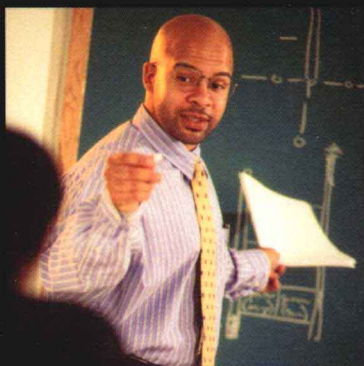


Experiencing **CORRECTIONS**



FROM PRACTITIONER
TO PROFESSOR



Edited by
LEE MICHAEL JOHNSON



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Preface

This book is a collection of essays written by professors with practical experience in corrections. It was written to help bridge the gap between academia and practice. Its main purpose is to support teaching and learning activities that integrate vicarious and experiential learning in corrections. Few outlets are offered to social scientists desiring to publish scholarly works using their personal experiences. This is unfortunate given that personal employment experiences of scholars constitute a valuable resource for making concrete connections between academics and practice. Directly experiencing “each world” increases the scholar’s ability to identify these connections. Creating this book served as an opportunity for professors to conduct scholarly analyses using personal experiences and to counter the impression that academic scholars are “out of touch” with the real world. It is offered to help readers develop their abilities to connect scholarship and practice and, by doing so, increase their power to improve practice and make corrections work more rewarding.

Getting students to make meaningful connections between course work and “the real world” is important to most teachers, but finding materials that help students make these connections can be difficult. As most students understand, applying academics and practice to one another is a complicated task; the connections are often not readily apparent. Like other important abilities that students are expected to acquire, such as writing and data analysis skills, conceptualizing connections between academics and practice is an ability that teachers must develop in students. One method frequently used by instructors is drawing from past experiences to help explain lecture material, which is attractive because the concreteness and familiarity of personal examples make concepts clearer to students. This book employs

the same general strategy but in a more involved and structured way; it gives readers written detailed descriptions that they can carefully analyze.

This book is intended primarily for adoption in college level general corrections courses. Since the essays are narratives written in first person, the book is highly “readable”—comprehensible at all college levels. It is complementary to a number of corrections books, including most introductory texts. The book is useful for students in criminology and criminal justice and social work programs, especially those aspiring to work in a corrections field, along with current practitioners. Because authors demonstrate how to connect academics with practice, the book could also be used in internship, practicum, and some social work courses. Also, while the essays are elegantly written, they are the personal reflections of accomplished scholars and thus contain insights appropriate for advanced study. On the graduate level, the book would work well alone or with another book in courses on correctional treatment and counseling, professional applications, and special topics. Finally, the essays contain useful and citable information, such as anecdotal evidence, that may be of interest to other scholars and current practitioners.

This book has unique features intended to make it an important contribution to criminal justice literature. Few books focus on the use of personal experience in studying and teaching corrections. This book reviews academic and practice knowledge garnered by individuals who have been correctional practitioners and are now academic scholars. The essays contain authors’ valuable and insightful reflections on their efforts to achieve important objectives while they were employed in the field. Authors use their real-world experiences to explain and illustrate theoretical and methodological concepts and to demonstrate approaches to practice. In retrospectively applying concepts and perspectives to corrections, the authors contribute significantly to the development of a marriage between academics and practice.

While the essays are diverse with regard to topics, writing style, and specific organization, each author includes pertinent background information, an overview of the workplace, a narrative of experiences, and conclusions or implications based on the experiences. Spanning the three general types of correctional environments—incarceration, community corrections, and juvenile corrections—the collection of essays discusses working in prisons or prison systems, probation and parole, and juvenile residential and community corrections.

Each essay tells an interesting and important story. The essays go beyond simple storytelling, however, as discussions of experiences are grounded in scholarship. At the same time, they keep academic and professional jargon to a minimum and avoid excessive citation. The essays are necessarily subjective, containing a great deal of advocacy and critique, but arguments are based on concrete experience and scholarly analysis. It is not the intention of this book as a whole to advocate any particular views or opinions, nor to dictate practice, but to use practical experience to illustrate concepts and demonstrate how to connect academics and practice. Additionally, although the authors are very frank and straightforward in narrating, evaluating, and contextualizing their experiences, the book is intended to be optimistic. It is intended to help prepare future corrections workers by giving them a view into the many possible challenges in this type of work, not to make them pessimistic about working in corrections.

