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## Listening to Juvenile Corrections School Teachers: A Step-By-Step Process for Interview Studies Guided by Hermeneutics

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## Listening to Juvenile Corrections School Teachers: A Step-By-Step Process for Interview Studies Guided by Hermeneutics

### Abstract

The act of interviewing is a complex endeavor, and there are many pathways a researcher can take when designing their interview study. This becomes particularly critical when embarking on a study that will require participants to talk about subjects that may be sensitive in nature. In this paper, I share how I utilized a hermeneutic perspective to guide my interview study with teachers from juvenile corrections schools. I explicitly define and walk through why I selected hermeneutics. Then, I provide detailed step by step descriptions of how my data collection and analysis process was informed by the hermeneutic circle. The process is illuminated through the inclusion of findings from one juvenile corrections school teacher.

### Keywords

Interview, Hermeneutics, Hermeneutic Circle, Qualitative Research, Teachers

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# **Listening to Juvenile Corrections School Teachers: A Step-By-Step Process for Interview Studies Guided by Hermeneutics**

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*The act of interviewing is a complex endeavor, and there are many pathways a researcher can take when designing their interview study. This becomes particularly critical when embarking on a study that will require participants to talk about subjects that may be sensitive in nature. In this paper, I share how I utilized a hermeneutic perspective to guide my interview study with teachers from juvenile corrections schools. I explicitly define and walk through why I selected hermeneutics. Then, I provide detailed step by step descriptions of how my data collection and analysis process was informed by the hermeneutic circle. The process is illuminated through the inclusion of findings from one juvenile corrections school teacher. Keywords: Interview, Hermeneutics, Hermeneutic Circle, Qualitative Research, Teachers*

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Interviewing is a complex and oftentimes unpredictable endeavor. There is no single approach to interviewing as a research method and there is no guarantee with regards to how the interview will go, or how the participant will behave (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003). Depending on the theoretical perspective you align with, and your research purpose and question, the style of an interview can range from what Gubrium and Holstein (2002) refer to as a basic model or an active model. In the basic model, an interviewer's role is simply to pull information from the interviewee, taking care not to contaminate the information with subjectivity or extraneous information. In the newer active model, there is not a single truth as the interviewee takes on a more active role than simply asking for information. Now, the researcher and interviewee take on a more collaborative partnership in seeking understanding about the topic at hand (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

Conducting an interview with a participant that may include sensitive topics involves special care taken to ensure a positive, safe, and productive research experience for both the researcher and participant (Watts & Liamputtong, 2013).

In this article, I share how I utilized a hermeneutic perspective to guide my interview study with teachers from juvenile corrections (JC) schools. The purpose of the study was to explore how teachers in juvenile corrections (JC) school settings understand their working conditions. The guiding research question was: How do teachers understand (make meaning of; interpret) their experiences in their juvenile corrections school's working conditions? I will present this study's theoretical perspective, research design, procedures, and participants. I begin with a discussion about hermeneutics, the theoretical perspective of this study. Next, I describe the methodology employed to conduct this study's research. Then, I provide detailed procedures for data collection and analysis, and include the Listening Guide developed based on one JC school teacher to illuminate the methods.

## **Defining Juvenile Corrections Schools**

Juvenile corrections (JC) schools are situated in locked correctional facilities where youth are confined and also attend school. Across the United States each year, teachers in JC schools work with approximately half a million students who come to their classrooms with

significant academic, behavioral, and mental health needs that far exceed proportions in general public school settings (Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005; Shippen, Patterson, Green, & Smitherman, 2012). Teachers in JC schools engage in work that comes with challenges not found in typical public schools (Gagnon, Houchins, & Murphy, 2012; Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivette, 2009; Mathur, Clark, & Schoenfeld, 2009; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). There are unique challenges related to the setting itself, in addition to the staff and student population (Gagnon & Barber, 2010; Gagnon et al., 2012; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010; Mulcahy & Leone, 2012; Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, & Tobin, 2009; Wang, Blomberg, & Li, 2005). Although teachers in JC schools are likely to experience more challenging working conditions, little is known about how these teachers cope with such experiences. Researchers have primarily collected large scale survey data addressing their working conditions, and therefore the resulting knowledge base consists of broad information that does not necessarily represent teacher voices, opinions, understandings, or interpretations of their experiences.

Entering into this research study, I knew that I would have to plan carefully with consideration to the potentially complex and sensitive nature of my participants' experiences. It was of utmost importance to me to create a safe, inviting, and trusting environment for my JC teacher participants.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

The experiences of teachers in JC are deeply personal to me. I have worked as an intern, teacher, and researcher in exclusionary school settings for over fifteen years in locations spanning alternative schools, psychiatric hospital schools, and JC schools in London, New York City, Florida, and New England. The work I have done in these schools is characterized by intense emotional highs and lows, but the accomplishments, even when few and far between, are incredibly rewarding.

