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Literacy learners in prison: Finding purpose in the 'second space'

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study, part of a larger mixed-design study, presents the findings from interviews with six federal prisoners who participated in mandatory inmate literacy programs. The interviews were designed to elicit the participants' views on literacy and learning. The study found that the inmates were frequently preoccupied with thoughts and worries about home. These intense thoughts, framed as second spaces, often conflicted with and distracted from the first space of the literacy classroom. However, second spaces could be viewed as funds of knowledge or generative themes that motivate learners, support hybrid literacies, and help prisoners enact new identities.

## Literacy learners in prison: Finding purpose in the 'second space'

## Introduction

Many adults incarcerated in U.S. prisons have only a limited ability to read and engage in literacy activities. Haigler, Harlow, O'Connor, and Campbell (1994) found that 49-percent of a sample of 1,147 adults in U.S. prisons lacked a GED or high school diploma. 'Minorities' (i.e., non-whites) comprise 74-percent of the total inmate population. African Americans are incarcerated at a rate seven times higher than Caucasians. Western (2003) noted, "the U.S. penal system has become ubiquitous in the lives of low-educated African American men, and relatively common for low-education men in general" (p. 15). Today, there is broad political support, but limited funding, for prison-based literacy programs. Still, over 40 percent of the 650,000 prisoners released from U.S. prisons each year lack the literacy skills needed to pass the GED Exam (Solomon, Johnson, Travis & McBride, 2004).

Literacy programs in U.S. prison systems tend to be based on top-down instructional practices in which the curriculum, as opposed to students' personal interests, is the primary definer of learning content (McGill-Franzen, 2000; Warner, 1998). Missing from these practices may be an appreciation for students' perspectives and the role of the adult learner in shaping and directing aspects of the literacy program. Student-centered learning is a key tenant of adult learning (Knowles, 1984) and is consistent with constructivist-oriented theories of literacy learning (Au, 2000; Boudin, 1993; Fingeret & Drennon; 1997; Moll, 1998). There is evidence that literacy learners in prison are capable of articulating their personal literacy- and life-needs, and act as agents on behalf of their own learning. A small but poignant literature describes prisoners' views about issues such as: concern for their children (Craig, 1981; Covington, 1998), learning resistance and shame (Boudin, 1993), trust and rapport with teachers (Saba, 1990;

Shethar, 1993), self-reflection and transformative learning (Mullen, 1994; Wright, 2001) and the need for safe learning spaces in prison (Loewen, 1997).

Yet, in many U.S. prison classrooms, learners' diverse interests and needs are unexplored, and cultures of mistrust threaten to undermine the efforts of even the most dedicated staff. Third space theory, first formulated by Lefebvre (1991) and based on earlier work by Foucault (1972), can be used to study complex forces that shape and define spaces, particularly when populated by groups of unequal power. Recent developments in third space theory (Bhabha, 1994; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004; Soja, 1996; Wilson, 2003) provide helpful frameworks for understanding the clash between the impersonal (and often de-personalizing) 'first space' of official prison discourses and the 'second spaces' of prisoners' intense, unvoiced, private thoughts and feelings about families, identities, relationships with others, and time. By understanding the way spaces like prison classrooms are "socially constructed" (Soja, in Leander & Sheehy, 2004, p. x), we may be better equipped to examine the dynamics that invite, suppress, enhance, inhibit, and punish the voices and views of literacy learners. This knowledge, in turn, might help policy makers and correctional educators design learning environments that are more engaging, relevant, and effective. To date, few studies have examined prison-based literacy learners' views within a third space framework (Wilson, 2003).

#### Framework for the Study

This study was designed to engage six prisoners in a dialogue that might reveal some of their views about literacy learning in prison and themselves as learners. Through open-ended interviews, the following two research questions were addressed: (a) How do prisoners in literacy classes view themselves as learners? (b) How do they view literacy learning in prison?

