Self-Efficacy Matters: An Examination of its Impact on Education for Justice-Involved Adults

Tonya Van Tol

St. Catherine University

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/dsw

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Social Work Banded Dissertations by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.
Self-Efficacy Matters:
An Examination of its Impact on Education for Justice-Involved Adults

Tonya Van Tol

A Banded Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Social Work

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

May 2017
Abstract

This banded dissertation is comprised of three scholarly works. Each of these products examines the impact of self-efficacy on the educational experiences of students who are criminal justice involved. Social cognitive behavior theory serves as the conceptual framework for this banded dissertation.

The first manuscript of this banded dissertation is a conceptual analysis that focuses on the intersection between self-efficacy and social capital. Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory describes the connection between self-efficacy and collective efficacy meaning the group impacts the individual. This work explores the impact of social capital and self-efficacy on student populations that have similar characteristics to those with criminal histories including first generation college students and students with low socioeconomic statuses and applies that knowledge to students who are criminal justice involved.

The second manuscript of this banded dissertation describes qualitative research that evaluates the barriers students with criminal histories face and the significance of self-efficacy with respect to educational outcomes. Participants in the study identified both internal and external barriers they faced while meeting their educational goals.

The third product of this banded dissertation presents a summary of a peer-reviewed workshop presented on November 14, 2016, at the National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education in Providence, RI. The paper encapsulates the information presented about Project PROVEN, a reentry program, located at a Western Wisconsin technical college and the findings from the qualitative study focused on the impact of barriers and self-efficacy of students who are criminal justice-involved.
Social cognitive theory is highly researched and widely applied to many populations and organizational settings. This banded dissertation focuses on one aspect of Bandura’s theory, self-efficacy, and applies it to justice-involved students, a population that has been overlooked in research. The findings from this work include the importance of building self-efficacy, including increasing social capital and linkages within educational systems in order for students to increase the likelihood of successful educational outcomes. Understanding these students’ experiences is imperative for education and criminal justice professionals in order to better respond to the needs of these students and to increase retention and reduce recidivism.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude for the guidance and support of my dissertation advisor Dr. Robin Whitebird who provided clarity and wisdom along with a regular dose of reality that helped propelled me to the finish line. A huge thank you goes to Sarah, Anne and the rest of my DSW cohort who were there through the thick of it offering encouragement and laughter. A special thanks goes to Dr. Ann Lichliter who offered countless hours of motivation, professional knowledge, and guidance in 40-minute increments. Much love and appreciation goes to my husband, Josh, who provided love, support, and kept our household running smoothly while I pursued my educational goals. I also would like to acknowledge my kids, Arie and Kaia. In part, this undertaking was for you and your independent spirits have shone through.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i

Acknowledgments ......................................................................................................................... iii

List of Tables .................................................................................................................................. v

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................... 6

Conceptual Framework .................................................................................................................... 7

Summary of Scholarship Products .................................................................................................... 8

Discussion ......................................................................................................................................... 10

  Implications for Higher Education and the Criminal Justice System ........................................ 11
  Implications for Future Research ................................................................................................. 12

Comprehensive Reference List ......................................................................................................... 15

Product 1: Evaluating the Impact and Intersection of Self-Efficacy and

Social Capital on Justice-Involved Individuals Receiving Educational Services ...................... 22

Product 2: Evaluating the Impact of Internal Barriers and Self-Efficacy of

Justice-Involved Students Pursuing GED or Post-Secondary Educational Goals .................... 43

Product 3: Self-Efficacy Matters:

Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved ............... 68
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Demographic characteristics</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Efficacy Matters:

An Examination of its Impact on Education for Justice-Involved Adults

The Department of Justice states that more than 650,000 people are released from prisons each year (Wagner & Sakala, 2014; Meyer, 2011; Candeda, Busbee & Fanning, 2013). This does not take into account the revolving door that is the county jail system where many people are booked in and released over the course of a year for both new crimes and probation violations. Reentry of people coming out of prisons and jail has become a more pressing topic as jails and prisons are overcrowded and the cost of housing inmates is overwhelming local, state and federal budgets.

Underlining these issues is an overall philosophical argument that exists about whether or not people who have committed crimes should be punished or rehabilitated. If rehabilitation is to become the focus of prisoner reform then it is imperative to evaluate programs that are in place that assist people who are attempting to reenter society. The Second Chance Act established in 2008 became an established federal funding stream that aimed at implementing evidence-based programs specifically addressing the needs of prisoners reentering society. Among other programming, education and employment support for this population has been a focus of reentry grants. Studies have shown that increasing education and employment opportunities decreases recidivism (Nally, Lockwood, Ho & Knutson, 2012).

The population of focus for this banded dissertation is formerly incarcerated individuals who are seeking educational opportunities in the community. These students are typically first-generation college students, living in poverty, many who have alcohol and other drug addictions (AODA), and mental health issues. A great deal of research and studies are dedicated to understanding the impact of educational programs within prison settings. Fewer studies have specifically looked at educational programs for people who have been released into the
community. This banded dissertation will address the impact of self-efficacy on these students and how it impacts their educational accomplishments.

**Conceptual Framework**

Social cognitive theory (SCT) is the conceptual framework used for this banded dissertation. Bandura developed SCT in the late 1970s and the theory has seen wide application in organizational and educational contexts. The theory purports that individuals contribute to their own growth and development, but there are interlocking influences consisting of behavior, cognition, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1989a). Bandura’s theory states that in order for an individual’s learning and development to occur, they must exercise their own personal agency. Personal agency is the ability to influence themselves and their environment through their cognition and behavior (Bandura, 1989b). Human agency is applied through collective agency defined as interdependent efforts by a community or a group within an organization (Bandura, 2000).

A central concept of Bandura’s work is self-efficacy and is defined as one’s belief in their capability of making life changes, learning a new skill or idea i.e. goal realization. According to Bandura (1997), an individual’s self-efficacy drives perseverance and resilience during challenging times. There are four sources from which people derive personal efficacy. One source and the one Bandura (1977) states is the most important is performance experience. The basic premise of performance experience is that success builds self-efficacy and failures weaken it. Self-efficacy is also gained through vicarious experiences. If someone who is similarly situated observes a person model success then self-efficacy likely will increase. On the other hand, if a person similarly situated fails, this can decrease self-efficacy. A third source of self-efficacy is verbal persuasion where an individual’s self-efficacy is impacted by either encouragement or discouragement relating to particular tasks being performed. The final source
of self-efficacy is physiological feedback whereby individuals respond to bodily sensations that can be perceived positively, increasing self-efficacy, or negatively, decreasing self-efficacy.

In the educational setting, self-efficacy dictates choices that are made including the choice to come to school and enroll, the type of program student elects to enroll into, and dictates length of time they will spend pursuing their educational endeavors along with the amount of effort expended in the pursuit of their goals (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). “Students who believe they are capable of performing tasks use more cognitive and metacognitive strategies and persist longer at those tasks than those who do not” (Pajares & Schunk, 2001 p. 245). This is an important consideration in understanding how to increase persistence of students who may not have positive educational experiences. Bandura (1977) theorizes that people will more likely participate in activities in which they feel at least some level of skill and confidence, and conversely avoid those activities where there is a perceived lack of competence. According to this theory, students will pursue goals that they believe are obtainable and avoid those they feel are out of reach. Self-efficacy is not fixed and can shift over time. These concepts were utilized to explore self-efficacy of students who were formerly incarcerated and the impact it had on their success.

**Summary of Scholarship Products**

This banded dissertation is comprised of three distinct works of scholarship that are linked by both the social cognitive theoretical framework and population. Each product explores the topic of self-efficacy and how it is impacts students who are criminal justice involved. The first product, entitled “Evaluating the Impact and Intersection of Self-Efficacy and Social Capital on Justice-Involved Individuals Receiving Educational Services” is a conceptual work. The purpose of this work is to exam Bandura’s concept of human agency through collective efficacy. Through the investigation of published literature in the areas of higher education, self-efficacy
and prison education, this product evaluates the impact of vicarious experiences and social persuasion and how that impacts self-efficacy with this population in a higher education setting.

The second scholarly work is entitled “Evaluating the Impact of Internal Barriers and Self-Efficacy of Justice-Involved Students Pursuing GED or Post-Secondary Educational Goals.” This is a manuscript describing the outcomes of a qualitative research study of 15 adult subjects who were students attempting to obtain a GED or a post-secondary college degree. These subjects were students who described their internal and external barriers they encountered and the impact they had on educational experiences. Face to face interviews were conducted and information was gathered to better understand and gauge how barriers and self-efficacy relate to students’ educational success.

The third scholarly work in this banded dissertation is a summary of a peer-reviewed workshop presented on November 14, 2016 at the National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education in Providence, RI. This conference focuses policy and practices to increase access to education and employment opportunities for nontraditional, adult learners with an emphasis on community and technical education and workforce development including career pathways. The workshop entitled “Self-Efficacy Matters: Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved” provided context by incorporating information about Project Proven, a reentry program that addresses the educational and employment needs of students who are criminal justice involved. The purpose of the workshop was to give an overview of the findings and implications of the qualitative research on self-efficacy and barriers of students from the second scholarly product from this banded dissertation. The workshop provided participants with case studies and practical applications of the research that could be integrated immediately into practice.
Discussion

The focus of this dissertation is to better understand the barriers faced by students with criminal histories and the impact self-efficacy and social had in their pursuit of academic goals. According to Bandura (1997), positive self-efficacy plays an important role in increasing the likelihood that students who face adversities are more likely to overcome them. This is important in application to the education setting where there can be tremendous life barriers that can get in the way of obtaining long-term educational goals.