I believe the obstacles that face this group of teachers are plentiful and complex, and that this cocktail of challenges very often results in negative emotions, burnout, and attrition. I myself am a teacher who decided to leave the exclusionary school classroom. What prompted me to leave the classroom had almost nothing to do directly with my students. I left because I struggled with the lack of support I received in training, and the sense of powerlessness I felt in the wake of policies that did not serve this population of teachers or students. My students were seemingly set up to fail because of policies beyond my power as a classroom teacher. I began to think about other teachers in classrooms like mine. I wondered how isolated, exhausted, and jaded they felt each day at work. I think I largely wondered about this because it was how I was feeling too.

As a result of the nature of my experiences, I seek to understand how teachers understand their own experiences working in these settings. There is a lack of research about the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, skills, and emotional wellbeing of individual teachers in exclusionary school settings. Thus it is imperative that I engage in research through which I can explore how teachers in exclusionary school settings understand and emotionally respond to their working conditions and how these responses may influence their commitment to teaching students in these facilities. In understanding the contextual issues, including barriers and facilitators, that characterize these teachers' everyday work experiences, I can begin to identify the ways to support teachers in these settings so that they may survive and thrive in their positions, and ultimately provide the best support to their students.

## **Defining Hermeneutics**

The theoretical perspective guiding my study was Dilthey's hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1976). Hermeneutics originated in an effort to understand Greek classical literature and is traditionally associated with identifying the meaning of Biblical scripture. However, hermeneutics has also been applied to the social sciences for interpreting written information and understanding the practices, events, and situations of groups of people (Crotty, 1998). Dilthey, recognized as the father of modern hermeneutics in human science inquiry, believed that the understanding, or interpretation, of human experience was best understood through a hermeneutic approach, and therefore sought to create a theoretical framework through which to study human experience and existence (Howard, 1982; Tappan, 1990).

### **Dilthey's Conceptualization of Hermeneutics**

According to Dilthey, human experience is comprised of three primary components: cognition, emotion, and volition, or, stated more simply, the ways in which one thinks, feels, and acts (Dilthey, 1976; Tappan, 1990). Dilthey's ultimate objective was to find a way to understand (make meaning of; interpret) human experience in order to understand other individuals. However, he believed that lived human experience was a private phenomenon that others cannot see, and that in order for others to understand, or interpret, another individual's experience, that individual must first express his or her experience. Dilthey believed that an expression was a symbolic representation of an individual's lived experience and the only way for outsiders to gain insight into another's subjective lived experience. Such expressions might take a number of forms, including spoken word, an interview transcript, poetry, art, and even music (Tappan, 1990).

Language is considered to be the primary means of access into understanding how people understand their experiences in Dilthey's conceptualization of hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1976). To gain an insight into this information, data must be collected by first-person or self-report accounts from the individual themselves (Dilthey, 1976; Tappan, 1990).

Dilthey grasped that gaining an understanding of another individual's expression of their lived experience is a complex endeavor. Because of this, he believed the best way to accomplish such understanding was to begin with a fixed textual expression of the lived experience that can be interpreted, such as a transcribed interview text. He asserted that the interpreter's own lived experience could not be bracketed from the interpretation process because it shapes how he or she comes to understand the experience of the individual being interpreted.

### **Dilthey's Hermeneutic Circle**

In order to fully comprehend the parts of an individual's experience, Dilthey posited that the interpreter must first examine the whole of the individual's lived experience before interpreting its individual parts, accomplished when the interpreter enters into what is known as a hermeneutic circle. The circle could be compared to approaching understanding an experience by first examining it from a bird's eye perspective and then honing in on individual aspects of the experience. Having examined the experience as a whole and then as individual aspects, the interpreter returns once again to the whole of the experience. This return to the "bird's eye perspective," allows the interpreter a new, deeper level of understanding of the experience (Tappan, 1990).

In this study, I focused on JC teachers' expressions of their personal histories and experiences working in JC schools. The primary underlying assumption of this study was that

teachers' own understanding of their experience at work is different from how I as an outside researcher, not involved in their daily lives, understand their experience. However, because I was involved throughout the research process my understanding of participants' experiences allowed me to craft personal portraits of each participant's experience, and was thus key to the findings.

When I first met with each teacher participant, we shared our personal understandings of our experiences in JC schools. In doing so we created important initial connections with each other (Atkinson, 1998), and yet new levels of understanding occurred as a result of every subsequent conversation. Thus, my understanding of each teacher's experience of working in a JC school was in a constant state of evolution.

