Integration of Culture in Reading Studies for Youth in Corrections: A Literature Review

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Abstract

The majority of youth in corrections have had negative school experiences and below average academic achievement. Longitudinal research indicates that both academic failure and a negative life-long trajectory are a probability for many youth confined to correctional facilities. Given the high number of youth from ethnic and cultural minority backgrounds who are incarcerated in the United States and the low rates of achievement, the purpose of the current review is to assess the empirical literature on reading interventions for youth in corrections. In particular, the literature was analyzed to determine the extent that cultural factors were considered in the development and implementation of reading interventions for youth in corrections. It is disconcerting that in reviewing more than 170 articles only four were empirical intervention studies with incarcerated youth. This finding speaks clearly to the need for more research behind the fence. The small body of literature dealing with incarcerated youth is primarily comprised of studies that identify academic deficiencies rather than programming that may strengthen reading skills in this population.

The literature is consistent that the majority of youth in corrections have had negative school experiences, have below average academic achievement, and longitudinal research projects that both academic failure and a negative life-long trajectory are a statistical probability for many youth confined to correctional facilities (Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 2000; Foley, 2001; Kollhoff, 2002; Leone, Meisel, & Drakeford, 2002). Reviewing the available data, juveniles confined to long-term facilities also appear to have high rates of illiteracy (Baltodano, Harris, & Rutherford, 2005; Coulter, 2004; Drakeford, 2002; Malmgren & Leone, 2000).

There are also a disproportionate number of students with disabilities in the juvenile justice system. Although the general school
population outside of secure care has a disability rate of approximately 12.7%, a national survey of juvenile correctional facilities indicates that an average of 34% of youth in juvenile facilities have diagnosed disabilities (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirier, 2005). The survey also reported great variability in prevalence data with some states reporting disability rates approaching 70% and other states reporting very low rates. This suggests that the overall disability rate may be higher than 34% as child-find activities in some states are less than desirable. Of those identified with disabilities, 47.7% were learning disabled and 38.6% were emotionally disabled. Both of these disability categories rely heavily on human judgment and tend to have higher rates of minority students (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Incarcerated youth are at-risk for poor academic outcomes for a number of reasons. The school experiences of many of these youth prior to incarceration place them at high-risk for academic delays. Incarcerated youth have more truancies, grade retentions, and suspensions than the general population (Quinn et al., 2005). Many were expelled or dropped out of school. In addition, many youth were essentially pushed out of school because their behaviors were incompatible with school goals. Given these factors, it is not surprising that most youth are significantly below grade level upon entry to a secure care facility (Center on Crime, Communities, and Culture, 1997; Foley, 2001).

Once incarcerated, a number of additional factors put these students at risk for prolonged illiteracy. There are numerous challenges to educating incarcerated youth. Varying periods of confinement and high mobility rates make continuous education problematic. Differing views among secure-care staff on the roles of punishment and control versus rehabilitation and treatment inhibits the delivery of quality systematic education (Leone, Meisel, & Drakeford, 2002; Nelson, Leone, & Rutherford, 2004). Many facilities lack adequate classroom space for educational purposes. Instruction can be interrupted by institutional activities such as; transfers to other units for mental health, discipline, and protective custody. Finally, in many states there is inadequate funding to hire qualified teachers in secure-care settings and salaries and working conditions are often not comparable with the local education agencies. Mirroring a national shortage in public schools, the lack of appropriately certified staff is particularly acute in the area of special education.

Cultural Considerations in Developing Reading Interventions for Youth in Corrections

In addition to poor educational outcomes, a disproportionate number of youth in juvenile correctional facilities comes from ethnic
minority groups regardless of special education status. In 1997, African-American's comprised 40% of youth aged 10 to 17 in correctional facilities and Hispanic youth accounted for 18.5% of the incarcerated youth in the same age range (Galigher, 1999). In addition, African-Americans are 5 times more likely to be incarcerated than Caucasian youth, while Latinos and Native Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be incarcerated (Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000; Sigmund, 2004). In other words, in the general population culturally and linguistically diverse youth are minorities, but in the correctional population they represent the majority.

Given the high number of youth from minority backgrounds that are incarcerated in the United States and the low rates of achievement, the purpose of the current review is to examine the empirical literature on reading interventions for minority youth in corrections. These youth come with their own set of experiences and cultures that influence their understanding of reading, its importance, and its utility in their everyday lives. These factors are essential when considering achievement levels among incarcerated youth and when planning effective interventions. Incarcerated youth also must learn within the unique culture of a secure care facility where educational goals and security needs do not always go hand in hand.

While culture is critical to consider in designing interventions for at-risk youth regardless of whether or not they are incarcerated, it is largely ignored. In fact, Artiles (2002) asserts that this oversight is a reflection of a more problematic issue in special education which is the "invisibility of ethnic minorities and culture in research practices" (p.695). Given the overrepresentation of racial and ethnic minority youth incarcerated in the United States, it is timely to examine the literature regarding reading studies in corrections to determine if cultural factors have been considered. In many educational studies outside of corrections, cultural considerations are addressed solely by the inclusion of an isolated categorical variable. "Because participants' perspectives and their contexts are important in the study of reading competencies and performance, it is germane to ask who is included in reading research, what do we know about these individuals' cultural histories, and what role does culture play in their learning process?" (Artiles, 2002, p.695). Unfortunately, this question has not been addressed for incarcerated youth and Keith and McCray (2002) emphasize that not only is it critical to address the disproportionate representation of culturally and ethnically diverse males incarcerated in the U.S., but we must also consider the disproportionality of those youth with special needs and the impact that ineffective interventions will have on their continued development. It is time to go beyond
simply accounting for the CLD students included in research studies and ensuring that the sample included in the study is representative of the population. It is not simply a variable to control for through statistical analysis. Often culture is considered only in terms of one’s belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group. However, reducing the notion of culture to a categorical variable implies that one's culture is comprised of static membership to a variety of categories such as race, religion, SES, and ethnicity (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002).

