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Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies Among Prison Educators in State Prisons

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MPhil, Walden University, 2019

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Abstract

Correctional education in the United States can be traced back to 1789. Its main purpose was to teach inmates literacy so that they could read the Bible. Because most of the inmates in the U.S. state prison system will be released in modern times, they will need as much education as possible to adapt to civilian life. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of 6 correctional educators belonging to the Correctional Education Association who are employed at maximum and medium secured prison regarding their strategies for handling stress and coping in their classrooms. The transactional model of stress and coping theory formed the theoretical framework for understanding stress and stress management in prison-based classrooms. The data analysis involved open and axial coding from which emerged 7 themes: Lack of consistency and little downtime, students with mental health issues, unexpected violence and physical danger, classroom creativity and connection, personal coping strategies, supportive coworkers, and unsupportive managers. According to the findings, when prison educators can find ways to overcome their stress, they can not only function more efficiently in their jobs, but they can also be more effective in their roles of helping prisoners reach better personal achievements themselves. Findings may provide the tools to help prison educators cope within the classroom so they can focus on providing an education to lead the inmates to a more productive future.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my darling daughter Megan. I love you to the moon and back.

Acknowledgments

I thank the Lord for giving me the strength and inspiration to complete this dissertation. Without you, Lord, none of this would have been possible. I also wish to thank the many people who have had an impact on my life through this very long journey. Dr. Tina Jaeckle, my dissertation committee chair, never gave up on me even when I gave up on myself. Thank you for pushing me when I needed a push. I am forever grateful for your patience and understanding. To my committee member Dr. Mary Bold: Thank you for thoroughly reading my dissertation and providing necessary feedback throughout this journey. I am grateful for your patience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Most major civilizations have used some form of imprisonment as punishment. At first, prisons were used as a temporary destination before a sentence of death or slavery (History of Prisons, 2018). In time, prisons became correctional facilities with a goal of inmate rehabilitation and reform. By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Enlightenment thought contained the idea that punishments should be swift and mild (Gerson, 2018). The wars that engulfed the world at the beginning of the 20th century brought about prisoner of war camps and concentration camps. The idea of probation was introduced, and the first prison for holding inmates in perpetual separation was designed (History of Prison, 2018).

This chapter begins with an overview of penitentiary education in the United States. It continues with a discussion of the need for research on prison educators, the nature and purpose of the present study, and the two research questions that guided the study. I next present the study's theoretical framework, definition of terms, and assumptions, limitations, and scope. The chapter ends with sections on the study's significance and a summary.

Background

Correctional education in the United States can be traced to 1789. Early prison education programs were referred to as Sabbath Schools, and their purpose was to teach inmates literacy so that they could read the Bible (Messemer, 2011; Schorb, 2014). It was believed that while attending these schools, prisoners would identify their sins, ask forgiveness from God, and attain salvation (Messemer, 2011). The curriculum mostly

involved reading Bible verses. The objective was to change inmates' hearts (Messemer, 2011).

Secular education, which focused on math, reading, and writing, was introduced into the prison system between 1826 and 1840 (Schorb, 2014). Some prisons also had history and geography classes. By the mid-1840s, the prison curriculum expanded to include history, astronomy, geography, physiology, and physical education classes. In 1847, New York became the first state to mandate that correctional education be made available at all state institutions. The prison reform movement, which began in Elmira, New York, advocated for inmates to participate in educational and vocational programs as part of their prison sentences (Messemer, 2011).

The American Industrial Revolution began in the early 1800s. The demand for industrial workers led U.S. politicians and prison officials to embrace the philosophy of rehabilitation. As the demand for labor increased, U.S. prisons developed inmate vocational programs to help meet the demand for skilled workers (Messemer, 2011). It took nearly 100 years for the concept of educating prisoners to receive wide support from the public, Congress, and correctional officials (Ryan, 1995). Throughout the 1960s, the idea of rehabilitation became a leading factor in U.S. corrections (Messemer, 2011).

The Pennsylvania system and the Auburn system in New York were the two most important prison systems during the early period of correctional education. Other states patterned their prison systems after these systems (Messemer, 2011). During the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal funding for correctional educational programs dropped significantly, especially in states such as California, Florida, and Illinois. Congressional

legislation passed in 1994 prohibited inmates from receiving Pell Grants, which effectively defunded postsecondary education in prisons (Coley & Barton, 2006). Little is known about how prison educators handle the stress of teaching inmates. Therefore, the present study explored how prison educators cope with the stress of teaching in state prisons.

Statement of the Problem

More people are incarcerated in the United States than in any other developed country. The U.S. criminal justice system holds an estimated 2,300,000 people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails as well as military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories (Carson, 2016; Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Related to the large numbers of incarcerated individuals, many U.S. citizens have increasingly supported prison policies based more on punishment than rehabilitation (Michals & Kessler, 2015).

Still, at least 95% of all state prisoners are released from prison at some point in time (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019). Because the number of people sentenced to prison since the 1980s has increased, there are more than 650,000 former state prisoners (Taliaferro et al., 2016). Employment is crucial for keeping prisoners from returning to prison. Inmates attending vocational training account for 90% of postsecondary education in correctional settings (Zoukis, 2015). Getting and keeping qualified teachers is crucial in ensuring that prisoners receive a quality education. Because many prison inmates are

being released each year, rehabilitation plays a key role in inmate behavior, and prison education is one of the best rehabilitation tools (Zoukis, 2015).

Little is known about how prison educators handle the stress of teaching inmates. Therefore, the present study's focus is on exploring how prison educators cope with the stress of teaching in correctional settings. A prison educator's role is challenging. Differences in inmate student ages, literacy levels, and willingness to learn all play a part in their success. Kamrath and Gregg (2018) noted that education in correctional facilities is advantageous; however, it does carry many challenges, not the least of which is the environment in which the teachers work. Even though most prison educators are qualified academically through college and certification programs, their education does little to prepare them for working with prisoners. Therefore, it becomes difficult to recruit and retain qualified personnel, and there is a higher turnover rate than in other settings (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018).

Prison educators, like teachers generally, tend to be poorly paid. Teacher wages still lag significantly behind those in other professions (Long, 2017). For prison educators, students are often manipulative, disadvantaged, and downtrodden. The work conditions of prison educators can be depressing and dehumanizing. Inmates often resist their own education and safety, and correctional education programs can be poorly planned and regulated (Gehring & Hollingsworth, 2002). Inmates who participate in vocational training are 36% less likely to reoffend, and over 50% of those who graduate stay out of prison (Zoukis, 2015). Additionally, prisoners who participate in correctional education are more likely to obtain successful employment upon release (Lugo et al.,

2017). Zoukis (2015) claimed that students in prison respect their teachers, for the prisoners feel that teachers are the only ones who offer unconditional support and believe in their potential. For many incarcerated individuals, prison educators are their best and many cases only link to survival and rehabilitation (Zoukis, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

After an extensive review of the literature, I found only a few studies on how prison educators manage work-related stress, and these studies did not focus on the perspectives of the prison educators themselves. There is a gap in the literature on prison educators and their stress coping skills. The purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of correctional educators, their strategies for handling stress, and the coping skills they use in their classrooms. A qualitative approach—specifically, phenomenology—was used address the research gap using the perspectives and experiences of full-time teachers in the prison system. Exploring how full-time prison teachers manage stress in their classrooms can reveal valuable information that can help other prison-based teachers manage their stress in similar settings.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

RQ1: How do prison educators describe their stressors in the classroom?

RQ2: What strategies do prison educators use to cope with their stress in the classroom?

Theoretical Framework

High workplace stress levels compel the need for more research on how individuals experience and cope with stress in their work. Workplace stress has been associated with issues such as job dissatisfaction, high turnover rates, and mediocre job performance (Adera & Bullock, 2010). High turnover rates for teachers who specialized in fields like special education and work with high risk populations has high costs associated with teachers leaving their positions (Adera & Bullock, 2010; Edelson, 2017).

The transactional model of stress and coping theory (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) was the theoretical framework for understanding the roles of stress and stress management in prison-based classrooms in the study. This theory holds that individuals cognitively appraise a stressor to assess the extent to which the stressor might deplete their resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The theory defines a stressful event as a person-to-environment transaction, the severity of which depends on the external stressor's impact. The event is mediated by the person's appraisal of the stressor and the social and cultural resources available (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). When faced with a stress-related event, a person evaluates the potential threat using primary appraisal. Primary appraisal is an individual judgment about the significance of an event as stressful, positive, controllable, challenging, or irrelevant. A second appraisal follows, which is an assessment of the person's coping skills and options. Secondary appraisals address what can be done about the stressful situation. Coping is the use of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Nature of the Study

The present study was a phenomenological inquiry as the intent was to explore prison-based educators' experiences of the phenomenon of stress related to teaching at a medium security prison. Semistructured interviews were conducted with a sample of seven individuals who teach in correctional settings who may have experienced stress in their positions. Phenomenology was used to study a phenomenon through recording the lived experiences of people who have undergone the same events (Lewis, 2015). Their experiences go beyond personal perspectives, as in case study (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017) and are more in depth than in a quantitative study, which would not have suited the purpose of the present study. All of the participants have taught in prisons regularly.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms used in penal education and the criminal justice system have meanings specific to these settings. These meanings may change slightly depending on context. Simple definitions are provided for the following terms:

Correctional education: Various education programs provided to prisoners of both genders who are incarcerated. Programs can be anything from basic life skills to college education and vocational training (National Reentry Resource Center, 2019).

Correctional educators (also called prison educators): Individuals who teach in correctional settings (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018).

General equivalency diploma (GED): An exam taken by individuals who did not graduate from high school. Passing this exam confers a certificate equivalent to a high school diploma (City College of San Francisco, 2016).

Recidivism: The rearrests, reconviction or return to prison of a released inmate, with or without a new sentence (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019).

Stress: A physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or psychological tension (MedicineNet, 2018).

Vocational education: Education and training that aims to equip people with knowledge, skills, and competencies required for specific occupations or more broadly for the labor market (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2019).

Assumptions

Assumptions reflect the nature of knowledge that determines the scope and findings of a study—they can only be truthful if researchers accept them as truthful as a matter of speculation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). First, using a general qualitative approach, one would be able to study the strategies that prison educators use in managing occupational stress while teaching in prison. Second, I assumed that the six participants were able to participate in the interview process to the point of saturation. Third, I assumed that though I was conducting interviews at a distance, their personal environment was comfortable and that they had consented to be available for the interviews over the time I was conducting them.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is limited to prison educators in state prison system in the United States who have had experiences with occupational stress during their jobs. A phenomenological design that involved phone interviews was used to gather data for this study. The study was based on the theory of psychological stress and coping that prison

educators use in managing occupational stress as they deal with inmates in medium or maximum secured prisons. The findings may have limited transferability because they do not cover educators working in youth prisons, federal prisons, private prisons, or minimum secured prisons. However, the study outcomes may add further to the literature on how prison educators experience stress and cope with it in their daily work.

Limitations

Limitations in a study are the intent of the researcher's procedures and the weaknesses of a study (Mitchell et al., 2013). First, I used a purposive sample of what resulted in six participants, which might have had an effect of data quality and transferability of the findings. To address this limitation, I used the same interview questions for each one of the participants (Appendix A). Although 10 participants are often suggested to reach saturation, the rich phenomenological data they provided allowed me to reach saturation sooner; thus, I transferred most of their thick descriptions to the results section to help improve the validity and accuracy of the study (see Kroening et al., 2016). Second, focusing on state prison systems might be a limitation in understanding how prison educators face and cope with stress in youth prisons, federal prisons, private prisons, and minimum-security prisons.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the lived experiences of prison educators and their perspectives regarding coping with stressors in the classroom as correctional educators. Study findings may fill gaps in the literature on prison educator stress while teaching offenders. The findings may also provide valuable information

about prison educators and their stress coping skills in the classroom using first-hand accounts from teachers who have taught 12 months or more at state prisons across the United States. Understanding how experienced prison educators manage stress in their classrooms may help new prison-based educators cope more effectively with stress in their classrooms.

Findings from this study may affect social change by bringing to light the responsibilities of prison educators and the stress that results from teaching prison inmates. The present study's focus also calls attention to the importance of vocational training for inmates to prepare them for release and qualify them to obtain employment so as to reduce recidivism rates. With a deeper understanding of how prison educators manage stress in the classroom, findings from this study may improve relationships between teachers and inmates, thus promoting personal growth for inmates and possibly increasing graduation rates.

Summary

Education in the prison system represents opportunities for inmates to prepare for life outside of institutional confinement. Educators who choose to teach in correctional settings are often confronted with dangerous felons. However, education in correctional institutions has been proven to reduce recidivism and allow individuals to garner higher wages across the board (Mastrorilli, 2016; Wootton, 2016). Chapter 1 was an introduction of the study's central question and problem statement, followed by the study purpose. Also included was a brief discussion of the study's conceptual framework, which focuses on stress, stress management, and coping skills. Chapter 2 is a review of

the literature that informed the study. Chapter 3 describes the phenomenological methodology used in the study. Study results and conclusions are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Stress is prevalent in people who teach in a prison setting (Patrie, 2017). However, there is little research on prison educators and stress in medium and maximum-security prisons. Most research has focused on stress in correctional officers (COs) or in public school teachers. The present qualitative study's focus was on exploring the experiences of correctional educators, how they handle stress teaching in a medium security prison, and the strategies they use to cope in prison classrooms. The following literature review also includes studies on stress's symptoms and effects. Because of the lack of studies prison educators and stress conducted within 5 years of the present study, research on occupational stress in prison guards and in public school teachers was also included. The following chapter covers the following areas: (a) the literature search strategy; (b) the present study's theoretical framework; and (c) synthesis and analysis of research on prison educators, stress, occupational stress in prison settings, and occupational stress and teachers.

Literature Search Strategy

I originally limited the literature to include in this review to studies published between 2015 and 2019. I extended the search to beyond 5 years because of the limited amount of information available in this time frame to support this study's research questions. Extending the search to scholarly articles published before 2015 also added historical viewpoints. The selected articles are important because they establish substance and credibility. Databases used to find literature to review were accessed through Walden University's online library and included EBSCO, Sage Journals, ProQuest, Academic

Search Premier, and Education Research Complete. The search for articles led to various books and journals that were also reviewed. Search terms used were as follows: *correctional education, correctional educators, prison education, prison-based education, prison teachers, stress, burnout, occupational stress, prison educators and stress, correctional educators and stress,* and *prison educators and burnout*. The articles selected were retrieved from various sources with the focus on prison-based educators and stress coping strategies with social issues in mind. Each article selected provided a significant direction into the involvedness of correctional education and the educators that provide significant time of themselves. Another reason these articles were used in this selection was because of the use of qualitative research methods using a case study design. A gap in the current research on the on prison-based educators and stress is also included. Therefore, my search was extended to occupational stress in certain workplaces, which included COs and public-school teachers.

Theoretical Foundation

I chose the transactional model of stress and coping as the theoretical framework for understanding the roles of stress and stress management in prison-based classrooms. This theory is a basis for evaluating the progression of coping with stressful events. It defines a stressful event as a person-to-environment transaction with the severity depending on the impact of the external stressor (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). The event is mediated by the person's appraisal of the stressor and on the social and cultural resources available (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977).

According to the theory, stressful experiences result from transactions between people and their environments (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The theory holds that people continuously appraise everything that happens, using emotional prompts from earlier experiences of stress in the appraisal process. When faced with stress-related events, people evaluate the potential threat using *primary appraisal*, which is an individual judgment about the significance of an event as stressful, positive, controllable, challenging, or irrelevant. This is followed by *secondary appraisal*, during which people assess their individual coping skills and options. In other words, secondary appraisals address what can be done about stressful situations. Coping is the change that is used by way of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands (Carver et al., 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While stress is an unavoidable part of the human condition, coping is what makes the difference in adjusting to outcomes.

The term stress was used as early as the 14th century to mean difficulty, straits, hardship, or disorder (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Robert Hooke used the word in a slightly different way to describe how human-made structures such as bridges should be designed to carry large loads without disintegrating (Lazarus, 1999). Hooke's description of mechanical stress drew on three concepts: load, stress, and strain. Load referred to external forces; stress referred to the area of the structure over which the load was applied; and strain referred to the deformation of the structure produced by the combination of load and stress (Lazarus, 1999). In applying this theory to the human condition, I posit that people in challenging environments also undergo load (outside

forces beyond their control), stress as a reaction to load. and strain, negative changes that can come about as a result of the external forces and excessive stress.

As evidence, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific eternal or internal demands that are taxing or exceed one's personal resources. This process has three elements. The first, observation and assessment, reflects what the person thinks as compared to what the person does. Second, what the person thinks or does is observed in a precise context and as a result, coping thoughts and actions are directed toward a condition. To fully understand coping and weigh it, there is a need to know what one is coping with. Third, to have a dialog with oneself or others about the coping process means talking about an internal change (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

An important part of my analyzation for the present study is that coping involves more than solving a problem. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that there are coping functions that pertain to specific contexts such as health and illness, exam taking, and the welfare system. For the present study, my focus will be on problem-focused coping strategies, which are directed at defining the problem, producing alternate solutions, weighing the possibilities in terms of their costs and benefits, choosing among them, and then acting (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that problem-solving skills reflect the ability to research and analyze situations in order to identify problems and determine courses of action that may be effective. The difficulty inherent in many stressful encounters creates certain strains that may surpass the person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In

many instances, however, the person's resources are adequate, but the individual fails to use them to their fullest because doing so may create more conflict and anguish. Factors that restrict how people deal with problems are called restraints. Restraints may arise from personal agendas or may be environmentally based (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

People cannot escape stress, so they must learn how to develop coping mechanisms, which make significant differences in how people adapt to outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Lazarus (1966) emphasized that an individual shift began to emerge from that of stress to that of the coping process. As stressful situations take place, coping becomes enormously important as the instrument through which a positive sense of well-being can continue in the face of adverse conditions. This process can reflect strategies that help to enhance and boost the spirits, such as positive comparisons, which Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described as thinking positively even while faced with adversity. Coping resources include personal qualities and the environment while coping reactions are emotionally focused or problem focused and determine short-term and long-term outcomes.