### **Sample Selection**

During the recruitment and selection process, it was imperative that I selected participants who were (a) currently teaching in JC school settings and (b) willing to participate in interviews about their experiences, which they were likely to consider highly personal and potentially sensitive in nature. These goals led me to identify participants through two methods: convenience sampling and snowballing. In this section, I will describe how I recruited each of my five teacher participants, and also introduce Marie, one of the five teachers from the broader study. Marie's findings will be utilized as an example to showcase the methods.

#### **Convenience Sampling**

Due to the highly confidential and secure nature of JC facilities, gaining access to staff and students poses difficult challenges for outside researchers. As a result, my initial attempt to gain access to potential participants was through convenience sampling via my professional contacts; two out of five teacher participants in my study were recruited via convenience sampling. A convenience sample was appropriate in this case, because prior relationships facilitate the trust necessary to conduct meaningful interviews.

#### **Snowball Sampling**

Next, to increase the participant pool, I engaged in snowball sampling, asking my two initial participants to identify other potential participants whom they believed would be willing to participate in the study (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Snowball sampling allowed me to recruit three additional teacher participants.

#### **Protection of Human Participants**

I obtained approval for this research study through my University's Institutional Review Board. I communicated the purpose of the research in addition to the potential risks and benefits of participation to the participants verbally and in writing prior to obtaining their verbal and written consent to participate in the study. Each participant was informed of the voluntary nature of the study and that they could end an interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

## **Participant and Context**

This paper includes findings from Marie, a white woman in her mid-40s. She has served as a teacher in the same JC facility in the Southwestern United States for nearly ten years. She has only worked in JC schools. For the past five years she has assumed the Lead Teacher role. Her facility serves male and female juveniles primarily aged 12 to 18 years of age and has an average enrollment of approximately 50 to 60 youth at any given time. The majority of students are committed on average for two months but some may stay as long as nine to ten months. Marie is certified in General and Special Education in grades K-12 and recently also completed requirements for her School Administrator license.

## **Data Collection**

To allow me to examine teacher participants' understanding of their experiences working in JC schools, I collected career timelines and conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. In this section, I provide details about each aspect of data collection.

### **Career Timelines**

I requested that each teacher participant create a career timeline prior to our first interview session. This exercise resulted in an artifact that helped my participants begin to think about their career "life story" and their own preunderstanding of their experiences in JC schools before the interview. Then it also served as a support for them during the first interview. They could look at the career timelines over the course of the entire interview to help frame their thinking and sharing.

### **In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews**

My primary means of collecting data was through participant interviews. I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the five teacher participants. Seidman (1991) recommends conducting three interviews for the following reasons: (a) during the first interview, the participant and researcher are able to begin the process of building a rapport and the participant gains an idea of the lay of the land that the researcher hopes to cover; (b) the researcher and participant can begin to cover initial exploration of the topic in the first interview; (c) between the first and second interview, a participant has time to think and reflect upon the initial interview conversation thus paving the way for the second interview; (d) the participant may enter the second interview and engage in a more in-depth and focused conversation of the phenomenon; and (e) after the second interview and before the third, the researcher can review transcripts and develop any necessary follow-up questions.

The first two interviews occurred within the span of a month, whereas the third interview occurred after preliminary data analysis since one of its purposes was to serve as a member checking process. During the third interview, I was able to ask clarifying or additional questions and my participants had the opportunity to contribute any additional information they wanted to provide (Seidman, 1991). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Due to the nature of the study, I began each interview with the broad opening question, "Tell me about your experience teaching in JC schools," and from there allowed participants to direct the topics of conversation in the remainder of the interview. Riessman (1993) recommends that interview guides be comprised of broad questions and be supplemented by probing questions in the event that a participant experiences difficulty responding to questions.

Examples of probing questions and statements include: “Tell me more,” and, “Can you give me a specific example of \_\_\_\_\_?” I asked open-ended questions such as, “Tell me what happened” as opposed to “When did X happen?” to stimulate narrative storytelling. See Appendix A for the full Interview Guide.

### **Researcher Preunderstanding**

Prior to interviewing participants, I crafted my own subjectivity statement. This statement was a necessary step in my research process prior to beginning interviews as it served as documentation and reflection of my own preunderstanding and personal history with JC schools and other exclusionary school settings.

Because of the nature of qualitative research, a researcher’s subjectivity, or expression of her lived experience, is integral to the findings of a research study, and should therefore be explicitly identified (Brantlinger et al., 2005; McWilliam, 2000; Stiles, 1999; Tappan, 1990). The process of examining one’s subjectivity allows the researcher to identify the potential benefits and disadvantages that her experiences and beliefs potentially brings to a study, as it is not possible to separate one’s subjectivities from one’s research from Dilthey’s perspective. In this study, this process meant examining my goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and history as they related to the experience of teaching in JC school working conditions. This was a useful exercise to think about how my own experiences as a teacher and researcher in JC schools may be similar and/or different than my participants, and how this may be affect my interviews with them.

