The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: The Impact of Structure, Content, and Readings

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ABSTRACT

This study examines qualitative and quantitative data from a fifteen-week experiential course held in a county jail. The course was modeled after the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, and included college students and people who were incarcerated at the time. Survey data and comments gleaned from student papers were used to assess the impact of course structure, content, and readings on the understanding of a daily course topic. Both data sources reveal that deep understanding of the course topic was facilitated most by the course structure. The course content and daily readings were rated, respectively, as second and third in overall importance. The elements of the class structure represented one of several effective templates used throughout the course, and affirm the role of a well-structured experiential learning opportunity in educative outcomes situated in correctional facilities.

Introduction

Instructors involved with experiential education as service learning face important decisions about how to organize classroom and field sessions. At its core, service learning course development begins with a general plan to "make conscious application of students' experiences by integrating these experiences into the curriculum'" (Carver 1997, 144) in a manner that fosters a mutually beneficial relationship between the learner and the groups of interest (Wright 2000). And, if such plans engage simultaneously the senses, cognitions and emotions with the learning environment, the experiential education process may facilitate some of the most enduring educational opportunities (Carver

1997, Markus et al., 1993) for both the students and the groups or communities who they learn from and work with.

Of course, service learning is neither inherently educative (Dewey 1938, Simons and Cleary 2005) nor replete with assurances of other desired outcomes like an enhanced sociological imagination (Marullo 1998, Scarce 1997) or feelings of cultural relativism (Borden 2007), just to name a couple. Although nonacademic outcomes like these are important, educational outcomes have become increasingly scrutinized in an era when primary and secondary school administrators are accountable to federal mandates (i.e., Public Law 107-110, 2002 No Child Left Behind) to achieve standards in academic performance (Ives and Obenchain 2006). College faculty who have never used experiential education techniques also may question whether they entail a reasonable investment of time and talents given the likelihood of logistical hurdles associated with course creation (Wright 2000), somewhat mixed results concerning academic outcomes (Simons and Cleary 2005), a relative dearth of quantitative evidence on academic efficacy (Markus et al., 1993), and the increasing institutional and community dissatisfaction with experiences that resemble charity based relationships rather than those that foster a sense of mutuality and social justice (Lewis 2004). Last, gate keepers affiliated with educational or correctional facilities are likely to expect information on educative outcomes prior to approving the implementation of novel teaching pedagogies used by college faculty within jails or prisons.

The research literature on the best practices for educational outcomes (effective as well as for some traditional courses) suggests some useful yet general strategies. For example, experiential courses must be structured (Hollis 2004; Meisel 2008), involve ongoing opportunities for critical reflection on the relevant experiences or service (via dialogue and/or writing opportunities) (Dewey 1938; Hollis 2004; Mooney and Edwards 2001), incorporate readings that facilitate connections between theoretical issues and experiences (Wright 2000), and communicate clearly the expectations for reflective assignments (Wright 2000).

Beyond these general guidelines, few studies examine the nature of specific integrating experiences or activities that may facilitate intended academic outcomes where the goal is to "be with" rather than to "do for" (Pompa 2002). In addition, there is little information on students' assessments of course aspects that enhance learning the most. To date, reviews of outcomes (e.g., Wright 2000, Simons and Cleary 2005) tend to focus on all-or-nothing impacts, with no comparative consideration of specific course features that facilitate observed outcomes.

The current study is a departure from this trend, and examines three course features that may enhance students' understanding of course material and why these features matter. In addition, this study includes a unique sample and is concerned with the assessments provided by all students involved in a college level course offered in a local jail. The features of interest are the course location (context), *structure* (e.g. ice breaker activities, small group discussion, large group brainstorming sessions, etc.), *content* (e.g., nature of questions, precise topics of discussion), and daily required *readings*. The course is modeled after the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, and contained an equal number of people who were incarcerated in a local jail (Inside Students) and college students (Outside Students) from a nearby liberal arts institution as well as one member from the local community. All students came together once a week to learn about social inequality from a sociological perspective.

