AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: EXAMINING PRISON-BASED

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS A PLATFORM FOR EMPOWERMENT IN A

CORRECTIONAL SETTING AND BEYOND

by

Shohei Morita

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Environmental Studies
The Evergreen State College
June 2021

This Thesis for the Master of Environmental Studies Degree

by

Shohei Morita


has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by


_____

Kathleen Saul, PhD
Member of the Faculty


_____

Date

ABSTRACT

Agents of Transformation: Examining Prison-Based Environmental Education as a
Platform for Empowerment in a Correctional Setting and Beyond

Shohei Morita

The United States faces a mass incarceration crisis in which one in every 116 adults are imprisoned. That prison environment severely limits opportunities for people to become empowered. Prison and empowerment are frequently viewed as antithetical, making it challenging for these contrasting concepts to intersect. One avenue for increasing self-esteem and positive attitudes in prisons and thus contributing to empowerment, is education. Environmental education in particular offer a multitude of benefits to its participants, especially through having direct interactions with nature and living organisms. Despite these benefits, formal research into the potentials of utilizing prison-based environmental education program as a platform for promoting empowering opportunities remains relatively unexplored. Through this research project, I conducted an investigation into what empowerment looks like in a prison context, and how participating in prison-based environmental education programs may result in the incarcerated participants becoming empowered. At the outset, I worked with previously incarcerated thesis advisors to explore the causes for disempowerment in prison, and how to counteract these forces to increase empowering opportunities. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals who had previous experience in prison-based environmental education programs. By identifying themes from the interviews and categorizing those into each level of analysis within Zimmerman's theoretical framework of empowerment (individual, organizational, and community), I determined what aspects of the program(s) led to empowerment in a correctional setting through environmental education programs. Data analysis yielded themes associated with empowerment on each of the three levels of the empowerment theory, as well as themes related to disempowerment. Results showed that while signs of empowerment were observed in all three levels of the empowerment theory (individual, organizational, community) they were more aligned with the individual level than the organizational and community levels, suggesting that the empowerment gained through participating in environmental education programs occurs predominantly on an individual level. Ultimately, qualitative evidence suggests that prison-based environmental education programs may serve as an ideal platform for gaining empowerment. However, it is also necessary to continue to fight against the forces of disempowerment within these programs to ensure incarcerated participants' experiences are truly empowering. Findings of this study may be helpful to corrections staff, incarcerated individuals, as well as prison educators, in making efforts to increase empowering opportunities through education.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

## List of Tables

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis reader, Dr. Kathleen Saul, for her guidance and mentorship, not only throughout the thesis process, but also my two years at MES.

I would also like to thank my thesis advisors, Susan and Matt, for taking on this role and contributing a significant amount of time and energy into supporting my thesis. Their expertise and input were instrumental in shaping this research project.

To all the formerly incarcerated interview participants who openly shared their experiences and helped me learn and grow as a person – thank you.

I wish to express my appreciation to Kelli at the Sustainability in Prisons Project, for providing me with constant support and resources. This thesis would not have been possible without your persistent encouragement and inspiration.

I would also like to acknowledge Emily at the Sustainability in Prisons Project for taking the time to help me brainstorm and practice my thesis presentation (even on weekends!).

Anne – thank you for proofreading my draft, even when faced with unreasonably tight deadlines.

Jaileen, Chris, and Coquito, for reminding me to breathe every once in a while. Taking breaks from thesis and spending time with you all certainly made the process less stressful.

Undertaking a graduate level thesis is not easy, to say the least. This research project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my partner, Madison (and Frisca the cat), and my parents, Masayuki and Teruko Morita. Thank you for always pushing me to challenge myself and believing in my ability to do this work.

In dedication to the people,
who have lost their lives to COVID-19 while incarcerated in Washington State prisons.

**Introduction**

*...the butterfly would undergo metamorphosis and you're bringing this program to the women and then I, myself, could see some of the stages. The butterfly was going through it and I was as well, throughout the time I was there.*

- Former butterfly program technician

More than two million adults are incarcerated in the United States, and each year more than 700,000 leave federal and state prisons and return to outside communities (Davis et al., 2014). When they leave a highly structured prison environment for the unstructured world, many struggle to navigate and adjust to their new environment due to the stigma and negative public perception of being formerly incarcerated and the lack of support systems that enable them to pave a path for success – all of which stem from the systemic oppression designed to disempower currently and formerly incarcerated individuals.

There have been a multitude of studies conducted on the topic of prison-based education programs as a goal to reduce recidivism (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). However, when almost three-quarters of individuals released return to prison with the majority of them within the first year of release, it begs the question as to whether the current system for providing prison-based education effectively serves its intended purpose to provide opportunities that help improve the future of incarcerated individuals (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). Environmental education is a new and emerging approach to in-prison education that has gone widely unexplored in terms of potential benefits and outcomes. Effective in-prison environmental education can have the potential to be transformative on both individual and organizational level, enabling

individuals to exert control and engaging them in decision making for social change (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). This qualitative thesis research uses a focus group and semi-structured interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals to determine if and how environmental education programs can lead to empowerment during and beyond incarceration.

I have divided this thesis into two chapters. In chapter one, I explain my work under the guidance of thesis advisors - formerly incarcerated individuals with prison-based environmental education experience - in a seminar-style focus group setting, to define empowerment and determine what it means for someone to become empowered in a prison context. Examining Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment theory from a prison context enabled me to narrow my focus and ultimately set the scene for chapter two. Additionally, a priori themes identified based on the focus group discussions were used for subsequent data analysis. In chapter two, I explore the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with five formerly incarcerated individuals who have previously participated in prison-based environmental education programs. Using the data collected from the interviews, I performed a template analysis to determine if and how the themes fit into Zimmerman's empowerment theory framework.

*What does it mean for individuals in marginalized and oppressed communities to be empowered, and what tools are required for empowerment? How can environmental education empower incarcerated individuals in a correctional setting and beyond?* These questions will be addressed throughout this thesis to explore if and how the tools to empower individuals in marginalized and oppressed communities can be applied to in-prison nature-based education programs as a means for incarcerated individuals to

reclaim power and confidence and ultimately set them up for success within and beyond prisons.

## Positionality Statement

I, as the researcher, have never been incarcerated. My work with incarcerated individuals and corrections staff through the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) has given me an insight into the structure of prisons and a better understanding of various issues surrounding the justice system. I felt it was imperative that those with lived experience of incarceration have an active role in setting the agenda and influencing research design. Whenever possible, I collaborated with and received input from formerly incarcerated individuals to ensure that I conducted this research in an inclusive manner.

I am currently employed by the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP). This, combined with the research participants' previous experience with participating in SPP programs, may introduce some biases into this type of qualitative research. Whenever possible, I took into account the various types of possible participant and researcher biases including acquiescence bias, social desirability bias, sponsor bias, confirmation bias, and leading questions bias, and made attempts to minimize such biases by maintaining neutrality so as to reduce the influence on the outcome of the research.

## COVID-19 Acknowledgement

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of our lives. Within the walls of a prison, the threat of the virus has been amplified as lack of vital information and proper personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as the inability to social distant from

one another are reported across facilities nationally. As of this writing, 6,249 individuals have been diagnosed with COVID-19 in Washington State prisons, resulting in 14 deaths.

In conducting research pertaining to prisons, the exacerbated risk as a result of the pandemic posed added considerations that must be taken into account. The safety and wellbeing of incarcerated individuals are top priority, and any research conducted during the pandemic must proceed with this in mind. Furthermore, research must be designed in a way that does not ignore or minimize the threat of the pandemic aggravated by systemic injustice of corrections.

**Chapter 1. Agents of oppression and revolving doors: Understanding empowerment in a prison context**

*The truth of the matter is, we're not a bunch of pit bulls that have been caged our whole lives and that they're trying to just house us. But a lot of times that's the way it's perceived.*

- Former conservation nursery technician

## 1.1 Introduction

The United States currently incarcerates more people than any other country in the world at a staggering rate of 860 per 100,000 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). Further, data from the US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics show that about 68% of individuals released from prison were arrested within three years, 79% within six years, and 83% within nine years (Alpher, Durose, Markman, 2018). Despite Washington Department of Corrections' (WADOC) commitment to "transform lives for a better Washington" (Washington Department of Corrections, n.d.), empowerment and the prison system as they stand today are on complete opposite sides of the spectrum. How can we find an intersection of these two seemingly disparate concepts that were traditionally designed to never intersect? Through two separate sections in this chapter, I aim to explore the empowerment theory beyond the scope provided by Zimmerman (2000), and address what it means for someone to become empowered in a prison setting. In the literature review, I investigate the history of prisons and Zimmerman's empowerment theory framework to provide the necessary background information to better understand empowerment in a prison context. Following the literature review, I present the work I performed under the guidance of two thesis advisors with lived experience of incarceration to examine and understand the various factors that lead to

incarcerated individuals becoming disempowered within the current prison system, and what empowerment looks like in this environment.

## 1.2 Literature review: Defining empowerment in a prison context using the empowerment theory framework

### *1.2.1 Introduction*

The current prison system in the United States perpetuates poverty and jail time, trapping people in an endless cycle of incarceration. Prison, therefore, can be identified as a marginalized and oppressed community that <u>disempowers</u> incarcerated individuals by rendering them unworthy of citizenship and human rights (Castro, 2018). *What does it mean for individuals in marginalized and oppressed communities to be empowered, and what tools are required for empowerment?* This question will be addressed by examining the literature to explore how history and the modern justice system contribute to the continued systemic oppression of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. I will also explore the empowerment theory as the primary framework to build a foundation on which to conduct an investigation to define empowerment in a prison context.

### *1.2.2 Prison industrial complex and the history of imprisonment*

The prison industrial complex, a confluence of various government and industry interests encouraging incarceration as solutions to social, political, and economic problems, helps people in authoritative positions gain and maintain power through racial, economic, and other privileges at the cost of oppressing certain groups of people

(Schlosser, 1998). However, the root of the problem is deeply embedded in the culture and history of colonialism –one in which the European colonizers "claimed" native land by brute force. Power differentials have historically been institutionalized into social and economic systems of the United States to ensure certain groups of people always remained at a disadvantage. This system reinforced the power of certain groups of individuals while oppressing others.

Connections between slavery and imprisonment can provide a historical explanation of modern mass incarceration in which people in oppressed communities and people of color are overrepresented. The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery "except as a punishment for crime" (Gilmore, 2000). This exception allowed for racial discrimination and the continued forced labor of Black people. Shortly after the enactment of the 13th Amendment, the number of Black incarcerated individuals increased sharply. In Mississippi, there was a 300 percent increase in the number of incarcerated individuals, from 272 to 1,072 between 1874 and 1877 with a majority of them being persons of color. Georgia saw a similar increase, from 432 to 1,441 after a series of criminal laws were exacted to increase the number of serious crimes (Adamson, 1983).

The stipulation of the 13th Amendment created a new form of controlled and forced labor of Black people, supported by the enactment of the Black Codes and the convict leasing system. The Slave Codes were rewritten as the Black Codes after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. These laws restricted formerly enslaved individuals from obtaining employment and housing among others. Movement restrictions made seemingly non-criminal acts such as standing in a certain part of town

or walking at night a crime for "loitering" or "breaking the curfew" (Adamson, 1983; Benns, 2015; Browne, 2010). The enactment of these laws served as a legal medium for re-enslaving Black people.

Soon after, a convict leasing system was developed, further rolling back the gains made during Reconstruction. Under this system, the government "leased" out incarcerated individuals to White plantation owners, farmers, and political leaders for an average of $25,000 a year. The money, paid in exchange for control over their lives and labor, benefitted the state which received revenue, as well as the White business owners who had access to unwaged and unprotected workers (Benns, 2015; Browne, 2010).

The violent and torturous nature of convict leasing led to a reform as many states phased out the system. However, another brutal form of forced labor emerged in the form of chain gangs. Originally started in Georgia to support the expansion of roads in the 1890s, chain gangs consisted of incarcerated individuals with felony convictions compelled to work in poor and inhumane conditions. Five individuals were chained together around their ankles while they worked from dawn to dusk, shoveling dirt at a rate of 14 shovelfuls every minute. They were forced to remain chained up as they ate bug-infested and rotten food and slept in cages, all while having limited access to medical or bathing facilities (Lichtenstein, 1993). The torturous and inhumane conditions including corporal punishment such as whipping, confinement in a sweatbox under the sun, and hanging from bars (Lichtenstein, 1993), were disproportionately mapped onto people of color, as 80 percent of those in chain gangs were African American, despite them only representing 12 percent of the at the time (Kelly, 1999). It was not until the 1950s, almost 100 years after the end of the Civil War, that chain gangs were abolished in

every state (Browne, 2010). Thus, establishment of the prison system not only served as a functional replacement of slavery, but also a legal and political means to sustain cheap and free labor and further support white supremacy.

The prison industrial complex and further exploitation of prison labor continued through post-World War II, the Cold War, and into the late-20th century on a national scale. For instance, Camp Columbia, a prison labor camp, was established in 1944 near Yakima River in Washington to provide labor supporting the nearby Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Incarcerated individuals were transported from McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary to work in fruit orchards and farm lands acquired by the US Army, processing and canning fruits for military use (Davis, 2002).

With an unprecedented growth in the number of prisoners, states continued to leverage profits from prison labor. Contending that prison labor may save taxpayer money, provide vocational training and thus help boost post-release employment, and reduce recidivism rates, Washington Correctional Industries (CI) -- founded in 1983 -- employs incarcerated individuals to operate factories to produce low-cost goods for state agencies. Yet, CI has cost taxpayers $20 million since 2007, and their claims of improved employment prospects and reduced recidivism have yet to be proven, all while reaping millions of dollars in revenue and perpetuating mass incarceration through cheap prison labor (Berens & Baker, 2014).

### 1.2.3 Prison in the 21st Century

The incarceration rate in the United States has only continued to increase, with over 2.2 million people currently in prisons or jails – more than any other country in the

world (Davis et al., 2014). Aggravated in part by the War on Drugs and the "get tough on crime" efforts started in the late 20th century, prison populations continue to remain racially skewed to this day as Black and Latinx individuals are disproportionately targeted for incarceration (Alexander, 2012; Castro, 2018; Lynch & Sabol 1997). As a result of this systemic racism, people of color are more likely to be tacitly trapped in this vicious cycle of continued incarceration.

Forced and cheap labor is still prevalent in many prisons across the nation where incarcerated individuals are required to work if cleared by medical professionals, and are often punished for refusing to do so (Benns, 2015). Furthermore, incarcerated individuals, who on average make $0.14 to $1.41 per hour, are not protected by minimum wage or overtime laws that protect workers who do the exact same jobs on the other side of the barbed-wire fence (Sawyer, 2017; Browne, 2010).

Incarceration negatively affects an individual's economic and social prospects post release. A comprehensive report on the effects of incarceration on economic mobility by the Pew Charitable Trusts (2010) found that incarceration reduces hourly wages for men by approximately 11 percent and annual earnings by 40 percent after they have completed their sentences. Furthermore, a formerly incarcerated individual on average will have earned a total of $179,000 less through age 48 than if they had never been incarcerated.

Racial inequalities are also evident as incarceration depresses the total earnings of White males by two percent, of Latino males by six percent, and of Black males by nine percent (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Felony disenfranchisement laws also disproportionately affect people of color. Of the 5.3 million adults who cannot vote

because of felony-class criminal convictions, a full third are Black, leading to nearly eight percent of all adult Black individuals in the United States having been stripped of their right to vote (Castro, 2018). Furthermore, people of color are more likely to be mistreated solely based on their race, background, or culture. Black and Latinx individuals are more likely to be ticketed and searched during traffic stops than White people (Langton & Durose, 2013). Police are also 3.6 times more likely to use force against Black people than they are against White people when making an arrest (Castro, 2018). Additionally, the adverse impacts of incarceration will extend far beyond the incarcerated individual to their children and families. Statistics show that one in nine Black children (11.4 percent), one in 28 Latinx children (3.5 percent) and one in 57 White children (1.8 percent) have an incarcerated parent (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). Children who have currently or previously incarcerated parents are more likely to suffer from physical, psychological, educational, and financial burdens. Parental incarceration may also be tied to increased rates of depression and anxiety of their child, which frequently disrupt their educational performance (Cyphert, 2018). A study by Davis and Shlafer also found that "youth with currently and formerly incarcerated parents were more likely to report substance use and abuse compared to youth who have never experienced the incarceration of a parent" (Davis and Shlafer , 2016, pg. 8) As such, the effects of parental incarceration extends far beyond the parent as their children, too, become victims of mass incarceration.

