Article

In Service Together: University Students and Incarcerated Youth Collaborate for Change

SAGE

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Abstract
Through the lens of two courses at Portland State University (PSU), this article addresses critical service learning pedagogy as transformational for both incarcerated youth and university students. In one course, PSU students share a writing/art workshop with youth in juvenile detention though *The Beat Within* (www.thebeatwithin.org). Another course brings together PSU students and young men incarcerated at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in an inside/out course format (www.insideoutcenter. org). Working collaboratively, students have developed a variety of service-learning projects. This article explores the impact of critical service learning courses on both incarcerated young people and university students.

Keywords
critical service learning, motivational capital, incarcerated youth

Background: Why Service Learning Matters

> The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

—Mahatma Gandhi

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Over the past two decades, ample research has documented and highlighted the positive outcomes of service learning for college students (Richard, Keen, Hatcher, & Pease, 2016). The National Clearinghouse for Service Learning (2016) defines service learning as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (https://gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse). Participating in a meaningful way with and for the community in a service-learning course has been determined to have a positive impact on a variety of academic and nonacademic outcomes including writing skills, critical thinking and problem solving, interpersonal skills, leadership abilities, commitment to activism, and civic responsibility (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Moely & Ilustra, 2014). Just as service-learning courses often are highly beneficial and transformational for college students, civic engagement opportunities and experiences can likewise create positive outcomes for all young adults, including noncollege youth. There are tremendous personal and psychological benefits from civic engagement for all young adults during this key transitional period of their lives— late adolescence/early adulthood. Some of these benefits are participation in collective problem solving, evaluation of personal values, and connection to social networks, and other educational and employment opportunities (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). In addition, young people who participate in engaged social responsibility activities are more likely to stay civically involved as adults (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Mitchell, 2015). Service-learning opportunities for people experiencing incarceration offers these same benefits (Hinck, Hinck, & Withers, 2013; Lagemann, 2016). This article explores university partnerships with carceral institutions utilizing a critical service learning pedagogy and a specific focus on partnerships with institutions detaining young people, aged 12 years to 25 years.

Positionality of the Authors

To place this article in context, it is important to understand the positionality of the authors. Deborah Smith Arthur has been an advocate for justice-involved youth for over 25 years. She practiced criminal defense and juvenile law for 10 years in the Portland area, and the focus of her work for the latter half of that decade was representing young people, aged 15 years to 17 years, charged in adult criminal court under Oregon's Ballot Measure 11. Codified in the Oregon Revised Statutes, this measure, passed overwhelmingly by Oregon voters in 1994, created mandatory minimum sentencing upon conviction for certain crimes, and also required automatic waiver to adult criminal court for juveniles charged with these crimes. After that period as a courtroom lawyer, Smith Arthur began teaching at

Portland State University (PSU). She developed the partnerships described here with the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice and with the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA), now teaching/facilitating both of these courses.

Jamie Valentine comes to this work through personal struggle. From her own life experiences, she had to self-reflect to heal and thrive. She came to realize that she was more than a few negative traits, more than the worst things she has done, and accepted that to grow, she had to find her inner peace. Through this transformational epiphany, she realized that removing shame was key in healing ourselves and one another.

Valentine found healing through gardening—nurturing plants—gave her perspective. She spent 3 years volunteering at Columbia River Correctional Institution in Portland with incarcerated people through garden-based transformational education. She witnessed the walls break down for the inside gardeners as they discussed major life traumas while planting vegetables. Individuals who were once combative became collaborative, working with other inside gardeners with respect and openness. The garden became "safe space" that provided opportunity for self-reflection, vulnerability, and healing. In cocreating the garden, they were transforming a little piece of land while transforming themselves. She connected with Smith Arthur while employed at PSU, prior to taking on her current position.

Civic Engagement Disparities

As referenced above, civic engagement opportunities for young people can produce positive outcomes. Unfortunately, cumulative disadvantage and differing opportunities to access institutional support affords much less opportunity for civic engagement among low-income and historically marginalized young adults (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Opportunities for justice-involved youth are limited even more so. However, the benefits of service-learning and civic engagement certainly extend to criminal and juvenile justice system–involved young people as well. There is a growing body of research about the positive implications of meaningful service that promotes *agency* as a component of a re-entry programming for people returning to the community after a period of incarceration. In using the term "meaningful" service, we refer to service involving community engagement that is not simply a required task of menial "community service," such as garbage clean-up, but instead service that involves problem-solving and critical thinking—service that "builds community" (Bazemore & Boba, 2007, p. 48).