The conceptual research done for this dissertation looked at the interplay between collective efficacy and self-efficacy. Collective efficacy that comes from access to social capital plays an important role for students because when they see others they know or can relate to doing well that in turn increases their own self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). In order to decrease the internal and external barriers students experience and increase access to higher education, it is critical to determine ways to increase social capital for these students. Beyond supportive staff and instructors, introducing students to peer supports in the program and throughout the institution can increase self-efficacy though Bandura’s (1977) concept of vicarious modeling. Efficacy increases when justice involved students see other students like themselves succeeding. When people are leaving jail and have few support systems, people within institutions including the criminal justice system and colleges have to help build these support systems in order to increase the likelihood of success.

Another component of self-efficacy that was explored through qualitative research was barriers to success for students. Students who were formerly incarcerated reported having a number of external barriers, but reported internal barriers having a greater impact. Self-doubt, fear of failure and the belief they do not deserve better than what they have all were identified as significant challenges for students. Self-efficacy for students who faced these barriers increased
as they attained educational goals over time. In addition, the subjects reported a change of motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic where they became less focused on external factors such as money and cars and more on personal satisfaction and taking care of family.

The interconnection of social capital and self-efficacy play an important role on student success and how students interpret barriers they face. This banded dissertation explores the impact these factors have on students and discusses how education and criminal justice professionals can incorporate these important ideas in order to increase the likelihood of success for these individuals.

The findings from the conceptual and qualitative research confirm previously published work. There is a lack of research in the areas of students with criminal histories and their experiences in higher education. The research available on the subjects of self-efficacy and social capital are applicable since the characteristics of the subjects overlap. Research does show that students who have criminal histories report a barrier to learning was a lack of support within the community and college (Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey & Byers, 2007). In addition, research has shown that students who have supportive instructors and mentors on campus who provide positive feedback have lower attrition rates (Engle & Tinto, 1998). The published research (Bandura, 1997, 2000; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001) and findings from this study found that these positive supports increase self-efficacy for these students.

**Implications for Higher Education and the Criminal Justice System**

The findings from this research have a number of implications for both higher education and the criminal justice system. With the high number of people being released from jails and prisons every year, it is essential that systems have a better understanding of people’s experiences in order to reduce recidivism. Studies have shown that access to employment that pays a living wage is a critical component of reducing recidivism (National Employment Law
Jobs that pay higher wages are often skilled and required education beyond a high school credential. Therefore, engaging people who have been formerly incarcerated in educational opportunities can not only lift them out of poverty, but will also help to reduce recidivism. Professionals within community corrections including probation agents, judges, and social workers who work with this population would benefit from understanding the impact of this research and applying it to their clients as they work to attain their goals. Beyond educational goals, self-efficacy plays an important role in the success of other endeavors of the population including obtaining and maintaining employment, maintaining sobriety, and reducing criminal activities (Bandura, 1977).

Students who have criminal histories and are considered at-risk are more likely to have left high school without a credential and have reported previous negative school experiences (Kirk and Sampson, 2013). In addition, they may have fewer skills in reading, writing and math that make them less college prepared than their peers who graduated from high school (Davis, Steele, Bozick, Williams, Turner, Miles, & Steinberg, 2014). These factors may contribute to lower educational self-efficacy. Students who are first generation and have a criminal history also do not have the built in support systems to help guide them through the college admissions process nor have the understanding of the day-to-day experiences stressors that college students face. Institutions of higher education must begin to understand the perspective of this underserved population and address their needs in order to help increase access to education and the retention of these students once they are enrolled. Reentry professionals and educators can increase self-efficacy by focusing on strengths and promoting educational goals that build on these strengths.

**Implications for Future Research**

There is very little published research about the experiences of people who have returned to the community from incarceration and engaged in educational endeavors. The purpose of this
dissertation was to apply Social Cognitive Theory and develop a greater understanding of the impact self-efficacy has on students who were formerly incarcerated and are striving to attain educational goals. This population has overlapping characteristics of at-risk student populations that has a large body of research published including first generation college students, students from low socioeconomic statuses, and students of color. However, there are specific issues and needs that directly impact people with criminal histories that need to be better understood and addressed.

In addition, a great deal of research has focused on the impact of education for people who are in prison. Based on this research, it is understood that access to education improves the likelihood that people will not return to prison because they in turn have increased opportunities to obtained skilled employment upon release. Therefore, it is critical to address the gap in research regarding people in the community with criminal histories who are accessing education in order to have a better understanding of their experiences and needs. Other areas to be expanded upon in research include understanding the motivation of people seeking education who were formerly incarcerated, gaining knowledge on the impact incarceration has on self-efficacy and how that impacts educational self-efficacy are other areas that are under researched. In addition, research should evaluate programs that offer services to students who are justice involved and what specific services are in place nationally to help build self-efficacy for this population of students.

**Conclusion**

Students who are justice-involved have significant barriers to employment and education. These barriers can be overwhelming for students, but they can be overcome with the help of increased self-efficacy and social supports. Positive self-efficacy is intrinsic in nature and can help students feel that these barriers are not roadblocks, but instead are challenges to overcome.
Building social capital can strengthen social supports for students. These concepts are interconnected and social capital can positively influence and increase self-efficacy. Students are in need of both to increase the likelihood of success and professionals in both higher education and criminal justice play important roles in helping students to develop social capital and increase self-efficacy. Students who meet their goals have the potential of positively increase retention and graduation rates, and makes our communities stronger.
Comprehensive Reference List


Evaluating the Impact and Intersection of Self-Efficacy and Social Capital on Justice-Involved Individuals Receiving Educational Services

Tonya Van Tol

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

Author Note

Tonya Van Tol, Doctoral Candidate, School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tonya Van Tol, Western Technical College, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601. Email: vantolt@westerntc.edu
Abstract

This conceptual analysis evaluates the intersection between social capital and self-efficacy, a cornerstone of Bandura’s Social Cognitive theory. The focus is the impact of these interconnected concepts on students who are justice-involved. There has been very little research on this population, so this work explores the impact of social capital and self-efficacy on students with similar characteristics to those with criminal histories including first generation college students and students with low socioeconomic statuses. Then that knowledge is applied to students who are criminal justice involved.

*Key words:* social cognitive theory, social capital, self-efficacy, justice-involved populations, re-entry education
Evaluating the Impact and Intersection of Self-Efficacy and Social Capital on Justice-Involved Individuals Receiving Educational Services

Wagner and Rabuy (2015) report that over 11 million people are booked in and released over the course of a year from county jails nationwide for both new crimes and probation violations. The Department of Justice (Carson, 2015) reports that 650,000 people are released from prison each year and these statistics demonstrate the need for systems to better address the needs of people returning to the community post-incarceration.

There is limited information on success of students who are justice involved receiving education in the community. There is a lot of research available on the impact of education for those who are in prison and the statistics are important to consider. Forty percent of state prisoners in the United States do not have a high school credential (Harlow, 2003). People who are released without a high school credential are at a disadvantage without a basic education and those who do have a high school diploma or equivalent may lack the skills necessary to obtain stable employment. Prisoners and parolees who participate in education programs, recidivate approximately 20% less than those who were not enrolled in education programs (Ross, 2009).

A critical component of successful reentry is providing people with the ability to become financially stable through access to education. Obtaining postsecondary education gives people returning to the community from prison marketable skills, creates a stronger workforce, and can be a major factor in lifting people out of poverty (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). Earning a postsecondary degree can lead to a salary high enough to meet basic needs including adequate housing, food, childcare, transportation and healthcare. In addition, studies have shown that increasing access to education and employment reduces recidivism (Nally, Lockwood, Ho & Knutson, 2012).
For those who have been justice-involved an important aspect of successful employment and education is high self-efficacy for students. Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one’s own capability to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1997). Concepts of positive or negative self-efficacy stems from a person’s past experiences (either their own or observed), achievements, and feedback provided in a learning setting such as that given by instructors or employers (de Fátima, 2014).

The people returning to the community face a bleak reality since many of them lack adequate job skills and have barriers to employment due to the stigma they face because of their criminal history. Another significant barrier is a lack of positive support systems in place for this population. They often return to the same neighborhoods and reconnect with friends or associates who are engaged in the activities that lead to incarceration. Their family may not support positive changes that are necessary in order to avoid returning to jail or prison. If they had positive support systems, they may have severed ties due to criminal activity and drug use that negatively impacted those around them and may need time to rebuild those lost connections. Therefore, it is critical for practitioners and policy makers focused on reentry efforts to understand the impact of social capital on this population.

This paper has two purposes. One is to expand on the understanding of nontraditional adult learners who are justice-involved. The second purpose is to examine the intersection of social capital and self-efficacy. There has been very little research done that addresses either of these issues (Brouwer, Jansen, Flache & Hofman, 2016). There is a gap in the research addressing justice-involved students, so this paper draws on data from empirical literatures of similarly situated populations that have a plethora of research available including first generation college students (FGS) and people from low socioeconomic statuses (SES) in order to broaden the
knowledge of students who have previously been incarcerated and the impact of social capital and self-efficacy on their success.

**Literature Review**

The statistics on Americans with criminal records are startling. By the age of 23, nearly 1/3 of American adults will be arrested (Brame, Turner, Paternoster, & Bushway, 2012). The vast majority of these arrests is for minor violations and are non-violent offenses. The Department of Justice (2010) reported that only 4% of the 14 million arrests in 2009 were considered serious violent offenses. Of those arrested, 75% are male (Solomon, 2012). Black men are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated. African Americans comprise of less than 14% of the total US population, but make up 28% of all arrests and 50% of black men will have been arrested by the age of 23. In addition, 40% of the people incarcerated are black (Sabol, Minton, & Harrison, 2012).