Poverty and racial inequalities are not only predictors of incarceration and the justice system, but also frequently the outcome, preventing individuals from escaping the cycle of reincarceration (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Amidst this mass incarceration crisis

in which one every 116 adults is incarcerated in the United States, poverty and race play

a central role in the current criminal justice system (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016).

Even before sentencing, low-income individuals most likely cannot afford the high price

of bail. The median felony bail bond of $10,000 equates to roughly eight months' income

for an average detained defendant (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). As a result, low-income

detainees spend more time in jails and prisons compared to their high-income

counterparts. This widens disparities in social and racial classes though accumulating

debt, decimating future job opportunities, and increasing risk of physical and mental

health, ultimately affecting their resilience and ability to improve their quality of life.

Consequently, people of color, who already face greater rates of poverty, are subjected to

higher rates of reincarceration and become significantly overrepresented in the United

States prison system (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). This racially further reinforces and

makes it increasingly difficult to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration.

In 2010, White people, incarcerated at a rate of 450 per 100,000, comprised 29%

of the incarcerated population while making up 64% of the United States population.

Both Black and Latinx individuals were overrepresented in correctional settings, making

up 40% and 19% of the prison population despite representing only 13% and 16% of the

United States population respectively (Sakala, 2014). Thus, the justice system in the

United States can be described as a system that locks up low-income individuals, and as a

result, disproportionately imprisons people of color and perpetuating an endless cycle of

poverty and incarceration. While significant efforts have been made over the years to

address various forms of injustice surrounding prisons in the United States, brutal forces

of racism and social inequality continue to sustain and drive forward the justice system.

### 1.2.4 Empowerment theory

By design, the current justice system ensures that the incarcerated people are and will remain disempowered. The negative impacts of incarceration will also remain with the individuals post-release, as many of them are stripped of their rights and abilities to participate in many aspects of social life which could, and often does, lead to reincarceration. With this in mind, we must create effective support systems and outlets in which to help empower incarcerated individuals. I now revisit the question: *What does it mean for individuals in marginalized and oppressed communities to be empowered, and what tools are required for empowerment?*

Zimmerman defined empowerment as

*A value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life (Zimmerman, 2000, pg. 43).*

Thus, empowerment includes both the process and the outcome by which people gain greater access to available resources and mastery over their lives (Swift & Levin, 1987; Rappaport, 1984; Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). Empowering process refers to the action taken to achieve a goal or an outcome. Empowered outcome measures the resulting effect or consequence of people's attempts to gain greater access to resources, and control over their lives (Zimmerman, 2000). Furthermore, this framework can be viewed as a multi-level approach where empowerment can occur at the individual, organizational, and community levels (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman 2000). On all three of these levels of analyses, participation, control, and critical awareness are key aspects that could ultimately lead to empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000).

According to Zimmerman, empowerment on an individual level involves "beliefs about one's competence, efforts to exert control, and understanding of the socio-political environment" (Zimmerman, 2000, pg. 46). In other words, empowerment on this level requires that individuals gain critical awareness of their social and political situation so they can identify and cultivate resources they need to achieve a desired outcome or goal (Kieffer, 1984). On the individual level, the empowering process may include learning decision-making skills and managing resources, while gaining a sense of control and critical awareness are considered empowered outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000).

Empowerment on an organizational level occurs within organizations that undertake the process, and as a result produce an outcome in which members gain control over their lives. The empowering process on this level may include shared responsibility and leadership and collective skill development as a result of collaborative work or action, while empowered outcome may include influencing policy or developing of a sense of identity (Zimmerman, 2000).

On a community level, empowerment involves individuals as well as organizations working collaboratively to improve the community by identifying and responding to community needs and threats to quality of life, and providing opportunities for citizen participation (Cottrell, 1983; Zimmerman, 2000). Examples of empowering communities (a process) includes providing access to resources and encouraging diversity and inclusion, while characteristics of empowered communities (an outcome) may includes formation of organizational coalitions and outlets for citizen participation (Zimmerman, 2000).

Zimmerman's theoretical model served as a starting point at which to explore empowerment in a prison context. In the next section, I describe the work I conducted with previously incarcerated thesis advisors to determine if and how incarcerated individuals gain empowerment in a correctional setting.

### 1.2.5 Conclusion

Because empowerment is context and population specific as stated by Zimmerman (2000), the empowerment theory will be used as the main theoretical framework to define empowerment from in a prison context. The resulting and refined definition of empowerment will then ultimately serve as the foundation on which to determine how environmental education fits into the empowerment construct and act as a platform for empowerment during incarceration and beyond.

## 1.3 Analysis: lessons from thesis advisors

### 1.3.1 Background

Because empowerment is context and population specific, as stated by Zimmerman (2000), understanding how prison-based education programs can empower incarcerated individuals requires that we define and understand what it means to become empowered in a prison context for incarcerated individuals. Zimmerman (2000) also stated that the empowerment process requires community participants to have an active role not only in implementing the programs, but also in setting their agendas. Furthermore, the underlying definition of empowerment as well as the process to achieve it "*must be self-defined by the people of concern, otherwise we undercut by our metacommunications the very essence of empowerment*" (Rappaport, 1984, pg. 4). In the

context of this thesis, the people of concern refers to incarcerated individuals. As such, those with lived-experience with incarceration must have an active role in influencing the research through input and feedback to ensure the research is being conducted in a way that is effectively empowering. This led to two questions: *What is required for incarcerated individuals to gain empowerment in a correctional setting? Similarly, what are the barriers preventing them from becoming empowered?* By working with two formerly incarcerated thesis advisors, I attempt to answer these questions and develop a research design for conducting semi-structured interviews that accurately portrays the problems that exist within corrections and encompasses the need to resolve that issue.

The current system of incarceration reinforces a cycle that ensures that the incarcerated people remain without power and control. By recognizing the power imbalance that exists between those who are incarcerated and those who are not; and by working with thesis advisors who have a lived experience with incarceration, I attempt to prevent taking a top-down approach in conducting a research project that involves incarcerated individuals, preventing their true voices from being heard and, as a result, perpetuating the cycle. By recognizing them as equal partners, I ensure inclusivity and conduct accurate and useful research that will not only advance this field of scholarship but also address the issues surrounding our justice system.

In this research, I regard thesis advisors as the expert teachers, providing vital information to help shed more light on racial and social injustices surrounding the current system of incarceration, and to promote social change in a way that empowers incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, the process of working with thesis advisors is necessary as it helps establish a space where true voices and stories of those with lived

experience of incarceration can be heard. Including the thesis advisors as teachers for the researcher not only serves to flip the researcher-research participant power dynamic into a student-teacher relationship, but also allows them to be in control of the situation.

Thesis advisors are not considered research subjects, and no data were collected about them or used to write this thesis. The primary goals of working with thesis advisors included:

- defining empowerment in a prison context,

- collaboratively identifying a priori themes, and

- providing support and input in framing interview questions to be used for the semi- structured interviews in Chapter 2.

All meetings were conducted remotely using Zoom to comply with all COVID-19 protocols, and took approximately four hours for each participant. This included an hour to read key background materials (journal papers and book chapters provided by the researcher), an hour each for two focus group sessions at an hour each, and another hour for time spent on corresponding with the researcher (ie: reading and writing emails, asking questions, setting up meetings). Figure 1 outlines the process for this section of the study.



*Figure 1. Flowchart outlining the process of working with thesis advisors.*

The first session focused on defining empowerment within a prison context. This session was designed to be unstructured and thus to create an open space in which the participants could speak freely. I minimized researcher facilitation so that the thesis advisors maintained control of the session. In the second session, the group collaboratively worked on identifying a priori themes based on the definition of empowerment that had been discussed in the previous session. These themes were used as a part of data analysis and to inform semi-structured interview questions. A draft form of semi-structured interview questions were shared with the group. Based on the work from the earlier session, the group then provided input on framing these questions. Figures 2 and 3 depict the key terms of empowerment and disempowerment that were identified during the two sessions with thesis advisors.



*Figure 2. Key terms which contribute to the continued disempowerment of incarcerated individuals, identified in collaboration with thesis advisors.*

18

*Figure 3. Key terms which enable incarcerated individuals to gain empowerment, identified in collaboration with thesis advisors.*

Conducting accurate and meaningful research involving the systems of incarceration requires that the voices of those most impacted by the system play a central role in driving the research forward. Furthermore, as the researcher, I need to ensure that my narratives accurately portray and reflect the voices of those with lived-experience with incarceration while simultaneously taking deliberate actions to prevent using their voices to fit my narrative. As equal partners in this research, the role of thesis advisors include influencing the research design and helping the primary researcher better understand the primary issue. In the following section, I outline lessons I learned from working with thesis advisors, discussing what leads to incarcerated individuals becoming disempowered, and what it means for them to gain empowerment in this environment. As such, the next section is a synthesis of the voices of the thesis advisors as well as my

understanding of empowerment in a prison context based on research, past experience, and conversations with thesis advisors.

### *1.3.2 Lessons from thesis advisors: the oppressive prison culture*

**Dehumanizing experiences**

The thesis advisors frequently mentioned 'dehumanizing experiences' during our conversations. As soon as somebody enters the door into a prison facility, they are assigned a DOC number. They are stripped bare naked to be searched, told when to eat, when to leave their cell, and forced to work for pennies. Human beings who enter the carceral system are reduced to numbers and often become referred to as *offenders, convicts*, or *inmates*. The use of such outdated language takes away power, control, and anything that makes the incarcerated human beings, labeling them as *offenders, convicts*, or *inmates*, to reinforce the idea that that is their sole identity and role during their time in prison. When these individuals are reduced to these terms or numbers, it becomes more difficult to see them beyond these labels. They are no longer individuals with their own ideas or personalities. In fact, as the thesis advisors helped me understand, people in prison are often reduced to and seen as a single snapshot of their lives – a snapshot of an action that resulted in their incarceration. This perpetuates the systemic oppression that eternally criminalizes and dehumanizes incarcerated individuals. By using labels and seeing the incarcerated only as perpetrators of crimes, it becomes easier to ignore elements of their past beyond the reason they are in prison, or their future possibilities – all of which make them a unique human being. Could they be an artist, a student, a teacher, a social and environmental activist? This list of possibilities can be much longer

but for the forces of systemic oppression and dehumanization that create an image of them as nothing more than an *inmate* doing time in prison.

**Fear**

One of the ways in which prison administrators retain power and control over the incarcerated individuals is by using fear. Incarcerated individuals, who often lack power and control, are supervised by those on the other side of the power dynamic spectrum who are tasked with enforcing policies and protocols. In this environment, incarcerated individuals become more prone to unfair punishments stemming from the abuse of power. Excessive and unjust punishments are often used to reinforce this power dynamic, often resulting in infractions or the incarcerated being sent to administrative segregation or intensive management units (IMU). As made clear by the thesis advisors, incarcerated individuals are frequently put in a position where they are unable to speak up or freely share their thoughts and opinions. This isn't to argue for or against the use of punishments like infractions or administrative segregation. Rather, I point out that the system of incarceration operates on fear, where the incarcerated persons are often stifled, knowing that there will be (often unfair) retribution, reinforcing a culture and system where those without power remain suppressed and silenced.

**Isolation, stigma, and discrimination**

Disconnected from the rest of the world and outside communities, prison functions as its own community, going as far as relying on the incarcerated individuals to perform various jobs within the facility to support its operations. As a result, people

remain isolated with minimal human contact. They are separated from their families, and stripped of everything that brings them comfort and connection to the outside world. Regardless of how much time they have on their sentence, feeling distant from everything on the other side of the fence is not an uncommon occurrence. As thesis advisors helped me understand, many incarcerated people have been subjugated by the system; in county jails, the court system, and on the streets, before they even arrive at prison. Once there, they are placed in a cell within a concrete building with gates, barbed-wire fences and walls, and are expected to become rehabilitated upon completion of their sentence. Ultimately this sense of alienation and isolation significantly contributes to the disempowerment of incarcerated individuals, preventing them from having a chance at improving their lives during and beyond incarceration.

Prisons are designed to constrain incarcerated individuals within the walls, making it easier for the general public to disregard or inadvertently forget their existence. However, a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that at least 95% of all incarcerated individuals in a state prison will reenter society at some point (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). In many cases, people suffer the negative impacts of incarceration even after being released. This negative perception often overshadows the various efforts that promote rehabilitation, personal development, and empowerment of those who are incarcerated. The stigma of incarceration will often continue to negatively impact their lives as they likely face obstacles in at least the following areas: employment, housing, military service, holding public office, parental rights, travel, public social benefits, jury service, education, and voting (Castro, 2018). This continued negative perception and

stigma results in an endless cycle that perpetuates the disempowerment of incarcerated individuals.

**Culture of "us versus them"**

Many instances in which incarcerated individuals become disempowered in prison can be attributed to the culture of *us versus them*, a binary viewpoint that pits the administrators and the incarcerated people against each other to reinforce the preexisting power dynamics. Such thinking can be linked to the dualism stage of William Perry's (1968) model of intellectual and ethical development, where everything can be ordered into one of two categories, with an authority figure who has the answers to the absolutes (Bizzell, 1984). This fails to take into account the relativistic viewpoint, or gray areas in between. Problems arise in a correctional setting with this dualistic approach, when prison administrators ignore or do not prioritize the needs or best interests of incarcerated individuals. Prison administrators also do not effectively serve the role of authority figure in Perry's intellectual model. In fact, it creates a conflict of interest within the dualistic view of *us versus them* as they attempt to fill two roles within Perry's model: one as the authority figure and another as one of the two absolutes (administrators and incarcerated individuals).

Based on my conversation with the thesis advisors, it quickly became clear that there is a distinct and divisive line that separates a group of human beings within a concrete building based on whether one has a badge or not, upheld and reinforced by both sides. Disempowerment of incarcerated individuals stemming from the oppressive culture is further exacerbated by the level of disconnect among the prison staff at various levels

of the administration. This results in the lack of connection and accountability, kicking problems down the road for somebody else to deal with. Ultimately, these staff are the agents of oppression, acting on behalf of those with more power, collectively perpetuating a culture that ensures those on the other side of the line, those without badges, remain oppressed and disempowered. To clarify, not all prison administrators are agents of oppression. In fact, to broadly label all prison staff as such will only reinforce the very culture of *us versus them*. However, I learned from my discussions with the thesis advisors that those who are members of the dominant group within this system with vast power differentials need to make conscious decisions to redistribute this power and agency to the incarcerated individuals in a way that they can create opportunities and connections for improving their future prospect within and beyond prisons.

### *1.3.3 Lessons from thesis advisors: empowerment within the prison walls.*

**Autonomy and Connection**

As noted by the thesis advisors, people in a prison environment are continually disempowered, and have no choice but to become reliant on the system and the agents of oppression, making them wards of the state. In the process, they are put in their cells, placed on restricted movement and told to walk along a yellow line, and are stripped of various aspects of what make them human beings. In this oppressive and dehumanizing environment where there are limited choices, access, and opportunities, they end up fighting each other for control somewhere in their lives. Violence is common in these settings, and it is often one of the only ways to obtain or maintain control of a small shred of life. Goffman (1961) supports this claim by describing how incarcerated individuals

24

may deploy violence to resist the power and control of the institution, and to impose their own sense of order. This leads to a culture of violence.

