feel uncomfortable at any time and do not want to reveal certain kinds of information, you can skip a question or leave the focus group at any time.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not benefit directly from your participation in the research. However, the information you provide and the overall results of the research may help to improve services offered to formerly incarcerated young adults who enroll in an alternative school setting following a period of incarceration in a correctional facility.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

You will receive a payment in the form of a gift card of \$25 if you choose to participate in the focus group.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. I will not write your name in the transcripts of the interview, and when I save your interview transcript onto the computer I will use a code rather than your name. Your name will not be linked to your

responses in any way. All of the digital audio recordings of the focus group will be kept in a password protected online file, and the only people who will have access to the password will be members of the UCLA research team.

All participants will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group between the participants only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: Charles Lea, MSW at 323-212-5945 or via e-mail at chlea@ucla.edu. If you wish to ask questions about your rights as a research participant or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researchers, please call the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

CHECK BOX:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX D

FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How An Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Youth Facilities Community Reintegration

Founder/Executive Interview Guide

Background/Demographics

1. Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?
 - Where are you from? Live currently? (family background)
 - What was it like growing up in your neighborhood? Family?
2. How did you get involved in this work?
 - Personal/employment history
 - Can you describe the settings and populations you've worked with?
 - Did these experiences influence your career pathway? How?

Overview of Alternative School

3. Can you describe the organizational history of the organization?
 - Founding/longevity
 - History in the community
 - Experience serving incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth
4. What is the mission/goals of this alternative school? How and why was this decided?
5. Does the school have a sponsoring agency? Describe.
 - Type of agency (charter school, other)
 - Types of support received from sponsoring agency (financial, staffing, admin, in-kin, other)

Leadership and Staffing

6. Can you describe the school's leadership and staffing structure?
 - Racial/ethnic background
 - Experience working with incarcerated/formerly incarcerated youth
 - Hiring processes/practices
 - Professional development and training
 - Staff to participant ratio
 - Strengths, challenges, and needs (e.g., staff turnover)

Students

7. Can you describe the students who in enroll in your alternative school?
 - Racial/ethnic background; Gender
 - Academic skills/abilities

- Criminal history
- Strengths, challenges and needs (dropout, etc.)

Service Model and Approach

8. Can you describe the schools service model?
 - Educational program (e.g., Bring You're A Game)
 - Employment Services (e.g., work readiness/life skills training, job placement)
 - Case Management/Counseling
 - Leadership (e.g., youth policy council)
 - Arts-Based Activities (e.g., F.L.O.W, music studio, etc.)
 - Other (Down to Earth, service learning, supportive Services, partnerships, etc.)
9. What types of supports are available to students with a criminal record? Similar or different than other students?

High Expectations

10. What expectations does the school have of students? How are these expectations promoted?

Supportive and Caring Relationships

11. How does the school recognize students' strengths? Accomplishments?
12. Does the school intervene to help students address non-school related issues? How?

Meaningful Opportunities

13. What types of opportunities are available for students to participate in the learning process? What impact do these opportunities have on students?

Budget

14. Can you describe the schools budget and funding sources for FY 2016-17?
 - Is your budget sufficient to address youth's service needs? Explain.
 - Are you able to leverage in-kind contributions to augment participant services? Explain.
 - What are you plans to sustain the alternative school? Explain.

Closing

15. What does it mean to be successful in this educational setting? Why?
16. How would you compare formerly incarcerated Black male students to other students?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share about anything we did or did not discuss?

APPENDIX E

CASE MANGER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How An Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Youth Facilities Community Reintegration

Case Manager Interview Guide

Background/Demographics

1. Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?
 - Where are you from? Live currently? (family background)
 - What was it like growing up in your neighborhood? Family?
2. How did you get involved in this work?
 - Personal/employment history
 - Can you describe the settings and populations you've worked with?
 - Did these experiences influence your career pathway? How?

Overview of Case Management Services

3. Can you describe the overall goal and structure of case management services at this alternative school?
 - Philosophy/approach, goals, leadership/management structure, etc.
 - Services, activities, assessments/service plans, partnerships, referrals, etc.
 - How do case managers determine service needs for students?
 - What is the average caseload per case Manger? Is this load manageable given the support that students need?

Supportive and Caring Relationships

4. How do you and your case management team get to know your students?
5. What case management strategies are used with students who are struggling to remain engaged and enrolled in school?

High Expectations

6. What expectations do you have for your students?
7. How do case managers promote high expectations with students on their case load?
8. How are these expectations reinforced?
9. How do students respond to these expectations?