Teaching Approaches and Outcomes in Prison Educational Programs

Most educational courses in correctional facilities are not experiential in nature, and studies of them tend to be fairly narrow in scope. Among people who are incarcerated there remains a singular outcome of interest-- recidivism (Wade 2007)--because any form of rehabilitative program in prisons is expected to demonstrate that it helps reduce crime. To a lesser extent, educational achievement post-release has been an outcome of interest (Wade 2007). But, if "nothing works" (Welch, 2004 p. 79) toward these ends, any other the outcome--whether meritorious or negative--pales as a point of concern.

The evaluations by Case et al., (2005), Case and Fasenfest (2004), and Torre and Fine (2005) are exceptions. Case et al., (2005) interview females post-release, and shift the focus from a strict calculation of recidivism to subjects' personal experiences and testimonies about the efficacy of selected education opportunities received in prison. Likewise, Case and Fasenfest (2004) evaluate a prison based educational program. Specifically, they used focus groups to talk with males and females post-release, and asked formerly incarcerated individuals for their subjective assessments of the benefits of the education program received during incarceration and whether it helped them find and maintain employment. Last, Torre and Fine (2005) examine the impacts of higher education on women in prison, namely the psychological, academic, and more broadly based benefits of prison education programs on the women who were incarcerated, their children, the prison environment, and society-at-large.

Teaching Traditional Students in Experiential and Traditional Courses

Critical reflection and "doing" activities are part-and-parcel to experiential education, and are the core epistemology that facilitates deep understanding (Mooney and Edwards 2001). Dewey (1938) argued that genuine learning begins with experience. Likewise, learning occurs "best by interacting" (Palmer 1993, p. xvii) with people, an intermingling of experience, curriculum, and reflection (Mooney and Edwards 2001) that may result in the active construction of knowledge. Critical reflection, the complement for experience, also operates as a purposeful agent of student growth and academic learning (Ives and Obenchain 2006; Markus et al., 1993; Pompa 2002; Tynjla 1998).

In studies of effective learning in traditional classes (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Nystrand 1997), there too critical reflection is described as a key feature and may be facilitated through dialogic or discussion-based interaction between and among students and teachers. Although it may entail diverse modes of classroom interaction, each form involves well-planned, consistently applied, and ongoing use of critical questions and discussion that actively engage students in the process of knowledge creation and grounds current topics of discussions within the fabric of overall course interests.

Nestled within the context of experiences between students, dialogic interaction may facilitate dimensions of learning and student benefits that are difficult--although not impossible--to duplicate in a standard classroom setting (Pompa 2002). In the context the course studied here, the benefits extend to include the prospect of transformation in students' perspectives on issues of crime and justice, life course, or both (Pompa and Crabbe 2004). At minimum, however, the templates for any experiential class include a distinctive structure, content, and course readings. The structure of the learning experience refers to the way in which the learning experience is arranged intentionally (e.g., passive listening and note-taking, small group discussions, large group discussions, film presentations, brainstorming sessions, directed discussions of course readings, ice breakers, etc.). The content of the learning experiences includes the substance of information, feelings, insights that are shared or created by students. Last, readings pertain to curriculum- related information that students are instructed to examine in relation to the course in preparation for daily classes and exams, or perhaps integrate into course papers.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program was piloted in the fall of 1997, in the Philadelphia Prison System. Then, as now, the program involves teaching

college level courses within jails or prisons, with each class comprised of the same number of people who are incarcerated (Inside students) and college students (Outside students), as well as a course facilitator (typically a professor). Although topics vary, all courses are concerned with issues of crime and justice. To date, the program has been implemented by 56 instructors who have taught 147Inside-Out courses involving over 5,000 students (Inside and Outside) at 37 colleges and universities.

Inside-Out instructors must take a week-long training course that covers the Inside-Out curriculum, pedagogy, and tenets (http://www.temple.edu/inside-out). Core precepts include deepening the conversation about crime and justice, assigning a human face to complex topics and concerns, fostering a sense of mutuality in experiences shared between Inside and Outside students, and empowering others toward transformation of perspectives, life courses, or perhaps both. Each facilitator works from the *Instructor's Manual* (Pompa and Crabbe 2004) that is a week-by-week comprehensive tool for developing and providing a college course that meets for about 15 weeks in 2 1/2 hour sessions.

Course Description

This course involved the collaborative efforts of a liberal arts college and a nearby county jail. In the 2007-2008 academic year, the college had a student population of about 1,800 undergraduate and graduate students combined. Of these, about 88% were Caucasian, about 6% African American, 61% female, and 92% enrolled as full-time undergraduates. Most were between the ages of 18 and 22 years.