Throughout my discussions, I learned that gaining empowerment requires a systemic and cultural change that enables currently incarcerated individuals to have more control over their lives to make positive changes through increased opportunities and ability to make choices. Thesis advisors pointed out that, mentoring their peers, sharing special skills or knowledge, or starting new programs, are just some examples that can help the incarcerated find significance in purpose and thus become empowered. Unfortunately, such opportunities are extremely few and far between.

Incarcerated individuals could also greatly benefit from having increased opportunities to find and make connections. Finding connections with their peers, with staff, and with those in outside communities, opens the door to a world of new opportunities where people can look beyond differences, find common ground, and establish relationships. This also bridges the *us versus them* dynamic, helping to see beyond their typical role in their environment that is reinforced by the system (ie: incarcerated individuals, prison staff, non-incarcerated community members) and humanizing the experience for all parties.

Autonomy in a prison context can be defined as a "perceived possibility to regulate one's own behavior" (van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013, pg. 430). This heightened sense of personal control allows incarcerated individuals to have better outcome control, increased choices, and improved predictability of future events (Goodstein et al., 1984). Having autonomy and connections gives the incarcerated a heightened sense of rapport and teamwork for making positive changes. As pointed out

by the thesis advisors, when people coexist in a collaborative environment with healthy relationships, natural outcomes such as learning to be patient, becoming a better communicator, and being an active listener, can be observed. These changes can have significant positive impacts in a prison setting where people tend to be racially and culturally segregated, or as the thesis advisors explained, "cliqued up". Being able to connect with those outside of their group is undoubtedly healthy and beneficial. It may start with smaller actions, like eating or working together, to merging circles to build a diverse community and thus respect and appreciation for one another. This act of breaking down walls, as explained by thesis advisors, provides agency for collective action, and is beneficial on both individual and community levels. These skills apply to various aspects of life beyond their time in prison, serving to empower these individuals even after their release. Ultimately, greater autonomy and connection may allow for new possibilities in which to improve their lives during and beyond incarceration.

**Realizing self-worth**

Those who enter the prison system have frequently been subjected to systemic oppression before they even arrive at the facility. As such, their sense of self-worth and self-efficacy have often already taken a beating, only for them to become further disempowered in prison, where choices and opportunities are severely limited. This is further exacerbated by the previously explained circumstance in which incarcerated people are referred to as *inmates* or *offenders*. It often becomes difficult to consider themselves as anything more than traditional labels of prison culture that get applied to them, and in the process damaging their own self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore, a

26

major part of gaining empowerment in a prison entails having opportunities where incarcerated individuals can realize and rediscover their self-worth. People benefit greatly from having the opportunity to can feel a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment. Furthermore, seeing beyond the traditional labels through these opportunities enables incarcerated individuals to realize the possibilities of what they can accomplish and a sense of self-belief that they have the power to make positive changes during and beyond incarceration.

Thesis advisors also helped me understand that opportunities that give them a sense of purpose and significance greatly contribute to their ability to realize their self-worth. Some examples provided during the conversations include undertaking a specialized job which allows them to positively contribute to the greater community, such as caring for an endangered species. Prisons frequently rely on the incarcerated individuals to ensure day-to-day operations by employing them for various positions across the facility, and, for some, providing vocational skills and training that translate to jobs outside of prison.

Gaining empowerment requires that incarcerated people are provided with opportunities to carry out meaningful tasks that enable them to find a purpose and significance. Making meaningful contributions toward a purpose or a goal allows for a rediscovery of sense of pride and self-belief, which can significantly contribute to a renewed sense of self-worth. One such example provided by the thesis advisor is working in a composting program where participants coordinate vermicompost and bokashi composting (a fermentation process for food waste) and breeding black soldier flies to help reduce facility food waste and create beneficial soil amendment to be used in the

prison gardens. As indicated by the thesis advisors, these experiences in which they are

able to positively contribute to their community may lead to the realization of self-worth.

This will not only benefit the incarcerated on a personal level, but also have broader

effects, potentially contributing to changing people's attitudes about what can be

accomplished in prison.

**Trust and accountability**

In a prison environment where incarcerated people are bound by strict policies,

procedures, and protocols, such as restricted movement and strip searches, opportunities

where they can gain trust and practice accountability are limited. However, increasing

such opportunities is vital in efforts to create a space where incarcerated individuals can

become empowered. As a result of being entrusted with certain responsibilities such as

caring for living organisms through the Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) programs

including honeybees, butterflies, turtles, and various plants, potential outcomes include

being able to trust themselves, further contributing to their ability to realize their self-

worth and what they are capable of achieving. Greater responsibility and trust also

enables incarcerated individuals to practice and promote accountability in their daily

habits and relationships. One potential outcome of such practice is its impact on their

ability to reflect on their past and develop and execute plans for a transformative change

both within and beyond prisons. Transformative change can be defined as "*a process by*

*which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives*

*are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified*" (Cranton,

2006, pg. 6). Some examples, as pointed out by the thesis advisors, may include

28

undertaking a job which allows them to positively contribute to their community or pursuing post-secondary education.  Such undertakings may provide a sense of empowerment through the exposure to new ideas which help counteract the negative effects of incarceration.

Furthermore, accountability must be equally practiced by all parties within the system. It is not only the incarcerated individuals who must practice accountability but also the prison administrators and other non-incarcerated individuals. As discussed in my conversations with the thesis advisors, there were many issues of lack of accountability where prison administrators often failed to follow through on agreements they had with incarcerated individuals. Ultimately, empowerment through accountability and trust only works if all players within the system of concern actively work to establish new opportunities in which those who are marginalized can take part.

Based on my discussions with the thesis advisors, I learned that positive outcomes of increased trust include a sense of respect and appreciation, and more importantly, being valued as a human being for who they are. While opportunities inside a prison are sparse, incarcerated individuals are capable of doing much of the same work that are commonly done by those with job titles, degrees, or licenses in outside communities if given the chance. Yet they continue to be disempowered in the current system, aggravated by the generalized public perception that they are often incapable of doing the same work as non-incarcerated individuals solely based on their incarceration. Stigma, therefore, is a major contributing factor to the negative consequences for individuals with a criminal record (Evans et al., 2018). Legal barriers also present challenges with various aspects of reentry such as housing and employment. For instance, a criminal record may

disqualify a formerly incarcerated individual from employment, especially in licensed or professional occupations (Western et al., 2001). Despite the various barriers and constraints that exist within a prison environment, they are capable of doing things to contribute to and make positive changes within the greater community. Ultimately meaningful opportunities where incarcerated individuals are valued and trusted may serve to counter the public narratives and enable incarcerated individuals to gain a sense of respect and appreciation.

## 1.4 Conclusion

Through the literature review and working with thesis advisors, I explored the definition of empowerment beyond Zimmerman's theoretical framework, specifically addressing what it means for somebody to gain empowerment in a prison setting.  I now revisit the question: *What does it mean for individuals in marginalized and oppressed communities to be empowered, and what tools are required for empowerment?* In attempting to answer this question, it quickly became clear that the agents of oppression systemically ensures that the incarcerated individuals always remain at a disadvantage and thus disempowered, during and beyond their incarceration. As such, prisons and empowerment are two contrasting concepts made exceedingly difficult to overlap due to various systemic forces that perpetuate the prison industrial complex. However, as thesis advisors helped inform, there are a multitude of benefits that emerge from the intersection of these two concepts, and this overlap is where incarcerated individuals are able to diverge from the revolving prison doors and forge a new path to success. Empowerment in prisons requires a systemic paradigm shift where opportunities for a transformative

change are made accessible to all incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, empowerment requires that we humanize the process to change the public narrative of incarceration in a way that views these individuals beyond a snapshot of a mistake, and as human beings. I echo a question raised by one of the thesis advisors: *What is a human being worth?*

**Chapter 2. Journey of transformation: Environmental education as a platform for empowerment**

*… education can come in many different forms … I also think that it taught me that you can find peace and grow in the worst situation possible.*

- Former butterfly program technician

## 2.1 Introduction

Studies involving the topic of in-prison education programs as a goal to reduce recidivism abound (for example, Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). However, recidivism rates in the United States remain alarmingly high, with a report by the U.S. Department of Justice (Alper & Durose, 2018) indicating that five out of every six individuals released from state prisons were rearrested at least once within nine years of their release. This leads to the question: *Do the current in-prison education programs effectively serve their intended purpose to provide opportunities which help improve the future of incarcerated individuals* (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014)? Environmental education as a means to empower incarcerated individuals has gone widely unexplored. Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) stated that gaining empowerment requires enabling individuals to exert control and engaging them in decision-making for social change. *How can environmental education empower incarcerated individuals in a correctional setting and beyond*? In this chapter I address this question by first exploring the literature on the benefits of exposure to and interaction with nature and living organisms, and environmental racism as barriers preventing oppressed and marginalized individuals and communities from participating in environmental movements. I then explain the semi-structured interviews I conducted with previously incarcerated prison-based environmental education program participants to investigate how environmental

education can fit into the empowerment construct and ultimately serve as a platform for empowerment in prisons and beyond.

## 2.2 Literature Review

### 2.2.1 Benefits of exposure to and interaction with nature and living organisms

Throughout history, humans have had an intimate relationship with nature. While our overall interaction with nature has been significantly reduced as a result of modernization and industrialization, it continues to be an integral part of human lives as we heavily depend on natural environment for our well-being. A wide range of benefits from interacting with nature has been reported in the literature, spanning physical health and psychological well-being to cognitive ability and social cohesion (Berto, 2014). Benefits of interacting with nature will be presented by utilizing the following typology outlined by Keninger et al. (2013): *mental state, physical function and/or physical health, cognitive ability or function, spiritual well-being, and social effect at an individual and community scale.*

*Positive effect on mental state*

Interacting with nature can have a wide range of benefits from increased self-esteem and improved mood to reduced anxiety, anger, and frustration (Keninger et al, 2013). Chang and Chen (2005) found in their study on the effects of window views and indoor plants on human psychophysiological response that the participants showed signs of reduced nervousness and anxiety when they had a view of nature and/or when indoor plants were present, while participants suffered the highest degree of tension and anxiety when placed in an environment without a window view and/or indoor plants. Similarly,

Han (2008) found that in a classroom of middle school students, participants showed significantly stronger feelings of comfort and friendliness with the addition of a plant to the classroom compared to a control class without any plants. The experimental group with plants also had fewer hours of sick leave and punishment records due to misbehavior than the control group. These studies collectively show that even indirect interaction with and exposure to nature (ie: having an indoor plant) can have a positive impact on the mental state of individuals in a given environment. In prison settings where incarcerated people are prone to higher levels of mental fatigue and rates of mental health challenges, nature contact delivers a wide range of benefits on their mental state such as heightened feelings of calm and wellbeing (Moran, 2019).

*Positive effect on physical function and/or physical health*

Studies have also shown that interaction with nature can lead to reduced stress and cortisol levels, and help with addiction recovery. In Van Den Berg and Custers' (2011) research on gardening and affective restoration from stress, participants who took part in 30 minutes of outdoor gardening following a stressful Stroop task, a psychological test that requires participants to respond to incongruent stimuli, positive mood was fully restored after gardening. Furthermore, this interaction with nature through gardening promoted relief from acute stress (Van Den Berg & Custers, 2011). Another study by Bennett et al. (1998) investigated the effect of a therapeutic camping program on addiction recovery and determined that directly interacting with and being exposed to nature lead to significant improvements in autonomic arousal, frequency of negative thoughts, and alcohol craving. Researchers in this field unanimously indicate a positive

34

relationship between nature and human physical function and/or physical health (Van Den Berg & Custers, 2011; Bennett et al., 1998). With 73.6% of individuals in the criminal justice system having substance abuse involved with their criminal behaviors (Beck, 2000), the positive effects of nature contact on physical function and health may contribute to supporting incarcerated individuals with substance abuse disorders with pain management and reduction in stress and anxiety (Berry et al., 2020).

*Positive effect on cognitive ability or function*

Further empirical evidence suggests that interaction with nature delivers a wide range of human benefits specifically related to cognitive ability or function. To investigate the effects of plants on task performance and mood, Shibata and Suzuki (2002) conducted research into the behaviors of high school students who performed various tasks in a room with and without plants present. They determined that the presence of plants had a positive impact on the outcome of the tasks, especially on tasks associated with creative work. Similarly, Wells (2000) investigated the relationship between the naturalness and restorativeness of the home environment and the cognitive functioning of low-income urban children. Wells found that children who had greater levels of greenness at home tended to have higher levels of cognitive functioning.

*Positive effect on spiritual well-being*

A number of studies exist to show that exposure to natural scenes enhances spiritual well-being. In Fredrickson and Anderson's (1999) research examining qualitative aspects of the exposure to nature as a source of spiritual inspiration,

participants stated that the power of nature through complete immersion contributed to their experience and acted as possible sources of spiritual inspiration. Curtin (2009) further supported this claim by stating that interaction with nature leads to spiritual fulfillment and psychological health benefits. Collectively, these studies support the premise that there is a wide range of physiological and spiritual human benefits stemming from both direct and indirect exposure to, and interaction with natural scenes.

*Positive social effect at an individual and community scale*

Interactions among community members within natural settings can enhance social capital, establish a meaningful relationship with other community members with similar goals, values, and interests, and develop a sense of belonging. For example, being a part of nature-based community such as community gardens provides benefits such as increased social cohesion, social support, and social connections (Kingsley & Townsend, 2006). Evidence also suggests that contact with nature can mitigate mental fatigue, and consequently reduce aggression and violence (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001; Kaplan, 1995). In their investigation into the effects of environment on mental fatigue, Kuo and Sullivan (2001) found that residents living in barren buildings had higher levels of mental fatigue, and as a result reported more aggression and violence than those living in greener buildings. Similar findings were also observed in prison settings by Nadkarni et al. (2017): nature-deprived incarcerated individuals who had access to nature videos reported feeling more empathetic and committed 26% fewer violent infractions compared to those who did not have access to these videos. Collectively, these findings suggest that the positive social effects from both direct and vicarious experiences with nature may be

especially beneficial in nature-deprived settings such as prisons due to the forced proximity of people enduring various forms of hardships.

### *2.2.2 Environmental racism and the exclusion of oppressed and marginalized individuals and communities in environmental movements*

While the literature outlining the benefits of interacting with nature abounds, access to the natural environment is disproportionately skewed, leaving certain groups significantly more nature-deprived (Borunda, 2020) and more prone to the impacts of environmental issues such as pollution and contaminated drinking water than others (Bell, 2016). The United Nations Environment Programme defines environmental rights as a substantive and procedural human right to environmental conditions of a specified quality. Substantive rights refers to "*those in which the environment has a direct effect on the existence or the enjoyment of the right itself*" including;

- civil and political rights such as the rights to life,

- freedom of association and freedom from discrimination,

- economic and social rights such as rights to health, food, and an adequate standard of living,

- cultural rights such as rights to access religious sites, and

- collective rights affected by environmental degradation such as the rights of indigenous peoples (The United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.).

Procedural rights "*prescribe formal steps to be taken in enforcing legal rights*", and these include the three fundamental access rights: access to information, public participation, and access to justice (United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.). While efforts to

improve environmental conditions have appeared across the globe, such movements frequently exclude marginalized groups, who are often on the front lines and most affected by the problems the movements aim to rectify (Jones, 2020).

Low-income people of color are disproportionately affected by various detrimental environmental conditions, often unable to escape from the cycle that perpetuates and reinforces poverty and oppression due to systemic injustice that is designed to prevent them from improving their future economic and social prospect. Low-income communities of color are often consciously targeted for polluting operations due to lower property costs in those neighborhoods and the lack of political and economic power of the community members to resist such operations. For instance, Bell and Ebisu (2012) found racial and ethnic disparities in exposure to toxic pollutants, where Whites had the lowest exposures while Non-Hispanic Blacks had higher exposures than did Whites for 13 of the 14 airborne pollutants they tested. In addition, vulnerable communities with weak political opposition become more at risk to harmful exposure because government agencies are more likely to approve polluting projects there than in wealthier communities. Furthermore, when these communities often lack the ability to attract economic development, they are coerced into bringing polluting developments into their communities with the promise of associated jobs, economic development, and tax revenue (Jantz, 2019).