### **Interview One**

The purpose of the first interview was enter into the hermeneutic circle with my participant and gain an understanding from them broadly about their full career life story as they chose to share from a bird’s eye view (see Appendix A). The opening question was, “Tell me about your timeline.” In doing so, each teacher began to tell me the story of his or her life in JC schools.

### **Interview Two**

The second interview honed in on details of each participant’s career life story. Before the second interview, the participant had time to reflect further on the topics discussed in interview one, and was therefore likely to be more comfortable and prepared to provide more in-depth reflections. In line with the hermeneutical circle, we as researcher and participant were able to focus more closely on specific aspects of the whole of the story. Specifically, I asked the teachers to recount memories of significant high and low moments at work that moved and changed them. Additionally, as a means of eliciting further details about their experiences, we spoke about daily routines and interactions at work.

### **Interview Three**

Finally, during the third interview, we as researcher and participant returned to the whole of the story at a bird’s eye view after paying close attention to various components and details of their story. The third interview also served as a final member check and a time to reflect on a new understanding of the teacher’s experience at work. A member check is often considered “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314); therefore, prior to and during the third interview, I shared transcript data, interpretations,

and tentative analysis of the participant's data based on previous interviews. The purpose of the final member check was to ensure that I did not misrepresent their ideas and that I crafted a credible portrait of them from their perspective (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Our discussion centered on clarification of the emerging representation of their accounts (see Appendix A), with guiding questions being, "Given what we have discussed over the course of our interviews and reviewing the tentative analysis, how do you understand your experiences as a JC school teacher? What do you see for the future?"

### **Data Analysis: The Listening Guide**

The interview data collected in this study was analyzed using Gilligan's Listening Guide methodology (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003), which posits that each person is comprised of multiple voices, and that we must listen for these various voices in order to understand the whole of that person and their experiences. I selected this method because of the way it complements Dilthey's hermeneutic principles. The Listening Guide required that I assume the role of listener and engage in multiple listenings of my teacher participants' transcripts. These listenings helped me tune into the multiplicity of voices within each teacher participant. Listening is different than other more traditional methods of coding, because as part of the process of listening, my voice as the listener is also brought into the analysis. However, there is a clear definition of who is playing the role of listener and who is speaking (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003).

### **The Listening Guide Process and Alignment with Dilthey's Hermeneutics**

In this section, I explain the four steps of the Listening Guide analysis process and the ways in which it coincides with Dilthey's hermeneutic principles.

#### **Step One: The Plot**

As previously explained in this article, the hermeneutic circle begins by examining the whole of a person's experience of a phenomenon. Similarly, the first step of the Listening Guide (listening to the plot) directs the outsider to listen for the big ideas in listening to the speaker's plot, the researcher, or listener, identifies the characters and landscapes of the entire story: what are the major themes? What is expressed and what is not? As part of this step, the listener responds to the plot; the listener has an opportunity to outline their feelings and respond to what they initially hear in the speaker's story. The listener can reflect on why they are responding in this manner and how that is likely to impact their understanding of the speaker (Gilligan et al., 2003).

**Marie's plot.** Marie is a white woman in her mid-forties. She has spent her entire teaching career in one JC school, spanning nearly a decade. She was enthusiastic about sharing her JC teaching story and her passion for this work. A word she used again and again during our interviews was fortunate. Marie described herself as someone who had always known she wanted to be a teacher. Similar to other participants, however, she had no idea that teaching in JC was something that even existed. During our first interview, she was quick to tell me how grateful she was to have had this experience because she believed this was the work she was meant to do:

I feel very blessed because...I really just happened upon this job. I had no idea it existed and from the very first month I was there, I just thought that this is

where I'm supposed to be. It was a flawless fit from the very beginning. I'm very fortunate.

When Marie graduated with her bachelor's degree and general education teaching certification in grades K-8 at the age of 34, she began substitute teaching in the small rural community where she lived in the southwestern United States. She worked for six months at the only school in town, a K-12 school with an enrollment of roughly 125 students, until she learned about an open full-time teaching position at a local JC school. Upon learning of this opportunity, Marie decided to apply immediately.

I've always an affinity for this particular student population. I've been drawn to kids who maybe need a little more support and guidance.