In 2007, the average daily population of the county jail was 588, with a total bed capacity of 822 (male and female general population, disciplinary cells, and medical bed capacity combined). In this same year, 7,254 males and 2,685 females were booked in the jail. Among males, 60% of those booked were Caucasian, 27% African American, and 13% of Hispanic origin. Among females, 73% of those booked were Caucasian, 24% African American, and 3% of Hispanic Origin (Floyd County Sheriff's Office, Annual Report 2007).

The course was an upper level, elective sociology class called *Social Inequality: Race, Class, and Gender*, and provided a sociological exploration into the causes and consequences of inequality in America, with an emphasis on the interface between inequality, crime, punishment, and justice. For fifteen weeks, the students met every Thursday afternoon for 2½ hours. Week Four focused on the question "what are prisons for?" and was the focus of this study

Short Reflection Papers were among the course requirements and the source of most qualitative data. A few students made explicit comments about Week Four in their Final Paper, so these comments are included as well. Like other weeks, the structure of Week Four included elements that resulted in maximum student interaction: activities (e.g., icebreakers) involving the entire classroom, guided discussion in the context of a small group (4-5 Inside and Outside students) or the larger group using the "circle process" (Pompa and Crabbe 2004, p. 17), brief moments for student journaling, and focused discussion led by the instructor.

Class Students

The class was comprised of 15 Outside and 15 Inside students, as well as one person from the local faith community who took part given her interest in working with marginalized social groups. Among the Outside students, three were male, all were Caucasian, and all either juniors or seniors in college.

None of the 15 Inside students took the course for college credit, but agreed required to fulfill all course requirements. For a couple of reasons, only 10 of the 15 Inside students were able to take part in the class for the entire semester. Five of the Inside Students were African American, the rest were Caucasian, non-Hispanic. All Inside students were female.

Methods

Data come primarily from information gathered during or written about (in Reflection Papers) the fourth weekly session of the semester, which was also the second combined meeting between Inside and Outside students. At the end of this class, students were administered a short survey about the relative importance of that class session's reading, content, or structure on their understanding of the daily topic "what are prisons for?" During Week Four, there were 14 Inside and 12 Outside students present. During Week Five, 10 students submitted a Reflection Paper pertaining to class activities that transpired during Week Four.

Week Four Context. Week Four, like all combined sessions, was held in the county jail within a multi-purpose, centrally located room. It was in the shape of an octagon, with three sides that had a large, Plexiglas window that covered the top half of the wall, and just large enough to accommodate thirty chairs arranged in a circle. During each class period, there was a constant trickle of people--those incarcerated and staff--who passed by these windows. Jail staff entered the room during classes only when they needed to make

special announcements about departure routines, query the instructor about needed class resources (e.g., pens for Inside students), or distribute medications to selected Inside students.

Prior to this course, only one Outside student had ever been within the walls of a prison or jail, and that visit involved a facility tour as part of another course. Not surprisingly, the weekly class sessions presented Outside students with regular exposures to novel--and at times disturbing--visual, procedural, and sensory experiences. For example, on two occasions after class ended, the Outside students observed facility staff perform a task--a pat down search of Inside students--that was usually carried out after Outside students were escorted away from the classroom. On these occasions Inside students were escorted out of the classroom, instructed to line up single file facing the wall, and get into position (i.e., place their feet apart and palms on the wall over their heads) for a pat down search.

Week Four Structure. The template of Week Four involved the same elements used throughout the semester: a large group-circle process, icebreaker activity, small group discussion, large group brainstorm and discussion led by instructor, and closing large group circle time. Dialogic interaction was incorporated throughout each facet of this session, and the template was implemented with minimal downtime during transitions from one activity to another

Week Four began with all students (n=26) forming one *large group circle* with Inside and Outside students intermixed around the circle. Next, the instructor led an opening *icebreaker* activity (20 minutes) that required the students to move around the classroom and intermingle further. After that, the instructor distributed a list of seven questions related to the daily reading assignment. Students were told to form small *discussion groups* of 4-6 people (a mixture of Inside and Outside students) and select one question from the list as a focal point of group discussion (20 minutes). Following the small group discussions, students gathered into the *larger group circle* and reporters shared their group's discussion points (10 minutes). Then, the instructor initiated an activity that involved everyone, to encourage deeper thinking about the week's topic. On the board, the instructor wrote the question "what are prisons for?", asked students to reflect silently a moment on their personal response, and invited everyone to give answers to the question without discussion or comment from others. All responses were written on the board, and kept in view throughout the class.