The effects of environmental degradation are not equally distributed across socioeconomic and racial groups; low-income people of color are more likely than White people to experience unequal access to nature and live in nature deprived areas where they cannot safety get outside, access clean water and air, and experience a diversity of

wildlife (Rowland-Shea et al., 2020). Unequal access to nature is further supported by the underrepresentation of people of color at natural resource and environmental agencies, as well as people of color feeling unwelcome or in danger when visiting public lands and other public areas designated for the enjoyment of nature due to the risk of being targeted, stereotyped, or harmed (Newsome, 2020; Lanham, 2020). For instance, Erickson et al. (2009) found in their research various historical and cultural factors that resulted in low use of national parks by African Americans. Respondents in their study cited concerns over physical safety and fears of traveling outside of ones' comfort zone, rooted in historical racism. As such, people of color are more likely to not only have unequal access, but also experience risk to their safety, difficulties gaining access, and alienation in outdoor spaces for simply trying to enjoy or protect nature (Rowland-Shea et al., 2020).

Violation of procedural environmental rights prevent low-income people of color from accessing vital information and means for active participation in matters that directly impact them. Oftentimes, those who are most threatened or affected by environmental impacts are not a part of the solution process. In terms of climate change, Ghosh (2016) points out that since the period of Western industrialization, the emerging fossil fuel economies required that other nations be prevented from developing coal-based energy systems of their own. It is in fact true that

> *poor nations of the world are not poor because they were indolent or unwilling; their poverty is itself an effect of the inequalities created by the carbon economy; it is the result of systems that were set up by brute force to ensure that poor nations remained always at a disadvantage in terms of both wealth and power (Ghosh, 2016, pg. 110).*

How can we resolve various environmental challenges if those who are most vulnerable are absent from the discussion? The environmental movement has been for the most part

dominated by White people and perspectives, leading to discrimination and the framing

of priorities through their exclusive view point (Taylor, 2014; Purdy, 2015). Attempting

to address and resolve climate change in an exclusive manner without the participation of

diverse groups is merely self-serving. Ultimately, the outcome will be far less effective in

resolving various issues to protect our environment than that of a more inclusive

approach.


### 2.2.3 Environmental Education in Prisons

Educational programs and opportunities made available in correctional settings

nation-wide provide skill building and job training. Such programs aim to assist

incarcerated individuals to vocational training and education to assist with reentry and

reduce recidivism rates. Maltz (1984) defines recidivism as:

> *... a reversion of an individual to criminal behavior after he or she has been*
>
> *convicted of a prior offence, sentenced, and (presumably) corrected.*

An overwhelming majority of currently incarcerated individuals enter prison without a

GED or high school diploma (The Pew Charitable Trust, 2010). Between 1970 and 2010,

nearly all of the 700 percent increase in incarceration was concentrated among those with

no formal college education (National Research Council, 2014). Thus, education is

integral to the rehabilitative goals of both state and federal corrections, and it has become

increasingly common for individuals to be able to earn a GED or high school diploma

while incarcerated.

Studies conducted on education and recidivism rates unanimously indicate that

education leads to lower rates of recidivism (Koo, 2015; Lewis, 2018; Maltz, 1984). In a

2013 RAND report funded by the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance,

Davis et al. (2013) found that:

> *Receiving correctional education while incarcerated reduces an individual's risk of recidivating after release. After examining the higher-quality research studies, we found that, on average, inmates who participated in correctional education programs had 43 percent lower odds of recidivating than inmates who did not (Davis et al., 2013, pg. xvi).*

Despite these claims, of the $81 billion spent on state and federal prisons every year, only

about six percent is used on programs such as vocational training, life-skills training,

educational programs, social activities, and psychological treatments, and recreation

(Cnaan et al., 2008). Any and all educational programs in prisons are arguably beneficial.

However, how effective are these programs in reducing recidivism rates, and making a

positive impact on the incarcerated individuals during and beyond incarceration? With

seemingly high national average recidivism rate, one approach to making a greater

impact is to allocate more funding and efforts to expand existing programs. Given the

current state of mass incarceration wherein incarcerated individuals continue to be

disempowered, taking an alternative approach to providing prison-based education should

be explored; environmental education as a potentially effective platform to achieve

empowerment, reduced recidivism, and success in and beyond prisons.

Environmental education in prisons is relatively new, yet is becoming

increasingly more common (Weber et al., 2015). Education model and topics for

environmental education programs can range from environmental literacy to composting,

becoming a certified beekeeper to growing endangered plants. However, amidst the

increase in the number of environmental education programs across prison facilities

nationwide, greenwashing of prisons becomes a major concern. We must, therefore,

clearly differentiate in-prison environmental education for empowerment from

greenwashing prisons with cheap labor as a means for the prisons to save operational costs.

Prisons may use the "greening of corrections" as a discursive strategy to appear more ethical and progressive, and as a justification to continue utilizing cheap and forced labor (Bohlinger, 2016). According to the US Department of Justice (2011, pg. 1), "... *some of the most innovative and greatest cost savings solutions can be found in the greening of corrections.*" This is not to ignore or minimize the benefits of participating in such programs. However, prioritizing cost savings over other benefits to participating in sustainability programs is a questionable approach that raises labor exploitation concerns and fails to consider the needs and gains for the incarcerated individuals, especially when the average hourly wage for working in a non-industry jobs (ie: non-state-owned businesses) ranges from $0.14 to $0.63 (Sawyer, 2017).

In 2005, the Washington State Department of Corrections (WADOC) built the nation's first correctional building that met the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold rating at the Monroe Correctional Complex. This energy-efficient building contains classrooms and computer labs as well as waterless urinals and rainwater catchment system for flushing toilets. This was followed by a $40 million Silver LEED-certified Intensive Management Unit in 2006, WADOC's first building with this level of LEED certification to house incarcerated individuals (Anderson, 2015). To date, the Department has completed 32 LEED-certified buildings. At Coyote Ridge Corrections Center, attaining the LEED gold standard led to 32% reductions in energy and water use (WADOC, n.d.). These numbers alone are impressive. However, it also begs the

question: Do such attempts to create a "greener" facility ultimately sustain the environment or the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration?

### *2.2.4 Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP)*

Providing environmental education in prisons without "greening corrections" ensures that making prisons more sustainable occurs only as a byproduct of the education that supports the transformation of lives of incarcerated participants. The Sustainability in Prisons Project (SPP) partners The Evergreen State College with the Washington State department of Corrections. SPP works to foster sustainable change by bringing nature, science, and environmental education into prisons (Sustainability in Prisons Project, n.d.). Furthermore, SPP:

> *brings together incarcerated individuals, scientists, corrections staff, students, and program partners to promote education, conserve biodiversity, practice sustainability, and help build healthy communities (Sustainability in Prisons Project).*

SPP offers a wide range of environmental programs within 11 out of 12 state prisons in Washington, ranging from beekeeping, gardening, butterfly and turtle conservation to environmental literacy programs and environmental engagement workshop series.

SPP's various educational programs allow incarcerated individuals to take ownership of a project. Beekeeping, turtle, and butterfly technicians, for example, ensure the success of their program through hands-on work. As a result, these programs can be profoundly rehabilitative for participating incarcerated individuals who take pride in their work and feel a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, they learn the importance of responsibility and self-reliance, as well as gain trust from their peers and correctional staff. Most importantly, as SPP Project Manager Kelli Bush notes, incarcerated program

43

participants are "treated as partners in our work" and as "active and valued participants in an ongoing exploration of how to solve a critical environmental problem" (Lyons, 2012). As such, these programs give incarcerated individuals an equal voice in a correctional setting plagued by power imbalance.

Effective environmental education programs also incorporates and emphasizes community building. With a focus on personal growth, education, and advancement in a skill or vocation, SPP programs strive to create community *within* the prison while simultaneously connecting incarcerated individuals to communities *outside* of the prison system. For example, incarcerated beekeeping technicians and program participants contribute to the betterment of their environment within their facility by planting flowers which may provide a multitude of benefits such as increasing green spaces in a nature-deprived area, and promoting positive social contact among program participants as they work together to care for the bees and the flowers. Through this program, they also work and connect with various outside partners, enabling them to network with people who they would otherwise not have the opportunity to meet while incarcerated. Through their shared labor alongside outside program partners, incarcerated participants learn teamwork and forge a sense of community beyond prisons (Lyons, 2012). Ultimately they take pride in putting this work toward the betterment of their local communities.

Environmental education programs such as those offered by SPP can also serve to provide a safe environment separate from the emotionally, physically, and psychologically harsh conditions of prison (Lyons, 2012). For example, the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly program technicians are able to leave the prison gate to go work in the greenhouse located outside of the fence. This external environment helps incarcerated

individuals on various levels and creates a space where they can freely express themselves and regain self-esteem and confidence (Lyons, 2012). Ultimately, meaningful work that emphasizes equality and community building significantly contributes to the transformation of incarcerated individuals.

### 2.2.5 Conclusion

Differentiating environmental education programs serving as a platform for empowerment from ones that merely greenwash prison helps fight the forces of systemic injustice. With a clear idea of what a truly meaningful and impactful environmental education looks like, I turned to semi-structured interviews to determine if and how such programs can fit into the empowerment theory framework.

## 2.3 Methods

### Sampling and data collection

I used the same two-step process as I had used to recruit thesis advisors to obtain a convenience sample of five research participants to take part in semi-structured interviews. Participants consisted of formerly incarcerated individuals who had previously participated in prison-based environmental education programs. The participants were no longer under any DOC supervision.

Prior to conducting interviews, participants completed an optional and anonymous demographic survey using Google Forms. Questions attempted to capture each participant's age, race, gender, preferred pronoun, and the educational program in which they were involved. I used this data to better understand the survey participants but will

not share the data to ensure that the identities of all participants in the small sample

remained confidential.

I conducted five one-on-one semi-structured interviews, each lasting no longer

than 60 minutes, using Zoom. The interview protocol contained three main interview

questions in addition to a few follow-up prompts under each of the main questions to help

guide the conversation (Appendix A). I had developed interview questions and prompts

based on techniques outlined by Spradley (1979) and Leech (2002). All interview

questions and prompts were shared with the participants prior to the interview to ensure

that they were able to prepare and would be comfortable with answering the questions.

Interviewees received a compensation of $100 for their time and trouble. Figure 4

outlines the process for this section of the research.



*Figure 4. Flowchart outlining the process of working with interviewees*

### *Data analysis*

I recorded and transcribed the semi-structured interviews. Based on the

information gathered from the interviews, a priori codes identified during focus group

sessions with thesis advisors (Chapter 1) were refined; I determined whether each code

contributed to the empowerment or disempowerment of incarcerated individuals. The

codes associated with empowerment were then assigned into code sub-groups based on

the empowerment theory framework (individual, organizational, and community). I then

conducted a framework analysis using atlas.ti to identify patterns among the responses

and determine how they fit into the empowerment theory framework.

*Table 1. Refined codes and their associated code sub-groups*

| Refined code | Empowerment/ Disempowerment | Framework code group |
|---|---|---|
| Access to resources | Empowerment | Individual |
| Accommodating for different learning styles | Empowerment | Community |
| Bridging the "us versus them" dynamic | Empowerment | Community |
| Contributing to the greater good and giving back | Empowerment | Community |
| Exposure to new ideas and experiences | Empowerment | Individual |
| Future prospect (higher education) | Empowerment | Individual |
| Future prospect (jobs) | Empowerment | Individual |
| Having choices | Empowerment | Individual |
| Learning new skills | Empowerment | Individual |
| Opportunities | Empowerment | Individual |
| Outside prisons | Empowerment | Individual |
| Ownership of program | Empowerment | Organizational |
| Personal growth | Empowerment | Individual |
| Positive interaction with DOC staff | Empowerment | Community |
| Positive interaction with peers | Empowerment | Community |
| Positive interaction with program partners | Empowerment | Community |
| Purpose and significance | Empowerment | Individual |
| Realizing self-worth | Empowerment | Individual |
| Responsibility and accountability | Empowerment | Organizational |
| Sense of respect | Empowerment | Organizational |
| Trust | Empowerment | Organizational |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dehumanizing experiences | Disempowerment | N/A |
| DOC staff's negative perception of program | Disempowerment | N/A |
| Fear and isolation | Disempowerment | N/A |
| Negative interaction with DOC staff | Disempowerment | N/A |
| Stigma and discrimination | Disempowerment | N/A |
| Systemic issues and challenges associated with DOC | Disempowerment | N/A |
| Toxic prison environment | Disempowerment | N/A |

## 2.4 Results

Codes assigned to the empowerment code group were grouped into major themes within each level of the empowerment theory framework. Within the individual level of empowerment, themes uncovered included (1) exposure to new ideas and experiences, (2) improved future prospect post-release, (3) finding purpose and significance, and (4) program location. On an organization level, observed themes included (5) ownership of the program, (6) responsibility and accountability, and (7) a sense of respect. Lastly, themes observed in the community level included (8) accommodating for different learning styles, and (9) positive communication and interaction. Disempowering characteristics of a prison environment identified in chapter one with thesis advisors were also observed across interview participants in all three environmental programs that were analyzed. Codes with disempowering characteristics were grouped into the following themes: (10) negative interactions with DOC staff, (11) dehumanizing experiences, (12) systemic challenges with DOC, and (13) lasting negative impacts. Each of these will be discussed below.

*Exposure to new ideas and experiences*

Interview participants frequently touched on the exposure to new ideas and experiences as one of the benefits to participating in an environmental education program. In many cases, these participants had limited experiences working with living organisms such as the western pond turtles and Taylor's checkerspot butterflies. These programs offer participants the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and explore new fields. In this process, a former turtle technician learned that despite previously not being comfortable working with living organisms, being a part of the program and taking care of the turtles made him realize that he enjoyed working with them.

> The reason why it's good is because it takes you way outside your norms. I've never in my life thought about taking care… I don't like no animals. But my second stint with SPP was getting involved with turtles. You know, the endangered western pond turtles. And I knew nothing about that but I was taught and I learned it and I liked it. And I was taking care of turtles. Measuring them for whatever that disease was that was destroying their shells -- we had to rehabilitate them before putting them back out there.

Especially in Washington state prisons where opportunities for environmental education are rarely offered, the programs offered by SPP provide valuable access to new experiences related to science and sustainability. When presented with such opportunities, participants broaden their outlook on a particular topic or aspect, as noted by another former turtle technician:

> Most of everything I read in [facility that he was previously housed in] was political ideology, or considered to be humanities, you know what I mean? And when I got into the turtle program, I got exposed to science. Yeah, it was a really good fit. And it brought out some empathy, you know what I mean? I've always been an empathetic person because I've been raised in a conscious household but I hadn't really thought of all the micro-connections between the soil and the plants, you know what I mean? I had never been in that frame of mind. I was more stuck in a class conflict kind of head set. So yeah, it definitely brought more of that out of me. I think it made me more broadly empathetic. Instead of just empathetic for humans, but more empathetic towards, you know, the whole.

49

Respondents also spoke to various new and unique opportunities that were made available to them outside of their regular tasks as a program technician. In this process participants obtained tools and skills that would otherwise not be attainable inside prisons. The following two quotes from a former butterfly and turtle technicians demonstrate such example.

> … we actually got to go to the biology conference, and we got to present. That was amazing. It was three of us, [another butterfly technician], myself, and I believe [another butterfly technician], maybe. And then of course two escorting officers. But we actually spent all day there, right? Presenting on the butterflies and meeting biologists that it's their actual job, you know? So that was crazy.

> And:

> I got to go to the Fish and Wildlife refuge where they have the turtles. I got to put on hip waders and walk around in the pond and catch turtles in a trap with [SPP staff] and the Fish and Wildlife biologist. Anyway, so yeah, it was just cool. I got to go on field trips.

SPP staff and other outside partner organizations frequently make educational resources and study materials available to program participants. The following quote by a former butterfly technician demonstrates the lack of educational and informational resources available in a correctional setting, and how environmental programs such as the ones offered through SPP can serve to increase access to such resources.