Class inequalities are clear when analyzing who is incarcerated. People in prison report lower educational with state prisoners having on average a 10th grade education (Western & Petitt, 2012). For people without a high school diploma or a GED the outlook is bleak in the labor market. To further compound the issue nearly 2/3 of businesses conduct some form of criminal background check and 87% of people of businesses ask within the application process if people have a criminal history and conduct background checks (Lageson, Vuolo & Uggen, 2015). These issues alienate people with criminal histories exacerbate the issue of them obtaining economic security further perpetuating the cycle of incarceration. By obtaining education and training and building social capital, people have a better chances of breaking the cycle and reducing the likelihood of returning to jail or prison.

This literature review will discuss the education for people who are returning to the community from jails and prisons. Due to the lack of published research on this population,
information and examples will be drawn from studies that analyzed self-efficacy and social capital of similarly situated students such as first generation college students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students who have criminal histories and are working to achieve educational goals post-incarceration have a unique set of characteristics and barriers to success, but we can learn a great deal from other research available and begin to apply it to students who are justice involved.

Social Capital

Social capital theory was developed to demonstrate the impact social ties have on our lives (Putnam, 2000). It is a way to quantify resources and value that is derived from interpersonal relationships that can be capitalized to further one’s interests (Sandefur & Laumann, 1998). Social capital in its most basic form is the value of actual or potential resources, goodwill available from others, and the way in which people interact with one another (Bourdieu, 1986; Adler & Kwan, 2002 and Dekker & Uslander, 2003). It is considered appropriable or has the ability to be utilized for multiple purposes at different times. It can be used to obtain employment or helping a family member with car problems. Putnam (2000) states that social capital can be gauged by evaluating an individual’s network size, connections that can be effectively mobilized, and the amount of capital possessed in their own right. Social capital can also be non-advantageous in certain situations. For example, Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) found that people with common adversities might be tied through these experiences. If someone is attempting to forge a new path or move beyond these adversities there may be backlash from the group. This can be seen with people who are attempting to leave gangs, leave the drug scene, or distance themselves from families or friends who are still partaking in criminal types of activities or drug use. Different theorists emphasize various aspects of the collective and individual nature of social capital. It benefits both individuals and the greater community around them. For this
paper, the focus will be on individual gains and value obtained through access to social capital and the benefits of increased social capital to individuals who are formerly incarcerated.

**Bonding and Bridging Social Capital**

Bonding and bridging social capital are concepts that need to be considered for at-risk students, specifically students who are first generation college students (FGS), low socioeconomic status (SES), and have criminal histories. Putnam (2000) refers to bonding social capital as mutual aid occurring within social circles and personal acquaintances. This can be physical and emotional support that creates mutual trust and behavior norms that reinforces close in-group ties. Bonding social capital is crucial for families and communities not in the dominant culture that have found very little outside support. For individuals attempting to move into new social circles bonding social capital can be a tie that binds them to their criminal past. Bridging social capital is the linkage of individuals of one culture or class to diverse opportunities, connections and resources (Putnam, 2000). It is bridging social capital that opens doors to broaden one’s identity and offers exposure to new ideas for growth that may not be found within the confines of one’s known environment and social connections. For students with criminal histories in college, this social bridging is essential particularly if students are first generation college students and have no other supports that are familiar with the rules and norms that exist within higher education.

The utilization of social capital can be understood through the employment seeking process. The old adage often said it is not what you know, but whom you know is demonstrated through networking and the utilization of social capital to obtain employment. Bonding capital is important for surviving, but bridging social capital is essential for thriving (de Souza Briggs, 1998). It is expected that people who are returning to the community from prison and jail will tap into their known bonding social networks. This may lead them to a job and a positive direction
for a time, but ultimately these networks can bring them back full-circle to the same behaviors that led to incarceration and lasting change does not occur. If bridging social capital is available and utilized, not only will the person potentially find a job, but they will also form connections with people outside of their previous social circle who do not engage in the same behaviors and activities. Self-efficacy is an important aspect of this bridging process because ultimately people need to view themselves as being capable of bridging into this new social setting and successfully navigating the new cultural norms. In addition, they need to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the new groups.

Putnam (2000) states that those with low social capital have barriers to prospering economically. These barriers are due to a lack of cultural knowledge, information and resources available that allows access to broader economic opportunities. For those who have criminal histories or large gaps in employment due to incarceration, they have even more barriers to economic security due to reduced access to employment opportunities.

Social Capital and the College Experience

Social capital is a component that is important for college students to have or to acquire in order to increase their likelihood of success. First generation college students come onto college campuses without having parents who had previously graduated. They have less educational social capital than their peers who have parents who completed college. When parents have completed college they have the ability to pass institutional knowledge including general information about college application processes, financial aid, and the academic rigor of college to their children (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Families of people who have incarceration histories have low levels of education (Elonheimo et al., 2007) Parents are less influential for older non-traditional students, but these knowledge gaps start from a young age and can have a lasting impact. Parents who have never gone to college simply do not understand the importance
of homework, may not have the skills to help their children, do not know how to seek out extra supports and are not aware of the long-term implications this has for their children who will eventually pursue higher educational opportunities (Lareau 1989). In one study, Deil-Amen (2011) found that 41% of the students who participated in the research study found school supports to be stronger than family support. The study found that families verbally supported students, but lacked the shared vision and had difficulty understanding the students’ experiences. Without family support, traditional students are likely to fail to ever enter college (Brouwer, Jansen, Flache & Hofman, 2016). Additional research is needed on nontraditional adult learners in higher education. Further research needed to understand non-traditional college age students and the impact they place on supports systems.

Bridging social capital is important for FGS and SES students because as Putnam (2000) states, social connection helps to maintain group norms and rules of conduct. Understanding these rules is important when attempting to exist within another group as people who are FGS and from poverty are doing when attempting college. People often build their friendships or attachment to a peer group based on characteristics similarities (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). This creates an incredible disadvantage for people leaving jails and prisons who are looking for a fresh start. The people they most relate to are also people with addictions, distorted thinking patterns and are involved in criminal activity. These students may feel judged by peers for his/her past and feel they do not have a place in society where they will be accepted. An individuals’ sense of belonging and group membership that is subjective in nature, is central to whether or not they will persist from term to term and eventually meet their goal of degree obtainment. Durkheim’s (1951) theory states that if students do stay, it is because they have a perception that they belong both in an intellectual and social sense and have formed a connection to both the institution and people within the institution. Tinto (1994) predicts that students who
do not integrate into the college environment will feel a sense of isolation and leave prior to matriculating.

In one study it was found that students who had more social capital experienced more success in their studies during their first term of college (Brouwer, Jansen, Flache & Hofman, 2016). Another issue is FGS are less engaged academically and socially because of outside obligations and are less likely to reach out to social supports (Engle and Tinto, 2008). A number of studies have found that students who were willing to seek out help from peers formed more friendship which allowed for ongoing support and in turn increased student success (Bouwer, et al., 2016 and Lomi, Snijders, Steglich & Torló , 2011). As most students with a criminal records are FGS, they too would highly benefit from peer support, but may need more guidance and support from staff to obtain peer support.

The literature shows that personal relationships matter and have a pivotal influence on students working toward obtaining their educational goals. Research is needed to demonstrate the direct impact of personal relationships for students who are justice involved. This paper will now describe self-efficacy, the tie to social capital and the role they play in student success.

**Self-Efficacy and the College Experience**

Self-efficacy is the cornerstone of Bandura’s (1997) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to achieve a goal. Concepts of positive or negative self-efficacy stem from a person’s past experiences (either their own or observed), achievements, and feedback provided in a learning setting such as that given by instructors or employers (de Fátima, 2014). Students with high levels of self-efficacy are more willing to take on more difficult tasks and set more challenging goals (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). Conversely they will avoid activities or setting goals they feel are out of reach. Studies have shown that self-efficacy can impact motivation and student success. This self-perception influences a students’
decision to attend school, the amount of effort put forth, and the persistence when obstacles and barriers are presented (Chemers, Hu & García, 2001). Self-efficacy plays a critical role in student resilience and the ability to cope when faced with these challenges (Bandura, 2000).

Two of the ways Bandura (1989) believes self-efficacy is strengthened is through vicarious experiences and social persuasion. Vicarious experiences are the observed experiences of similarly situated individuals. In other words, self-efficacy is increased when students observe relatable people modeling behaviors that lead to success. It can be inspiring and create a sense that they too have the ability to achieve similar educational success. The other concept impacting self-efficacy is social persuasion. Social persuasion is verbal encouragement from others. In the educational setting, this positive feedback can come from instructors, staff or other students. It is useful in sustaining students through difficult tasks that if overcome lead to success.

Self-efficacy impacts education in a number of ways. One way is that many students are not academically prepared. In one study, it was found only 14% of FGS had taken algebra in the 8th grade compared to over 33% of students with college-educated parents (Horn & Nunez, 2000). The lack of exposure to higher levels of math English may cause students to feel they are incapable of completing related college courses.

**Discussion**

Social Cognitive Theory states that a person's behavior is partially shaped and influenced by social systems and the person's cognition (e.g., expectations, beliefs) (Bandura, 1992). Though Bandura (2000) does not name it social capital, the idea of collective efficacy interplays with self-efficacy throughout SCT and argues individuals’ behaviors results from influences of their social network. This social network offers invaluable bonding social capital that includes a sense of belonging, assistance when day-to-day problems arise and ongoing social supports. This type of social capital is beneficial for survival, but it is bridging social capital that is essential for
students who are justice-involved who are trying to move beyond their current circumstances. By increasing bridging social capital, instructors, advisors, and other supportive personnel can positively influence and increase their self-efficacy (Putnam, 2000). Copenhaver, Edwards-Willey, and Byers (2007) research on parolees taking college classes at a university report a barrier to learning was a lack of support within the community and college. People who are justice-involved may start building their bridging capital by seeking out other people who were also formerly incarcerated and have found success. This demonstrates Bandura’s idea of vicarious experiences (1992). Meeting and interacting with others who were once where they are gives people hope that there is a chance they too will be successful.