In their important article, "Civic Engagement Model of Reentry," Bazemore and Boba (2007) note that civic community service and engagement as re-entry practice has a positive impact on reintegration outcomes.

Specifically, they argue that civic engagement leads to reduction in recidivism through support for the development of prosocial identities of those experiencing reintegration, the opportunity to reshape the community's image of people who are returning to the community after a period of incarceration, and the development of community capacity for offering informal supports of reentering people (Bazemore & Boba, 2007). Civic service and engaged social responsibility can transform self-image as well as public image for persons re-entering the community, thus, "transforming individuals from liabilities to assets" (Bazemore & Maruna, 2009, p. 376). The development of social capital, external supports, and prosocial relationships, all of which can be accessed and developed through civic engagement opportunities, facilitates a shift toward a noncriminal or nondelinquent identity (Fox, 2016; Lagemann, 2016).

The Importance of Motivational Capital

Clinkinbeard and Zohra (2012) examine the concept of motivational capital of incarcerated juveniles in their compelling research exploring "expectations, fears and strategies" of juveniles preparing for successful re-entry and a life beyond incarceration (p. 236). They define motivational capital as "a collection of social and cognitive resources which work together to provide momentum for behavior" (Clinkinbeard & Zhora, 2012, p. 237). Closely linked to the sociological concept of social capital, motivational capital is "the cumulative gathering of motivational resources for behavior" (Clinkinbeard & Zhora, 2012, p. 237). Indeed, current criminology research, to a large extent, agrees that the development of social capital is a central factor leading toward desistance from criminal activity (Fox, 2015). Successful community re-integration is partly dependent upon the ability of the formerly incarcerated person to resist criminogenic influences, as well as the receptivity of the community to the re-entering person (Bazemore & Boba, 2007; Fox, 2016). Through collaborative and meaningful civic engagement opportunities, incarcerated people, including young people, have the opportunity to develop prosocial skills, interests, and relationships, whereas community members have the opportunity to challenge their assumptions and stereotypes about people experiencing incarceration and undergo a shift in perspective that can ultimately contribute to a more just and humane approach to criminal behavior (Hinck et al., 2013). The positive personal benefits of civic engagement are an important factor in the creation of motivational capital for young people experiencing incarceration and preparing to re-enter society, and the benefits to the community participants in these collaborative civic engagement opportunities include the ability to reshape their concept of delinquent and criminal offenders.

Partnerships Between Higher Education and Carceral Institutions

In her powerful book *Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison*, Nell Bernstein (2014) declares that "[r]ehabilitation happens in the context of relationship," and that through positive relationship with caring adults, young people can improve their self-perceptions and begin to see prosocial ambitions as realistic goals (p. 259). Institutions of higher education are well-positioned to step into these relationships and engage in collaborative learning and academic explorations with people experiencing incarceration (Simpkins, 2015; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). Sokoloff and Schenck-Fontaine offer a substantial and useful literature review of higher education in prison programs, noting that higher education for people involved with, or previously involved with, the criminal legal system, even beyond the benefits to the individual students and participants, is an integral part of maintaining community safety. A study completed by the Rand Corporation in 2013 reviewed the existing research on educational programs in carceral settings, and found evidence that prison education participation greatly reduces recidivism, positively affecting community safety (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders, & Miles, 2013). Frustratingly, it is a strategy that is all too often overlooked (Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017). Additional recent scholarship on higher education in prison programs highlights the need for educational programs that not only offer content, but also support broad human, intellectual, and social outcomes as well (Gould, Harkins, & Stevens, 2015).

PSU Capstone Program

The courses described herein are offered through PSU, which places a heavy emphasis on engaged and applied research and learning. The Senior Capstone is one of these engaged learning opportunities—the final general education requirement for undergraduate students. Capstone courses are small, interdisciplinary, service-learning seminars, and students collaborate together with a community partner. Academic content is paired with relevant service-learning experiences. In most cases, seminars are limited to 16 students, allowing for relational and engaged learning (Kerrigan, 2015). Two of these Capstone courses allow incarcerated young people and college students to work collaboratively on service-learning projects that in some way benefit the community: The Juvenile Justice Capstone and Metamorphosis: Creating Positive Futures Capstone.

Juvenile Justice Capstone

The Juvenile Justice Capstone has a long-standing partnership with the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, Juvenile Services

Division (DCJ), and, specifically, the juvenile detention facility, the Donald E. Long Home (DELH). As has been identified in scholarly examination of partnerships between higher education and carceral institutions, "the partnership is crucial in determining the success of the program" (Gould et al., 2015 p.105). Having visited clients in juvenile detention and worked with juvenile court counselors from Multnomah County DCJ as a defense attorney, the instructor had established relationships with some key staff and administrators who assisted in building the essential foundation for the partnership and the course. Without partnerships, education in prison programs would not exist (Gould et al., 2015).