Interview questions were organized in a framework similar to that established by Lytle (2001) in her work with community-based literacy learners. Lytle described a process of facilitating learners' growth in self-conscious understandings of their own purposes for learning. Through this process, teachers collaborated with adult learners to investigate their views along four dimensions of literacy -- beliefs, practices, processes and plans:

*Beliefs* include adults' theories or knowledge about language, literacy, teaching and learning. *Practices* refer to the range and variations of learners' literacy-related activities in their everyday lives. *Processes* mean the adult learners' repertoires of ways to manage reading and writing tasks and the products of these transactions. Finally, *plans* signal what adults themselves indicate they want to learn, including their short- and long-term goals, and how they plan and interact to attain these goals. (p. 386)

Third space framework was also used, developed by Wilson (2003), to help interpret findings relating to the participants' repeated references to two distinct worlds that competed for their thoughts. The first world was the prison itself; the second was the complex web of feelings and thoughts associated with home that often distracted the prisoners from the demands of the classroom. Wilson (2003) developed her theories about a third space while conducting ethnographic research with incarcerated juveniles in Great Britain. She provided examples of third spaces in juvenile prisons where adolescents, despite the dehumanizing forces of institutional living, created non-prison spaces where they reconstructed "a sense of personal and community identity" (p. 5). These personalized spaces involved literacy-related practices such as letter writing, taping greeting cards to cell walls, decorating walls with graffiti, creating poetry and listening to music. She noted how these spaces drew on the other two worlds (prison and the

outside), but “operate through a culturally defined discourse...that distinguish them from [the] other spaces” (p. 6). Thus, Wilson described the third space as a safe place within prison (first space) where the prisoners’ personal thoughts (second space) were allowed expression, and where they could reflect on life in ways not possible in either of the other two spaces.

#### Methods

To build rapport with the participants, all aspects of the interview process was explained, including the use of a tape recorder, as part of the informed consent process, and again during the lay summary just prior to the interview. Inmates were reminded they were free to choose to not participate in the interview and that no reprisals would be taken against them.

#### *The Participants*

Six incarcerated adults from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons were interviewed between November 2002 and February 2003. The participant group included one minimum-security female; and two low, two medium, and one high security males (see Table 1). All six participants were selected from two federal prison complexes -- one in a southeastern state and the other in a northeastern state.

The six participants constituted a maximum-variation sample (Glesne, 1999). Their selection was based on recommendations from staff, willingness of the participants, and their demographic profiles (Table 1). As a group they represented: one minimum security-level female, one resident of a shelter program for vulnerable inmates, two deportable aliens, three African Americans, three Caucasians, one English language learner, and learners with a variety of self-reported learning challenges, such as dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder, drug addiction, and serious head injuries. Despite this diversity, four of the six participants were perceived by staff as being cooperative and invested in learning. One limitation to the study may be the

sample's under-representation of adult literacy learners in prison who are more guarded around staff.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data was collected by conducting 90-minute interviews for each participant. An interview guide was used and refined through pilot testing and after each interview. More discrete questions were replaced with broader ones. For example, the question "What do you like to read?" was replaced with "What is reading like for you?" The interviews were audiotaped and then fully transcribed. Also, field notes were taken during the interview.

The analysis of the interview data was completed in five stages. (1) Field notes and research memos were written during and immediately after the data collection process. (2) All transcriptions were edited for accuracy and non-verbal cues; field notes were superimposed onto the transcripts. (3) Nud\*ist Vivo (Version 1.1) software was used to code the transcripts. Using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), participants' utterances were coded. During this stage, 88 codes emerged. (4) The 88 codes were consolidated by linking similar ideas together. For example, three independent codes – "Stay Away from Inmates," "Self-control," and "Lying and Trust" – formed a larger theme "Negotiating Relationships." Unlike stage 3, this integrative process (Abi-Nader, 1990) sometimes involved themes that were more interpretive and abstract. This process of consolidation resulted in 20 major themes. (5) These 20 themes were then arranged under five headings: purposes, practices, beliefs about resources for learning, beliefs about barriers to learning, and the second space (see Table 2) based on Lytle's (2001) and Wilson's (2003) work.

#### *Subjectivity threats.*

Throughout much of the dialogue with inmates, I was aware of being in a flow of conversation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) that centered on the interview questions. I tried to follow the participants' lead and allow them to tell their own stories about the experiences most important to themselves as literacy learners in prison. But at times, I struggled to put my personal and professional lenses aside. To control for these threats, the following strategies were used. First, an ongoing effort was made to be conscious of my biases and expectations. Second, I tried to avoid interview questions that were negatively or positively stated. For example, "What are your *concerns with* the prison program?" was changed to the more neutral question, "What are your *thoughts about* the prison program?" Third, member checks were attempted with the participants by sending them summaries of key portions of the transcripts. However, only three could be reached -- two had left the system, and I could not establish a confidential method for communicating with the remaining one. Fourth, data from the interviews was triangulated with field notes, formal tests, educational history questionnaire, and conversations with staff.