When evaluating culture and its impact on academic interventions such as reading a more complex view of culture is necessary. Rogoff and Angelillo (2002) contend:

If social science were to equate culture with a social category, or the intersection of such categories, we would lose the opportunity to understand cultural processes as the interrelated aspects of people's overlapping and historical participation in changing and conflicting cultural communities. Cultural processes do not function in isolation or in mechanical interaction among independently definable entities. Research efforts that try to control for all but a few aspects of community functioning — to be able to separately examine the effects of standalone variables — overlook the meaning that is given to each aspect by their integration (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002, 216).

How then do we integrate culture into instruction for incarcerated youth? Educators continue to ask how we account for and support the differences that exist between and within individuals (Cole & Engestrom, 2005). Kauffman's (1989) suggests that in our multicultural society teachers must ensure that they have considered cultural explanations to inappropriate student behavior. Beyond the implications for addressing deviant behavior, the key is to connect to their individual life story (Collier & Thomas, 2001).

It is the role of the correctional educator to provide at least the basic skills that the student did not receive in public school and that are essential for being a productive, law-abiding citizen. “Students in prison are cognitively mature. Although they may not have had the opportunities for continuous formal schooling, they have grown and matured through their many—sometimes difficult—life experiences” (Collier & Thomas, 2001, 68). Similarly, students that do not possess those qualities and skills that are valued and taught in an academic setting are not necessarily intellectually deficient. It is likely that they have honed skills that are not particularly valued in formal school contexts, but that are needed in their community, culture, family, gang, set, or clique (Faltis, in press). For example, detained and incarcerated
youth might see themselves as alienated from mainstream institutions as the result of multiple factors (e.g., poverty, discrimination, structural racism, community violence), and thus, they may not perceive school literacy to be a valuable skill. Additionally, they are not eager to focus their efforts on school literacy achievement while incarcerated or when returning to their home school (Keith & McCray, 2002).

From a sociocultural perspective, human development is a cultural process and people's participation in cultural communities mediate developmental pathways. Rogoff (2003) explains that

people's performance depends in large part on the circumstances that are routine in their community and on the cultural practices they are used to. What they do depends in important ways on the cultural meaning given to the events and the social and institutional supports provided in their communities for learning and carrying out specific roles in the activities (p.6).

From this perspective, communities have varying developmental goals that are supported by particular strategies and rely on alternative means to assess progress toward developmental endpoints. These aspects vary substantially across cultural communities. In order to address the needs of the marginally literate ethnically diverse incarcerated youth, we must account for youth's sociocultural contexts of literacy, understand the meaning and perceived benefits of reading, and incorporate that knowledge in direct and explicit instruction (Keith & McCray, 2002).

Our definition of culture includes three components: (1) the cultural group practices of the group to which the student belongs (i.e., Mexican-American, African-American, etc.) which we call the culture of the student; (2) the culture of the institutional settings which youth inhabit, which in this case is the correctional facility; and (3) that the place where education for these youngsters takes place is the space where these cultural components (student and institution) meet. The purpose of this review was to assess the current literature on reading for youth in corrections. We sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are the topics covered in reading interventions with incarcerated youth?; (2) Are issues of disproportionality addressed?; and (3) Are cultural issues addressed including the culture the youth bring with them, the culture of the institution, and the interaction of the two?
Method

We used a two-step approach to identify articles for this review. First, we identified studies through computerized bibliographic searches from abstract and citation archives published from 1975 to 2005. In addition to the electronic search, we conducted a hand search of two prominent journals in the field - one from special education and one from correctional education - from 1995 to 2005. Behavioral Disorders is a peer-reviewed journal that in the field of special education and the Journal of Correctional Education is a peer-reviewed journal focusing on educating incarcerated adult and juvenile populations.

We excluded non-data articles such as reviews and commentaries. We included only those articles that reported results of reading assessments or interventions. Furthermore, the participants had to be court-involved youth under the age of 19. Articles were coded by topics covered including: data on achievement levels and reading interventions. Demographic data collected included: gender, age, ethnicity, geographical location, and disability. The ways in which investigators collected their data were coded as: observational, archival, self-reported, and permanent products (i.e., checklists and tests administered by the researchers) Finally, we coded each study based on whether the issue of culture was addressed; and if so, how it was addressed.

The following index sources were searched so that articles could be located in both educational literature and social science journals that deal with criminology, psychology and at-risk populations. Social Sciences full text, Sociological Abstracts, Academic Search Premier (EBSCO Host), Education abstracts, ERIC, Criminal Justice Abstracts, LexisNexis Academic, PsycINFO, Social Work Abstracts, Hein-Online: The Modern Link to Legal History, JSTOR (Journal Storage Project), and Kluwer Online. In order to ensure that we did not inadvertently exclude pertinent studies for this review, we used a number of combinations of keywords. The searches were based on the following keywords and various combinations of these words: juvenile corrections, juvenile delinquents, literacy, reading, EBD, emotional disturbance, behavior disturbance, behavioral disorders, aggression, externalizing, internalizing, academic failure, culture, crime, education, anthropology, African American studies, Asian American studies, Chicano studies, criminal justice, ethnic studies, and family studies. We used keyword combinations that included juvenile corrections and literacy or reading, juvenile delinquents and literacy or reading, juvenile corrections and EBD or emotional disturbance or behavioral disturbance or behavioral disorders, juvenile corrections and aggression, aggression and reading or literacy, juvenile corrections and academic failure, juvenile corrections and culture, juvenile crime and literacy or reading, academic achieve-
ment and juvenile corrections. In our hand search, we examined articles in two prominent journals. The first journal reviewed was Behavioral Disorders, a special education journal that reports on youth at-risk or identified with emotional and behavioral disorders. This journal was deemed appropriate because it is assumed that incarcerated youth have some degree of behavioral difficulty that led to their arrest and incarceration. In this journal, we looked for articles that had incarcerated youth as the target population. Once articles were identified as dealing with the target population, each article was reviewed for inclusion of reading data and only evidence-based studies were included in our analysis. The second journal targeted for the hand search was the Journal of Correctional Education. This journal serves researchers and educators in the field of corrections, including youth and adults. This journal was scanned for articles with youth aged 19 or younger. After identifying the articles, each was reviewed for inclusion of reading data.