Despite those prior relationships, however, it was several years of working together before the partnership became as solid as it is currently. Although Multnomah County DCJ is relatively progressive and is a model site through the Annie E. Casey Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (https://multco.us/dcj-juvenile/jdai), when the relationship between PSU and DCJ was new, some detention staff were hesitant about an influx of college students coming into DELH. The students were sometimes seen as an addition to the workload for detention staff, causing some to be resentful of the partnership. Furthermore, some staff were not proponents of creative opportunities for the youth in detention. Although this tension can still exist, it is now, thankfully, largely reduced, as the Capstone has been accepted as a part of the culture of DELH.

The youth detained in DELH are between the ages of 12 years and 18 years, and are primarily being held pre-adjudication, or pretrial in the case of Measure 11 youth. The average length of stay is 14 days, but youth can spend anywhere from one day to 241 days in the facility. Roughly 60% of youth in DELH at any given time are incarcerated under Oregon's Ballot Measure 11 (ORS 137.700, multco.us/dcj-juvenile, n.d.). Youth of color are overrepresented as compared with their numbers in the Portland metropolitan area.

For the service-learning component of this course, Capstone students bring a writing and art workshop through a program called *The Beat Within: A Publication of Writing and Art From the Inside* (www.thebeatwithin.org) into DELH. In small groups, Capstone students get to know the youth on the various detention facility units and with whom they work closely each week to respond to "prompts" distributed to numerous juvenile facilities nationally by *The Beat Within*. The topics address a wide variety of issues, including personal as well as political and public policy issues.

For the detained youth who participate, these workshops provide an opportunity to have a voice beyond the walls of detention. Youth, through the Capstone students, submit pieces of writing and/or art to the editorial board of *The Beat Within*, and their work is considered for publication in the bimonthly magazine. As indicated in their mission statement, *The Beat Within*

"provide[s] incarcerated youth with consistent opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences in a safe space that encourages literacy, self-expression, some critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relation-ships with adults and their community" (http://www.thebeatwithin.org/about-us/). Affording detained young people the opportunity to build these relationships with the community and to tell their stories and engage in dia-logue regarding public policy can be transformative (Christianakis & Mora, 2016; Tilton, 2013).

PSU Capstone students participate in this critical service-learning experi-ence by engaging with the youth in prosocial ways and facilitating the weekly workshops. Detained youth participate by sharing their own thoughts, experi-ences, and opinions with PSU students, *The Beat Within* magazine, and a broader audience of Beat Within readers. In addition, both college students and the young participants are asked to reflect critically on the underlying systemic issues related to juvenile incarceration. In sum, the collaborative critical service-learning project in the Juvenile Justice Capstone is the devel-opment of prosocial relationships between college students and incarcerated youth, and the community-engaged writing and art that occurs in the weekly workshops, finding a broad audience through *The Beat Within* magazine.

Metamorphosis: Creating Positive Futures Capstone

This Capstone is an inside-out course,[1] bringing 15 PSU Capstone students into the OYA's MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility (MYCF) in the small town of Woodburn each week to study and learn together, side by side, in a collaborative and engaged learning community. MYCF is the largest OYA facility, all male, with 271 beds as of July 2017. A small percentage of people housed there are children aged 12 years to 15 years; and the rest are between 16 years and 25 years. OYA houses young people adjudicated in juvenile court, as well as youth convicted as adults under Oregon's automatic waiver law (Ballot Measure 11) who are officially in custody of the Department of Corrections (DOC). Youth can be held in an OYA facility, such as MYCF, until the age of 25 years. Overall length of stay in close custody averages to 271 days for juveniles and 1,356 days for DOC youth, and many of those move on to a DOC facility just prior to their 25th birthday to complete their sentence. About 41% of people incarcerated in OYA are African American, whereas 2.1% of Oregonians are African American. Not surprisingly, Hispanics and Native Americans are also overrepresented when compared with their num-bers in the state (http://www.oregon.gov/oya/docs/QuickFacts/QuickFacts-July2017.pdf; https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR).