A number of institutions of higher education have worked to increase students’ self-efficacy and social capital by implementing peer support and mentoring programs. These programs have been found to improve student involvement on campus, increase motivation and self-efficacy (Padgett & Reid, 2003). These programs have been found to improve student involvement on campus, increase motivation and self-efficacy (Mangold et al., 2003). A cohort model has shown to be effective in providing students with meaningful opportunities to build long-term relationships that increase social capital and self-efficacy (Deil-Amen, 2011).

An important consideration particularly for institutions of higher education is that adult students remain in their communities of origin (Deil-Ame, 2011). This means that students have a foot immersed in two worlds. If family and friends are verbally supportive, but lack an understanding of the educational goals, students may start to feel some disconnection to their network and may have not have full immersed them in the new cultural norms that exist within colleges and universities. Instructors and staff can play a critical role in negating some of these possible negative feelings by understanding that this exists within their students’ educational experiences. They can both help build students’ social capital and increase self-efficacy in a
number of ways. Not only can instructors offer feedback that increases students’ mastery of subjects (Usher and Pajares, 2008), but also provide positive feedback that is essential to building positive self-efficacy and build peer connections for students.

Instructors can build social capital by mentoring their students, introducing them to professionals who can help advance the students’ career and assisting students in connecting to resources across campus and in the community that can help them be successfully. This exchange of information for students with barriers is essential because these students may not ask for assistance or may not know exactly what would be helpful to help them. Having access to more information can increase students’ feelings of belongings and increase efficacy by supporting shared goals (Deil-Amen, 2001). Bridging social capital can increase ties to this new social group, building lasting social connections that can be valuable for students as they attempt to make difficult changes and shape a new life for themselves.

Granovetter (1995) uses the terms coupling and decoupling, social mechanisms that perfectly describe the process involved for students with criminal histories as they obtain their education. This idea similar to bonding and bridging social capital allows for students to draw the positive support from their current social networks while they build skills and abilities in order to participate in broader networks that will eventually lead to stable, living wage employment. Social capital improves students’ psychological and physical health (Putnam, 2000) and like positive self-efficacy having strong social capital helps people better cope with trauma and other barriers that stand in the way of success. Ultimately, the feelings of attachment and belonging that come from built relationships with students, faculty, advisors, etc., lead to acquisition of knowledge that leads to effective career choices. This enhances self-efficacy because students find they are enrolled in programs that are a good fit and they will have a higher likelihood of long-term success. They need to build social capital and acquire the information
that comes from the bridging social capital to get to the point where they have high self-efficacy
and see themselves as students who belong. Deil-Amen (2011) refers to this as socio-academic
integration that increases feelings of competence and a sense of belonging to the college and
allows the student to have a more solid sense of their identity as a student.

Hope is an important component for people who want to seek change. Pelissier & Jones
(2006) purport that hope is linked to positive self-efficacy. Seeking education can provide people
with a sense of pride and optimism. Education is a stepping-stone along a path that can lead to
long-term careers and eventually create greater financial stability. In our culture, occupation
holds great meaning. It is an identifier, categorizing people in so many different ways. People
who do not work can feel a loss of this identity. Employment gives people a positive sense of
accomplishment and a feeling of belonging. Education can help guide people in a life-changing
direction of career possibilities they never had previously known or believed were available to
them. These opportunities are more likely to be feasible to people with higher self-efficacy or to
people who have had previous positive work or educational experiences (de Fátima, 2014).

Self-efficacy and social capital are two important aspects of many issues people may
grapple with as students. Whether or not they see themselves as successful students is one
component, albeit important, of a larger picture. Education can be a very frustrating and daunting
experience for people who are not academically prepared, do not have social supports in place,
do not understand the processes of college enrollment, and/or do not have basic life needs met
such as access to food, stable housing, transportation, and childcare (Engle & Tinto, 2008).
People also need to have a sense of belonging and feel that they are a part of the institution, not
an outsider trying to fit into the place they are learning (Chemers, et al., 2001).

Implications

It is imperative that we have an understanding of students who are justice-involved and their
experiences with education post-release in order to impact recidivism. In one study, it was found that approximately 65% of female parolees committed new crimes within a year of release (Schram et al., 2006). Most of these women had unmet needs including access to education, employment, and stable housing. Education within prisons is well-studied and the National Institute of Justice reported to Congress in 2000 that prison education has the most impact on reducing recidivism compared to all other prison programming (Martinez & Eisenberg, 2000). In addition, other studies have found similar outcomes. An analysis was completed of hundreds of parolees who had participated in college programming while incarcerated and it was found that there was a 21-23% reduction in recidivism for those who participated compared to inmates who did not (Fine, 2001 and Chappell, 2004). This is significant because it demonstrates how critical access education is for people who returning to our communities in order for lasting, positive changes to occur. The positive societal impact can be quite large if institutions are able to integrate best practices to support these students.

Implications for higher education will be increased retention and graduation rates. Engle and Tinto (1998) reported that low-income FGS are 4 times more likely to leave college without completing their degree and within 6 years only 43% had graduated. Focusing retention issues to support students with multiple barriers including criminal histories is imperative to increasing graduation rates. In addition, society will see reductions in recidivism and cost of housing inmates will decrease. This increases public safety and saves taxpayer dollars.

If we truly want to give people an opportunity to change their lives and to reduce recidivism then there must be opportunities for people to not only find a job, but also find a career path increasing the likelihood they work continuously without gaps in employment and earn a wage that creates stability within their lives. This is especially true since there are high rates of unemployment for people who recidivate (Piehl, 2009). This topic helps to inform social
workers in the criminal justice field, probation agents, academic advisors, instructors and other student affairs professionals working with justice-involved students. This population has many challenges, but they also have many strengths and to have a solid understanding of those strengths is important in helping people to increase self-efficacy in order for people to have a better chance of being successful as they make difficult life changes.

Further Research

It would be important to determine how students acquire self-efficacy and social capital. Bandura (2000) purports that it increases with success and diminishes with failure. So an important question to ask is how to help students grow their self-efficacy. Also just as important is to figure out and understand how to reduce the impact of failure when it occurs, so self-efficacy does not decrease significantly with a single occurrence of failure. This paper looked at the overall impact of self-efficacy, but did not determine whether self-efficacy for people is already in existence or if it is developed over time. Further research on the impact of student supports and academic readiness should be explored. In addition, research must be conducted to understand the interconnectedness of social capital and social efficacy on justice-involved students. There are no empirical studies that exist that specifically address this linkage with this population.

Conclusion

Hope and optimism are traits that affiliated with positive self-efficacy. Possessing these traits is essential as building new connections while maintaining existing relationships can be extremely challenging for students. This paper explored the impact of self-efficacy and social capital on justice-involved students. Based on previous findings it was determined that self-efficacy played a significant role in the success of first generation college students and students of low socioeconomic status. Applying this research to justice-involved students, it can be
inferred that positive self-efficacy and strong social capital would also impact their ability to successfully complete their educational goals. Therefore these concepts would be useful indicators to measure the effect of programs or interventions for justice-involved students and determine the likelihood of student success for these individuals. The stakes are high for these individuals, their families and our communities. By creating environments that increase self-efficacy and social capital for people with criminal histories, there will be increased access to jobs that offer a living wage, increase family stability, increase public safety and decrease recidivism by eliminating the revolving door of the criminal justice system.
References


Evaluating the Impact of Internal Barriers and Self-Efficacy of Justice-Involved Students

Pursuing GED or Post-Secondary Educational Goals

Tonya Van Tol

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas

School of Social Work

Author Note

Tonya Van Tol, Doctoral Candidate, School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tonya Van Tol, Western Technical College, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601. Email: vantolt@westerntc.edu
Abstract

There is very little written about the experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals who are pursuing educationally focused goals. Education and employment are two major factors in reducing recidivism. 650,000 people are released from prison every year. In an attempt to begin to understand these students’ experiences this qualitative study was conducted to look specifically at barriers students experience and the significance of self-efficacy and its impact on success. The 15 participants in face-to-face interviews identified both external and internal barriers they face as they attempt to obtain their General Education Development (GED) or college degree. Positive self-efficacy was identified as a factor for students who have experienced educational achievement. For those students with high self-efficacy, barriers were seen as difficulties to overcome and not insurmountable problems.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, reentry education, adult education, justice-involved students, recidivism, internal barriers to academic success, external barriers to academic success
Evaluating the Impact of Internal Barriers and Self-Efficacy of Justice-Involved Students

Pursuing GED or Post-Secondary Educational Goals

Personal barriers for me are age, drug history, criminal history, children at a young age… those things. But they should be looked at as stepping-stones not barriers because I’ve passed them…I deal with them, I understand them… I try to move forward from them. They’re not walls anymore, they’re more like stepping-stones.

This quote from a study participant illustrates the significant barriers standing in the way of individuals who have been incarcerated and shows the mindset of individuals can shift over time. We need to understand individuals who have a criminal history and are attempting to improve their lives through educational pursuits.

The emphasis on reentry of formerly incarcerated adults has become a national priority. The Department of Justice (Carson, 2015) reports 650,000 people are released from prison every year in the United States and this number does not reflect the revolving door of county jails. This population returns to their communities often with a lack of job skills and fewer employment opportunities due to stigma from being incarcerated. Approximately 75% of those who are released from prison are rearrested within five years (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014). Access to educational opportunities while incarcerated or upon return to the community is a crucial component of reducing recidivism and increasing the likelihood people will become self-sufficient.

Barriers among this population include alcohol and other drug addictions (AODA), mental health issues, generational poverty, and many have had exposure to trauma. Despite these barriers, students who have criminal histories pursue education in hopes of a better future. Having an understanding of how these students successfully meet their goals and what barriers to success they face is imperative.
This qualitative study will use a phenomenological model to explore the impact of self-efficacy (the belief in one’s capacity to achieve a particular goal) and external and internal barriers of criminal justice-involved individuals who are participating in a college reentry program and are engaged in pursuing educational goals at a small Midwestern technical college.

