
Current Juvenile Corrections Professional Development Practices and Future Directions

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Abstract

Personnel in juvenile corrections (JC) work with students who have challenging academic, behavioral, and mental health needs. The complexity of the JC setting requires personnel to be highly skilled in effective practices to meet the demands of their job. Unfortunately, juvenile correctional personnel are neglected as an important link in the school-to-prison pipeline that can be used to redirect students away from further or repeated involvement in the court system. In this article, our purpose is to provide readers with information on the professional development (PD) needs of JC personnel. Student, teacher, and facility contextual considerations in JC are described. Then, specific JC PD knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with student academic, behavior, and mental health needs are detailed. Finally, resources and future directions are offered.

Keywords

at-risk students, emotional disturbance, teacher preparation practices and outcomes

Although it is difficult to identify a causal relationship, researchers have long asserted that teacher content knowledge, methodological training, and education are critical factors in promoting student achievement (Druva & Anderson, 1983; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Kamil, 2003; Monk, 1994). Professional development (PD) activities are one approach to providing teachers in juvenile corrections (JC) schools with updated or additional information to advance knowledge and disposition toward detained and committed students with and without disabilities, as well as to providing information related to content knowledge and effective instruction. Moreover, combined training of teachers and correctional staff can further support the appropriate and consistent provision of behavioral interventions.

PD in the Era of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)

The potential of effective and meaningful PD is reflected through policy, as well as dedicated time and money (Darling-Hammond,

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Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). During the 2004-2005 school year, teachers spent an average of 66 hours in PD costing the federal government approximately US\$1.5 billion (Birman et al., 2007). The national push for PD is represented in the NCLB Act (2002) and the IDEIA (2006). For example, the NCLB Act requires that every teacher receive high-quality PD (Birman et al., 2007) as part of efforts to improve student achievement. Furthermore, the NCLB Act indicates that PD must be longer than a day in length, must be based on state content standards, must be established on scientifically based instructional strategies, must have a lasting and positive effect on student and teacher behaviors, and must be regularly evaluated. Yet, most PD today varies in its delivery of these components (Birman et al., 2007).

In addition to mandates from the NCLB Act (2002), teachers serving students with disabilities must adhere to the IDEIA regulations (2006) and ensure that these students receive access to the general education curriculum and meet standards for adequate yearly progress (AYP). The IDEIA further supports the notion that educators need support in these endeavors. Specifically, the IDEIA promotes the use of funding for PD and to promote implementation of research-based instructional strategies for students prior to and following classification with a disability.

PD in JC

JC schools are one setting where PD is particularly important. Federal and state governments have invested millions of dollars into JC reform (Houchins, Jolivet, Shippen, & Lambert, 2010; Houchins, Shippen, & Jolivet, 2006). Yet, as Gehring and Hollingsworth (2002) commented, "Although correctional education has been on the scene for more than 200 years, it is still a frontier" (p. 90). The difficulties of teaching in JC were documented as early as 1897 (Eggleston, 1991). Today, researchers continue to acknowledge the challenges faced by teachers in JC and the importance of PD for them (DelliCarpini, 2008).

In light of research on JC teacher knowledge and practice, there are even more pressing needs for PD. Teachers often do not have the requisite skills to effectively assist detained and committed students academically and behaviorally (Houchins, Puckett-Patterson, Crosby, Shippen, & Jolivet, 2009). Researchers also reported that principals in JC often do not have adequate knowledge of the IDEIA and NCLB Act requirements (Gagnon, Barber, Van Loan, & Leone, 2009; Gagnon, Haydon, & Maccini, 2010), which makes it difficult to provide appropriate supports and information to teachers. Gagnon et al. (2009) noted that slightly less than half of JC principals knew if their school made AYP, a central component of the NCLB Act. Moreover, teachers in JC often lack content knowledge and information on research-based instructional strategies (Maccini, Gagnon, Mulcahy, & Leone, 2006). Lack of teacher knowledge and direction from administrators underscore the importance of comprehensive and effective PD for these teachers.

Yet, limitations do exist with regard to our understanding of the effective components of PD for teachers (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008). The majority of PD literature is anecdotal, not empirically based (Webster-Wright, 2009). Moreover, teachers commonly have concerns regarding the appropriateness of PD. Grossman and Hirsch (2009) indicated that a majority of teachers reported they did not receive PD that was beneficial or relevant to their teaching assignment. Specifically, teachers indicated they did not receive enough training on students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009), a group that is greatly overrepresented in the JC system.