Metamorphosis utilizes what Gould et al. (2015) have termed a *participatory model*, as the academic content is developed in collaboration with educators, students, and nonprofit staff within MYCF. The content of the course varies each term, as some of the inside students repeat the course, but always involves historical and contemporary examples of social justice movements. As part of the course requirements, students develop and implement a collaborative civic engagement project. The direction of the project changes each term, depending upon the course content and the current issues affecting students, but consistently the goal is for all students—inside and outside—to see themselves as agents of change in a broader community. For example, during one term, inside students alerted the class to their concern about the 100-plus-year-old trees on the MYCF campus. Although at one time numerous trees adorned the campus, many of them had not been maintained well, were rotting, and were simply removed. The students, as a collective, decided to take action to address the preservation of the trees on the MYCF campus. They engaged in research and wrote a paper about why trees were important to personal well-being and rehabilitation as well as for the environment. In addition, they petitioned OYA administration to preserve, maintain, and add trees to the MYCF campus. Finally, students documented their efforts in a collaborative volume that also used trees as a metaphor for personal growth. (Arthur, 2015).

In another term, the theme of the course was "where, why and how we live." Students studied gentrification and displacement and explored how government laws and policies created segregated neighborhoods. For the collaborative project that term, students engaged in story exchanges, using a process developed by the nonprofit Narrative 4, "build[ing] a community of empathic global citizens who improve the world through the exchange of personal narratives" (https://narrative4.com/mission-vision/). Students exchanged stories about their ideas of "home" and these stories were recorded and became a radio show/podcast, serving to share with a broad audience students' thoughts and stories related to our course content of segregation, gentrification, and displacement, and secondarily, almost as a by-product, sharing the power of our collaborative inside/out community. In each of these examples, the projects evolved naturally out of discussion around the course content and examination of various ways that all students, inside and outside, could collaborate as change agents and have meaningful impact on a topic of shared concern.

Critical Service-Learning Pedagogy

Moving service-learning pedagogy a step further, or deeper, both of the courses mentioned herein are situated squarely within a *critical* service-learning pedagogy (Mitchell, 2008). In other words, these courses are about

more than being of service or helping someone. They were purposely developed in a way that encourages egalitarian relationships between all students and participants, asking them to examine and reflect upon the deeper complexities that construct the social justice issues addressed in the courses. In addition, the experience of working together inside a detention or youth correctional facility situates the learning within a real and applied context. Freire advocates "reading the world" as a key pedagogical strategy, and the place-based aspects of these critical service-learning experiences allow students to reflect deeply upon that place (juvenile detention or youth correctional facility) (Freire & Macedo, 1998). This, in turn, has a meaningful impact upon the relationship of students and participants to that place and to related policies (Gruenewald, 2003). Indeed,

> . . . firsthand experience [inside carceral institutions housing youth] can become an important way to shape an audience's sensitivity for processing arguments calling for social change regarding the prison-industrial complex. . . and prepare [students] for a critical examination of incarceration policy (Hinck et al., 2013, p. 40).

How do these collaborative, critical service-learning experiences affect the college students and the incarcerated students and participants? Specifically, we examine evidence of interrupted assumptions and perceptions for students and participants in these courses. Has their involvement within these courses, working collaboratively, reshaped their ideas about each other? Is there evidence of a deeper understanding of the underlying complexities of the context of the courses and of the social justice issues they confront? We also examine for evidence of increased motivational capital as a result of these collaborative, critical service-learning experiences. Are students and participants developing prosocial skills and relationships through these courses? Are they developing greater awareness of themselves as civic participants with the ability to be agents of change? And if so, does this identification as change agents empower them in the other aspects of their lives?

A Note About "Students" and "Participants"

In this article, both the terms "students" and "participants" are used in reference to incarcerated young people in these courses. In the case of the Juvenile Justice Capstone, all the detained youth are between the ages of 12 years and 18 years, and are still working on high school credits. With their school-day involvement with the Capstone and *The Beat Within*, they are receiving high school credit for their participation. However, some workshops take place in

the evening and on weekends, and participants in those workshops do not receive academic credit. Unless workshops are integrated into the school day, the detained youth are not required to participate, although most do choose to do so. Detained youth involved in this course are referred to as *participants*, as they are not college students.