Meaningful Opportunities for Participation

10. What types of opportunities are available for students to participate in the case management process?

11. What impact do these opportunities have on your students?

Closing

12. What does it mean to be successful in this educational setting? Why?

13. What works for providing case management services to formerly incarcerated youth in an alternative school setting? Challenges?

14. How would you compare formerly incarcerated Black male students to other students?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share about anything we did or did not discuss?

APPENDIX F

ACADEMIC INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Exploratory Case Study of How An Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Youth Facilities Community Reintegration

Academic Instructor Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group. Our discussion today will focus on how the structure and practices within this school and classroom settings support formerly incarcerated young adults as they pursue their high school diploma. The focus group will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and you will receive \$25 for your participation. Please know that all of the information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be connected with any personal identifying information in any way. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Teacher Background/Demographics

I'd like to begin by asking some general questions about your personal and teaching background.

- Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?
 - Where you from? Live currently? (family background)
 - What was it like growing up in your neighborhood? Family?
 - What was school like for you? (elementary, secondary, post-secondary)
- How did you get involved in this work?
 - Personal and employment history
 - Can you describe the settings and populations you've worked in?
 - Did these experiences have an influence on your career pathway? How?

Overview of Educational Program

Next I'd like to ask you some questions about the educational program

- Can you describe the structure of the John/Muir Educational Program
 - Philosophy, goals, activities, assessments, etc.
 - Leadership or management structure
 - Strategies/model for enhancing academic achievement?
 - Partners or providers selected for participation

Classroom Structure and Culture

Next I'd like to ask you some questions about your classroom structure and culture.

- Can you describe how you structure your classroom?
 - Teaching philosophy and strategies
 - Management structure
- *Supportive and Caring Relationships*
 - How do you get to know your students?
 - What dispositions and characteristics do you possess that help strengthen student-teacher relationships?
 - Trustworthy; attentive; empathetic; respectful, listening
 - What instructional strategies do you use with students who are struggling to learn?
 - How do you think about students' cultures when you are creating lesson plans?
 - Do you intervene to help students address non-school related issues? If so, how?
 - What is your philosophy about teacher-student interactions?
 - What is the connection between teacher-student interactions and students': Achievement? Emotional development? Social development?
- *High Expectations*
 - What expectations do you have of your students?
 - How do you promote high student expectations in your classrooms?
 - Rules (i.e., clear and consistent)
 - Educational curriculum (i.e., rigorous, equitable, accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities"
 - Opportunities to participate in decision-making processes
 - Perceive students (as resilient)
 - How do you reinforce these messages?
 - How do the students respond to these strategies?
- *Meaningful Opportunities for Participation*
 - What types of opportunities are available for students to participate in the learning process in meaningful ways?
 - Participatory opportunities (e.g., cooperative learning; extracurricular and after school programs)
 - Contributory opportunities (e.g., school and classroom governance, serve learning)
 - Empowering opportunities that provoke critical thinking
 - What impact do these meaningful opportunities have on your students:
 - Build social competence; problem-solving skills; sense of self, future orientation etc.

Closing Questions

- How would you compare your teaching experiences at New Earth to other educational settings you have taught?
- What does it mean to be successful in this educational setting:
 - Academic achievement?
 - Community reintegration?

- I am trying to better understand how teachers describe educational resilience. How would you describe educational resilience?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about anything we did not discuss or that I did not ask?

APPENDIX G

FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUNG BLACK MEN RECRUITMENT FLYER

University of California, Los Angeles
Luskin School of Public Affairs, Department of Social Welfare

FORMERLY INCARCERATED BLACK MEN (18-25) WANTED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY EXAMINING POST-INCARCERATION SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

WHO: African American/Black men, ages 18 to 25, residents of Los Angeles County, who were released from a correctional facility within last five years, and are currently enrolled in school for at least three months,

WHAT: As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in two in-person interview lasting approximately one hour, where you will be asked questions about your post-incarceration schooling experiences.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$25 gift certificate for completing at least 30 minutes of the first interview, and a \$35 gift card for completing the second.

BENEFITS: There are no anticipated risks or discomforts by participating in this study. The results from this research may assists school and juvenile justice staff members on how to best support and assist young Black men in school following their release from a correctional facility.

CONTACT: For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact the principal investigator, Charles Lea, MSW at 323-212-5945 or via e-mail at chlea@ucla.edu.