*Reactivity threat.*

I was not a total stranger to all of the prisoners as I had done prior literacy testing with three of them. And, all six participants were aware that I was a Bureau employee who was knowledgeable of, and responsible for, literacy policy. Despite the participants' willingness to participate, our 'keeper-kept' relationship presented certain unspoken barriers. For example, no participants criticized other prisoners or staff by name; nor did they criticize their present teachers. Despite my assurances about confidentiality, I believe most of them still expected me to share the contents of our conversations with other staff.

Findings: Biographical Sketches of Two Participants



Even though six biographical sketches were collected, due to length, only two biographical sketches are presented here. These sketches will help the reader “contextualize” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 79) findings by relating them to actual persons and may reduce stereotypical ideas about prisoners.

The sketch of Anne Blanchard’s strong and determined character provides insight into her literacy practices – especially her frequent letter writing -- despite low scores she achieved on reading tests. (All participants’ names used in this paper are pseudonyms.) Denis Vincent’s biographical sketch presents a picture of how an English language learner struggled with an English-based sixth grade classroom when he first came to the United States. Both sketches provide insights into what constitutes literacy in the eyes of prisoners and suggest generative themes (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997) that could be regarded as distractions from, or purposes for, learning.

#### *Anne Blanchard*

Anne is a 33 year-old African-American woman serving time at a minimum security-level camp. Her mother had been a migrant worker and Anne’s schooling was frequently interrupted. She described herself as a “slow learner.” When Anne became pregnant and quit school in the sixth grade, she finally escaped the embarrassment of being in a special ed class with second graders. Here are some of her experiences growing up:

I went through four or five schools...When we [moved] you didn't have time to tell your friends bye or nothing...Sometime we'd stay at a camp [where] everybody's got their own bed...We [the camp kids] stuck together...Everybody with a different language...bi-language...The kids would go out [in the fields] and do'in a *little* pickin'... do'in a *lot* of eatin' fruit...[LAUGHTER]. But [for my mother] it was hard work.... The kids always

pick on the one that's in the SLD class...[In the sixth grade] I would get frustrated...I was gettin older now. The age was kickin my butt. And I'm goin back in the second grade...That was a joke...around the school. And I got pregnant then too...I never went back to school after I had the first baby, until I turned...18 [and] went to Vo-Tech school...I really liked it...cause I started...readin [and] writin...better... Everybody's equal in Vo-Tech school.

Throughout the interview, Anne had a pleasant and soft-spoken demeanor, and was complimentary of her prison teacher and her school. She had been in the literacy program at the prison for four years and had seven months left to serve. Although she achieved very low scores on reading tests administered as part of a larger study (see Table 3), Anne noted that she was reading for pleasure at least 30 minutes every day, and wrote letters home to her children. “All [family news] comes through me. It comes from a letter. They want to write me a lot. And then I write and tell them what they were saying.” She asked other inmates for help with spelling.

Anne struggled to stay involved with the day-to-day lives of her six children, ages five to eighteen, who, at the time of the interview, were divided among three families and a juvenile detention facility. She told me her son got locked up shortly after her mother – his grandmother – died:

...[He is in] a juvenile facility...He almost got a GED...I write him, he write me, every week...We [ex]plain in our letter, how we doing in school...That make me feel good lettin me know he alright, he's not getting in trouble. I always try to...explain to him, it can get hard. People will talk about you. I tell him he has to walk away, always try keep his head up...don't worry about what nobody say...

*Anne's second space.*

Anne described her family-related concerns as complex and emotionally intense. When her mother was dying, she was allowed one visit home. She had to choose between visiting her mother in the hospital, or going to the funeral where she could and also see her children. She chose the funeral:

My momma always loved...my kids...they were the ones who kept her really warm...even when she got weaker and weaker. The only thing she wanted for me, the best thing, go and get on a train and come home. That's all she asked from me, come home and I can see you. And that's what's the hardest part...My daughter was really close to her, but my son was more closer...She helped raise all my children...they took it real hard...Their grandmomma's passed, and I had to come back to prison...They don't have my momma [their caretaker] any more [and] I [had] to get my kids situated...A preacher, a friend of the family got three of my kids and my sister has one son, and my daughter stays with my mother-in-law...Everyone a little spread out...And that's what was the last thing I wanted, and my momma wanted, to get the kids spread out, and stuff.