Typically, in the Metamorphosis Capstone, the incarcerated young men are between the ages of 18 years and 25 years. Some are enrolled as students at PSU through this course, receive academic credits. After a relatively lengthy bureaucratic struggle,[2] PSU was convinced to offer reduced differential tuition for inside students enrolled in *Inside-Out* courses offered through PSU, including this one; inside students are billed a flat rate of US$100 per course. The OYA covers that tuition for students enrolled in the Metamorphosis Capstone; in the case of partnerships with Oregon DOC, individual students are billed. Several of the inside students in Metamorphosis are also enrolled at other institutions of higher education, and PSU works with them to help them transfer credit to the institution that will eventually grant their degree. Although the majority of inside students enrolled in the Metamorphosis Capstone choose to take the course for credit, this is not the case for all. The Instructor of the course works closely with OYA and with staff of Hope Partnership/Janus Youth, a nonprofit organization that has a strong presence at MYCF, to invite young men into the course who do not necessarily see themselves as college bound. Some of these students do not want to take the course for credit, they may be concerned about their ability to complete the work, or about structural barriers that may prevent them from giving their best in the course, such as competing demands on their time, or studying successfully within a highly stressful and sometimes chaotic environment (Nurse, 2013). Not surprisingly, however, many of those young men later re-enroll in a subsequent term, for credit, potentially as a result of changed self-perceptions. All of the students in this course, whether receiving college credit or not, are referred to as students.

Reflection as a Pedagogical Tool in Effective Critical Service Learning

A key component of critical service learning as a tool for transformation involves reflective process. Learning through experience is not necessarily intuitive. Supporting learners to reflect critically upon their experiences before, during and after their service-learning experiences can deepen and solidify the associated learning (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Richard et al., 2016). Maximal learning occurs through not just the experience alone, but through critical

reflection upon the experience (Ash & Clayton, 2009). In addition, as students and participants are asked to reflect upon the larger complex structural roots that surround and contextualize the critical service-learning experience, the engaged learning experience for all participants—college students and incarcerated students and participants alike—moves beyond personal and/or social development, and into the realm of social change activism. Indeed, "[e]xperience becomes educative when critical reflective thought creates new meaning and leads to growth and the ability to take informed actions" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p. 180).

In both of these Capstone courses, students and participants are asked to reflect through writing and discussion on the deeper causes and contexts of their work. Beyond doing good work that will benefit the broader community, students are asked to think critically about attitudes and policies that create the conditions surrounding their work. Through collaborating with the "other" and then critically reflecting upon that experience, students and participants are able to understand juvenile, criminal, and social justice issues in a deeper way than they could by simply reading about the content area. It is not uncommon for students to be affected emotionally as well as intellectually by the experience. Through reflective writing assignments, students are asked to connect their experiences and their feelings about those experiences to the course content, related policy, and to identify, document, and reflect upon their own growth as a result. In both courses, the term ends with a closing circle, a final session involving all students, participants, the instructor, and staff in the facilities, during which all in the circle are asked to identify and share what the experience of learning and working together has meant for them—how they have grown as a result of the experience of the course. These reflections come in the form of various creative arts: poetry, spoken word performances, drawing, dancing, singing, and simply verbal reflections, and are often powerful and emotional.

Researching Impact of Collaborative Critical Service Learning

Through this qualitative research study, approved through the Institutional Review Board at PSU, we attempt to contribute to generalizable knowledge about outcomes of collaborative critical service-learning projects between college students and incarcerated students and participants between the ages of 12 years and 25 years. Relying upon Creswell's (1994) model of qualitative research, the researchers conducted data analysis using reflective writing in the form of short essay and poetry, created and submitted by

both inside students and participants and outside students over the course of four terms in both the Juvenile Justice Capstone and the Metamorphosis: Creating Positive Futures Capstone. These documents were analyzed and evaluated through the lens of predetermined criteria for both outside and inside students and participants. Researchers independently identified emerging themes expressed throughout the reflective writing for the following evidence. For the outside PSU students, papers were reviewed for evidence of "interrupted assumptions" connected to working together with inside or incarcerated students. For incarcerated students and participants, reflective writings were analyzed for evidence of increased "motivational capital": evidence of increased social and cognitive resources developed as part of these service-learning experiences.

Research Participants

Our study contains two classifications of research participants: "outside," PSU students, and "inside" students and participants from DELH and MYCF, engaged in the Juvenile Justice Capstone or the Metamorphosis: Creating Positive Futures Capstone. Students from PSU, MYCF, and DELH enrolled or participated in each class autonomously, by choice, and based on individual interest in the subject matter and course concept.