There is an even greater paucity of data available to identify what constitutes high quality and effective PD for teachers working in JC schools. Providing PD to these teachers is further complicated by issues unique to this setting including a high percentage of students with academic, behavioral, and mental health needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2010), a punitive rather than rehabilitative mentality (Nelson, Jolivet, Leone, & Mathur, 2010),

and issues related to safety and facility security level(s) (Jolivet & Nelson, 2010). It remains important, however, to provide the most useful and effective PD possible to JC teachers based on our current knowledge as well as understanding of the setting. As such, in the remainder of this article, we focus on promoting a deeper understanding of the complex PD needs of JC professionals, as well as providing recommendations and related resources. First, we provide information on the characteristics of students, teachers, and the JC setting. Second, we describe “next steps” in JC PD. We examine issues related to professional knowledge, skills, effective instructional practices, and cross-discipline approaches to student behavior and mental health needs. Finally, we provide JC PD resources and offer future directions and considerations.

Unique Characteristics of JC

Student Characteristics

Students in JC have unique academic, behavioral, and mental health needs (Gagnon & Richards, 2008). Annually, approximately 144,000 youth enter JC facilities in the United States (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). About 38% of students in JC facilities are classified with a disability, as compared with 12% in typical public schools (Gagnon et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Students with disabilities in JC typically are classified with a learning disability (LD) or emotional disturbance (ED; Gagnon et al., 2009; Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, & Poirer, 2005). Several studies verify the serious academic deficits of students in JC, including difficulties with reading and mathematics (Harris, Baltodano, Jolivet, & Mulcahy, 2009; Krezmien, Mulcahy, & Leone, 2008). Also, the long-term trajectory of these students is bleak, with few graduating from high school (Hjalmarsson, 2008). Youth who drop out are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed (i.e., an adult who would like to work full-time, but works part-time) and earn only

64% of what a typical high school graduate is paid (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Sun & Khatiwada, 2010).

In addition to academic problems, students in JC possess serious behavioral difficulties. The proportion of students with the special education classification of ED in JC is 6 times greater than traditional public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Behavioral problems related to ED hinder students throughout incarceration. For example, students with ED commonly have persistent difficulties related to poor social skills (Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). In fact, these students are segregated from the population and placed in disciplinary confinement at greater rates than other students (Leone, Zaremba, Chapin, & Iseli, 1995).

Considering the high percentage of students in JC with ED, the mental health statistics of these students are particularly relevant. About 25% of students with ED have experienced physical or sexual abuse or neglect, and half have been emotionally abused (Oseroff, Oseroff, Westling, & Gessner, 1999). Also, about 45% of students involved with JC have substance abuse problems (Loeber, Burke, & Lahey, 2002; McClelland, Elkington, Teplin, & Abram, 2004). Moreover, up to 66% of delinquent students meet diagnostic criteria for a mental disorder (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2000; Coccozza & Skowrya, 2000; Wasserman, McReynolds, Ko, Katz, & Carpenter, 2005). The complex nature of supports needed by students can overwhelm the capacity of personnel and resources within JC (Cuellar, Kelleher, Kataoka, Adelsheim, & Coccozza, 2008; Fredericks, 1994). As such, the academic, behavioral, and mental health difficulties of detained and committed students pose a significant PD challenge for teachers and security personnel who may not have the tools necessary to provide the needed services and supports.

Personnel Characteristics

Few empirical studies have focused on teacher characteristics in JC. Some information,

however, does exist concerning teacher background, education, experience, and use of certain instructional and behavioral practices. In two national studies, researchers reported that teacher experience level is relatively consistent with special educators in public schools (Maccini, Strickland, Gagnon, & Malmgren, 2008; Wilkerson, Gagnon, & Mason-Williams, 2010). The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2000), however, identified poorly trained and/or insufficiently certified personnel as a major concern in JC. At least in part, difficulties arise for JC teachers due to a lack of context-specific preparation (DelliCarpini, 2008; Eggleston, 1991; Mathur, Clark, & Schoenfeld, 2009). To effectively serve the JC student population, teachers need preparation for a variety of challenges occurring at a greater intensity than traditional public school settings (Houchins et al., 2009).