Anne's son in the juvenile facility had problems with schooling similar to her own:

He got suspended because he was fighting...he has a temper...[On the phone he told me] "Mommy they called me stupid and dumb"...That hurt my feelings...because I thought that about me. [I saw myself] in my son...I mean, I never got angry [when I was a child]. I'd just go home and cry.

Despite her considerable need for literacy support and her struggle to support the children, Anne's personal literacy needs were not addressed through her literacy classes. Anne described her struggle to stay focused on official class work despite the recent death of her

mother. For Anne, there appeared to be a clear distinction between literacy learning and day-to-day personal needs, no matter how pressing:

...Hmmm. It gets frustrating because, you know, we have a lot of stuff on our minds...especially home. And...it might get hard, but we know it [an education] is something we need...When I go to school, I go there to learn. Whatever I got on my mind then, I take it out...you don't wanna bring your problems at class, because you're learning once you join the program...I had just lost my mom, August, and there was a lot of pressure...It seemed like my whole world had gone bad, but...I'm a calm person; [when I came to class] I would calm it off, and I wouldn't show my true feelings...

Anne Blanchard's strong character can be seen in her determined use of literacy activities – especially her frequent letter writing – to hold her family together in light of the recent loss of her mother (and despite the very low scores, she achieved on reading tests administered in the larger study). But there was no evidence that her intense, personal literacy and parenting efforts were connected to her classroom instruction, or that she herself connected academic literacy learning with her personal literacy needs. Such generative themes (Fingeret & Drennon, 1997) as holding a family together through letter writing might have been invited into the classroom; instead, they were left behind at the classroom door, which served as the border between first and second spaces.

#### *Denis Vincent*

Denis Vincent was a Haitian male, age 29, who came to the United States when he was 13 years old. His first language was Haitian Creole. Denis did not start school in Haiti until he was ten because he had to work. He loved math. When he arrived in the US he was placed in an English-speaking sixth grade class in Florida, but spent the first year in ESOL classes. He

repeated eighth grade and dropped out of school in the tenth to work and send money to his family in Haiti. Here is a brief account of his school experiences in Haiti and Florida, his frustrations with learning in a second language, his talent for living on his own and for fixing cars, and the pressures that forced him to drop out of school, despite his love of learning:

I went to school in Haiti and...in 1986, come to the United States...to middle school. I had a whole bunch of problems. I couldn't stay in school [even though] God gave me the ability to go to school... and school was free...In my country...your family had to pay to go to school...It was kind of hard for me to learn [in school in Haiti]...the teacher...give you a spanking...[LAUGHTER]...One time...I played soccer [after school] and forgot to study. The next day...[the teacher] broke my leg...right here! She hit me with like a big paddle...I was ten years old. It was first grade...They think that by whopping you it's going to make you want to study...Your parents will whoop you, too! [LAUGHTER] They agree with that. Sometimes [the students] cannot learn, then they'll let the teacher whoop them...They just sit there and look sad, that's all...[But it] makes me learn!... Ever since [that experience] I was just coming up...learning to write my name...read Creole a little bit...

I was thirteen years old [when I moved to America]. I didn't have [my] Haitian parents. I [had to] speak English [in school]...Man, it was hard...I was in sixth grade, [but] not in a regular class, just the ESL class...for about like a whole year...My friend, him a Haitian student...like me...was helping me...It's like I had to start all over again ...learning a different language. I went from sixth [to] ninth grade...My family keep writing me, they don't have any money...I hit the street and starting working to take care of them. I

dropped out of school. I sent money back home. That's when I started...fixing cars...It was [a skill] I was born with.

Despite Denis' success learning to fix cars and surviving on the street at an early age, he regretted dropping out of school. "[School] was a good experience...if I...stayed in school...the life that happened to me never would have happened. I could have been in a better place now."