I identified the transactional theory of stress and coping as the present study's theoretical foundation in reflection of the study's focus on the experiences of teaching in a medium-security prison. These experiences may lead to work-related stress when there is no determining workplace congruency. When there is high workplace congruence between what employees and employers expect, then there is higher productivity and job satisfaction (Graham et al., 2016). Graham et al. (2016) found that more congruence lessens stress and turnover intentions and also increases satisfaction overall. Lack of

emotional resources or ways to seek help when feeling stressed may lead to negative coping mechanisms that could result in poor work performance. However, being able to access resources like counseling is likely to produce positive coping strategies such as problem-solving, communicating about stress, and asking for assistance from associates and administration. Being able to recognize stress in the first place is important before coping mechanisms are developed.

Characteristics of Stress

Stress is defined as a physical, mental, or emotional factor that can lead to depression (in 57.6% of cases) that leads to anxiety (in 36.4% of cases), ultimately leading to physical and mental tension (Mahani & Panchal, 2019). Stress happens in many occupations and is often caused by lack of agreement between what is expected from employees and the absence of available support systems from employers such as open communication and workplace counseling. Research has shown that individuals who teach special populations are prone to more stress than teachers in regular schools (Kagwe et al., 2018). Workplace stress is a financial concern for employers as it can cause high rates of work absenteeism, high medical costs for employees, more on-the-job accidents, declines in work performance, and increased transfers of workers from their current positions to less stressful positions (Muigai et al., 2018).

In certain situations, stress can help people achieve their goals and move through challenging situations, yet it can also cause substantial emotional turmoil and physical ailments (Colligan & Higgins, 2008). Because stress is seen as a reaction to an event, the stressor can be encouraging or discouraging. In its basic form, stress can be positive

(eustress) or negative (distress; Colligan & Higgins, 2008). Examples of eustress are graduating from college, buying a new car, giving birth, or getting a new job. Distress, on the other hand, reflects reactions to negative stressors. When people think of the word stress, they think of unpleasant situations: being under pressure to perform a task, or responses to terrible events that have occurred. The point of discussing the two types of stress is to show that stress can help people accomplish goals and push them toward positive productivity. However, given a certain amount of intensity and extended amounts of arousal, stress can become crippling and lead to illness, burnout, and emotional turmoil (Colligan & Higgins, 2008).

Stress is an interaction between an individual and a source of demand within the environment. It is also a condition that exists when people experience demands that surpass their abilities to cope, resulting in disturbances to their mental and physical balance (Colligan & Higgins, 2008). The American Institute of Stress (2019) noted that 40% of employees reported their job as being highly stressful, and 25% view their jobs as the most stressor event in their lives. Also, on the job, stress is more associated with health complaints than that of money or intimate relationship problems.

Bhui et al. (2016) claimed working conditions were the main cause of stress regardless of the location of employment. People working in the public sector often mentioned physical environment and job assignment as contributing factors of stress. Employees in the private sector cite working long hours and lack of direction as sources of stress (Bhui et al., 2019). Family or relationships problems, death and sickness, and

maintaining a balance between social and personal responsibilities were other sources of stress experienced by employees (Colligan & Higgins, 2008).

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress has been identified as one of the top 10 health problems in the United States (Quick & Henderson, 2016). Quick and Henderson (2016) claimed that occupational stress is not a critical or deadly condition that can be cured through treatment. Instead, it is a long-lasting condition that requires an understanding of the history of the problem before intervention can be considered. When investigating the root of occupational stress, it is necessary to look at the causes of stress, otherwise known as risk factors, the response to the stress, and the result of the life history, methods of distress or the structure of healthy stress.

When investigating the origins of occupational stress, three issues require our attention: job-relationship, living condition, and self-imposition. The employee who lacks decision-making skills is especially challenged in high-stress jobs. The second primary cause is indecision about where one stands in the workplace. Work uncertainty and queries about the penalties of one's actions at work create constant wear and tear on the body (Quick & Henderson, 2016). The final cause of occupational stress is the inability to manage conflict at work. All conflict is not bad; some conflict could improve issues at work and is both productive and purposeful.

Work is an essential part of human life. But, when work prevents people the opportunity to use their ingenuity, intellect, and decision-making abilities, it causes stress (Communications Workers of America, 2017). With the introduction of new skills, many

jobs have become disjointed, and job tasks have become conical, leaving employees disconnected from the final product. Deskilling has created boredom among workers, making their workday less fulfilling, thereby creating offices with rows of employees joined to computers that can monitor every keystroke (Communication Workers of America, 2017). The knowledge of one's work being recorded has increased the pressure of the workday, which has led to an increasing amount of stress and heart disease (Communications Workers of America, 2017).

Work-related stress is a negative response to demands and pressures that are not matched to the employee's knowledge and abilities (World Health Organization; WHO, 2019). Stress can occur in many work situations; however, it is made worse when workers feel they have little support from managers and coworkers. On the other hand, workers are less likely to experience work-related stress when demands and pressures of work are coordinated, support is received from managers and coworkers, and employees can participate in the decision-making process regarding their jobs.

A healthy job is one where the pressure on workers is equal to their aptitudes and resources, their control over their work is suitable, and they get enough support from individuals who matter to them (WHO, 2019). A healthy workplace has an absence of dangerous conditions and a variety of health-promoting conditions including the establishment of appropriate information, training on health-related matters, and accessibility of health endorsing structural support practices (WHO, 2019).

Occupational Stress and Teachers

Stress is inevitable in many occupations; however, some occupations produce more stress than others. For the sake of this literature review and due to current and limited data on correctional educators, I will also focus on two other occupations that have had a vast amount of research done regarding the stress employees in those fields experience. The first group of employees who experience such stress is schoolteachers. Several studies have identified stress as the direct cause of job dissatisfaction among educators (Yu et al., 2015). Teachers are under a great deal of stress due to their work, relationships with students, relationships with coworkers, work overload, long hours, and high work concentration (Yu et al., 2015). Yu et al. (2015) explained when such high-stress intensity is not properly relieved, some teachers lose their passion for the teaching field and show undesirable, and unsympathetic behavior toward their students. Therefore, a high level of pressure can consume the emotional and physical resources of teachers and lead them in a state of job burnout (Yu et al., 2015).

Another primary concern regarding teachers and the associated stress is teacher attrition, which involves teachers who voluntarily leave the field. Such attrition has emerged as a major concern for government leaders and researchers within the United States. Prison educators have high attrition rates due to the clash of prison culture with their previous perceptions and experiences (Patrie, 2017). In prisons, officers and prisoners are dominant in contrast to the people who come to educate the latter. This domination tends to contrast to the educators' view of the world and may become an

avenue of stress for the educators as they adjust to stepping between two different environments (Patrie, 2017).

Lambert et al. (2018) reported the attrition rate is approximately 5.3% of the teacher's workforce, and along with the attrition rate, there is the associated financial, organizational, and educational cost associated with teachers leaving the workforce. For example, school systems and state agencies allocate a large sum of money to teacher induction and original training, continuous professional development of new teachers, along with the recruitment and hiring process. As a result, costs increase as teachers leave their position (Lambert et al., 2018). Equally, when teachers experience an enormous amount of stress, even more stressful events occur within the learning environment.

On the job, stress is documented as a key variable related to teachers leaving the profession, and high levels of stress in United States teachers have been widely noted in research (Lambert et al., 2018). Even though there is an increasing amount of research on teachers and stress, most studies emphasis is on outward and organizational factors related to stress, such as wages, and the size of the classroom. There are merits to researching those factors of teacher's stress. However, the psychological factors associated with teacher's everyday experiences of their classroom is often overlooked, creating an incomplete picture of how stress plays a part in the teacher workforce overall (Lambert et al., 2018).

Teachers at risk for occupational stress involves how teachers appraise their classroom resources and demands as inadequate, therefore placing them at greater risk for stress and lower occupational health (Lambert et al., 2018). While some teachers flourish

in the classroom, most are exposed to work-related stressors for long periods, which as a result can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, teaching ineffectiveness, and classroom management difficulties (Lambert et al., 2018). One of the few studies on prison educators I found related to stress was Kamrath and Gregg (2018). The researchers conducted a mixed methods study of the external and internal factors that lead to the decision of teachers to remain in their positions or leave. Conditions improved with the introduction of a program involving mentors and training that permitted new prison educators to be less isolated in the classroom through discussing skills gaps, culture shock and philosophical matters (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018).

Teachers play a pivotal role in creating a classroom atmosphere that nurtures learning and social-emotional well-being. Nevertheless, teaching can be stressful and handling dynamic forces just as demanding. As an occupation, teaching is inundated by a large number of turnovers contributing to burnout with recognizable rates of teacher attrition rising in public schools (Flook et al., 2013). Teacher stress and burnout have been an ongoing challenge in education, and for teachers who remain in the teaching field, stress can impact their performance in the classroom. Numerous sources of stress have been cited, including scheduling, workload, disruptive students, and structural factors (Flook et al., 2013).

Teachers also face growing pressure and inspection due to standardized testing. Flook et al. (2013) noted, while these concerns are difficult to address and have a long history, supporting teachers in these current condition will require teacher participation. A sense of belief in oneself and the feeling of togetherness with students and coworkers

have been identified as important basics linked to teaching engagement and less emotional fatigue and mental distress (Flook et al., 2013). The personal, societal, and financial costs associated with attrition are too concerning to ignore.

Teachers' ability to provide high-level teaching environments may be dampened if they are too stressed (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). Given the directional influences of a teacher and child relationship, the prosocial model suggests a child's negative behavioral affects a teacher's ability to provide a high-quality teaching environment. Extreme levels of a child misbehavior in the classroom can lead to a disordered classroom environment and an increased level of teacher stress (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). Referring to Lazarus's transactional model of stress and coping, teacher's emotions of stress affect their subjective interpretation of events as not being able to achieve the classroom goals or events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Teachers, especially those teaching at-risked children, may feel stressed because of the combination of teaching children with behavior problems, together with low pay, extended work hours, and little classroom support stress (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). Referring to the theoretical framework helps to understand burnout among teachers by suggesting a recurring relationship between a child's behavior problems and teacher stress (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014).

Correctional Education

I was able to find some studies on correctional education, but only two came close to addressing the topic of this study (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018; Patrie, 2017). Other studies were mostly on specific educational areas such as higher education and Pell

grants (Gaskew, 2015; Larson, 2015; Mastrorilli, 2016; Simpkins, 2018; Sokoloff & Schenck-Fontaine, 2017; Utheim, 2016); teaching incarcerated youth on the autism spectrum (Ostrovska, 2017); the dispossession of youth in a prison school (Champion, 2018); teaching academic writing in a women's prison (Maher, 2016); teaching Spanish in a community college prison program (Drew et al., 2015; Palomino & Ragsdale, 2015); teaching geoscience (Heron, 2019); art education in prison (Brewster, 2015; Giles et al., 2016; Ruyter, 2017); dance education in prison (Kuhlmann, 2006); religious education (Atkins et al., 2019; Boccio, 2017); music education in prison (Kautsky, 2017); conducting two studies on literacy learning (Muth et al., 2017); teaching human rights in jail (Saxton, 2016); teaching literature (Parkinson, 2018); and increasing literacy skills (Robinson, 2018). Education is the main route for inmate restoration and reentry into society. Education increases the likelihood of employment and greatly increases potential earnings. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) estimated that the median weekly earnings in 2012 for individuals without a high school diploma was $441, compared with $1,066 for those with a college degree.

Throughout the 1960s, the idea of rehabilitation became a leading factor in American corrections. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal funding for correctional educational programs dropped significantly. Although there is significant evidence showing the benefits of education for prisoners and former prisoners, access to higher education for them has been harshly curtailed. A change in the Omnibus Crime Bill in 1994 included a provision that blocked Pell Grants for incarcerated students. Proponents of the change argued that criminals did not deserve an education and that

funding education for inmates would reduce funding for nonincarcerated students (Rand Corporation, 2016). The passage of this law effectively defunded postsecondary education in prisons (Coley & Barton, 2006).

Because of this change in the law, the number of prison education programs has dropped. By 2005, only 35% of prisons provided access to educational programs. States such as California, Florida, and Illinois have cut their correctional education budgets even more since the 1990s (Duwe & Clark, 2014). According to Duwe and Clark (2014), states reduced funding for prison education programs by an average of 6% between fiscal years 2009 and 2012. States with large prison populations cut prison education funding by 10% on average, while states with medium-sized populations slashed education budgets by an average of 20%. Educators made up just 3% of all employees in state and federal prisons (Rand Corporation, 2016).

Prison Educators

Access to prison education is fundamental to a former inmate's successful reentry into society; it decreases recidivism by helping ex-offenders find work that will enable them to make a living (Rand Corporation, 2016). Because prisoners cannot leave to attend traditional classes, teachers must go into prisons to teach them. These investigation and interview responses showed that prison educators are different from public teachers. They are prepared to teach their content areas, but not completely prepared to work with prison populations, and they are not trained to work in a diverse classroom (Jurich et al., 2001).

A prison educator could have a positive impact on the lives of the inmates they teach since many inmates do not have positive role models and have not learned how to maintain healthy personal relationships (Wright, 2004). The role of the prison educator is challenging because of the disparities between students in the same classroom: different age ranges, low levels of literacy, and differing abilities and levels of motivation. For instructors who are willing to teach behind bars, security requirements impose substantial limitations. Instructors and volunteers cannot enter or leave the correctional institution easily. Once inside, clearance to come and go is problematic, and instructors must often endure extensive security measures to enter or exit their classrooms (Zoukis, 2015). Teachers cannot go over their allotted class time or speak to inmate students before class. The institution allows 10 minutes for inmates to reach their classes once movement is announced. Classes are capriciously canceled, and class assignments are changed without notice, making attendance unreliable (Zoukis, 2015).

Prison teachers must also deal with frequent interruptions and prison students being absent for reasons beyond their control—inmates may be prevented from attending classes because of a violation, a parole hearing, or a visit from an attorney. When the facility initiates a lockdown, inmates must immediately return to their cells and remain there, and lockdowns often last for months at a time (Zoukis, 2015). The prison environment has many obstacles for the educator to overcome. Prison teachers need special training to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of a prison environment where security, not learning, is the main concern. Some educators may feel that teaching in such an environment is an aggravation until they see how many inmates are hungry for an

education (Zoukis, 2015). Inmate students look to their teachers as people who will not give up on them and who believe in their abilities. Prison educators who at first may be unwilling to teach inmates often determine that they are much easier to teach than traditional students because they are devoted to their education (Zoukis, 2015).

The Virginia Department of Correctional Education conducted a study that evaluated prison education. The study found that traditional teacher introductory programs did little to help prepare educators to teach in prisons (Jurich et al., 2001). Jurich et al. (2001) claimed, "Training on behavior management, anger diffusion, basic principles of psychology, or strategies to deal with antagonistic systems are also absent in these traditional training programs" (p. 1). Due to lack of preparation for educators, the Virginia Department of Correctional Education evaluated prison educators' needs over 5 months.

The assessment was separated into three parts: (a) focus groups with instructors, prison inmates, and superintendents; (b) an analysis of training needs; and (c) observations and discussions at correctional institutions (Jurich et al., 2001). The following topics were recommended for prison-specific educator training:

1. The philosophy of correctional education
2. Proper communication skills in a prison environment
3. Improved understanding of prison behavior
4. Teaching procedures
5. Defining a successful educator

There is little scholarly research on the day-to-day operations of correctional school settings (Wright, 2005). Between 2013 and 2018, I have found only limited studies on the correctional educational setting. This omission is significant because prison educators often must improvise their roles and become more than just educators to the inmates they teach. Prison educators may have to help inmate students to develop necessary social skills, including discussing past indiscretions, admitting weakness, and learning when and how to trust others (Schlesinger, 2005). Prison educators may also have to provide counseling to student inmates who have a hard time functioning in a prison setting, especially those who seek their advice. Additionally, prison educators may also have to motivate inmate students whose low self-esteem and limited circumstances make it difficult to set and achieve goals.

Stress and the Correctional Environment

Corrections are a significant part of the U.S. Criminal justice system. Over $30,000,000,000 are spent annually to house over 1,400,000 prisoners in more than 1,200 prisons that employ over 400,000 people (Lambert et al., 2015). Correctional staff are an essential part of the prison system. The staff are the heart and soul of correctional organizations and are responsible for the countless daily tasks and duties that keep a facility running smoothly. Correctional institution operations are labor intense, and the employees account for over 70% of the costs of operating a typical correctional institution (Lambert et al., 2015).

Also, the institution’s work environment can have a significant effect on the staff. Regardless of the position, working at a correctional facility is difficult, dangerous, and

unappreciated by most people. Griffin et al. (2010) noted the limited research on burnout in the field of corrections has proposed that burnout is a significant problem for many COs and other prison staff.