Marie worked in the oldest operating JC facility in the state. The facility held approximately 50 to 60 male and female juveniles at one time. On average, most individuals were committed to the facility for one to two months, but some stayed as long as nine months. Marie said that the facility was not originally designed to have a school:

We're in an old, old building and it is not set up for long term at all. It's small, there are no windows. And then the single windowless classroom that we have is in what used to be a dormitory years ago. It was built back in the day when there was a very punitive mindset, I mean the kids are in jail, they're going to sit in their cells and nothing else goes on. So it just wasn't built for the progressive thinking and what the programming that we've found to be necessary to help these kids.

Consequently, reconfiguring the school operations was a creative endeavor given that the building was originally designed and built with consideration to punitive purposes. Marie's JC facility only had one classroom. The windowless room, formerly a boys' dormitory, accommodated approximately 30 students. To accommodate all the students, two separate school sessions were held each day. The morning session, for older male students, always had the largest enrollment. All female students, younger male students, and any students Marie described as being particularly high need attended school in the afternoon.

As a condition for her hire, Marie agreed to go back to graduate school for two years while she worked on obtaining her special education master's degree and K-12 Special Education certification so she could become the special education teacher for the facility. Shortly after Marie began her teaching position, the lead teacher left the facility, so Marie was promoted to lead teacher. She was the only certified teacher in the facility and described herself as playing the role of general education teacher, special education teacher, and administrator during her beginning years in the facility. The school employed two teachers including Marie, both certified in special and general education, a teaching assistant, and a transition coordinator.

The two teachers and teaching assistant worked together in the former dormitory-turned-classroom. The room had several long tables and twenty computers. An average of 20-25 students attended each morning and afternoon session. During the first three hours, the students worked individually on their personal work folders and Marie described the education staff as serving in a tutor role.

So we are bouncing around from kid to kid to kid and they raise their hands when they have questions and they need help, so I will do History, Math,

Science, and Health all in the span of time. We're out there just bee bopping around, helping kids with questions they may have. Well I guess we are kind of tutors.

For the remaining hour and a half, the educational staff in the room worked as a team to teach a lesson to the whole group. She described the daily whole group lesson as being an activity that anyone could participate in regardless of academic level or background knowledge.

We'll talk about current events or just do some fun lessons off the wall or history lessons or life skills, all kinds of stuff. But, so it doesn't matter if the kids know how to read or not or if they know how to add or not, they're not those kinds of lessons.

During the time of our interviews, Marie revealed that she was at an interesting crossroads in her JC school career. For the first time in their history, her JC facility was preparing to relocate to a brand new building. In addition, Marie was preparing to transition into her new official role as principal of the school. She believed the facility had the right philosophy towards educating incarcerated students, and was thankful that the staff and students would finally have a building that reflected this philosophy:

...from the very first day I started here, the facility has always been so supportive of education. It's been the hub of the facility. They are so accommodating and so supportive. I know I am so fortunate to work in a place that holds education in such high regard. They know how important education is and so we don't face or have to deal with a lot of the obstacles or friction that other facilities do. We're really, really fortunate that way. When we get in this new facility our whole program's going to change too because we're going to have the space to do what we want really want to do with the kids.

**My response to Marie's plot.** In listening to Marie's plot, I found myself eager to discover her multiplicity of voices. Marie's experiences in JC, as she described them, were quite different from the other participants. Marie also had more years of experience in JC schools than any other participant in this study, and she conveyed the most enthusiasm for her work, students, and colleagues. She enjoyed the work from the very beginning and this passion persisted over time.

Although she essentially stumbled into this specific line of teaching work, after nearly a decade on the job, she appeared to still experience joy in her career and growth and improvement in her craft and she reported no intention of leaving. In fact, she was the only participant interviewed that was advancing into a leadership role in a JC school. I listened for what supports helped her to remain and experience success in her work in JC schools.

## **Step Two: I Poems**

The next step in Dilthey's hermeneutical circle involves a closer examination of the various components that comprise the whole of a person's story. The second step, crafting I poems, focuses specifically on the voice of the "I" who is speaking. When searching for the "I" in a transcript, the listener first selects a portion of the transcript and underlines or selects every first-person "I" within a passage, along with the corresponding verb and any other words around it that are significant to the listener. Next, the underlined "I" passages are extracted from the transcript and kept in the same sequence in which they appeared in the transcript.

Each phrase becomes its own separate line of the I poem. By creating an I poem, the listener is able to isolate the “I” voice and attend to its unique rhythms and expression that may otherwise get lost in the story (Gilligan et al., 2003). The I Poem may capture concepts about a person that they do not explicitly communicate (Woodcock, 2005).

### **Marie’s first I poem: Fortunate, part one**

*I love where I am.  
I have no desire to go to a public high school or middle school or even elementary.  
I’m certain  
I’m where I’m supposed to be.  
I’m very fortunate.*

This poem captured Marie's allegiance to and passion for her work in JC schools. Marie understood her work to be very different from that of a traditional public school setting and felt fortunate, a word she used countless times in her conversations with me. Marie felt she was working exactly where she was meant to be working.