Results

The electronic search yielded 156 articles on incarcerated youth with ages 19 and under. However, only 16 were data-based articles on reading. Although the hand search produced 14 additional articles on adjudicated youth, only two met the data-based reading selection criteria. Consequently, of the 170 articles reviewed, 18 met the search criteria. We found additional articles that addressed reading achievement with incarcerated youth, but they did not employ an empirical design and were consequently excluded from this study. A majority of these articles were reviews of the literature, statements of current practices or needs, or theoretical explorations of the link between delinquency and academic achievement.

The findings of our review of reading research for youth in secure care will be reported in terms of research questions. The first section will address the topics covered in the literature, the next section will cover the findings as they relate to disproportionate representation of minority students in juvenile corrections, and the final section will review how the studies addressed cultural issues.

Topics Covered in the Reading Literature on Incarcerated Youth

The 18 articles that met the search criteria fell into two broad categorical topics: (a) academic achievement levels and (b) reading interventions.

Academic achievement. Eleven of the articles focused on academic achievement and the link between reading achievement and a number of other variables. A common theme in these articles was that incarcerated youth had lower than average reading achievement.
Reading achievement was higher among non-offenders than among offenders, as was achievement higher among non-recidivists versus recidivists. Achievement also tended to be higher for Caucasians than for Hispanics or African-Americans. There were no significant differences in achievement when youth volunteered for literacy programs or when they were assigned to them. Additionally, violent offenders tended to have lower achievement than other offenders. Three of the articles included discussion on assessment when dealing with the achievement levels of incarcerated youth. In one study authors reported 50% of the sample had some indicators of dyslexia, which was inconsistent with the finding of another author that the rate of dyslexia for incarcerated youth was more parallel to non-incarcerated youth if a more restrictive definition was used that focused on phonological processing instead of overall reading achievement.

The studies we reviewed were conducted in a number of industrialized countries including: the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Scotland. However, a majority of the studies were conducted in the U.S. Again, a finding replicated across the studies is that incarcerated youth tend to be sub-average in academic achievement (Beebe & Mueller, 1993; Wilgosh & Paitich, 1982; Jerse & Fakouri, 1997) and that recidivists tend to have lower achievement scores than non-recidivists (Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 1999; Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1997). Wheldall and Watkins (2004) argue that although reading scores are sub-average, 75% of the incarcerated youth in their study in Australia had achieved at or above functional literacy levels. They defined functional literacy as reading at the 10-11 year old range on a standardized measure.

Another finding reported in the achievement studies was the presence of reading disabilities. Half of the incarcerated youth in a Scotland study self-reported indicators of dyslexia (Kirk & Reid, 2001). Similar findings were reported about prevalence and definitions of dyslexia in two studies in Western Europe. Snowling, Adams, Bowyer-Crane and Tobin (2000) found that the prevalence of dyslexia among juvenile inmates varied greatly depending on the definition of dyslexia. When dyslexia was defined as a discrepancy between reading achievement and non-verbal reasoning, 56% of the inmates were considered dyslexic, compared to only 5% of the non-incarcerated control group. If dyslexia was defined as a discrepancy between verbal IQ and reading achievement, 43% of the juvenile offenders were categorized as dyslexic compared to only 8% of the non-incarcerated group. When a stricter definition of dyslexia was established that included measures of phonological processing rather than a discrepancy model, only 25% of the offenders were dyslexic while 19% of the
non-offenders were dyslexic. The imposition of a definition of dyslexia that included difficulties with phonological processing yielded similar prevalence figures. Additionally, Svensson, Lundberg, and Jacobson (2003) examined 70 juvenile inmates and 61 controls from local schools in Sweden who were tested for dyslexia. When phonological processing was used to determine dyslexia, the inmate and general population were similar.

Seven of the reviewed achievement articles relied on archival data found in student files. Five studies (5) used permanent product (PP) data in which the researchers themselves collected data in the form of interviews, tests, and inventories, and one study used a combination of archival and PP data to report on academic achievement levels.

Between the years 1978 and 2005, the total number of incarcerated youth across the 14 studies was 2,854. Of those, approximately 90% were male and 10% were female (273 total females). One of the studies did not separate the number of males and females (Herse & Fakouri, 1978), but both were included in the study. The average sample size for the achievement studies was 204 youth. The majority of the studies had youth between the ages of 12 and 18. One study included 11 year olds and two studies included youth beyond 18 year olds.

Of the studies that reported racial data, 573 of the participants were Caucasian (48%), 369 were African-Americans (31%), 192 were Hispanic (16%), 30 were Native Americans (3%) and 58 were classified as “other” (5%). Racial data was reported for 1192 out of 2,854 youth studied. This is approximately 42% of the total sample.

Aspects of the students' educational background were reported in some of the studies. Of those reporting special education status, 437 students were receiving or had a history of receiving special education services (53%). This compares with 365 students who were not in special education. Poor educational histories were reported in two studies (Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1999; Ryan & McCabe, 1993). The percentage of students with GEDs in the Katsiyannis and Archwamety study was 51%, while those with educational levels below the 8th grade accounted for only 25% of the sample.

Nearly all of the achievement studies used standardized, norm referenced testing to report on literacy levels among incarcerated youth. The most common reading achievement score reported was word identification, with some studies reporting word attack (phonics) and comprehension measures as well. Only one study (Baltodano, Harris & Rutherford, 2005) included a curriculum-based measure in the analysis of achievement levels. This was also the only study that reported on reading fluency.