Occupation Stress and Correctional Officers

A second occupation with a significant amount of stress within the work environment is that of COs. COs play an important role within the prison system as they are in charge of many responsibilities to safeguard their location, making sure it is operating proficiently. Legislative reforms started in the 1970s, including the "get tough on crime" laws and mandatory sentences. Therefore, prisons have undergone dramatic changes in the makeup of offender population (Ferdik & Smith, 2017). According to Ferdik and Smith (2017), the rise in prison population escalated from 300,000 to more than 1.5 million between 1975 and 2013, and the violent crime population also increased from 40 percent in 1985 to more than 60 percent by 2013.

The responsibility of COs carries the danger of constant physical harm and emotional stress. The amount of nonfatal prison workplace injuries between 2005 and 2009 per 1,000 was 33 percent, which compared with 26 other professions, ranked third to police officers and security guards. Also, in 2011, COs experienced 544 work-related injuries and sicknesses that mandated absences from work per 10,000 full-time prison guards, which was the third-highest amount of nonfatal injuries exceeded only by police officers and security guards (Ferdik & Smith, 2017). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that between 1999 and 2008, 113 United States COs were killed in the line of

duty, which estimates a loss of life of 2.7 per 100,000 full-time workers; reporting the 22nd highest among 115 professions (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2013).

Brower (2013) explained COs experience huge amount of stress, burnout, and various mental health-related consequences due to their employment. The implications of negative physical and mental health outcomes for COs can have devastating effects on the prison system. With staff shortages and officers absent from work, this cycle can create low officer to inmate ratios and high rates of turnovers which could lead to ineffective implementation of correctional facility's security mandates (Brower, 2013; Crawley, 2004; Ferdik et al., 2014).

Finney et al. (2013) found occupational stress and burnout affect between 19% and 30% of employees in the working population. Constant occupational stress can cause burnout in the workplace and is described as exhaustion, detachment, ineffectiveness, and lack of personal goals (Finney et al., 2013). The researcher claimed job stress and burnout results in workers displaying decreased organizational commitment and lower productivity. Stress factors affect correctional institutional employees due to housing a population against their will while trying to accomplish the prison's mission and protecting the public's safety by inspiring and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens (Finney et al., 2013).

It is recognizable that a prison is a relatively different place that presents safety risks that may cause stress. Prison work is physically and psychologically demanding and poses different types of health and safety risks. Steiner and Wooldredge (2015) argued occupational stress among COs can be encouraged by the characteristics and experiences

of the officer but also by collective factors involving the characteristics of the prison environment such as security level and crowding. Occupational stress is the response to the stressors in the workplace, a perceived threat to a person's well-being or safety (Finney et al., 2013). Among COs, stress and burnout can lead to adverse personal, social, and work-related outcomes. Nevertheless, when compared with the general working employees, the effects are more pronounced in COs. In COs, occupational stress has been associated with decreased life satisfaction, internal withdrawal, inability to cope with traumatic experiences, sicknesses, and substance abuse (Finney et al., 2013).

Another stressor for COs is the addition of more prisoners in the prison system without the increase of additional COs. Steiner and Wooldredge (2015) noted that officers who do not see that the number of staff or time needed to meet the demands of the job may feel greater amount of stress. Comparable to emergency responders and other law enforcement employees, COs are exposed to danger at a higher rate than the overall population. There is research implementing direct exposure to danger, and workers' understanding of safety and stress (Steiner & Wooldredge, 2015).

Occupational Stress and Prison Educators

The total prison population in the United States in 2016 was 1,506,800. Alper et al. (2018), writing for the BLS, in the United States, reported that in 2005, there were 401,288 state prisoners released. There were 1,994,000 arrests in 9 years or 5 arrests for every prisoner released from correctional facilities; 60% of the arrests happened from years 4-9 and 68% were arrested in a 3-year period. Seventy-nine percent were arrested in a 6-year period, with 83% arrested in the entire period—most within the first 3 years of

release (Alper et al., 2018). Furthermore, 47%, nearly half of the prisoners who were not arrested in the first 3 years of their probationary period did get arrested from the fourth to the ninth year. To put it simply, 44% were arrested the first year and 24% were arrested in the ninth (Alper et al., 2018).

Because the number of U.S prisoners is high as well as recidivism, Hrabowski and Robbi (2002) claimed receiving an education in prison can help keep inmates from committing crimes once they are released from prison. Receiving their high school degree can mean the difference between living freely in society or returning to prison. As a group, prisoners have less education than has the general public. Also, having a record, those who are on parole are less likely to be educated and face a greater disadvantage when they apply for employment. When comparing the cost of correctional education to that of re-arrest, reprocessing through the courts and being sent back to prison, the results point to that of correctional education. The cost of imprisoning 100 individuals for four years is approximately $10 million. Provided an additional $1 million, those individuals could receive a full-time four-year college education while behind bars (Hrabowski & Robbi, 2002).

Prisons must employ educators to teach inmates while in prison. Because inmates cannot leave the facility to attend classes, the teachers must go to prison to teach the inmates. The prisons are institutions of control and security where educators are subjected to safety procedures and must change the courses used on campus to accommodate restrictions placed upon the prison student. Placing students with different security classification in a classroom can be intimidating for the instructor. Also, teachers

must contend with many class interruptions, such as inmates being absent from class due to an infraction or a parole hearing (Zoukis, 2017).

Sources of Stress in the Classroom

Although the teaching profession was at one time considered to be a low-stress occupation, over the last 30 years, the importance of academic achievement has changed teaching to be one of the most stressful occupations (Kagwe et al., 2018). According to Kagwe et al. (2018), sources of stress among prison educators include low motivation in students, disciplinary problems, bad working conditions, the pressures of time and high workload, and inadequate support of the administration. According to Wright (2005), learning to teach in prison can be hazardous and unsettling. Also, teaching in prison is confusing, disquieting, and a different experience.

Summary and Conclusion

Working in a prison setting as a prison educator is stressful. Learning to teach in prison can be hazardous and unsettling (Wright, 2005). Teaching in prison can be confusing, disquieting, and a different experience than what educators experience outside penal institutions (Patrie, 2017). However, various coping skills could help ease the discomfort or tension that results from the exposure to the stressors that exceed the educator's ability to cope. Coping mechanisms, such as positive comparison, can make a significant difference in how one adapts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Identifying the individual and environmental causes of stress is important to develop strategies and coping skills to reduce stress. This qualitative study involved interviewing prison educators in two medium secured prisons and obtaining information

on the educator's stress level teaching in prison and the coping skills they apply to alleviate that stress. Due to the limited amount of current research on stress and prison educators, I included research on occupational stress and teachers and occupational stress and COs. As a result, this study could fill the gap in the literature concerning stress and prison educators. The remaining chapters of this study contain information on methods and methodology, data analysis, findings, and recommendations. I explain how using in-depth interviews and questionnaires help fill the gaps in the research and meet the methodological criteria.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of correctional educators, how they handle stress in medium security prisons, and the strategies they used to cope in the prison classrooms. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the methodology used to address the research questions. I explain the rationale for my study design, which includes the reason I decided to use a qualitative study. The use of semistructured interviews on teachers' experiences with stress in a correctional setting helped me to better understand the perceptions of stress prison educators hold and the strategies they use to endure their stress. Next are details concerning my role as a researcher including how I recruited the participants, collected data for the study, analyzed the data, and ensured the trustworthiness of the study including its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I then explain how I followed ethnical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do prison educators describe their stressors in the classroom?

RQ2: What strategies do prison educators use to cope with their stress in the classroom?

To answer the research questions, I used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological design. Such a design allowed the prison educators the opportunity to describe what stress meant to them and what strategies they used to cope with on the job stress. Using phenomenology to record the educators' lived experiences is ideal for

exploring and understanding how these teachers address the challenges of working daily with incarcerated students. Pathak et al. (2013) explained that a qualitative method can be used to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions. Additionally, using a qualitative tradition, more specifically collecting data from in-depth interviews, can help the researcher understand an experience or event from a personal perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Quantitative research is based on hypotheses and the use of instruments that the researchers either develop themselves or use ones developed by other researchers (Yin, 2016). Such a large base of objective numerical data is useful for generalizing results and deterring bias (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). At first, I considered using a quantitative method, but although I could have collected more data from more participants, I would not be able to gather the thick, rich data that a qualitative method can provide. An in-depth study on prison educators' day to day encounters with stress and coping serves my purposes for collecting heavily descriptive data. Also, in the context of keeping the present study simple and straightforward, a mixed methods tradition might have brought more time and complications in completing the study. Therefore, I argue that a qualitative study was the best means for exploring and understanding the phenomenon of stress in the prison classroom.

Qualitative research encompasses a variety of perspectives including grounded theory, case study (which may be combined with other approaches), narrative inquiry, and ethnography, among others (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Although I looked at the other perspectives, I rejected them in favor of phenomenology. Case study, for example,

addresses cases in their contexts wherein the researcher seeks the participant's perspectives (Bromley, 1986). Rather than seeking the participants' perspectives on matters they themselves would not experience directly, I wanted to explore their personal experiences regarding stress in their workplace. Thus, I discarded case study. In narrative inquiry, the research obtains stories on a subject from the participants wherein the stories involve making sense of the world infused with universal meanings, often from marginalized population (Lenfesty et al., 2016). Though narrative inquiry would be appropriate for collecting anecdotes from prisoners, it was not an appropriate approach for their instructors whose experience in prison is only a part of their lives.

Grounded theory is used by researchers to create new theories based on what participants share, not using established theories (Hoare et al., 2013). Because I had already chosen a theory for the framework of the study, I was able to discard grounded theory. Finally, I was able to discard ethnography, which researchers mainly used to describe cultures that shares the same beliefs and values (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). It was more likely that the participants in the present study did not all share the same beliefs and background but rather their lived experiences in a specific setting—the workplace—in which they educate incarcerated individuals yet go on throughout the rest of the day and the weekends leading unique lives. Thus, phenomenology best suited the study in which the participants did share the phenomenon of stress and how they coped with it in the prison education setting.

Role of the Researcher

I conducted telephone interviews with the prison educators who are members of a correctional education association. Because I have not had any direct connections with prison educators or prisoners, I would not be in a position of power with the participants nor would I have any conflicts of interest in conducting my study. As a qualitative researcher, I upheld the standards of credibility and dependability in collecting the data, as well as in analyzing the data and presenting the findings.

Bias is possible when researchers, as the main research instrument, bring their own opinions and feelings into a study. Therefore, I planned to keep a reflective journal to prevent bias (see Goldstein & Olswang, 2017). Goldstein and Olswang (2017) recommended that researchers record their feelings, whether any errors had been made, how the quality of the interview went, and if things might have turned out differently. These perceptions were recorded at the time of the interview and shortly after each interview is completed. My researcher role was as an observer who not only collects audio data but also interprets the participants' telephone interviews. I regarded their vocal tone, thought I was not able to observe facial expressions or body language. I presented all the interview questions in an objective manner and offered only the information that was necessary to conduct a smooth interview. I addressed all ethical concerns of the participants and assured them that their participation was entirely voluntary, they could exit the interview at any time, and any data they decided to have removed would be addressed promptly.

Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological method with which the study was done is described in depth not only in the final dissertation but also in the reflexive journal I kept. During the analysis process, I organized data in visual concept maps as well as Word tables, which I described in detail so that other researchers can replicate the study.

Participant Selection Logic

The population for the study was professional educators who worked with incarcerated individuals. The purposive sample of participants in this study was prison educators who were members of a correctional education association. The criteria I had were only that the participants were professional educators hired to teach prison inmates and who had at least 12 months experience teaching in their present place of employment. I planned to interview eight educators. If eight was insufficient to reach saturation, I planned to recruit two to three more. If saturation came before eight participants, as it did, I planned to stop the interviews. The data reached saturation by the time I had interviewed six participants. Saturation can be defined as the circumstances where no new information is presented, which can happen even before the planned number of participants are interviewed (Galvin, 2015). Because the participants in the present study worked in the same kind of setting, they were homogeneous in their experiences, practices, and skills (Galvin, 2015). Once the prison educators agreed to participate, I contacted them to set up interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Instrumentation

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of work-related stress which include the cause of the stress and strategies used to cope with the stress. I, as the interviewer, was the main data collection instrument as I assured the participants of the voluntariness of the study, that they could exit the study at any time and decline to answer any questions. I asked the questions, recorded the interviews, and took field notes in a reflexive journal to minimize bias. The interview began with asking the participants about their positions, years' experience, how they got into the prison system as educators, and their stressors in the classroom. After the participants described their stressors, I asked how they coped with the classroom stressors by outlining the strategies they used. I prepared probing follow-up questions to help with the flow of the original question just in case the participants' responses lacked clarity. The initial set of questions permitted me to explore the causes as well as the strategies used to reduce the stress.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To research stress and coping strategies of prison educators within a correctional education association, I conducted interviews with prison educators who are members of a correctional education association. To speak to the prison educators, I contacted the Executive Assistant and President of the organization to get approval for this research project with an email asking for permission to speak to its members. After consent was given to proceed with the research, I followed protocol and sent out recruitment emails to members of the organization asking to speak to prison educators whom I asked to contact

me by email or telephone with questions about the study and their interest in taking part in it. Since 1930, the Correctional Education Association (CEA) has provided leadership, direction, and services to correctional educators and institutional correctional education programs around the world. CEA has also been the only professional advocacy group for juvenile justice and adult correctional education for the private sector, political organizations, and social agencies in the United States.

Once the prison educators agreed to participate, I contacted them to set up interviews that were to last for approximately 45 minutes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to discard my plans for face to face interviews and instead do them over the phone. I asked the participants when would be the most convenient to meet with them. I suggested a quiet place that they felt most comfortable discussing the subject of stress. During the interviews, I took handwritten notes and used a digital recorder. I interviewed teachers at different prisons across the United States who had been employed as educators for 12 months or more. One advantage of having to discard the face to face interviews was being able to expand the geographic area in which they worked. I interviewed prison educators in the Southeast, northern Midwest, and West Coast.

Data Analysis Plan

After I collected the data, I transcribed the audio interviews of the prison educators using a transcription service that preserved both audio and video components. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, discounting sounds such as “um.” I used descriptive coding to break down the data according to each of the two research questions while describing the perceived stress and causes of stress and strategies used. When

conducting qualitative inquiry, researchers must pay meticulous attention to language; they must also reflect deeply on the patterns that emerge in the context of the human experience (Saldaña, 2016). I used coding to capture different patterns within the transcripts and take other reflective notes as I read through my transcripts to facilitate the process that ended in emerging themes on the lived experiences of prison educators.

Saldaña (2016) has written extensively on coding. I coded the data manually by developing tables on Word files based on the transcribed interviews. First, I skimmed the transcripts to keep them fresh in my mind. Then, I scanned them for meaningful terms that could be entered into the tables on a preliminary basis. The next step I took was to read each transcript carefully that I had printed out and used highlighters and written notes to emphasize important information. All the time, I added to my notes and kept an audit trail to enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis procedure. When my study of the transcripts was complete, I turned to the tables and went over them reflectively so that themes began to emerge. At this point, I asked a colleague for feedback, as I stated in confirmability section, on their perspective on the degree of objectivity of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be ensured when a study's authenticity is established. Researchers can do so by using detailed records of all stages of the data collection and analysis process, noting whenever researcher bias becomes problematic, and triangulating the study. These strategies can ensure trustworthiness (Toma, 2014). Toma (2014) added that a detailed description of the study's design can also be included to bolster trustworthiness. Not only is trustworthiness discovered in the details of the findings but

also in the researcher's purpose to be transparent about biases and care to use triangulation (Toma, 2014).

Credibility

It is essential to ensure credibility in qualitative research, which can take place through use of member checking to make sure all the information given by the participants in the transcribed data is exactly what they said (Birt et al., 2016). I used member checking to ensure credibility. I contacted the participants and offered to share a summary of each of the transcripts with them to check for inaccuracies during the interpretation of data in regard to their actual experiences, which could allow for me and the participants to correct any distortions and to highlight and correct errors. Although they all declined to see the summary, they left it open for me to contact them with questions about completed or incomplete data. I did contact three of them and they replied immediately with clarification by email or phone.

Transferability

Transferability is connected to external validity—how well a study can be valid in other contexts (Morse, 2015). It means to the degree to which a study's findings can be transferred to these contexts and the researchers can duplicate them (Mosalanejad et al., 2018). I developed detailed findings to the degree that others who conduct studies on the same topic of on-the-job stress for prison educators would be able to comprehend the research and evaluate the results so that the present study can become a part of their literature reviews (Morse, 2015). The way to ensure transferability is in the study's depth as well as participant observations and examination of outside data if available (e.g.,

statistics on educators in correctional facilities from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). I also compared this phenomenological study with other studies to determine if additional research might be added to the field. In addition, I made recommendations for strategies to incorporate in the classroom in prison settings.

Dependability

I found other sources of data that supported my interpretations to triangulate the data by comparing my findings from the research with other research regarding stress and prison educators. I engaged in meticulous record keeping in my reflexive journal (see Anney, 2014), demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data were consistent and transparent. My use of journaling and unofficial reading of any available public documents did broaden my own understanding of the prison environment in relation to educators who work in these settings. I also kept notes that included not only my reflections and observations of the interviews but also bracketing of my own biases and personal feelings during and after the interview process as well as an audit trail. Then the dependability of the study could be ensured so other studies might produce similar results (Saldaña et al., 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability can be defined as neutrality and if the findings are both consistent and replicable to enhance objectivity in qualitative studies (Polit & Beck, 2014). One way to achieve confirmability is to maintain an audit trail of the analysis stage wherein researchers keep detailed notes of all they decide as the analysis proceeds. Researchers may also ask a colleague to review their research and get feedback in a peer debriefing

session, which also prevents bias (Polit & Beck, 2014). Member checking can also enhance confirmability (Connelly, 2016). I ensured steps were taken as far as possible that the study outcomes were the result of the experiences of the participants, as opposed to my own experiences and preferences. I had a colleague check my data analysis in addition to notes and audit trails to avoid inappropriate biases that could have impacted the data analysis.