### **Marie’s second I poem: Fortunate, part two**

*I am about my job  
I am about these kids  
I guess becoming an administrator has changes  
and there are some very good positive changes  
I will also be taken away from day to day operation  
I have an opportunity to have an impact  
I guess the impact that you make is different  
I have an excellent staff right now.  
I should say, team  
I feel fortunate*

This poem emerged from a line of conversation centered on Marie's upcoming transition into her position as School Principal. It showed Marie trying to continue to convey a positive spirit and attitude and also shed light on her sense of anxiety about moving from the classroom to overseeing the larger school and facility. “I am” statements became “I guess” when she spoke about the near future as an administrator.

### **Step Three: Contrapuntal Voices**

The third step is listening for contrapuntal voices. In the Listening Guide, contrapuntal voices refer to the multiple voices of the teller. The term contrapuntal comes from music and refers to two or more melodic lines that are played and move together in song (Gilligan et al., 2003). The voices may be in opposition or in harmony with each other. After I reflected on the plot and the “I” voice, I identified the subsequent voices heard while listening to the speaker’s story. These voices include, for example, Voice of Dissonance and Voice of Surrender. They focus closely on emotions, actions, and/or beliefs that were prominent in each teacher’s story across interviews. Identification of voices is accomplished through separate readings to allow the listener to specifically attend to each additional voice. Certain lines in the transcript may represent multiple voices.

**Marie's first contrapuntal voice: Voice of collaborator.** The strongest voice I heard when listening to Marie was the Voice of Collaborator. Marie conveyed an overwhelmingly positive attitude about her work in JC schools. She attributed this to her colleagues at JC facilities and across the state.

I feel very fortunate to be teaching in this field and especially at this facility because we have so much support for education. And I also appreciate the collaboration we have statewide in secure care education. We've got a tight group of educators in our state. I can call fifteen other people with a question and I can get information from them.

She was quick to highlight that teaching in a JC school was inherently unique in many ways, and had the potential to be significantly more challenging. It was particularly difficult for her when she first began the job.

I felt like I wasn't making any progress for at least the first year I was here. I loved working with the kids, but it was really, really hard. It was. It just didn't feel right. I always felt like I was not teaching, not doing what I was supposed to be doing.

Marie credited her ability to remain, succeed, and enjoy her career to the strong collaborative and supportive relationships and strong communication she had with other educators and stakeholders in her facility and other facilities statewide:

A common thread in facilities across the state is our willingness to share. We get together quarterly, the entire state, and then we have once a year symposium, where we catch up and compare notes. It's a lot of support and also a lot of accountability. With that support, we're able to continue to grow and improve and it's, we're just very, very fortunate.

Marie cited the spirit of collaboration as supporting her success in this challenging school environment.

When I began working at the facility, the lead teacher at the time was a great, great person and she gave me a lot of support. The short-term successes are very hard to get used to. You don't get to follow students for a traditional school year like other teachers. And the lead teacher said, "You are, you really are doing what you're supposed to be doing. You're not going to see it in an 18 week stay, but believe me these little four hour blocks of time we have with the kids, for a few weeks at a time, if you look closely, you really do see growth." And I'll tell you what. She really. . . helped me to realize that we are making progress. Just in a different way.

When she talked about the spirit of collaboration and communication in her facility, she emphasized how they were ideals that were valued across the facility. Further, she indicated how embracing these two values prevented many challenges that were common in other facilities:

Collaboration, it's so important. It comes across in the whole feel of the facility. I mean it's important to management and the detention officers and everyone else. We don't face or have to deal with a lot of the obstacles or friction that other facilities do. We're really, really fortunate that way. So we share and we learn from each other and we learn from each other's mistakes and we share our celebrations.

Marie viewed education and security staff at her facility as being very separate from each other and having different roles in their daily work. However, she believed they a sense of mutual respect and transparent communication existed between the education and security staff at her facility.

Oh it is awesome. We respect who they are and what they're doing and the job that they have to do. We view ourselves as guests in their facility. So if we wanted to do something that's a little out of the norm or might make security feel a little antsy, like if kids have to be out of their seats or use tools or whatever that they don't normally use, what we will do is just go to management and show them our lesson and tell them what we want to do and why we want to do it and sometimes we're told nope, that just flat out, that can't work, there are too many risks involved. But most of the time they either say yes or want to work together to find ways to modify a lesson so that it works for everyone.

Marie believed that the collaborative conditions in her facility were unique when compared with other facilities.