This book's readability and "real life" analyses will help instructors generate student interest and involvement in their courses, helping those that find it difficult to see the practical relevance of academic knowledge. The essays put a "human face" on the study of corrections, without sacrificing learning quality (without "dummying down" material). They bring core corrections books to life by offering real life professional experiences and concept applications. Students may enjoy the book's personal touch and appreciate its relevance to their career interests. This book simultaneously serves two important instructional purposes that may often seem contradictory to students: disseminate academic knowledge and prepare them for the professional workforce.

The book contains three special pedagogical features. First, each essay chapter begins with an Editor's Introduction written to prepare readers to learn from the essay. These introductions identify general points in each essay regarding the author's work, challenges faced, type of scholarship applied, and overall lesson. Second, each chapter, including the introduction and conclusion, ends with three discussion questions. These are designed to assist instructors in developing group discussions, assignments, and exams or quizzes and assist students with a study aid for digesting the material in the chapter. Third, each chapter, including the introduction and conclusion, also ends with author recommended related readings. These are intended to help students further explore the subjects of the essays, providing them with possible sources for papers and instructors with possible additional readings to assign.

❖ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Brief Contents

Preface	xiii
Chapter 1. Introduction: Connecting Academics and Practice in Corrections	1
<i>Lee Michael Johnson</i>	
Chapter 2. Looking Back: Reflections of a Probation and Parole Officer	15
<i>John Randolph Fuller</i>	
Chapter 3. Presentence Officers as Beasts of Burden: Coping With Drug Mule Cases in an Age of Punitive Sentencing	27
<i>Staci Strobl</i>	
Chapter 4. Experiencing the ISP Movement: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly	39
<i>Eric J. Wodahl</i>	
Chapter 5. Patient Evaluations R Us: The Dynamics of Power Relations in a Forensic Psychiatric Facility From the Bottom Up	55
<i>Jeffrey Ian Ross</i>	
Chapter 6. Re-discovering Possibility: Humanistic Psychology and Offender Treatment	73
<i>David Polizzi</i>	
Chapter 7. Administrative Work in Institutional Corrections	89
<i>Kelly Cheeseman Dial</i>	
Chapter 8. The Experiences of an Outsider Spending Time Inside	107
<i>Gennifer Furst</i>	

Chapter 9. Learning Corrections: Linking Experience and Research	121
<i>Lucien X. Lombardo</i>	
Chapter 10. Corrections: Experiences in State Parole	135
<i>Tiffiney Barfield-Cottledge</i>	
Chapter 11. An Attempt to Change Disproportionate Minority Contact by Working in Youth Corrections	149
<i>Robert J. Durán</i>	
Chapter 12. Helping Residential Youth Pursue Their Interests: Good for Youth and the Youth Worker	165
<i>Lee Michael Johnson</i>	
Chapter 13. Experiencing the Parallels Between Juvenile and Adult Community Corrections	183
<i>Cassandra L. Reyes</i>	
Chapter 14. Working With Minority Youth in Residential Treatment	199
<i>Everette B. Penn</i>	
Chapter 15. Working in Corrections and Teaching About the Field: A Short-Term Insider's Perspective	213
<i>N. Prabha Unnithan</i>	
Chapter 16. Experiencing the Criminal Justice System: Lessons for Later Criminological Understanding	227
<i>Robert F. Meier and Teresa F. Smith[*]</i>	
Chapter 17. Conclusion: A Review of the Essays	245
<i>Lee Michael Johnson</i>	
Index	261
About the Editor	273
About the Contributors	275

Detailed Contents

Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvi
Chapter 1. Introduction: Connecting Academics and Practice in Corrections	1
The Value of Integrating Academics and Practice	2
A Preview of the Essays	7
References	12
Recommended Readings	12
Chapter 2. Looking Back: Reflections of a Probation and Parole Officer	15
The Job	17
The Work Environment	18
Applying Social Science	20
Hard Lessons	22
<i>Manipulative Clients</i>	22
<i>Frustrating Bureaucracy</i>	23
Concluding Observations	24
References	25
Recommended Readings	25
Chapter 3. Presentence Officers as Beasts of Burden: Coping With Drug Mule Cases in an Age of Punitive Sentencing	27
Introduction: Federal Probation and Drug Courier Cases in NYC	28
Handling Drug Courier Cases	29
The Larger Economic and Political Context	33
Personal Reflection	34
Conclusion	36
References	37
Recommended Readings	38