Method

To conduct this research, reflective writing previously submitted by students and participants in both Capstone courses during the four terms were randomly selected, drawing 40 submissions from outside students and 40 submissions from inside students and participants across the eight classes for a total of 80 data samples. After random selection of data, all identifiers were removed from the reflection papers and replaced with either "incarcerated student/participant" or "PSU student." These de-identified documents were analyzed independently by researchers to understand the effect of service learning for both outside PSU students and incarcerated MCYF students or DELH participants. Each researcher read through the 80 reflection documents, reviewing the data and noting emerging themes. The researchers confirmed and verified results of the data in what Patton (1990) describes as content analysis, categorizing data patterns into themes and topics. Researchers noted several key themes in the writings of both incarcerated students and participants and University students, highlighting specific outcomes of collaborative service-learning, discussed in detail below.

Analysis

In conducting thorough content analysis and review of the data, researchers identified themes that demonstrated impact. Specifically, questions guiding the research were as follows:

- Has collaborating with incarcerated youth reshaped college students' ideas about people who are incarcerated and re-entering?
- Is there evidence of a deeper understanding of the underlying complexities of the juvenile and criminal justice systems?
- Can evidence of a shift in attitudes toward political issues surrounding society's response to crime through mass incarceration be found?
- Is there evidence of increased motivational capital as a result of these collaborative critical service-learning experiences for inside students and participants?
- Through these critical service-learning experiences, are incarcerated students and participants developing prosocial skills and relationships?
- Is there evidence of a developing awareness of themselves as agents of change?
- Is there evidence of increased social and cognitive resources resulting from working together with college students in service-learning courses?

Summary of Findings: Outside Students

After reviewing the 40 reflection essays and poems from PSU Capstone students, several themes emerged. Overall, many of the students discussed how they had negative preconceived notions regarding the incarcerated students. However, through meeting and collaborating together, these ideas were dismantled. By the end of the term, PSU students had a completely different perception of who is incarcerated, commenting on the intelligence, passion, and humanity of their fellow incarcerated classmates.

Specifically, four main themes emerged throughout the writing of outside students, which were a direct result of service learning and collaboration with incarcerated students. First, the outside students see the inside students and participants as more than their crime or delinquent act and as capable individuals full of potential. Outside students also commented on similarities between themselves and the inside students and participants, identifying privilege and mentorship as a key factor in either success or incarceration. Third, PSU students discussed the importance of connection and the power of

collaboration. Finally, after embarking on this educational journey, outside students had a newfound commitment to justice and advocacy.

More Than Their Crime, Shifting Perspectives

Upon reflection at the close of the 10-week class, outside students described how different their perspective was from the beginning of the class, and how much they had transformed as individuals. One PSU student shared about previous conversations with her family, who had urged her not to enter a correctional facility, fearing for her safety. Other students commented about feeling nervous, expecting the worst from their incarcerated classmates. However, through engaging in learning opportunities together, their perceptions of incarcerated people changed. As one student states, "My fixed idea about who these inmates were supposed to be were challenged." Inside students were seen as, "fellow academic scholars" intellectually capable, and full of compassion, and possessing an ability to change. As one student reflects, "a person's past does not write their future," and these incarcerated students have unique and important perspectives to offer society.

Realizing Similarities

Outside students remarked on similarities between themselves and the inside students and participants. Several noted that the only thing that separated them was wearing a visitor badge. Because of mentorship and support from family, outside students had advantages that their incarcerated peers did not. Students acknowledged that with only a small change in circumstance roles could have been reversed, "if one thing had been tweaked slightly in my life, I could have easily ended up where these guys are today. There is nothing separating me from them in terms of worthiness." Upon realizing their similarities, students were able to connect on a deeper level, breaking down barriers separating "us" and "them," and build egalitarian relationships.

Power of the Group/Importance of Community

Another theme that clearly emerged was a strong sense of the importance of community *connection and power of collaboration. Many PSU students indicated through their reflective* writing that they found power in the diversity of the group, and found that the experiences, skills, and perspectives that all contributed made for a stronger and more powerful outcome. As so beautifully stated by one student,"Helping one another and peacefully coexisting is what enriches our lives."

Deeper Understanding and Desire to Create Change

After learning in a general way about the background of their incarcerated classmates, and through class readings and discussions about privilege and power, outside students felt a commitment to addressing the injustices of the criminal and juvenile justice systems. They gained empathy for their classmates and individuals in society whose circumstances gave them an increased chance of being imprisoned. One PSU student writes after learning about privilege and access to social capital, "I felt enraged! I was furious to be a part of a system that blatantly neglects those that it predetermines will have no gifts to give and nothing to offer." Through learning about the larger system and listening to the stories of their incarcerated classmates, outside students realized the deeper complexities around incarceration and described a deep desire to dismantle unfair social structures, which keeps specific populations marginalized. As one student advocates, "This newfound information has prompted me to look further into policies and practices that disproportionately result in the incarceration of minorities, and marginalized members of our society." Another student states, "I am astounded at the young bright minds trapped in this facility."