With these responses in view, the large group separated one more time into *small groups* to talk about a set of related questions: what is the appropriate role for prisons in society? Is this the role prisons actually play? Why or why not? What are some things that prisons do well? Do poorly? (25 minutes). The class ended with a *large group circle,* and students shared a single word or phrase that best represented their thoughts on the issue "what are prisons for?"

Week Four Content. The opening icebreaker began with all students standing in the center of the room, and then being instructed to move to one side or the other according to the rules of the opening activity. For example, the instructor read a series of paired items (gum versus jaw breakers) and asked students to decide, based on their own personality and preferences, which of the two things they were most like. The instructor indicated which side of the room represented each of the two things, and students walked to the side that most matched his/her personality (e.g. "gum" walked to the left side of the room, "jaw breakers" to the right).

Week Four Readings. The reading assignment was a chapter called "The Politics and Economics of Punitive Criminal Justice" (Western 2006, Chapter 3). It was from one of the course's required texts, and provided an overview of the nature of the recent prison population boom (e.g., when it began, who has been most impacted), as well as some fundamental economic and political changes in American society that precipitated this boom.

Survey And Qualitative Data Results

Survey Data.

At the end of the fourth class, each Inside and Outside student was handed a short survey consisting of four questions: How much or how little did the *readings* for today affect your answer to the question "what are prisons for?"; How much or how little did the *content* of class discussion affect your answer to the question "what are prisons for?"; How much or how little did the *structure* of class discussion (for example, using some small group discussion, some large group discussion, some brainstorming with the larger group, some direct discussion of the readings) help you think in a deeper manner about "what are prisons for?"; How much or how little did you read the assignment before coming to class today? Each question had a ten point scale, where 1 was "not at all" and 10 was "completely." Responses to these questions are summarized in Table 1 (p. 21), where means and standard deviations are provided for all four variables.

Table 1. Relative Importance of Class Structure, Content, and Readings (N = 26) mean (standard dev.)

Student Group		Structure	Content	Readings	Completed Readings
Inside	(n = 14)	7.71 (1.82)	6.57 (2.28)	5.86 (2.28)	6.29 (2.95)
Outside	(n =12)	8.67 (1.16)	7.83 (1.98)	6.42 (2.23)	5.58 (2.33)
Combined	(n= 26)	8.15 (2.53)	7.04 (2.16)	6.12 (2.23)	6.27 (2.66)

One-sided t-tests were used to determine whether differences observed between two means were caused by chance. To begin, we compared the mean ratings (all students combined, n=26) for Structure versus Readings (8.15 versus 6.12, $p < .01$), Structure versus Content (8.15 versus 7.04, $p < .05$), and Content versus Readings (7.04 versus 6.12, $p < .07$). These data suggest the relatively strong impact of course structure relative to course content and readings with regard to understanding the daily topic. The overall pattern in these data reveals a consensus among students--Inside and Outside--on the relative significance of the readings, content, and structure of the class: the *readings* were important, but the least significant of the three features asked about. Course *content* was rated as second in importance, followed by course *structure*.

Next, one-sided t-tests were used in subgroup analyses to determine whether there were any differences between Inside and Outside students (e.g., ratings on structure comparing Inside and Outside student scores, 7.71 and 8.67 respectively). As expected, none of these comparisons yielded statistically significant differences between mean ratings on structure, content, or readings when comparing the Inside and Outside student responses.

Although Inside and Outside students showed an identical pattern in their overall ratings of the features (i.e., both groups said that course structure affected their understanding of "what prisons are for" the most), Inside students tended to give lower appraisals for each course feature. For example, the mean rating of the importance of readings was 5.86 for Inside students and 6.42 for Outside students. Although these rating differences (i.e., Inside student ratings versus Outside student ratings) were not statistically significant, qualitative information from a Reflection Paper suggests that the difference may be valid

nonetheless and grounded in students' relationship with the course context: the county jail. The following quote best captures the profoundly different relationship Inside and Outside students have vis-à-vis the jail.