Chapter 4. Experiencing the ISP Movement: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly	39
Introduction	40
Overview of the Agency and Program	40
The Goals of ISP	43
A Typology of ISP Offenders: <i>The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly</i>	44
Assessing the Effectiveness of ISP Supervision	48
Conclusion	52
References	53
Recommended Readings	53
Chapter 5. Patient Evaluations R Us: The Dynamics of Power Relations in a Forensic Psychiatric Facility From the Bottom Up	55
Overview of the Institution	58
Reflection Framework	59
My Experiences	61
<i>The Front Line: P.A.s, Nurses, and Correctional Officers</i>	61
<i>Management</i>	63
<i>Contradictions</i>	65
<i>Getting Involved</i>	68
Conclusion	70
References	72
Recommended Readings	72
Chapter 6. Re-discovering Possibility: Humanistic Psychology and Offender Treatment	73
Introduction	74
Overview of the Facilities	76
<i>A Brave New World: Psychotherapy in the Age of High Tech Incarceration</i>	76
Framework: Humanistic Psychology	79
Clinical Experiences	82
Conclusion	85
References	85
Recommended Readings	86
Chapter 7. Administrative Work in Institutional Corrections	89
Background	90
Program Description	91
<i>Staff Morale</i>	92
<i>Professionalism</i>	92

<i>Communication</i>	92
<i>Offender Climate</i>	93
Implementation Strategies	94
<i>Human Resource Strategies</i>	95
<i>TQM</i>	96
<i>Leadership Strategies</i>	98
Implementing the Program	101
<i>Planning</i>	101
<i>Training</i>	102
<i>Running the Program</i>	102
<i>Working With People</i>	103
Reflections and Conclusion	104
References	105
Recommended Readings	106
Chapter 8. The Experiences of an Outsider Spending Time Inside	107
Introduction: A Brief History of Prison Oversight	108
My Position With the Agency	109
The Work	110
Experiencing Race, Class, Gender, and Aging in Prison	117
<i>Poor Minorities</i>	117
<i>Women</i>	117
<i>Aging Prisoners</i>	118
Conclusion	119
References	120
Recommended Readings	120
Chapter 9. Learning Corrections: Linking Experience and Research	121
Introduction	122
Auburn Correctional Facility	123
How to Understand the Prison World	125
Some Key Learning Experiences	128
<i>Visit With the "PK" on First Day of Work</i>	128
<i>Professional Corrections Conference, September 1970</i>	130
<i>Post-Attica Activism (Letter to the Commissioner)</i>	131
Summary	133
References	134
Recommended Readings	134

Chapter 10. Corrections: Experiences in State Parole	135
Introduction	136
Employment Background	136
<i>Texas State Parole</i>	136
<i>Parole Supervision: The Job</i>	137
Experiences: My Caseload	139
<i>Working With Females</i>	139
<i>Working With Racial and Ethnic Minorities</i>	140
<i>Sex Offenders</i>	141
<i>Neighborhood Characteristics</i>	142
<i>The Importance of Community</i>	
<i>Resources</i>	143
Conclusion	145
References	146
Recommended Readings	147
Chapter 11. An Attempt to Change Disproportionate Minority Contact by Working in Youth Corrections	149
Introduction: My Background	150
Overview of the Facilities	152
My Experiences	155
<i>Undergraduate</i>	155
<i>Graduate Years</i>	157
Conclusion	162
References	163
Recommended Readings	164
Chapter 12. Helping Residential Youth Pursue Their Interests: Good for Youth and the Youth Worker	165
Overview of the Workplace	166
Framework	168
Experiences	170
<i>The Art and Recreation Center</i>	170
Conclusion	177
References	180
Recommended Readings	180
Chapter 13. Experiencing the Parallels Between Juvenile and Adult Community Corrections	183
My Journey as a Probation and Parole Officer-Bilingual	184
Reflections on My Experiences	189
<i>Safety and Cooperation</i>	189
<i>Relevant Theory</i>	193