APPENDIX H

FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUNG BLACK MEN INFORMED CONSENT

“Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Exploratory Case Study of How an Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Young Adults Facilitates Community Reintegration”

Mr. Charles Lea, MSW, in collaboration with Dr. Laura Abrams from the Department of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. Mr. Lea is a graduate student in the Department of Social Welfare, and is conducting this study as a part of a course project. Dr. Abrams is serving as Mr. Lea’s faculty sponsor. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you meet the criteria of the target population. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to examine the post-incarceration schooling experiences of young adult Black males (aged 18-25) in Los Angeles County. We are interested in understanding what you see as critical to your academic success following incarceration, as well as factors that influence your academic aspirations and future opportunities.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Sign and date the consent form.
- Sign and date the consent to review case file, so that study eligibility can be determined
- Schedule an interview date and time with the Principal Investigator. Interviews will take place at the community organization you are a participant of.
- If selected, schedule a date to be observed by a researcher during school hours.
- Attend the scheduled interview with the Principal Investigator where you will be asked questions about your post-incarceration schooling experiences, including your school behavior, interactions with teachers, school staff and other students, and any challenges and/or successes you experienced.
- If selected and willing, to be observed by a researcher at school on the pre-scheduled observation date.

How long will I be in the research study?

This study is expected to end after all study participants have completed the interviews and all the information has been collected. Interviews will last approximately one hour. Your participation in this study will therefore take a total of about two hours, as you will be asked to complete two interviews.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts by participating in this study, except that you may feel slightly uncomfortable when sharing any negative experiences in school you may have had.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, the results from this research may assist school and juvenile justice staff members on how to best support and assist young Black males in school following their release from a juvenile correctional facility.

Will I be paid for participating?

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$25 gift certificate for completing at least 30 minutes of the first interview, and a \$35 gift card for completing the second.

Will information about my participation and me be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be shared only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of placing interview notes, audio recordings, and consent forms in a locked cabinet. Interview notes, audio recordings and consent forms will also be kept in separate folders. Only the Principal Investigator and Faculty Sponsor will have access to this data and will make transcriptions of the interview with no names attached, after which audio recordings will be destroyed and interview notes will be shredded. Transcripts will also be marked with an alias assigned to them. You have the right to review the audio recordings made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

On the checklist at the end of this consent form, you will be asked to indicate if you would permit the researchers to use the information you provide as part of this study for future research.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- You may review, edit, and erase the tapes/recordings of your in-person interview.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

• **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Principal Investigator: Charles Lea, MSW at 323-212-5945 or via e-mail at chlea@ucla.edu

Faculty Sponsor: Laura S. Abrams, PhD at 310-206-0693 or via e-mail at abrams@publicaffairs.ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

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

POTENTIAL USES OF DATA

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

- I agree to allow interview transcripts to be used for future research
- I do NOT agree to allow interview transcripts to be used for future research

CONTACT FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Please check the appropriate box below and initial:

- I agree to be contacted for future research studies
- I do NOT agree to be contacted for future research studies

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Contact Number

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX I

FORMERLY INCARCERATED YOUNG BLACK MEN INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW #1

Background

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Where are you from? Where did you spend your childhood? Who raised you when you were little?
 - a. Use follow-up questions to determine family structure and family structure changes prior to and through adolescence. (i.e., SES, housing, etc.)
3. How was it for you growing up in [X] neighborhood?
4. What was school like for you growing up?
 - a. Use follow-up questions to flesh out the participants' social and educational history. Lead these questions to a discussion of high school and adolescence.
 - i. Peer groups and peer interactions?
 - ii. Academic achievement? (i.e. grades)
 - iii. Teacher interactions?
 - iv. Gangs, Drugs, Violence?
 - v. Policing? (community and school)

Incarceration

5. Can you describe how you initially became involved with the criminal justice system? (i.e., incarceration)
 - a. First incarceration, offense type, facility, length of incarceration.
 - i. Use follow-ups to determine number of incarcerations in lifetime, types of offenses, facilities, etc.
 - b. Interactions with correctional officers (i.e., fairness, safety, fear, etc.)
 - c. Types of correctional educational programs participate in?
 - i. Follow-up with questions about quality and usefulness of these programs.
 - d. How did they prepare you to return to the community?
 - i. Follow-up with questions on making connections with parole or probation, whether educational assistance was set up prior to release (during any period of incarceration), date of last reentry.

Reentry

6. Overall, how has reentry been for you? How hard or easy have you found it?
 - a. Where have you been released to? (housing/living situations, during any release)
 - b. School reenrollment prior to Alternative School? Successes? Challenges? Supports?