> There was no personal TV so you didn't get information, educational information at all, right? Except for whatever you're gonna see on King 5 for 35 minutes. So that really, that's a very narrow view. We didn't even have newspapers where I was at, ok? So, very, very narrow view of what's going on worldwide, you know? Not even worldwide because you're watching local news, it's very rare that you're gonna find out about anything in 35 minutes worldwide unless it's love and hip hop, I dunno (laughs). So I think that was also very key that we had the ability to gain information that we weren't seeing openly given to us, right?

The same former butterfly technician continued to emphasize the lack of educational resources available in prisons and the need for outside partners such as SPP

to bring these materials inside to make them available to incarcerated individuals. Furthermore, she spoke to the importance of having access to resources beyond education within the program, such as resources for making exit plans that ensure a smooth reentry upon release. She noted:

> [SPP staff] really went out of his way to get us information on resources and being able to make exit plans. And stuff like that, you know, it's huge because nobody else in prison cares about that, ok? There's no resource packets you're gonna get. People aren't even gonna listen to you. You don't even have anybody to ask that question to, you know? So having that there was huge also.

### Improved future prospect post-release

Former technicians frequently expressed a sense of transformation throughout their time in their program, and this personal growth was often tied to improving their future prospect post-release. These programs served as an outlet in which participants gain experiences and skills which not only helped overcome various challenges during incarceration, but also had lasting impacts to help through and beyond the re-entry process. For instance, participants work with each other and with other program partners, gaining new skills in the process such as collaboration, taking and following directions, and critical thinking, all of which may positively contribute to an improved future prospect upon release. In one instance, a former butterfly technician spoke to her personal growth as a result of participating in the program contributing to her ability to plan for the future.

> So for me, personally, I went to prison because of a substance abuse disorder so, and I had fought with that for like 15 years of my life off and on, off and on, and so I think when you first get there, I remember for me my experience is that each year certain, you know, season like, it was like a layer of fog would peel back and things would become more clear, more clarity would come to me. . . . And so

then from that I was able to just really set these goals for myself. We did a lot of writing, I had a bunch of journals of data but also just journal writing, I think that always helped me a lot. Just being able to reflect. And then I continued that on into communities so I would just write, like, "ok what are my next steps?", "what am I going to do?" And then you know, I've been in school now. I did my undergrad at Evergreen specifically because of the program and SPP so that's why I came. I moved from [a different part of the state] just specifically to come here. And then after that I did my undergrad and I said "I'm going to do more!" So, "I'm gonna do my masters now", right? And then I still have thoughts about maybe doing more but I don't know yet (laughs). But um so yeah that's how I continuously pushed myself to, "you can do more" right?

Personal growth gained from participating in these programs was often discussed in conjunction with access to jobs and higher education, suggesting that the programs may contribute to improved post-release prospects. Furthermore, these programs not only teach participants the skills needed to achieve various post-release goals, but program staff and partners also often provide direct support in searching for jobs or applying for higher education institutions. A former butterfly technician spoke to her experience during her time in the program and how it led to being offered a job and accepted into college:

It prepared me and encouraged me into following through for future, right? Like actually, [SPP staff] was like, "have you thought about applying for college?" And I was like, "no", I mean I was doing TCC (Tacoma Community College) inside the prison but she was the one that was like, "you should apply to Evergreen". And that was the first step, right? And then I handwrote out my essay, right? And I filled out my college application and put it in [SPP staff]'s notebook for him to take home or take to school with him so it can get started. And it was like every step that I did from there impacted my life, right? I was accepted into college before I left prison. […] The butterfly has been in every part, has impacted every part, right? From just focusing daily care on this little tiny endangered species that I wanted to absorb every piece of knowledge. And my curiosity then grew into like studying, right? And then it just like started to really push for every aspect that I needed so that when I walked out those gates, I had my focus and I knew what I was doing, right? Because inside there working in the seminars, working in the lab, built it so when I went to school out here, I

had those skills and I had the group work skills. And when I went to apply for my first job which was actually an intern job that I ended up teaching back in prison, I had those interview skills, I had that network, I had [SPP staff] and [SPP staff] that had written me these amazing letters, you know, [external partner] from the Oregon Zoo – like, they're so supportive in every step of the way, even outside they've been there, right?

*Finding purpose and significance*

In prisons where opportunities are limited, providing access to new experiences beyond the typical jobs that are widely available in a prison setting can have a multitude of positive impacts and outcomes. As observed in a conversation with a former conservation nursery technician, being exposed to new experiences and acquiring skills in these programs enabled participants to find purpose and significance within a prison environment that could otherwise be repetitive and counter-productive. He noted:

> … SPP was my actual first job that actually had a purpose rather than scrubbing a toilet in the unit. Where I actually had to wake up every morning, go to work, and come back. And it really took me from where I stopped growing as a person, and really put in on like a blast, you know? I only had a few years left when I got into the program so they really helped me just become a more confident person.

Furthermore, a newly gained sense of purpose and confidence can have a lasting impact and can positively contribute to the re-entry process. The same former conservation nursery technician continued to speak about what he gained during his time with SPP helped him acquire a job post-release.

> As far as getting a job I was kinda stuck in shock for the first six months so I didn't really jump onto that bandwagon but after hanging out for the summer and what not, you know, there's something missing. I need to do something different here. And I said "I need a job", I needed a purpose when I woke up. That purpose - every day you go in there [the green house] to see if they've [the plants] grown at all or if they start to pop up and even the fish, you know, how they grow every day and you feed them - it was such a wake-up call for me - that I didn't need approval from people, I didn't need to hide who I was or what I couldn't do. It was a job. And the fish needed me, obviously. I needed to change their water, I

needed to make sure they were healthy, I needed to make sure the plants were healthy. So for me it just gave me a purpose, it gave me self-worth, it gave me confidence, and honestly those are things that you can't, sometimes you can't teach yourself, you know?

As participants spend time in environmental education programs, they become experts in the rearing of living organisms such as butterflies, turtles, and plants. Being considered an expert and the accomplishing tasks with which they are entrusted ultimately leads them to regain their sense of self-worth and self-confidence. In talking about their experiences, former conservation nursery and butterfly technicians noted:

> …probably my favorite part of my program is where it took me pretty quickly actually, to where I was talking in front of people and things were coming out of my mouth, I was like, "holy crap, I think I do know what I'm talking about", you know?

And:

> And in incremental amounts, right?  So of course during breeding season there's lots and lots of activity, but even off-breeding season, we have tours and things of that nature and it happens in such small doses that it kinda just starts to give you like a little grain, a little piece of sand, or pebble – "yeah I'm human, I can do this, I can move forward, I deserve something better", right?

Realizing self-worth and gaining self-assurance have the potential to be particularly empowering in a prison setting where there is a major imbalance of power between those who are incarcerated and those who are not. Discussions with a former conservation nursery technician revealed that regaining self-esteem enabled him to break through this power dynamic to see himself as an equal member of the community.

> Before, [receiving compliments] was terrible, like, I just wanted them to shut the hell up, you know what I mean? It was bad. And it would make me feel bad about myself because I felt like I was not that person and I'm living a lie. And it was just like this big huge mental screw, I would screw myself when it came to that stuff. But now I see the compliments that they give me now and I see it as something I earned rather than something that I inherited or whatever. I used to see people as so much more, and I would see myself as so much less. But now I've kind of leveled myself out where I don't need to impress anybody, you know?

54

*Program location*

The turtle and butterfly program areas are located outside of the prison grounds, requiring incarcerated technicians leave the prison gates every day to go to work. Although just a few feet outside of the prison fence, technicians from these two programs unanimously spoke of the power of to being able to step outside, away from some of the toxic prison environment, on a daily basis. This action had symbolic, emotional, and tangible impacts. To one turtle technician, the added perks of having a program area outside of prison included having access to resources that would otherwise not be available on the other side of the fence.

> I got to leave prison. I got to go outside the gate every day. I had my own little office, a refrigerator, a library of books and, you know, I can even try a little mealworm experiments, you know what I mean? It was a cool little place away from the prison that was like a sanctuary.

Furthermore, being surrounded by nature provided technicians a sense of peace and tranquility, which may positively impact their mental and emotional well-being. Two butterfly technicians noted:

> The greenhouse was located right outside the fence line so we went out there for 7 to 8 hours [a day] so we were able to be somewhere else, and not inside of the prison. And you know sometimes in prison, the life in prison can be very, just, redundant or toxic, right? But outside it just felt like a little escape, and we were surrounded by, we're literally in the middle of nowhere, all these woods. There was just, it was beautiful out there, right? And the greenhouse was all glass so we could just, I mean, when we go out there in the morning, we take our coffee and just enjoy the sun, right? And it was just an escape.

> And:

> Every morning we go to the prison gate, they open the gates and they let us out. Unescorted, they just open up the prison gate and we walk out of the prison gate around the prison. […] We were out in the woods. And we just walk up to our own area outside of the fence with a little shed, class lab. We had our own gardens that we grow flowers and stuff for, right? But you can literally be there all day and no one's screaming at you, no chaos, so much healing and finding

> yourself come from in there … And you just happen to be outside the gate every day, where, I can't put into words what it gives you. That three minute commute from the gate to the lab. And walking through those little glass doors, the weight that's off your shoulders in that moment, you know?

The opportunity and ability to leave the prison grounds, even for a brief moment, provided program participants a sense of peace and freedom, away from their daily life of prison and all of the associated negative impacts on their wellbeing. It also gave a sense of relief from the weight of the prison system which enabled them to redirect their energy to caring for living organisms.

### *Ownership of the program*

While these programs involved and were supported by various partners, including SPP and DOC staff and external organizations and experts, the technicians were most instrumental in ensuring a smooth operation, often spending hours on the ground undertaking various tasks to maintain the health of the living organisms. This allowed the incarcerated technicians to take ownership of the program while spending a significant amount of time interacting with the living organisms and forming a bond with them. A former conservation nursery technician reflected back on this, noting:

> [my] favorite part is that they bring it to you, they let you work at your own pace, and they let you own it. And they let it become yours. Which in actuality, it should be, right? You're doing something, you need to make you feel like it's yours.

> With the butterfly program, the ability to leave the gates to go work outside the prison in their program area contributes to the technicians having a greater sense of ownership of the program.

> Tranquility, our own area, we're out there by ourselves. And now they have all these gardens … Taking plants from the edges of the property and bringing them

56

in or whatever, right? But now we have like big plantago beds and all that kinds of stuff. It's the ability to be out there with each other, you know, without supervision over the top of you. You're just in your own groove doing your own thing, learning. And you have that time to actually like, interact with people and get to know people on their own level, you know?

### *Responsibility and accountability*

Through the participants' involvement in the program and learning to care for various living organisms, some technicians expressed a newfound sense of responsibility over the animals and plants, and for the overall health of the program. One former turtle technician discussed how he paid extra attention to ensure the turtles in his charge received proper care.

> You get the right person, they can learn a lot. They take care of the turtles. I mean we took care, we actually bathed them turtles. We bathed them turtles more delicate than you bathe a child. I mean that's crazy. Because they [are] so fragile, I was trained to bath them like that (laughs).

The technicians play a vital role which directly impacts the program and its success. This sense of responsibility and accountability stems from being entrusted to care for the living things. In some instances, technicians revealed that this process of gaining trust and responsibility led to healing inside prison and regaining hope for the future. A former butterfly technician noted:

> So when people go [to prison], some people are really broken, right? And so in that program, they were really entrusting us with a lot of trust, right? "Here's an endangered butterfly, and you're gonna be in charge of doing all of this work" right? And like, "I hope that you'll be able to, you know, make this group and program thrive". And it did, in fact. And I think that component right there, someone trusting you again even in a setting like that. So for me personally, it just encouraged belief in myself that I could be. But this was just like a moment in time but that there was more to come still, after.

*Sense of respect*

The power structure in a prison environment ensures those who are incarcerated remain disempowered. This power imbalance often contributes to a toxic prison environment and dehumanization of incarcerated individuals. Throughout the interviews, participants frequently expressed how gaining respect as a result of participating in these programs helped them combat some of these negative forces. By being exposed to new experiences and skills and connecting with various program partners, they gained a sense of respect for themselves. By instilling a greater sense of equality by promoting respect for and between all program participants, including the incarcerated individuals, DOC and SPP staff, and external organizations and volunteers, the program helped elevate incarcerated individuals to the status of equal partners. Such instances were recounted by former butterfly and conservation nursery technicians.

> …and then to have SPP and Oregon Zoo and you know, everybody. We worked with the Environmental Protection Agency all these things, right? Like, all these government agencies come in. We had Japanese authors come in, and of course, PBS a couple of times. You know, all these things, biologists from all over the world, and they're so amazed at what you do, and they treat you like a human.

> And,

> …then SPP comes in and they're like, they humanize you again, you know? They come in and they bring a tour through and they let you actually lead the tour. And they want you to lead the tour and interact with these people, when normally DOC is like, "no don't interact with these people, don't talk to these people, you're an inmate", you know? So it humanized me, it gave me self-worth, it gave me a purpose, it gave me self-esteem that I never had, that's for sure … and then you got Evergreen who I don't think I've met one, not one Evergreen student or professor or whatever you wanna call it, anybody within Evergreen that ever walked in a room and ever treated me or anybody around me like we were less than.

*Accommodating for different learning styles*

Streamlined traditional approaches to learning do not always meet their intended outcome or purpose for many people. Educational programs must account for people with disabilities and varied learning styles to take an adaptive approach to offering meaningful and impactful education, even in a prison setting. A former conservation nursery technician spoke to his experience with the program, noting that:

> … it was so boring at first and almost kind of scary because, again, my vision is not very well and a lot of things I can't do so that was kind of a hindrance for me my whole life. But I loved how they made it so simple. And I'm more of a hands-on learner. I don't really obtain a lot of information by hearing it. I can't read or write very well at all, so that's not really an option either. It's just repetitive, over and over. Hands-on experience. And no matter hands-on I needed for it to sink in, they were just there for me along the whole way, which helped me a lot. So that was probably my favorite part about it - was how it was scary and not interesting to me at all and how they really brought it to me and made it interesting, you know? And made it fun, you know what I mean?

Creating an inclusive environment for people with all abilities requires that those who develop and support the program make continual, conscious efforts to improve and adapt. The scenario outlined above also serves as a challenge for all education providers. Ultimately, being able to adapt the learning to the individuals empowers not only the incarcerated participants, but also the staff and external program partners as they engage in a creative process, allowing for greater accessibility to educational opportunities. The same former conservation nursery technician continued:

> …the way that the people are able to learn and see things and stuff like that doesn't work for me. And it doesn't work for a lot of people who actually have this eye disease. And it's very, very hard to find something to adapt for you to see and learn and all this other stuff so I think that it gave them some hurdles to get over and try to work with, which was good on both ends because it made me ask for help. And it made them think about how to help me. Which I think from there it kind of gives them more tools in their box too. And it gets their creative juices flowing on how to beat that and get over that along with me at the same time. So I think just in that sense alone, kept them on their toes … But all in the end it all

comes down to one thing, right? And that's patience, compassion, and the ability to work with somebody to brainstorm something in order to get it where you need it to get it to go to professionally and appropriately, and come out the end with a good result. So I think that that helps them and that helps me too.

### *Positive communication and interaction*

Positive interaction among program participants and partners, where mutual respect produces positive outcomes, were frequently observed across all programs. In particular, incarcerated technicians' participation in these programs often resulted in promoting positive interaction with DOC staff. As described by a former turtle technician, enhanced constructive communication, where everyone is free to speak, question, and criticize respectfully and appropriately, may help bridge the "us" versus "them" dynamic in prisons, often humanizing the process and enabling the DOC staff and the incarcerated technicians to see each other beyond their assigned roles in prison (ie: prison staff and the incarcerated).