*Reading interventions.* While achievement studies spanned a 30-
year period, only three were prior to 1990. Interventions studies were found between the years of 1994 and 2004 only. Three of the intervention studies demonstrated reading gains for incarcerated youth, while the other documented fewer recidivists among those participating in academic interventions. The number of participants ranged between a low of 6 and a high of 191, with three of the four containing fewer than 50 youth.

In one study the investigation included psychosocial and vocational treatment in addition to educational treatment (Brier, 1994). The investigation lasted 24 months and those who completed the program were far less likely to recidivate than those who did not complete the program. The remaining 3 studies focused exclusively on reading outcomes. The students in the Coulter (2004) study made significant gains in passage reading and comprehension. Average gains increased with the number of sessions the students completed. The six youth in the Drakeford study (2002) made gains in oral reading fluency and reading attitudes. Finally, Malmgren and Leone (2000) reported significant gains in decoding, but not comprehension, in a 6-week, intensive program.

In terms of racial make up, 11(4%) of the participants were Caucasian, 147 (58%) were African American, 91 (36%) were Hispanic, and 4 (2%) were “other.” One-hundred twenty-five (60%) students were not in special education, while 85 were receiving special education services at the time of the intervention. Brier (1994) reported that 111 (69%) out of 192 students in the study had dropped out of school.

Researchers in two of the four intervention studies relied on a scripted Direct Instruction program called Corrective Reading (Englemann et. al, 1999; Drakeford, 2002; Malmgren & Leone, 2000). One other study used direct instruction methodology using novels that were considered highly interesting to the youth. In the remaining intervention study the reading methodology or materials were not specified (Brier, 1994). This study included literacy as one portion of a broader treatment package to reduce recidivism. The other treatment elements included in this study were psychosocial and vocational interventions.

Disproportionality. Issues of disproportionate representation of minority youth in the juvenile correctional population were only addressed in 2 articles. Drakeford (2002) discussed disproportionality among incarcerated youth in his intervention study of 6 African-American youth in Maryland. Baltodano et al. (2005) also discussed issues of disproportionality in their assessment article as they analyzed achievement by age, race, and disability. In all other articles, disproportionality was not mentioned or discussed even when racial data were available.
An integrated view of culture: Cultures in the correctional facilities and facilities’ cultures. In the 14 achievement articles, we found only one that addressed the culture of the youth in a way that extended beyond race categories. Svensson et al. (2003) employed a research design that was mindful of differing cultural backgrounds of incarcerated youth. Their model included a network of factors, such as: immigrant status, poverty, home languages, literary models in the home, and so forth. The studies looking at achievement and recidivism (Archwamety & Katsiyannis, 1999; Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 1997) contained background data on variables such as race, gang membership, location of residence (urban or rural), and history of abuse; however, those factors did not provide the strongest predictor of recidivism rates. Rather, verbal IQ was the single best predictor of recidivism, with race being second in terms of predictability. Researchers did not examine how race and culture impacted the results of the study.

The remaining achievement articles did not address student culture in the design or the analysis. These articles were either silent on the issue of student culture or they used race as a single variable to describe a group of students. Perhaps the sentiment was captured by Beebe and Mueller (1993) when they stated in their discussion of categorical offenses and achievement levels that “This study acknowledges economic, cultural, sociological, environmental, personal, and interactional factors as being associated with contributing to the current status of the youthful offender, but these factors were not evaluated for this study” (p. 196).

The culture of the institution was addressed twice in the achievement articles. Katsiyannis and Archwamety (1997) cast the culture of the institution in a positive light. They explained that the especially low recidivism rate (10%) in their study was due to a treatment program called “Positive Peer Culture”. This program helps delinquent youth “to identify problems, accept responsibility, and utilize the positive power that peer influence can have” (p. 52). The other reference to the culture of the institution was in Kirk and Reid’s (2001) study. The authors reported that the study sample was not necessarily representative because of prison management imposed restrictions on who they could survey. These researchers did not address how the culture of the institution impacted the learning or achievement of youth at the facility.

The single article that specifically addressed culture was from Sweden (Svensson et al., 2003). Though not an intervention study, culture was used in the analysis of the data collected on achievement. In their analysis, Svensson et al. took into account the fact that 22 out of 70 inmates in their sample were immigrants. These authors promoted
the idea that proximal and distal factors were essential to successful reading acquisition. The proximal factors included phonological processing, word recognition, and cognitive processes. Whereas the distal factors in their model were more complex notions of culture. The distal factors included linguistic background including native language of the students and their immigrant status. Another factor in the model was the impact of cultural background on literate habits and the background knowledge the student brings to the learning situation. The home environment serves as another distal factor and included attachments and literate models. The final distal factor was instruction. Instructional factors included the number of different teachers and schools attended, the methods of instruction, and the history of school attendance. In the model, these distal factors impacted vocabulary, world knowledge, and motivational processes. Both proximal and distal factors impacted the hallmark of reading instruction, namely comprehension.

In addition to developing a model for reading outcomes that included distal factors, Svensson et al. (2003) also analyzed their data to include differences in achievement between native and immigrant children. Here, a combination of research methodologies improved understanding of how the distal factors impacted reading achievement. The researchers looked at native/immigrant pairs on achievement measures. They also conducted interviews and file reviews to extrapolate data on cultural conditions, schooling, and home environments. They found that Swedish delinquents outperformed immigrants on comprehending connected texts even though their word recognition and spelling skills were similar. The authors concluded that “obviously, some process over and above technical reading skill is required for connected texts. Prior knowledge and relevant interpretation schemas are probably good candidates as explanations of the observed difference” (Svensson et al., 2003, p.681).