**Literature Review**

Reentry of people coming out of prisons and jail has become a more pressing topic as jails and prisons are overcrowded and the cost of housing inmates is overwhelming local, state and federal budgets. For example, in the state of Wisconsin as of 2013 the budget for the Department of Corrections now exceeds the budget for the University of Wisconsin System (Cornelius, 2015). Underlining these issues, an overall philosophical argument exists about whether or not people who have committed crimes should be punished or rehabilitated (Lipsey & Cullen, 2007). If rehabilitation is to become the focus of prisoner reform, it is imperative that effective programs are in place to address issues facing people who are attempting to reenter society. Studies have shown increasing education and employment opportunities for this population decreases recidivism (Nally, Lockwood, Ho & Knutson, 2012). This has led to significant increase in reentry funding from the federal government to increase education and employment support. In order for these programs to be successful, it is essential to understand these students’ experiences including barriers to success and the impact self-efficacy has upon these individuals.

**Justice-Involved Students**

Students who are attempting to attend college with criminal histories have a unique set of characteristics and barriers to success. People who are incarcerated are less likely to have successfully obtained a high school education (Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders & Miles, 2014). For juveniles who are already struggling in school, arrests can create further educational
estrangement and distance through perceived stigma or institutional reaction to the students’
criminal involvement, indirectly impacting students leaving school without a diploma (Kirk &
Sampson, 2013). It was found that 36 percent of people in state prisons had less than a high
school education compared to 19 percent of the general population (Davis, et. al, 2014). This
means that many college students who are justice-involved obtained a general education
development (GED) certificate. If they meet the minimum entrance requirements for an open-
enrollment college, they still may not have a full understanding of what it means to be a college
student and the amount of academic rigor entailed. Kirk and Sampson (2013), point out that high
school staff may impact this further by excluding “criminally inclined students ” from college
preparation activities (p. 7).

There is a large body of research dedicated to the characteristics of those who are at risk for
not completing a college education (DeFreitas & Rinn, 2013). The risk factors for these students
could include: delayed entry into higher education from high school, being financially
independent from parents, having dependent children, attending college part-time and having a
GED instead of a high school diploma (Engle & Tinto, 2008). These factors impact students who
are coming to school who have previously been incarcerated.

Many of these students are also first generation college students (FGS), who are enrolled in
college, but do not have a parent who has attended college or received a college degree (Ramos-
Sánchez and Nichols, 2007). Research of first generation college students demonstrates they are
at a disadvantage in regard to accessing higher education, lack understanding of the admissions
and financial aid processes (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004), and lack both financial and family
support (Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols, 2007). Engle and Tinto (2008) found that FGS with
lower socioeconomic status were four times more likely to not return to college after their first
year. They also found that only 11 percent of low-income, first-generation students earn
bachelor’s degrees compared to 55 percent of people without the additional barriers to education. These issues are compounded by the fact that many justice-involved students must overcome additional barriers including alcohol and other drug addictions (AODA), mental health issues, generational poverty, and trauma (Jarjoura, Triplett & Brinker, 2002; Najavits, Weiss & Shaw, 1997; Deitch, Koutsenok, & Ruiz, 2000).

Students with criminal justice involvement may have many court-ordered obligations. In addition to family and work obligations, students with criminal histories may have mental health and AODA treatment, court appearances, drug and alcohol testing, and probation agent appointments. Students with criminal records may feel socially isolated because they do not see themselves fitting into the classroom environment. They may feel different from other students in the fact they carry with them a history many students in their classes may not find relatable or they may even be judged if their criminal histories become known. Ultimately, these issues of feeling different or isolated contribute to whether or not these students perceive themselves as having the ability to successfully reach their goal of obtaining a college education. Attrition rates are high for these students and it is important to understand underlying causes and how self-efficacy of these students helps or hinders their success (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

Studies of self-efficacy of people who are struggling with AODA issues found self-efficacy shifts based on situation and is multidimensional (Freeman, Liossis, Schonfeld, Sheehan, Siskind & Watson, 2005) It is reported that profiles of people with addictions have self-destructive thought patterns that diminish successful engagement in employment. These thought patterns include identity conflict, difficulty with life transitions, and low self-efficacy and expectations of outcomes (Comerford, 1999) and support as they proceed through their educational path.

**Self-Efficacy and Student Success**
Concepts of positive or negative self-efficacy stems from a person’s past experiences (either their own or observed), achievements, and feedback provided in a learning setting such as that given by instructors or employers (de Fátima, 2014) Studies have shown perceptions of self can impact student success. According to Chemers, Hu & Garica (2001), self-perception influences a student’s course of action, the amount of effort put forth, and the persistence of these students when faced with obstacles and barriers. Self-efficacy also plays a significant role in student resilience and the ability to cope when faced with new challenges. These issues students face can be anxiety producing and those who are working through challenges can find negative emotions debilitating (Chemers, et al., 2001). Bandura (1997) argued individuals with high levels of coping efficacy were able to adopt an alternative course of action, such as embarking on educational opportunities that can change harmful environments. Chemers, et al. (2001) argued the ability to problem-solve, make decisions, and manage personal resources effectively could be attributed to self-efficacy beliefs. A person’s self-efficacy beliefs also contribute to the ability to manage stressors generated in demanding settings such as a college. For those who are better equipped to mitigate these challenging situations, there is a tendency to view difficulties as challenges not threats (Bandura, 1997; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009). The study conducted by DeFreitas and Rinn, (2013) found students with low confidence in writing abilities, reading comprehension and math problem solving directly correlated to lower academic performance. Grabowski and colleagues (2001) found that if students feel the capacity to be successful they undertake and continue those endeavors and are inclined to avoid taking on challenges they may feel incapable of completing.

There is lack of research focused specifically on the self-efficacy and support systems of justice-involved individuals who are working toward obtaining college degrees. In order to
increase the understanding of these students’ college experiences, this article presents data on reported barriers and how overcoming those barriers affect self-efficacy.

**Theoretical Framework**

The concept of self-efficacy is the core of Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory and was the guiding theoretical framework for this research. According to Bandura (1997), an individual’s self-efficacy drives perseverance and resilience during challenging times. In the educational setting, self-efficacy dictates choices that are made including the choice to come to school and enroll, the type of program student elect to enroll into, and dictates length of time they will spend pursuing their educational endeavors along with amount of effort expended in the pursuit of their goals (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). “Students who believe they are capable of performing tasks use more cognitive and metacognitive strategies and persist longer at those tasks than those who do not.” (Pajares & Schunk, 2001 p. 245) This is an important consideration in understanding how to increase persistence of students who may not have positive educational experiences. Bandura (1977) theorizes that people will more likely participate in activities in which they feel at least some level of skill and confident and conversely avoid those activities where there is a perceived lack of competence. According to this theory, students will pursue goals that they believe are obtainable and avoid those they feel are out of reach. Self-efficacy is not fixed and can shift over time. These concepts were utilized to explore self-efficacy of students who were formerly incarcerated and the impact it had on their success.

**Method**

This qualitative study was conducted with 15 adult participants, ages 22-43, who were formerly incarcerated. Using a non-probability, purposive sample set, participants were selected based on the criteria that they were participating in a criminal justice system reentry program at a
technical college in the Midwest and pursuing education-focused goals. The author developed the interview guide in consultation with experienced qualitative researchers in the social science and criminal justice fields. The interview guide was piloted with two participants to test for participant understanding.

Using a semi-structured interview format, the researcher conducted individual face-to-face interviews that lasted 45-60 minutes. Interviews were used as the primary data source. They were transcribed and entered into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program. In addition, demographic information was collected through a brief survey completed prior to the interview. Other data included interview summary notes and field notes indicating thematic trends, emerging ideas, and particular information from interviews the author found noteworthy.

Data analysis occurred through an open coding and contextual analysis process. Through an impartial peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014), a colleague coded a transcript as a cross check and validation method. A final codebook was created from initial coding and feedback from this same colleague. Follow up interviews took place with three participants (member checking) in order to clarify points and assess validity of the data interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This study and all its components were approved through the researcher’s college Institutional Review Board process. The students’ names have been changed in this paper to protect their identities, but the author chose to use names in order for purposes of relatability.

Results

Participants who were pursuing education and were all voluntarily enrolled in a criminal justice reentry program at a small technical college were interviewed to discover their perceived barriers along with the impact of self-efficacy on their educational endeavors. 15 participants were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 22-43 with the mean age being 30 years old (SD =5.1). Five females and 10 males participated in the study. The majority of the students were
white (n=11) and all had criminal histories. All were formerly incarcerated, and all but one participant reported having at least one felony on their criminal record. Ten of the participants reported having been arrested as juveniles with the average age of first arrest being 16 years old, and seven individuals stated that they have spent time in a juvenile facility. Fourteen of the participants reported struggling with drug or alcohol addiction and all 14 indicated being in recovery for a length of time ranging from five months to over two years.
Table 1 Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Attended College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charged and Convicted of a Felony</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of First Incarceration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Incarcerations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convicted as Juvenile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent time In Juvenile Facility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol or Drug Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Recovery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time In recovery(Months)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers to Success
The researcher asked study participants about perceived barriers to success they faced as students. The students talked about numerous external and internal challenges they struggled to overcome. Some of the barriers were linked specifically due to the fact that students had criminal histories. One student Ben stated that he had attempted many times in the past to do things differently when he was released from jail, but felt “the doors close repeatedly” and it was ultimately easier to return to familiar life patterns.

Participants talked about external barriers that they faced as students. The majority of students reported finding balance between life and school as being a difficult challenge. Eleven of the 15 participants have children and seven participants consider themselves single parents. The majority of the participants were working at least a part-time job. One participant reported working 60 hours a week in addition to attending school part-time. Two of the participants were actively looking for work at the time of the initial interview. Issues with financial stability were also reported and most students stated they were concerned with paying bills and managing household expenses. Participants overwhelmingly stated that family members or significant others played an important role in supporting them with childcare assistance, transportation, housing assistance and other supports that made it possible to attend school and work.