> … I mean a good portion, a good handful of the guards were super cool. They wouldn't just do their job but they were actually interested in [the turtles]. They'd come in and let me give my turtle spiel, you know what I mean? They would just come in and check stuff out. There were some COs (Correctional Officers) that would come in and be like, "what are they doing out there". But there were other COs that would come in and you can tell they were genuinely just interested in stuff and saying hi. And you got to kind of drop that uniform for a minute, you know what I mean, in that era of authority, and got to talk to them as people, you know, and not inmate to officer. So that was a really cool kind of byproduct of the program. And yeah I mean generally there were a lot of COs that were surprised by our humanity, you know what I mean? I don't know how because working in that job there's a lot of other things in prison that will reveal peoples humanity but yeah I mean it was kind of weird, some officers would be like surprised that we care about the earth or the turtles or whatever. And they'd be like, "oh they must be ok people". And their attitude would change.

Program participants often had the opportunity to interact with their peers in their work area away from their usual prison environment. Participants spoke about how this served as an outlet to start positive conversations with their peers within the program.

60

This often progressed into various positive outcomes as described by two former butterfly technicians:

> I think before I went into the butterfly program, I wasn't about, especially in prison, interacting with other people Like I wasn't supportive of other people, right? Like I was there doing my time, I've done prison before, that's just how you operate, right? And I definitely left there forming relationships and wanting to help others, which I think I didn't go into that program like that.

Then,

> I really loved the relationships I was able to build up with the women. I think that we had a lot of time out there just with us and it was really a great opportunity to learn more about each other and really encourage each other because we always... You know, there's a lot of talk that happens in prison, it's like, "what are you gonna do moving forward"? But also knowing that you can't move too far into the future because you might get stuck in this place of just like wishing you weren't there anymore knowing that's your reality, right? But it was a really good way for me, like I would talk to some of the women, "this is what I plan to do, what do you think about my plan?"

In some cases, conversations also occurred outside the program area; participants could have a positive dialog with other incarcerated individuals at their facility. Such instances lead to increased education, awareness, and access to opportunities for more people outside the program given the wide-reaching impacts that extend beyond the program area into the greater community. For example, a former turtle technician, reflecting back on his time in the program, discussed how his conversations about the turtles with other incarcerated individuals resulted in positive changes. He noted:

> ...yeah no, a lot of inmates did change, like wow, especially when they find out about... I told them the history of the stuff about how [the turtles] used to be everywhere and as more and more people came and filled in wetlands and took water away and polluted shit and ate them (laughs).

In addition to the aforementioned interactions with DOC staff and with other incarcerated individuals, former program technicians across all programs repeatedly noted the benefits of connecting with SPP staff and other external program partners and

61

experts. Such interactions served to diversify their connections and interactions in a

prison setting where such opportunities were otherwise limited, ultimately promoting

access to new information, experiences, and resources. As expressed by a former

conservation nursery technician, fostering this type of environment over time also

changed DOC staff's general stance on the level and type of interactions incarcerated

people are able to have.

> They [DOC staff] somehow came to a level of understanding that you need to
> have some type of relationship with the person who's teaching you, the SPP
> students, and you have to have some type of connection there. So they really
> backed off on that a little bit, and allowed that natural human interaction to be a
> normal appropriate thing, and not be something dirty and crazy and wrong and
> whatever. So thank god for that because yeah, I created some connections there
> with [SPP staff] and [SPP staff]. It was nice to see them, you know? I considered
> them my friends when I see them, and my mentors, and my coworker - however
> you wanna call it - I looked at them as all that because yeah, it was allowed to be
> that ... And they are a huge part of your weekly success, right? Because all week
> long you're taking down notes, taking down data, you can't wait to see them
> because you can't wait to tell them something or ask them something, like "hey
> what do you think about this, what's going on here", you know what I mean? It's
> like it was your connection to the outside world. So that was important.

### *Negative interactions with DOC staff*

Despite the clear signs of empowering outcomes within the various programs as

described above, the technicians also described multiple instances in which they

encountered disempowering situations or circumstances within the program. A former

technician spoke to his heightened stress associated with fear of unfair retribution for

speaking up to an officer about topics or requests related to the program:

> You know, the stress of having to assert myself to people in authority. They're
> good at causing me problems, causing me serious problems. It might get worked
> out but it might not. I could get booted out of the program, or booted out of camp,
> or sent back to medium. But sometimes I had to do it, because it's not in their
> minds, they're not thinking about the [living organism], you know what I mean?
> It's an important thing, like they can't let the [living organism] die out there from
> neglect, but it's not the first thing on their mind. The first thing on their mind is

telling us inmates where to go, how to move, when to move here, when to move there, you know what I mean? So they're not thinking about… And when an inmate comes up and gives them a hard time about not moving or needing to move somewhere else, their instinct is to push, like "wait, you can't tell me, I'm telling you; get out of your bunk, you can't go out there, everything's locked down", or whatever. And I'm like "hey the [living organism] man, the lights are on, the water temperature, they have to be fed", that kind of stuff.

*Dehumanizing experiences*

As outlined in chapter one, dehumanizing experiences is a recurring theme within a prison setting. Unfortunately, interviews revealed that these instances also arose during the environmental education programs. A former technician recounted her experiences stating:

> My least favorite thing about being out there [program area] was the dehumanizing part of having to beg and fight to be able to use a restroom. There was no restroom out there. At one point there was a honey bucket, but they would lock it and it would be at the officer's discretion of whenever they felt like they would come around and unlock it and wait for us to use it or whatever. And there's a lot of issues around that with women. So there was a lot of officers who really used it as a power thing, or treated like garbage around it. Oh, being stripped out, I guess, that would be the next one, right? Because at one point we weren't being stripped out but then somebody else in a different program fucked up on some shit - a completely different program - and we were getting stripped out. And so then the cops [DOC staff] leave you outside the gate because they don't want to strip you out and they'll make you sit out there for two, three hours till shift change so other cops have to strip you out.

*Systemic challenges with DOC*

Incarcerated individuals continue to be oppressed and disempowered as a result of systemic issues inherent within the DOC. While these wider issues may not necessarily result from or occur directly from environmental education programs, it impacts incarcerated individuals participating in the SPP program. A former technician recalled his experience during incarceration:

> In prison, being a convict already gives you one. That takes you to second rate citizen. Being a person of color takes you to third rate citizen. They don't care

what crime you did, you did a crime, you're a bad person - takes you to a fourth rate citizen. They strip you naked, look up your butt, have you pick up your nuts and everything - that takes you to fifth rate citizen. So we at a fifth rate citizen right now. They treat you like nothing. […] You serving time. You are the bottom of the bottom and they treat you as such. Like I said, they strip you butt naked. That's humiliating enough. And then not only that, grab your balls. Then stick your hands in your mouth, let me see your tongue, bend over, cough, three times. It's a whole different aspect.

Incarcerated technicians also frequently encounter DOC staff who may not be supportive of the shared values goals of the program. Situations where these staff's perspective and the program's mission do not align may hinder efforts to increase and foster access and opportunities for empowering education, as noted by a former technician:

> …the punitive people in DOC want to get rid of these programs. They don't want money for shacks to hold turtles and guards to have to turn key for technicians. They don't want that. They want more training on how to step on somebody's neck or fire a less-than-lethal block gun, you know what I mean? They want more toys to blow up. Act like they're tough (laughs).

### Lasting negative impacts

Despite the efforts of empowering education through these programs and various support systems offered for incarcerated individuals, they frequently continue to suffer the consequences of incarceration after being released from prison, during and beyond the re-entry process. A former technician spoke to his experience during his re-entry, noting:

> When I got home I sat in my house and I looked at the walls and I was so freaking lost dude. I was so lost because the landscape had changed, the buildings had been torn down, the trees had grown more, all these colors and stuff - I was stuck. And I was so scared. And you know what I thought? Well what the fuck am I gonna do, you know? What am I gonna do? What do I normally do? I mean, I'm back in the same house I was in getting high and doing this crazy stuff in, and I thought to myself, "well maybe I should get high", and I was like, "hell no", you know what I mean (laughs). But that's what I'm saying. That's real life stuff. People come home to the same surroundings to the same stuff.

While there are wider systemic issues at play which negatively impact and disempower individuals during and beyond incarceration, those who are involved in educational programs such as those offered through SPP can work together to collaboratively address these issues and promote change. Recognizing these existing issues and challenges that create barriers to incarcerated people becoming empowered may encourage program partners to continually reevaluate or adapt the program in a way that will have better lasting positive impacts and outcomes for program technicians and participants during incarceration and post-release.

Interview data revealed that many of the disempowering forces that exist within corrections were also observed in the programs I explored. Negative interactions with DOC staff, dehumanizing experiences, systemic challenges, and lasting negative impacts all contributed to the further disempowerment of incarcerated individuals. Conversely, empowering characteristics (exposure to new ideas and experiences, improved future prospect post-release, finding purpose and significance, program location, ownership of the program, responsibility and accountability, sense of respect, accommodating for different learning styles, and positive communication and interaction) were identified as having positive influences on the participants and in combating the forces of injustice and disempowerment within the prison system. In the following section I further analyze the interview data and provide recommendations on how to minimize the aforementioned forces of disempowerment while simultaneously elevating the empowering characteristics observed within the programs.

## 2.5 Discussion

Based on a code analysis performed using atlas.ti, signs of empowerment and disempowerment were observed across all three programs. However, codes associated with empowerment significantly outnumbered those related to disempowerment, as displayed in Figure 5 below.
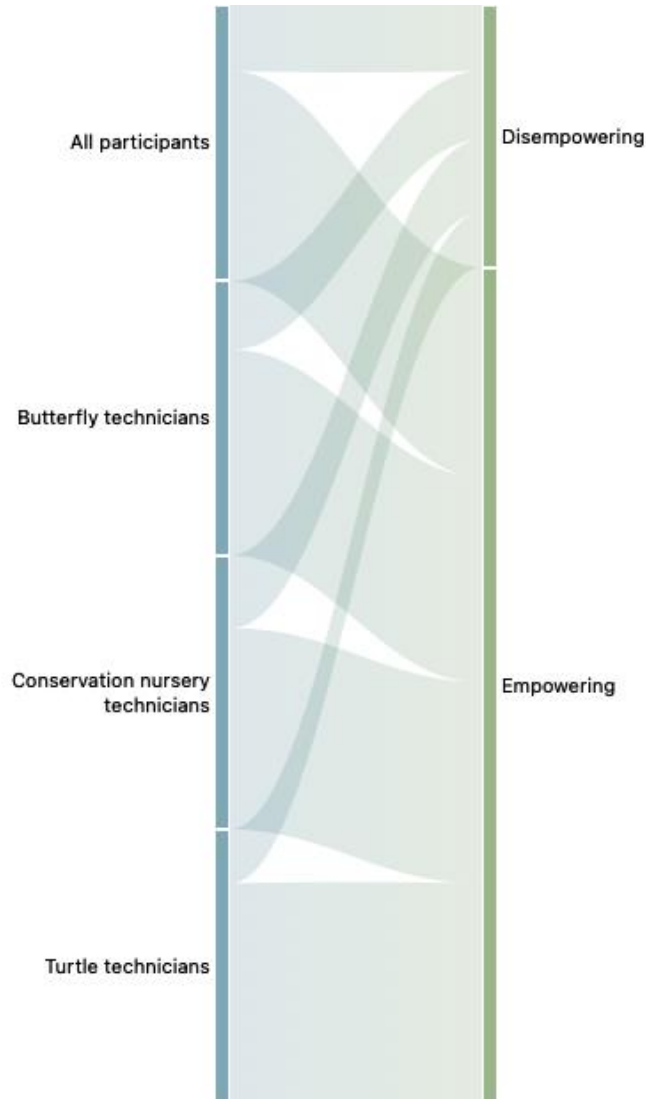


*Figure 5. Sankey diagram displaying the frequencies of codes associated with empowerment and disempowerment (right) within different programs (left).*

Findings from the code-analysis also suggest that while empowerment may be observed in all three levels of the empowerment theory—individual, community, and

organizational-- they were more aligned with the individual level than the organizational

and community levels. This finding was consistent across all three programs, as seen in

Figure 6, suggesting that the empowerment that results from participating in

environmental education programs, such as those offered through SPP, occurs

predominantly on an individual level.
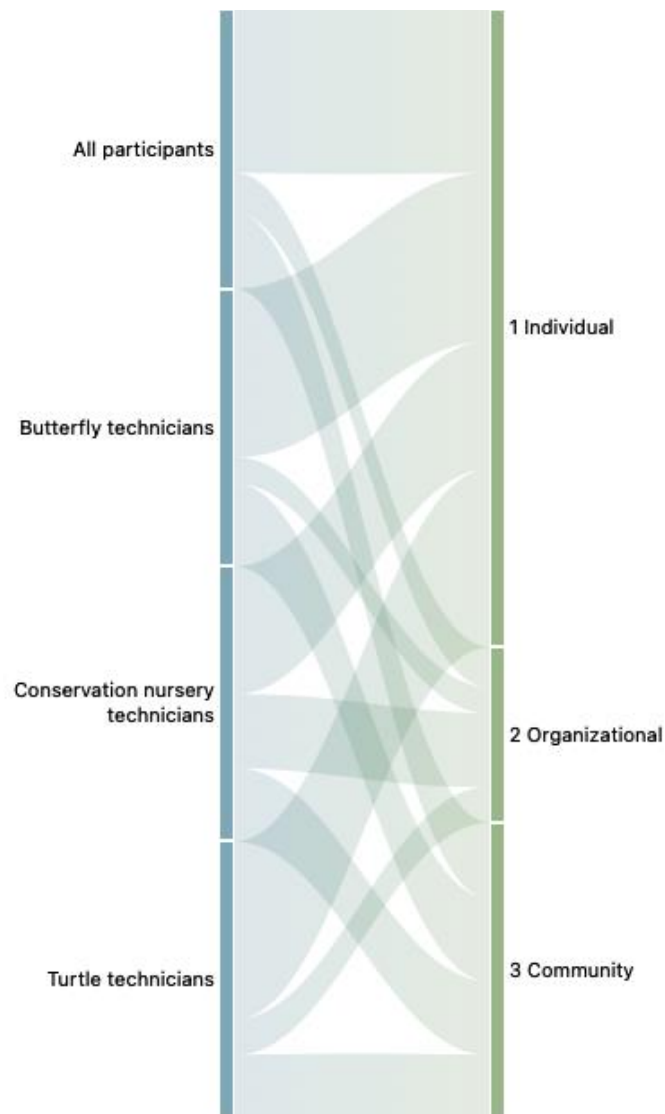


*Figure 6. Sankey diagram displaying frequencies of empowering codes organized in three levels (right) within observed programs (left).*