Both native and immigrant students, regardless of phonology skills, had experienced neglect and many separations during early childhood, single-parent households, drug abuse in the home, limited access to adult literacy models, irregular schooling, and high absenteeism. All of these factors are outside of the child and must be considered cultural in nature.

Those in the study with lower phonological skills had subtle differences from those with stronger phonological skills. These differences included lower levels of parental education, immigrants who had lived in Sweden for a shorter period of time, special education because of poor achievement, poorer grades in school, and documented histories of early reading and writing difficulties.

The use of a complex model of reading acquisition acknowl-
edged that reading difficulties may have numerous causes and involve a complex interrelation of individual and contextual factors (Svensson et al., 2003). Using this model, the authors demonstrated that by focusing on decoding instead of comprehension, the prevalence of dyslexia is not greater among inmates than the population in general. When comprehension is used as the gauge for dyslexia or reading difficulties, the inmate population is overrepresented because of a combination of proximal and distal factors.

Of the four intervention studies, two of them had only African-American participants, one did not report ethnicity, and one had an equal number of African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian participants with 4 of each. The Brier (1994) study had the most participants with 192, but issues of race and culture were not addressed. The other 3 intervention studies had smaller numbers of participants with 45, 12, and 6. With small sample sizes, it is hard to generalize findings to larger populations of incarcerated youth and especially difficult to draw any conclusions about efficacy with minority populations.

The culture of the institution was cited by Drakeford (2002) as an obstacle to providing reading instruction in a youth correctional facility. The Youth Correctional Officers (YCOs) were generally not part of the educational staff and functioned as security policing potential rule violators. Because of their orientation towards punishment and control, Drakeford (2002) contends that they did not place a high value on the literacy needs of the youth. Lockdowns, meeting with lawyers, and cell searches made instruction in the correctional facility challenging and disjointed. In spite of these challenges, the youth in his study did want to learn to read better. Some students were actually so eager to participate in the reading program that they broke facility rules (out after curfew) to try to join the reading groups.

Discussion

First, it should be noted that given the 30-year time period from which the articles were retrieved, there was a shallow pool of articles addressing reading in juvenile corrections facilities. The most significant findings of this literature review were: 1) the lack of intervention studies with incarcerated youth, and 2) the absence of cultural considerations when teaching and evaluating incarcerated youth. We will discuss both of these findings and offer areas of consideration when planning reading interventions for incarcerated youth. These considerations will include the cultural background of the students, the cultural aspects of the institutional setting, and the interfacing of the two.

We anticipated that much of the literature would include race/ethnicity as a categorical variable only, and we also expected to find
few articles on reading instruction with incarcerated youth (Leone, Krezmięń, Mason, & Meisel, 2005). The review of the literature in fact confirmed that expectation. Additionally, we expected to find articles that addressed the culture of the correctional institution in the social sciences literature considering the pervasiveness of the discussion within that literature. However, this did not turn out to be the case. It is disconcerting that in reviewing more than 170 articles; only four were empirical intervention studies with incarcerated youth. This finding speaks clearly to the need for more research behind the fence. The small body of literature dealing with incarcerated youth is primarily comprised of studies that identify academic deficiencies rather than analyzing programming that may strengthen skills in this population.

Equally troubling was the lack of discourse on cultural issues in the published studies. Of the 18 studies included in this review, nine were silent on both cultural and racial issues. Of the nine remaining articles, five used race as a variable of analysis rather than considering a more complex notion of culture. Consequently, only four articles addressed either the cultural background of the students themselves or the culture of the correctional institution. However, none of the articles specifically addressed how the culture of the student and the culture of the institution interface.

The materials used in two of the four reading interventions did not leave room for cultural considerations because they utilized Corrective Reading, which is a scripted, direct instruction program. In this mastery learning program, students progress through lessons in a uniform way that does not take into account the unique cultural backgrounds of the students. Furthermore, when teaching this program, the instructor aims to elicit specific correct responses. These responses reflect the cultural norms of the authors and do not promote linking text to personal experiences. In our experience, the stories in these texts are not particularly interesting to youth in secure-care settings. It is questionable if the stories are an appropriate match for this population.

The materials used in the Coulter (2002) study were more promising in being sensitive to cultural issues. In this study, direct instruction methodology was employed using high-interest novels. Students were also able to choose their materials within a certain range that was appropriate to their reading levels. Unfortunately, the remaining intervention study did not specify materials or methodology so no inferences about the inclusion of culture could be made. In addition, the literature review revealed a heavy reliance on archival data for analysis. While archival data provides important information, this
type of analysis is devoid of cultural analysis because the researchers are not dealing directly with the subjects of the analysis. A further concern with using archival data is that the researchers cannot control for accuracy of the numbers/categories they are analyzing. Since the researchers did not collect the initial data themselves, they risk errors in test administration, scoring, and coding of categorical variables such as race. In terms of test scores, we do not know if the examiners were qualified or if the tests were scored accurately. Moreover, data and procedures across counties or districts are used differently and diagnostic labels might be operationalized differently, thus creating greater conceptual confusion. Unfortunately, reliance on archival data reduces the ability to account for and ensure the validity of the data and fidelity of procedures.

An interesting finding is that the educational attainment issues with incarcerated youth are consistent across various Western countries. In Scotland, Sweden and the UK, achievement scores were lower for inmates than for the general population. The study from Australia stated that most inmates had a functional reading level; however, the 5th-grade reading level cited would not be considered adequate for employment in the United States. Finally, in Canada only a few youth in their study had achieved grade-level status on instruments that measured intelligence and academic achievement. So, it is clear that in Western, industrialized countries achievement for incarcerated youth is substandard.

The Svensson et al. (2003) study addressed both culture in terms of proximal and distal factors. This study did not, however, address the culture of the juvenile correctional institution; instead it provided an explanation of how factors within the child and the environment may contribute to risk for delinquency. The study did call into question the notion that a majority of inmates are learning disabled. By using a definition of dyslexia that narrowly defines reading problems in terms of phonological processes, the disparity between incarcerated youth and their non-delinquent peers disappears.