I talk with other educators in secure care that bring stuff to detention and security staff and they'll just flat out get a nope stamp without any discussion. And we're so fortunate that's not the case here. I have a very unique situation here in that the support that we receive here is exceptional and it's not common from the secure side and I recognize that and I so appreciate it. I mean I might have a whole different attitude and outlook on secure care education if I had happened to land in a different facility and didn't this the support. I don't know anything different. I hear stories and I think, oh my gosh, that sucks.

Marie described facing challenges at work but feeling capable of overcoming them, specifically because of support from her collaborative JC community. Instead of retreating from problems, her colleagues collaboratively tackled issues and approached them as learning opportunities.

I think that even the difficult times, they're learning experiences and they're opportunities to self-assess and reflect on the program as a whole and we are able to look at maybe what are we doing that's right and working on what we need to change.

**Marie's second contrapuntal voice: Voice of change.** The second voice I heard as I listened to Marie was the Voice of Change. At the time of our interviews, Marie was at a significant crossroads in her JC school career. She had recently earned her Administration license and was preparing to transition into the role of Principal when the JC facility moved into their new building. Although Marie always wanted to be a teacher, she never envisioned herself becoming an administrator.

I never had aspirations to become a principal of a school. I just wanted to be a teacher. The county superintendent is my boss and he said, "Have you ever thought about getting your principal certificate? And I thought, "Well, not really." And he said, "Well you might want to think about that." And so I thought, "Okay, if my boss tells me I ought to think about it, maybe I ought to. And so I returned to it and I am so glad I did it.

Once the plans for the move to the new facility were communicated to the staff, Marie was offered and accepted a promotion to School Principal. Plans were made for her to assume this role full-time after the relocation to the new building.

When she initially talked to me about her evolving role in the school, she asserted a belief that it would not substantially affect the nature of her work, or how much she enjoyed it. She had recently begun the transition to administrator, spending half of her day teaching and the other half training for her new role:

To be honest, I will have a little more responsibility than I did, but not a whole lot will change, other than I think, well I know I learned a lot and I've learned stuff to help me become a better leader. I honestly, I just kind of by default am where I am. I need to be a little less with the kids and focus a little more on leadership and systems and, just getting new programs started up when we move in the new facility, but I feel very fortunate about that every day.

When thinking about the past nine years and the future to come, she commented,

I've felt more confident than ever about what we do and progress that we make with these kids. ...after nine years, I just really get it now.

The events to come, including moving to the new facility and transitioning into her new position, were changes Marie envisioned as being characterized by both advancements and challenges. She viewed this as an opportunity to design and implement many of the visions that she had developed over the course of her teaching career:

When we get in this new facility, our whole program's going to change because we're going to have the space to do what we want to do with the kids.

It was clear that Marie spent time thinking about her leadership goals for the school and her full transition into an administrative role. She described her vision for the facility: she wanted the services that the educational staff provide to be efficient and beneficial to the students, and hoped to achieve this vision through constant attention to learning new practices and implementation of sustainable systems: "To set something up that will continue and continue to improve long after I leave is my goal."

She saw herself as having two main priorities. Her first priority focused on issues related to transitioning students into the community after their release. Specifically, she hoped to extend the stakeholders involved in collaboration and communication to include personnel working with juveniles after their release.

I'm really, really focused on external transition right now and what do these kids need that they're not getting when they're released and bringing the whole community together; all of us who work with these kids in different capacities.

It was evident that Marie was passionate about applying the ideas and infrastructure she had experienced as a teacher and extending it to include this wider network of stakeholders involved in the wellbeing of her students.

I would love to have some sort of an advisory council that includes different service providers in the community that work with these kids to talk to each other and streamline services and just be more efficient in how we serve the

kids. There's so much out there that I don't even know about, even in our small community, that I know would be helpful if we just made a connection and worked together.

Her second priority focused on improving the experiences of teachers within her facility and elsewhere. Although Marie had positive experiences as a teacher, she was very aware that this was not likely the case for all teachers and all JC schools.

I'd like to see something regional and even national, where we could talk to each other and learn from each other. It just makes sense because we are such a unique group of educators and we have unique needs. We need setting specific opportunities similar to those that are available to traditional public educators. While we may get invited to traditional public educator related events, the trainings they receive are very rarely relevant to us and what we do.

#### **Step Four: Returning to the Whole/Synthesis**

Just as Dilthey's hermeneutic circle returns back to the whole story after attending to its various parts, the fourth and final step of the Listening Guide is to return back to the whole of the participant's story and synthesize the findings based on the first three steps of the Listening Guide. The entire process allows the listener to arrive a new level of understanding. My guiding question during the synthesis process was: What have you come to know as a result of this process? I reflected once more on the guiding research question: how do teachers understand (make meaning of; interpret) their experiences in their juvenile corrections school's working conditions?