Based on these results, I conducted a code co-occurrence analysis (see

Appendices B and C), and used atlas.ti to establish networks to connect corresponding

codes with co-occurring frequencies greater than two (Figure 7). The findings from this

analysis indicate that relationships exist between various codes across all levels of

empowerment. While there were more signs of empowerment within the individual level,

opportunities for empowerment are not constrained to one level of analysis, as judged by

the large number of arrows connecting codes across all three levels, and suggesting that

processes and outcomes of empowerment within any given level of analysis may be co-

dependent on empowering processes or outcomes that exist within a different level. For

instance, having positive interactions with their peers (community level of

empowerment) and personal growth (individual level of empowerment) had a co-

occurring frequency of three, suggesting that these codes may be linked despite being

categorized under different levels of empowerment. While having positive interactions

with their peers may be considered empowering on a community level, empowering

outcomes also result in benefits on an individual level where people gain a sense of

personal growth. For example, when turtle technicians work together to care for the

turtles, they not only gain benefits on a community level such as building rapport with

one another and improved collaboration and communication skills, they also as a result

gain personal growth through learning new scientific facts and techniques, and newfound

confidence in their knowledge and skills to care for the turtles, all of which can be related

to empowerment on the individual level.
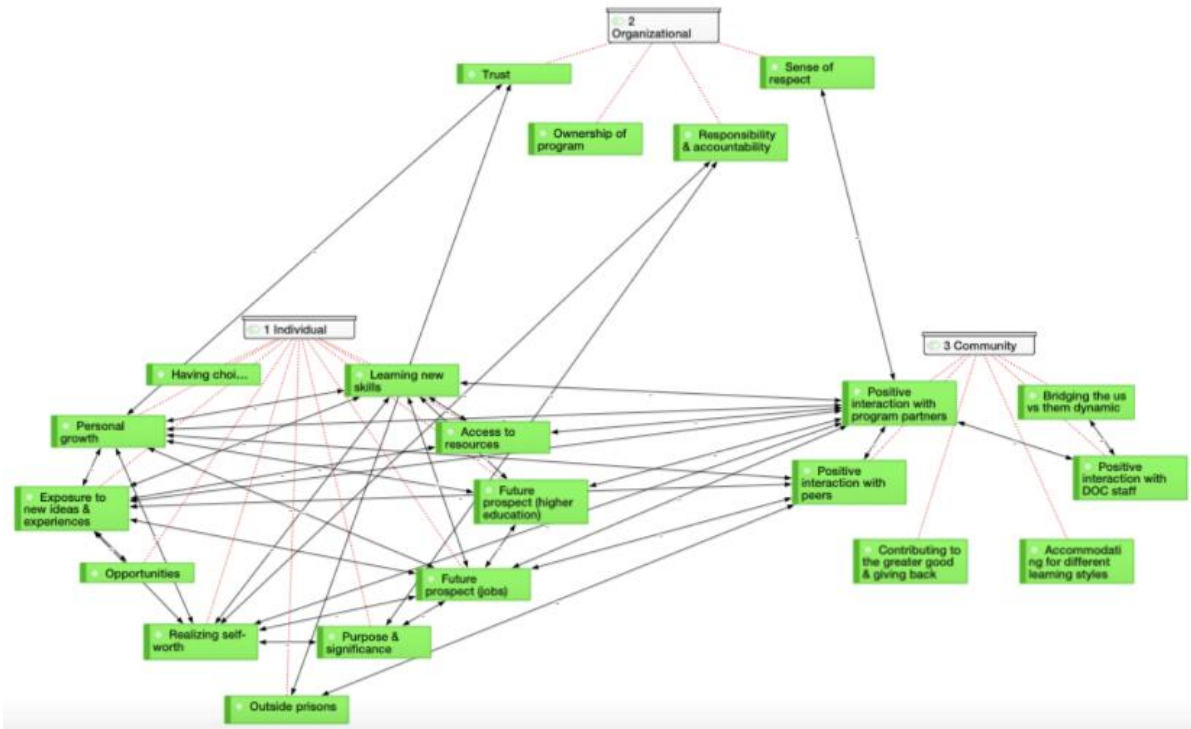
*Figure 7. Diagram of codes organized in three levels of analysis (individual, organizational, community) displaying networks connecting codes with a co-occurring frequencies of two or greater.*

I then revisited the question: *How can environmental education empower incarcerated individuals in a correctional setting and beyond?* A conceptual map of prison-based environmental education programs, adapted from Han et al.'s (2020) analysis on prison-based dog training programs, can be found in Figure 8. This figure presents the environmental program as an intervention, with empowering processes and outcomes as a result of participating in these programs. Prison-based environmental education programs should focus on creating and fostering an environment wherein the participants are able to access and engage in empowering processes. This ultimately leads to empowering outcomes for incarcerated program participants within a correctional setting and beyond. While these programs effectively serve as an outlet in which

participants are able to become empowered (the green arrows), disempowering

circumstances still impact these individuals (the red arrows with the bar across it), rolling

back the efforts made within the program to make positive changes. In addition to

promoting and expanding environmental programs in an effort to increase opportunities

and access to empowering education, those who are involved in coordinating these

programs should simultaneously work on addressing each of the disempowering impacts

that negatively affect the program technicians.
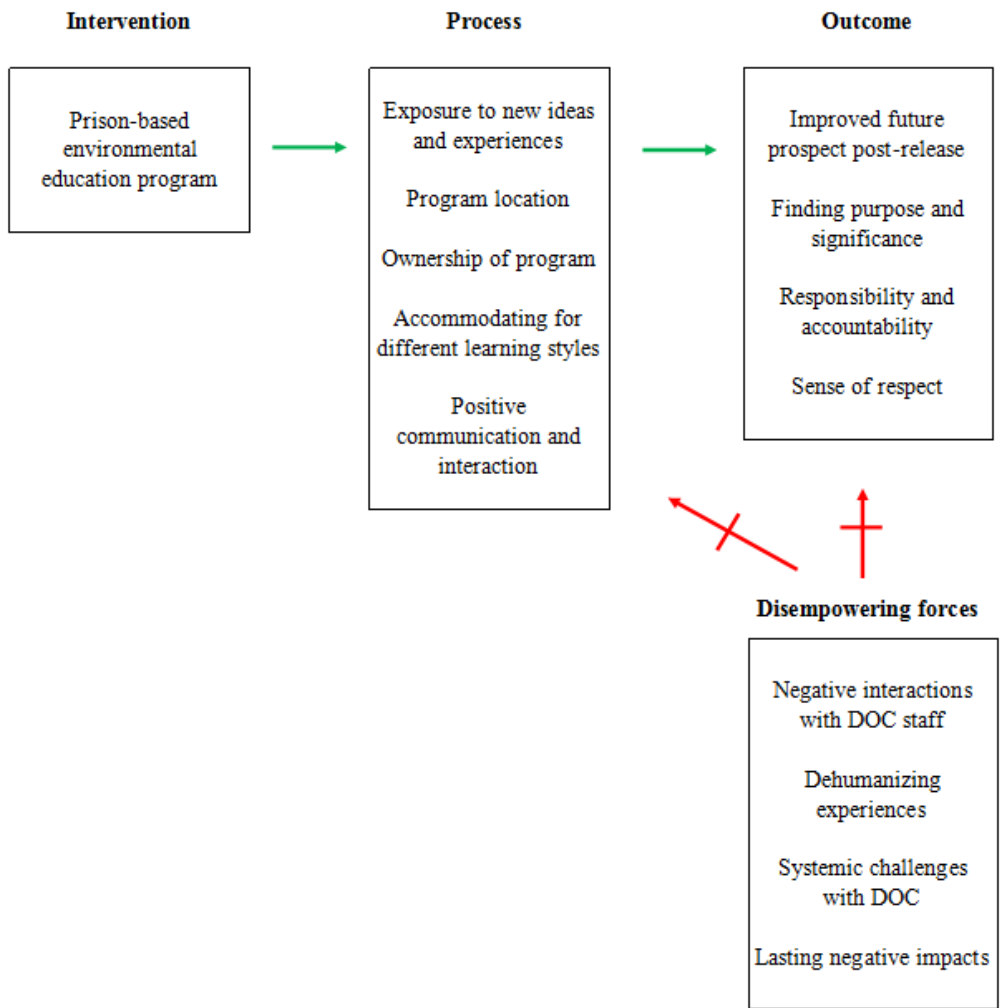


*Figure 8. A Conceptual map of prison-based environmental education program
(intervention) and its empowering processes and outcomes, impacted by disempowering
forces of the prison system.*

Minimizing program participants' dehumanizing experiences and negative interactions with staff requires that staff, especially those who may not see the benefits to these programs, shift their thinking from taking a punitive approach to one that is more centered around rehabilitation. Incorporating transformative justice oriented trainings for corrections staff is certainly a good starting place, with a focus on a cultural shift with greater emphasis on education, compassion, and redemption, rather than perpetuating the cycle of mass incarceration through the punitive approach. Within the environmental programs, educators should be trained to utilize their positions as non-incarcerated partners to identify and address issues and challenges incarcerated participants encounter, such as dehumanizing experiences.

In addressing the systemic challenges within corrections, prison administrators must first acknowledge the history and recognize existing and underlying issues including social and racial inequalities. Systemic change comes slowly and it requires a constant battle. Within the environmental programs, education curricula and materials including text books and other course materials should emphasize and incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion. Educators should also focus on diversifying educational resources and materials so a wide range of viewpoints and perspectives on any given topic, as well as learning spaces where incarcerated people can freely speak and share opinions appropriately and respectfully, are made available.

To address negative impacts of incarceration post-release, environmental education programs should support incarcerated program participants beyond their time in the program (ie: incorporating benefits that can be useful during reentry). Some examples include certifications that are recognized by potential employers, as well as

college credits for those who may want to pursue postsecondary education. Other examples that may lessen the impacts of incarceration post release include providing letters of support/recommendation for future employers and college applications, as well as identifying and partnering with potential employers who may provide job opportunities that require specialized skills obtained in the program.

Referring back to the discussion in Chapter one with thesis advisors on what it means for incarcerated individuals to become empowered in a correctional setting, many of the concepts associated with empowerment can be observed within the environmental education programs that I explored. This overlap not only suggests that prison-based environmental education programs may serve as an ideal platform in which these empowering processes and outcomes may occur, but also that the processes and outcomes of empowerment within environmental programs may also be applied to empowering incarcerated individuals within the general prison population. For instance, providing access and exposure to new ideas and experiences, gaining a sense of respect, and gaining responsibility and practicing accountability, to state a few examples, can be applied beyond the environmental programs to other areas of the prison system such as housing units, job sites, and other educational, vocational, or therapeutic programs as a means to empower incarcerated individuals and promote positive change.

As one of the thesis advisors pointed out: *The butterflies gave us a purpose and a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment, and self-worth, and we gave the butterflies a chance at life.* Together, they undergo metamorphosis on their journey of transformation. Ultimately, incarcerated individuals gaining empowerment requires everyone within the system including educators, prison administrators and staff, undergo metamorphosis. As

we collectively embark on this journey of transformation, I circle back to the key

question posed by one of the thesis advisors: *What is a human being worth?*

**Conclusion**

Exploring the literature and working with thesis advisors revealed various factors which prevent incarcerated individuals from becoming empowered in a prison setting. Forces of disempowerment such as dehumanizing experiences, fear, isolation, stigma, discrimination, and the culture of *us versus them* between incarcerated individuals and the prison staff were identified to contribute to the reinforcement of the prison system which perpetuates mass incarceration, preventing people from escaping from the revolving doors of prison. To counter these negative forces, incarcerated individuals require the opportunity and the ability to gain autonomy, make connections, realize self-worth, gain a sense of trust and practice accountability. Given the restrictive nature of prisons, such opportunities are severely limited.

Through this research I explored the potential opportunities that exist in utilizing prison-based environmental education programs as a platform for creating opportunities for empowering incarcerated individuals. Based on the literature, interacting with nature and living organisms provides a multitude of benefits including positive effects on mental state, physical function and health, cognitive function, and spiritual well-being. Qualitative data obtained from conducting semi-structured interviews with former prison-based environmental education program participants revealed that engaging in these programs and interacting with living organisms resulted in various empowering outcomes.

I then grouped those outcomes into Zimmerman's (2000) theoretical framework of empowerment (individual, organizational, community). Empowerment on an individual level included being exposed to new ideas and experiences, improved future

74

prospect post-release, finding purpose and significance, and having access to a program area outside of prison grounds. On an organizational level empowering outcomes within the programs included gaining a sense of ownership of the program, taking responsibility and practicing accountability, and developing a sense of respect for themselves and for others. Empowerment on a community level included promoting a learning environment that accommodates different learning styles and fostering positive communication and interaction with program partners.

Despite these signs of empowerment, former program participants also identified disempowering circumstances such as negative interactions with DOC staff, dehumanizing experiences, systemic challenges with DOC, and lasting negative impacts of incarceration post-release. Subsequent data analysis revealed that there were significantly more signs of empowerment than disempowerment. Within Zimmerman's (2000) theoretical model, empowerment was more aligned with the individual level than the organizational and community levels, which suggests that empowerment as a result of participating in environmental education programs occurs predominantly on an individual level. However, high code co-occurrence frequencies between empowering codes across all three levels of analysis (individual, organizational, community) suggests that these signs of empowerment are not constrained to a discrete level of analysis. Rather, they exist on a continuum.

Collectively, these findings suggest that prison-based environmental education programs serve as an ideal vessel for providing transformative education where empowerment and the benefits of nature intersect. Further, educators should take a

comprehensive approach to develop and foster each element of empowerment identified in this research.

Some limitations of this research include the small sample size and the types of environmental programs I explored. Due to Human Subjects Review protocols, only those who were no longer under DOC supervision could be contacted and recruited to participate in the research, which significantly reduced the number of prospective research participants. The small sample size also meant having limited types of environmental programs to investigate. This ultimately led to working with only three environmental programs, all within the Sustainability in Prisons Project. As recommendations for future research, increasing the sample size and the types of environmental program, especially those outside of the Sustainability in Prisons Project, may offer new and additional findings which may further contribute to this field of research.

Findings from this research may be helpful in exploring a new approach to the current criminal justice system and its associated rehabilitative programs. Ultimately, such approach may better assist incarcerated individuals in reclaiming power and confidence to forge a path to success within and beyond prison, and most importantly, to fight against the forces of systemic injustice and break the cycle of mass incarceration.

## Bibliography

Adamson, C. (1983). Punishment after Slavery: Southern State Penal Systems, 1865-1890. Social Problems, 30(5), 555-569. doi:10.2307/800272

Alexander, M. (2012). The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness. New York, NY: The New Press.

Alper, M. & Durose, M.R. (2018). *2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-year Follow-up     Period (2005-2014)*. 24.

Anderson, R. (2015, July 31). Greenwashing Washington State's Prison System in a River of Sewage. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2015/jul/31/greenwashing-washington-states-  prison-system-river-sewage/

Beck, A. J. (2000). State and federal prisoners returning to the community: Findings from the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice

Bell, J. (2016, April 25). *5 Things to Know About Communities of Color and Environmental Justice*. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2016/04/25/136361/5-things-to-know-about-communities-of-color-and-environmental-justice/

Bell, M. L., & Ebisu, K. (2012). Environmental inequality in exposures to airborne particulate matter components in the United States. *Environmental health perspectives*, *120*(12), 1699–1704. https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1205201

Bennett, L., Cardone S., & Jarczyk, J. (1998). Effects of a Therapeutic Camping Program on Addiction Recovery: The Algonquin Haymarket Relapse Prevention Program. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 15(5), 469-474. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-5472(97)00222-5

Benns, W. (2015, September 21). American Slavery, Reinvented. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/prison-labor-in-america/406177/

Berens, M., & Baker, M. (2014). *Sell Block: The empty promises of prison labor*. The Seattle Times. http://projects.seattletimes.com/2014/prison-labor/1/

Berry, M. S., Repke, M. A., Metcalf, A. L., & Jordan, K. E. (2020). Promoting Healthy Decision-Making via Natural Environment Exposure: Initial Evidence and Future Directions. *Frontiers in psychology*, *11*, 1682. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01682

Berto, R. (2014). The role of nature in coping with psycho-physiological stress: A literature review on restorativeness. *Behavioral Sciences*, *4*(4), 394–409. doi: 10.3390/bs4040394

Bohlinger, B. J. (2016). *Greening the gulag: Politics of sustainability in prison*. University of Oregon. Retrieved from https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/20537/Bohlinger_oregon_0171N_11630.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1.

Borunda, A. (2020, July 29). *How 'nature deprived' neighborhoods impact the health of people of color*. National Geographic. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/how-nature-deprived-neighborhoods-impact-health-people-of-color

Bureau of Justice Statistics (2016). U.S. correctional population declined for the ninth consecutive year. Retrieved from https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/cpus16pr.pdf

Bizzell, P. (1984). William Perry and Liberal Education. *College English, 46*(5), 447-454. doi:10.2307/377048

Browne, J. (2010). Rooted in Slavery: Prison Labor Exploitation. *Race, Poverty & the Environment, 17*(1), 78-80. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/41554724

Castro, L. E. (2018). Racism, the language of reduced recidivism, and higher education in prison: Toward an anti-racist praxis. *Critical Education, 9*(17). doi: 10.14288/ce.v9i17.186357

Chang, C., & Chen, P. (2005). Human Response to Window Views and Indoor Plants in the Workplace. *HortScience HortSci*, *40*(5), 1354-1359. Retrieved from https://journals.ashs.org/hortsci/view/journals/hortsci/40/5/article-p1354.xml

Cnaan, R.A., Draine, J., Frazier, B. and Sinha, J.W. (2008) 'Ex-prisoners' re-entry: an emerging frontier and a social work challenge', Journal of Policy Practice, Vol. 7, Nos. 2–3, pp.178–198.