> There is no way a person taking a tour of a jail or prison can understand what jail or prison really is, because it isn't something you can't see. Forget the buildings, bars, and wire. It is a loss of freedom, which isn't a simple matter of someone telling you where you can and can't go. It means you are totally removed from the world you knew, and that the world has to get along without you and you without it. Your footprints are washed away and you begin to wonder whether you ever did exist. (Kaye, Inside student)

In addition, more Inside students completed the reading assignment (6.29 for Inside versus 5.58 for Outside students). This finding is consistent with anecdotal evidence reported by some Inside-Out instructors who share that Inside students usually are better prepared for class than Outside students. This difference is not, however, statistically significant at the .05 level.

Last, Table 2 provides data on the correlation coefficients for the four study variables. These statistics reveal an interesting pattern of association among course elements. Overall, students providing higher ratings on the impact of readings also provided higher ratings of the impact of both content (.41, $p < .05$) and structure ($r = .36$, $p < .05$) . In addition, ratings on the role of structure were significantly correlated with ratings on the role of content ($r = .52$, $p < .01$). The correlation between the amount of Readings completed and impact of readings ($r = -.24$) was not statistically significant. Most students indicated that they completed some of the readings for that day's session (mean = 6.27, where 1 is completed none of the readings and a 10 is completed all the daily readings).

Table 2. Correlation coefficients (n=26)

	2	3	4
1. Reading Impact	.41	.36*	-.24
2. Content Impact		.52**	-.35*
3. Structure Impact			-.46*
4. Did the Readings			

(1-tailed test) * = .05, ** = .01

Qualitative Data.

Qualitative data were gleaned from Reflection Papers (N=12) submitted subsequent to Week Four, and three Final Papers that offered unsolicited reference to either Week Four or the three course features: *structure*, *content*, and *readings*. Reflection Papers selected for review in this study each contained observations and reflections on the Week Four class.

Course Structure. The structure of the combined classes involved alternating templates (comprised of identical elements rearranged from week to week) for engagement between Inside and Outside students. By the fourth week, students had experienced one full class session that implemented one such template. Thus by Week Four, each student had some sense of what was meant by the term "structure" mentioned in the survey. These preplanned templates served as an important backdrop for daily topics, prevented a feeling of monotony with regard to the flow of weekly sessions, and fostered one-on-one dialogue, as in the small group discussions. Small group discussions were regarded favorably by all students for a variety of reasons.

> I found that I benefited more from the small group discussions, as that was where I really felt comfortable participating. These more intimate settings were where I was more able to connect and better understand the experiences the Inside students were having (Linda, Outside student)

> Before, ... told myself that there was nothing that "these people" could teach me that I didn't already know. Now having only been around them twice, I've learned not to judge anyone before getting to know them first. (Mekalia, Inside student)

> Outside students began to see the Inside students as intelligent, kind, and brave. The Inside students began to see the outside students as welcoming, friendly, and thrilled to learn about their experiences. It seems the best way to battle stereotypes is interaction with a person being stereotyped. (Robin, Outside student)

The icebreaker activity--like others used throughout the semester-- was intended to serve as fodder for deep personal reflection, observations about relationships, and class topics, but also added a bit of frivolity to classroom dynamics.

> .... We witnessed a visual representation of the most transformational aspect of the program when we observed last week the entirety of the mixed group--some on this line, some on that line, and some hovering in the middle of the room--interacting and contributing as a functioning unit with parts both strong and weak.... It was not difficult for anyone to perceive similarities between Inside and Outside students as they physically aligned themselves with one another and produced similar statements about their choice for the group to hear (Libby, Outside Student)

The large circle was used in a variety of ways throughout each class period. Sometimes, the instructor advised students to share their reflections on a session topic, and passed a tennis ball around the circle. Holding the ball signified each person's desire to speak, while passing the ball on to the next person indicated the wish to remain silent. The large circle process allowed students to focus on others' comments and anticipate their own opportunity to speak as the tennis ball moved around the circle.