There is also a substantial need to include professionals from a number of disciplines when providing PD related to knowledge of students with disabilities and mental disorders (Caldwell, Vitacco, & Van Rybroek, 2006; National Council on Disability, 2003). In a recent survey of JC personnel (e.g., care workers, counselors, probation officers), less than two thirds reported having training about students with disabilities (Kvarfordt, Purcell, & Shannon, 2005). These results are consistent with previous research (Jackson, Cockram, & Underwood, 1994) that indicated criminal justice personnel lacked knowledge about persons with disabilities. Specifically, JC personnel are often in need of a PD that provides the knowledge and strategies to deal with the behavioral and cognitive issues of persons with disabilities (Jurich, Casper, & Hull, 2001). Not only would training of JC personnel result in better services to youth, but also, these professionals, "who believe they are helping youth resolve problems are less likely to experience job related stress" (Wells, Minor, Angel, Matz, & Amato, 2009, p. 254).

Setting Complications

JC settings are replete with contextual barriers that impede the implementation of effective

practices necessary to meet youth needs. Although a thorough analysis of unique contextual issues within JC is beyond the scope of the current discussion, we highlight some pervasive JC issues. For example, teachers noted a lack of appropriate educational materials within JC (Wilkerson et al., 2010). In particular, there is inadequate and outdated technology (Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2000). It remains unclear whether the lack of resources is linked to security issues, due to inadequate financial support, or other factors. What is undeniable is that many teachers do not believe that they have the resources necessary to instruct students. If PD is to be effective in JC, teachers must be provided with appropriate instructional materials and/or optional materials that also satisfy safety concerns. Moreover, the knowledge of how to adapt materials to the JC setting is an important and ongoing issue for PD.

Clearly, safety is a serious issue for teachers in JC. Students must be held accountable for inappropriate behavior, yet a sole reliance on reactive and punitive approaches contrasts greatly with the principles of effective behavior management (Barton & Butts, 2008). JC schools commonly operate within a culture that relies on fear, control, threat of isolation, and further punishment, rather than an orientation that emphasizes proactive and positive approaches to promoting prosocial behavior (Gagnon, Rockwell, & Scott, 2008). Teachers who take a behavioral approach to student behavior may find themselves at odds with punishment-oriented teachers, administrators, and security staff (Meisel, Henderson, Cohen, & Leone, 1998). Conflicts between educational and correctional personnel are a considerable difficulty that may be a combination of the need for security and the lack of PD focusing on facility-wide positive behavior interventions and supports, as well as more targeted and individualized behavioral interventions (Barton & Butts, 2008; Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2000; Nelson, Sugai, & Smith, 2005).

Another setting complication for JC PD is that, as of 2001, 88% of facilities only required a high school education for correctional officers (Stinchcomb, 2002). Even correctional

officers with higher education training reported feeling unprepared to assist in more therapeutic approaches (Robinson, Poporino, & Simourd, 1997). The logical conclusion is to provide cross-discipline PD that emphasizes effective proactive and positive behavioral approaches, as well as delineating clear, consistent, and swift consequences for inappropriate or dangerous behavior (Eggleston, 1991; Jurich et al., 2001).

Next Steps for JC PD

Improved Preservice and In-service Teacher Training

The majority of teachers in JC receive the same preservice preparation as their colleagues in more traditional school settings (Ashcroft, 1999; Eggleston, 1991; Wright, 2005). Preservice preparation for work in JC would, however, benefit from “a ‘move towards academic recognition’ of correctional education as a specialized field of education at the university” (Wright, 2005, p. 24). We caution that preservice teacher preparation should, however, include supplemental information and coursework, rather than an alternative and perhaps a less rigorous path. Alternative certification, as opposed to extensive preservice preparation, may ultimately lead to a decrease in teacher effectiveness, retention, and student achievement as seen in the broader teacher quality literature (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2009; Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2003). In fact, teachers with more traditional preservice training generally stay in the field longer, feel more prepared, and report being more satisfied with their job (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; Darling-Hammond). Preservice preparation programs should be the foundation for providing learning opportunities in pedagogical skills needed to work with diverse populations of students (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). This idea rings especially true considering Feng and Sass’s (2010) findings that preservice preparation significantly affected

the ability of special education teachers to promote achievement in their students with disabilities.