Summary of Findings: Inside Students and Participants

In reviewing the data from the reflective documents of the incarcerated students and participants (insiders), three major themes emerged: the power of, and gratitude for, the group; a new or strengthened commitment to civic engagement and a sense of civic responsibility; and personal transformation and a new or renewed sense of hope about the future. Each of these themes is discussed in depth below.

Power of the Group/Importance of Community

As is true for the outside students, many insiders also expressed that they were impressed by and grateful for the power of a group of people from varied backgrounds working together toward a common goal. They seemed to derive energy and strength from this collaborative process, and, at the very least, found it to be enjoyable and a pleasurable break in the routine of the daily life of incarceration. One insider indicated, "one person can only be so strong, but a group of people are a collective force of achievement." Another states "I learned that on my own I am nothing. . . however, when I am able to

connect with others around me I am part of something so much bigger." Insiders enjoyed the experience of meeting each week with their colleagues from the outside. Comments indicate appreciation for getting to know and interact with new people, and great pleasure in "sharing with the outside students what it's like on the inside." Insiders expressed gratitude "that we can all learn from each other." Yet another aspect of the benefit of the group collaboration that inside students and participants felt was a sense that they were no longer isolated. They appreciated that their voices could extend beyond the walls of incarceration. In the words of one insider, "It's really good that people care about us. A lot of people forget about us, so we appreciate when you come in."

Civic Engagement and Responsibility

Another theme to emerge from the data extracted from insiders' reflective writing was a new or strengthened commitment to civic engagement. Many youth documented this new or renewed concern for the greater civic good and found excitement and a sense of efficacy and empowerment in that. They were excited that "through this class we were able to make change," and "we were proactive in ways outside of the classroom." Insiders expressed a desire to continue their activism after community re-entry. Many reflected upon what they can do to "make this world a better place," and indicated a desire to apply what they had learned—about content, about themselves—to be a part of "fixing problems" in the world. Poignantly, another insider stated that the experience of collaborating with the PSU students, "made me feel like I still matter out in the world beyond the fence."

Personal Transformation and Hope

Finally, the third theme to emerge from the data was the idea that inside students and participants had been personally affected in important ways by their participation in the collaborative service-learning project, and that they had found a new or stronger sense of hope about their future as a result. As one incarcerated young person succinctly stated, "[t]here is hope for a better tomorrow." A shift in identity seems to have emerged. One incarcerated student remarked that as a result of the class experience, he felt "more like a human being and less like a convict." Many insiders expressed that the collaborative experience strengthened their compassion for others, and now had a "better outlook on life and the people around [them]." The experience had "opened [their] feelings up." There was a sense that "when I get out I can make it." From the poem of one insider, "with vision of walls and bars, we still unstoppable, our voices rise."

Discussion

This analysis of reflective writings of both PSU students and incarcerated students and participants suggests that these collaborative critical service-learning experiences have powerful impacts for both groups. To begin, there are numerous positive outcomes for incarcerated students and participants. Beyond receiving college credit at reduced tuition, this research illuminated some evidence of increased motivational capital and an increased sense of hope and positive expectations for their "future selves" as a result of these courses. Imagining an improved future self, in turn, provides motivation for action to develop strategies that can help make that vision a reality (Clinkinbeard & Zhora, 2012). This belief in the capability of self-improvement is a powerful force. As Nell Bernstein (2014) elaborates, "When a captive speaks of hope, he's talking of a strategy as much as an emotion: a technique to stay human in an environment designed to dehumanize him" (p. 93). In developing prosocial tools to remain connected, incarcerated students and participants increased their connectivity to the outside community. In addition, there is evidence of students and participants on the inside increasing or developing a sense of responsibility and an eagerness to positively affect the world. In her recent book highlighting the imperative of access to higher education for people experiencing incarceration, Lagemann (2016) addresses the importance of this outcome, affirming that "[c]ollege in prison programs promote civic competence and support student aspirations to make a positive difference for other people" (p. 95). Results of our research would indicate that these critical and collaborative service-learning courses can result in increased self-perceptions as agents of change, providing motivational capital through the prosocial egalitarian relationships built, the appreciation of the power of the group, the personal feelings of hope and transformation, and the desire to take action to address social justice issues.