- c. Reactions of family and friends to incarceration? Support? Distanced themselves? How do you respond?
 - i. Use follow-up questions to determine whether the participants are integrated into a community, neighborhood, a family, etc. and if they feel any levels of shame or embarrassment, pride or confidence.
- d. Who do you talk about your reentry challenges and your successes?
 - i. Use follow-up questions to determine who the participants trust and why?

School Reentry: Moving into an Alternative School

- 7. Can you describe your school re-enrollment process at the Alternative School?
 - a. Why did you decide to re-enroll? (goals, motivation, etc.)
 - b. What did you sacrifice to re-enroll in school?
 - c. What barriers and obstacles to reenrolling did you experience?
 - d. What was most helpful during this process?

Situation

- 8. When you enrolled in the Alternative School was the timing right for you to go to school?
 - a. How far in advance did you decide to go to school before you enrolled?
 - b. How did you view your initial enrollment in Alternative School? Positive? Negative? Didn't think about it? Why?

Self

- 9. How did you feel when you first enrolled in the Alternative School?
 - a. Would you consider your re-enrollment process a successful experience? Why or why not?
 - b. *If successful:* What did you do to make it a successful experience?

Support

- 10. What did your family and friends think about you enrolling in the Alternative School?
 - a. In what ways have they been supportive? Not supportive?

Strategy

- 11. What strategies did you use to adjust when you first enrolled in the Alternative School?

Closing

- 12. What have you liked most about enrolling in school at the Alternative School? Disliked?
- 13. What does successful reentry mean to you?
- 14. Is there any thing you'd like to share that we didn't discuss? Any questions for me?

INTERVIEW #2

Moving Through an Alternative School

1. What has school been like for you since being released?

Supportive and Caring Relationships

2. Can you describe your teachers?
 - a. How do they make learning relevant to your own life experiences?
 - b. How do they help you when you are struggling with your school work?
 - c. Do they help you to address non-school related issues? If yes, explain?

High Expectations

3. What expectations do your teachers have of you and other students? How do they reinforce these expectations?
 - a. Rules (clear and consistent)
 - b. Educational Curriculum (rigorous, equitable, accommodates diverse learning styles and abilities)
 - c. Opportunities to participate in decision making
 - d. Perceives student as resilient
4. How do you feel about/respond to these expectations? What about other students?

Meaningful Opportunities

5. What opportunities do you have to participate in class activities? Do you participate in these activities? Why?
 - a. Participatory Opportunities (cooperative learning, extracurricular and after school programs)
 - b. Contributory opportunities (school and classroom governance, service learning)
 - c. Empowering opportunities that provoke critical thinking
6. What impact would you say your participation (or lack of) in these activities has had on your schooling experience? Academic achievement? Self?
 - a. Build social competence
 - b. Problem solving skills
 - c. Sense of self
 - d. Future orientation)

Self

7. Overall, has attending school realistic goal for you? Why?
 - a. How do you feel about attending an alternative school?

Situation

8. Did you anticipate or face any challenges in going to school after being incarcerated? Please explain.

- a. Is attending an alternative school an experience you would consider positive or negative? Why? Do you feel like you are gaining or losing something? Why?

Support

9. What types of supports were available and what supports did you utilize upon reenrolling in school? (academic, social, emotional, financial, etc.).
 - a. Who offers support and how? (family, friends, School: teachers, staff, programs, etc.)

Strategy

10. What strategies do you use to help you to adapt as a student?
 - a. Are you involved in any activities outside of your classes? How have these influenced your schooling experiences?
 - b. Do you use any supportive services to help you cope with being a student? (religious organizations, counseling, community groups, etc.)
 - c. What is the greatest barrier you have encountered while attending this alternative school? How did you try to overcome that barrier?

Closing

11. What does it mean to be successful at this school? Why?
 - a. How if at all, did being incarcerated shape the way you approach school? What about your pre-incarceration schooling experiences?
 - b. Do you think that because of your incarceration experience you experience school differently than most other students? If so, why/in what ways?
12. How if at all, has your post-incarceration schooling experiences influenced your future goals and opportunities?
 - a. Picture yourself five years from today. How do you see yourself in terms of your personal life or goals, as well as the type of work or career you would hold?
 - b. What factors, from your perspective, influence the reason why envision your future in this way?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences that I have not asked?