**Returning to the whole with Marie.** In the case of Marie, the most significant takeaway was the immense power that perceived positive and sustained collaboration had on her morale, satisfaction, and ability to persist, grow, and succeed in the JC school setting. Marie acknowledged that being a teacher in JC schools was unique and challenging compared to teaching in other settings. From the beginning, however, Marie experienced a sense of strong collaboration among not only education and security colleagues in her own facility, but also JC colleagues across the state.

As a result, Marie spent her entire teaching career in this facility and reported no intentions of leaving. Rather, she prepared to step into a leadership role and expand upon the collaborative values that worked so well in her experiences. She expressed intentions to use these experiences to improve outcomes for her students and the universe of staff serving them before, during, and after commitment to JC facilities in her own school community, and, if she reaches her goals, with teachers from across the country.

#### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Throughout each stage of the study, I made a conscious effort to be transparent in my research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since recommended practices for qualitative researchers include addressing how credibility and trustworthiness are established (Brantlinger et al., 2005), I engaged in several efforts to enhance the quality and rigor of my research. First, I created an audit trail by maintaining detailed notes and organization in such a way that another researcher could follow and duplicate the steps taken in my data collection and analysis processes. Second, I engaged in first and second level member checking with my participants by sharing my initial transcripts, findings, and final Listening Guides with them to verify that I represented them fairly. Third, to ensure that my participants' stories honored their voices,

the narratives were written with a continuous inclusion of a variety of formats of direct quote presentation of my participants' voices. Finally, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the study to record my personal biases and reflections.

### Study Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the participants did not craft their Listening Guide narratives independently; as the researcher, I played the primary role in the construction of the final narrative (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan et al., 2003; Lewis, 2008). Second, the study was limited to the experiences reported by the specific teachers that opted to participate in my study. It could be the case that if more and/or different participants were included, the findings could have been different; for instance, other themes or different aspects of themes could have emerged based on the inclusion of more and/or different participants. Finally, the small sample size and qualitative nature limit the generalizability of these findings.

### Concluding Thoughts

The act of conducting interviews is a complex endeavor, and requires careful planning before, during, and after the actual interview event. There is no single prescribed method for carrying out an interview study, and there is no guarantee for what will happen once a participant sits down with a researcher for the actual interview. Each researcher must give careful thought to the nature of his or her study in order to make informed decisions that will frame the research design and yield the most conducive setting for both researcher and participant. This becomes especially important when speaking with participants who may be vulnerable and/or are speaking about topics that may be sensitive in nature. In this study with JC teachers, designing an interview study guided by hermeneutics set the stage for a research experience where the researcher and my participants were able to communicate in a space that fostered mutual trust, rapport, and ideal conditions to reach a new understanding.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS**  
**Interview One (an hour and a half)**

Interview One is a semi-structured interview focusing on the collection of the participant's career life story as a juvenile corrections teacher. Participants bring the career timeline they designed to this meeting to facilitate the conversation.

Questions might include items such as:

1. Tell me about your timeline.

Probes if necessary:

2. Why did you become a teacher?
3. Think back to when you began in the juvenile corrections school environment. What were your early days in this job like?
4. Tell me about your experience working in the juvenile corrections school environment.
5. Tell me about the social support you receive at work.
6. Tell me about the training you receive at work.
7. What are your goals as a teacher in juvenile corrections school environment?
8. Do the school's values and goals align with your own?
9. Is there anything we've left out of your juvenile corrections career life story?
10. Do you feel that you've given a fair picture of yourself?

**Interview Two (one hour)**

Interview Two is a semi-structured interview that seeks to examine how they reacted externally and felt emotionally in light of the moments and events that have moved and changed them at work. In the beginning of the interview session, I will review the preliminary career life story I have created as a result of interview one with the purpose of ensuring I have not misrepresented their ideas, missed any critical information, or need to remove anything.

Questions might include items such as:

1. Last time we met, we talked about your career life story. With that in mind, I want to talk about what stands out when you think about your experience as a teacher in a juvenile corrections school environment.
2. What are the moments and events in your work as a juvenile corrections teacher that have moved and changed you?
3. What are the highs and lows?
4. What are the lasting effects on you and your views of yourself as a teacher?
5. Is there anything we've left out of your juvenile corrections career life story?
6. Do you feel that you've given a fair picture of yourself?

**Interview Three (one hour)**

During Interview Three, I will review the analysis that emerged from the participant's data based on the two previous interviews with the purpose of ensuring that I have accurately represented their story.

Questions might include items such as:

1. What do you think of my analysis and representation of your life story as a teacher?
2. Is there anything important that has not been included in your life story?
3. Do you feel like this is a fair and accurate representation of yourself as a teacher in a juvenile corrections school? (Is there anything that you would like to add? Remove?)

### **Author Note**

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