The students who were interviewed were asked specifically about external barriers, but a theme strongly emerged from the data as the students specifically identified internal barriers. Negative self-perception was reported, including the belief that employment options are perceived as limited due to their criminal histories. Many participant felt that they have shown success in school, but due to unknown professional employment opportunities they have a great deal of uncertainty as to their long-term career prospects. Jason stated, “not every but most opportunities I see in front of me, they do seem out of reach and they do seem like they’re for people that are better than me.”
Students who had less time involved in the program and had a term or less of school completed typically discussed a general lack of belief in their ability to be successful. Internal self-doubt came up in multiple interviews. Jason, who had recently started college when interviewed, stated that he had not achieved goals that he had set until he was an adult and that growing up he thought he could accomplish goals. Jeremy specifically stated that he is a felon and his barriers were mainly personal in nature and felt that for a time that he was unable to successfully complete college.

Students spoke of the idea of standing in their own way of success also known as self-sabotage. Throughout the interviews participants mentioned that the only thing standing in his/her way was they themselves or as Kyle stated, “the only thing that can stop me is me.” Jeremy mentioned, “…there’s nothing holding me back except myself…just the fact that I have to get past my own opinions of myself to better myself.”

**Redefining Success.**

Participants in the study were asked how they would have defined success when they first came into the reentry program or when they were still facing legal consequences and their current definition. David stated the following, “Otherwise, everything else is self-induced, created by myself. Now I don't have them problems as much, now that I erased wants and focus on my needs. That eliminated most of the barriers that I pretty much created by myself before.” His statement shows the connection between how these participants formerly viewed success and ties together the idea that the view of success is closely aligned with internal barriers to success. The values for these individuals were (often or sometimes described by the respondents as) askew when they were actively using drugs in the past.

Students overwhelmingly described success in their previous life in several ways: 1) not going back to jail 2) being able to obtain drugs, and 3) having a lot money and obtaining material
goods such as cars. The students’ current definitions of success are strikingly different. Students spoke of setting and achieving both short-term and long-term goals and that is how success is now defined for them. Ben indicated the importance for him of setting and obtaining smaller goals in order to stay grounded. Approximately one-half of the participants stated that being happy or finding happiness including finding fulfilling employment is part of their current definition of success. Another 1/3 stated in their interview that being able to support their family was one measure of success. Paul spoke of being self-reliant, being able to pay the bills and taking pride in a day’s work were all ways in which he defined success. These new definitions of success can be linked directly to increased self-efficacy these students experienced over time.

Self-Efficacy

Participants were asked to reflect upon their confidence levels at the beginning when they first started the reentry program and their confidence levels of how they felt at the time of the interview in relation to their ability to succeed in meeting their educational goals. Participants were asked to use a 1-10 Likert scale with 1 being very low confidence and 10 being very high confidence. Of the fifteen study participants, all but three indicated that they increased in self-confidence from their first interactions with the reentry program. Alisha stated having very low confidence when she first started the reentry program. She recalled, “(None) at all, not confident at all. When I started…I had just got out of being in trouble. I had two DUIs. I was drinking really bad. I had served some jail time. I had lot of issues and lots of unknowns… Am I going to be able to maintain my sobriety through probation and not go back to jail…Can I do this?” Olivia who had just obtained her GED and was about to start college classes at the time of the interview stated,

I just never really thought still that I'd be the one to do it. I didn't ever see myself getting HSED or anything.” “I'm a little nervous …I know I can ... If I have any
problems I have my little team that I go to for help still and then I'm going to have my instructors too and probably learn about a bunch of more people that can help me. I know that even if I struggle with something, I have the right people around me to help me.

One participant stated she felt high levels of confidence when they started, but did not have a full understanding of the expectations of college and she now describes having non-supportive peers who she perceives as having kept her confidence low. Several participants made statements that they had strong levels of self-efficacy from the beginning, but indicated they needed support getting on the right path to success. They felt that they had the intelligence needed for school and knew they were smart, but needed support from others in their lives to move forward in signing up for school and completing their goals.

**Increased Self-Efficacy from Experiencing Success**

The students who had successfully completed at least one term of college courses resoundingly showed increased self-efficacy. They also demonstrated a transfer of increased self-efficacy in overcoming other obstacles such as recovery from addictions to an increase in self-efficacy in education or other goal obtainment. Garret stated, “I pretty much look at it as, if I've already succeeded in recovery and sobriety… I look at that and tell myself, "if I've done this now, then I've done something that no one else can do or have such a hard time doing, then everything else should be easy.” Gabby also recognized a change in her perception over time. “I don't know, it made me bloom into someone that I didn’t know that I was. My confidence in myself, in my ability to do things that I’ve never done before like school is skyrocketing now when faced with something, trying something new for the first time or something I’m not as apprehensive as I used to be. “
With higher levels of self-efficacy it was reported that these students were willing to take more risks and had increased confidence in their future success. Olivia revealed,

> Just looking back on everything that I've had to go through and stuff and knowing that this is where I am now, it just helps give me the confidence and motivation to just be like, ‘I know you're scared but you'll learn it, you'll get to know it. You can do it. You'll be fine.’ I think it all makes me want to push myself more.

Also speaking about overcoming drug addiction Kai stated “I think overcoming dope addiction is definitely a good like… it empowers my motivation inside to want to succeed more. So I know that if I can overcome that… even though I… you know I swing a few back… you know like if I can overcome that I believe that I can achieve most of the things that I want.” Kai also talks about a shift in motivation where he now does things he does not necessarily want to do and went on to say “I tell myself, “do what you don’t want to do” cause I feel like with that kind of mind conditioning it will build like more strength inside internally that will you know grow into something that will lead me to my bigger picture of success.” Cassey talked about overcoming addiction as a success, but going beyond that to achieve other goals, “So it makes me feel good that I know that I can succeed at something. And not just succeed like at my recovery. But I can succeed at something that’s gonna better my life ultimately that you know can continue to grow in my life.”

Overall, the interviews conducted indicate students had a strong desire to improve their future outlooks, but multiple internal (e.g. often expressed as self doubt) and external barriers (e.g. the doubts and beliefs of others) impeded success. The definition of success changed over time for the participants. A clear linkage was revealed between past success and current views of educational self-efficacy.
Discussion

Students who were formerly incarcerated face multiple external and internal barriers to success. The external barriers such as transportation, financial stress, and maintaining balance between the demands of academic workload, employment and home life were identified as key issues. As difficult as these barriers are to overcome, the internal barriers were identified as greater in significance to these students and resolutions are not as straightforward.

Internal barriers were identified by students as potential issues that stood in their way of success. Self-doubt, fear of failure, not believing they deserved better in life or seeing themselves as less worthy than others were all ideas that were presented by study participants. The lack of self-efficacy for those students who had not experienced ongoing success showed by the fact that motivation to continue to work through the challenges was hindered. These students had a harder time defining what success looked like and tended to focus more on the challenges as stumbling blocks versus successful students who viewed challenges as necessary stepping-stones.

Participants who were further along in their education goals stated they had moved beyond their internal barriers and self-doubt, but it took seeing themselves as successful for that happen. The participants indicated that self-efficacy increased as academic goals were obtained. In addition, participants identifying goals of happiness further support Bandura’s Social Cognitive theory (1997) by demonstrating the desire for more long-term and enduring goals versus short-term pleasure seeking that came when using drugs and alcohol.

Students indicated that they changed their view on what success was from extrinsically focused to intrinsically focused. Bandura (1997) states that motivation is a key factor in a person’s actions. Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory is further supported by these students’ experiences. His research purports that for people to be motivated, they first must have self-efficacy or believe in their abilities to achieve particular goals. If individuals feel excessively
challenged, it is less likely positive thoughts of successful outcomes will impact motivation hence decreasing it. Consequently, delayed gratification strategies to achieve long-term goals are maladaptive and lead to immediate gratification seeking strategies being utilized (Bandura, 1977; Tice, Bratslavsky & Baumeister, 2001). Students in this study identified the shift in focus over time from external rewards that are linked to immediate gratification or pleasure seeking e.g. money and cars to longer-term pursuits that incorporate delayed gratification such as obtaining meaningful careers and taking care of their family. Ben very eloquently sums up these concepts “I’m very okay with completing something now. I will face it head-on, I will brainstorm how… I try to think of the end result before I make a decision.” The long-term strategic planning is developing and replacing short-term decision-making processes that have guided these students in the past.

One area where self-efficacy remained low even as academic self-efficacy increased was participants’ perception of their ability to obtain professional employment opportunities post-graduation due to their criminal history. Students indicated that they had to do better academically than their peers in order to prove themselves worthy in their professional fields. The doubt created by long-term career prospects can be a major barrier for people who are considering embarking upon educational endeavors. Glasser, Calhoun, Bates, and Bradshaw (2003) found that many people who are incarcerated feel their future options are bleak and in particular feel a sense of hopelessness specifically related to employment opportunities. If potential students do not perceive positive outcomes they will be less willing to attempt academic challenges.

There are a number of implications from this research for reentry professions such as jail and prison educators and counselors, social workers, college advisors, college instructors, and human service workers in corrections to consider. Educators both in correctional facilities and out can
facilitate growth in self-efficacy by recognizing and building on strengths of individuals who have criminal histories and help students apply these strengths to academic course work and goal attainment. Understanding and promoting career pathways that are open to people with criminal histories and utilizing that information in reentry planning is essential. In addition, helping to build social capital of people with criminal histories and pointing them in the direction of available jobs and support in keeping those jobs, both in the immediate and long-term, can begin to reduce the hopeless mentality that might exist.