The isolation of JC professionals, particularly teachers, is a longstanding concern that was noted nearly two decades ago (Coffey & Gemignani, 1994). Today, teachers often remain unsupervised and unprepared; this isolation could result in use of ineffective practices and attrition (Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002; Gagnon et al., 2009; Houchins et al., 2009; Maccini et al., 2006). Aside from the actual content of PD, there are additional considerations including the methods of sharing information and ensuring that best/promising practices are implemented, as well as mindful planning of the order and topics covered in PD sessions (see Houchins, Shippen, & Murphy, 2012 [this issue]). Detailed description of PD methods is beyond the scope of our current discussion. It should be noted, however, that professional mentoring shows promise (Darling-Hammond, 2003). In the sections that follow, we discuss three areas of PD content that are particularly important for JC teachers and, in the case of youth behavior and mental health needs, correctional officers: (a) teacher content knowledge, (b) effective instructional approaches, and (c) cross-discipline approaches to youth behavior and mental health needs.

Teacher Content Knowledge

The NCLB Act (2002) holds JC teachers accountable for being appropriately highly qualified and knowledgeable in core academic content areas in the same manner as it does for public school teachers. Minimal data are available regarding the highly qualified status of JC special and general education teachers. Moreover, it is unclear if there is a greater percentage of special educators in JC due to the high percentage of youth with disabilities. Additional research is needed on the topic. There may, however, be a trend toward hiring more special educators in JC, as in one state where all JC teachers are required to have a special education certification (State

of Indiana, Indiana Department of Correction, 2008). The hiring of special educators is relevant to content knowledge in that special educators commonly report feeling less prepared to teach higher level courses that are often required for a high school diploma (e.g., Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II; Gagnon & Maccini, 2007; Maccini & Gagnon, 2006). As such, content-focused PD becomes a significant area of need for JC teachers.

The issue of highly qualified teachers in JC is also complicated by conflicting approaches to educating youth in this setting. Specifically, Gagnon et al. (2009) noted the competing recommendations of experts in the field on whether the priority of JC education should be to offer youth access to the general education curriculum or provide a more functional curriculum (e.g., vocationally oriented curriculum). The former would necessitate JC teacher training and knowledge in more typical core content areas, whereas the latter would require additional vocational-related knowledge.

Despite the controversy surrounding the most appropriate way to serve JC youth, research indicates that most JC mathematics and reading teachers, as well as principals, believed the primary purpose of their school program was to support students in getting a high school diploma (Gagnon et al., 2009; Maccini & Gagnon, 2010; Wilkerson et al., 2010). Teacher and principal views align with NCLB Act (2002) and IDEIA (2006) in terms of the emphasis on a rigorous curriculum that is aligned with the general education curriculum. Expert views that a functional curriculum is important should, however, not be ignored. Many youth in JC will have difficulty obtaining a high school diploma and need educational opportunities in addition to the general education curriculum (Gagnon et al., 2009). For this reason, teachers may need to have additional content knowledge related to life skills and vocational areas. In this sense, the NCLB Act "one size fits all" approach to teacher highly qualified requirements may need to be reconsidered (Platt, Casey, & Faessel, 2006). Consequently,

content-related PD would also need to move beyond an emphasis solely on core academic content.

Several solutions to content-focused PD are plausible. For example, one solution might be having JC facilities collaborate with local school districts to have JC teachers participate in local school district PD. Another approach is making arrangements for PD using online certification programs. Finally, state administrators could consider offering statewide training that meets the PD needs of JC teachers. This final approach would likely require state-level coordination and related travel funding (O'Rourke, Catrett, & Houchins, 2008).

Effective Instructional Approaches

JC teachers need PD to support the implementation of research-based instructional practices. The sparse body of research on the provision of effective instructional approaches in JC schools paints an unsettling picture. Maccini et al. (2006) reported that effective instructional strategies for students with disabilities are rarely used. A recent national survey of JC teachers supports this notion (Maccini et al., 2008). In fact, teachers in JC have specifically identified PD as a critical need for implementing effective instructional approaches (Wilkerson et al., 2010). Moreover, in national studies, teachers commonly reported that certain effective practices do not meet their students' needs, contrary to available research (Maccini et al., 2008; Wilkerson et al., 2010). For example, teachers reported that peer-mediated instruction does not meet students' academic needs when in fact many detained and committed students could benefit from the structured social interactions, active participation, and immediate feedback common in peer collaboration. Teacher perceptions of the approaches they use may be another indication that teachers need additional PD to better understand effective approaches to address student difficulties in mathematics and reading.