Limitations

In order to promote future research it is essential to identify some of the limitations of the current review. First and foremost, we must acknowledge that we limited the review to research published in peer-reviewed journals. As such, we excluded dissertation studies as well as articles in journals that do not have a peer-review process. Additionally, although we conducted a rigorous search for articles, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the possibility that articles eluded us in the process. Another weakness of the current re-
view stemmed from the difficulty we encountered in comparing studies that used very different categories and potentially different definitions for the terms. Considering that the review included articles published since 1970 the terminology regarding race and disability categories has changed over the years.

Another problem in coding demographic data was the fact that some authors did not distinguish between short-term and long-term juvenile facilities. This is problematic in that the types of programming offered at short-term detention centers often differs from that of longer-term correctional facilities. Furthermore, it is assumed that youth sentenced to long-term facilities have more serious issues and may have been detrained in short-term facilities several times before being sentenced to a long-term facility. Five of the studies were from countries other than the United States so any application of the findings must be viewed with caution as the criteria for incarceration and conditions of the facilities may or may not reflect practices in the United States.

Directions for Future Research

In reviewing 18 articles dealing with adjudicated youth, only four documented experimental reading studies. Unfortunately, none of them considered the culture of the students in their analysis. The authors advocate for more research in this area that is mindful of culture in addressing the literacy needs of incarcerated youth. Little is documented on how these youth's interests and experiences shape their attitudes toward reading and how those attitudes might shape academic discourse within a correctional facility.

Additionally, a number of the studies cited difficulties in institutional communication as barriers to the effective implementation of academic reading interventions. As such, we urge researchers to fully explore the barriers between the educational and security components, identify ways to overcome these institutional barriers, and more importantly perhaps, find ways to incorporate the security personnel into education. By doing so, it is likely to create a more cohesive and consistent environment for the youth in corrections and to increase the effectiveness of the interventions implemented for them.

Innovative research. First, researchers should acknowledge that teaching and learning in a correctional facility is unique. It is not parallel to a public school. The institutional characteristics of prison life make it very different. "Explicit references to prison teaching cultures in the literature are meager, so that in most cases, readers must extrapolate the effects of prison culture on prison teaching cultures" (Wright, 2005). Wright also points out that, "Teachers bring to prison
professional identities and practices fashioned in a different cultural landscape." (p.20). He goes on to describe a sort of acculturation that occurs when teachers begin working in correctional facilities. "I argue that prison cultures infuse teaching cultures in prisons, not totally absorbing them, but transforming them sufficiently so as to create culture shock for the novice teacher. In other words, prison teaching cultures should be thought of as hybrid, syncretic cultures – a blend of home and host world behaviors, experiences and identities." (p. 23).

Considering the dearth of studies on educational practices in juvenile correctional facilities and the lack of cultural factors in the literature on incarcerated youth, we would like to promote consideration of cultural factors in future research, using the framework described by Wright (2005) on reading interventions with inmates. Also lacking in the literature reviewed was the inclusion of qualitative studies that consider what the students themselves have to say about literacy. No such studies were found in our search. Consequently, we would like to present works by researchers who studied culture and literacy practices outside of corrections as a possible place to start when considering instruction for incarcerated youth. Their studies were conducted with members from the two largest minority groups in juvenile correctional facilities: African Americans and Hispanics.

Morrell (2002) drew upon pop culture to work with urban youth in California to promote literacy practices. He used rap music, film and television as vehicles to incorporate youth culture into the classroom. Students read, analyzed and wrote their own rap musical lyrics. By doing so, they were able to critically evaluate their own cultural practices and those of the artists. In using film, Morrell brought in popular films that mirrored classic texts. "This analysis focuses on two classroom units that incorporated popular film with the traditional curriculum to make meaningful connections with canonical texts and to promote the development of academic and critical literacies. The first unit began with The Godfather trilogy (Coppola, 1972, 1974, 1993) and incorporated Homer's The Odyssey. Another unit joined Richard Wright's (1989) Native Son with the film A Time to Kill (Schumaker, 1996)." (pg.76). Finally, Morrell described how he used television as a medium to look critically at issues raised in popular culture. Students researched topics and wrote critical essays on such topics. Teachers in juvenile correctional facilities would have to make some adaptations to Morrell's ideas to work within institutional constraints as some media are not allowed in the facilities. For instance, books and music associated with gangster activities are often banned from juvenile correctional facilities. Consequently, teachers would need to work within the regulations of their facility.
Meecham (2001) advocated translating the ideas of jazz improvisation as a means to connect with students in culturally diverse classrooms. "A basic cultural concept underlying all jazz improvisation is that of the crossroads. Described as a definitive moment of challenge or crisis, a crossroad is reached when one is forced by circumstance to move beyond the familiar range of understanding and integrate new domains of information." (pg.183). Using this theoretical framework, the student's prior knowledge and experiences are called upon to make sense of literacy texts. The teacher "asks questions that provoke students to weave their own connections between the themes discussed and their own prior cultural knowledge." (pg. 184)

Lee (2000) explored the culture and its implications in her work with African-American youth. She used the cultural-historical perspective of slavery to assess how power is brought into language practices of these youth. She asserted that cognitive abilities are based on the rituals of problem-solving skills and that the historical oral language practices could be used to enhance classroom instruction. Researchers and educators in correctional facilities could use this model to create literacy activities that are meaningful to the youth they serve.

While Lee’s work dealt directly with student cultures, Moll’s work focused on teacher practices and culture. Moll (1997) used study groups comprised of teachers who were trying to make sense of their own practices. These teachers visited their students’ homes and discovered the social networks that existed among predominately Hispanic families. This format built a community of teachers who became informed about the lives of their students and how their classroom practices could be mindful of culture. Teachers in correctional facilities visiting the homes of their student is very impractical given that incarcerated youth come from a variety of geographical locations. However, this format could be used to permeate some of the institutional barriers that inhibit literacy instruction in correctional facilities. A greater understanding of priorities and perspectives between education staff and security staff (rather than families as in Moll’s work), could transform current practices.

Finally, Hill (1998) used a qualitative method to report on a literacy program designed specifically for incarcerated teen fathers. Due to the fact that the study did not provide outcome data for the program, it was not included in our literature review. However, the structure of the program holds hope for incorporating culture into the educational practices within juvenile correctional facilities. In a class of 25 male students within a correctional facility, 50% were fathers and 60% were bilingual students. The reading levels in the class ranged from primer to high-school level. The goal of the program was to both increase the
literacy skills of the inmates and provide them with tools for carrying their literacy skills home to their children upon release.

Literacy instruction was based on narrative stories around the themes of bullying and embarrassing moments. The teacher read books to the students that centered on these two themes. Both literature and poetry were used. Students were expected to make links between the characters and their own experiences as they wrote their own narratives around one of the themes. From these narratives, the teacher started working on expanded stories and improvisations. Peers were taught to ask specific questions to each other to develop clarity in their writing. As the teachers introduced new authors and characters the students could identify with because of their own experiences, the youth began and began asking for more books with similar themes and by the same authors. The use of personal narratives as an instructional strategy holds promise because it takes into account the cultural experiences and artifacts of the participants.

We resonate with Collier and Thomas (2001) who advocate for instructional practices in youth correctional facilities that help culturally and linguistically diverse learners, for these practices could be beneficial for all learners behind the fence. “For correctional educators, the best strategy is to adapt the materials that are available, do hands-on instruction when possible, making use of vocational training materials, and use students' life experiences to develop meaningful narratives for literacy acquisition.” (p. 72).

It would serve the research community well to implement some of these ideas and take data as to their effectiveness. The potential is so great and yet so little has been done.

References


Drakeford, W. (2002). The impact of an intensive program to increase the literacy skills of youth confined to juvenile corrections. *Journal of Correctional Education, 53,* 139-144.