There are several limitations of this study. The experiences described by the small sample size of the study may not be generalizable to all individuals who were formerly incarcerated and seeking educational opportunities. This is a fairly elusive population and many people who start the program do not complete their initially stated goals. In addition, they frequently move and/or change phone numbers and there is difficulty in maintaining contact. Therefore, the participants were chosen based on accessibility. The researcher had the ability to connect with these individuals at the time of the study and again for these reasons the sampling limitation may produce a less generalizable result. In addition, the participants knew the researcher as an employee of the college and coordinator of the reentry project. In an attempt to reduce bias, procedures were put in place prior to the interview in order to distinguish the role of researcher as separate from practitioner for the purposes of this study.

There are very few studies that specifically look at the experiences of post secondary students who were formerly incarcerated. Further research may help determine best practices in jail and prison reentry planning including advising and counseling students who are college bound. Additionally, better understanding is necessary of how to increase student services on college campuses to support these students from the time they apply to school through graduation.
Conclusion

With 600,000 people leaving prison every year, there is an urgent need to help people who are coming back into our communities not recidivate. Understanding the barriers, as well as the mindset and motivation of students who have criminal histories is imperative. This information will be useful to practitioners who are working with these students to understand and aid them in removing those barriers to success. A GED or college education, while being a documented way out of poverty and a way to level the playing field, is a reward that comes after an extended period of time. It is critical that students experience short and long-term success in order to build self-efficacy. Understanding and utilizing best practices to assist in building small obtainable goals to increase self-efficacy is critical for these students to experience long-term success.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2004.10.007


Self-Efficacy Matters:
Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved

Tonya Van Tol

St. Catherine University | University of St. Thomas
School of Social Work

Author Note

Tonya Van Tol, Doctoral Candidate, School of Social Work, University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tonya Van Tol, Western Technical College, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601. Email: vantolt@westerntc.edu
Abstract

Reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals is a national issue. Education is one component that plays a key role in decreasing recidivism. This paper is a reflection of the information presented at a workshop entitled, “Self-Efficacy Matters: Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved” presented on November 14, 2016, at the National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education in Providence, RI. The presentation incorporated information about Project PROVEN, a reentry program, located at a technical college in Western Wisconsin and findings from research focusing on self-efficacy and barriers to obtaining educational goals.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, reentry education, adult education, justice-involved students, recidivism, internal barriers to academic success, external barriers to academic success
Self-Efficacy Matters:

Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved

Research was presented at the National Conference on Effective Transitions in Adult Education from a manuscript entitled, “Evaluating the Impact of Internal Barriers and Self-Efficacy of Justice-Involved Students Pursuing GED or Post-Secondary Educational Goals” prepared as one product of this author’s banded dissertation. The qualitative research project explored the impact of self-efficacy on educational success for people who were formerly incarcerated and seeking a GED or a post-secondary degree. This paper includes the presentation proposal, an annotation of the workshop presentation, and a self-reflection on learning outcomes.

Presentation Overview and Proposal

Abstract

Reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals is a hot topic nationally. Education plays a key role in decreasing recidivism. This workshop focuses on research from Project PROVEN, a reentry program located at Western Technical College in Wisconsin. Student experiences will be highlighted along with strategies to improve student self-efficacy.

Workshop Content, Objectives, and Format

The emphasis on reentry of formerly incarcerated adults has become a national priority. The Department of Justice reports 650,000 people are released from prison every year and this number does not reflect the revolving door of county jails. This population returns to their communities with a lack of job skills and fewer employment opportunities due to stigma from being incarcerated. Access to educational opportunities while incarcerated or upon return to the community is a crucial component of reducing recidivism and increasing the likelihood people will become self-sufficient. Having an understanding of how these students successfully meet their goals and what barriers to success they face is imperative. The focus of this workshop is on
self-efficacy of criminal justice-involved individuals who are engaged in pursuing educationally focused goals. Do students who have criminal justice involvement identify themselves as students and what is the significance of this on educational outcomes? Access to education not only reduces recidivism, but a college education is especially important in helping people gain access to living wage jobs. This workshop will provide research specifically focused on Project PROVEN, a reentry program located at Western Technical College in western Wisconsin including case studies of students who have participated in the program. Following this workshop participants will be able to:

- Identify barriers to student success and the impact of self-efficacy for students who are criminal justice-involved
- Describe best practices for engaging students in this population to increase self-efficacy
- Implement strategies to increase self-efficacy for students who are criminal justice involved

See Appendix B for proposal approval notification.

See Appendix C for official conference program cover with presentation details.

**Biography**

Tonya Van Tol has over 15 years’ experience in the criminal justice and education fields. She currently administers a reentry program at a technical College in Wisconsin focused on reducing education and employment barriers. Her scholarly interests include social welfare policy, trauma, and improving outcomes for individuals who are justice-involved.

**Annotation of Presentation and References**

**Introduction and Program Context Slides 1-8**

The presenter utilized a PowerPoint presentation found in Appendix A. The workshop began with introductions of the participants. The introductions included where the participants
were from, his/her role in the organization, why they chose the workshop and what they had hoped to gain. The presenter then established credibility by providing her professional experiences and interest in the topic of students who are criminal justice involved. In order to provide context of the research, an overview of Project PROVEN was presented along with the goals of the program. The focus of this introduction was to relate issues faced by students who come to school with criminal histories including the challenges of obtaining a college degree and how the program addresses this through case management and retention practices and increasing employment prospects for students who participate in the program. One goal of the workshop is to begin to de-stigmatize these students by addressing the fact they face the same issues as students who are from poverty, who are first generation, and students who may have left high school without a credential and do not have a criminal background.

Self-Efficacy Description Slides 9-10

In this part of the workshop self-efficacy was defined and distinguished from other concepts. Self-efficacy is defined as beliefs in one’s ability to perform specific tasks. The distinction between self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy is an important one. Self-confidence is one’s belief in their self-worth and the likelihood they will succeed. Self-efficacy is a combination of self-confidence and self-esteem (Bandura, 1994). For example, a person with self-confidence knows that he or she can take a test, but self-efficacy is the idea that there is a belief they will successfully pass the test.

The concepts of self-efficacy from Bandura’s (1994) theories were discussed in relation to the higher education setting. The concept of social persuasion can be seen when people feel they possess the capabilities to accomplish educational activities are more likely to summon greater effort and sustain it. Whereas the opposite is true if people have self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arise. People who think they lack ability tend to avoid
challenging activities that promote increased capacity and quickly give up when faced with difficulties. Educators can help people who are building self-efficacy by creating situations that bring success and avoid inserting people in situations too quickly where they are likely to fail.

People's idea of their personal efficacy is impacted by mood. Positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy and a negative mood diminishes it (Bandura, 1997). One way to modify self-beliefs of efficacy is to decrease people's stress reactions and help in modifying their negative emotional tendencies and misinterpretations of their physical states (Bandura, 1977). How people perceive and interpret their emotional and physical reactions is important. People who have high levels of self-efficacy are likely to view their state of emotional arousal as a energizing and motivating. Those with low self-efficacy regard their arousal as a hindrance. The self-efficacy concepts were applied within the educational setting to demonstrate concretely how both negative and positive self-efficacy can potentially impact students. In addition, concrete examples were provided of real-world experiences of the presenter of how both high and low self-efficacy has presented in various situations with students.

**Research Description, Findings and Implications Slides 11-15**

The next part of the presentation reviewed the research methodology, research subjects’ demographics, and description of the qualitative questions. The findings of the study were presented and an in-depth discussion of barriers reported by the subjects was presented. The presenter linked the internal barriers to self-efficacy through examples and quotes pulled from the research manuscript.

Findings included students’ definitions of success and how that change over time as students move further away from their criminal thinking patterns. Other findings presented include students reporting that increased self-efficacy comes from experiencing success as found in other self-efficacy research (Bandura, 1997).
The implications of this research were reviewed. The immediate implication for Project PROVEN is that aspects of the project that was set up intuitively through modeling and in fact these processes are based on Bandura’s research. When practitioners have an understanding of the research and are utilizing best practice this increases the positive impact on clients who are served. Utilizing this research, professionals on college campuses can start to reduce fear and anxiety of coming onto campus and build case management models that integrate practices that can increase self-efficacy for students. These practices increase retention and more importantly student satisfaction and success.

The research from this study backs the findings from Engle and Tinto (2008). Based on student interviews and their success tracked over time, a great deal of focus should be placed on helping first-term students through in order that they see themselves as successful students with higher self-efficacy.

**Case Study, Practical Applications and Conclusion Slides 16-21**

This section of the presentation was focused on reinforcing the ideas presented about self-efficacy and the research findings. These activities were developed with the understanding that practitioners want concrete ideas to apply immediately. In addition, this was a 1.5-hour workshop and it was crucial that participants had an interactive experience. The participants were asked to divide up into groups of 4-5 people and have small group discussion based on case studies that were presented. The case studies looked at real-life examples and questions were generated to engage the audience in identifying barriers and brainstorming ideas to increase self-efficacy for the individuals in the case study. The small groups shared ideas generated in a large-group discussion. Other aspects of the importance of working with criminal justice involved individuals were also discussed including equity, empowerment and growth mindset, and building social capitol to reduce barriers to success. The workshop concluded with the
presenter’s final thoughts on seeing individuals through a strength’s perspective and though a
non-judgmental lens.

**Summary of Participant Evaluations**

Twenty-two people attended the workshop and twelve (n=12) completed the evaluation form created by the presenter for the workshop. Six presentation skill areas were addressed through ratings of a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. The following presentation skill areas and mean rating included:

1. The session content was consistent with description in the agenda  Mean Response 4.3
2. The session information will help me be more effective in my position  Mean Response 4.2
3. I can use the information I learned right away in my work  Mean Response 4.2
4. The session met or exceeded my expectation  Mean Response 4.1
5. The topics covered were relevant, interesting and timely  Mean Response 4.3
6. The session was interactive with significant audience participation  Mean Response 4.3

One half of the respondents (n=6) indicated they work directly with people involved in the criminal justice system. There was a correlation between those who worked directly with individuals and an increase in the rating response to question 3.