Ethical Procedures

Before I collected any data, I needed approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board, and I followed all of their guidelines (12-27-19-0276162). I asked the Correctional Education Association for access to members to interview (see Appendix B). The ethical considerations for this research consisted of the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview questioning and the option not to answer any of the interview questions. All research conducted on humans must be proactively accepted by the subjects themselves through the procedure known as informed consent, which is a process by which a subject voluntarily confirms his or her willingness to participate in a particular trial, after having been informed of all aspects of the trial that are relevant to the subject's decision to participate (Manti & Licari, 2018). Informed consent is written in a language that is easily understood by the participants, and it must diminish the likelihood of intimidation or unjust influence, and the participant must be given adequate time to consider participating (Manti & Licari, 2018).

I obtained informed consent from the prison educators participating in this research well in advance of the interviews and informed them that their participation was

voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, the interviews were held at a time and location convenient for the educators at their end. I recommended to the prison educators to find a place that could offer privacy without their being overheard such as a private room in their home. They were also told they could refuse to answer questions. The participants were treated with the utmost of respect and ensured they would remain anonymous as well as the data they provided. I removed names and other identifying information from the transcripts. The data will be kept locked up in a file cabinet in my home to which only I have the key, and the computer data will be encrypted, both for a period of 5 years. When the period is up, I plan to erase all files and shred my notes and anything else I have stored in the cabinet.

Summary

This qualitative study consisted of 45-minute interviews with prison educators who are members of a correctional education association on their experiences of stress in teaching in a prison and the strategies they use to cope with stress. Included in Chapter 3 were the role of the researcher and information on the methodology used in this qualitative study. I also discussed data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 consists of the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of correctional educators, their strategies for handling stress, and the coping skills they use in their classrooms. A qualitative approach—phenomenology—was used to address the gap in research on this topic using the perspectives and experiences of full-time teachers in the prison system. Exploring how full-time prison teachers manage stress in their classrooms may reveal valuable information that can help other prison-based teachers manage their stress in similar settings. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do prison educators describe their stressors in the classroom?

RQ2: What strategies do prison educators use to cope with their stress in the classroom?

Chapter 4 presents the setting of the study and demographic details on the six participants (see Table 1). All participants were presently employed as educators in medium and maximum prison settings and had significant years of experience. They also lived in different geographical areas of the United States. Table 1 illustrates their genders, their years of experience, and the settings in which they worked. I then describe how the data were collected and analyzed, after which I discuss evidence of the study's trustworthiness including its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Then, I present the results, organized by research and interview questions. The text contains the participants' detailed statements, both summarized and quoted, after which I summarize the results.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Years experience	Prison setting
P1	Female	30	Mental health setting
P2	Female	5	Medium/max
P3	Female	14	Medium
P4	Male	4	Medium/max
P5	Male	33	Medium/max
P6	Female	19	Medium/max

Data Collection

Six participants completed the semistructured interviews. I recorded all interviews on a digital recorder next to my cell phone, which was on speaker mode to capture all the interviews clearly. Each participant was interviewed once, which took approximately 45 minutes, except for P5, who spoke for over an hour. Although I originally planned to interview eight prison educators, the data had reached the saturation point by the time I reached six participants. Nothing unusual occurred during the data collection.

After the interviews were recorded, I used a transcription service known as Temi. When the interviews were transcribed, Temi sent them to my Gmail account, where they were displayed on Google Docs, both graphically and auditorily. I went through all the documents and removed the disfluencies like “um” and “you know,” and fixed the mistakes the service made as I listened to them. Although the interviews yielded rich

data, some questions went directly unanswered for three of the participants. At that point, I emailed each of them, and they wrote back with in-depth clarifying responses. When the transcripts were completed accurately, I made a detailed Word table, in which I pasted participants' entire responses to interview questions to prepare them for data analysis. In other words, I made six tables by participant with all their answers to the interview questions in the cells.

Data Analysis

After two thorough readings of each question, I went back and highlighted recurring words and patterns using the Word highlighter tool. On the side of the table, under the interview question, I recorded key words that appeared significant. I wrote up the results of the interviews in narrative form, which made it easier to find themes. After writing the results section, I went back to the data tables to review them again. Finally, themes began to emerge among the repeated highlighting and reviews.

As stated in Chapter 3, I did code the interview data manually by developing detailed tables on Word files based on the transcribed interviews (see Saldaña, 2016). Further, as I reread the interviews and data tables numerous times, I triangulated the data using my handwritten notes recorded during the actual interview, which helped me keep an audit trail to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Reviewing the tables and the results section thoroughly and reflectively helped me discover emerging themes. I also asked a colleague for feedback, which she was willing to provide, on the degree of objectivity of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The primary way to ensure trustworthiness is to keep detailed records of all the stages of data collection and analysis. Also, the moments that researcher bias emerges should be noted. Adding these triangulating sources to increase authenticity such as notes taken during the interviews and journal entries for the data collection and analysis process leaves an audit trail to ensure trustworthiness (Toma, 2014). Such an audit trail aids the researcher's transparency, particularly about biases (Toma, 2014).

Credibility

Member checking is done to make sure all the information the participants gave in the transcribed is exactly as they revealed (Birt et al., 2016). I asked the participants at the end of the interview process if they wanted to review their transcripts to check them for accuracy. Although they declined the offer, I did tell them I might be contacting them again with questions if anything was unclear or missing. I found that direct answers to one or two of the interview questions were missing in three of the interviews. I contacted them by email, and they answered immediately with substantive answers to fill in the gaps.

Transferability

Transferability is related to external validity, or how well a study can be valid in other contexts (Morse, 2015). In other words, transferability is the degree to which the findings of a study can be transferred to other studies to duplicate by other researchers (Mosalanejad et al., 2018). Although I could not interview the participants face to face, I was able in the clear recordings observe the tone in which they delivered their lived

experiences as prison educators. My detailed findings, aided by an audit trail as well as examining outside data on the prison education system from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), helped me compare my study with others to determine if additional research might be added to this professional field. In Chapter 5, I recommend strategies to incorporate in the prison classroom setting.

Dependability

In Chapter 3, I planned to find other sources of data to triangulate the data by comparing my findings with other research on prison educators and how they deal with stress on the job. My record keeping was meticulous in demonstrating a clear decision trail both in interview notes on factors like tone of voice and detail in my reflexive journal (see Anney, 2014). The combination of the journaling during and after the interviews and reading of available public documents helped to broaden my own understanding of how educators work in a prison environment. As a result, I ensured the dependability of the study so that other researchers can get similar results in other studies involving prison educators (see Saldaña et al., 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability is sometimes defined as neutrality and replicability, which is used to increase objectivity in qualitative methodology (Polit & Beck, 2014). Again, the audit trail during the data analysis stage is a useful tool. In using audit trails, researchers keep detailed notes of all their decisions in each step of data analysis. In addition, they might ask a colleague to review their research to prevent bias by getting honest feedback in a peer debriefing session (Polit & Beck, 2014). Another confirmability tool is member

checking, which I did with three participants by asking additional questions to ensure accuracy and clarity of data (Polit & Beck, 2014).

Results

Six participants answered 10 interview questions as well as a voluntary eleventh question, offering them an opportunity to add more information if they felt it was necessary. The experiences expressed by the participants, educators in the U.S. prison system, were deep and rich. All interviews lasted at least 45 minutes, and P5 talked for over an hour and contacted me one or two additional times to add things he felt should be included. The following paragraphs are organized by research questions and interview questions in chronological order. The themes are presented after the results section.

RQ1: How Prison Educators Describe Their Classroom Stressors

Interview Question 1

What is your job title? How many years of experience do you have in this field? P1 said her title was "special teacher" with her northern midwestern department of corrections. She had been working for "close to 30 years" in the prison system with years of experience with the juvenile division and the last 5 years with adult education. P2 revealed her job title was "correctional teacher one," and she had about 5 years in the field. P3 worked on the West Coast, getting her job title from the state as a high school teacher with 14 years "as a correctional educator" and with her experience in public school, she taught a total of 24 years. P4, one of two men, had many years' experience as a correctional officer, and has been designated simply a "teacher" in the prison system for the past 4 years. P5, the other man, also had the job title of "teacher" at a corrections

facility for “individuals that have psychological difficulties or needs that are not being met in the typical correctional facility.” He has been at his present position for 1 year yet a correctional teacher for the past 33 years. Finally, P6 named her job title as “teacher” for the “past 19 years.”

Interview Question 2

How did you get started in this line of work? P1 was originally licensed to teach social studies but could not find a job due to “so many applicants.” Therefore, she went back to school to get a degree in chemical dependency counseling. After having worked in Appalachia with underrepresented people, she got into juvenile corrections and applied for a state job with the prisons. She eventually began working with adults starting in 2005 in a northern midwestern state. P2 had a friend who was a correctional educator. The fact that her friend would brag about prison education being stress free compared to public schools attracted P2 to the concept of prison teaching. She was hired part time at first after she was eligible to retire from public education and then served full time after she retired. She is working in a “medium/max super max” prison. P3 heard about prison education from a friend who encouraged P3 because of her background in special education and her insecurity of not being hired back because she was “the low man on the totem pole” at middle or high school special ed. Feeling encouraged to try the prison system, P3 volunteered and felt she “connected with the prisoners immediately” and she thought “a lot of it was just because of the experiences [she] already had with struggling families.”

P4 was a corrections officer in the prison system, but always had had a college degree and “when the opening finally came up to get promoted to a daytime position Monday through Friday being a teacher,” he accepted. He is in a “blend of a maximum security because [they are] a psychiatric hospital too [with] medium inmates, men and women.” P4 claimed his facility is “a different shade of animal.” After graduating from college mid-year, P5 wanted to teach English in a high school, but there were no positions available at the time. After having worked in a cheese factory for half a year, his brother pointed out there was a teaching position at a juvenile correctional facility so he “put in for it and was granted an interview” and though “normally it takes five interviews before you're offered a position,” he was offered one right way. That was in 1987 and P5 has been teaching in prisons ever since. P6 had a bachelor’s degree in special education and worked right away at a high school. Her roommate at the time informed her about a special education position in the prison, which the roommate said “was a fascinating combination of education and psychology.” Despite not being interested at first, P6 went for a tour and was “really fascinated by the psychology, the behavior of the individuals,” which “fed into [her] passion for emotional behavior disorders and people with significant learning disabilities.” She started in the prison only after having taught high school for one semester and has been there ever since.

Interview Question 3

What is your work routine on a typical day? To P1, as a special ed teacher, no day is the same. For example, she said, “I float between four classrooms. Plus, I do individual work like support the psychology staff. I am split between three prisons. and I work in

segregation and on the mental health unit as well." She also works in the administrative control unit in the supermax: "So when the guys have been extremely naughty, I go down, work with them and we have had men actually earn diplomas down there." She added, "It's never the same day twice because she has to "put out lot of fires every day." In the classroom there are "about 25 offender students with about five to seven tutors, offender tutors." She said that it "looks like a regular room with students sitting at tables, students doing their thing. Some guys are on the computer. It's just the difference is that all that variety."

P2 normally has an 8:00 class before which she must go through metal detectors, wands, and a pat search. The buildings are "really spread out" and P2 must tell them she is there before class starts. Her students are restrained 23 out of 24 hours a day she has to go to the unit, which is near her classroom. They "have to be belly chained and foot shackled and cuffed, and they have to have at least two officers escort them to the classroom" two or three at a time. The "seats are really, really hard metal and just steel is what they are, and they're bolted with like these gigantic bolts into the concrete with their nondominant hand cuffed." Then, she said, "We have school." When she is done, she calls the unit again and they come down to get them as soon as they can and she calls for the next unit, "shooting" for two and a half hours at a time. Emergencies with the physical building or a bathroom accident will stop school for the day. She tries to be as entertaining as possible like "singing some stupid song." They do "social studies, science, English, grammar, and essay writing because they have to write an essay on their test and then we do math and reading. We have five basic subjects."

P3 has a busy work routine that is “very demanding.” There is “minimal, if any downtime at all, and there's a lot of the paperwork, is very important, working in a state bureaucracy.” P3 mentioned “paperwork attendance records and disciplinary reports and progress reports.” Report cards must go in a statewide database system. On a typical day, P3 works from 7:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. She teaches three classes of adult basic education at the lower level which is basically equivalent to an English language learner class. The adults she teaches have been tested to read at “either a non-reading 0.0 to 3.9 ninth grade, ninth month, third grade level, and this is the class placement for inmates is done through the test of adult basic education.” P3 went through all her three classes in two-hour blocks, typically with 18 students, until 2:30 p.m. and then preps with the hope of finishing her day by 3:00 p.m. Her teaching assistants are inmates who must be supervised. All her students are men and 20% of them are in prison for life. Unlike her previous students who were nonviolent offenders, now her students can be described as “hardened criminals.” One education guard (not in the classroom) circles nine classrooms. P3 added that if “it's [the prisoners’] yard time, they can come up to the library. So, the guards are “also dealing with inmates traffic coming in and out of library.”

P4 was briefer. He said, “It’s getting here at 7:15 in the morning prepping for the school day by seeing what I'm going to be teaching.” He starts at 8:00 teaching math and has two math classes during the day and a couple of computer classes. On an average day, he teaches “five classes and an African studies class.” His day starts at 7:15 a.m. and goes to 3:45 p.m. P5 is teaching a competency-based education program for students who

have difficulty getting their High School Equivalency diploma: “We get them to complete their competencies and then they can earn their high school diploma.” P5 teaches math for the first two periods, works with the men on the unit for a period, and goes back to his classroom. He has another class, then his lunch break, and then he goes up to the unit for another group and has a science class. He then teaches an hour of math and that will take him till 4:00 p.m. In the northern midwestern state in which he teaches “there are different ways that students can get their high school diploma. One of those is by passing the 509 programs, which has to get approved by the department of public instruction,” a competency class he teaches.

P6 has approximately four to five classes a day that last 45-minute periods and has a prep hour two 45-minute periods a day. She also attends weekly staff meetings on the unit that “consist of a social worker and the treatment team has an institution, unit supervisor, a psychologist, social worker, a therapeutic recreation specialist, and a teacher as well as a nurse or a doctor with the client or the inmate.” They discuss treatment plans for the next two months and how they are doing. She gets feedback from other teachers that that student is scheduled with to give the treatment team updates. P6 teaches primarily academic basic education, reading classes in addition to a group she started called Exploring Forgiveness. She also teaches a mental health-based class called Illness Management and Recovery, which is “provided for the substance use disorder program.” P6 went on to discuss the origin of the forgiveness class in detail, a class that is voluntary to “explore the idea of what it means to forgive, what it would mean for them to make movement towards forgiving those that have maybe hurt them or sometimes students say,

'You know, I need to forgive myself first.'" She expressed it was for "healing the self and healing those, those things that we've buried."

Interview Question 4

What is your experience in dealing with a problematic inmate, and how did you handle the situation? "We have what we call progressive discipline," explained P1. Thus, in her northern midwestern state, prison education is seen as a job for the inmates. Some of the things they tell the young men during orientation is to be on time, have their shirts tucked in, and display their IDs. Then the consequences for behavior issues are outlined clearly. They have three chances before termination. Because the 18 to 20-year old men know the rules and "really respond to consistency," it is "very, very rare to have fights and aggression in education… and most of their behavior stuff occurs on the living unit." P1 goes back to them in their segregation and says, "Hello, let's talk about what you did because I want you back in education." P1 has only witnessed three fights in "the last 5 years in education," which she attributes to "the consistency and expectation and kind of pre-teaching and developing that community." The only time she mentioned specifically was "a fight that went off was in the art room."

P2 talked about an event that is "kind of funny now" but it "wasn't funny then." She had only "kicked out one, two, three maybe three out of class over all this time." She tries to interview her students carefully and carefully research each one of them. She added, "If anyone makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up, I don't have to take them." She added, "I have total control over who I have in class and who I don't. That's one of the wonderful things about this. But anyway, we used to have cages, which were

like phone booths made out of wire." One of the steps she had to go through was to start going cell to cell for six months and then she had visitation, room booths going booth to booth, chair to chair for six months. The cages were three to a room and known as "educages." One day she came in hearing a man had been on a hunger strike. He was an older "old school guy" in the middle of a Crip and an Aryan Nation prisoner. The "old school one starts hallucinating and he starts thinking apparently that I don't know." All that time he was yelling at P2: "You did it to him. You did it, you made him like this, you caused all this!" She added, "Only not in those kinds of words. I mean, very vulgar. And I try to talk to him and it, I mean he would just go off crazy." She continued, "He starts shaking the bars, he starts spitting out at me now. And so, the two on the side, I'm so proud of them to this day, cause they both were like, 'Old School, calm down, calm down.'"