*Denis' second space.*

Denis had been in the literacy program at his medium security prison for three years, had respect for his teacher and felt he was making progress. He could write a four-page letter for the first time. He wanted to get his GED, but his immediate interest was to improve his reading and writing in English so when he got out of prison he could start his own business. Denis was not married and had four children. His mother (in Haiti) had been sick, and his family needed money to pay for medical expenses. Denis was able to concentrate in the GED program except when letters from home caused him to worry about his family:

Sometimes I go in [the classroom]...I go in and do my work, but some days I get like frustrated...I come from outside with an attitude. I just go in there and feeling I don't want to do nothing...The attitude is like sometimes you get back flash...The attitude is just like the frustration that you heard...my mother is sick real bad and I can't do nothing for her. That's what comes to my head when I come into the class. That make me don't even want to do nothing. It's like...it's still inside, you know, it's hurting inside and you can't do nothing about.

Throughout the six interviews, only once did a participant mention a personal literacy event taking place in the literacy classroom. Here is Denis' account of how a conversation with his

teacher provided a new way of looking at, or a new *place for processing*, a problem he was having with the caretaker of one of his sons:

I got one of my child's mother, you know, she didn't even want to bring my son here [for me] to see him...Sometimes I even discuss it with my teacher, too...I said, "I've got problems, Mrs. A\_\_\_, I want to see my son. His mother won't bring him here to see me." [Ms. A\_\_\_ said], "Why don't you go ahead and write a letter?...Bring it to my [attention]...I'll correct that letter you're making." And after she tells me, you know, all the frustrations will go away...talking can solve a lot of problems!

Denis presented a picture of an English language learner who struggled with an English-based sixth grade classroom when he first came to the U.S. His story provides a small insight into what he (and his teacher) perceived as appropriate content for literacy instruction. Unlike Anne Blanchard's case, this did include (at least once) Denis' personal literacy needs. Denis' frustration with his child's caretaker was converted to potent action with the support of his teacher, suggesting a transformative role for third spaces in prison classrooms.

#### Other Findings: Barriers to Third Spaces in Classrooms

Many themes about prisoners' perspectives fit within Lytle's (2001) and Wilson's (2003) frameworks (Table 2). All six participants had personal reasons for wanting to improve their literacy skills (e.g. to vindicate themselves in the eyes of significant others, to help others avoid a life of crime), and many of these purposes were quite different from the expressed purpose of the program. Despite their self-reported reading difficulties and disabilities, most of the prisoners reported surprisingly high levels of literacy-related practices outside of the classroom, such as reading newspapers, books, letters or religious materials; writing letters; and keeping journals.

Many of the personal purposes for learning identified by participants were oriented to the world outside of prison. Within Wilson's (2003) third space framework, the outside world can be thought of as the prisoner's second space (and prison as first space). Five of the six participants described at length their sometimes all-consuming thoughts of home that acted both as engines for literacy practices and distractions to classroom learning.

As second spaces relate to (and typically are suppressed by) the first spaces of traditional prison classrooms, they are experienced as distractions. Second spaces were implied in Anne Blanchard's statement, "we've all got a lot of stuff on our minds," and Denis Vincent's comment, "I come to class with an attitude." Technically, these citations could have been coded as third space events, since they were voiced to me. However, these interior places were typically undisclosed within the prison classroom, and thus remained second spaces in their natural state.

All six participants reported having unvoiced personal needs that at times distracted them from classroom literacy learning. For five participants, these thoughts typically focused on home; but for one, they dwelt on his current relationship with staff and their inability or unwillingness to see him as a changed person. As counter-intuitive as it might appear, only two of the six participants expressed a desire for their teachers to invite personal literacy needs into the classroom.

Two participants described intense feelings of embarrassment and shame because of their low literacy abilities. They perceived other students in the mandatory program as aggressive, and they perceived classrooms as psychologically unsafe places, not places where one exposed personal issues and concerns. Other participants also expressed feelings of shame that permeated and shaped their second space thoughts. They feared being perceived as: stupid, a bad mother, and a career criminal incapable of changing. Only one participant, Anne Blanchard, appeared to



be comfortable sharing her personal literacy needs with other prisoners (e.g., seeking help with letter writing), but this was in places other than the literacy classroom.

The disconnect between personal literacy needs and the academic focus of the formal literacy program was largely unexamined by the literacy learners. They felt resigned and helpless to change many of the conditions of their lives. These feelings were attached to unmet (and unvoiced) personal needs such as assisting the family with health care costs, supporting their children after the death of their caregiver, reuniting with an estranged daughter via phone calls, steering a nephew away from repeating the mistakes of his incarcerated uncle, and persuading the parole board that the participant had changed. Denis Vincent believed he had failed his family by not being able to send home money to pay for his mother's health care costs. One learner struggled to make amends for introducing his sister to drugs (which ultimately killed her) by corresponding with his niece about her homework. One prisoner expressed general frustration with the way he perceived staff to be judging him (as a career criminal).