APPENDIX J

FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How An Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated young Adults Facilitates Community Reintegration”

Charles Lea, a doctoral candidate from the Department of Social Welfare in the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study that is supervised by Dr. Laura S. Abrams, Professor of Social Welfare. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an instructor or mentor in a community-based, alternative education program. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how community-based, alternative education programs help formerly incarcerated young adults obtain a high school diploma and supports their successful community reintegration.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 60 to 90-minute focus group with approximately 5-7 other instructors or mentors who work with formerly incarcerated young adults in a community-based educational setting. During the group you will be asked a series of questions to respond to and discuss with other members.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes, including signing forms, participating in the focus group and receiving your compensation.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

If you feel uncomfortable at any time and do not want to reveal certain kinds of information, you can skip a question or leave the focus group at any time.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not benefit directly from your participation in the research. However, the information you provide and the overall results of the research may help to improve services offered to other people who are released from prison or jail.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

You will receive a payment in the form of a gift card of \$10 if you choose to participate in the focus group.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. We will not write your name in the transcripts of the interview, and when we save your interview transcript onto the computer we will use a code rather than your name. Your name will not be linked to your responses in any way. All of the digital audio recordings of the focus group will be kept in a password protected online file, and the only people who will have access to the password will be members of the UCLA research team.

All participants will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group between the participants only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. Additionally, if you so wish, you can review, edit, and erase the tape/recordings of your participation in the research. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact the Principal Investigator, Charles Lea, MSW at 510-220-2323 or via e-mail at chlea@ucla.edu, or the Faculty Advisor, Laura S. Abrams, PhD at (310) 206-0693 or via e-mail at abrams@luskin.ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to: UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

CHECK BOX:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX K

CASE MANAGER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Post-Incarceration Schooling: An Examination of How An Alternative School for Formerly Incarcerated Youth Facilitates Community Reintegration

Case Manager Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this focus group. Our discussion today will focus on how the structure and practices within this school and classroom settings support formerly incarcerated young adults as they pursue their high school diploma. The focus group will last approximately 30 to 40 minutes and you will receive \$25 for your participation. Please know that all of the information you provide will be kept confidential and will not be connected with any personal identifying information in any way. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Background/Demographics

I'd like to begin by asking some general questions about your personal and teaching background.

- Can you start by telling me a little about yourself?
 - Where you from? School/Program Enrolled? Degree Expected?
 - Experience working with incarcerated/formerly incarcerated youth
 - Role and length of time at alternative school
 - Why you selected this alternative school as your internships site.

Case Management and Supportive Services

Next I'd like to ask you some questions about the case management and supportive services and approach

- Can you describe the role of case managers/interns in this school setting?
 - When do you first meet with youth? How often? What's discussed?
 - Types of services provided (e.g., service plan, counseling, supportive services, etc.) describe.
- Can you describe your case management philosophy and approach?
 - How do you get to know your students? (*Supportive/Caring Relationship*)
 - What expectations do you have of your students? (*High Expectations*)
- How do you determine what services are needed for each youth? (*Meaningful Opportunities*)
 - What types of opportunities are available for students to participate?
 - What impact does these opportunities have on your students?

- What works for providing case management services to formerly incarcerated youth in an alternative school setting? Challenges?

Closing Questions

- What does it mean to be successful in this educational setting? Why?
- How would you compare your formerly incarcerated Black male students to other students in this school setting?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about anything we did or did not discuss?

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Youth characterized as “over-age and under-credited” are students who are “over the traditional school age for his or her grade level and lack adequate credit hours for his or her grade level” (Justice Center, 2015 November 5, p. 1).

ⁱⁱ Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a measurement defined by the United States Federal No Child Left Behind Act that allows the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized tests.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol Skills Training Program, AmeriCorps, Job Corps, JOBSTART, Job Training Partnership Act, New Chance, Nurse Home Visitation Program, Ohio Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program, School Attendance Demonstration Project, Skill-Based Intervention on Condom Use, Teenage Parent Demonstration, and Youth Corps.

^{iv} Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture and needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional and academic success. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining primary (school-wide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual) systems of support that improve lifestyle results (personal, health, social, family, work, recreation) for all youth by making targeted misbehavior less effective, efficient, and relevant, and desired behavior more functional.

^v Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. In California, the State Board of Education decides on the standards for all students, from kindergarten through high school. The California Department of Education helps schools make sure that all students are meeting the standards. Since 2010, a number of states across the

nation have adopted the same standards for English and math. In California, these standards are called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (see, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>).

^{vi} Ban the Box is the name of an international campaign by civil rights groups and advocates for ex-offenders, aimed at persuading employers to remove from their hiring applications the check box that asks if applicants have a criminal record.

^{vii} Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. In California, the State Board of Education decides on the standards for all students, from kindergarten through high school. The California Department of Education helps schools make sure that all students are meeting the standards. Since 2010, a number of states across the nation have adopted the same standards for English and math. In California, these standards are called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (see, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>).