P3 thought "it's really important and this is what I learned when I was teaching special education students and working with the parents is to try to deescalate the situation as much as possible." If an inmate is really upset about something, she hears them out and lets them know she is actively listening to them: "I think that's very important that you take the time, you just take the time, you just stop what you're doing and you take the time to figure out their perspective and where they're coming from." P3 added, "A lot of times what I do is I try to just step outside the classroom for a minute and then if they're really upset, I'll assign them some work and have an inmate clerk or an inmate teaching assistant kind of circulate around and, and take any questions that the inmates have of the assignments." Then she takes them just outside her classroom door

and still to look in the window and supervise everybody. Sometimes they complain about their placement, “especially if they have a high school diploma or a GED and they have to go back.” She suggests to them to make a choice when they come, how they can benefit: “Learn one thing that you can from this, review your skills, review your math, write a letter home, try to make it life skill related, write a letter home if they need to, so that they can make the time useful” since they have to be assigned to her class because once they're assigned to education, it is almost impossible to get them out of education until we verify their GED or high school diploma, and “that is how it is set up.”

Because P4 works in a “psychiatric prison slash hospital,” he usually has “people blow up and throw their tantrums” and he realizes he has many “mentally ill inmates who are in some form trying to stabilize the brain chemistry in their mind.” P4 continued, “So they may be actively psychotic where they're hearing voices or seeing things and I usually can let it go for a period and then contact the unit staff to say, ‘Are they all right today?’” He often lets it go with “whatever is their mental illness at the time.” They might be having a bad day, and he lets it go, but if it bothers him, and they “realize that it bothered [him], usually they come back within a few hours or [he sees] them later in the day and they apologize,” saying they weren’t themselves that morning and they thank him for “letting them come to class.” P4 does not internalize these issues because if he does have a “bad inmate, they don't have to be in [his] class.” Because math and education classes are a privilege, he can “cut back their hours until they are stable, or they feel more as if they want to be here because they don't need to be here.” P4 concluded, “It's not being forced upon them to be in math class.”

P5 described IQ4 as “a loaded question” and gave different examples. When he was in the mental health unit, he had a student cheating on his test. P5 confronted the student and told him to leave. However, P5 noted, “At that point, he became rather disruptive, started to curse at him and apologized for the language,” but this was part of the inmate’s story: “He said, ‘You are a Neanderthal mother fucking bastard.’ And I said, ‘Wait a minute! The first word…’ P5 continued, “He kind of looked at me and I said, ‘I've never been called that word. No, come on. Back up. You gotta help me out here.’ And so, he said, ‘Well, Neanderthal.” P5 added, “’Okay, how do we spell that?’ And at that point he started laughing and that is when I caught on. If you use humor appropriately, you can really deescalate situations.” So P5 has tried to use humor as often as he can in dealing with students: “That doesn't always work though - at times students can become disruptive.”

In an example of having to use another coping strategy, P5 said he was working in the maximum-security unit, with five students and one of them brought up his work and claimed he was done for the day. The student proceeded to walk back to his desk and punched another student in the face. So, P5 hit the alarm and broke up the fight that ensued. The next day, when P5 tried to talk to the offending student, “Joe,” Joe told P5 that the student he hit used the N-word with an obscenity. P5 told Joe that he should have told his teacher about the incident. P5 also talked to the other student by himself before class and admonished him about the bad choice of words. In that case, it was not humor but reasoning. P5 concluded, “Oh, I tried to use humor if I can and I try to reason with them if I can. Humor and reasoning.”

P6 told a long story that I will try to sum up. P6 usually looks “underneath the behavior” and finds her students “anxious or they're feeling hurt. And feeling put on the defensive side.” She tries to “look past the behavior” and tries to talk them to build rapport. Their behavior changes if one changes the environment like taking them outside the classroom to talk privately. In all the years, she has “hit the trouble call button twice.” Once, P6 did so when a student was exhibiting “signs of schizophrenia,” and the other students were staring at him. The other time involved hitting the “trouble button” by mistake. Mostly P6 deescalates trouble by using humor: “Humor goes a long way with these guys. Being assertive but not sounding condescending or treating them like they're children. They're very sensitive to how you word things.” P6 continued, “So I use my manners all the time, you know people just appreciate, like all humans appreciate, being asked could you please sit down or you know, I'm just gonna wait a minute until everybody quiets down in class before we get started,” a polite kind of assertive request without needing people to feel like they need to defend themselves. P6 added, “Humor and body proximity helps too. If there's people that are talking in class or something's going on just getting up and walking or through the class can also get them back on task.” She concluded, “Maybe the key is getting them to know that you care about them, that you are an invested in their success. And I think they invest in themselves more when they know somebody else cares about them doing well.”

Interview Question 5

What do you do to keep your emotions in check when your patience is tested? P1 explained that it is “hard to keep [her] emotions in check … when you see grown men

fighting in there." She recalled, "What I did was, first of all, I stopped and I took a breath and just started walking through in my head the procedures that we're trained in to handle a situation like that." Safety and security were first, moving the other offenders away. She noted that the units are very violent. In this one incident, the coworker was already calling for assistance "so he is the incident command." She described "getting the guys out of the way and up against the wall" because she knew the backup would be coming in with handcuffs and other equipment. She was in an auxiliary role but got "an adrenaline rush," but just kept repeating the steps.

P2 argued, "I don't think they really tested my patience," but she recalled that in middle school with 36 kids to a room with seventh and eighth grade mixed, being with them all day except gym class, "that, was stress." She had to "hide a lot of stress back then," but in the prison system, all she had to "do is make a phone call and they're gone. So, they know that I don't have discipline problems." P2's way of addressing stress is to "foster an atmosphere of mutual respect." She viewed respect as "number one around here." Students in the prison "know [she'll] show them respect as long as they show [her] respect." They do not even swear in the room because if one student does "like a new one, the older ones will get on him." She tells them there is "an invisible waterfall on that door, and when you walk under that waterfall, we're all the same in here you're not a Blood, you're not a Crip, you're not." They are in Miss B's room and in her "gang," so they do not "have time for all that junk." Most of them are fathers and are frustrated at not being able to contribute to their family, but P2 convinces them she is giving them a way to contribute to their home, how to do something that is going to help their kids

because statistically, the more education they have, the better their children will do. P2 is so happy that she cries when her students achieve a GED after in many cases, several years. She added that it is like “conning a con … putting on a show,” and not take things personally to help them. Her strong faith helps her in what she considers her calling, and when she gets home, she smokes and has a rum and Coke to relax, and she is happy because she just got remarried a few days before the interview.

P3 felt she did not have the option to keep her emotions in check because she was “on 200% of the time.” She added, “I mean, it’s like you are beacons on the stage and all the inmates are on you, trying to figure you out” and how to manipulate their teachers, which is the “criminal mind.” P3 knows quite a bit of psychology and sees education as her toolbox in learning how “to deal with somebody with a lot of baggage, and they have limited experiences and low literacy.” So, P3 said, “I have learned to be very clear about saying no and being assertive, borderline aggressive to let them know that my no really means no.” She added, “I think it's important to really set those boundaries, so the inmates start to feel a little safer.” She also uses humor, which “is very, very important to lighten up the situation when you cannot be a smart ass but, but just, make some sort of a comment where it lightens the situation as much as possible.” P3 is very upfront about the boundaries, so they will know she will always follow up with writing them up for being late, for example.

P4 tries not to take things personally “because everyone is dealing with their own mental health in this place,” and if they are acting up, he may have written three conduct reports in the last 4 years: “Only three—and that's basically fights between you hit, you're

sitting in my chair or somebody crossed the line between inmates on inmates. It's never really disrespect for me." P4 believes the disrespect is usually "towards another inmate." He claims, "They don't usually go off on teachers even in the psychiatric prison like ours. So, to deescalate them, I usually send one back and I call the officer down the end of the hallway and he knows that somebody is coming his way." P4 added, "We separate the two as fast as we can. We have 600 staff for 400 inmates. So, response is very fast if something happens." Because he is so much older than most of his students, they tend to look at him as a grandfather figure, and generally, they do not do anything they would not do in front of their grandparents.

To recap a significantly long answer, P5 tends not to lose patience with students because he knows they are trying to work, unless they are being disruptive. In that case, he calls out the student privately and explains to them the value of education. To a person who is there for six life terms and could not understand why he was in school, P5 told him, "If you aren't going to be able to get out physically to learn about the world, why in the heck don't you come in and start learning about the world through books, through letters, terms, through science?" He managed to get him interested and in about three months he finished off his HSDD and he wanted to take more classes. He encourages his students to be successful no matter their circumstances. P5 finds out student interests like the student who wanted to be a barber and used that as a "hook" to find the source of his interest. Most of the men had been discouraged in their youth by parents and teachers since they were small children, and P5 encourages them no matter how long it takes, even if it takes a year of tutoring to learn fractions, for instance. Once he got a back injury in

dealing with an inmate, but P5 got through it and still thought the managers were the hardest people to deal with rather than the students.

To deal with her emotions, P6 practices deep breathing and tries to "look at things from a third party perspective and not take it personally to remind [herself] that [she] is there to be a role model to people that are still learning how to be outside in the community and be a positive, constructive citizen." She holds herself to a "high standard of modeling pro social behavior." Though she has not been perfect, she felt she was at "99% of the 19 years" she has been in the system and has "really exceeded expectations" of herself. For example, she might say, "Hey I wanted to apologize for losing my patience there or I could have worded that better." Prosocial behavior is taking ownership and "at the same time identify whatever the behavior was in class, that was probably problematic. So that they're taking responsibility and ownership too." To P6, "it shows that you can work things out with words and not yelling or swearing or slamming things around, that you can work through it and move on and still have a good working rapport with one another." She likes having lunch with coworkers as a "really light, fun time to just process what's going on during the day or just for some laughter." P6 thinks "laughter is huge." She also goes walking outside in nature sometimes. She joked that she is afraid if she went out walking at lunch she might not come back and "just keep going."

Interview Question 6

What is the most challenging moment you have experienced working as a correctional educator? The most challenging moment that P1 had ever experienced was in July 2018: "On that day, I overheard my friend being murdered while at work." The

man was bludgeoned to death with a hammer. He was a correctional officer who had worked in the Education Department. P1 revealed that “from that day nothing would be the same -at work or at home - it hasn’t been ‘normal’ since.” For the first time, P1 seriously questioned her career choice and wondered if she would have the courage to return to her job. She continued, “I think when he died, small pieces of many of us died, too. It left me questioning if the work I was/am doing as a teacher is worth it.” It took time to heal from an event like this officer’s death. P1 concluded, “There are good days and bad days - I keep teaching and slowly recovering.”

P2 continued her story about the cage, which was long, and it concerned going to get help and getting flak for it. The out-of-control student was spitting at the others as he tried to calm them down. Spitting is the “ultimate disrespect.” The two were “keeping their hands up so the cameras can see that they're not having any part in it.” All P2 knew was that she was given a number to call in such circumstances and she used it on the phone in her room. Still, she looked up and down the hall to see if she could get help without dialing because they “wouldn’t be having school probably for a while and [she would] have to fill out a million reports and dah, dah, dah.” Before she knew it, she had 25 officers in her room with the Billy clubs drawn and their OC spray out. She felt embarrassed and said, “Ah, I only was wanting one or two of y'all.” They retorted, “Well you dialed that number that's the riot number if you're bleeding or being raped number.” That is THE number, but that was the only number anybody gave her.

P2 heard about the incident for months and that really “razzed” her. Finally, she got a call from *the* captain who settled it by calling it a drill and that she did great and

they would not be speaking about it again. The next morning the lieutenant was in her room having her write down a list of 25 numbers with the one she had called at the bottom; the last one she should ever call. Further, P2 mentioned that most of the inmates probably had grown up in an institute with a bad reputation in that southern midwestern state and because all of them could pick a lock easily, she could only be "cautiously optimistic" they would not get out of their cages or their foot shackles. At least in the 5 years P2 taught, it had not happened. P2 only felt threatened with that student that day, a man in his 60s who might have, in her mind, taken some drugs, and was soon transferred to a mental health unit. He wrote P2 an apology letter, but it was confiscated and P2 never saw it.

For P3, in the 14 years she was in and out of correctional institutions, she had to wear a personal alarm device so she could check out as well as the keys to her classroom. She stated, "One time I knew that there was an incident escalating between two inmates and one of them went out to the bathroom and the other one snuck out. And when I realized it, I went, Oh no." She contacted the officer as it turned out, she contacted the officer right away and told him she thought there was going to be a real conflict: "All of a sudden there was all this yelling out in the hallway outside my classroom, and the guys were just at it fighting each other" and "brought it into the classroom." Blood was everywhere, but she complained about how management responded to it, which made the incident more stressful and uncomfortable for her.

P3 said, "So you have to deal with that layer as well. It's not just the incidents with the inmates, it's how school administration responds." The officer came back and

asked her if everything was all right. P3 was thinking, “Oh yeah, what do you want me to say? Like everything is great, right? I just had a fricking battle in my classroom, blood all over the floor.” After she wrote the report up, her supervisor then was very punitive, and she called up her classroom because she left a message with her and said she had an incident with the two inmates fighting. The supervisor called her back and said, “Well, you do not have any directive to release your class and you need to write up those inmates.” Responses like that made P3 feel she had no support and a lot of instability in her school as well as much turnover with principals. There is also favoritism, “not too much different from working in the public schools where it can happen as well.”

P4 said that the hardest part of being a teacher in prison is that he “must realize” he is “not in control.” He tries to be supportive and “plant a kernel” in his students that they may grow into better people. P5 talked about his injury at work when he was involved in breaking up fights. They are told “if there's a physical altercation between students, we should try to break them up and do whatever we can, so they don't get injured.” He continued, “That meant if I got injured, okay, but try not to have the student’s pound on each other.” After he got injured a few times, his supervisors suggested he should not step in as quickly, that he can wait for someone else because he had injured his back once. However, a student bigger than he decided he was “gonna pound on a student that was a lot smaller than he was.” So P5 grabbed the bigger student from the back and put his arms around him and tried to lift him to get him away from the student, and that's when he could feel tingling up and down his legs and he whispered in the student’s ear, “Can you help me? I think I'm about to fall.” The student quickly

stopped fighting and helped him sit down because his legs were going out. He got a "23036—the designation for getting hurt while intervening." Even with his injury, P5's greatest challenges come from "dealing with managers." As soon as his supervisors came in, they told P5 he could go back to work but he could not even stand because he could not get up.

P6 said the most difficult challenge, as a woman is "working with male individuals that are incarcerated." She revealed, "I've had probably four or five individuals over the years that were sexually inappropriate. You know, put their hand down their pants or fondled themselves." Looking back, she could not think of a time she had been trained to deal with that, so she ended up questioning herself: "What was I wearing, why would this person do this? Did I give them some kind of mixed signals?" P6 said that is what new staff all think. She added, "It really has nothing to do with that. It's just that they've identified you as somebody that is a female that they are fixated on, and maybe it's like a physical release for them." P6 told of one incident when an inmate touched her behind when she was unlocking a bathroom door a few years ago. It was "pretty unsettling," but she handled it the right way and "whipped around and said, 'Did you just touch me?'" He denied it "up and down." When she was questioning herself, she remembered there were cameras. Her supervisors reviewed the recordings and the student had learned his arm out to brush against her.

Interview Question 7

Describe a stressful event you encountered while teaching at the priso8n. P1 had an offender put a chair through a glass window that was in the hallway. She

remarked, “Yeah, after a while it just sort of becomes part of your routine. Through the glass window. You just, you learn and move out of the way and to follow the protocol.” She added that when she worked in segregation, “It’s not unusual for me to have someone who's naked in VCs or whatever, and you’re, ‘Okay, and obviously we're not going to be doing fractions today.’” Nothing in her teaching prepared her for these kinds of scenarios, but “you just learn as you go from officers and from, other veteran teachers and it just sort of becomes what you do.” The case involved a weapon and “there was blood all over and just trying to focus on what I was doing and not be like, *Oh my God, really?*” P1 concluded, “We do what you do. I work in segregation and I see a lot of things like that. Not directed at me, but it did, it happened in the classroom.”

The officers, to P2, “are just as bad sometimes.” She described her first days at the prison as a sort of initiation into a fraternity, a hazing in which she was “given the hardest time.” P2 emphasized that “nothing was easy that first couple of years, I swear, nothing.” She described how she would call to the units to get her students into the classroom and was met with passive aggressive delays from staff that sometimes took over an hour, even though the staff assured her the students were coming up. To address the unprofessional behavior, she learned “to go down on the unit, go around make sure they're awake, and to make sure that they're coming.” Another reason P2 took this tactic was to check if the staff were asking the students if they really wanted to go to school because the staff had reported to her they were refusing, which was untrue: “I go talk to them, they're saying they're not refusing, the officer's not asking them. So, I just say ‘don't try to con a con.’” P2 continued, “You gotta be tough, especially at first. Then it’s

all good after you win the respect and the trust of the officers." P2 also said, "I had a good thing going before they moved me last month, a really good thing. I have only cried a couple of times and I am a crier, so you are going to cry a couple times. But it's all worth it."

Having students "that do not want to be in education" is stressful for P3. "Either they do not want to be in education because they already have a GED or high school diploma, like I've already mentioned. But it is, it is bureaucracy, it is what it is." So, P3 just tells them they need to make the best of it. They are here, and then there's other inmates that they just do not want an education because they "just don't care." P3 had not really talked much about that, those inmates, but she claims she really tries to win them over: "I just talked to them and I just say, "Hey, when's the last time you were in school? How far did you go in school? What was your experience in school?" She tries to have a conversation with them to try to figure out where they're coming from, and she says, "Look, you're assigned to education. It is a prison literacy law and it is the way CDCR is set up. You have to be here, and I'm required by my school principals to write you up if you don't show up." She also reminds them it is a safety issue "because the officers are going to be looking for [them] if [they're] not in [her] class." "And so, she says, "What would you like to do since you need to be here? I offer them either, they can, do they want to, do they want to review a math?" P3 continued, "Because when they are assigned to my class, they do have to take a math assessment." Most are readers, so she does not assess reading but assesses math. She encourages them to work on resumes or write

letters home as long as they are “busy doing something and that seems to have eliminated 90%, 95% of the problems right there.”