The participants may have felt incapable of changing the literacy program as well. Anne Blanchard, for example, did not question the authority of the official curriculum, or her position in the classroom as a receiver (not constructor) of knowledge. Two participants did challenge the academic content of the program and wanted to have more control over what was being taught -- one wanted to improve his spelling; another wanted to be placed in a higher level of the program -- but neither voiced an interest in shifting the focus of the classroom to their personal needs.

Finally, the learners' traditional ideas about education may also be seen as a barrier to third spaces in prison classrooms. Participants seemed to possess epistemologies and views of literacy learning that were shaped by childhood and cultural experiences that privileged official school discourses, received knowledge, and authoritative scripts for 'doing school' and being a

Comment [71]: Should this be reworded?

student. For example, Denis Vincent's childhood learning experiences in Haiti are characterized as highly authoritarian, where the student's job is to listen and do as told. Anne Blanchard moved from one special education placement to another. She was repeatedly told about her deficiencies, and relegated to the lowest caste in the school (until, as an adult, she went to Vo-Tech school where "everybody's equal"). Helping learners like Denis and Anne embrace a more empowered, constructivist approach might be challenging, despite their profound personal literacy needs. On the other hand, they and the other participants reported vigorous personal literacy practices such as letter writing and leisure reading outside of class. Perhaps an offer to support these practices by a trusted teacher in a safe classroom might enable hybrid 'third' spaces that serve as a bridge to new ways of knowing and learning.

#### Discussion

The six participants expressed diverse beliefs about the nature of literacy learning and themselves as learners (See Table 3). Despite compelling evidence of (a) suppressed personal needs that *might* be considered as funds of knowledge (Moll, 1998) and (b) the emergence of prisoners' third spaces in prison locations *outside* the classroom (Wilson, 2003), there was only slight evidence of classroom-based third spaces in this study. Based on the preliminary findings, much needs to be done to transform prison classrooms into engaging, learner-centered spaces that support literacy learning *through* learner's personal literacy needs, *not in spite of* these needs.

A number of barriers currently prohibit staff and students from embracing second spaces in prison classrooms. These barriers need to be addressed before meaningful shifts in perceptions and uses of prisoners' personal literacy needs in typical U.S. prison classrooms can be expected. These include: prison-culture issues of trust, power, and safety; learner issues related to shame,

self-esteem and ingrained ideas about passive ways of doing school; and policy issues related to staff and curricular support for learner-centered approaches.

#### Conclusion

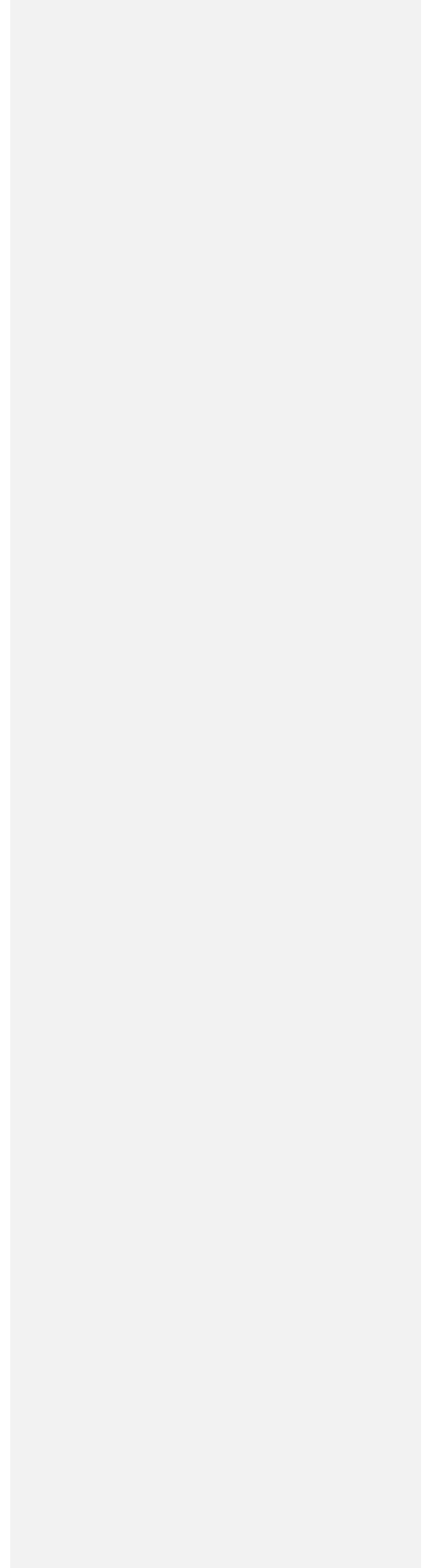
The six participants, not representative of all prisoners, were surprisingly open and interested in discussing their views of literacy and learning. They had intense, personal reasons for wanting to advance their literacy abilities that were not directly related to official curricula. In fact, the tension created by these purposes sometimes competed with classroom instruction. One participant described a third space event in which his personal purposes for learning were supported in the prison classroom.