> I remember ... everyone went around the circle and said what they got out of the class. This caught me off-guard because besides knowledge, I had not thought that I would gain anything significant. I didn't realize it would be the powerful experience that it was. I remember many people saying that they wanted their pre-conceived notions and judgments to surface so that they could be aware of them and try to get rid of them. I am typically a very open and caring person and I like to think that I have no prejudices so to hear other people say that it made me think that I might actually have some. And I did, I evaluated my thoughts before and after class on who people in prison were and my ideas have changed dramatically. (Loren, Outside student)

Overall, qualitative data support the objective ratings of course *structure*, *content*, and *readings*. Students learned most due to the course structure, benefiting greatly from the weekly smorgasbord of interactional templates that involved moving and mixing students quickly between icebreakers, small group discussion, large group brainstorming, and so forth. The class structure kept students meaningfully engaged with the topic and each other. The structure also facilitated serendipitous discoveries (e.g., "the other" students were not so different) and processes (e.g., dissolution of stereotypes about people who are incarcerated or in college).

Course Context. The content of each type of structured period of engagement created powerfully instructional, enduring, and at times emotional memories for many students. Course content prompted personal reflections.

> Through our discussions, I have been challenged, and any pre-conceived notions that I had about jail or prison life are now void (Penny, Outside student).

In addition, some student reflections mentioned the intellectually and emotionally engaging conversations that were part of their bonding and learning. These unfolded gradually within weekly small group discussions.

> I am still amazed at how much we as human beings long to be respected. When Carly-an Inside student-said that all that prisons did a good job of was "stealing" her self-respect, it hit me pretty hard. My heart broke for her and for all of them at that moment. (James, Outside student)

> They act as if they are just really concerned about "inmates," how they're/we're treated as an individual, as a group or how we are affected mentally.... I am overwhelmed by the mind-set because they're eager to learn more than to just to "know" . . . I see likeness and joy in this program, including myself. We are getting more attached to each other as humans and concerned with the questions. (Patricia, Inside student)

> .... the things that were brought up such as improper use of money, living conditions, and other issues bothered me. The question that I could not get out of my head was "why?" and I think that is a feeling I will continue to experience as the class progresses (Penny, Outside student)

Still other students felt that the content affected their learning because it encouraged ongoing, critical consideration of complex issues related to crime and justice. This was captured in one student's Final Paper, as he commented on Week Four and his overall memory of the course content.

> What are prisons for? Our facilitator posed this question to the class numerous times throughout the semester. As we got further and further into the course, the answer got more difficult (Robin, Outside student)

Taken together, quotes concerning content also highlight the various forms of dialogic interaction that were structured into interactional templates. Such interactions involved a seamless series of open discussions between students, each of which was guided subtly by the facilitator, who wove such interactions together per session and over time, with integrating questions.

Daily Readings. Inside and Outside students said that the reading for Week Four had the least impact on their understanding of this issue "what are prisons for?" In the Reflection Papers, students were required to make reference to the readings through the use of quotes, to support or refute points made. But, student editorial comments about readings were infrequent, and ranged from being neutral in nature--with terms such as "interesting" or "useful" mentioned most often--to those reflecting a strong emotional reaction.

> ... but that story really hit home to me (Sherry, Inside student referring to a crime vignette included in the daily reading)

> The opening statement of the Lifers article is a very powerful one. (Kendrick, Outside student)

> The ... book ... is prejudiced. The whole book may not be prejudiced, but to me, as a mixed woman, the book mainly talks about "blacks" more than "whites!" To me, the cover of the book is sorta prejudiced because the man is "black' why couldn't it have a mixture of colors of people on the cover of the book (Sheila, Inside student)

> I really didn't like the book ....because it is mostly statistics. I like reading books that have more information not numbers. (Catharine, Inside student)

In general, readings were mentioned most often when students had a strong positive or negative emotional reaction to a particular passage.

Course Context. Although the survey did not ask about the context on learning, it is apparent that the physical context for the Inside-Out class--the county jail-- was an integral aspect of this experiential learning opportunity.

> "The environment for learning is unlike any other - unconventional - and it is a great one." (Shandra, Inside student)

> "This class provided a learning experience outside of college and comfort (Liz, Outside student)

Here, students affirmed the educational role and value they associated with learning in a jail alongside Inside students.

CONCLUSION

This study focused on Week Four of a fifteen week course concerned with crime and justice and modeled after the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. It used student self-reports and qualitative data from class papers to assess the educative value of three course features that are generic to experiential education: structure, content, and academic readings. One of the unique aspects of this course was the bringing together of an equal number of Outside (college students and 1 member of the community) and Inside students (people who were incarcerated) who spent 15 weeks learning together as peers about complex topics such as social inequality, crime, and justice. According to all students in the class, course structure had the greatest educative value, followed by content and readings. Inside and Outside students answered similarly in this regard.