P4 discussed fights. He calculated, “I know the response in here is probably about 8 to 10 seconds before I have eight or nine bodies piling on staff. Once, he described “just keeping two old guys away from each other and a shouting for one to get behind me. And they were in their stare-down, so they were, they were just butting.” Another time there were two young kids who had known each other on the streets “and everything else.” P4 “stupidly got in between and took a few blows to the back, but they were more after trying to get at each other.” P4 described himself as “just the something in the middle that got in their way.” The students had not “meant to go in and do anything to [him].” P5 talked about a time when a student had “broken out of the window and had a piece of glass in his hand to go after another student.” When P5 restrained him, his hand was cut. After that, the officers came in the room “in record speed” when he hit the alarm, as they always do. The officers are well trained and are extra well trained. P5 described the officers as “phenomenal” and added, "Actually I work with some damn good people. I can count on them. I know that if I need help, they are there, I know that when I got hurt, they're there.”

I reminded P5 that he had mentioned that the students had come up with an escape plan, and I asked him to elaborate on that incident. P5 complied and talked about three students in the maximum-security prison who had “talked his mother into smuggling matches in in a visit. He had hollowed out his pillow and filled it up with paper.” They planned for the fire to go off in their unit to be a distraction, during which

time when the fire trucks came, they were planning to kill P5 and escape. Fortunately, another student told P5 of the plan and it was thwarted after the homemade weapons were found. Because the mastermind had not been able to carry out the plan, he was not charged heavily and was back in the classroom. The student had been shackled and eventually asked for help to learn some math for his HSED.

The most stressful part of the incident was that the student was not being charged for his plan to murder P5 but only for the matches. P5 added, “When I think about my life was worth my damn work keys it’s kind of throws me for a loop now and then.” The incident happened 20 years ago and P5 had never told his wife: “I probably just went home and played with the dogs and stayed outside.” The idea that a student can kill him at any time made P5 cautious to the point he will not sit with his back turned in a restaurant and watches everyone when he goes shopping at the mall: “I have to be on alert all the time.” P5 continued with one more incident when a student had smashed his window and was “slicing up his arms.” P5 was surprised how calm he was even though it was the first time he had witnessed such an incident: “I had switched over to this extremely all rational person, and that scared me that I was becoming so desensitized to what could happen in front of me.” That is when he figured he better get off of a mental health unit for a while and go into a different teaching position.

P6 brought up the “sexually based misbehavior” as one of the more difficult things in her experience. She told of an incident a couple months ago when she had a student with a history of domestic violence in class. He wanted to go back to the unit. She was explaining how he needed a blue slip to do so, but he was towering over her desk

with an “intense look and he was kind of gritting his jaw and kind of spitting his words out.” The student started repeating P6’s name over and over and she could feel the adrenaline releasing in her body because she did not whether she should stand up or hit the button or if he was going to come over the desk at her. She realized, “Nope, I am sticking with what I'm saying because he's trying to like dominate me and control me.” So, she stayed calm and he did not act out any more than “the really strong negative, angry energy.”

Two days later he came back and was as “sweet as can be,” which was even more unsettling. After P6 discussed the student’s behavior with him, he said, “No, no, no I'm not upset with you at all. I really don't want you being upset with me.” It was just really eye opening. It how much of a 180 somebody could do within just a matter of seconds.” She added, “But he also wanted to kind of let me know he was capable of that. And then as quickly as it started, it stopped.” They worked through that and it was cordial after that, but P6 was still on alert with that student, not even liking to be challenged when the student was polite yet inappropriate: “So things like that when I feel like my physical safety might be in question are kind of the more stressful moments I've had.”

Interview Question 8

What different stressors do you have in the classroom? P1 described stressors she has encountered as follows: “I'm hearing the stories of these guys and you know, it's true because he'd looked in the files and, and you know, that's stressful, aggressive.” She added, “Posturing on the living unit is very stressful. As a woman working in an all-male prison, I'm constantly looked at and I'm not that exciting to look at.” P1 went on to

describe stress as “a constant trying to balance between teaching and having the compassion that you need as a teacher and following all the safety and security protocol. It is like walking into worlds all the time. All the time.” She claimed the students come after her because she is female: “Yep. I have had them masturbate in front of me and I use humor a lot. I'll say, ‘Okay, we're not counting to 11. You know, you can put that away. And now I am calling for the squad.’” One case involved a weapon and there was blood all over. She added, “I work in segregation and I see a lot of things like that. Not directed at me, but it did, it happened in the classroom.”

P2 talked about a young student from a nice home who had killed his stepmother. She described him as “a blonde headed white kid, and with the scariest eyes [she had] seen at that point, terrified eyes.” She explained, “And then after he got his GED, they moved him down, but he got moved in with the Aryan, I mean UIB, which is Aryan Nation.” She went on to say that the inmates “almost have to join something for protection.” So, he went with the UIB P2 hated to see him get sucked into that environment, a boy who ordinarily would be going to college and in a fraternity. He does not remember killing his mother and claims she was abusive to him.

When P2 saw the young man with his long pointy “Satan beard,” his “eyes were not his anymore.” He is still polite when she sees him but has struggles having no visitors—no siblings and a father who refuses to talk to him. She added, “His real mom is a drug addict, lives in Arkansas, he hasn't seen her in forever, so he really has nobody. So, that is when I cried that first time, I saw him, after he moved to that new unit and he'd started changing.” Although she is not supposed to say it, she tells him, “I'm praying for

you, if you need books, paper, pencil, whatever I can and I'm praying for you." She claims she can see the pain in his eyes, and "he was saying help me," and she just thinks, "God bless you, protect you, keep you safe from harm." She tries to see him every time she can and then just starts "bawling," and has to leave because she's not supposed to do that and "you can't let them see you like that."

P3 sees inmates as "good people that made bad decisions." She avoids looking up their criminal history or the police reports, so she does not have "that bias." She tells other teachers, "It's up to you whether you feel that it would bias you with your instruction with them or not to look up their criminal history." She knows for herself personally she would have a hard time with the Crip crimes against women and children, and she has quite a few Crips and does not "even want to know sometimes—sometimes ignorance is bliss or not bliss," but it is just best to not to know and rather "just start with a clean slate, look at him as a human being." She asks the students what their plans are after parole and found many of them have no plan, so she does informal counseling. She tells them, "Based on what I know, based on research, the more education and training that you have, the more likely you're going to be successful on the outside. You have to have a plan." Another thing P3 does is to "lighten up the situation and have a sense of humor. There has to be some lightness and humor, and I would even have another strategy to point out the positive as much as possible" because the prisons are built for punishment. P3 sees them as a negative environment and it is important to "try to shed some light as much as you can, try to be the beacon as much as you can." She sets up her

classroom with a lot of inspirational posters and plants. She shows TED talks and educational DVDs to go with her lessons to really try to make it interesting.

A stressor to P4 is when his students “don't seem to be making very much progress.” He added, “Everybody is at a different level. So, some people, will never get past division or subtraction. Maybe I have 50-year-old men that will never get past borrowing from borrowing and subtraction.” The big thing to P4 is he does not want to “go ahead and research too much into why they're in here because [he’s] afraid [he’s] going to go ahead and look at them in a different way.” If he is enjoying a student’s personality and finds out he is in for murder or child rape, he is afraid that would taint his opinion of “who they are and in their past.” P4 sees that as one of his main stressors, so he copes by trying to look at the students as they are now. He has regretted the times he has Googled a student’s name that changed his opinion of the student. He concluded, “What they're in for was the worst day in their life and what got them there. If you look at them in another way, in a negative, altering way, you cannot look at them the same way again.”

“I am guessing,” said P5, “that some of my stressors fall in line with teachers in public schools.” He feels if he is unable to meet the students’ needs, unable to provide meaningful material, it is not easy providing meaningful material when the materials in his classroom might have been published in the 80s. On his first interview, his interviewers assured him that everything was set up regarding scope and sequence, but “they lied.” All his teacher editions were printed in the 70s at the time. There were no textbooks and the librarians had just given him dictionaries that “she was going to throw

out.” The major stress P5 feels from working in a classroom in a correctional facility “centers upon uncertainty,” which continues for him from the time he wakes up in the morning until he falls asleep at night. When he hears the “clicks of the multiple gates that open” for him, he hopes for a boring day. He does not know if he will get home on time or what condition in which he will be when he leaves. There may be attempted suicides or fights.

P5 does not know if he will get injured if he breaks up a fight and recalls restraining students over 45 times and being injured “several times,” and especially reflects on the time the student planned to kill him to take his keys. Staff also can find themselves under investigation for minor reasons and have to “verify their importance and the need for their job. Staff have been investigated because a student pulled a piece of blank cardboard out of the garbage.” P5 also finds it stressful when the students “do not want to put forth effort and improve,” and copes with it by trying to relate the material to them, to modify the assignments to something that might interest them.

P6 also has student that do not want to really be a part of a class or a program “because they felt like they were kind of pushed into it or they just wanted the class hours, but they didn't want to do the learning in the class.” It is stressful because go to greater lengths to let her know that they are not pleased about being in her classroom, and their attitude is negative. She copes with their attitude by trying to “kill them with kindness, you know engage people, find out find out what it is that they're invested in and they're interested in and find out how the material will help them achieve their goals or their dreams.” She added, “And then you'll see the personality and the behavior change

and it will become more positive." She does not know how the class content is going to apply to them or be meaningful to them, so she copes with this stressor by finding out *what* is meaningful to them. For example, she might say, "Oh, can you imagine how excited your mom or your auntie's gonna be when they learn that you're working through these to get your HSED or if you want to go on to technical college" or whatever it might be.

P6 thinks it is important to find that out about them and get them invested in their own education and their own learning. P6 also helps other staff people so that they are aware too that it is important to talk with their coworkers and colleagues to get support, to get advice for more knowledgeable staff, seasoned staff, especially if they need help approaching a student. Also stressful are other coworkers coming from other angles as well as the "burnout from teaching the same thing over many years" and getting tired of it. P6 copes because she has a good supervisor now who works with her to "infuse [her] creativity and individuality and [her] strength into [her] classrooms." P6 thinks that is "really a wonderful thing because [she thinks] students pick up on whether you're engaged or not and the content that you teach and that makes a big difference how it's being received."

RQ2: Strategies Prison Educators Use to Cope with Stress in the Classroom

Interview Question 9

What strategies do you use to cope with stressors in the prison? IQ9 yielded results similar to IQ8 but contained more information on strategies prison educators use to cope with stressful events both in the classroom and the prison. P1 credits her

"supportive team" she works with. They will sit down and debrief among each other and talk about what worked and what did not. Outside of work she shared, "I really like dogs, so I try to hang out with my dog. I try to take breaks during the day and get outside." P1 added that inmates "have to do something pretty egregious, not to be back in education. We have a few who will not be back because they have assaulted peers. Very rarely we will try as much as we can to get them in education." P2 reiterated the story about the inmate who had killed his stepmother and how she tries to cope by wishing prayers and protective thoughts on him. P3 noted that her drive hope is 25 minutes so she listens to music to "wind down and has a glass of wine to destress as well as stop by at the gym on the way home and walk [her] dog" as well as "more healthy things."

To P4, stressors are in different places on different days. In contrast to public school, where everyone is literally on the same page, prison students are at different levels. However, there are only eight of them. His tutors are inmates who "sit and work with the individual problems until they're both stumped because the tutors only have a high school education too," but he relies on them, which helps him cope with the classroom stressors. He also lets students work at their own pace, and he has a 500-piece puzzle out all the time that makes the environment less stressful for both him and his students.

P5 is likely to deal with the stressors that are in line with public schools just like the teachers in public schools. He has learned to be creative and develop the material he wants to use in the classroom. When he develops an assignment, he hangs "onto it forever. I am not going to throw an assignment out because I might be able to slightly

alter it in the future, if I can remember where it is, and if I can find it." He finds the questions about dealing with the stressors of the "uncertainty of working in a prison a damn good question." The drive in to work helps him prepare mentally for the day. He can "put barriers up and get set for each student, and hopefully each situation." When he parks his vehicle, he "puts [himself] in condition yellow" where he is "relaxed and alert" to the point it becomes part of his personality. He has to become a people watcher, "and wonder when the crap is going to hit the fan." Finding a coworker to talk to "is a must," for "a coworker can relate to what you saw and did without just staring at you like you're crazy." When his spouse asks how his day went, he tells her the same thing he has told her for the past 30 years: "It was fine." He added that a student may have told him his brother was shot and killed the previous night and his dad dumped his son's body in a ditch so the cops cannot find it or he may have watched a "guy slicing up his arms, but 'It was fine.'"

Besides using humor, P6 has tried to make her room "aesthetically pleasing," to "cover up the cinderblocks as much as possible and have inspirational quotes around the walls." If she notices somebody is having kind of a tougher time, P6 has "a packet of inspirational quotes" that she will give to the students. They talk about mantras and things to help them get through the tough days. She has stress balls to use if she notices a student's "legs going a mile away minute or that they look anxious or they're pacing." And then there's "Music! I tend to like having music in the background. Students really respond well to music." P6 realizes she is probably one of the only academic teachers who has music always going in the background, very low because students with

schizophrenia find the radio upsetting. She tries to keep it “as calm as possible” in her classroom so it is “a place that students like to come to because it's more relaxing than being on the unit.” They know she works “really hard just to have it kinda be easygoing, you know?” If a student is having a bad day for learning, she offers them a book to read and “chill so they can get back to it tomorrow.” It is important to be as “flexible as possible because not everybody is going to be on all the time. We all have our bad days. So, to be understanding, to be compassionate and be flexible, I think is very helpful.”

Interview Question 10

How do co-workers or supervisors assist with stressful classroom events and how helpful do you find the assistance? “We are taught to respond as a team,” noted P1. “And mostly what our role is in the hierarchy of response in the prison is crowd control [she laughed]. So, we just try to get everybody out of the way and clear a path for the officers who respond.” P1 said that they rarely go “hands on.” Most of the students “know the drill” and move out of the way. The only time they break up fights is if the attacks are personally directed against the teachers: “So if we see stuff that's starting to look like it might escalate, we try to like separate the two offenders or maybe send someone back to take a day off or call someone to let them know.” P1 added, “But afterwards we, we talk as a team. ‘Did you see this? Did you see that? Or if we hear something, ‘Oh, so and so's mom died last night and you know, you might want to keep an eye on him.’” She continued, “We're in constant communication with each other, whether it's in person or on the phone.”

P1's coworkers are lifesaving and explaining what a prison educator does is difficult: "My husband is a very good man. He is in the military, but this isn't his world. And my dad was a schoolteacher, so he thinks we'll just give them detention." She continued, "And so, you know what I mean? People just do not understand. And my coworkers do, and we do a lot of support for each other to the point where we say, 'Hey, have you thought about talking to a professional?'" She continued, "You know, or 'Hey, I'm about you. Have you talked to the chaplain?'" P1's coworkers implemented a trauma informed framework for teaching, which meant that they sat down and talked about some of their traumas with each other: "And, so now they will also work to where if someone is struggling with this whether it's behavior, emotional, whatever, they're not getting along because we want our guys to get an education." They will trade students; they will take teams, or someone will tag out after they will move them to another room "before we dismiss the students from education. So that is how close the team is. And I work in two other prisons and the teams are not that way and it's a lot harder." P2 has "a very good, very strong individual that [she is] kinda pretty happy with right now. He listens to a lot of stuff and doesn't comment too awful much." She added, "The other two teachers there are wonderful, and they talk things out all the time." P2 trusts them 1000% with anything she has got. So, having a good working relationship with coworkers is important to P2: "For sure like venting purposes, frustration." She added, "Oh man, I'm talking more about the workers right now. I mean when they accept you. There's this weird thing in prisons where it's uniformed against non-uniformed and there it is." P2 stated, "Sometimes the officers you know, and I want them to know that. Again, I slip them

candy, Hey, I'm not above bribery." P2 added, "I just try to be friendly with them and let them know because they're the ones that open and close the gates around here." She emphasized, "I'm not about to make them mad at me or upset with me or, let them think I'm anything but just like them."

According to P3, the coworker is where correctional educators need to turn: "You need to find a trusted coworker who's not gonna blab to supervisors or somebody who's going to blab back to the supervisor or it's going to somehow go up the chain of command to the associate warden." P3 has one person in particular she trusts and goes to about her issues who keeps whatever she says confidential. She also has "friends on the outside, a couple of them, one of them did used to work in corrections, and one of them, use to work with County youth," so she knows the at-risk population. P3 thinks it is important to build a support system because if you do not find somebody to trust inside you have to find somebody on the outside: "It's very, very important for your health and wellbeing."

On the negative side of coworkers, P3 had the following to say: "Well, working in a correctional situation, like I mentioned, it's paramilitary. It's a very rigid system and so some of the people that you run across are not necessarily going to be warm and fuzzy." She added, "They're not going to necessarily care about your point of view, or they could even be abusive towards you and disrespectful and you can't change that." She noted, "The only thing that you can do is you can control your response to all the negatives in the prison system, but you can't control other people's behavior." Because management "sticks up for each other," it is important to be aware: "Just really look all around you,

have eyes all around you, on your back. Not to be paranoid, but be aware of who is around you, what kind of people they are because some not nice people work in corrections." Some of P3's students are more respectful than some of her coworkers.