Cross-Discipline Approaches to Student Behavior and Mental Health Needs

In general, many teachers do not have even the most basic training and knowledge of proactive and effective behavioral interventions (Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Rosenberg, Sindelar, & Hardman, 2004). It is not surprising that teachers in JC reported that student behavior is one of their most significant stressors (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, 2004). This may account for why approximately 40% of JC teachers in one state indicated that one to three students have been physically injured in their classroom in the last 2 years (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, n.d.).

Furthermore, teachers noted that problems with behavior management are related to a lack of a system-wide plan for appropriately addressing misbehavior and promoting appropriate student behavior (Houchins et al., 2006). Cross-disciplinary PD related to student behavior and mental health needs should include educators and security personnel and be related to (a) facility-wide emotional and behavioral supports, (b) specific population risk factors (e.g., groups related to drug and alcohol addiction), and (c) individualized approaches to student behavior (Houchins, Jolivet, Wessendorf, McGlynn, & Nelson, 2005). For example, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is one systematized facility-wide behavioral program that provides varied levels of support to youth and would be appropriate for cross-training JC personnel (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005).

While few studies have been conducted specifically about collaborative behavioral and mental health interventions in JC, a meta-analysis suggests that well-implemented therapeutic interventions in a JC setting can reduce recidivism (Lipsey, Wilson, & Cothorn, 2000). These findings have led to an increasing interest in JC PD that includes the aforementioned research-based tiered behavioral principals, as well as cognitive-behavioral interventions (Gagnon & Barber, 2010). The

most thorough summary of providing PD to implementing an effective system-wide behavioral plan comes from Dunlap and colleagues (2000). Their key components to PD did not specifically address unique characteristics in JC, but provided a research-based starting point. Specifically, training should (a) target a multidisciplinary audience and be delivered in a manner that promotes collaboration among the participants, (b) use a case study format, (c) be dynamic and promote skills that can be generalized, and (d) be comprehensive by addressing a wide range of topics associated with positive behavior support (Dunlap et al., 2000).

PD Resources for JC

Although there is an increasing amount of PD materials for JC personnel to access, the materials and training continue to be limited and all too often generic. Subsequently, JC teachers often do not believe they receive adequate training for the unique context in which they work (Gagnon et al., 2009; Gagnon et al., 2010; Houchins et al., 2009). Providing JC personnel with the appropriate PD that they need to educate their students using effective evidence-based instruction and behavior management is the standard that educational professionals must reach. Changes in the PD JC that teachers receive may require examining the legislative mandates governing the setting and gaining a clearer understanding of the student and teacher needs (Platt et al., 2006). Modifications in the IDEIA and NCLB Act that clearly articulate the needs of JC settings might have a profound effect on the type and quality of PD that they receive. Until that time, JC professionals must rely on the current literature of evidence-based practices and programs available specifically for JC and for education more broadly.

PD material is available to JC personnel for purchase or at no cost. One specific and centralized source of general and JC-specific PD materials is the *Learning Port National Professional Development Library* (<http://www.LearningPort.us>). Learning Port is an

Office of Special Education Program federally funded project that works in collaboration with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education to serve as an online conduit of PD, state agency materials, videos and resources developed by national organizations, and online modules and toolkits. Topics range from those that are applicable in a variety of broad settings, including professional learning communities and accountability, to resources that specifically target JC. The format, duration, cost, level of access (public, registration), assessment components, and the year it was created are indicated along with contact information and direct links for accessing resources.

Future Needs and Final Thoughts

Despite the emphasis placed on PD in the NCLB Act, IDEIA, and national organizations, there is still insufficient research informing the relationship between PD and student achievement (Desimone, 2009; Grossman & Hirsch, 2009). In 2007, when the *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance* reviewed 1,300 studies examining the effectiveness of PD on student achievement, only 9 of the studies met the inclusion criteria set forth by the *What Works Clearinghouse* for methodological rigor, validity, and reliability. The studies included indicated that when teachers receive substantial PD, student academic achievement increases, but the need for more high-quality research in this area is clear (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shaply, 2007). Additional research on JC PD is greatly needed, particularly in the areas of setting-specific factors and cross-discipline PD, to effectively serve these youth and their complex behavioral, academic, and mental health needs. Nevertheless, it is evident that teachers and personnel in JC require PD based on our best available knowledge, if they are to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and the repeated involvement of youth with the JC system (Houchins et al., 2010).

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