The course structure evaluated was a template of interaction applied throughout the semester, albeit with the elements therein (e.g., ice breaker activities, large group circle) arranged in a different order from time-to-time. Students indicated that they benefited from the structural template for several reasons: it lessened the potential for monotony, promoted genuine interaction between Inside and Outside students, encouraged in-depth discussions about life experiences and topics relevant to course issues, and facilitated the dismantling of stereotypes and reconstruction of labels. The following quotes suggest why all features were important, but course structure had the largest impact.

> It (the course) had such a unique setup and structure, and presented material in a way that really caused it to sink in, not just fade like that of other classes. What we got from it was academically good, but our gains from this class went so far beyond that I listened with moist eyes as my fellow classmates told how this class had changed their lives in very significant ways (Adeline, Outside student)

> Being able to take theories from our readings and learning from the real-

> life experiences of one another was an invaluable learning tool. Through this unique class format, I gained a better understanding of the criminal justice system and how race and gender play a factor in crime and punishment, as well as possible ways of altering the current justice system to make it more effective. (Linda, Outside student)

Overall, these data suggest an important result. The educative value of an experiential course is a function of several interlocking course features. Although daily readings were rated as having the least impact on the students understanding of the daily topic, the mean rating for this variable was not low. Instead, students said daily readings had, on the average, an impact of 6.12 on a 10-point scale, a mere two points below the mean rating for the impact of course structure (8.15).

These results should be interpreted within the context of study limitations. First, this study involves an evaluation of features used in one class session (the fourth week) within a fifteen-week course. Perhaps the ratings would be different (e.g., rated the readings as more important than content) if students had completed the surveys at a later point in the semester or completed multiple such surveys. However, the perusal of Final Papers, some quoted here, affirmed that course structure remained the salient feature throughout the course.

Second, future Inside-Out courses should include similar assessments of the relative impact of course features. Multi-site assessments that replicated and then build upon the one implemented in this study would strengthen out ability to assess the educative, comparative value of the course components that are a part of the Inside-Out curriculum as well as other types of experiential courses.

Last, in some ways the qualitative-but not quantitative-findings pertaining to the role of readings were a surprise. From the perspective of the instructor, the quotes in the Reflection Papers did not mirror fully the nature of the oral exchange about the readings in the classroom. It is the author's recollection of the fourth week session that the readings served a more important role in the understanding of "what are prisons for?" than is reflected in the quotes. For some students, the readings helped connect the student with herself and others and served as a strong conversational stepping stone in the open discussion.

This study contributes to a growing literature on the educative value of experiential courses, and offers a preliminary answer to why some experiential courses may be uniquely poised to offer positive educational outcomes. As suggested by Meisel (2008), successful outcomes stem from well-planned, highly structured experiences. This may be particularly true when the people from the

community (Outside Students) and people who are incarcerated (Inside Students) come together in close quarters as peer learners, yet must quickly and effectively work through any personal trepidations that may stem from the biases, stereotypes, or general misunderstandings held about the other or the context of the course itself (i.e., a jail or prison). Our structure facilitated this transition and drew from pre-planned templates that served as an important backdrop to weeks of engaging content and interaction about social inequality. The careful timing involved in the smooth transition from one feature to another (i.e., from encompassing circle, to small group discussion, to quiet reflection time), so critical for the overall impact of the simultaneously beneficial features (i.e., context, structure, content, and readings). The parameters for interaction (e.g., first name use only, no labeling language, no personal relationships beyond the boundaries of the classroom) that were launched within the first weeks of the semester also may have served to create and help maintain a comfortable forum for learning about and discussing complex and sometimes emotionally charged issues.

To conclude, this study also contributes to our understanding of the impact of a teaching pedagogy that is not typically implemented in college courses offered in prisons for people who are incarcerated. Interestingly, here as in studies of students in traditional classrooms, we find preliminary evidence that regardless of the classroom location or student composition, learning that involves well-structured opportunities for critical reflection and "doing" may be a universal best practice in higher education.

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Biographical Sketch

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