The comments provided by workshop participants that pointed out areas to consider for improvement included: “I would like more specifics and details of what worked and what didn’t. I know the generalities seem obvious, but the interesting stuff is (often) in the details.” One participant suggested that handouts would have been helpful. The positive feedback included: “Your passion is contagious.” “Although the PROVEN history was helpful, the self-efficacy research was the most educational part of the presentation.” In addition, an open-ended question was asked, “Describe the most relevant information you can begin to incorporate immediately
into your current work.” The participant responses included: “Broaden contacts and support systems for reentry students.” “Leaving with a better understanding of the impact of self-efficacy and how I can help increase it in my students.” “Thinking about how self-efficacy support strategies can be integrated throughout the system and use of self-efficacy strategies in my interactions with students.”

**Reflection on Learning and Conclusion**

The experience of presenting research though a daunting endeavor was both enriching and empowering. In the past several years, this author has presented various aspects of Project PROVEN at local and regional conferences and with co-presenters at national conferences. This was the first time publically presenting these research findings and the first national conference the author presented alone. The biggest challenge was delivering information that included the context and history, the research information itself and the practical aspects that people would find useful in their practice upon returning to their jobs in an engaging and interactive manner. It was important as a presenter to use activities that allowed for audience participation and discussion that incorporated key concepts of the research findings and its impact on students. Based on the audience participation and feedback this goal was accomplished and over time with recurring presentations it is anticipated that confidence in presenting the material will increase and the presentation itself will become more polished. The workshop was an excellent culminating experience allowing this author to publically showcase important research to education professionals regarding students who are criminal justice-involved.
References


Appendix A

Presentation Slides

Slide 1

Self-Efficacy Matters
Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved

Slide 2

Introductions

• Who is in the room?
• Who I am

Slide 3

Project PROVEN Overview

• DOE Grants 2013, 2015
• Serve adults who have a criminal history
• Work within the jail to develop relationship and transition planning
• 3 counties in WI- La Crosse, Trempealeau, Monroe
• Programming Pod
Project PROVEN Overview

Education
- GED
- HSED
- Pre-college prep courses
- Credit courses
- Program admissions

Opening the Doors to College
- Basic needs
- Previous school experience
- Issues with learning disabilities
- Mental health
- Substance abuse/recovery
- Also look at goals and strengths
- Support systems

Employment (PROVEN Certificate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding a Job</th>
<th>Keeping the Job (Soft Skills)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Assessment</td>
<td>Overcoming barriers to keeping a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search and Networking</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming barriers</td>
<td>Communication and Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Cover Letter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Resume</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anticipated Outcomes

Participants who successfully complete Project PROVEN will:

• Obtain employment or begin education
• Receive ongoing support and case management - systems navigation
• Maintain employment for a minimum of 6 months
• Transition to new higher paying position
• Complete GED, a technical diploma or associates degree

Challenges

• County Jail (Avg of day of stay 12 days)
• AODA
• Homelessness
• Trauma
• Mental Health
• Non-linear paths

Defining and distinguishing self-efficacy

1) Mastery experiences (successes increases SE and failure decreases it).
2) Social modeling (seeing others similarly situated achieve goals which raises the belief in their own abilities).
3) Social persuasion (Positive affirmations by those surrounding them.)
4) Physical and emotional states (emotional regulation of stress)

Why Self-Efficacy?

“Whether you think you can or you can’t either way you are right.”

-Henry Ford

Data from Qualitative Study

15 Project PROVEN participants
- Ages 22 to 43
- Females n=5 Males n=10
- White n=11 Asian n=2 Black n=1 Native American n=1
- All had criminal histories
  - Charged and convicted of felony n=13
  - Most had juvenile records n=11
    - 7 had been incarcerated as a juvenile
- All but one reported having AODA issues

Interview questions focused on school experiences, supports systems, definitions of success, barriers to success, and questions addressing self-efficacy.

Findings

- External barriers include financial stability, childcare, unstable housing, and balancing life responsibilities
- Perceived barrier to future employment
- Internal barriers had more impact

“Personal barriers for me are age, drug history, criminal history, children at a young age... those things. But they should be looked at as stepping-stones not barriers because I’ve passed them... I deal with them, I understand them... I try to move forward from them. They’re not walls anymore, they’re more like stepping-stones.”
Findings

• Definition of success changes over time
• Increased self-efficacy came from students experiencing success

"I just never really thought that I'd be the one to do it. I didn't ever see myself getting HSED or anything." "I'm a little nervous... I know I can... If I have any problems I have my little team that I go to for help and then I'm going to have my instructors too and probably learn about a bunch of more people that can help me. I know that even if I struggle with something, I have the right people around me to help me."

Implications

• If individuals feel excessively challenged, it is less likely positive thoughts of successful outcomes will impact motivation thus decreasing it. Delayed gratification strategies to achieve long-term goals are maladaptive leading to immediate gratification strategies (Bandura, 1977; Tice, Bratslavsky & Baumeister, 2001).
• Educators can facilitate growth in self-efficacy by recognizing and building on strengths and help students apply them to academic course work and goal attainment.

"I pretty much look at it as, if I've already succeeded in recovery and sobriety... I look at that and tell myself, "If I've done this now, then I've done something that no one else can do or have such a hard time doing, then everything else should be easy."
Case Study Activity

Discuss at your tables the following:

Question 1: What are the primary concerns that come to mind as you read about the person in your case scenario?

Question 2: What do you think it will take for this individual to find success in either education?

Question 3: What does your institution offer to support this student in order to increase their self-efficacy? What gaps are you have when you are considering what services that are in place to address the needs of this individual?

TECHNIQUES

• Strengths perspective

• Empowerment and growth mindset
  (Next slide)

• Focus on relationship building and building social capital

• Motivational Interviewing ie active listening and reflecting
Other Important Considerations

- Race
- Class
- Gender
- Mental Health
- Trauma

One Final Thought

Everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.

Contact Information

Tonya Van Tol, MSW, LGSW
Doctorate of Social Work Candidate
University of St. Thomas
608-785-9267
vantolt@westerntc.edu
Appendix B

E-Mail Notification of Presentation Proposal Acceptance

---------- Forwarded message ----------

From: Sydney Breteler <sydney_breteler@worlded.org>

Date: Tue, Jul 26, 2016 at 2:13 PM

Subject: Re: Your 2016 Effective Transitions Conference Workshop

To:

Cc: "Sharma, Priyanka" <priyanka_sharma@worlded.org>

Good afternoon,

I'm emailing to inform you that your proposal has been accepted for the 10th annual Effective Transitions in Adult Education Conference which is to be held on November 14 - 16, 2016 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Providence, RI.

If for any reason you will be unable to join us this November at the conference, contact me as soon as possible, otherwise I will contact you again at the end of August about the time and date of your presentation and with a code for the lead presenter reduced rate for conference registration.

I would also like to let you know that we may edit your workshop description for consistency and clarity as it will appear in our program book.

You can find all information regarding the conference on our website, and I encourage you to spread the word to your networks!
Do feel free to email me if you have any further questions. I am looking forward to seeing you at the conference in November!

Regards,

Sydney

---

SYDNEY BRETELER

STAFF ASSOCIATE

617.385.3797

www.worlded.org
Appendix C

Conference Program Cover with Presentation Details
CONFERENCE | AT A GLANCE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2016

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM  Conference Registration
                  Grand Foyer

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2016

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM  Conference Registration
                  Grand Foyer

  9:00 AM – 12:00 PM Preconference Sessions

  1:00 PM – 2:30 PM  Workshop Session I

  2:45 PM – 4:15 PM  Workshop Session II

  4:30 PM – 6:00 PM  EdTech Panel - Leveraging Trends in Blended, Distance, and Mobile Learning
                    Rotunda

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2016

  7:30 AM – 4:00 PM  Conference Registration
                     Grand Foyer

  8:00 AM – 9:00 AM  Breakfast & Exhibits Opening
                     Grand Foyer

  9:00 AM – 10:00 AM Plenary Session
                     Sponsored by Neillie Mae Education Foundation
                     Grand Ballroom

  10:15 AM – 11:45 AM Workshop Session III

  12:00 PM – 1:00 PM  Lunch followed by Student Speaker
                       Sponsored by GED Testing Service®
                       Grand Ballroom
Collaboration - A Skill That Matters

**Peter Terres**, Boston Centers for Youth and Families, and **Michael Farma**, Boston Centers for Youth and Families

*Bristol A*

This workshop will present three strategies for helping our students better understand the value of collaboration in academic and professional pursuits. Older students are often reluctant to collaborate with their professors, their advisors, academic support services or fellow students. Yet, the essence of higher education, and indeed professional careers, is collaboration.

Self-Efficacy Matters: Improving Educational Outcomes of Students who are Criminal Justice-Involved

**Tonya Van Tol**, Western Technical College

*Bristol B*

Reentry of formerly incarcerated individuals is a hot topic nationally. Education plays a key role in decreasing recidivism. This workshop focuses on research from Project PROVEN, a reentry program located at Western Technical College in Wisconsin. Student experiences will be highlighted along with strategies to improve student self-efficacy.

Using Technology to Develop Employability Skills

**Nell Eckersley**, Literacy Assistance Center, and **Cynthia Bell**, Literacy Assistance Center

*Salon I*

Workforce preparation is an essential part of the work we do. Part of this preparation is to help students develop employability skills. In this workshop, we will discuss the 9 employability skills as identified by the American Institute for Research (AIR) and RTI and learn how to use technology to help students develop these skills.