All six participants were actively engaged in personal literacy practices outside of class and most had clear ideas what literacy learning should be like. However, they often viewed themselves as helpless to change the way literacy was taught in prison, or to resolve persistent personal problems – most, but not all, involving family concerns back home.

Within a traditional model of correctional education, third spaces may appear irrelevant or threatening to both staff and inmates. But given the rich potential of the second space for generating learning themes, and the tension between first and second spaces in many prison classrooms, third space theory might provide a framework for practitioners and literacy learners to explore impediments to, and opportunities for, learner-centered approaches.

Denis Vincent described one example of what a third space event might look like in a prison classroom. The modesty of the example suggests that third space events do not have to be sophisticated and can occur within the structure of existing programs, even traditional ones. More needs to be known about the extent and quality of these occurrences, and what this tells us

about the readiness for U.S. prison systems, staff and inmates to remove barriers and transform the nature of literacy learning in prison classrooms.



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Table 1

Characteristics of 6 participants.

Participant	Cluster	Reading Score Level	Sex	Age	Race	Security Level	Other
Anne Blanchard	1	Basic	F	33	Black	Minimum	Left school in 6 <sup>th</sup> grade; multiple schools; mother was migrant worker in south. Described herself as a “slow learner.”
Earl Wilson	2	Basic	M	29	White	Low	Canadian citizen; schooled in a number of mental hospitals and juvenile facilities. Described himself as hyperactive and aggressive.
Denis Vincent	4	Intermediate	M	29	Black	Medium	L1 = Haitian. First three grades in Haiti; came by himself to Florida at age 13; struggled with L2 in high school; dropped out in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade to work to send money home.
Mark Harrison	5	Intermediate	M	41	White	Low	Quit school in 8 <sup>th</sup> grade; described school as frustrating, struggling unsuccessfully to learn to read. Eventually learned to act out to avoid exposing reading problems.
Caleb Polk	6	Intermediate	M	33	White	Medium	Described himself as hyperactive and being in special ed classes all his life because “I just didn’t have a normal mind.” Addiction to meth-amphetamine led to incarceration.
James Patterson	8	Advanced	M	32	Black	High	Quit school at end of 11 <sup>th</sup> grade. Reported he was attracted to power, status and fast money that came from life on the street.

Table 2

Six Prisoners' Views Organized by Themes.

Purposes

- To prove them wrong
- To help others
- Competence motivation
- Post-release goals

Practices

- Writing letters home
- Leisure reading

Beliefs about Resources for Learning

- Beliefs about inner-resources
- Beliefs about literacy support from other inmates
- Beliefs about literacy support from teachers

Beliefs about Barriers to Learning

- Beliefs about feeling unsafe
- Beliefs about when teachers are absent
- Beliefs about mandatory programs
- Beliefs about health-related barriers
- Beliefs about discrimination and disrespect

The Second Space

- The intensity of the second space
- Coping with news from home
- Caretakers
- Telephones and visits
- Staying focused in class
- The third space

Table 3

Participants' Scores on Various Reading Component Tests.

	Word Recog- nition GE	Oral Reading GE	Syllables per Minute	Rapid Automatized Naming- Letters (seconds)	Word Meaning GE	Picture Vocabulary SS	Silent Reading GE
Anne Blanchard	1.5	1.5	105	31	2.0	64	3.5
Denis Vincent	4.0	5.0	133	27	4.0	47	3.3