P4 stated, "I know [coworkers are] very supportive in talking with you and, if you want the advice, they'll give you advice. Otherwise they will destress you by talking about some distraction technique about something other than work, a distraction technique." P5 stated that it was "the correctional officers are the ones that will come in if [he hits his] alarm." He said that it was the officers and other teachers who called up to check on him when he hurt his back and his legs were "tingling" too much to move. P5 added, "Management never did. Management never asked me about it. It was my coworkers, the other line staff. The line staff always looks out for the other line staff. We've always got each other's back." He emphasized, "It's never management. Yeah, I do not understand that. So, I should not say that. The very good managers will ask, but the majority of them will not, and I've never understood that."

P6 remembered one education meeting a week where they "can come together and talk about things that are stressful or offer support to one another." They also report positive things: "We have two minutes of good news at the start of our education meetings so that there's kind of a positive connotation with it as well." She thinks "teachers are solely focused on their own individual classrooms. We do co-facilitate programs together so there is working together with one another, which is helpful." Once in a while they reach out individually to get some advice from someone because they have "been through similar kinds of instances here over the years." She does not think

they work “too much on problematic behaviors all that often,” unless someone is being really being abrasive and really unwilling to work with the teacher and make classroom standards: “Then we look to maybe start the process of removing them from the class until they're ready to reapproach it when they're feeling more balanced or well or open to learning.” P6 added, “But from the educational standpoint, I think having a supportive supervisor is huge. And all those other things that I had mentioned that are helpful is really kind of integral.” She noted, “You have to be cautious; you know with everyone. You know, I was feeling like somebody's trying to hustle me or get one over on me or I really can't trust the people who are telling the truth.” P6 concluded, “But that's kind of part of where we work. And it's for security reasons that you can't just trust what everyone tells you.”

Interview Question 11

Is there anything else that you would like to address that we have not discussed? All six participants had much to add to their stories. I am highlighting one or two points from each of them. P1 shared a story about encouragement: “I think when someone just needs some motivation. We have what we call starfish days. Do you know that story about the guy who was walking along the beach and found starfish? You know that one?” P1 continued,

> So, this guy's walking along a beach and he sees all these starfish coming up on shore and he picks one up and he throws it back in the ocean and this other guy's walking along and sees him doing this. “You know, why are you wasting your time with this? There are thousands of these starfish on the beach. You know,

you're not even putting a dent in that." And the guy said, "Well, it made a difference for that one!" He picked another one up and threw it back in the ocean. And we use that story at work when it gets tough and everything seems to be going wrong. We call those starfish days because maybe it did not change everything, but you may have made a difference to one person. Right. So, yeah, so someone is having a starfish day that is different then it's about, "Okay, we'll have you tried this? Have you tried that? Let us look at this. Let us look at that." But if someone is really questioning whether or not to stay, then personally I shift the focus to what is best for you as a person.

P2 talked about her experiences with different groups among the prisoners in a super max prison:

What I did when I first started, because there wasn't education in H unit at all in a super, in the supermax and that's what my job was, to try to figure out a way that they could go to school down there. Cause there was some under 21-year old and they had to find a school somehow. So, I looked for the gang, I looked for people that were high up, that have some influence, and I walked around cell to cell. I made sure that I spoke to those people every day, good morning, even if it was just a good morning. But I made sure that they knew I was showing them respect, okay. And so, when I got them on my side, then they would, others would come to school. The ones below that I had, you have to, I don't know, it sounds so stupid, but it's a whole different world inside these walls, inside walls in any

supermax is a whole ‘nother world. And to exist in that world, you have got to show respect to the ones that are on top. That is all there is to it.

P3 discussed mentoring some new teachers of retirement age and how they should prepare to be in the prison system:

Well, [some new teachers did not make it] for a lot of reasons. One is one of them in particular wasn't receptive to any help or suggestions and I think she came from a small private school and I think it was, I think it was too much of a crossover for her, and maybe not a good match. You have to be a certain kind of person. You really do. To be in corrections, you have to be, go with the flow. You have to be resilient; you have to be creative, resourceful, and some teachers are very structured and rigid. Now I am structured in the classroom, but I am real flexible with dealing with the inmates, so that I can get through with my classroom and get through with my day. I mean, in other words, I'm, I'm creative and so, you have to draw from that toolbox, from your knowledge, from take a moment to breathe for five minutes or five seconds or whenever you can, which is really difficult because you're kind of going in and going and going the whole day, but I think that some people I cannot see some teachers in the public school system making it in corrections. And I have had this conversation with a lot of other colleagues that they had their opinions on that too. But you have to be a certain kind of person to make it in corrections, if that makes sense.

P4 outlined the advice he would give to new teachers, especially from the standpoint of dealing with students:

Show the students empathy as if you were in the same boat as them, where you could be in the same boat but don't be their friend cause that'll get you walked out or they'll hook up and take advantage of you. Let us see, for an older person, for me, it would be treat everyone as if he could be your kid and you want him to get ahead. And for the last one I work in a psychiatric one. It is you're not, sometimes you're just planting a kernel of wanting to learn or starting to think in another way. It does not mean that that kernel of corn is going to wind up curling today. It might be next week or next month or might even be next year as long as you plant it. The seed of wanting to learn… and there's people who care about you. At least in our prison, it is not a stressful job.

A big issue for P5 is fraternization between teachers and students, an issue that drives him “up the wall”:

One thing I learned, whatever you do for one, you do for all. You don't ever tell a student, I'll do that for you, but I won't do it for someone else or I'll do it for you, but don't you tell anyone I did it? No, you do not cross that damn line. That is the most slippery little damn line in the world. I do not know. One of the teachers that started with me at XXX a year ago was blocked out for fraternization in July. I was dumbfounded that they had crossed that line I had, they were a, they are a damn good friend of mine. I did not see it. We talk daily. They never told me that they were doing it. They just started to make allowances for this student, gave the student their phone number, started to send money in for the students. I just, I did not have a damn clue. I never saw it coming. That is part, that is a big challenge.

> That is a frustrating part that normally I would have ticks me off. I would have thought I would be able to pick up on that crap because it's not the first time a coworker, a friend has crossed the line, and its fraternization.

For P6, teaching in prison can be easier than teaching in public school, according to her personal experience:

> Now this is my own standpoint. I do not feel it is, I think it can be stressful at moments. But I have to say, coming from being a special ed teacher out in the community, I was putting 60 plus hours of work in doing IEP outside of my 40-hour work week at the high school and dealing with parents. Some of them were kind of volatile. And you did not really have a lot of safety features at a public school. I actually feel more supported here. I do 40 hours of work a week here. I do not take homework home. I do not do grading at home. Every once in a while, I'm concerned about how maybe a student is doing over the weekend because maybe they were experiencing significant mental health symptoms on a Friday afternoon, and I've reported it and I'm just hoping they're doing okay. But other than that, there is, there is really not from an educational standpoint here. I do not feel that it is a chronic stress that is anything that I deal with at all.

All six participants provided in-depth answers to all the questions. None of them declined to answer any questions, and three of them provided additional information when I contacted them with questions. The following section describes further data analysis involving coding and themes.

Themes

After I wrote up the results section, I highlighted important information in the data tables I had made, which led to nine or ten themes. After reviewing the themes several times, I revised them to avoid repetition and came up with seven final themes for the 11 interview questions, especially IQ3 through IQ10. The themes are listed in Table 2. In the subsections that follow, I back up the themes with selected interview data.

Table 2

Themes

Theme
Theme 1: Lack of consistency and little downtime
Theme 2: Students with mental health issues
Theme 3: Unexpected violence and physical danger
Theme 4: Classroom creativity and connection
Theme 5: Personal coping strategies
Theme 6: Supportive coworkers
Theme 7: Perceptions of unsupportive managers

Theme 1: Lack of Consistency and Little Downtime

The typical routine of each of the participants workday varied. Also notable was the differences the participants highlighted between regular school and prison education. The only consistent aspect of prison education was that once the teachers left their workplace, there was little to no outside work. For instance, P6 measured the time she spent teaching and doing IEP work outside of school as 100 hours a week, but only has

her 40-hour work week in the prison with no homework or grading coming into her home life. Yet, the environment of a prison can lead to sudden schedule shifts. P1 is split among three prisons and she said, “It’s never the same day twice” for all the emergencies she has to address. P2 has to go through much walking to get from one end of prison to the other and even a bathroom accident “will stop school for a day.” P3 complained about her “very demanding” work with “little downtime” and the challenge of supervising her inmate teaching assistants. All the students are “hardened criminals,” which often results in inconsistent days. P4 has a full schedule with the only reliable prep time at 7:15 before his first class. P5 has a full schedule with little time to prepare and with significant pressure to get students prepared for their high school diploma, all on different levels with different needs. Finally, P6 has a demanding routine that involves a variety of classes and an intense weekly meeting with “a psychologist, social workers, therapeutic specialist, and a teacher as well as a nurse or a doctor with the client or the inmates.” She has more prep time than average (two 45-minute periods a day), but the number of people with whom she interacts can encroach on her downtime.

Theme 2: Students with Mental Health Issues

All prison educators worked with or had stressful experiences with students who had mental disabilities, sometimes life threatening to the educators. P1’s position is at a mental health unit. The older student in the cage that started the violent incident for which P2 raised the alarm got transferred to a mental health unit. P3 discussed a holistic atmosphere of paranoia. P4 has to take into account the mental state of his students because of their attempts “to stabilize the brain chemistry in their mind … so they may be

actively psychotic … and I can usually let it go." P5 works with "individuals that have psychological difficulties or needs that are not being met in the typical correctional facility." P6 teaches a mental health-based class called Illness Management and Recovery for substance abuse, on a positive note. However, P6 had frightening experiences involving intimidation from a student with a history of domestic violence, but she was shocked by the "180 somebody could do within just a matter of seconds" when he switched his affect.

Theme 3: Unexpected Violence and Physical Danger

All the educators work in prisons in which the inmates have had histories of violence, and the violent behavior continue within the educators' daily routines. Generally, most of the violence occurs on the living units (P1); it can erupt unexpectedly in the classroom, endangering teachers, and students alike. Further, one of P1's colleagues was murdered at work. P2's experience with the "educages" involving an older inmate in the middle of a Crip and an Aryan Nation prisoner was intimidating. P3 recalled a fight that started outside that was "brought into [her] classroom." P4, as a "grandfather" figure is talented at deescalating violent behavior, yet he has to do so often. P5 had been injured several times, twice seriously, and was almost killed in an escape plot but for another student disclosing the plot. P6 experienced sexual harassment from a student where she could "she did not whether she should stand up or hit the button or if he was going to come over the desk at her."

Theme 4: Classroom Creativity and Connection

All participants had worked in the prisons for many years and loved their jobs despite the challenges and stress that accompanied their work. Whether in or out of the classroom they were talented not only in coming up with innovative teaching methods in the midst of being supplied limited, outdated materials but also in connecting with their students as people with good potential to grow. P1's starfish story illustrated her desire to see the good in each individual. She also seeks out students who were removed from the classroom and works with them to make their way back. P2 relates to a wealthy inmate in for murder who joined a White supremacist group. She continues to connect with him, hoping he will change in time. P3 encourages her students to relate their classroom skills they see as meaningless with personal life connections like writing letters home. P4 avoids researching his students' past so he never has to "look at them in a different way" from the good people he sees them to be in his classroom. P5 related how he changed a student from violently cursing him out to laughing wholeheartedly at P5's humorous tactic of pretending not to understand the invective vilification. Finally, P6 uses inspirational quotes, mantras, and pleasant background music to keep a calm encouraging atmosphere in her classroom.

Theme 5: Personal Coping Strategies

The data indicated significant stress, violence, and personal danger in prisons that can even erupt on a good day, unexpectedly. All participants had means to cope with the stress from the prison environment during work or at the end of the day or develop attitudes that their jobs were ones for which they were grateful. P1 "hangs out" with her

dog and tries to take breaks during the day and go outside. P2 “fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect” in the classroom and when she gets home, she has a cigarette and a rum and Coke and enjoys her marriage that took place days before the interview. P3 listens to music on her 25-minute drive home, and similar to P2, has a glass of wine to destress as well as stop by at the gym on the way home and walk her dog. Also, like P5, she avoids looking up her students’ criminal records to avoid changing her opinion of them. P4 treats all his students as if they could be his “kid and you want him to get ahead.” Feeling like a grandfather figure to them helps him prevents feeling stress. P5 avoids telling his wife about any negative things that happened every day for the past 30 years to prevent stress from coming home. He also loves his job because he feels his students are the “best in the world” and the satisfaction that he helped over 360 students get their high school equivalency diplomas, which decreased their chance of reoffending, helps any negatives in his work tremendously. P6 gives gratitude every day that she can leave her challenges at the prison because she has nothing to deal with after work.

Theme 6: Supportive Coworkers

The participants mostly agreed that their coworkers were valuable, whether fellow educators or correctional personnel and staff. Most problems were with management, as illustrated by Theme 7. P1 compared her family’s response to events to her husband’s, a military man. She felt that only her coworkers understood what went on during the day. Her workers were supportive to the point where they implemented “a trauma informed framework for teaching,” where they discussed their issues with each other regularly. P2 has two teachers she “trusts 100%.” She is more careful with the staff but has found some

she can get along with well when she needs their support. P2 also mentioned a difficult early period with the staff that existing as a sort of hazing period, but she addressed it by taking initiative in connecting with the students on their units. P3 trusts one person in particular to whom she can confide anything, though to her, some of her coworkers are less trustworthy than her students. P4 had the experience both of corrections and education. He finds his coworkers very supportive, and some have the talent of destressing him "by talking about some distraction technique other than work." P5 relies heavily on other teachers and the correctional officers, the latter on which he can depend if he has to call for help. P6's colleagues work heavily on cooperative planning in a well-organized supportive way.

Theme 7: Perceptions of Unsupportive Managers

Some of the participants felt different about management than they did about their supportive colleagues and cooperative correctional officers. P2 felt the case managers caused chaos by unexpectedly shuffling schedules around and keeping students, in some cases, permanently from getting an education. P3 worried about what she says to others "going up the chain of command" to the top. Thus, she was wary about trusting all her colleagues to not "blab." She believes managers "stick up for each other," so it is important to "be aware." In one incident, she found her supervisor to be "very punitive," unjustifiably. P5 listed his greatest challenge comes from "dealing with managers," especially when they told him to go back to work when he could not even stand up from his injury at the hands of a student. He complained, "It especially "drives me nuts when

management is not always willing to listen to staff about safety and security. It's foolish in my book. Leave us to teach, let us be safe in our jobs."

Summary

Chapter 4 reiterated the purpose of the study as well as the research questions. It also outlined the research setting, participant demographics, how data were collected and analyzed, and a description of the seven themes that emerged from the study, which were the following: lack of consistency and little downtime, students with mental health issues, unexpected violence and physical danger, classroom creativity and connection, personal coping strategies, supportive coworkers, and perceptions of unsupportive managers. The rich, in-depth testimonials of the six prison educators who make education meaningful for incarcerated students, young and old, provided meaningful material to be interpreted in the chapter that follows. Chapter 5 also contains recommendations, limitations, implications, and conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of correctional educators, their strategies for handling stress, and the coping skills they use in their classrooms. This methodological approach was used to address the gap in research on this topic using the perspectives and experiences of full-time teachers in the prison system. The research questions were written to address how the educators experience stress in their positions and how they address these issues. Using the transactional model of stress and coping theory to understand the roles of stress and stress management in prison-based classrooms, I selected six educators, most of whom simply had the title of "teacher," who worked in prisons throughout the United States.

Interpretation of Findings

After I had reviewed the literature on stress among prison educators in the United States and found additional sources, I found that the present findings do extend knowledge in the field of prison education. There is a significant gap in the literature on stress among these teachers, for little in the research on prisons and education is focused on their stress levels. I used the transactional model of stress and coping theory to understand the roles of stress and stress management in prison-based classrooms in which individuals appraise a stressor to assess the extent to which the stressor might negatively affect them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The main factors in the theory involve cognitive appraisal and coping, which are critical to address individual stress in certain environments and which involve immediate and long-range outcomes. First, a person uses primary appraisal to assess the threat. Then, they use secondary appraisal to evaluate

how they will cope with the threat and what their options are. Coping is the use of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Cognitive appraisal is the element individuals use to determine when they encounter challenging circumstances if the situation is relevant to their well-being (Carver et al., 1989). The participants in the study had to use such appraisals often. Still, even though they worked in an environment that could erupt in violence at any moment and managers who were not supportive, all expressed how much they loved their jobs. They had a variety of coping tactics to continue as educators in the prison system from P5's concealing his stress from his wife every day for over 30 years to P2's strong faith mixed in with a glass of rum and a cigarette to P6's basket of affirmations and background music to spread positivity to young men who faced years of incarceration, all protective ways of coping with stress levels that few educators have to address.