### Appendix: Empirical Research on Reading for Youth in Corrections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Article Type</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Participant Characteristic and Setting</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Research Design and Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Inclusion of Culture in Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Baltodano, Harris, &amp; Rutherford (2005)</td>
<td>Age: 14-18 Sex: males Long-Term Arizona N=187</td>
<td>Relationship between achievement level and age, race, and disability</td>
<td>Combination of archival and PP data Variables: WJ-III achievement scores in reading and math DIBELS ORF grade 4, 5, 6 age, race, disability status</td>
<td>Race used as a category label for analysis Disproportionality discussed</td>
<td>Average reading level = 8th grade Average math level = 8th grade Lowest achievement = Native Americans Highest achievement = Caucasian Hispanics disproportionately represented (54% of sample) Special education students lower than non-special education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Beebe &amp; Mueller (1993)</td>
<td>Age: Not reported (grades 6-12) Sex: Male &amp; Female Detention Michigan N=486 male N=97 female</td>
<td>Explore relationship between achievement IQ, and category of offense</td>
<td>Archival data Variables: Category of offense, reading achievement, math achievement full-scale IQ reported SS because kids had different standardized assessments in files</td>
<td>Not Addressed</td>
<td>Lowest achievement associated with category 1 offenses (aggressive felonies) Low-average achievement for all students (Standard Scores of 85-90) Math lower than reading</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Jerse &amp; Fakouri (1978)</td>
<td>Age: &lt;18  Sex: Males and Females  Detention Indiana  N=108 delinquents  N=108 non-delinquents. Paired by sex, grade level, school attended</td>
<td>Predicted non-delinquents would have higher achievement scores</td>
<td>Archival data Variables: reading achievement, math achievement, IQ</td>
<td>Not Addressed</td>
<td>Non-delinquents higher on all measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Katsiyannis &amp; Archwamety (1997)</td>
<td>Age: 12-18  Sex: Males  Long-Term Midwest  N=147 recidivists  N=147 non-recidivists</td>
<td>Explore factors related to recidivism</td>
<td>Archival data 17 variables in three categories: 1. Institutional like length of stay, category of offense, etc. 2. Cognitive ability 3. Achievement in reading, writing, math</td>
<td>Collected data on race, gang membership, abuse and location of residence prior to incarceration, but didn't report results from this analysis as significant to prediction of recidivism. The culture of the institution was sited as a positive force in reducing recidivism to 10%.</td>
<td>Non-recidivists higher on all achievement measures, but not on IQ</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Katsiyannis &amp; Archwamety (1999)</td>
<td>Age: 12-18  Sex: Male  Long-Term Nebraska  N=284 with GEDs  N=273 w/o GED</td>
<td>Explore link between academic remediation and reduced recidivism</td>
<td>Archival Variables: risk assessment, WJ Achievement, GED exams, IQ, reason for commitment</td>
<td>Not addressed</td>
<td>Need for academic remediation because academic improvements associated with lower rates of recidivism</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Podboy &amp; Mallory (1978)</td>
<td>Age: 11-19 Sex: Males and Females Detention California N=183 males N=67 females</td>
<td>Determine profile of offender with learning disabilities</td>
<td>PP data Variables: interviews, Bender Visual Motor test, Babcock Story Recall, WISC Block Design &amp; Digit Span, PPVT, WRAT, Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test</td>
<td>Typical participant described as &quot;17-year old, white male.&quot; Culture not addressed</td>
<td>Non-LD performed better than LD who performed better than DD (defined as IQ below 80, LD by discrepancy) 13% DD 50% LD by their definition</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Ryan &amp; McCabe (1993)</td>
<td>Age: 16-25 Sex: Males and Females Facility Type not Specified South Carolina N=77 male non-achievers N=29 male achievers N=21 female non-achievers N=18 female non-achievers (Achievers=1 year growth in reading)</td>
<td>Test whether voluntary participation or mandatory participation impacts literacy achievement</td>
<td>Archival data Variables: reading achievement, gender, achiever status</td>
<td>Race = 70% black and 30% white Race used as a variable to control for in the results.</td>
<td>No significant difference in achievement scores based on voluntary vs. mandatory participation. Achievers were from both groups.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Snowling, Adams, Bowyer-Crane &amp; Tobin (2000)</td>
<td>Age: 15-17 Sex: Males Facility Type not Specified United Kingdom N=91 incarcerated N=38 non-incarcerated</td>
<td>Compare literacy levels offenders and non-offenders using 3 definitions of dyslexia</td>
<td>PP data Variables: WORD (Wechsler Reading Dimensions), 2 phonological skills tests (Graded Nonword Reading Test &amp; spoonerism task), British Picture Vocabulary Test, WISC-III Vocabulary and Block Design subtests</td>
<td>Social class status of the non-incarcerated students was reported, but class information on the incarcerated youth not reported</td>
<td>SS for offenders in all areas lower Reading=85 (102) Spelling=74 (100) Vocab=75 (105) Block Design= 89 (98) Prevalence of dyslexia differs by definition used: Dyslexia 1= reading vs. non-verbal IQ 56% offenders vs. 5% controls Dyslexia 2= reading vs. verbal IQ 43% offenders vs. 8% controls Dyslexia 3= phonological processing 25% offenders vs. 19% controls (Argue that Dyslexia 3 controls for school history and SES) Prevalence of dyslexia varies greatly depending on criteria/definition used</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Wilgosch &amp; Paitch (1982)</td>
<td>Age: average age of 14 Sex: Males and Females Detention Canada N=72 males N=27 females</td>
<td>Prevalence of LD in delinquent youth</td>
<td>PP data Variables: Raven Progressive Matrices, WISC Vocabulary, WRAT</td>
<td>Not Addressed</td>
<td>Only 4 males and 2 females were average or above on all three tests 60% behind one or more years</td>
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| 12 | Achievement | Kirk & Reid (2001) | Age: n/a  
Sex: Males  
Facility Type Not Specified  
Scotland  
N=50 | Prevalence of dyslexia among incarcerated youth | PP Survey data  
Variables: Quick Scan, computerized self-assessment for dyslexia with yes/no answers in 8 areas assoc. w/dyslexia | Study sample stipulated by prison management (culture of institution) | 50% of sample reported some indicators of dyslexia |
Sex: Males and females  
Facility Type Not Specified  
Sweden  
N=49 males  
N=21 females  
Incarcerated  
N=61 non incarcerated controls  
IQs below 80 excluded | "Obtain a firmer basis for characterizing the literacy situation among juvenile delinquents" | PP data  
Variables: Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, decoding, word chains, oral word, sentence reading, spelling, orthographic choice (frequent spelling patterns), pseudo-word reading, text reading, phonological choice, digit span, word generation | N=22 immigrants (both parents from another country, but child grew up in Sweden)  
In discussion, authors state that reading problems must take into account "a complex network of interrelated proximal and distal factors" (like opportunity to learn, poverty, different language in home) | When phonological processing used as dyslexia definition, prevalence for incarcerated youth and non-incarcerated youth similar. Poor reading because of limited vocabulary |
Sex: Males  
DT Australia  
N=68  
Detained but not necessarily convicted of crimes | Determine the proportion of offenders who had achieved functional literacy skills | Archival data  
Variables: Burt Word Reading Test, self-rating of reading ability | 13% Aboriginal  
37% non-English speaking background | 75% sample had achieved at or above functional literacy levels defined as reading at 10-11 year old range (grade 5) |
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Brier (1994)</td>
<td>Age: 16-21 Sex: 93% Male, 7% Female Detention New York N=192</td>
<td>Assess success of program on recidivism rates</td>
<td>PP data Variables: WRAT-R reading, spelling, arithmetic 2. Adolescent Behavior Checklist</td>
<td>Race data in 4 categories: AA, H, W, O</td>
<td>Those who participated in the program were less likely to recidivate</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Coulter (2004)</td>
<td>Age: average = 15.5 Sex: Males and Females Detention Colorado N=10 male N=2 female N=10 sped (5 ED, 4 LD, 1 MR)</td>
<td>Increase reading ability through a tutoring program</td>
<td>PP data GORT3 scores in passage reading and reading comprehension pre/post test scores</td>
<td>Race variables reported 4 white 4 AA 4 Latino Students did have input on interests with their assigned tutor</td>
<td>GORT3 post-test 10-20 sessions = minimal gain 21-31 sessions = 1 yr. average gain Culture not explicitly addressed</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Drakeford (2002)</td>
<td>Age: 17 (average) Sex: Males Long-Term Maryland N=6 Sped, AA? male</td>
<td>Explore impact of supplemental reading program on reading achievement and attitudes</td>
<td>PP data Single-subject multiple baseline design Variables: ORF measure using CR, Pre/post on RSRA</td>
<td>Challenges of institutional culture addressed in discussion including: YCO value of reading, lock downs, meetings with lawyers, cell searches, fires Youth violating rules to participate in study Disproportionality discussed</td>
<td>Gains in ORF, reading grade placement and attitudes</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Malmgren &amp; Leone (2000)</td>
<td>Age: 17 (average) Sex: Male Detention &amp; Long-Term Maryland N=45 (44% sped)</td>
<td>Impact of 6-week reading program on reading achievement Students grouped by performance on CR placement test</td>
<td>PP data Variables: GORT-3</td>
<td>All participants AA</td>
<td>Significant gains in 3 of 4 reading measures on GORT-3. Gains on comprehension not significant Pre/post scores still below the 1st percentile</td>
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