Conclusion	195
References	195
Recommended Readings	197

Chapter 14. Working With Minority Youth in Residential Treatment **199**

Introduction	200
Juvenile Justice and Residential Placement	201
Working With Youth	203
<i>A Residential Treatment Center</i>	203
<i>The Routine</i>	204
<i>Minority Youth</i>	206
Conclusion	210
References	211
Recommended Readings	212

Chapter 15. Working in Corrections and Teaching About the Field: A Short-Term Insider's Perspective **213**

A Backdrop: Real World Stories in the Classroom	215
Principles, Applications, and Examples	217
<i>Correctional Organizational Principle I: The Acquisition and Use of Relevant Information Is Crucial to All Correctional Organizations.</i>	218
<i>Correctional Organizational Principle II: Correctional Organizations and Their Members Can Be Understood as Microcosms of the Trends and Problems Confronted by the Larger Society Within Which They Operate</i>	220
<i>Correctional Organizational Principle III: The Decisions and Work Products of Correctional Agencies Illustrate the Interplay Between Formal and Informal Aspects of Bureaucratic Organizations as Well as Their Self-Perceived Places in Society</i>	221
Conclusion	223
References	224
Recommended Readings	224

Chapter 16. Experiencing the Criminal Justice System: Lessons for Later Criminological Understanding **227**

Introduction	228
Vicarious and Experiential Learning	229
The Value of Internships	229
<i>The Gap Between Vicarious and Experiential Learning</i>	233

What Can We Prepare Interns to Expect	234
Recognizing the Traditional Goals of Corrections	236
Thinking About Recidivism	239
Conclusion	242
References	242
Recommended Readings	242
Chapter 17. Conclusion: A Review of the Essays	245
Working in Prisons	245
Working in Probation and Parole	251
Working in Juvenile Corrections	255
Conclusion	258
Recommended Readings	260
Index	261
About the Editor	273
About the Contributors	275

1

Introduction

Connecting Academics and Practice in Corrections

Lee Michael Johnson



The essays to follow are written by professors with practical experience in corrections. Each essay contains the author's valuable and insightful reflections on their efforts to achieve important objectives while employed in the field. Like academia, the workplace is an environment in which important knowledge is produced and disseminated. The advantage of drawing from academic scholars with practical experience in corrections is that they can combine "real world" and academic knowledge and show the relevance between the two. The authors use their real world experiences to illustrate theoretical and methodological concepts and to demonstrate approaches to practice. In retrospectively applying their theories and perspectives to corrections, the authors contribute to the development of a bridge between academic scholarship and practice.

This first chapter is designed to introduce the reader to the book's two main tasks. First, it seeks to establish the value of integrating course work and practice by discussing some of the key benefits, difficulties, and general strategies involved in making connections between academics and practice. Second, it provides a preview by describing the general nature and purposes of the collection of essays, including an identification of the types of issues covered by the authors.

❖ THE VALUE OF INTEGRATING ACADEMICS AND PRACTICE

Many if not most educators, professionals, and students would agree that it is important to be able to make connections between academic course work and everyday life, including professional practice. Instead of simply hoping that students will find a way to apply what they have learned in school after graduation, their abilities to use academic knowledge in practice must be cultivated while they are still in school. Relating concepts taught in courses to real world scenarios in assignments, tests, and other activities is good practice for applying them “for real” at work and in other environments. It cannot be assumed that the ability to make connections between academics and practice comes naturally. It can be difficult to make connections between what is learned in courses and what happens in practice even in studies oriented more toward professional practice. For example, social work students may find it difficult to see the relevance of theory to their experiences at internship or practicum sites (partly because of conflicting goals between the agencies and the academic discipline), even though making theory–practice connections seems to be one of the main purposes of such programs (Lewis & Bolzan, 2007). Also, students have their own backgrounds and theoretical orientations that may clash with some of the people they work with or under when entering the field, which could create interference or lack of support in attempts to connect academics and practice. Thus, to truly understand the usefulness of connecting academics to practice, studies must also be directed toward learning *how* to apply academics to practice and vice versa, not just *about* academic and practice subjects. The authors of this collection of essays assist here by exhibiting some connections between scholarship and practice.