Carver et al. (1989) developed a series of conceptual scales on which I based many of the interview questions, which aided in effectively obtaining rich, thick data: coping actively, planning, suppressing competing activities, engaging in restraint coping, seeking social support for practical reasons, seeking such support for emotional reasons, focusing on emotions and venting about them, disengaging behaviorally, engaging in positive re-interpretative and growth, denying what is going on, accepting the circumstances, and embracing faith or religion. Even though the participants were in a situation of daily stress, they coped in a variety of creative ways or turned to their colleagues or their faith to prevent harm to themselves. The theory of stress and coping fit

the study well as it would other studies about people who make their living from working with inmates in the U.S. prison system. Basing the interview questions on the theory of stress and coping helped me to write detailed data interpretation, implications, and recommendations. In the sections that follow, I interpret the data according to the seven themes that arose during the data analysis stage in answer to the two research questions on how prison educators experience and address stress (lack of consistency and little downtime, students with mental health issues, unexpected violence and physical danger as well as perceptions of unsupportive managers for the themes related to stress and classroom creativity and connection, personal coping strategies, and supportive coworkers for the themes related to coping with stress).

Theme 1: Lack of Consistency and Little Downtime

Even though most of the prison educators had set schedules, the prison environment was inconsistent in what to expect day to day insofar as many interruptions and unexpected schedules made internal and external demands on them. Classes are often canceled at the last moment and student assignments change without notice, which has a negative effect on attendance (Zoukis, 2015). Further, the participants' classes and short preparation times were tightly packed into their schedules, making the lack of consistency especially difficult for reaching a challenging population of students. P4, for example, started working at 7:15 a.m., 45 minutes before classes started, to squeeze in some prep time. P3's "very demanding" work routine involved filing all the paperwork in a state bureaucracy in addition to teaching students with special needs and supervising inmate teaching assistants. Not only the workload but the expectations for prison

educators are high, a reason for turnover at many facilities (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). The positive side of their busy though often erratic schedules was that there was no work for any of them to take home at the end of the day.

Theme 2: Students With Mental Health Issues

All participants faced students with not only criminal pasts but also mental health issues and learning disabilities. In the three prisons in which P1 works, for example, one is a mental health unit. P6, while content with the fact she never has to bring work home, sometimes worries on the weekends about students who experience mental breakdowns on Friday afternoon and wonders how they are doing in her absence. All participants have dealt with violent eruptions from inmates, some of which needed to be locked down and even kept in "educages" so they could learn without being a threat to others. Because of potential violence often originating from mental illness, prison educators have significant limitations on how they can move through their workplace. When they are in place to teach, getting clearance to come and go is far from simple, and they must put up with strong security measures to leave and return to their classrooms (Zoukis, 2015).

Theme 3: Unexpected Violence and Physical Danger

Violence in prisons is a given, and all prison educators are required to send out alarms for sudden disruptions and get physically involved in restraining students if the need arises. Both P1 and P5 endured incidents where the weapons were glass from deliberately broken windows, and many students of the participants were shackled due to extremely violent natures. When unexpected violence happens, the teacher can get injured, or possibly killed, as mentioned by two participants: P5 was informed by another

student of a plan to murder him to obtain his keys for a planned escape. P1 witnessed her friend, a correctional officer, being bludgeoned to death with a hammer. She overheard the event as it was happening, at which point she questioned her career choice and felt nothing was normal from that day on. Though she stayed at her job, she responded to the lasting stress with a slow recovery consisting of good days and bad ones. All participants are accustomed to unexpected violence and physical danger, particularly because four out of six work in a combination of medium- and maximum-security facilities. Violent offenders are on the rise. Ferdik and Smith (2017) reported that while the prison population quintupled in almost 35 years between 1975 and 2013, violent prisoners in the system grew from 40% to 60% in a shorter time between 1985 and 2013.

Theme 4: Classroom Creativity and Connection

In a study of male prisoners in Arizona from secondary data, most of whom were involved in education programs compared to some who were not (86 prisoners from each group were selected), Courtney (2019) found decreasing incidents of misconduct for the students ((M = 0.52, SD = 2.26) contrasted to those who did not participate in education (M = -0.09, SD = 1.90). Courtney also discovered out of Functional Literacy, Work-Based Education, and General Education Development, the latter program had significantly more reductions in negative behavior. Also, self-efficacy, a positive attribute, can be developed as well through academic learning (Pelletier & Evans, 2019). For the most part, the participants were involved in general education, particularly in helping students master high school levels, which can lead to higher education prison programs.

All participants expressed passion about their work, jobs appealing to those who desire to help the most challenging students grow academically and develop goals, no matter how small (Zavrel, 2019). They also know that up to 40% of state prison inmates left high school before graduation and have significantly low skills and literacy (Brent & Maschi, 2019; Robinson, 2018). The addition of creativity and connection helped to reduce negative behaviors and improve academic success for the participants in the present study (e.g., P1 claimed the young men, 18 to 20-years old, responded well to consistency and it is "very, very rare to have fights and aggression in education" because "most negative behavior occurs on the living units"). The connection and creativity to which the participants engaged lessened violence and disengagement in class. All participants had high job satisfaction. The six participants had between 4 and 33 years of experience in prison education. In great detail, the participants laid out not only their coping strategies in cases of violence and lack of cooperation from management but their creative ways to make their students' learning experiences meaningful. Creative, connective strategies ranged from continuous low music playing in the background to encouraging learners to use their writing skills for personal family connections to handing affirming messages directly to students.

Theme 5: Personal Coping Strategies

Much of the information given by the participants involved numerous incidents and how they addressed them. As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) noted, coping is what individuals use cognitively and behaviorally to manage certain demands within them and outside of them. Stress is not avoidable; however, coping is what makes the difference in

adjusting to is the change that is used by way of cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While stress is an unavoidable part of the human condition, coping is what makes the difference in adjusting to the aftermath of a stressful event. The participants had collegial relationships with fellow teachers with whom they could talk over their problems and the knowledge that correctional officers could come to help in a violent situation in seconds at the sound of an alarm. Just the knowledge of the latter was comforting to all the participants including those with prior experience in public schools who did not have the luxury of such fast-protective responses. The participants also noted several ways they deal with stress when they are on breaks or at home from walking their dogs, to having a glass of wine, to not burdening a spouse with what went on during the day, to using self-affirming messages. Some did indicate that even a spouse in the military, for example, could never understand what was involved in their day to day life as prison educators regarding the stress they experience and how best to cope.

Theme 6: Supportive Coworkers

All participants had positive adulations for most of their coworkers, whether colleagues or staff, especially when support groups were formed. Likewise, Kamrath and Gregg (2018) found mentoring and training programs help prevent isolation among educators and enhance their skills and collegiality. Even though P1 had experienced a kind of hazing from her coworkers and a period of uncooperativeness, circumstances got better when she took a stand to go directly to the units and call up the students herself for class. The participants knew the correctional officers would respond immediately when

they needed help, and they could talk over classroom challenges with fellow educators. P1, for example, reported her teaching colleagues developed a “trauma informed framework” as an opportunity to sit down and discuss the stressful traumatic events they experience as well as how they can put their minds together to develop responses to students with emotional, behavioral, or other traumas with the goal of getting these students back on track toward getting their education. P5 explained that it was other teachers and the correctional officers who checked up on him when he hurt his back and could not move, but he emphasized in two different responses that the managers were so uncaring, they wanted him to go right back to work when he could not even walk.

Theme 7: Educator Perceptions of Unsupportive Managers

Many of the participants had negative stories to tell about their superiors in the prison system. P3 worried that she had to be careful to find a coworker in whom she could confide “who’s not gonna blab to supervisors … or it's going to somehow go up the chain of command to the associate warden.” She described prison as paramilitary, where one has to be careful. P5 said the most negative things about supervisors, especially in his role as a union representative and from his experience when he got no support from his supervisors when he was injured. When I searched for information in the literature about treatment of educators by supervisors, I could find little on this topic except in Kamrath and Gregg’s (2018) recommendations for future studies. Their own mixed methods study involved qualitative research for those who remained in their positions as prison educators and quantitative surveys for those who had left their positions.

A theme that arose during their surveys was the perceived lack of administrative support. It appears that most teachers who left the position felt unsupported by their administrators (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). Results from this study suggest those teachers who have chosen to remain have found methods to address such obstacles and situations, regardless of administrative support, and these support mechanisms overcome any drive and discouragement to leave the correctional classroom (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). Undoubtedly, a connection between improved administrative support and teacher retention could lead to improvements in the selection and training of correctional education administrators. The participants confirmed the people they could trust the most were others in the same or similar positions in many of their responses.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the strategies for coping that prison educators used to cope with stress in their everyday teaching jobs. My key findings were expressed in seven themes that came out of the data analysis of 11 interview questions addressing two research questions. The first was on stressful encounters the teachers had while engaged in their work, and the second was on how they addressed the stressful challenges. All participants addressed the interview questions in great detail. Not one of them declined to answer any questions, including IQ11 asking for optional additional information. All the interviews lasted at least three-quarters of an hour. Because of the gap in literature about how prison educators cope with stress, most of the findings extend the literature with new, rich, in-depth information.

Limitations of the Study

As in all research, the present study did have some limitations (see Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). First, though I am professionally employed as a professor in the field of criminal justice, I have never worked in a prison in any capacity. Therefore, much of the information was new to me. Second, though the semistructured interviews yielded in-depth information from each of the participants, I recorded all of them over the phone. Thus, I did not get to observe facial expressions and body language that I would have seen face to face. Still, I took field notes during the interviews, and I was able to discern tone of voice, especially during the participants' more emotional stories, which added to the depth of exploring their experiences in their lengthy narratives. I also wrote in a reflexive journal as I read over the transcripts and noted further ideas and impressions I got from the information. Third, originally, I planned to interview eight participants and was concerned if that would be sufficient. However, after interviewing six participants, a smaller number, the data were completely saturated and no new information was shared. Finally, the participants worked in different facilities in different regions of the country (e.g., a northern midwestern state, in Oklahoma, and on the West Coast). Thus, even though the data were saturated after speaking to six prison educators, their experiences may not accurately reflect those of other prison educators in other correctional facilities in different regions. Still, the data I collected were abundant, and detailed enough to get a sufficiently accurate picture of how prison educators experience and cope with stress during their workdays.

Recommendations

Despite the limitations of this phenomenological qualitative study in an educational setting at medium secured prisons, the lived experiences of the six participants included rich material that can be addressed both by my recommendations and material from the literature review. In general, many of the studies involved solutions for prison educators who had experienced difficulties in addressing work-related stress. The problem was made worse not only by the stress of teaching in a prison environment but also the lack of support from the educators' supervisors.

Future researchers have much work to do on the effect of stress on educators in the U.S. state prison system. After an extensive search of the literature on prison educators, I found only one article connected to my research, on the topic of turnover of prison educators (Kamrath & Gregg, 2018). The study was similar to mine in that the researcher interviewed satisfied prison educators still in the system and surveyed dissatisfied prison educators who had left the system. There are abundant articles on correctional officers and factors related to turnover and stress (e.g., Ferdik et al., 2014; Lia, 2017), but little on an important part of preventing recidivism, prison education (e.g., Courtney, 2019; Pelletier & Evans, 2019). More is needed on retaining prison educators because of their important role in prisoner rehabilitation.

The general consensus among the participants was they had little recourse when they encountered stressful events in their positions. Many had good relationships with their colleagues, but few could seek help from their supervisors. Not only could they not get help from management, but none of them even mentioned any employee assistance

programs (EAP) for staff whether teachers or correctional officers. I strongly recommend future researchers and policy makers recognize the importance of mental health in the prison system for employees whose job involves almost constant stress as they educate and control inmates in the state correctional system. EAP programs are set up to give employees free access to short-term services not only for the employee but for the employee's family. EAP is confidential and also provides referrals if more treatment is needed. A particular need among the participants would be for the team building and stress management programs EAP also provides (Graessle et al., 2018).

Only one participant mentioned any kind of professional development communities (PLCs) where the teachers shared common goals in their missions as prison educators, and that was less formal than the typical PLC. Whalen et al. (2019) discussed implementing a process of PLC among prison educators to make a strong cultural shift for the entire teaching staff even if the changes are not suddenly seen. In California, 35 correctional facilities had regional training programs to realize their goals such as engaging in a team activity and sharing assessment data. The process is successful and ongoing (Whalen et al., 2019). More time needs to be put into such programs, even if the workday is occasionally extended to fit into the educators' tight schedules.

Because most of the inmates in the U.S. state prison system will be released at different points of time, they will need as much education as possible to adapt to civilian life. Not only should academic skills be considered but vocational skills as well. Most men and women who are incarcerated have a variety of personal and educational challenges. Patterson (2014) investigated skill levels of incarcerated adults. Those with

low skills face particular challenges including health and academic vulnerabilities, and they generally go back to low socioeconomic communities. Most adult prisoners consider their future as employees as why they take vocational and academic programs, though the completion rate is significantly low compared to previous studies (Patterson, 2014).

If put into practice, these recommendations can significantly reduce stress levels among prison educators. My study can be made available to prison employees, prison supervisors, and public policy makers who could begin to put such good practices into action, which might significantly reduce the problem of experiencing and coping with stress on their important job in improving outcomes for prisoners through education. Additionally, these recommendations address turnover rates for prison educators and highlight the importance of education in decreasing recidivism rates.

Implications

As I stated in the significance of the study, my research may effect social change by highlighting the responsibilities of prison educators and the stress they experience while teaching offenders as well as how they cope with the stressors. The study called attention to the importance of academic skills development to help prisoners, most of whom will be released from the correctional institution to seek employment, which reduces recidivism rates (Brent, 2018; Robinson, 2018). The findings of the study, which reflect my deep exploration and subsequent understanding of how prison educators manage stress in the classroom, may improve relationships between teachers and inmates as well as between prison employees and supervisors. The study may also help to fill the

little researched gap in how prison educators' function in their roles to connect with their students and eventually reduce recidivism.

At the individual level, the present study has significant implications for an often-overlooked teaching profession, that of educating prisoners who for the most part have low skills and high secondary school dropout rates. As the participants revealed, their duties and schedules vary widely from those of regular public-school teachers. While the former can leave their work at the prison, the hours they do put in are packed with preparation, teaching, and high accountability in addition to unpredictable schedule changes and the expectation of violence. Thus, the factors that Lasthuizen and Paanakker (2016) found, which were (a) personal stressors, (b) organizational stressors, (c) operational stressors, and (d) external stressors, were experienced by each one of the participants in my study. When prison educators can find ways to overcome their stress, these individuals can not only function more easily in their jobs, but they could also be more effective in their roles of helping prisoners reach better personal achievements themselves.

At the organizational level, the study has particularly strong implications. Most participants expressed a lack of communication and commitment to change on the part of their supervisors, almost as if educators played an insignificant part in the correctional system and their concerns best be ignored. P5 had the strongest things to say about the callousness of most managers: "It's never management…. The very good managers will ask, but the majority of them will not, and I've never understood that." If state policy can

be changed to reflect the importance of prison education, then prison educators may find a more equitable and fair system in which to do what they do best with less stress.

In implications for more research, quantitative studies with a larger group of prison educators in every state of the Union can be conducted on how they experience and cope with stress in their classrooms. Such research will help to bring a more universal awareness of the problems experienced by those who teach prisoners and how to solve them. The present study has strong implications for social change. The United States has the world's highest incarceration rate among developed countries, 440 sentenced prisoners per 100,000 population and most prisoners undergo at least basic and high school equivalency or vocational education (Bronson & Carson, 2019). Strengthening the education system by empowering educators with the right tools to meet stress head-on and cope with it successfully will in turn strengthen the teachers to empower incarcerated individuals to eventually lead productive lives in society.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study provided the perspectives of educators regarding sources of occupational stress and coping strategies as they taught in state prisons. Based on the study findings, there is much work needed to support the prison educators so that their stress is minimal on a daily basis. The study participants' experiences provided insight into teaching inmates in medium/maximum secured prisons. These findings may aid in introducing positive social change in correctional education by providing the tools to help prison educators cope within the classroom so they can focus on providing an education that could lead the inmates to a more productive future.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your job title? How many years of experience do you have in this field?
2. How did you get started in this line of work?
3. What is your work routine on a typical day?
4. What are some things that make you feel stressed?
5. What is your experience in dealing with a problematic inmate, and how did you handle the situation?
6. What do you do to keep your emotions in check when your patience is tested?
7. What's the most challenging moment you've experienced working as a correctional educator?
8. What different types of stressors do you have in your classroom?
9. What strategies do you use to cope with stressors in the prison?
10. How do co-workers or supervisors assist with stressful classroom events and how helpful do you find the assistance?
11. Is there anything you'd like to address that we haven't discussed?

Appendix B: Permission Letters to Interview Participants

Letter for Correctional Education Association

Dear Ms. Wilson:

I attend Walden University; working on my PhD, and my dissertation is on *Sources of Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies Among Correctional Educators in a Medium Security Prison*. I hope to speak to at least eight educators in your organization regarding their experiences teaching in a prison environment. Please let me know your protocol to speak with them.

The following is a synopsis of my study: The purpose of my proposed study is to examine the lived experiences of correctional educators and their perspectives regarding coping with stressors in the classroom as educators. Study findings may fill gaps in the literature on correctional educator stress while teaching offenders. The findings may also provide valuable information about correctional educators and their stress coping skills in the classroom using first-hand accounts from experienced teachers who have taught 12 months or more at state level prisons. Understanding how experienced correctional educators manage stress in their classrooms may help new prison-based educators cope more effectively with stress in their classrooms.

The proposed study's focus also calls attention to the importance of vocational training for inmates to prepare them for release and qualify them to obtain employment to reduce recidivism rates. With a deeper understanding of how correctional educators manage stress in the classroom, findings from this study may improve relationships between teachers and inmates, thus promoting personal growth for inmates and possibly increasing graduation rates.

Please feel free to email me at [redacted] or call at [redacted] to discuss the protocol to speak to members of the Correctional Education Association. Thank you again for your time!

Sincerely,

Vanessa Meade