For the university students, assumptions about those experiencing incarceration were indeed challenged and interrupted as a result of working together with the inside students and participants. To a large extent, perceived barriers fell away and wakefulness was cultivated in this unfamiliar territory in which they collaborated for change with young people inside the carceral setting. The shared experience, thus, became fertile ground for new perceptions and discoveries. Indeed, within these shared engaged learning experiences "countless life lessons and realizations surface[d] about how we as human beings operate in the world, beyond the myths and stereotypes that imprison us all" (Pompa, 2005, p. 176). In addition, outside students became interested in unpacking and challenging the underlying complexities of the juvenile and criminal justice systems. The context of the course—the collaboration with incarcerated young people, the physical learning space inside

the razor wire, the readings and reflections—created the potential for thinking critically and creatively about these systems, and ultimately, challenging them.

Alignment With Existing Research

Our research is in alignment with existing research in this area. Previous research on service learning within carceral settings had similar findings for the outcomes of the collaborative learning experiences for outside students (Hinck et al., 2013). Furthermore, prior research indicates that for young people experiencing incarceration, partnerships such as the ones created in these two courses, allowing for face-to-face interactions and shared civic engagement responsibilities, offer an increased sense of community engagement, and a decrease in feelings of isolation (Catching, 2013; Christianakis & Mora, 2016; Hinck et al., 2013). Indeed, "[e]ngaging young people in changing their communities may be a more powerful and successful way of getting young people to change themselves than efforts that focus on individual rehabilitation" (Tilton, 2013, p. 1195). Through engagement with college students from the outside, young people are supported in constructing different narratives for themselves (Nurse, 2013). In their research, Allred, Harrison, and O'Connell (2013) note a statistically significant increase in self-efficacy for inside students of higher education courses offered via an inside-out format. Likewise, Shoemaker, Willis, and Bryant (2014) describe collaborative education and knowledge development in carceral settings as being a key component of transforming one's perspectives and opportunities.

Limitations of the Research

Although some clear themes emerged from the research, the data are quite limited and the findings, while positive, could be strengthened by additional studies utilizing a larger sample and differing methods. For instance, some of the samples drawn from the Juvenile Justice Capstone were based upon prompts from *The Beat Within* unrelated to the questions posed in this research, thus, somewhat limiting the data set from that course. Also, during class collaborations, discussions, and closing circles, students and participants often engage in rich and thought-provoking dialogue, which unfortunately was not captured and analyzed in this research. To continue to study impact, the authors suggest further research regarding collaborative service learning in carceral institutions, posing reflection prompts that enable students to specifically articulate the significance of the experience. In addition, surveys and interviews of students and participants would allow an even deeper understanding impact.

Also problematic is the fact that the sample included only a very small number of female participants. Because MYCF is all male, and only one unit in DELH houses females, the female voice and perspective is largely unheard, and this is a large and unfortunate omission. It would be interesting to replicate this research to include collaborative service-learning experiences inside Coffee Creek, Oregon's women's prison, and Oak Creek, Oregon's youth correctional facility for females.

Finally, while the vast majority of juveniles detained at DELH are eligible to participate in the Juvenile Justice Capstone and *The Beat Within*, only young men who have earned the positive behavior status on the MYCF campus to be eligible to enroll in the course are allowed to do so, as determined by OYA administrators. Therefore, the sample is skewed, reflecting a small portion of young men already achieving success within the institution.

Conclusion

Partnerships involving higher education and youth carceral institutions, particularly when they involve collaborative critical service-learning courses are "win/win" in that they result in significant positive impacts for all students and participants, and allow and encourage a new way of imagining our nation's juvenile and criminal justice policies. As stated by Sarah Allred, associate professor of sociology and department chair at Berry College, "one of the greatest things that comes out of these types of classes is the confidence that both groups of students feel after completing them and the culture of positivity that they promote" (Lalji, 2015). Collaborative critical service-learning courses can and should be more broadly offered and available. Opportunities that enable students and participants from diverse backgrounds, facing difficult life struggles, to work together to bridge perceived differences, and affect social justice issues promotes agency and creates a community of change. As one outside student eloquently stated,

> In a course focused on bringing together groups of people from seemingly different places, we found that we were more alike than different. We are all humans in this world, and we are all responsible for working together, and approaching each individual with a sense of acceptance and understanding. We shouldn't let our experiences define us, but rather use them as tools to help increase our level of understanding and awareness of the world around us, and put those experiences to good use.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

Notes

1. The inside-out prison exchange program is an educational program that brings together campus-based college students with incarcerated students for a course, which takes place inside a carceral setting. (www.insideoutcenter.org)
2. This process involved working closely with the registrar's office and the committee on reduced differential tuition, with approval from the board of trustees.

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