Cooper, A. D., Durose, M. R., and Snyder, H. N. (2014). Recidivism of prisoners released in 30 states in 2005: Patterns from 2005 to 2010. Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 244205.

Cornell Empowerment Group. (1989). Empowerment and family support. *Network Bulletin, 1*(2), 1-23

Cottrell, L. S. (1983). The competent community. In R. Warren & L. Lyon (Eds.), *New perspectives on the American community* (pp. 398-432). Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

Cranton, P. (2006), Fostering authentic relationships in the transformative classroom. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2006: 5 13. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.203

Curtin, S., (2009) Wildlife tourism: the intangible, psychological benefits of human–wildlife encounters. *Current Issues in Tourism, 12*(6), 451-474. DOI: 10.1080/13683500903042857

Cyphert, A. B. (2018). Prisoners of Fate: The Challenges of Creating Change for Children of Incarcerated Parents. *Maryland Law Review*, *77*(2).

Davis, Jean Carol. (1993). Columbia Camp, Prison Camp in our Midst, 1944-1947. *The Courier, East Benton County Historical Society*, *15*(1).

Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2013). *Evaluating the effectiveness of correctional education: A meta-analysis of programs that provide education to incarcerated adults*. RAND Corporation.

Davis, L., Steele, J., Bozick, R., Williams, M., Turner, S., Miles, J., … Steinberg, P. (2014). How effective is correctional education, and where do we go from here? The results of a comprehensive evaluation. doi: 10.7249/rr564

Davis L, Shlafer RJ. Substance Use among Youth with Currently and Formerly Incarcerated Parents. *Smith Coll Stud Soc Work*. 2017;87(1):43-58. doi:10.1080/00377317.2017.1246797

Gilmore, K. (2000). Slavery and Prison — Understanding the Connections. Social Justice, 27(3(81)), 195-205. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from http://www.jstor.org.evergreen.idm.oclc.org/stable/29767242

Erickson, B., Johnson, C. W., & Kivel, B. D. (2009). Rocky Mountain National Park: History and Culture as Factors in African-American Park Visitation. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *41*(4), 529–545. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2009.11950189

Evans et al. 2018 Evans, D. N., Pelletier, E., & Szkola, J. (2018). Education in Prison and the Self-Stigma: Empowerment Continuum. *Crime & Delinquency*, *64*(2), 255–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128717714973

Fredrickson, L.M., & Anderson, D. H. (1999). A qualitative exploration of the wilderness experience as a source of spiritual inspiration. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *19(*1), 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1006/jevp.1998.0110.

Ghosh, A. (2016). *The great derangement: climate change and the unthinkable*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press.

Goffman, E. (1968). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. AldineTransaction.

Goodstein, L., MacKenzie, D.L. and Shotland, R.L. (1984), Personal Control and Inmate Adjustment to Prison. Criminology, 22: 343-369. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1984.tb00304.x

Han, K.-T. (2009). Influence of Limitedly Visible Leafy Indoor Plants on the Psychology, Behavior, and Health of Students at a Junior High School in Taiwan. *Environment and Behavior*, *41*(5), 658–692. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916508314476

Han, T. M., Gandenberger, J., Flynn, E., Sharma, J., & Morris, K. N. (2020). Empowerment theory and prison-based dog training programs. *Journal of Social Work*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017320954350

Hughes, T., & Wilson, D. J. (2004). *Reentry Trends in the United States* (p. 31). Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Jantz, E. (2018). Environmental racism with a faint green glow. Natural Resources Journal, 58(2), 247-278. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www-jstor-org.evergreen.idm.oclc.org/stable/26509979

Jones, R. (2020, July 29). *The environmental movement is very white. These leaders want to change that.* National Geographic. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/environmental-movement-very-white-these-leaders-want-change-that

Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 15, 169-182.

Kelly, L. (1999). Chain gangs, boogeymen, and other real prisons of the imagination. *Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice*, *5*(1), 42.

Keniger, L. E., Gaston, K. J., Irvine, K. N., & Fuller, R. A. (2013). What are the benefits of interacting with nature?. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *10*(3), 913–935. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10030913

Kieffer, C. H. (1984). Citizen empowerment: A developmental perspective. *Prevention in Human Services, 3*, 9-36.

Kingsley, J., & Townsend, M.,(2006). 'Dig In' to Social Capital: Community Gardens as Mechanisms for Growing Urban Social Connectedness. *Urban Policy and Research*, 24(4), 525-537, DOI: 10.1080/08111140601035200

Koo, A. (2015). Correctional education can make a greater impact on recidivism by supporting adult inmates with learning disabilities. *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (1973-), 105*(1), 233-269. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/26402444

Kuo, F. E., & Sullivan, W. C. (2001). Aggression and Violence in the Inner City: Effects of Environment via Mental Fatigue. *Environment and Behavior*, *33*(4), 543–571. https://doi.org/10.1177/00139160121973124

Langton, L. & Durose, M., (2013). Police behavior during traffic and street stops, 2011. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau Justice of Statistics. Washington, D.C. Retrieved online: https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pbtss11.pdf

Lanham, J. (2020, May 29). I've spent my life birding while black. Here's why I can't and won't forgive Amy Cooper: Opinion. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.newsweek.com/ive-spent-my-life-birding-while-black-heres-why-i-cant-wont-forgive-amy-cooper-opinion-1507247

Leech, B. (2002). Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews. PS: Political Science & Politics, 35(4), 665-668. doi:10.1017/S1049096502001129

Lewis, N. (2018). Mass Incarceration New Jim Crow, Class War, or Both?. People's Policy Project. Retrieved from https://www.peoplespolicyproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MassIncarcerationPaper.pdf

Lichtenstein, A. (1993). Good Roads and Chain Gangs in the Progressive South: "The Negro Convict is a Slave". *The Journal of Southern History, 59*(1), 85-110. doi:10.2307/2210349

Lynch, J. P., & Sabol, W. J. (1997). Did Getting Tough on Crime Pay? *The Urban Institute*, 13.

Lyons, H., (2012). Food, Farming, and Freedom: Promoting a Sustainable Model of Food Justice in America's Prisons. *Senior Capstone Projects.* 73. http://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/73

Maltz, M. D. (1984). *Recidivism*. Orlando: Academic Press.

*Mission & Vision | Washington State Department of Corrections*. (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2021, from https://www.doc.wa.gov/about/agency/mission.htm

Moran, D. (2019). Back to nature? Attention restoration theory and the restorative effects of nature contact in prison. *Health & Place*, *57*, 35–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.03.005

Nadkarni, N., Hasbach, P., Thys, T., Crockett, E., & Schnacker, L.E. (2017). Impacts of nature imagery on people in severely nature-deprived environments. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 15*, 395-403.

National Research Council. (2014). The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Newsome, C. (2020). It's Time to Build a Truly Inclusive Outdoors. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2020/its-time-build-truly-inclusive-outdoors

Perry, W. (1968). Patterns of Development in Thought and Values of Students in a Liberal Arts College: A Validation of a Scheme. *U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare*. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED024315.pdf

Peterson, A., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2004). Beyond the individual: Toward a nomological network of organizational empowerment. American Journal of Community Psychology, 34, 129-

Purdy, J. (2015, August 13). Environmentalism's Racist History. Retrieved December 13, 2020,   from https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history

Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: Introduction to the issue. *Prevention in Human Services, 3*, 1-7

Rowland-Shea, J., Doshi, S., Edberg, S., & Fanger, R. (2020, July 21). The Nature Gap. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2020/07/21/487787/the-nature- gap/

Sakala, L. (2014). Breaking Down Mass Incarceration in the 2010 Census. Retrieved from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/rates.html

Sawyer, W. (2017, April 10). *How much do incarcerated people earn in each state?* [Prison Policy Initiative]. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2017/04/10/wages/

Sawyer, W., & Wagner, P. (2019). Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019. Retrieved from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2019.html

Schlosser, E. (1998). The Prison-Industrial Complex. Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1998/12/the-prison-industrial-complex/304669/

Shibata, S., & Suzuki, N. (2002). Effects of the foliage plant on task performance and mood. *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* 22(3), 265-272. https://doi.org/10.1006/Jevp.2002.0232.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sustainability in Prisons Project (n.d.). Retrieved from http://sustainabilityinprisons.org/

*Sustainability & Environmental Performance*. (n.d.). Washington State Department of Corrections. Retrieved June 13, 2021, from https://www.doc.wa.gov/corrections/programs/sustainability.htm

Swift, C., & Levin, G. (1987). Empowerment: An emerging mental health technology. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 8,* 71-94

Taylor, D. E. (2014, July). The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations. Retrieved from https://www.diversegreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FullReport_Green2.0_FINAL.pdf

The Pew Charitable Trusts (2010). Collateral Costs: Incarceration's Effect on Economic Mobility. Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts.

United Nations Environment Programme. (n.d.). What are environmental rights? Retrieved December 13, 2020, from https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/environmental- rights-and-governance/what-we-do/advancing-environmental-rights/what

US Department of Justice. (2011, March). The Greening of Corrections: Creating a Sustainable System. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/024914.pdf

Van Den Berg, A. E., & Custers, M. H. G. (2011). Gardening Promotes Neuroendocrine and Affective Restoration from Stress. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *16*(1), 3–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105310365577

Van der Laan, A., & Eichelsheim, V. (2013). Juvenile adaptation to imprisonment: Feelings of safety, autonomy and well-being, and behaviour in prison. *European Journal of Criminology*, *10*(4), 424–443. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370812473530

Weber, S. R., Hayes, M. P., Webb, T., & Leroy, C. J. (2015). Environmental education in prison: A comparison of teaching methods and their influence on inmate attitudes and knowledge of environmental topics. *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review, 16*(2/3/4). doi:10.1504/ier.2015.071026

Wells, N. M. (2000). At Home with Nature: Effects of "Greenness" on Children's Cognitive Functioning. *Environment and Behavior*, *32*(6), 775–795. https://doi.org/10.1177/00139160021972793

Western et al 2001 Western, B., Kling, J. R., & Weiman, D. F. (2001). The Labor Market Consequences of Incarceration. *Crime & Delinquency*, *47*(3), 410–427. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128701047003007

Zimmerman M.A. (2000) Empowerment Theory. In: Rappaport J., Seidman E. (eds) *Handbook of Community Psychology*. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4193-6_2

## Appendix A. Interview Questions

1. Ice breaker: What environmental education program were you involved in, and why did you decide to participate in it?
2. Grand tour: Could you describe a typical class or meeting within the program that you were involved in?
   - *Prompt: ask for a mini-tour on different activities within a program.*
   - *Prompt: probe about their specific role or position within the program.*
3. Experience question: Could you tell me about your experience with participating in (specific program)?
   - *Prompt: what was your most and least favorite part of their experience?*
   - *Prompt: probe about the differences between their program and other programs in prison.*
   - *Prompt: probe about impacts of the program on a personal/individual level*
   - *Prompt: probe about impacts of the program on a community or organizational level*
   - *Prompt: probe about lasting impacts (on both personal/individual and community levels) beyond prisons.*
   - *Prompt: did you see any changes in yourself before and after participating in a (specific program)?*
   - *Prompt: probe about what they gained, as well as what they feel they contributed to the program.*
   - *Prompt: probe about any connections that were made as a result of their participation (including with their peers, facilitators, prison staff, the greater community)*
   - *Prompt: probe about if and how this program can help combat issues related to systems of incarceration.*

**Appendix B. Code occurrence frequency**

| Code | Occurrences |
|---|---|
| Access to resources | 12 |
| Accommodating for different learning styles | 4 |
| Bridging the "us versus them" dynamic | 5 |
| Contributing to the greater good and giving back | 3 |
| Exposure to new ideas and experiences | 22 |
| Future prospect (higher education) | 9 |
| Future prospect (jobs) | 9 |
| Having choices | 2 |
| Learning new skills | 12 |
| Opportunities | 7 |
| Outside prisons | 13 |
| Ownership of program | 3 |
| Personal growth | 16 |
| Positive interaction with DOC staff | 2 |
| Positive interaction with peers | 10 |
| Positive interaction with program partners | 15 |
| Purpose and significance | 9 |
| Realizing self-worth | 8 |
| Responsibility and accountability | 5 |
| Sense of respect | 4 |
| Trust | 7 |
| Dehumanizing experiences | 6 |
| DOC staff's negative perception of program | 1 |
| Fear and isolation | 2 |
| Negative interaction with DOC staff | 5 |
| Stigma and discrimination | 1 |
| Systemic issues and challenges associated with DOC | 14 |
| Toxic prison environment | 6 |

# Appendix C. Code co-occurrence analysis table

| | ●Access to resources | ●Accommodating for different learning styles | ●Bridging the us vs them dynamic | ●Contributing to the greater good & giving back | ●Dehumanizing experiences | ●DOC staff's negative perception of program | ●Exposure to new ideas & experiences | ●Fear & isolation | ●Future prospect (higher education) | ●Future prospect (jobs) | ●Having choices | ●Learning new skills | ●Negative interaction with DOC staff | ●Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ●Access to resources | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Accommodating for different learning styles | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Bridging the us vs them dynamic | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Contributing to the greater good & giving back | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Dehumanizing experiences | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| ●DOC staff's negative perception of program | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Exposure to new ideas & experiences | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 2 |
| ●Fear & isolation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Future prospect (higher education) | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| ●Future prospect (jobs) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| ●Having choices | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| ●Learning new skills | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Negative interaction with DOC staff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ●Opportunities | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | Access to resources | Accommodating for different learning styles | Bridging the us vs them dynamic | Contributing to the greater good & giving back | Dehumanizing experiences | DOC staff's negative perception of program | Exposure to new ideas & experiences | Fear & isolation | Future prospect (higher education) | Future prospect (jobs) | Having choices | Learning new skills | Negative interaction with DOC staff | Opportunities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outside prisons | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Ownership of program | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Personal growth | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Positive interaction with DOC staff | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Positive interaction with peers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Positive interaction with program partners | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Purpose & significance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Realizing self-worth | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Responsibility & accountability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sense of respect | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Stigma & discrimination | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Systemic issues with DOC | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Toxic prison environment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Trust | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | Outside prisons | Ownership of program | Personal growth | Positive interaction with DOC staff | Positive interaction with peers | Positive interaction with program partners | Purpose & significance | Realizing self-worth | Responsibility & accountability | Sense of respect | Stigma & discrimination | Systemic issues with DOC | Toxic prison environment | Trust |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Access to resources | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Accommodating for different learning styles | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Bridging the us vs them dynamic | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Contributing to the greater good & giving back | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Dehumanizing experiences | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| DOC staff's negative perception of program | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Exposure to new ideas & experiences | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Fear & isolation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Future prospect (higher education) | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Future prospect (jobs) | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Having choices | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Learning new skills | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Negative interaction with DOC staff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Opportunities | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | Outside prisons | Ownership of program | Personal growth | Positive interaction with DOC staff | Positive interaction with peers | Positive interaction with program partners | Purpose & significance | Realizing self-worth | Responsibility & accountability | Sense of respect | Stigma & discrimination | Systemic issues with DOC | Toxic prison environment | Trust |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | Outside prisons | Ownership of program | Personal growth | Positive interaction with DOC staff | Positive interaction with peers | Positive interaction with program partners | Purpose & significance | Realizing self-worth | Responsibility & accountability | Sense of respect | Stigma & discrimination | Systemic issues with DOC | Toxic prison environment | Trust |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Outside prisons | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Ownership of program | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Personal growth | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Positive interaction with DOC staff | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Positive interaction with peers | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Positive interaction with program partners | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Purpose & significance | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Realizing self-worth | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Responsibility & accountability | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sense of respect | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Stigma & discrimination | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Systemic issues with DOC | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Toxic prison environment | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Trust | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |