Educating Incarcerated Youth In Illinois: A Blended Learning Model

John Sonnenberg

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss

Part of the Accessibility Commons, Adult and Continuing Education Commons, Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons, Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Civil Rights and Discrimination Commons, Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons, Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Educational Methods Commons, Education Law Commons, Education Policy Commons, Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons, Gender Equity in Education Commons, Instructional Media Design Commons, Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons, Juvenile Law Commons, Online and Distance Education Commons, Other Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons, Secondary Education and Teaching Commons, Special Education Administration Commons, and the Vocational Education Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss/233

This Dissertation - Public Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons@NLU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@NLU. For more information, please contact cschmit2@nl.edu.
EDUCATING INCARCERATED YOUTH IN ILLINOIS:

A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL

John Sonnenberg
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National-Louis University
February, 2017
EDUCATING INCARCERATED YOUTH IN ILLINOIS:
A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL

John Sonnenberg
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

Chair, Dissertation Committee  EDL Doctoral Program Director

Dean, National College of Education

Dean’s Representative

Date Approved
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to better understand the reasons behind the apparent continued success of a blended learning educational model in place since 2012 in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). Using a mixed methods approach, data were gathered and analyzed from a variety of records, reports, and other documentation that included: diplomas awarded, courses taken, course completion, enrollment trends, student mobility rates, GED testing information, and special education student enrollment and performance. Data were also gathered through classroom observations and individual and group interviews with the IDJJ district superintendent, principals, and teachers at six different IDJJ facilities. Findings were that implementation of a blended delivery model in the IDJJ sites corresponded with significantly increased traditional diploma and GED graduation rates, as well as perceptions of teachers and administrators of their increased efficacy, satisfaction, and ability to meet the unique needs of incarcerated youth. These findings are particularly important given the correlation between educational achievement and recidivism. Findings also indicated great promise for using blended learning to address the challenges related to transience, special education needs, and a student’s history of school difficulties and failure that pose potential roadblocks for so many incarcerated youth. It was concluded that the success of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model is due to a uniquely designed student-centric approach to learning that is characterized by four personal practices: perceptions, pathways, partnerships, and progress. Recommendations flow from these findings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the past nine years, I have received support and encouragement from a great number of individuals. Dr. Norman Weston has not only been the chair of my dissertation committee, but also has been a mentor, colleague, and friend. His guidance has made this a thoughtful and rewarding learning experience. He is my meddler.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Arlene Borthwick, Dr. Jan Perney, and the Dean’s Representative, Dr. Terry Jo Smith, for their support over the past two years as I moved from an idea to a completed study. Dr. Anita Silverman selflessly gave countless hours to reviewing and challenging my research. Amy LeFager, in her role as a librarian, provided gracious responses to my inquiries. Dr. David Brothman and Dr. Lynette Tannis offered their invaluable advice and friendship. Sister Rose Wiorek for detailed copy editing and moral support.

Throughout my doctoral program, I have been blessed and challenged by some amazing educators, including Dr. Richard Best, Dr. Harrington V. Gibson, Dr. Vicki Gunther, Dr. Antonina Lukenchuk, Dr. Linnea L. Rademaker, and Dr. Linda S. Tafel. I include in this group my collegial cohort members who journeyed along the same path: Jyoti Achria, Alex Barbour, Joanne Brales, Bridget Cahill, Christine Clark, Walter Crnich (Casey), Anne Dunn, Debra Hochman Feiger, Robert Freeman, Latasha Geverola, Judith Hamilton, Sandra Keim-Merrill, Scott Klene, Mark Larson, Paige McNulty, Vera Neyman, Christine Nolan, Kimberly Ptak, Jennifer Rosenzweig, Daniel Walsh, and Heidi Wennstrom.

It is equally important to acknowledge and thank the noble staff and school board members of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) and Harrisburg School
District 428. Led by Superintendent Gloria Davis, they are the heroes in this story.

Additionally, the superintendent’s faithful support of this research made this completion effort possible.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all of my friends and family who have put up with my passion to transform education through technology.
DEDICATION

To my wife Beth Sonnenberg,

her unwavering support and encouragement over these many years

were my indispensable anchors.

She must really love me to have put up with

and have joined me on this amazing adventure.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. v

LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................................. xiii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................................... 1

   The Path ....................................................................................................................................... 3

   Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice ......................................................................................... 7

   The IDJJ Blended Learning Model ............................................................................................... 15

   GradPoint: A Personalized Virtual Learning Solution ............................................................... 16

      Prescriptive pathway ................................................................................................................. 17

      Sequential pathway ................................................................................................................... 17

      Flex pathway ............................................................................................................................. 18

      Individual progress monitoring ............................................................................................... 18

   Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................................... 19

   Rationale ..................................................................................................................................... 19

   Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 20

   Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ............................................................................. 23

   Personalized Learning .................................................................................................................. 23

   Blended Learning ......................................................................................................................... 26

   Juvenile Justice History and Background ................................................................................... 28

   Juvenile Education ....................................................................................................................... 34

   Juvenile Education Utilizing Technology .................................................................................... 35
Indicators Needed for High-Quality Juvenile Education ........................................38

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................39

Research Questions .........................................................................................39

Case Study Methodology .............................................................................40

Setting ............................................................................................................42

Participants ....................................................................................................43

Superintendent ............................................................................................43

Principals .......................................................................................................44

GradPoint Support Coordinator ...............................................................45

Blended Learning Teachers .........................................................................46

Quantitative Data Collection ......................................................................46

Principal Monthly Report ............................................................................47

GradPoint .....................................................................................................49

Quantitative Data Analysis .........................................................................50

Qualitative Data Collection .........................................................................51

Individual Interviews ..................................................................................52

Group Interviews ........................................................................................53

Documentation of Interviews ......................................................................54

Observations .................................................................................................55

Documentation ............................................................................................57

Qualitative Data Analysis ............................................................................57

Individual and Group Interviews ..............................................................58

Observations .................................................................................................59
Summary Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 59
Limitations ................................................................................................................................. 59
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS ........................................................................................................ 61
Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 61
Quantitative Findings .................................................................................................................. 61
  Principal Monthly Reports ........................................................................................................ 61
  Results of the Courses in GradPoint and Analysis of Courses .................................................. 69
  Performance ............................................................................................................................... 73
  Utilization Hours ...................................................................................................................... 76
  Special Education ...................................................................................................................... 81
  License Usage ........................................................................................................................... 83
  Balance of Instruction Between Traditional and Online ............................................................. 85
Qualitative Findings ..................................................................................................................... 87
  Overview ....................................................................................................................................... 87
  Theme One: This Is a Real School ............................................................................................. 87
  Theme Two: Give the Student What He Needs ........................................................................... 94
  Theme Three: Teacher As “Meddler In the Middle” ................................................................. 102
  Theme Four: Student Takes Responsibility for Learning ........................................................... 106
Summary of Findings .................................................................................................................... 110
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .................................................................................................. 112
Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 112
Discussion of the Findings .......................................................................................................... 113
Personalized Practices in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model ......................................................... 114
Perceptions .................................................................115
Pathways .......................................................................115
Partnerships ...................................................................116
Progress ........................................................................117
Recommendations ............................................................117
  Continue Support of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model ..........117
  Make More Use of Quantitative and Qualitative Data ............118
  Expand the Model to Other Centers of Juvenile Incarceration ....119
  Expand Research on Personalized Learning Systems to Regular Schools.....119
  Reduce Youth Incarceration ............................................120
Final Reflections ..............................................................120
REFERENCES .................................................................123
APPENDIX A: Interview Questions .....................................131
LIST OF TABLES

Table                                    Page
1. Summary of Number of Interviews and Observations Conducted.................... 51
2. Annual Average Enrollment for Each Facility and Yearly Total by Year .......... 63
3. Special Education Student Enrollment (Annual Average Number) .................. 64
4. Mobility of Students in IDJJ...................................................................... 65
5. Diplomas Awarded ..................................................................................... 66
6. GED Testing Information ............................................................................ 67
7. Licenses Consumed ..................................................................................... 84
8. Interactions Observed ................................................................................. 86
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>IDJJ population totals ...........................................................................</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>IDJJ population by race and ethnicity in 2014 ......................................</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Charlie’s ideal learning environment ..................................................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Blended learning ......................................................................................</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Course completion ....................................................................................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Course status by facility ........................................................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Course completion trends 2015 ..................................................................</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Number of courses taken by semester ....................................................</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2015 prescriptive and sequential pathways distribution ..........................</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Average passing score of prescriptive and sequential scores by location ....</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Total hours in 2015 ................................................................................</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Coursework hours in 2015 by semester ...................................................</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Coursework hours for 2015 by facility ...................................................</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Special education hours ..........................................................................</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Percentage score for completed courses for all youth and special education</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>GradPoint users by month .......................................................................</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The IDJJ Blended Learning Model key ......................................................</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It was two days before Thanksgiving in 2014. The calendar entry for 2:30 p.m. was not out of the ordinary. It read, “DWAIN BETTS CENTRAL STATES SER 3948 W 26TH ST STE 213 CHICAGO.” I had not met Mr. Betts, or visited the Central State Service Employment and Redevelopment (Central State SER). But it was a moment that validated my 40-plus years of effort to transform education through technology.

For those who know Chicago, the Little Village area of the city is not the worst, but certainly far from the best area of town. Mexican immigrants now inhabit this area (Serrato, 2014). Between the Agencia de Viajes Mexico and the Dollar Store, with iron grates across the windows, was the entrance to the building. The Central State SER was on the second floor. Down a dark, long hall with flickering florescent lights was the freight elevator; I stepped into it with my bag containing two laptop computers, a projector, an iPad, and two smartphones. It was a normal day. The elevator door started to close.

A large tattooed arm suddenly reached in to stop the door from closing, followed by two large young men with cold faces. There I was alone, with thousands of dollars of technology devices, in a bad neighborhood, with nothing more than my teacher instincts to protect me.

Somehow, I could see “good” in their eyes and so I asked one question: “What do you think of GradPoint?” This inquiry broke the silence in the elevator. After a pause, the larger of the two men turned to me and said, “It saved my life!”
Well maybe it was not a normal day, but then I realized it was. Every day we save lives of young people by giving them the knowledge they need to make better choices. I never learned the name of either youth, but there are thousands like these two young men as well as young women who had made bad choices in the past.

These two young men were participants in the Bridges Program that supports youth after they have been incarcerated in an Illinois Youth Center (IYC) and is a part of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ). My role was to support the GradPoint virtual learning solution that is a part of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model educational program. The first youth who spoke, we will call him Deonte, had personally benefited from the blended learning approach. Deonte continued his story: “I was able to use GradPoint to complete my courses and I graduated two weeks ago. I now have a job that required a high school diploma.” The other youth, we will call him Jerome, sheepishly added that he was there to see his Aftercare specialist, similar to a parole officer, because he had fallen a few weeks behind and was meeting to catch up. Deonte had come with Jerome to give him support. Jerome then said, “I’m going to finish my courses and graduate too.”

It was only a one-floor ride that lasted less than a minute, but their comments validated my life’s work of prognostication of the benefits of technology, virtual learning, and transition to a personalized educational system. If we can have such an effect upon children who not only have been rejected by traditional schools but also rejected by society to the point of incarceration, maybe the answer is there for every student. Can a blended learning approach improve learning for every student?
There is a need for a well-defined story, better yet a picture, for youth like Deonte; a convincing message is necessary that will help to support others in their efforts to change educational processes and embrace a personalized learning system through blended learning.

The Path

For over 40 years, I have been dedicated to supporting and serving the transformation of education through technology. As a student, teacher, school district administrator and school board member, my prophetic passion for educational technology caused me to continually seek opportunities to challenge the status quo and confront decision makers with innovative concepts. However, at almost every step, those with greater authority who could not see what I saw blocked these efforts. Eventually, I learned how to overcome those barriers by working with those in authority to make changes by painting a clearer picture for them. I have had to work incrementally towards compromises in dynamic, and sometimes chaotic, environments in order to make continual progress. It always seemed to me that the greatest barrier to improvement was not how to formulate the change, but showing others how the change would be effective and necessary for their own situation. If I could show that the change worked somewhere else and show the association between that other program and their own, progress could be made.

My conundrum began in fall 1980 when I was an eighth grade science teacher. This was in the early days of personal computers and I realized that technology was going to radically change K–12 education during my career. I believed that students should be allowed to use computers in the classroom, but my principal at the time called
computers “media,” so they needed to stay in the media center. At the time, I was not experientially or academically prepared to challenge his point of view. He had the authority to enact, block, or manage change within the building; however, I learned to work within the system. Each day I carried one of the 35-pound computers up the stairs to my classroom and at the end of each day returned it to the media center. I capitulated to the principal’s demand that the computer was media and, like a film projector, I was checking it out of the media center and returning it at the end of the day. I resented having to do the extra work. I believed that if I could show the principal that technology could work in the classroom, then he could make the quantum leap to seeing that computers are more than media. Maybe he could see the picture that a computer was a door to a personalized learning environment for students. The next year I had a computer in my room.

When I took an assistant superintendent position in an affluent school district in 1984, the progressive superintendent there had convinced me to join his administrative team rather than staying in the classroom. He also indicated that I would have greater authority to make changes. What I found was that I did have more authority; however, barriers were still there, just at a higher level. My recommendations for change would move forward, but now I had to paint a picture of progress for the superintendent, the board of education, and the state. Before change happened, I would have to create detailed plans, which included examples of success in other locations. This was challenging in that my plans were at the leading edge of progress. This meant that my examples had to be drawn from national, if not global, efforts. I could not just show them
what was happening in the classroom, but what was also happening in other places around the world and then have them make the association to our schools.

At the same time I took the assistant superintendent position, some teachers where I lived also asked me to run for a seat on the local board of education. Once again, my hopes were raised, believing I would now have a role in the change of my local schools by taking this high-level elected position. However, barriers continued, even when the board of education replaced the superintendent. State and federal regulations, unions, special interest groups, community issues, fellow board members, and even the new superintendent combined to resist innovative concepts that I championed. Because I was not sure where the resistance to change originated, I had to develop multiple images from various perspectives to drive a whole community forward. Examples of success internally and externally were key to making progress.

Since my days as a school board member and an assistant superintendent, I have worked at other districts, on grant projects, in corporations, and as the director of eLearning for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). At each of these levels, I encountered resistance to change. An example of an innovative project and the quixotic existence I have experienced around initiating change was my effort to provide a computer for every student. In 1985, I wrote a white paper, LappleII, on the concept now known as One to One (1:1), a technologically enhanced educational environment where every teacher and student has access to his or her own personal mobile computer technology. This white paper laid out details of plans to fund and implement portable technology for every student in the district where I worked as an assistant superintendent. I wrote about the need to empower every student with a portable learning device. I
painted a picture of the future with technology that did not even exist yet. The white paper laid out the concepts that, now a quarter of a century later due to technology now being available, are being implemented in many schools. However, there is still significant resistance in many districts. The 1:1 concept was based on ideas first presented in 1972 in Kay’s (1972) discussions of the Dynabook. The 1:1 concept is a concept that could be argued is a better way to educate students, but 45 years after Kay had the idea, it is still not widely implemented. Now, there are a significant number of compelling examples and many of them employ a blended learning approach.

The *LappleII* document went to the school board with what, I had been told, was the support of the superintendent. However, it was never approved and it quietly went away. What the document lacked was a clear picture of success and examples of success because it was literally three decades ahead of its time.

Transformational concepts are never completely blocked. I have found that eventually good ideas do succeed. It is clear that providing a complete picture for others to see and examples of successful programs that they can either relate to or feel that they are superior to in some way will make the change seem achievable.

At the time of this writing, I was a consultant to the largest educational company in the world that supported school districts across the country in their efforts to transform education through technology. All of the situations previously described involved a process of deciding what to do next. What transformational actions are needed to improve an educational program? Ultimately someone makes the final decision on these types of choices. I still find myself asking the same question, “What story can I tell, or picture can I paint, to help others who are making the decisions embrace the blended learning process
that I clearly can see will help their students?” I wanted to reflect on and research this lifelong perplexity and paint a clear image that everyone can embrace as achievable.

I have found that if others look at an example of success and if they can see that those who were successful were somehow challenged as much or more than they would have been otherwise, they will be able to accept the success as being something they can also achieve. Therefore, I needed to seek an example of successful blended learning for a group of learners who exceeded the challenges faced by learners in almost any school.

In working with schools across the country, one of my clients has been the IDJJ. IDJJ supports the education of all incarcerated youth in Illinois. These youth have not only been too challenging for their schools, they have been too challenging for their communities. IDJJ is the most extreme example of a more challenging educational system. If blended learning can positively affect education outcomes in IDJJ and a clear picture can be developed of this program, surely others will be able to embrace the concept for their own situations. If IDJJ can successfully educate children through the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, then so can any educational system.

Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ)

The IDJJ is an independent state agency, with administrative offices in Springfield, IL and Chicago. Its role is to provide juvenile corrections in Illinois. IDJJ’s mission is to enhance public safety and promote positive youth outcomes by providing strength-based individualized services to youth in a safe learning and treatment environment, so that they may successfully reintegrate into their communities (Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice [IDJJ], 2014, para. 1).
Juvenile justice began in Illinois in 1899 when Chicago courts established a separate system to keep youth away from adult criminal populations (Tannis, 2014). This was formalized in 1972 when legislation was passed to create a separate Illinois school district, Harrisburg School District 428, for the “purpose of administering and getting federal funds and so forth dealing with the education and rehabilitation of inmates of correctional institutions” (Illinois General Assembly, 1971, p. 19). Formerly a part of the Illinois Department of Corrections (DOC), this statewide school district was officially transferred to the IDJJ by statute in 2006 as an independent agency charged with providing individualized services to youth who are in contact with the law. This move recognized that youth have different needs than those of adults and aimed to help them return successfully to their communities. If a juvenile is adjudicated delinquent by a judge in one of Illinois’ circuit courts, he or she can be placed on probation or committed to IDJJ (Illinois General Assembly, 2005).

In 2014, IDJJ held, on average each day, 850 youth in six secure facilities. IDJJ is also responsible for approximately 1,300 youth on parole/Aftercare in Illinois’ communities (IDJJ, 2014). Aftercare youth have been released from the IDJJ facilities, but still are responsible to the courts for support and a supervisor. Each youth will have an Aftercare specialist assigned to them upon being paroled. The elevator where I meet the two youths was in a facility where Aftercare youth can meet their Aftercare specialist. These facilities have related services such as computer labs. As seen in Figure 1, the total population of the facilities is declining as laws and procedures change toward less restrictive solutions.
There are six IDJJ facilities: IYC-Kewanee, IYC-Harrisburg, IYC-St Charles, IYC-Warrenville, IYC-Pere Marquette, and IYC-Chicago. In 2014, 94% of youth committed to IDJJ were male. The 6% of female youth were all in the IYC-Warrenville facility (IDJJ, 2014). In this study, due to the small number of female youth, when referring to IDJJ youth in general, the pronoun “he” is used instead of the pronouns “he” or “she.”

The number of youth incarcerated is expected to continue to decline as society and now legislation are establishing policies that are limiting the use of confinement. Illinois Governor Rauner, with the support of the legislators listed, signed the following four bills into law on August 5, 2015:


   Amends Illinois law to “right-size” the IDJJ population and to improve departmental efficiencies in four ways:
• Misdemeanants—Redirects juvenile misdemeanants from IDJJ commitment and clarifies the prohibition of commitment for low-level offenses.

• Pending criminal case youth—Retains pending criminal case individuals at the county level following a new adult criminal charge.

• Length of Aftercare supervision—Adjusts the length of time a youth will be on Aftercare to be proportional to the offense under adult sentencing guidelines.

• Court documents—Expands which documents must be provided by the courts upon commitment to IDJJ, ensuring consistency in reporting.

2. HB 3718 (Chief Sponsors—Sen. Kwame Raoul and Rep. Elaine Nekritz)—Reduces the number of juveniles who are automatically transferred to adult court by allowing a juvenile court judge to have flexibility in their decision for youth ages 15 and younger.

3. HB 2567 (Chief Sponsors—Sen. Heather Steans and Rep. Robyn Gabel)—Increases the minimum age that youth can be held in a county detention facility unless other services are not available.

4. HB 3141 (Chief Sponsors—Sen. Dale Righter and Rep. Chad Hays)—Clarifies and consolidates the reporting of IDJJ to the Governor and General Assembly to ensure transparency and accountability. (IDJJ, 2015, p. 1)

According to IDJJ Director Candice Jones, “These measures greatly improve our ability to right-size juvenile justice in Illinois” (IDJJ, 2015, p.1). With the state’s
leadership moving in the direction of limiting confinement, the number of incarcerated youth in Illinois will decrease.

During the intake process, each youth goes through an orientation that determines needed services. All youth are provided basic medical care, education, food, and housing. IDJJ also provides mental health and substance abuse services based on the individual treatment needs. These youth also take the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI) test to help determine their educational placement.

A small subset of individuals under the age of 17, who are tried and convicted as adults in criminal court and who are also under age 17 when sentenced to DOC, can be housed at IDJJ until they turn 21 years of age. Youth can be committed to IDJJ if, at the time of their offense, they were at least 13 years of age but not older than 18. Youth are committed to IDJJ for an indeterminate sentence until the age of 21. In fiscal year (FY) 2014, the average age of a youth residing in an IDJJ facility was 17 years old, and the average age of a youth under IDJJ Aftercare supervision in his or her community was 18 years old (IDJJ, 2014).

As shown in Figure 2, 66% of the youth incarcerated in the IDJJ facilities are Black, 23% are White, and 11% are Hispanic (IDJJ, 2014). The focus of this research is on the individual and not on the ethnicity of the person; however, the inequity of the racial distribution does need to be pointed out (see Figure 2). In Illinois, according to the United States Census Bureau (2014), only 7% of the general population was Black males. At these ratios, it is evident that justice is not blind. In Illinois, a Black male youth is nine times more likely to be incarcerated than a none-Black youth.
Juveniles committed to IDJJ have been adjudicated delinquent of a wide range of offenses, including misdemeanors and felonies ranging from property and drug offenses to violent crimes. In addition, as described previously, some youth convicted in adult court can also be housed in IDJJ facilities until their ultimate transfer to the DOC. During FY 2014, roughly one-third (32%) of youth committed to IDJJ were adjudicated delinquent of a Class 2 felony, which includes offenses such as robbery, burglary, and arson (IDJJ, 2014, p. 7)

*Figure 2. IDJJ population by race and ethnicity in 2014.*
Youth spend, on average, nine months in IDJJ facilities. The average time is also decreasing rapidly. But youths’ sentences vary with each individual, from a few days to years. Compounding the challenges in the educational program is the fact that youth can enter the system or leave the system at any time. Contrary to most school systems that have standard start dates, term lengths, or a standard school calendar, IDJJ has an ongoing enrollment and practice of transferring students at any given time. This alone makes the challenge of learning and teaching difficult for both the students and the teaching staff. IDJJ has absolutely unpredictable periods of time working with youth. It is at the discretion of the judicial system when the youths arrive, when they leave, and how long they stay.

IDJJ has a total of nine long-term measureable outcomes for how IDJJ supports incarcerated youth. Two of these outcomes are educational goals:

1. Enhance academic curriculum and provide blended learning opportunities.
2. Expand educational opportunities.

The other areas include length of stay, access to mental health, and other improvements that are essential to reduced recidivism.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) designates the IDJJ schools as IDJJ School District 428. It is also referred to as Harrisburg School District 428 because it is technically in Harrisburg, Illinois. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) lists 6 facilities under IDJJ School District 428. The other facilities are technically under IDJJ, but are used to pass through funding or are closed facilities with legacy documentation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).
IDJJ is unique among other school districts in Illinois in its organization, governance, funding, and oversight. The school board is an appointed board; teachers are licensed by ISBE; the Illinois DOC Personnel Code governs staff; and the district operates in six residential programs geographically dispersed statewide within a state agency.

Because of the needs of the youth and their transience, IDJJ provides a blended educational program comprised of traditional classroom opportunities as well as online virtual classrooms. Through the virtual learning opportunities, students can work at their own pace and gain course credit, with teachers providing additional assistance when needed. IDJJ made targeted infrastructure improvements to enable the use of online education and credit recovery for youth through an online virtual high school program. The online education opportunities are in addition to the traditional classroom instruction provided. Of those youth enrolled in educational programming, approximately 82% are enrolled in online classes.

IDJJ’s ability to meet the youths’ educational needs was one of the primary areas of concern raised in the R.J. et al. v. Jones Consent Decree (Leone, 2013). The mutually agreed upon Consent Decree adjudges that the IDJJ has not been doing enough to meet youths’ educational needs. Considering the unique needs of the IDJJ’s student population, the ratio of teachers to youth has been too low. At the time of this study, the state of Illinois’ process for hiring educators hampered IDJJ’s ability to hire qualified teachers in a timely manner. IDJJ had much work to do in the area of education, but the Department had hired a new school district superintendent and was working quickly to make necessary improvements. The prevailing wisdom in school transformation is that
you have to raise expectations to improve outcomes, and that was what the IDJJ was striving to do (Tannis, 2014).

The IDJJ Blended Learning Model

Blended learning is unique to each institution, but foundationally, it is definable within specific constrains. For IDJJ, the implementation can vary as needed for each youth and to address the issues at each facility. The blended learning solution in IDJJ comprises the use of a commercial product for virtual learning instruction called GradPoint and complementary traditional printed textbooks. There are other teacher-developed resources that are also used in the solution where students struggle with a concept and the two standard resources do not provide any instructional support. The teacher is at the center of the process and facilitates what learning activities the youth will be participating in for each day.

The visualization of the blended learning model used in IDJJ was found in the work of Philips (2011) wherein an incarcerated youth’s image of the classroom was described. The computer was seen as a learning tool, but what was critical was that the whiteboard space was the youth’s motivation. This implied that technology was critical, but would lack effectiveness without other resources and support. It was the teacher who made the whiteboard space part of Charlie’s instructional program which motivated him; it was the school as a whole that gave Charlie a place for his learning, and it was all of the related elements in the school that provided the rich educational environment that supported his online learning.
Charlie's ideal learning environment is depicted in Figure 3 and is described by Phillips:

On the left side of the picture there is a comfortable chair where students could sit—on the right side was a computer that they could use when they were done with assigned work. The background, the part that reads “school,” was the most important piece for Charlie. He said this represented the whiteboard that spanned an entire wall of the classroom, and he was allowed to use the whole space to draw when he finished his work. This privilege motivated him to get through his work, since the teacher knew this is what Charlie wanted to do most. (Phillips, 2011, p. 165)

Figure 3. Charlie’s ideal learning environment.

GradPoint: A Personalized Virtual Learning Solution

GradPoint is a commercially available virtual learning solution from Pearson. GradPoint was developed in 2012 to replace the commonly used NovaNet program and to integrate other Online Educational Resources (OER) such as Florida Virtual School, eDynamics, and Career and Technology Education (CTE) courses. GradPoint has quickly become a dominant leader in the virtual learning market. The Pearson Catalog describes GradPoint:

GradPoint is an easy-to-use online learning solution that helps students in grades 6–12 develop the skills they need to succeed in high school, college, and beyond.
GradPoint gives you the power to truly personalize learning with proven and award-winning curriculum aligned to state and Common Core State Standards and delivered on an award-winning, intuitive learning platform. (Pearson, 2015, p. 2)

GradPoint uses Buzz by Agilix as a learning management system foundation. The solution provides over 300 courses and the courses are correlated to support local, state, and national standards. The courses can be easily personalized to meet the needs of the individual student. Any teacher with the proper authority in the system can edit the syllabus, modify quiz questions, add to the course from an extensive digital library and make use of other features that customize the instructional system to the specific needs of each student. The GradPoint courses also have different pathways for the same course material: Prescriptive, Sequential, and Flex, as well as a built-in system for individual progress monitoring.

Prescriptive pathway

Students who may have taken a traditional course previously may be assigned a GradPoint Prescriptive course where they have a pre-assessment and are “prescriptively” assigned lessons. Based on the pre-assessment, the student would be assigned specific lessons. The post-assessment would, however, assess the youth on all of the course material even if the material was skipped in the lessons.

Sequential pathway

A youth who has never taken a traditional course previously would normally be assigned a Sequential pathway course so they would take the whole. The teacher can still customize the course, but the pathway would include the whole course. The IDJJ youth are assigned Sequential courses when they will be incarcerated for sufficient time to complete the course. Sometimes students and teachers agree to have the student go through the whole course even when they have taken the course before because the
student could benefit from the review as well as the new instruction. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) requires sequential courses for NCAA eligibility.

*Flex pathway*

Flex is the same as Sequential, but whole course sections are removed and are used when a student has completed specific sections in a prior course, or are only taking the course for a specific period of time and would not have sufficient time to complete the whole course. GradPoint also can provide for elective, honors, virtual, and AP courses.

*Individual progress monitoring*

What GradPoint does not provide is the teacher of record or teacher support. GradPoint relies on local teachers for the facilitation and monitoring of learning. This monitoring includes detailed reporting on all aspects of the learning process. Some of the reports available on GradPoint include:

- **Critical Alerts**: Displays student activity where scores are below passing scores
- **Enrollment**: Displays enrollments in courses
- **License Usage**: Shows license usage
- **Overall Usage**: Displays online time and time spent in courses
- **Student Activity Details**: Displays student activity details in courses
- **Student Activity Summary**: Displays course activity summary for students
- **Student Usage by Day**: Details the time spent in courses by day
- **Student Report**: Details student performance for teachers to determine additional attention areas
- **Mastery Report**: Provides an overview of student performance in relationship to learning objectives
GradPoint records all learning efforts for later analysis, down to the seconds used and the scores on each question asked. This makes the platform of interest to researchers and those interested in personalized and blended learning styles of education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice uses the IDJJ Blended Learning Model to support incarcerated students’ completion of general education courses, preparation for the General Education Development (GED) test, and career education. Information was gathered through a narrative case study at the Illinois Youth Centers that utilized the GradPoint virtual learning solution. Blended learning utilizing GradPoint is being used in schools across the country, in other youth detention facilities, as well as in general education. Data compiled by the IDJJ as well as the data collected in this study were used as a response to the lack of research on the topic of juvenile education.

Rationale

The issue of incarceration in America, especially of the youth, is a growing concern. Prominent in this discussion is the effort to reduce recidivism and the key role education plays in this effort. Studies suggest that personalized learning using technology may hold promise, but calls for clarity through rigorous research have gone mostly unaddressed (Davis et al., 2014). In this study, I explored one example of blended learning utilizing technology that is adapted uniquely for each incarcerated youth.
The personalized education process through technology has been extensively researched in more traditional settings, but not in the extreme conditions unique to juvenile centers. The controlled environment serves to minimize variables and support an argument that success with children who have failed more traditional learning environments may not only have a message for incarcerated youth, but the general student population.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study is: What is the efficacy of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice?

Related secondary research questions that also guided this study include:

1. What changes have occurred in graduation rates, GED success rates, and the results of the courses such as the course completion rate at the IDJJ during the transition to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model?

2. What perceptions do the staff and administrators have concerning the IDJJ Blended Learning Model as it has been implemented at the IDJJ?

3. Do classroom observations corroborate best practices in blended learning such as personalized learning, group work, and the balance of teacher-led and student-centered instruction?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this work and are listed here to provide common understanding:

*Blended Learning Model*: This is the formal term used for the specific pedagogy used in the IDJJ to provide blended learning.
**Blended Learning**: This is also referred to as “hybrid learning.” It combines the best features of traditional schooling with the advantages of online learning. This is a more general term for any program that mixes online learning with more traditional resources. The phrase is normally in lowercase because it is a generic term.

**Career and Technology Education (CTE)**: This refers to online courses used for vocational education.

**Gbps**: This is the term used to define the speed of a digital data network connection. The term stands for Gigabits per second and represents the speed of data transmitted in units of a billion bits (on/off single) transmitted per second.

**General Education Development (GED)**: This is a test having six modules, all of which have to be passed in order to receive, in some states such as Illinois, a high school certificate equivalent to a minimal high school diploma. The GED has many variations by state and is generally viewed as less desirable than a high school diploma. Students must be 17 years old to take the test.

**GradPoint**: This is an online learning system for grades 6–12.

**iNACOL**: This acronym stands for the International Association for K–12 Online Learning. This organization is the largest organization for kindergarten through 12th grade educators who are involved in online, virtual, or blended learning.
Individual Education Plan (IEP): This term refers to a written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs. Every child who receives special education services must have an IEP.

Mbps: This term is used to define the speed of a digital data network connection. The term stands for Megabits per second and represents the speed of data transmitted in units of a million bits (on/off single) transmitted per second.

Online Educational Resources (OER): This term refers to any instructional materials that can be retrieved from the Internet and integrated into an online instructional system.

Online Electronic Education (OEE): This is a term that was originally used by the IDJJ to refer to any educational instruction provided through computers. At IDJJ, it has now come to mean the use of GradPoint.

SPED Students: This term is used at IDJJ on reports to indicate students who are considered in special education or are being reviewed for special education service and have, or may have, an IEP.

State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA): This is the name of the national organization for the state level educational technology directors and is a leading force in the advancement of federal regulation and policies related to PK–12 educational technology.

The Committee of Ten: This was the name given to a working group of educators that, in 1892, recommended the standardization of American high school curriculum.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review is based on the primary research question: What is the efficacy of a Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice?

Topics that are explored in this review include:

1. Personalized Learning
2. Blended Learning
3. Juvenile Justice History and Background
4. Juvenile Education
5. Juvenile Education Utilizing Technology
6. Indicators Needed for High-quality Education in Juvenile Justice

Personalized Learning

Only in the 20th century has education moved away from personalized learning. The Committee of Ten, in 1892, defined this movement to standardize education when members agreed with a conference of 98 teachers who were concerned with the secondary schools in America and with the academic work produced by students who were entering college. The teachers and the Committee of Ten wanted everyone to have the same education taught in the same way. There was no concern for any personal issues that would limit or expand a student’s efforts. They summarized this thinking:

Every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease. (National Education Association, 1892, p. 17)

With this change came over 100 years of students being forced into a one-size-fits-all educational system, even efforts of special education work to mainstream a
student back into the general system. Likewise, gifted programs usually consist of simply putting students through the same system at a faster pace; however, the instruction will be the same way to the same extent for every pupil, just as the Committee of Ten Chairman Charles William Eliot, President of Harvard University from 1869–1909, would have wanted.

Before this time, education was more personal. Instruction was done by tutors, in one-room schools with recitation desks or by craftsmen instructing their young wards. The Committee of Ten set in motion the mass production of education by treating every student the same. Some students would pass and some would fail.

More recent efforts to personalize education exposed the concern that not every student is the same. Stallard and Cocker (2015) warned that the result of a ubiquitous and unique education for each student is beyond the capacity of human individuals in the environments in schools today. The learner is not the focus. Instead, it is the issue of what the school is able to provide. Such terms as individualized instruction and personalized learning are not used in terms of what the learner needs, but what the school can actually provide, and that is very limited (p. 155).

According to Samah, Yahaya, and Ali (2011), the movement to personalized learning has been significantly researched:

Based on the review of previous research, online personalized learning environment is the best learning medium for individual difference approach, in that it has impacts on students’ achievements and satisfaction in learning. However, learning environment needs to provide new information, contexts for learning and practice, feedback, transfer, organizers, and attention devices. (p. 516)
Interactivity is essential and without technology the traditional resources lack the capacity to meet this requirement for a successful implementation of personalized learning (Samah et al., 2011).

Parents of special needs students are heading this movement toward personalized learning. Required by law, schools must develop and implement an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student. Stallard and Cocker (2015) described this phenomenon:

We see some parts of this process at work today with students who have special needs, each of whom has an IEP developed to personalize his learning activities. Progressive school divisions learned how to automate and manage the IEP process early in the present century. Knowledgeable parents, recognizing the value of personalized education, frequently lobby to have their child included in special needs classes. We agree with those parents. Every child needs an IEP. (p. 183)

As noted, IEPs no longer need to be only for special education. The following IEP description could apply to any student if a personalized learning process could be put in place for any student. “IEPs might be understood as a map that outlines student goals and the necessary services and supports to help each child meet his or her goals” Billingsley, Brownell, Israel, & Kamman, 2013, chapter 5, para. 3).

Efforts to use technology are on the rise in an effort to address Stallard and Cocker’s human capacity issue. Yet, efforts to implement computer-based personalized learning systems have drawn comment from even those who have supported using technology. Dr. Elliot Soloway, a professor of computer science at the University of Michigan who has studied and developed digital education tools and has supported the transformation of education through technology, stated: "Everybody's saying they're doing it—but we have to go one level deeper when we say 'personalized' learning, or the movement will not be sustainable. It will peter out" (Cavanagh, 2014).
It is the personalized learning system through a blended learning approach that provides the significant improvements in learning that are being sought by educators. A significant finding from a meta-study of educational technology was increasing individualized instruction:

Many studies found an increase in student-centered instruction. Teachers had additional tools and time they could devote to individualized instruction to meet the needs of specific learners. Thus, rather than a one size fits all approach, teachers could customize the instruction to address the specific needs of individual students. (Morrison, Morrison, & Ross, 2016, p. 18)

Blended Learning

The International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) (2015) defined blended learning:

Blended learning, also referred to as hybrid learning, combines the best features of traditional schooling with the advantages of online learning to deliver personalized, differentiated instruction across a group of learners. Students in formal blended learning educational programs learn online part of the time, yet have the benefit of face-to-face instruction and supervision to maximize their learning and to best fit their own needs. (p. 5)

For IDJJ and any institution, blended learning has a wide range of environments, but there is a combination of brick-and-mortar (traditional) education and online learning (Staker & Horn, 2012). Figure 4 graphically displays the elements of blended learning with the inclusion of the brick-and-mortar and the online learning elements. Brick-and-mortar refers to more traditional educational resources including teachers, buildings, textbooks, and other none-digital educational resources.
Although iNACOL and others have defined blended learning, it is a very fluid model that adjusts constantly to the needs of the student and the resources available to the instructor. The model always has two key components: a technology instructional system and a live teacher (Mackey, 2015).

The technology instructional system can vary widely from a grassroots developed set of websites or digital resources to a highly developed research-based instructional system that is professionally delivered. Though the systems vary widely, the core is that students access direct instruction from a system, not the teacher. The teacher’s role is defined as a guide on the side (King, 1993).

I prefer the phrase that McWilliam used to define a third meta-category of pedagogy, "meddler in the middle." In this description, the teacher has a more engaging role. In a successful blended learning environment, the teacher is directly involved in all
aspects of the student’s activities. The instruction may be provided by the system, but the teacher has assigned it, monitored it, and provided formative evaluation to the objective being learned (McWilliam, 2009).

Juvenile Justice History and Background

The first attempt to educate the incarcerated was described by William Webb, an inmate of the Philadelphia City Prison, when Bishop William White and Dr. Rogers preached to the inmates in 1787 (Teeters, 1955). The warden was so concerned about the event and the novelty of the moment that he had guards position a cannon with a lit linstock at the ready in case the inmates caused the instructors any concern.

In the United States, juveniles were treated the same as adult criminals until the establishment of the New York House of Refuge which opened in 1825 and soon grew to be the model for youth incarceration. The following narrative references the brief history of the development, operations, and termination of the New York House of Refuge.

Revenge, in the early 19th century, was the basis for all prisoner treatment, regardless of age. The Society of the Prevention of Pauperism sought to change treatment to a more reformed-based approach. In 1816, the society organized as a philanthropic association and researched the prisons of the day for over eight years. The committee’s report criticized the vengeful nature of the treatment of prisoners, the use of prisons for any offense, and the incarceration of children with adult populations. In response to the reported conditions of prisons and the treatment of children, the society established the New York House of Refuge, the first juvenile reformatory in the nation.

The committee's report criticized the prevailing spirit of revenge in the treatment of prisoners and deplored the imprisonment of individuals regardless of age or the severity of crime. Following adoption of the report in 1824, the Society
reorganized for the purpose of establishing a reformatory. (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 4)

Over time, the New York House of Refuge shifted from private management to the state of New York government management. This involved state legislation and the creation of judicial practices for juveniles. Over time, the state helped to organize, fund, and develop alternative treatment programs for juveniles. While the New York House of Refuge was privately held, the state of New York increasingly supported the initiative.

In 1824, the State Legislature incorporated the "Managers of the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in the City of New York." Next followed a statute authorizing courts state-wide to commit juveniles convicted of crimes or adjudicated as vagrants to the New York House of Refuge. (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 4)

The management of the program also shifted from the society members themselves to a superintendent or a matron. The Society of the Prevention of Pauperism members elected a 30-member board of managers with an acting committee of between five and then later seven members. The acting committee met weekly to deal with policy. The acting committee also hired a superintendent, for the boys, and a matron to supervise the girls. As I will discuss further on, this model continues today in the modern juvenile centers having a school board and a superintendent. “The Superintendent, appointed by the Acting Committee, was responsible for daily management. The matron supervised the Female Department” (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 4).

Using funds obtained from various sources is not new to addressing the needs of reform and even today is important to the story of incarcerated youth. Finding monies to support the reform of juveniles has never been a priority need but one that many entities together have joined in the reform movement of youth. The same was true of the New York House of Refuge. A year after establishing the New York House of Refuge, the
state of New York began providing funds. Some of the funds came from the general appropriations, but the House of Refuge also was supported by immigration through a head tax on arriving transatlantic passengers and seaman. Additional revenue was generated from proceeds from license fees for entertainment in New York City, such as taverns, theaters, and circuses. Both of these additional funding sources were also perceived to be sources of the juvenile problem. The Society of the Prevention of Pauperism and other supporters blamed immigration, intemperance, and commercial entertainment for juvenile crime and the subsequent incarceration; therefore, the problem became part of the cure.

From the proceeds of the state of New York, the federal government, and a private investment capital subscription, a financial tool that relies on a small pool of investors’ money for real estate investments, the Society of the Prevention of Pauperism purchased an old federal arsenal in Manhattan in July 1824 and then in other locations.

The reformatory occupied several other sites in New York City. Eventually the Society acquired $125,000 from the State and Federal Government for a new site on Randall’s Island in the East River, which was completed in 1854; housing for the Female Division was completed in 1860. (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 4)

Once opened, the House of Refuge grew rapidly. The reason for such growth is that the implementation was successful in meeting the goal of the original initiative of transitioning from revenge to reform. Within ten years, the House of Refuge grew from nine children to 1,678 youth. These youth were being admitted for even the smallest infraction or simply for being poor and on the street, so the numbers grew quickly. Additionally, they were being held for longer periods of time because the children became wards of the state of New York and were incarcerated without a definite term to
serve. It was common that, for a petty theft of a piece of food, a staving youth could be incarcerated for years (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 5).

In addition to the youth just being incarcerated, the reform process discusses the youth engaged in labor; at the time, this was seen as a form of vocational education. This labor force was seen as another funding source, but primarily, the program was for education and discipline. Today, the education program includes counseling and training in positive behavior. In this archived report, similar goals were described as religious instruction. However, direct religious instruction is a practice that is not in place in the indentured process for today’s youth.

Today, the Aftercare program does support the job training and career application skills needed by youth to find their own path away from pauperism, similar to the goal of the original philanthropic association that started the reform movement. The more detailed description that follows highlights some of the details of this forced child labor program.

A large part of an inmate’s daily schedule was devoted to supervised labor, which was regarded as beneficial to education and discipline. Inmate labor also supported operating expenses for the reformatory. Typically, male inmates produced brushes, cane chairs, brass nails, and shoes. The female inmates made uniforms, worked in the laundry and performed other domestic work. A badge system was used to segregate inmates according to their behavior. Students were instructed in basic literacy skills. There was also great emphasis on evangelical religious instruction, although non-Protestant clergy were excluded. The reformatory had the authority to bind out inmates through indenture agreements by which employers agreed to supervise them during their employment. Although initially several inmates were sent to sea, most male and female inmates were sent to work as farm and domestic laborers, respectively. (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 5)

This was just one program in New York. The reason for the existence of programs like the IDJJ was that others heard about these changes in New York and
embraced them. Similar to the Society of the Prevention of Pauperism, Illinois had others that wanted the best in the world for their incarcerated youth. Political thinkers, historians, and writers helped spread the success to the world and to Illinois. Global visitors came to see the House of Refuge and spread the story of its former woes, that where still existent in most locations, and this more reform-minded environment for incarcerated youth.

Similar to today’s use of celebrities to herald current social dilemmas, famous people in the past helped to communicate the need for change. In the early to mid-19th century, it was Alexis De Tocqueville (a French political thinker and historian best known for his work *Democracy in America*), Frances Trollope (an English novelist), and the famous Charles Dickens who spread the word of change in juvenile incarceration.

In 1857, the House of Refuge hosted a national convention of reformatory administrators; at that time, it had the largest reformatory population in the United States. Along with the prestige from celebrity endorsements and the expanding size of the program, their pride was self-justified to the extent of the following boast: “In the same year, the New York State Senate Committee on Social Agencies boasted that the New York House of Refuge is now in the extent of its operations, the greatest reform school in the world” (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 5).

Similar to other successful processes that have gained acclaim, there is also a final stage to these types of changes. With the House of Refuge came the “cottage plan” and other efforts to move away from the prison-like environments for youth to settings that were more modernized environments for youth. The following excerpt from the state’s archives briefly describes events that occurred over 78 years. The details of the slow
demise of the once heralded initiative are not essential; however, the Ozymandias-like warning of the sin of arrogance to current and future reformers should be noted.

The urban reformatory, a product of nineteenth century philanthropic reform, was being replaced by new state institutions in rural areas where there was more opportunity to follow the "cottage plan" first initiated in Lancaster, Ohio in 1857 and influential after the Civil War. As early as 1906, the Society was authorized to exchange its property for a new rural location, but no suitable site was found. Successive legislative measures designated the State Training School for Boys at Warwick for inmates under sixteen, and the State Vocational School at Coxsackie for those sixteen to nineteen as the successor state institutions for the New York House of Refuge. Finally in 1935, the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents in New York City dissolved and the institution on Randall’s Island closed. (New York House of Refuge, 1989, p. 6)

The modern Juvenile justice system takes root in Chicago in 1899 with the establishment of a separate court and justice system for youth (Krohn & Lane, 2015). In 1971, 72 years later, the state of Illinois created Harrisburg School District #428. Now, the educational programs being offered at all of the DOC facilities, both adult and youth, could take advantage of receiving federal funds for education, special education, and other programs that had to be distributed through a local educational agency. However, juveniles were still under the Illinois Department of Corrections until 2006 when the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice was legislatively created (Illinois General Assembly, 2005. At the same time, the Harrisburg School District #428 was moved from the Illinois Department of Corrections to the IDJJ.

Nationally, juvenile justice education governance is shaped by the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act which mandates youth receive medical, educational, vocational, social, psychological guidance, training, special education, counseling, alcoholism treatment, drug treatment, and other rehabilitative services (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002). In Illinois, the Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention Act along with the Due Process Clause in the United States Constitution are the foundations for the Consent Decree that sets the current path in Illinois for incarcerated youth and their education. (Leone, 2013).

Juvenile Education

All students in the United States are required to be provided a public education. It is at the core of our democratic system. Youth cannot be denied this right without the due process mandated in the 5th and 14th Amendments (Leone, 2013). In *R.J.et al. v. Jones*, the ruling of the court maintained that the youth in Illinois were deprived of their right to a public education, among other rights, without due process, and the Consent Decree defines the actions required to correct the concerns (*R.J. et al. v. Jones*, 2012). However, a large percentage of youth that exit juvenile centers do not return to school and drop out of education (Cusick, Goerge, & Bell, 2009).

Additionally, the deficiency in the critical educational skill of reading is a major limiting factor in educating juveniles. In the Project READ (1978) study, the average reading ability of incarcerated youth was estimated to be at the 4th grade level, placing youth at least five years behind their targeted level. This dated study is questionable, but a more recent equivalent report having more current information could not be located.

An additional issue in juvenile education is that incarcerated youth require special education services. Between 30% and 50% of incarcerated youth have been identified as having a learning disability compared to 10% of the general public (Mears & Aron, 2003). Therefore, an incarcerated youth is three to four times more likely to need special education services. In a regular school, you may have one to two special education staff
for every 10 teachers; in youth centers that provide education, there should be an expectation of one to two special education teachers for every three students.

The goals of the educational services provided to incarcerated youth in Illinois are to address special education needs, provide instruction toward course completion, complete sufficient courses to the level of a high school diploma or to a level needed to successfully pass the six modules of the GED test (R.J. et al. v. Jones, 2012). However, a 2013 study, adjusting for demographic and criminal issues, found that incarcerating youth decreased the graduation rate of this population of students by 13% (Aizer, 2013).

Juvenile Education Utilizing Technology

Juvenile justice education, especially with technology, has very limited support in the literature in the field. Valid research is also very limited, with only a handful of small, outdated projects published. Another compounding factor is that technology is advancing so rapidly that concerns about technology not being at the level needed to work in the juvenile centers of even a few years ago can often be overcome by some improvement in the centers’ technology. For example, project staff who report concern with video displaying, would no longer have an issue if there was improved bandwidth. Another example would be the concern that youth would have access to inappropriate information on the Internet, but now filtering technology supports proper monitoring (Leone, 2013).

Davis et al. (2014) reported that their meta study found only 1,150 documents and of these, only nine had a sufficient research design to be reviewable. The other 1,141 documents were either outdated or failed to meet even the minimal research standards established. This 2014 formal, large-scale, and well-funded research effort on juvenile education surfaced the stunning fact that only nine research projects were identified as
valid research; in short, there was very little to even evaluate. In their summary report on these nine research projects, only Read 180 and Avon Park Academy were evaluated as being rigorous and effective interventions:

Taken in conjunction with the broader research literature on each of the interventions examined, our systematic review does identify two interventions for which the evidence base is strongest: Read 180 (for reading improvement) and the kind of personalized and intensive intervention administered at the Avon Park Academy (for diploma completion and post-release employment). (Davis et al., 2014, p. 54)

Both Read 180 and the Avon Park Academy were supported by a large and rigorous study within juvenile correctional settings, and the effectiveness of Read 180 was further demonstrated by several large and well-executed studies outside of correctional facilities. Beyond these convincing bodies of research, the Davis study found that other studies were not supported or were very small studies, making it difficult to generalize any results.

What is also interesting is that both of the solutions in the Davis et al. (2014) study would be considered in 2016 to be out-of-date or non-existing solutions; therefore, the research on these two solutions could not be replicated. The Read 180 product used in the research has been replaced by the Read 180 Universal solution produced by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2016) and the Avon Park Academy has been closed and replaced by the Highlands Youth Academy (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2016). In 2016, of the hundreds of marketed digital solutions, not one study was found in the Davis et al. (2014) comprehensive meta study, or in this research, that was up-to-date and showed valid improvement in educating incarcerated youth.

One example, and the only one that could be found, of a research effort in a juvenile center that utilized technology was Langemeier’s (2007) study of a Midwest
juvenile center that utilized the software program called NovaNet. GradPoint, the solution used in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, replaced NovaNet in 2012. Langemeier’s project specifically compared two facilities with different pedagogical approaches against the Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte & Jacoby, 1990). In reference to the correlate of Climate of High Expectations for success and reteaching, the principal of the Midwest facility offered the following response:

What, if any, means of reteaching and regrouping are in place? Reteaching is completed by the use of NovaNet. This software package provides the youth with various levels of assignments and test. The test, for example, is graded while at their desk. NovaNet will then ask a series of questions that the youth missed from the test to assist with learning the areas not understood. Teachers continuously focus on filling knowledge and skill gaps with our students. Continuous assessment in a variety of forms is used to address acquired knowledge and skills. Groupings within classrooms are at the teacher’s discretion, but facility groupings are under control of the county agency. (Langemeier, 2007, p. 98)

Langemeier’s research illustrates the limited research available on juvenile education and technology. The results were inconclusive and the solution was with a product that is no longer even available to replicate the study.

One of the reasons for the limited body of research on juvenile education and technology is the lack of access to the Internet in these facilities. Researchers cannot study what does not exist. Educational solutions rely on the Internet to provide the instructional support youth require. Sweeney (2012) found that few of the 24 professionals in the state of Illinois who provided library services to incarcerated youth had Internet access. Additionally, the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA) is not only calling for Internet access, but also increasing, in 2017, the level of bandwidth for each student up to 1 Gbps per 1,000 students (State Educational Technology Directors Association [SETDA], 2013). Additionally, on the
national level, the education of children is seen as requiring the use of the Internet. SETDA’s expectation of Internet access for schools is at a speed of 1Mbps per student and is now an established part of a modern educational system, which like education itself, would require a legal due process to deny.

Indicators Needed for High-Quality Juvenile Education

The research of Tannis (2014) on incarcerated youth revealed that there are four indicators that determine the effectiveness of the education at centers for incarcerated youth: relationships, expectations, resources, and accountability. I built on this research to uncover the degree to which the IDJJ Blended Learning Model resource can affect the success of an Illinois Youth Center.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the IDJJ Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. As a case study, it was an in-depth examination of the education process inside six Illinois Youth Centers that used the GradPoint program, and other resources, as the basis for learning in schools that are within secure juvenile centers with incarcerated youth from the ages of 13 to 21. The demographic breakdown of the incarcerated youth is a societal issue because in 2014 65% of incarcerated youth were Black, while making up only 15% of the general population. The percentage of IDJJ incarcerated White youth was 23% and 11% were Hispanic.

The IDJJ was selected for this research due to the fact that it has implemented blended learning; the duration of that implementation and the results reported to the IDJJ school board indicate preliminary evidence of success in meeting course completion and academic performance goals of these youth as well as graduation counts. Another aim of this study was to review the significant amount of instructional data that has been collected since 2013. Additionally, the teachers at IDJJ were trained and experienced in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model and were able to provide experiential input into the various aspects of the implementation. I had the opportunity to interview school leaders, namely, the superintendent and the principals of IDJJ.

Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study is: What is the efficacy of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice?
Related secondary research questions that also guided this study are:

1. What changes have occurred in graduation rates, GED success rates, and the results of the courses such as the course completion rate at the IDJJ during the transition to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model?

2. What perceptions do the staff and administrators have concerning the IDJJ Blended Learning Model as it has been implemented at the IDJJ?

3. Do classroom observations corroborate best practices in blended learning such as personalized learning, group work, and the balance of teacher-led and student-centered instruction?

Case Study Methodology

Case study was selected for the primary research methodology. There were several factors that contributed to this selection, but the first was that something seemed to be working in the IDJJ where other solutions had failed. The fact that the IDJJ educational system was brought to court in *R.J. et al. v. Jones* to address the failed education of youth and other concerns was an extreme situation that few school systems have had to endure. The courts found that the traditional educational program was not educating the youth.

Instead of a costly and drawn-out fight over what everyone agreed were valid issues, both sides came together and agreed to a Consent Decree. The Consent Decree specifically defines the improvements necessary in juvenile justice educational services, including the general education, special education, exercise, recreation, work, rehabilitation, vocational education, and post-secondary education (*R.J. et al. v. Jones*, 2012, pp. 4–5).
Yin (as cited in Green, 2006) proposed the use of case study method for an “extreme or unique case, or even a revelatory case” (p. 115). These terms certainly apply to the IDJJ because the IDJJ is an extreme and unique case. The use of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model is also a revelatory case, in that little is known about the education of juveniles who are incarcerated, and the initial contacts through my work have indicated a surprising level of success. Case study allows for the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and both were utilized in this study.

Quantitative data were also a significant part of this study. Factual information such as completed courses, number of graduates, and number of students who had received their GED were also a part of this study. The quantitative data were also used to help expand the interviewees’ responses during the interviews because the quantitative data were collected first and partially analyzed.

The qualitative aspects of this study took an inductive approach: “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). Stake (1995) emphasized that the ethnographer should have an open and organized mind and that interview questions should be prepared ahead of time. This will prevent the researcher from going off task. Gillham (2000) maintained that the questions asked should be essential to the research. The questions should also be open-ended so that the answers received are open-ended as well. This will lead to an inductive approach (Brenner, 2006). For the most part, this case study used an inductive approach. Although the set of basic interview questions for staff and administrators can be found in Appendix
A, the questioning process itself was flexible and leaned more toward Stake’s open-ended inquiry process. Several aspects of the qualitative efforts of this study supported this inductive approach because the participants were very knowledgeable and comfortable in opening up to someone they knew and had worked with in the past. Gold (1958) described this role as the observer-as-participant. The observer-as-participant develops when the researcher or observer has only minimal involvement in the social setting being studied. There is some association to the setting but the observer is not naturally and usually a part of the social setting (Gold, 1958). This honest and open approach provided unique insights that otherwise would have been lost through a more structured deductive approach such as a survey.

Qualitative methods are most appropriate for answering questions such as “What is the nature of test preparation in school X?” Also, questions such as “How does tracking happen in school X?” Survey techniques are appropriate when the research interests are in discovering how much, how many, and the distribution of variables in a population (Green, 2006). Through this case study, I learned the what, how much, and how many so as to understand the “why.”

Setting

The sites selected for this study were the six Illinois Youth Centers found geographically distributed throughout Illinois. This study focused on the youth who leave these facilities, but are still supported after they leave them, and the IDJJ produces an annual report that lists the demographics of this population (IDJJ, 2014). In terms of race and ethnicity data, two thirds were Black, one fourth were White and the remainder were
Hispanic or other ethnicity. The female facility at IYC Warrenville had about 6% of the Illinois female population. The population numbers fluctuate significantly during the year and have been dropping in the last few years due to the attempts being made to decrease youth being placed in these facilities and the concerns brought forward by the Consent Decree (Leone, 2013). The decrease is also due to the general trend in America to reduce the number of youth who are placed into juvenile facilities (Krohn & Lane, 2015).

Participants

The participants in this case study were the IDJJ superintendent, the principals of the IYC facilities, the GradPoint support coordinator (technology director), and the teachers who used the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. These administrators and staff were participants in the interview process. The incarcerated youth could not be interviewed due to IDJJ policy that is based on the 1979 Belmont Report (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

Superintendent

The IDJJ superintendent, by law, is the only professional hired by the school board. The following Public Act information describes the board’s role in hiring the superintendent, and the superintendent is controlled indirectly through board policy. For example, the superintendent can recommend the hiring of any other employee, but the board approves or disapproves the recommendation based on established policy. It is the superintendent who is charged with the selection of staff, textbooks, instructional material, and courses of study. In this case study, all of these components, staff, textbooks, instructional material, and courses of study, were part of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. Consequently, the viewpoint of the superintendent at IDJJ was essential.
The superintendent who participated in this study was the first to be interviewed so as to make sure that the various aspects of the program were known by the researcher before the rest of the research process began. Public Act 105 ILC 5, section 10-16.7, school board duties with respect to the superintendent, states:

In addition to all other powers and duties enumerated in this Article, the school board shall make all employment decisions pertaining to the superintendent. The school board shall direct, through policy, the superintendent in his or her charge of the administration of the school district, including without limitation considering the recommendations of the superintendent concerning the budget, building plans, the locations of sites, the selection, retention, and dismissal of employees, and the selection of textbooks, instructional material, and courses of study. The school board shall evaluate the superintendent in his or her administration of school board policies and his or her stewardship of the assets of the district. (Illinois General Assembly, 2006, para. 3)

In this study, the superintendent was the person selected by the school board in July 2014 to run the district. There were interim superintendents and former superintendents who were involved in the selection and implementation of the online learning resources in the IDJJ; however, it was the then-serving superintendent of the IDJJ who was the clear leader at the IDJJ and was the only person seen as directing the operations of the IDJJ.

**Principals**

Each facility had a principal, and each of the six principals was interviewed about his or her role in the day-to-day operations of the school in their particular facility. The principals handled the staff and supported any educational operation. They also worked with the facility director to coordinate the inter-operations between the facilities non-educational operations and the school.

Because the principals were the educational leaders of the facility, their input into this case study was critical. However, the principals had varying backgrounds and
degrees of knowledge about the various aspects of the educational operations, including the IDJJ Blended Learning Model implementation. Four of the principals had been in their particular school for many years, while one was newly hired. One principal was the former interim superintendent who was transitioned to principal. One school did not have a current principal because the former principal had just retired a few months before, so the former principal was interviewed for this study. Though the variable of the principals’ experiences could be seen as a limitation, it also exposed an opportunity to explore these facilities through different perspectives and thereby added to the richness of the qualitative information.

GradPoint Support Coordinator

The GradPoint support coordinator was also called the backup and Local Area Network (LAN) technician or the technology director. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model was implemented with one person being responsible for the GradPoint system and supporting all training. This position is critical to the implementation of the model, but the person does not hold a teaching or administrative position. The position required extensive technical knowledge of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model systems, computers, network, GradPoint, other digital resources, technical support systems, professional development programs, and reporting processes. This position also required having a positive relationship with the superintendent, facility directors, principals, teachers, and other staff. The GradPoint support coordinator was the “go to” person for everyone in all of the facilities if there is a concern with the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.
**Blended Learning Teachers**

In this study, the term “teacher” was used generally to refer to IDJJ Blended Learning Model staff or blended learning teachers. The schools had a large number of staff members beyond the classroom teachers. With a large number of students having IEPs, special services were often needed. A disproportionate number of special needs students are incarcerated (Harris, Baltodano, Artiles, & Rutherford, 2006). However, the IDJJ Blended Learning Model treats all students as individuals; whether or not a student has an IEP is a moot point. The process adapts to each student so discussion with supportive staff who did not directly deal with the youths’ blended learning instruction was not of value for this research. For example, this researcher did not interview staff members who were responsible for counseling, library services, orientation, special education treatments, and other services that were not related to the blended learning process. This study focused only on those teachers who were knowledgeable about GradPoint and used GradPoint as part of their instructional resources. For the most part, these staff members were all classroom teachers.

It is important to note that not all teachers were trained on GradPoint and the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The principal determined which staff members would be interviewed and observed because the principal knew which staff members used the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. There were staff members who were selected but could not be interviewed or observed due to scheduling issues.

**Quantitative Data Collection**

Academic quantitative data were collected from reports generated from the Principal Monthly Reports and GradPoint. There were three years of data on the IDJJ
Blended Learning Model process, 2013, 2014, and 2015. Also, the program had transitioned over that period of time as training and computer access was slowly being implemented. Therefore, 2013 could be viewed as a baseline, reflective of the before IDJJ Blended Learning Model state, and 2015, as the after implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model state. Any historical data before the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was implemented was limited in quality and quantity; therefore, little prior quantitative data were available so none was used in this study. The quantitative data was used to determine how IDJJ Blended Learning was affecting graduation rates, GED success rates and course completions.

*Principal Monthly Report*

The Principal Monthly Report was a report generated by the principals of each facility for the superintendent of the IDJJ. The superintendent then reported this information publicly to the school board members as a document in their board packet. This report was used to quantitatively monitor the performance of each facility. The Principal Monthly Report included the following data fields:

- **Teachers Employed**: The number of teaching staff employed at the end of each month at each facility
- **Students Enrolled**: The number of youth enrolled in school at the end of each month at each facility
- **SPED Students Enrolled**: The number of youth enrolled in school at the end of each month at each facility that had been, or were in the process of being on an IEP
- **Admissions**: The number of youth admitted during each month at each facility
• Exits: The number of youth that had left during each month at each facility
• Eighth Grade Diplomas Awarded: The number of youth that had received the equivalent of an 8th grade diploma as determined in their transcripts
• High School Diplomas Awarded: The number of youth that had received the equivalent of a high school diploma as determined in their transcripts based on prior educational documentation, the Carnegie Units of attendance, and their GradPoint course completions
• GEDs Awarded: The number of youth that had successfully passed all six of the modules of the General Education Development (GED) test
• Students Tested for GED: The number of youth that had taken all six of the modules of the General Education Development (GED) test
• Students Enrolled in Online Electronic Education (OEE): The number of youth that were enrolled in GradPoint
• GED Grads Enrolled in (OEE): The number of youth that were enrolled in GradPoint with the specific purpose of completing their GED
• Students Completed OEE: The number of youth that were enrolled in GradPoint with the specific purpose of completing their GED

The Principal Monthly report was collected monthly. There were three years of principal reports so that comparisons could be made to the GradPoint quantitative data. The principals of the facilities provided the reports and there was no automated system to support the data other than their own records.

The use of the Principal Monthly Report information in the High School Diplomas Awarded field was used as the graduation completion totals. The Students
Enrolled information was used for the count of students who could potentially graduate. A ratio of the High School Diplomas Awarded to the Students Enrolled was developed for all of the youth in the IDJJ facilities for each of the three years being studied. The same ratio was developed for each of the faculties for each of the three years.

The use of the Principal Monthly Report information in GEDs Awarded and Students Tested for GED fields was used to determine the GED passing rate. A ratio of the GED passing rate was developed for all of the youth in the IDJJ facilities for each of the three years being studied. The same ratio was developed for each of the faculties for each of the three years. These ratios were compared.

GradPoint

GradPoint was a rich source of youth performance quantitative data. Each facility provided student summary reports that included details of the courses taken, time spent on task, scores on assessments, and status of completion. GradPoint information was already available for three years and was used to support the analysis. Any Personal Identification Information (PII) was removed before the analysis. OEE referenced in the Principal Monthly Report utilized the GradPoint product in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

The GradPoint course completion counts and the GradPoint scores on assessments for GradPoint Core courses (language arts, math, science, and social studies) were developed from the GradPoint Student Summary Reports provided for each of the three years for IDJJ. The information was not available by facilities for 2013 and 2014 due to the fact that tracking youth GradPoint activity by facility did not begin until 2015. Just the overall GradPoint course completion counts by year were used in analysis. A
comparison with the change in rate of graduations per number of students was used to provide support for an improvement in the graduation rate. That is to say, the number of students graduating was compared to the population count to develop a ratio of graduates. For example, a standard high school with a graduating class of 80% of the seniors is graduating 20% of the overall student population. If 200 students in the senior class graduate in a class of 250 and there are four grade levels in the school with a total population of 1,000 students, then 200 of the 1,000 students graduate, or 20%.

Because the reports by facility were available in 2015, the GradPoint data for GradPoint course completion counts and the GradPoint scores on assessments for GradPoint Core courses were analyzed by facility starting in 2015. Additionally, the 2015 data included the special education category information for the youth who were identified as having Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, or In Process. In Process indicated that the youth had an IEP, but the records had not yet been updated. From this information, comparisons were provided on the ability of special education youth to perform on post-assessments in GradPoint against the general population’s performance on the same GradPoint assessments.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The Principal Monthly Reports and the Semester Student Summary Reports were used to develop statistical information concerning the students’ graduation rates, GED success rates, and course completions. These data were used to address the first related secondary research question about the graduation rates, GED success rates, and course completions. Using descriptive statistics, the information was presented in tables and
figures that provide comparison information. These tables and figures were then reviewed and highlighted for important relative information.

Qualitative Data Collection

Quantitative data provided information on how the IDJJ Blended Learning Model impacted the performance of youth in attaining high school diplomas, passing GED tests, and completing courses. However, in order to reflect deeper into the effects of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, this research included administrative and teacher interviews (individual and group), as well as classroom observations. Table 1 provides a quantitative summary of the number of interviews and observations that were conducted over the course of the study.

Table 1

Summary of Number of Interviews and Observations Conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Group Teachers</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Group Teachers</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHI</td>
<td>3/7/16</td>
<td>3/7/16</td>
<td>3/23/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRB</td>
<td>3/9/16</td>
<td>3/9/16</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEW</td>
<td>3/3/16</td>
<td>3/3/16</td>
<td>3/21/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PER</td>
<td>3/15/16</td>
<td>3/15/16</td>
<td>3/15/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STC</td>
<td>3/4/16</td>
<td>3/25/16</td>
<td>3/25/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRV</td>
<td>3/4/16</td>
<td>3/16/16</td>
<td>3/16/16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech</td>
<td>3/9/16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supt Davis</td>
<td>12/4/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Transcribed TOTAL Interviews 30

*Notes Only

Table 1 displays a total of 30 staff interviews and 13 classroom observations. All of the observations and interviews were conducted in March 2016, with the exception of the superintendent interview which occurred a few months earlier as a part of the procedure to get the formal support of the organization for this study.
The researcher took on the role of the observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958) in order to collect the qualitative data. Due to having over 40 years of experience in educational environments, the researcher was well versed in educational practices and the use of technology in education. Also the researcher had been involved with and frequently visited the IDJJ facilities since 2012 while working for Pearson in support of GradPoint.

*Individual Interviews*

The superintendent was interviewed separately. The grand tour question (Brenner, 2006) was the opening question: “Can you give me your observations and thoughts about the Blended Learning Model as you have seen it implemented over your time working at the IDJJ?” This question was followed by minitour questions that probed related subtopics (see Appendix A).

The superintendent was interviewed so as to capture the leadership thoughts and reasoning behind the processes that the staff utilized. The superintendent was also expected to speak for the Board of Education for Harrisburg School District #428 and the educational related issues of the IDJJ and related agencies, such as the Central Management Services (CMS).

At each site, the principal of the facility was interviewed first so that they would understand the nature of the research before involving others in their facilities and to provide the researcher with some insights into the nature of the environment so that staff questioning would be more specific to the facility. The principals and the GradPoint support coordinator were each interviewed separately. The grand tour question (Brenner, 2006) was an open-ended question: “Please give me your observations and thoughts
about the Blended Learning Model as you have seen it implemented over your time working at the IDJJ?” This question was followed by minitour secondary research questions. In the effort to obtain answers to my research questions, I conducted a total of eight individual interviews, which included the superintendent, the six principals of the facilities, and the GradPoint support coordinator.

*Group Interviews*

Where possible, I interviewed the teachers in groups. Following Fontana and Frey (2000), the type of interview was a formal field interview with a preset, but in the field, setting. I was also somewhat directive in my semi-structured questions with a phenomenological purpose.

The facilities varied in size and the smaller locations had a limited number of teachers. In the smaller facilities, a group interview was not always possible. Also, the staff schedule did not always permit group interviews. When no other option was available, individual staff interviews were conducted using the same questioning procedure employed in the group interviews. Where possible, the interviews with the staff took place in a quiet room that was separate from the classroom.

Each facility had a repeat visit after the principal interview and again a grand tour question was presented to start the staff discussion. As an example, I asked: “Please share with me some of your thoughts and observations about the Blended Learning Model as you have seen it implemented during your time working at the IDJJ. How does it compare with other curriculum delivery models you may have used? What do you like about it? Is there anything that you don’t like about it?” Probing questions followed, but were only used if needed. Because the principal was interviewed first, at times, there
were additional unanticipated questions that were included so as to “build” the interview (Brenner, 2006).

Interviews lasted approximately one hour per group. The teacher group interviews involved teachers who gave their consent and used the IDJJ Blended Learning Model in their instructional process. The principal of the facility assisted in the selection process because he or she already knew which teachers were involved in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. However, the principal of a facility was not asked to stay for the staff interviews and the participants who chose not to participate or left at any time were not reported to the administrators.

The interview began with a review of the consent form and the participants were asked to sign the form after they clearly understood the process and all of the related aspects of the process. They also had all of the initial questions for the group interviews reviewed so they could leave before the discussion even began if they chose to do so.

**Documentation of Interviews**

Flick (2009) argued that using machines for recording renders the documentation of data independent of perspective (p. 294). In order to better capture the thoughts of interviewees and neutralize the relationship I had with the program, I used a digital recording device. Attempts to use an audio recording device were made at all of the facilities. I also took handwritten notes during all of the interviews. However, there were situations where the security in a facility did not permit such recording devices. In those cases, the research relied on my written notes.

The researcher personally transcribed these audio files so that nuances in communication could be noted and added to the log. A standard computer application for
slowing down the recording’s playback was used so that the audio could be accurately transcribed.

**Observations**

Following Tannis’s (2014) work, I observed at least two classrooms at each facility. Because of my experience in classrooms and my familiarity with the staff through my role as the regional manager for online and blended learning for Pearson, I was able to enter classrooms without significant disruption. Some of the youth may have seen me and been briefly distracted, but the staff had all seen me and because the interviews were followed by the observations, the teachers were comfortable with my presence. As an observer-as-participant, I had only minimal involvement in the social setting being studied, yet my familiarity was accepted by the staff (Gold, 1958).

I kept in mind Angrosino and Mays de Perez’s (2000) comment that “ethnographers may assert that they represent the many voices involved in the research, but we can still have only their assurance that such is the case” (p. 675). This work similarly has that assertion and relativistic assurance that the voices are represented with validity. The foundational use of Wolcott’s (1994) three terms, description, analysis, and interpretation, aided in guiding the qualitative research in this study. The decryption addressed the question: “What is going on here?” The analysis helped to identify essential features and interrelationships among the features: “how things work . . . or [are] not working . . . or how it might be made to work better” (p. 12). Then I addressed the final question, “What is to be made of it all?” (Wolcot, 1994, p. 12).

During the observations of the classroom period, I took notes on what I observed. I did not have a form, but did have a general process. I started the notes for each
observation with a diagram of the room noting the location of computers, teacher, and student desks. I also added other setting information such as lighting and sounds. The observation was directed toward the activities of the teachers and the students with a focus on their interactions and distractions. I intended to take a quick snapshot in detail of a normal five-minute period of classroom activity. Because time keeping was a problem without a cellphone or other normal timing device that is usually utilized, and the facilities often lacked working clocks, I only wrote on two pages of a small notebook. I estimated that writing constantly for five minutes generally filled two pages.

Another issue related to the classroom observations was that I had over 20 years of experience as a school district administrator and had been in thousands of classrooms. Based on this experience, I was able to quickly identify specific behaviors such as relationships, accountability, expectations, and resources. The atmosphere in a classroom setting during active class time did not take me much time to capture.

According to Flick (2009), by using observation methods, you will “transform the relations you study into texts, which are the basis for actual analysis” (p. 294). Though this is not a true ethnographic study because the focus is narrow, the technics of the observations were similar. Observing the environment and observing the details of the actions of the teachers and students guided these observations. I was also observant of items such as the signs posted, physical supports for youth, overall physical environment, and my own reflections. I noted the demographics of the students, teacher’s communications and actions, student communications and actions, the classroom conditions, the materials provided, disruptions, and interruptions. The focus of the
observations was on the balance between the utilization of the computer technology, the
direct interaction with the teacher, and the use of other non-computer resources.

At the end of each visit, I immediately recorded in a reflective journal what I
observed and noted any follow-up questions or concerns (Tannis, 2014). The journal and
the audio recordings, or notes if audio was not permitted, were transcribed in an Excel
document. The text was thematically analyzed and the use of computers, teacher activity,
and the use of other resources (a critical component of blended learning) were indexed
and tabulated.

Documentation

I collected any artifacts from the classroom observations that were made
available. These artifacts included, but were not limited to, student handbooks,
worksheets, copies of notes, copies of lesson plans, student schedules, and staff meeting
agendas. These types of artifacts were limited due to IDJJ restrictions.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Information collected from the individual interview, group interviews,
observations, documentation, artifacts, and quantitative data reports were coded,
searching for essential themes (Boyatzis, 1998). The qualitative data was analyzed
through a process that listed each unique statement (n=862) or observation (n=232) in
separate cells in a spreadsheet document grouped on separate tabs for the various
interviews and observation sessions. This information was either transcribed or copied
from notes. The information was then reviewed to find and highlight themes. Observation
notes were reviewed for themes and for evidence of the use of technology and resources.
The quantitative data tells the story of what happened, and these interviews and observations help explain not only the what, but the why of the phenomenon.

**Individual and Group Interviews**

The study interviews were recorded and transcribed. This required special permission because recording devices were not permitted in the secured facilities unless approved ahead of time by the facility director. As Flick (2009) indicated, a researcher should, “restrict the presence of the recording equipment” (p. 295). After the recording device was mentioned during the review of the consent form, it was then ignored. Any interviewee’s concern about being recorded was noted; however, this was not expected because the research was not probing any sensitive material.

With the leadership interviews and the staff group interviews, a triangulation approach was used to provide validation to the overall answers to the research questions. “Corrections by the group concerning views that are not correct, not socially shared, or extreme are available as means for validating statements and views. The group becomes a tool for reconstructing individual opinions more appropriately” (Flick, 2009, p. 197).

The similarity or variances in responses provided by the leadership and those of the staff not only shows validation of some issues, but areas where they are divergent. These differences were critical to obtaining a better understanding of the implementation and success of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

The steps involved in developing a code using thematic analysis requires, in most cases, that the information is criterion referenced, or anchored. The material to be coded must represent a subsample of two or more specific samples used in the research (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 41). This research searched for themes in the interviews and
observations that related directly to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The researcher looked for a fixed set of discussion points that could be identified as core to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. These points, or terms, were used as the anchor holding together the ideas central to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

Observations

Using the reflective journal created from the observation notes and from any artifacts collected, I labored to find examples of the themes that emerged from the interviews. For example, if principals indicated that teachers had students take notes during the class, then I collected example notes to validate the principal interview. Additionally, the use of computers, teacher interaction, and traditional resources were analyzed to determine the mix of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model in each facility.

Summary Data Analysis

In search of essential themes, the data collected for this research were analyzed by comparing responses from the individual and group interviews with observations and quantitative data. Themes that emerged from each source were made a part of the analysis. The researcher had a 40-year background in blended Learning. This experience provided the researcher with insights into terminology and blended learning processes that supported the identification of themes. The responses to questions and observational data were evaluated in light of the researcher’s craft knowledge (Barth, 2001.)

Limitations

The use of a single online product for blended learning in the IDJJ may lack replication in settings where alternative products might be utilized. Just because blended learning worked in IDJJ with GradPoint, this cannot imply that it would work in another
setting wherein a product other than GradPoint is used. There are many other online products similar to GradPoint, but each has its strengths and weaknesses. This research does not imply that any other online solution would be better or worse than GradPoint.

The lack of youth interviews in this study portends several limitations. Because any interaction with youth inside or outside of the facilities was restricted by the IDJJ, there is no corroborating qualitative data from the students’ points of view on blended learning. This research was not able to address the affinity of youth toward blended learning in terms of self-reflective understanding, interest, or effort.

Gold (1958) described my role as the observer-as-participant. After retiring as a certified school superintendent in Illinois with over 40 years of working in schools for the Illinois State Board of Education and companies like Pearson, I brought a vast amount of experience and craft knowledge (McNamara, 1978) to this research and an equal burden of distracting prejudices. The thought is that the documentation provided is neutral in nature to the degree that the inferences gleaned can be replicated from the information provided regardless of the researchers experience or perspective.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

Research to determine the efficacy of a Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice was completed through an analysis of instructional data, interviewing staff, and observing classrooms. Data were collected in four ways. First, Principal Monthly Reports were used to collect graduation and GED information. GradPoint provided detailed reports on course efforts and presented information on course usage, type of usage, facility usage, and special education usage. Interviews provided the bulk of the qualitative effort with a fourth section on classroom observations for triangulation of the other data.

The data are presented starting with the quantitative information gleaned from the Principal Monthly Reports and the GradPoint Student Summary reports. Then, the qualitative data are provided from the information gleaned from the interviews and the classroom observations.

Quantitative Findings

Principal Monthly Reports

In an effort to address the first related secondary research question concerning the graduation and GED rates, the Principal Monthly Reports were one source for the longitudinal data used for analysis. The Principal Monthly Report was developed monthly by the IDJJ facilities’ school principals, sent to the IDJJ superintendent, and then presented publicly to the Harrisburg School District #428 Board of Education. The Principal Monthly Report included the number of youth enrolled, special education youth enrolled, high school diplomas, GED awarded, GED tests taken, students enrolled in...
GradPoint, students enrolled in GradPoint preparing to take the GED, and the number of youth that had been admitted and exited in any month.

In order to understand the specific outcomes seen in the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the understanding of not only the number of graduates, GED passing rate, and course completions but also these data must be reviewed in light of the population or enrollment. For example, if enrollment dropped, the number of graduates should drop irrespective of the pedagogy utilized. There are three statistics collected in the Principal Monthly Report that helped to clarify the dynamics in the IDJJ that could affect the number of graduates, GED passing rate, and course completions: Students Enrolled, SPED Students Enrolled, and the number of Admissions to Exits (mobility).

As can be seen in Table 2, the Students Enrolled Last Day of the Month field displays the average of the youth population at the IDJJ facilities. This is the enrolled student field that indicates the enrollment. Each facility tracks this number to provide a comparison of services and success.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IYC Chicago</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Harrisburg</td>
<td>172.3</td>
<td>115.9</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Kewanee</td>
<td>145.3</td>
<td>121.8</td>
<td>112.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Pere Marquette</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC St. Charles</td>
<td>169.6</td>
<td>158.7</td>
<td>181.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Warrenville</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Total IDJJ</td>
<td>623.2</td>
<td>566.1</td>
<td>502.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note in Table 2 that the enrollment number fluctuates; however, this trend represents a decrease from 623.2 in 2013 to 502.8 in 2015 that would normally be reflected in other numbers such as graduates, GED test passed, and GED test taken. These data support the general trend to decrease the number of youth incarcerated in the manner provided by the IDJJ facilities (IDJJ, 2015).
Table 3

*Special Education Student Enrollment (Annual Average Number)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IYC Chicago</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Harrisburg</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Kewanee</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Pere Marquette</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC St. Charles</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Warrenville</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All IDJJ</td>
<td>251.5</td>
<td>227.0</td>
<td>202.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is the case in Table 2, in Table 3, the Principal Monthly Reports indicate that the number of students in special education with IEPs is also dropping. Because the number of youth is decreasing, a similar drop in the special education population would be expected. It would then be expected that data from the Principal Monthly Reports should reflect a corresponding drop in graduates and GED tests passed.
Table 4

*Mobility of Students in IDJJ*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Admissions</th>
<th>Exits</th>
<th>Total Shift</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>1508</td>
<td>2917</td>
<td>623.2</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1184</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>2459</td>
<td>566.1</td>
<td>4.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Feb or Dec</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Mo 5.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1347</td>
<td>1470</td>
<td>2817</td>
<td>502.8</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the mobility statistics for three years with the ratio of the shift in population. The mobility factor in Table 4 is an additional extraneous variable that dramatically affects the educational process and achievements at IDJJ. The number of youth admitted compared to the number of youth exiting these facilities is higher than any normal high school. Examining the Principal Monthly reports and comparing the total number of admissions and exits to the annual total population, a ratio of the shift (or change in the population) can be calculated.

If IDJJ were a normal school district in Illinois, it would have 13% of the students moving in and out each year, a 0.13 mobility rate. According to the 2013–2015 Principal Monthly Reports provided by the IDJJ as part of this research, and as can be seen in Table 4, the mobility rate for IDJJ in 2015 is 5.60, or 43 times the state average. This would indicate that the total population of an IDJJ school changes every few months. No school system in Illinois even comes close to this mobility rate (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015).
With the downward trend in enrollment, significant special education population, and mobility issues; the concerns of the courts in the Consent Decree are clearly understood. From these data, there should not be a significant increase in graduation rates and youth passing GED tests, in fact these rates should decrease. However, this is not what the Principal Monthly Reports indicate (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Diplomas Awarded*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>High School Diplomas Awarded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows the high school diplomas awarded from 2013 to 2015. I previously indicated that 2013 was the baseline, or beginning, for the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. From the enrollment and mobility figures, the most that could be expected is that the 2013–2015 numbers would trend downward at a similar rate. Instead, the number of graduates actually increases from 65 to 133 graduates (a 104% increase), more than twice what would have been anticipated. The increase is counter to the enrollment, special education population, and mobility rate information. This finding would support the positive effects of the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model if no other factors could be found to address this change and these data could be used to address this study’s first related secondary research question that deals with graduate rates.
In order to better understand the graduation rate in question, it is helpful to understand what a normal graduation rate would be. Illinois tracks the percentage of students that graduated within 4 years. In 2015, the Illinois four-year graduation rate was 86%, so an average high school in Illinois with 503 students (like IDJJ) would graduate 432 students or 108 senior students per year. A graduate is a student who was graduated with a regular high school diploma in four years with the group of students he started with in the beginning of the 9th grade.

In 2015, IDJJ graduated 133 youth which, compared to the average in Illinois, is 23% higher than what an average high school would graduate. IDJJ, with the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, is graduating at a higher rate than an average high school. If a high school was at a 100% graduation rate and had 503 students, it would be graduating 126 students a year. At 133 students graduating in 2015, IDJJ is graduating at a level above any high school in Illinois. Even if the high school graduation rate was at 100%, IDJJ is 6% higher. Table 6 displays the GED statistics generated from 2013–2015 with the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

Table 6

GED Testing Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GED Awarded</th>
<th>Tested for GED</th>
<th>Percent Passing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The graduation rate may be higher; however, as can be seen in Table 6, the GED test information seems to run counter to the graduation rates. GED is an alternative to standard high school diplomas and usually is a backup option for youth who have failed to achieve sufficient high school credits to even have a chance at a normal graduation in the time they have left to attend public school. At IDJJ, youth are given the option to pursue a GED if they are over 17, have a minimal sentence, and have almost no high school credits. Before the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was implemented, the GED was used to a greater extent because course completion in the time remaining on the youth’s sentence was usually not possible.

Although the number of youth that passed the GED test dropped, the passing rate increased by over 30% from 46% to 60%, as will be seen in Table 8. This passing rate would indicate a positive effect on GED scores that would also address this study’s first related secondary research question if other factors cannot be found to account for this variance. It should be noted that the GED test during this time changed and became more rigorous. Most schools saw a drop in GED performance (Illinois State Board of Education, 2015). An increase in passing rate is highly unexpected.

The Principal Monthly Reports indicate a decreasing enrollment and an increasing mobility rate, demonstrating a significant challenge for IDJJ to educate youth. Yet, the number of graduates in the reports has increased significantly and the passing rate for those who choose to take the GED path is also up significantly. If a similar trend of improvement can be found in the course completion information and this would also be supported by qualitative data, then again, the first related secondary research question of this study would be addressed. That is to say, if the course completion and success in the
courses can be validated and other factors minimalized, than the graduation rates and GED scores can be attributed to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

*Results of the Courses in GradPoint and Analysis of Courses*

In an effort to address this study’s first secondary research question concerning the results of the courses, such as the course completion rate at the IDJJ during the transition to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, this section provides quantitative information in the area of instructional data provided by the GradPoint program related to Analysis of Courses, Performance, Utilization Hours, Special Education, and License Usage.

*Figure 5. Course completion.*
Related to Figure 5, the total number of course enrollments for January 1, 2015 to June 30, 2015 is 3,821; of these enrollments, 1,003 students completed their courses. For all of 2015, Figure 5 shows that there are 8,818 courses with 2,565 courses completed. The number of courses that were completed in the July to December semester is 155% higher than the beginning of 2015. The overall trend from the baseline year of 2013 to 2015 indicates that course enrollment almost doubled from 4,702 to 8,818.

There are several types of status for a student in a course using GradPoint: Completed, Inactive, and Active (see Figure 6). Completed courses are those that include teacher final approval for completing the course. This completion status can sometimes include blended learning activities that were not a part of the GradPoint program. A completed course would indicate that the student has successfully completed the course, passed the post-examination process, and then this course completion would be on the youth’s permanent record or transcript. Inactive courses reflect students who have not completed the course and are no longer working on the course. An Inactive status may be due to the youth leaving the facility. The Active status is when a youth is enrolled in some courses and is actively working on completion of the course material. Because the IDJJ Blended Learning Model is not locked into traditional periods of time, courses can extend over periods of time such as semesters.
In Figure 6, the distribution of the status of courses is evaluated for each of the facilities and the youth enrolled in programs external to the IDJJ facilities in Aftercare. The number of courses is also reflective of the size of the population of the facilities. It should be noted that facilities such as IYC Kewanee and IYC Harrisburg have a higher portion of youth that completed courses than IYC St. Charles or IYC Chicago.
The trend comparison for 2015 for completed courses is improving, as can be seen in Figure 7 that shows the summary for the whole year for 2015 (January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015). The data show an increase from the first half of the year (spring 2015) to the second half of the year (fall 2015) from 3,821 to 4,997 courses taken. The 131% increase is important; however, the 155% increase in completed courses from 1,003 to 1,562 would be a shift in youth completing courses. This indicates an improvement due to an expanding implementation of the blended learning program, and this addresses the primary research question of this study.
Figure 8. Number of courses taken by semester.

Figure 8 shows the change in the number of courses taken by youth in 2015 at the various facilities and youth that have left the facilities (XOS). In Table 8, “Sp ’15 Courses” is the number of courses from January to June of 2015 and the term “Fall ’15 Courses” is the number of courses taken from July to December of 2015. In all but two of the facilities, there is an increase in the number of courses taken. In the IYC Chicago facility, there is a slight drop of only three percentage points in the second half of the year and the Prior IDJJ domain dropped as it was eliminated. The IDJJ domain (Prior) was a legacy domain that was left after the IDJJ created separate domains for each facility. One hundred thirty-six courses were taken in the spring but were not converted to a facility because the youth were released from the IDJJ and could not be shifted to another domain.

Performance

The IDJJ Blended Learning Model program utilizing GradPoint provides rigorous instruction along with a course post-examination or assessment tool. The performance of the youth completing courses is contingent upon their passing the post-assessments built into GradPoint. The details of the score for the course are also recorded and are reflective
of the student’s ability and knowledge of the course beyond a simple pass/fail measure. The teacher can look at each test item and see how the student responded. Utilizing the post-assessment scores, students can be compared to other students taking the same courses.

Figure 9. 2015 prescriptive and sequential pathways distribution.

Figure 9 shows the distribution of the courses by prescriptive and sequential pathways for 2015 by facility and semester. The GradPoint courses have different pathways for the same course material. A student that may have taken the course before, or may have come to the IDJJ with minimal transcript records, may be assigned a GradPoint course as a prescriptive course where they have a pre-assessment and are “prescriptively” assigned lessons. The post-assessment would, however, assess the youth on all of the course material even if it was skipped in the lessons. A youth who has never taken the course would normally be assigned a sequential pathway course, so he would take the whole course. There are courses that do not have this option, such as electives.
and flex courses, but these courses are not frequently taken by IDJJ youth and, therefore, are not included in Figure 9.

![Average passing score of prescriptive and sequential scores by location.](image)

*Figure 10.* Average passing score of prescriptive and sequential scores by location.

Figure 10 indicates that the average score for prescriptive and sequential pathway courses are very similar. Similar scores between pathways would indicate that the students who skipped instruction knew the material as well as the students who did not skip the lessons. The thought here is that the program does provide a good indicator for the lessons that should be skipped due to prior knowledge. The benefit of skipping unneeded lessons is that this would save the youth the time involved in going through lessons they already have mastered, and this would also minimize the IDJJ resources needed to educate a youth by not expending resources on lessons that the youth has already learned.

The distribution of scores does vary by facility as can be seen in Table 14; however, the variance is minimal. IYC Chicago does not use any sequential pathway
courses because the youth incarcerated there rarely stay very long. Because of this mobility, the IYC Chicago facility defaults to using prescriptive courses.

*Utilization Hours*

There were a total of 227,384 hours of instruction recorded in GradPoint during the six semesters in which these data were collected. The students were effectively spending their time in GradPoint while learning in a blended learning environment.

Although few traditional schools report student performance in hours, traditional education does accept the concept of Carnegie Units that are based on hours. This means that the calculation of hours has been seen as significant to the instructional performance of students. In Carnegie Units, if a student sits in a seat for 60 hours, the student receives a semester credit. In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the hours tracked are not just hours sitting in a seat without accountability. The hours are down to the second and are based on actual student interaction with an instructional system. There are additional hours that are not tracked that include the more traditional time spent working off of the computer, for example, in a discussion with a teacher. The hours do, however, give a direct comparison element. Since GradPoint does not change, students who work 3,600 seconds in GradPoint will have an hour of instruction that is consistent between years, location, and teacher.
Figure 11. Total hours in 2015.

The total hours for 2015 coursework for all courses taken and for completed courses are displayed in Figure 11. The 101,655 hours include all work for completed course, inactive courses, and for active courses. The 46,387 hours is only for completed courses that are now a part of the youth’s permanent record on their transcripts. The hours that were not in completed courses were also documented and eventually many of these hours will turn into completed hours even if students move to other facilities or even leave the IDJJ. When schools traditionally track hours, if they fail to achieve a semester credit in Carnegie Units, then the work the student performed, if any, is lost and goes undocumented. In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, each second is documented.
Figure 12. Coursework hours in 2015 by semester.

Figure 12 shows that the number of hours of GradPoint usage has also increased from January to June of 2015 to July to December of 2015, from 45,962 hours to 55,694 hours. The hours of completed courses have also increased from 18,861 to 27,526. The significance of the completed course hours is that the completed courses are a part of the youth’s transcripts so the time the youth put into these courses become a part of their permanent record. The youth and staff can see the value of the time spent in GradPoint and in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model classroom because each second counts.

When reviewing the data presented in Table 4, it is also important to realize that, with a 5.60 mobility rate, the students are constantly changing. This is not like a
traditional school where more hours may be spent from one semester to another. The only variable is the actual total youth population and the population is actually dropping. If there is an increase in hours, it is due to the implementation of GradPoint by the staff through assigning more students to the GradPoint resource and the achievement success of the students in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. Figure 12 refers to dates in 2015 and the legend can be further defined where “Sp ‘15 All Hours” are the hours of GradPoint usage from January to June. The “Fall ’15 All Hours” are the hours of GradPoint usage from July to December. The “Sp ‘15 Completed Course Hrs” are the hours of GradPoint usage for completed courses from January to June. The “Fall ’15 Completed Course Hrs” are the hours of GradPoint usage for completed courses from July to December.
Figure 13. Coursework hours for 2015 by facility.

The coursework hours can be seen by facility in Figure 13. From this figure, variations can be seen in the frequency of completed courses to all coursework hours. This lack of completed coursework hours may be due to a higher rate of transient youth at some facilities and, therefore, these youth do not have time to complete their coursework. However, this does not mean these transient youth could not complete their work at another facility or in Aftercare.
Special Education

In the IDJJ, special education plays a critical role in terms of addressing students’ needs. Recognizing special education is a critical part of many of the youths’ education. GradPoint, as part of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model process, continually is used to address the needs of special education youths so they can be just as successful as the rest of the population.

In December 2015, Pearson worked with IDJJ to identify the special education population and began to analyze the GradPoint performance of all youth compared to those who had been identified as having special educational needs.

Figure 14. Special education hours.
In Figure 14, the “All Youth Hrs” are all hours spent from July to December in 2015 for all IDJJ youth; this includes special education youth and general youth. The “Completed Course Hrs” are the hours spent from July to December in 2015 for students who completed courses. The “SpEd All Hrs” are all hours spent from July to December in 2015 for all IDJJ youth identified for special education, and the “SpEd Completed Hrs” are the hours spent from July to December in 2015 for youth identified for special education and completed courses.

Figure 14 indicates that the total hours for special education students to complete courses are 48.5% of the total hours special education students used GradPoint. This is nearly the same 49.4% for the same ratio with all of the youth. Both percentages round to 49% of the completed hours to the hours taken. From these data, we find that special education students can learn just as well and just as quickly as general students.

![Bar chart](image)

*Figure 15.* Percentage score for completed courses for all youth and special education.

As can be seen in Figure 15, the special education youth also score at or above the norm for all general education youth. Figure 15 shows the average percentage of the post-assessment for completed courses for all general education youth, the four special
education categories, and the average of all special education youth. Not only are special education students using GradPoint for their instruction similar to the general population, the results in Figure 15, through the special education support they receive and the blended learning process, show they have a similar outcome to that of mainstream youth, if not slightly better.

Figure 15 includes data from the post-assessment average scores for the completed courses. The BASI (a placement test) courses were extracted from all of the data because these are assessments and not post-course tests. The “Gen” scores are for youth who have no special education categorization and are considered general education students. The “S DC %,” “S KC %,” “S LC %,” and “S XC %” are the post-assessment score average percentages for the students in the four special education categories who completed courses. These special education categories are: D = Specific Learning Disability, K = Emotional Disturbance, L = Other Health Impairment, and X = In Process. The “S All Avg %” is the combined post-assessment score average percentage for all special education youth who completed courses.

License Usage

The GradPoint program has a license usage report that can be run to determine the number of licenses that were used in any given period. This report was run for monthly periods for 2013, 2014, and 2015.
When examining Figure 16 and Table 7 together, particular trends are represented. As can be seen in Figure 16, in January 2013, there are only 27 GradPoint licenses in use. This supports the concept of using 2013 as a baseline for performance indicators. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model took two years to fully implement. In July 2014, there are 569 active users in all of the facilities. By July 2015, there are 887 active
users and at the end of 2015, there are 1,204 youth using GradPoint. Active users are defined as users who have logged in during the month. Many of these users were external to the facilities in that they have been released, but continue to work on their courses outside of the facilities.

At the beginning of 2016, IDJJ purchased 765 licenses, and as Table 7 shows: 2013—500 licenses, 2014—625 licenses, and 2015—750 licenses. Figure 16 is a graphic representation of this license usage by month. The graph depicts an increasing trend in usage at IDJJ. As can be seen in Figure 16, the usage is above the permitted limit of 765, with 1,204 licenses being used; however, up to the time of this study and into the foreseeable future, Pearson had chosen to not limit student learning and to continue to support these additional licenses at no additional cost.

It should be noted that a growing number of IDJJ youth were becoming external to the facilities and continued to complete their course work through Aftercare efforts. In light of this trend, it would be expected that the number of youth using GradPoint will exceed the population of youth incarcerated in the facilities. It would also be expected that, with this drop in population, the number of licenses could begin to decline.

*Balance of Instruction Between Traditional and Online*

In order to get a sense of the level of implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, my research also evaluated the observational data related to the type of instruction. This information was subjectively broken out into observational interactive events that involved a student working online on a computer, teacher collaborative events where a teacher and student were seen interacting, and offline student events where a student was doing anything other than working online (see Table 8). The events where a
student was observed working online on a computer were almost always GradPoint instructional sessions.

Table 8

*Interactions Observed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Online Interaction</th>
<th>Teacher Interaction</th>
<th>Offline Interaction</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IYC Chicago</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Kewanee</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Pere Marquette</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC St. Charles</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IYC Warrenville</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDJJ TOTAL</td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
<td><strong>137</strong></td>
<td><strong>95</strong></td>
<td><strong>232</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, in Table 8, there are a total of 232 separate observational events. Some of these events include one or more of the three interaction types: online, teacher collaborative, and offline. There were a total of 372 interactions that I observed. For example, a student could be working with a teacher on a computer as they also looked up some information in a textbook; this would be one online interaction, one teacher interaction, and one offline interaction, but these activities would be counted as only one event.

In the six facilities, a total of 13 classrooms were observed. As displayed in Table 8, of the 372 observed interactions, 140 are online, 137 are teacher interactions, and 95 are offline interactions. When comparing these interactions to the total observed 232 events, 60% of the interactions are online, 59% are teacher interactions, and 41% are offline interactions. These numbers did vary by facility and classroom, but it is evident that this was an IDJJ Blended Learning Model where the three components, online, teacher, and offline, were all observed in every classroom. There may have been students
who individually only worked on a computer or only worked reading a book, but these observations, overall, supported the mixed environment that was the basis of this study.

Qualitative Findings

Overview

The interviews and observations revealed four major themes:

1. This is a real school
2. Give the student what he needs
3. Teacher as the “meddler in the middle”
4. Student takes responsibility for learning

Each theme is discussed and is presented with interview and observation data to support each theme.

Theme One: This Is a Real School

The principal at the IYC Chicago facility commented on students’ initial thinking about the school:

At first, the students thought it wasn't a real school. I don't hear that anymore, that it isn't a real school. It has helped students feel more validated in terms of what they are doing here; it has relevance to them and they can carry what they learn back to their home schools.

The principal went on to say: “I don't see the challenge by the students of the teachers’ credentials. They are now real teachers. This [is] a real teacher and a real school.” This was not about the students feeling that they were learning in a traditional Gary Plan type of school where students were first herded from room to room, eliminating any individuality (Gatto, 2000). This was about individual staff and students each repeatedly commenting on their perception of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model providing a real learning environment.
This principal at IYC Chicago took on the role of the coryphaeus when his staff used the exact same expression. According to one teacher, “We used to hear that this isn't a real school. Now they [students] see more of a purpose. They are in classes that they need. They now take it more seriously.” The teachers concurred with the environment having changed. Additionally, this change was seen down to the individual level. Note that this statement was based on the teacher’s observation of individual students.

The students I encountered and those mentioned by the staff in interviews, noticed the changes and took on the same perception that this was a real school. During a classroom observation in IYC St. Charles, a youth was heard commenting to a teacher, “They never had school, now they always have school.” Even the students had embraced the fact that something had changed and that their personal perception had been modified. In this example, the student now realized that this was a place of learning and that these were real teachers.

In these facilities, I saw rows of inmates moving down hallways through double sets of electrically locked doors with multiple guards escorting them in silence. I saw uniformed inmates waiting expressionlessly and not interacting, moving through corridors, and being housed in institutionalized spaces. In the classrooms that were observed, however, there was a consistent focus on education and a slightly less institutionalized environment. Despite the dehumanizing environment in the incarceration facilities, I observed that the classrooms seemed to be apart from the normal detainment environment. Students were seen working on their own, walking around the classroom engaged in activities that were a part of their education, such as getting a pencil. Guards
were outside of the classrooms for the most part. There was classroom control similar to a credit recovery computer lab found in any high school.

The teachers who were interviewed and observed were professionally trained, dedicated, and committed to educating each student. The teacher controlled the room of students in a way that was both ubiquitous and personal. They seemed to know about everything that was occurring in the room. In IYC St. Charles, I saw a teacher who was working with a student on one side of the room continually scanning the room as he talked to the one student. He observed another student’s screen go dark on the other side of the room and politely left the student he was working with to attend to the technical issue. He then quickly moved the second student to another computer and got back to the first student without any major disruption.

I observed that, overall, there was a sense that education was occurring with each student individually and the teacher was the center of the process. This was true not only because the computers were always on the outer walls of the room, but also because the teacher directed the processes in the room. Students still asked the teacher permission to leave the room or for help with a problem. In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the technology was observed as important and transformational, but it was the teacher who was perceived to be the captain of the process.

One principal reflected on her prior perceptions in comparison with the current perceptions: “When I first came, on my first day, I thought that there wasn’t any school. Why were all of the classrooms dark? Is no one in school?” She then explained: “When I got to the classrooms, however, I saw that everyone was showing a movie. Teachers were just passing students and giving students what they wanted—playing cards, watching
movies—and not engaged in academics.” The level of engagement and expectations changed tremendously with the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. In the interview, the principal made it clear that now staff expected students to be engaged in learning activities, and students expected a real teacher to mentor them in an individualized process.

Another comment that described the change to a real school and how students viewed the teacher came from the principal at IYC Harrisburg. The principal commented: “After these kids finish their high school requirements, most of them reflect back and see how much team work went on with the teachers to get them through their high school requirements.” The principal understood that each student had changed his idea of the role teachers had played in their education. Students changed their viewpoints of teachers, according to the staff who had been around since before the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The long-term staff in the IDJJ classrooms indicated that the youth used to perceived them more as monitors, similar to their guards. According to the staff in their interviews, the students used to see the teachers much like they had perceived the teachers in their prior schools. Now that had changed. Now, according to the staff, students saw the IDJJ teachers as exactly what they thought a teacher should be. When I observed the students interacting with the teachers, they were always respectful and receptive to the teachers’ assistance.

Staff had also changed their perceptions of students in this real school. “Kids have changed; they are more technically advanced,” the principal at IYC St. Charles explained. The technology director stated: “Students have a higher expectation. They are more in tuned to finish classes. They are seeing credits build up. We are now at a point where our
students have never known different.” In using the phrase “they have never known different,” the technology director was implying that this new educational process was the new norm that was now the standard perception of all of the youth. Staff also embraced the idea that students accept the IDJJ Blended Learning Model as the normal process.

One staff member at IYC Chicago tried to explain further this change in student perception with this analogy: “[In the past,] you would try to give them something they would need. They were on their own. They were on an island by themselves.” Now that had changed. The same staff member explained: “They [students] see a purpose now. I don't think they used to understand why they were doing an assignment. [Now,] they know they are working towards credits that they need to graduate.” The perception of learning had changed, for the teacher and the student, to something that was taking place in a real school. The teachers saw themselves as real teachers and not people who would abandon youth on an island.

Now, there was a sense that students would get a fresh start at IDJJ. One staff member explained how the perception of a student had changed: “They used to be on their own. They use to drown. Now they come in and everyone starts fresh. It gives them confidence, motivation to work, and something to accomplish when they are here.” This real-school perception of student success was a powerful foundation for the acceptance of the change to an IDJJ Blended Learning Model and helped the staff to understand the improvements seen in graduation rates, GED success, and course completions.

It should be noted that the students still came in with a negative view of education. One teacher commented on the perception of education held by some of her
new students: “They do not see the value in getting an education. I don't need that on the street.” Another staff member at the same facility assessed that the students were now more hard-core: “[The] pendulum had swung from not having that [hard-core youth] to having better youth and now is swinging back to more hard-core-type kids.” This was a negative perception of youth that was interesting because one would predict that if students were getting more hard-core and were not valuing education, the graduation rates, course completions, and GED passing rates would drop, but as seen in the quantitative analysis section of this study, that was not the case. The personal viewpoints of staff members about the challenges the students faced were being offset by the positive perceptions provided in the blended learning environment.

One staff member at IYC Harrisburg expanded on the poor quality of education the youth had at their home school:

Some just become street smart. Even though it [the IDJJ Blended Learning Model] is a slight opportunity, they do take advantage of it. If they had it [the IDJJ Blended Learning Model] in public schools, we may not have as many juveniles in corrections.

Could a program similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model have provided an educational environment for these students in their home schools that could have helped them to avoid incarceration? Most of the IDJJ staff would respond, yes. In the staff members’ professional opinions, if their students had an educational program like the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, they would have gotten a significantly better education. With a better education, they could have avoided the justice system.

These perceptions of school have dramatically changed the staff members’ points of view. At IYC Kewanee, one staff member put it bluntly: “I was one of those that was dead set against this [IDJJ Blended Learning Model]. This was not a good idea when it
just came in. I've done a 180. I really believe in this program.” Key to the implementation of IDJJ Blended Learning Model seems to have been the acceptance of the teachers that this change was for the best and that this change would continue to improve. Everyone involved must develop an alternative mindset that perceives the positive value of the new model. For IDJJ, the IDJJ Blended Learning Model did not takeoff initially; it grew over time. It was not forced into place quickly. The IDJJ staff took three years to transition. The staff were given time to embrace the new model and did so once they began to perceive the success of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

What was core to this longitudinal transformation? One of the teachers who was in the group interview conducted at Pere Marquette answered this question clearly: “GradPoint is absolutely the right thing to do for these kids!” The principal at IYC Chicago said it best for the other staff members: “After getting GradPoint, it was like a godsend. Teachers were actually just so happy, so very, very happy because now after getting GradPoint, they can give students exactly what the students’ need.” Adding to the this-is-a-real-school perception was the concern expressed by a staff member at the Warrenville facility: “If it [GradPoint] went away, we would be in academic triage.”

The perceptions of IDJJ staff related to the improvement in educational programs that created a real school centered on the implementation of the GradPoint program. The statements concerning real school, real teachers, and the positive affect on students were attributed to the implementation of GradPoint. In every interview, at least one statement or more highlighted the positive impact of the program.

Everyone saw perceptions, not just expectations, as being critical to the successful implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The implementation changed the
viewpoints of students, staff, and administrators. This helped all staff to understand the why of the graduation rates, GED success rates, and the results of the courses such as course completion rate. Everyone involved internalized the negative aspects of the instructional program that existed prior to implementation, the success that was in place, and the hope for continued improvement.

The statements and activities related to the IDJJ now being a real school addressed more than what Tannis (2014) called expectations because there were elements of more than what was to be; there was also the influence of the past and the inertia of the present. These concepts also came from every participant. They should be viewed, as I saw them, as parts of an implementation process that was driven by the reflections, acceptance, and anticipation of everyone involved.

This is the key point; to implement a successful blended learning model, there must be a sense of a positive change in the minds of almost everyone involved and a subtle sense that the progress would continue. In short, each example of being a real school had parts of these concepts—this was not about what we were doing; it was something different now, and it would continue to get better.

Theme Two: Give the Student What He Needs

By definition, a blended learning model can vary as needed for each youth and address the issues unique to each facility. Repeatedly, the conversations and observations emphasized the ways the path to learning was formulated uniquely for each learner. These pathways were developed partially within the GradPoint system, but included the student, teacher, and the principal in the process.
The following dialogue with IYC Harrisburg staff was a good example of how the staff in the group interviews responded to the idea of providing an education based on giving the student what he needs:

Interviewer: Have instructional resources for students changed with the implementation of blended learning?

Teacher 3: Education is like Swiss cheese and we have to fill in the gaps. They don't understand that they have gaps. We can't cram that into their heads in two weeks. We are not handing you the keys to a Lamborghini unless you know how to drive.

Teacher 1: In orientation, they take the BASI test. We use that to determine the courses they should take. Many don't take it seriously so then it is trying to see from prior records.

Teacher 3: Sometimes it is their performance in the classroom. It is trial and error.

Teacher 1: Sometimes they were in a public high school.

Teacher 1: Math has recently changed to only prescriptive [Prescriptive Pathway Courses in GradPoint] if they have had it.

Teacher 3: We never give prescriptive in social studies.

Teacher 2: We never give prescriptive in science because we want them to know all of the steps.

Teacher 3: It was no good before. We didn’t have the program.

Teacher 2: You got a student in the classroom, either you came up with your own pretest and put them in a book in the classroom and some teachers just place them. We were told to just give them a workbook and let them work through it. It started to change and got pretest and put them in the right sections.

Teacher 3: [I have a] 15-year-old boy in my classroom and all I have was a Native American workbook at 7th grade level. I had 15–16 kids in the classroom. What is a student to do? They just drew their gangbang symbols in books.

Teacher 2: Individual instruction was out the door because at one point, we had 17 kids in there. In a correctional facility!
Teacher 3: Because there is a curriculum written, there are middle school classes. The student can take as long as they want until they get it.

Teacher 1: Now they get what he needs. A kid would come in at a 5th grade level and another kid at a 12th grade level student. You have to have credits. You didn't have a normal public school subject. You had all of kids go through together. Now at least we know what they had and gear them to what he needs for graduation and match what he needs.

The staff members spoke of “Swiss cheese,” filling in the gaps, and prescriptive processes unique to each student. Also what could be heard was the frustration from the more senior staff members when they did not have the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, and they could not meet the needs of individual students. “Now they get what they need” was consistently expressed and observed.

In the classrooms, students could all be seen working, but in every classroom and watching every student, not any two students were ever doing the same thing at the same time. The students were all on their own personalized pathway. In every classroom, students were observed primarily working on computers, and the vast majority on the GradPoint program. However, the subjects they were learning, the processes they were working on, and even the way material was being taught varied by student in a way that met the student’s individual learning need at that moment.

There were many situations I observed that substantiated that the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was giving the student what he needed through implementation and the various methods to individualize instruction. These methods included the GED option, courses selected, resources implemented, the GradPoint system, and the utilization of the teacher in direct instruction. These methods are explained in the following paragraphs, but it is important to note that the IDJJ Blended Learning Model is based on the
supposition that Frederic Winslow Taylor’s concept that “individuality does not matter” is inherently inappropriate (Rose, 2015, p. 45). The IDJJ Blended Learning Model is about the individual student getting what he needs. The principal at IYC Chicago explained the GED option program:

In short, if the student is in 10th grade or higher, and in the staff’s opinion he would be successful and would have the requisite skills, then the youth would be taken out of the regular classes and enrolled in the GradPoint GED program. The student would still go to a regular classroom, but would work on GED preparation.

The first step in providing alternative pathways started with providing youth the option work toward a GED or a standard high school diploma.

In a classroom at the same school, I saw a student working on the computer while the teacher led a group discussion on Henry Ford. The student completely ignored the teacher and the teacher seemed oblivious to the student. Later, the teacher, when asked about the student’s inattentive behavior, explained to me that the student was working on his GED. The teacher was still there for the student if needed, but the student had the educational privilege to focus on the GED course materials and not the class discussion.

The students also could take the GED test on site and at any time. At IYC Harrisburg, I was walking with the principal when a student who appeared to be in the middle of the process of being released passed by us and the principal suddenly stopped. Turning to the student, he asked: “Are you leaving? Don’t you have your GED test scheduled for tomorrow?” The student replied with disappointment: “Yes, the judge released me today, but I would really like to take the test.” The principal told the guards to hold off releasing the youth and told the student that he would take care of this and make sure he could take the test. I did not find out what eventual solution the principal at
IYC Harrisburg found, but it was understood that he had the capacity to hold the student, or maybe even have the student take the test before he left.

Before the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the GED test was only given at certain times. Additionally, the student would need to be transferred to the IYC St. Charles or Joliet facility (now closed) to take the GED test at those facilities. This only happened twice a year. Many of the students lost the opportunity to complete their GED because they did not have an opportunity to take the test because they were not around when the test was given.

A student who was not going to study for the GED would then be processed for regular high school courses. A staff member at IYC Harrisburg verified the process: “In orientation, they take the BASI test. We use that [the BASI test results] to determine the courses they should take.” If a student was enrolled in a regular course to earn credits toward a standard high school diploma, the principal and staff determined from the student’s records or BASI test, the appropriate course that student should take. Students were then treated differently based on what the student needed and was tracked via their transcript.

The principal at IYC Kewanee added a comment on how courses are tracked based on what students needed via a transcript: “The transcripts we use, and we developed, it makes it more accessible to outside school districts.” Transcripts are used to determine the courses students need to take in order to graduate and to inform other schools they will attend after leaving the facility they are in.

Once the youth are enrolled in a set of courses, they are then exposed to a wide array of instructional resources. A staff member at IYC Chicago explained: “Every
Wednesday is whole class day for me. So once they get the schedule down, it is okay.” It was okay because students, before they understood the schedule, would complain when they were pulled off of the computers. Still, the teachers often seemed to have to deal with students who preferred to just work on the GradPoint program. However, GradPoint was just one part of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model; teachers provided a wide collection of variable learning options for students. GradPoint was at the core of the resources, but there was constant intervention with other pedagogical processes and resources.

Most of the teacher support to personalize the pathway was in direct small groups or one-on-one interventions with alternative resources. A typical observation was similar to the IYC Pere Marquette observation I made:

The teacher shows the student working on the computer something on the computer screen by pointing to the screen and reading something on the screen, then shows something in the textbook, and then having the student read from the textbook.

Teachers gave reading materials, worksheets, or found textbook information to support the students in understanding of the GradPoint lessons. These alternative resources, for example, included a piece of paper for a number-line problem on the computer in a classroom in IYC Kewanee, a pencil for note taking (students are not permitted sharp objects so the student had to leave an ID to get a pencil), or getting a dictionary in a classroom in Pere Marquett.

To better understand the situation at IDJJ, it is important to respect the limitations in resources and the inability to provide alternative educational pathways, conditions that existed before the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The principal at IYC explained: “We got into the game late due to our electrical problem. We only had
two outlets in a room and only had three rooms. Low bandwidth and low power gave us a ton of issues.” Some classrooms could not use GradPoint, not because the teachers were not trained or did not have computers, but because, even after getting the training and the computers, the rooms did not have electrical outlets or Internet access.

As the IDJJ Blended Learning Model rolled out and the technical and resource issues were addressed, GradPoint provided instructional features that expanded the individualization of learning for every student. A staff member at IYC Chicago stated: “It [GradPoint] starts them off with a pretest. If they pass the entire pretest they can test out and don't have to do so many assignments, through the prescriptive pathway. Mostly we use prescriptive.” The program had the capacity to give each student a unique educational path. This was best defined for students who took the prescriptive courses. These prescriptive courses had the same content as other core courses, except there was a pre-assessment given before each lesson and students could skip lessons based on this prescriptive process.

The process involved more than just the sequence of learning. Numerous interviewee comments acknowledged that GradPoint provided a unique pace for each learner. “The student[s] can take as long as they want until they get it,” stated a staff member at IYC Harrisburg. At Kewanee, a staff member expanded on the issue of pace:

If a kid needs to take an hour to get one lesson done, that is fine; if he wants to get four lessons done, that is fine. Kids are at different spots in the book [referring to the GradPoint course sequence], but it doesn't matter.

At IYC Warenville, a teacher further contributed that “they [students] can learn at their own level and their own pace. No other student knows that they are struggling except for me.” This last point was important. Students did not feel they were behind or failing
relative to others because they did not know where any other student was in their unique pathway.

The most significant aspect of this student-centric concept was the teacher. The superintendent, principals at each facility, staff, and direct observations supported the fact that the teacher was critical to a successful IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The superintendent provided a top-down directive: “I insist that the teacher works with the student helping them with the questions or problems that occur as well as providing examples and a stronger understanding of the subject.” The staff accepted this edict: “We can show them other ways to get there. GradPoint sometimes confuses them. It will give them a long way of doing it. I can reinstruct a different and easier way. Everyone learns differently.” This critical role of the teacher was evident in every classroom I observed. At no time was a teacher just sitting there with students working on computers. An observation made at IYC Pere Marquette illustrated the role of the teacher:

The teacher was still working with the student; she is not telling him the answer to the question on the computer, but is helping him to review his notes and showing him some things in the textbook. The question was, what was the source of Carbon 14 in a Mammoth remains? The question is tricky. The answer is atmospheric Carbon that is absorbed by plants then eaten by the Mammoth. I’m not sure the teacher even knew the answer. Eventually, they figured it out together.

Through this example, the use of multiple resources was seen and even the teacher in a teacher-learner role was visible. The teacher was not sure of the answer, but worked along with the student to explore resources until they both had an understanding of the problem and why the correct answer made the most sense. This moment was very unique to the student and, through the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the student learned not only an obscure fact, but also a process to learn.
This personalized approach to meet the student’s needs was one of the factors brought to the fore by staff in response to the special education students’ performance level in post-assessment scores compared to the general education students. The IYC Kewanee teacher explained this phenomenon:

Special ed kids are use to 1:1 so they know how to work it. It doesn't surprise me that they would do better. The student with special education would know how to get help. Traditional students don't expect 1:1 help so they don't seek it.

Because special education students are use to having their educational needs uniquely addressed, they seem to perform well in a blended learning environment. Where the general education student will shut down, the special education student knows to seek help. This is an important consideration for the implementation of blended learning. General education students need to value seeking help and expect it, similar to the expectations of special education students.

Through the use of optional diploma processes, various courses, educational resources, GradPoint features and skilled educators, the IDJJ Blended Learning Model supported pathways for each student to receive what the student needed. This concept was in direct contrast to traditional educational processes. Instead of institutionalized failure, the IDJJ student was provided a personalized pathway that gave the student what he needed.

**Theme Three: Teacher As “Meddler in the Middle”**

The educators in this study took on the role of teacher as meddler in the middle, as explained by McWilliam (2009). This meddler role was manifested in the discussions and the observations. At IYC St. Charles, a teacher walked over to a student who was sitting at a computer, but working on a workbook. The teacher began to show the student
some information from an Algebra II textbook she had been carrying. The student then went back to working on the computer. The teacher was not the sage on the stage, or even a guide on the side just watching the student struggle, but was directly involved with the educational process. Repeatedly, classrooms were filled with teachers and students who were moving about constructively, interactively, and respectfully.

The student’s acceptance of the teacher as the meddler in the relationship was just as important as the role itself and the student needed to accept this closer and interactive relationship. The positive relationship between a student and a teacher was not dominated by the teacher, but included the student’s responsiveness to the relationship. In all of my observations, I never witnessed a situation where a student withdrew from interacting with a teacher. In a traditional classroom, it was not uncommon for a teacher to ask questions and receive the typical response of a few students holding up their hands and the rest shying away from responding. With the IDJJ youth, it was easy to visualize these students as being more in the latter group. On the contrary, in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, each IDJJ student seemed to value and appreciate the interaction with the teacher when they provided meddler in the middle interactions.

“After these kids finish their high school requirements, most of them reflect back and see how much teamwork went on with the teachers to get them through their high school requirements,” stated the principal at IYC Harrisburg. In the following statement, the principal at IYC Pere Marquette summarized the student point of view as elevating teachers to champion status:

He [a teacher the principal was discussing] is very acknowledging and congratulates kids. Youth love him because he is always trying to help. There is something there that is very genuine. It is a very personal relationship where the student respects the teacher. I see the teacher as a coach. Encouraging the students
and will not rest until they have accomplished what they are working on. He is there for every step and you see the student’s reaction in enjoying that success afterwards. The student will say, "He trusted me to get it done." He is their champion.

In any other program that was similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, teachers being raised to “champion” status would imply that many students’ respect for their teachers was increasing and was building a foundation for positive partnerships between students and teachers.

At IYC Warrenville, a staff member articulated the benefits of positive teacher-student partnerships:

Now it is more on them [the students]. It is motivating for them. It is up to them to do the work. I don't tell them they have to do the work in a certain time, they just do it.

The teachers in this study truly cared about each youth they taught. Despite obvious issues that society may have with these students, the IDJJ teachers in this IDJJ Blended Learning Model relationship appeared to ignore societal concerns and prejudices. The teachers simply saw the youth as their students, even though their students were all in prison uniforms and were behind layers of locks, steel doors, and barbwire fences.

In all of my interviews and observational visits, I always felt that I was being watched, controlled, and dehumanized, and I was just visiting. The tension was always present. To forget this for a moment, would fail in understanding the importance of any relationship and the significance of the effectiveness of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model to change the relationships between students, teachers, administrators, and other IDJJ staff. A teacher at IYC Chicago shared the following reflection:

Now they [the students] are at a more comfortable level as to what they can accomplish. They know that their computer screen is unique to them so they
realize now that everyone in the class is not on the same thing so they have confidence to ask [the teacher] if they don't understand something.

This teacher was expressing that the students were not only comfortable in learning on the computer, but also in interacting with the teachers in such a way that they did not feel threatened or would not be exposing themselves to peer evaluation. This teacher’s comment verified that through the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, there was a sense of appreciation of student learning, comfort in a beneficial academic environment, and an appreciation of students’ accomplishments.

For this teacher, as the meddler in the middle, partnering with the student was important, but it ascended beyond the students to the administrators. One teacher at IYC Chicago commented:

So the first I heard of blended learning was when we got the technology. At first, I was doing a day or two instead of working out of the book. We would take a chapter at a time out of the textbook and work as a whole class. Now, administration wants to see whole groups, small groups, and one-on-one instruction at the same time in the classroom. We also have them at different levels.

The teachers accepted the tasks assigned to them by the administrators. There was a common sense that the origin of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model came from a top-down direction, but was done with respect for the teachers and an appreciation for their concerns. Yet, as this teacher confirmed, they were just beginning to implement the model.

Teachers saw the progress being made and now believed in the future and the administrators addressing remaining or new issues. The technology director, when asked why the filters had not been set up so students could use some of the courses, responded confidently, “In the next couple of years, the superintendent will get things open.” Even
the technology staff valued the administrative efforts, understood the complexity of the effort to make any changes at IDJJ, and believed in the commitment of the administrators to move forward.

The IDJJ Blended Learning Model dramatically affected relationships and established new partnerships between the various levels of people in the IDJJ operations. As the students’ respect for teachers increased, they demonstrated more responsibility for their own learning, students were more comfortable with the learning environment, the babysitter role of the teacher decreased as they became champions for youth, and the administrators became more demanding and respected. Just as the teachers were meddlers in the middle, so too were the administrators. Overall, there was substantial evidence of improvements in all aspects of relationships in the IDJJ.

In summary, the teacher as the meddler in the middle partnerships have changed with the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. A teacher at IYC Harrisburg admitted: “At the beginning, I felt like a babysitter. Now we are more involved and engaged with the students.” This positive transition supports the improvements seen in the quantitative data, but also in the overall educational environment.

*Theme Four: Student takes responsibility for learning*

In the interviews and observations, staff and administrators commented on their confidence in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model to help students. But it was more than just a hope that things would be better. There seemed to be common acknowledgement that the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was making a measurable difference; there was
strong evidence of improvement in accountability and the student was taking on more of the responsibility for this progress.

The principal at IYC Chicago stated: “The student has instant feedback. I had youth that just passed and will want to retake the quiz. There is a student-led drive for 100%.” The principal at IYC Harrisburg agreed: “Students can see their progress and track their progress, which keeps them engaged.” With the principal’s support of the student-centric process, the staff at IYC Kewanee reported: “There is more ownership for the kids. It is going to be on their [the students] record.” IYC Chicago staff commented: “They can see their grades. They can keep track of where they are and what they need to be doing.” The students had direct involvement in their progress.

The teachers saw students taking on greater responsibility for their own learning. This was evident in the comment from a teacher at IYC Chicago: “Before, they [the students] may listen and have taken good notes, but now the responsibility is on them. They have to work.”

An example of student-centric progress was demonstrated during a classroom observation at IYC Kewanee when a student was seen looking through his folder that had some printouts of quizzes, and he was organizing his own folder. A principal reflected on student responsibility:

More of the accountability is placed on the student. They do have some choice. If the student is enrolled in four courses, the student can do what they want and when they want to do it. By showing them the progress in other areas, you could get more done. That is different than traditional education that tells them when they have to do work.

The keys to accountability are the strong evidence of student ownership of their learning and the effectiveness of a system to track each learning moment.
A system to measure progress was found at each facility and was similar to what the IYC Harrisburg principal explained: “Each completed class on GradPoint goes on the student’s transcript. The teacher of the actual class the kid completes will send a note to the principal.” This principal added how the progress tracking has changed: “Before, we just had Carnegie units. On paper, he has earned the credit, but he didn't really. Now, with GradPoint, his accountability is concrete.” In the past, the students earned a quarter of a credit for 30 days of attendance. It was just seat time. Now, the students have to work for the credits. There was strong evidence of student ownership in the process, but also an additional sense that the new system had more accountability and validity.

The following dialog with IYC Kewanee staff was a good example of how staff responded in the group interviews to the question on accountability:

Interviewer: Has accountability changed for you and/or your students with the implementation of blended learning? If so, how?

Teacher 5: There is more ownership for the kids. It is going to be on their record.

Teacher 4: When you go in and look at a class, if they are working for another teacher, you can see what they did. You finished five courses. How did you do that? Admin can check.

Teacher 1: There is accountability for teachers. The principal could look at how students are doing. We had kids come in with Algebra II and didn't know how to add. We can drop the kid to a lower level. Math A, astronomy, geometry, and job skills are the basic classes we assign.

Teacher 5: It depends on the reading skills.

Teacher 1: If they are from another IDJJ facility, when they arrive, then we just keep them where they are and they keep going. It is one of the beauties of GradPoint.

The teachers and administrators respected the IDJJ Blended Learning Model’s accountability processes. The group interview dialogue hit on several points: student
ownership, collaboration between teachers toward student success, accountability of teachers, and cooperation between facilities. If there was not confidence in the system, then teachers would not be trusting students, administrators would be questioning staff performance, and cooperation between schools would not exist. This was not the reality at IDJJ. Even though much of the activity in classrooms was student-centric, the staff felt confident that students were learning and making progress.

The principal at IYC Kewanee proudly exclaimed: “We have seen, since we have started using online classes full time, that the graduation rates went from 10% to as much as 35% of the students getting their high school diploma.” As a point of reference, a typical high school graduates 20% of its students each year. After discussing this statistic, the principal at IYC St. Charles concurred: “I would agree that the graduation rate [at IDJJ] is much higher.” The staff members were also keenly aware of this progress, which was best described by a staff member at IYC Warrenville: “Now, we graduate people and that is the best gift they can have coming out of here.” The drive for progress was seen in these comments on graduation rates and GED passing rates.

Explaining the change in the GED program, the principal at IYC Chicago commented: “Teachers didn't teach to GED; they taught below the middle. Now students take the same course work as a normal high school student takes. So it is more challenging and more appropriate for taking the GED test.” The effect of this was explained by the technology director: “You have people here at our school that pretest for GED. Our testing scores are up because now we make sure they are ready for it.” For those students who would not have sufficient time to get a full high school diploma, the GED is seen as an equivalent option.
Progress system support extends to the Aftercare (Aftercare specialist, parole boards, and judges) programs when students leave IDJJ facilities. The principal at IYC Warrenville explained this process: “There are times when we can track them through the Aftercare specialist.” He continued: “We could even say to the Aftercare specialist, this kid is one or two credit[s] from getting a diploma, so they will stay on top of them.” Teachers were proud that the certificates developed for course completion were shared proudly by youth with parole boards and judges. They valued the students respect for the process and a staff member at IYC Harrisburg even commented that “the parole board leaves them here until they have credits they need before being released.” With the support of the principals at each facility and their staff members, the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was meeting students’ educational needs through a system that was constantly tracking the students’ personal progress even after they had left the facility.

These comments and observations helped with understanding the data that included graduation rates, GED passing rates, and course completions. These rates were improved because of the support provided through a shared responsibility system. These accountability processes tracked and validated the success of these educational efforts and were convincing evidence in support of continuing the implementation the IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

Summary of Findings

The improved graduate rates, GED passing rates, and course completions data provided evidence of the efficacy of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model included a mix of interactive activities that embraced online, teacher, and off-line events.
The interviews and observations revealed that everyone thought of the new program as a real school. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model also was built around giving each student what he or she needed. Relationships were even more personal then would be expected and were explained in a simple observation like “the teacher moved her chair next to him.” Teachers and administrators were meddlers in the middle and the students accepted and thrived in this relationship. Finally, staff and students had accountability because the responsibility for learning was shared.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Over 40 years ago, I knew something significant had happened when I realized I learned better in my computerized medical terminology course than I did in the lecture hall of my organic chemistry classroom. However, the nature of this phenomenon eluded me. As recounted in chapter one, when I met the two young men in an elevator, they indicated that a blended learning program had literally saved their lives. This elevator meeting affirmed not only the power of the use of technology in education, but it drove this in-depth research into the nature of the IDJJ’s Blended Learning Model phenomena.

The literature review provided ample evidence that students can achieve by utilizing technology in education. My experience of the slow pace of embracing this concept in education has been disappointing. I realized early on that, as the late Seymour Papert retorted to the Governor of Maine, “It only turns magic when it’s 1:1.” My life’s challenge has been to explain the advantages of transforming education through technology; therefore, I sought a convincing case.

Yin advised that a successful case study researches an “extreme or unique case, or even a revelatory case” (Green, 2006, p. 116). The IDJJ’s Blended Learning Model was perfect for the purpose of this research. IDJJ is extreme, unique, and revelatory. With a 5.60% mobility rate, a 46% special education population, an incarcerated existence, a clear focus on course completions, and a court mandate to educate, it would be hard to find a more challenging institution.
Of the millions of high school students in Illinois, these few hundred IDJJ youth had uniquely been cast out from their community schools. Hidden from public contact in the IDJJ, these youth, based on the comments from the staff, were the victims of their individuality that was problematic in their prior schools. Rose (2015) asserted this “uniqueness has become a burden, an obstacle, or a regrettable distraction on the road to success” (p. 57). From what the staff explained, the traditional educational program that failed these IDJJ youth was not a personalized learning system. The U.S. educational system is based on concepts that are over 100 years old. For example, Thorndike (1911), one of the founders of today’s educational system, taught the prejudicial view that the relative worth of an individual is based chiefly on the individual’s nature (sex, race, family, and religion), not the individual person. Thorndike’s use of the word “individuality” for his book title is in direct contrast to his lack of support for a personal learning process.

What was revelatory about the IDJJ Blended Learning Model was that it directly confronted the traditional acceptance of any student failing. As a staff member at IYC Harrisburg stated, “Education is like Swiss cheese and we have to fill in the gaps.” In other words, education was fitted to the student and not the other way around. Based on this understanding, this mixed-method case study asked and explored one basic question: What is the efficacy of a Blended Learning Model in the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice?

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study presented in chapter four show that the IDJJ Blended Learning Model can educate even the most challenging student. An incarcerated student
at IDJJ, if given the proper educational conditions, can learn as well as any other student and graduate. For example, graduations have increased from 65 graduates in 2013 to 133 in 2015, despite the decrease in population and the 5.60% mobility rate. During this same period, the IDJJ passing rate for GED testing increased from 46% to 60% even though the test itself was upgraded to a more rigorous assessment. The increase in course completions from only 454 in 2012 to 2,565 courses in 2015 supports the graduation rate improvements.

The staff interviews and observations that were conducted provided evidence of how the IDJJ Blended Learning Model helped to increase the number of graduates, GED scores, and course completions. Four themes emerged from the interviews:

1. This is a real school
2. Give the student what he needs
3. Teacher as the “meddler in the middle”
4. The student takes responsibility for learning

These themes suggest a personalized epistemological model for teaching, learning, and knowledge creation.

Personalized Practices in the IDJJ Blended Learning Model

Though homage was paid to “the real school” expectations and the rooms still looked like traditional classrooms, it was evident that the center of learning was the individual student. How this student-centric model worked can be seen in four personalized practices: perceptions, pathways, partnerships, and progress.
**Perceptions**

Personalized practice goes beyond Tannis’ (2014) term of expectations: “Not only do the educators maintain high expectations for themselves and their peers, they also maintain high expectations for their students” (p.32). Altered perceptions of the past, present, and future are a significant consequence of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. For example, IDJJ staff members indicated that students held little value for education when they were out on the street. However, at IDJJ, students saw that each second they worked counted, and the staff indicated that the students now saw that the work they were completing was leading to a positive future. Students, teachers, and administrators who used the IDJJ Blended Learning Model agreed that the past practices of group teaching, credit by seat time, and lockstep instruction were inferior to the new IDJJ Blended Learning Model. The administrators, teachers, and students embraced the new student-centric model, with some stating they had come 180 degrees from their initial thoughts on the new model. An effective program similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model changes everyone’s perceptions of the past, present, and future.

**Pathways**

The theme, *Give the student what he needs*, encompasses students seeking, finding, and creating their own pathways to learning to meet their individual needs. The IDJJ model uses computer technology to provide customized courses and automatically adjust instruction to meet the individual student’s learning needs. Thus, personalized learning is built in. However, creating a personalized pathway also includes the use of multiple instructional resource materials such as traditional textbooks, writing notes, and one-on-one discussions with fellow students and teachers. Additionally, in a program
similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, the teacher remains an important part of the educational equations. Critical interventions are offered by the teacher that are unique to the particular student and geared to the pace of the student’s individualized learning. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model is not one-size-fits-all instruction. Students are at the center, being encouraged and helped to find their own unique path to learning.

**Partnerships**

Successfully executing a program similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model requires personalized partnerships, as represented by the theme, *Teacher as “meddler in the middle.”* The interactions at IDJJ between administrators, teachers, staff, guards, Aftercare specialists, and students with each other are primarily through one-on-one relationships. Whole group instruction is not the norm. The vast majority of communications observed at IDJJ were between one person and another. Likewise, this personal relationship approach to facilitating student learning goes far beyond what is typically seen in a traditional classroom. In IDJJ, a student interacts with the teacher, the meddler in the middle, to form a learning partnership. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model does not replace the teacher’s primary role or responsibility for guiding a student’s learning, but rather redirects it toward the individual student’s needs and interests. In a program similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, a personal pedagogical relationship with the teacher and access to non-technological instructional resources combine with computer technology. This allows for customization of courses and digital progress monitoring and results in heightened engagement on the part of students in their day-to-day experience of learning.
Progress

In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, students take control and thus assume responsibility for their own learning. The prior educational model at IDJJ was traditional, stagnant, and founded on seat time and Carnegie Units. Groups of students, even if they did not learn anything, were matriculated through the IDJJ system on the basis of clock hours sat through and the length of a youth’s sentence. In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, learning, progress, and hence responsibility are unique to each student.

The GradPoint program supports personalized progress through prescriptive courses and customizable syllabi. However, personalized progress also involves the teachers working with each student and tracking all courses through a standard individualized transcript. Courses are not completed based upon clock-hours completed or a calendar, but on individually paced mastery.

The individualized and personalized nature of the IDJJ Bended Learning Model is felt and visible in the classroom. As a staff member at IYC Chicago stated, “The proof is right there for you.”

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this research, there are several recommendations that are pertinent for IDJJ, other similar institutions for incarcerated youth, state governments, federal programs, vendors, and for any educational system that wants to move toward a personalized blended learning pedagogy.

Continue Support of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model

IDJJ has successfully implemented the IDJJ Blended Learning Model due to the support and effectiveness of the IDJJ superintendent who was hired in July 2014. There
are still opportunities to expand the implementation of elective and career-oriented courses. IDJJ should not only continue the implementation of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model through training and improvements in technology, but also support expansion.

In the IDJJ Blended Learning Model, IDJJ staff members not only need to learn the software, but also be competent in the practices of personalized pedagogy. Sustained professional development is needed so that the student’s perception of IDJJ as a “real school” can continue.

Efforts to enhance pathway options to provide each student with what he needs should focus on more electives, advance courses, vocational options, projects, and other instructional resources. Enhancement will require not only having access to more resources, but also increasing bandwidth capacity and mobile technology. Even though this would be a challenge in centers of incarceration, efforts should still be made to provide IDJJ students with one-to-one technology in their housing unit and their classrooms, just like students in regular homes and schools.

In addition to one-to-one mobile technology, one-on-one relationships should be enhanced and expanded to include not only classroom support, but also instructional interactions via chat, e-mail, live lessons online, and other digital interactions, both within the centers and after youth leave. The teacher as the meddler in the middle relationship should not end at the classroom door.

*Make More Use of Quantitative and Qualitative Data*

To continue to gain support for these improvements and the IDJJ Blended Learning Model as a whole, there needs to be expanded use of quantitative and qualitative data. IDJJ should continue to develop annual, monthly, and dashboard systems
that can report progress and provide metrics to guide decisions. Due to the outstanding success of the program, efforts should also include professionally sharing the success with others within Illinois and with the personnel of incarceration programs everywhere.

The gathering of the students’ points of view for this study was prohibited. Student perceptions have significant value. An effort is needed to allow more researchers access to incarcerated youth within the restrictive guidelines of the Belmont Report (Belmont Report, 2015). Further research cries out to hear the voices of the youth.

Expand the Model to Other Centers of Juvenile Incarceration

Personnel in the state of Illinois, other states, and the federal government should be approached to see if programs similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model could be implemented in other centers of juvenile incarceration, and in schools where youth are prejudicially forced into the criminal justice system (Nellis, Greene, & Mauer, 2008). This study indicates that a program similar to the IDJJ Blended Learning Model could be effective in education settings where students are wards of the state, or have been cast aside by a traditional educational system.

Expand Research on Personalized Learning Systems to Regular Schools

This research has shown the value and promise of blended learning in IDJJ. However, continued research, development, and the use of this model need not end with IDJJ. School districts and blended learning systems vendors, working together, could develop and test personalized learning systems similar to those found at IDJJ, especially schools having large populations of at-risk students. Even though increased funding is going into online and blended educational systems at all levels, more research into its effectiveness is needed, specifically with at-risk youth. Whether used in public, private,
or for-profit educational settings, blended learning, like any other instructional model must be regularly and systematically evaluated for effectiveness. Vendors of online personalized learning systems could provide support for such efficacy research, if not by choice then by customer mandate.

*Reduce Youth Incarceration*

Nationally, a bold, frank conversation is needed about the incarceration of minority youth and about their education while incarcerated. This research suggests that a blended personalized, technology-enhanced approach to educating incarcerated youth results not only in increased academic achievement but, perhaps more importantly, develops within the student the desire to go on learning. An on-going, public discussion is needed to make known the benefits of technology-enhanced personalized learning systems like the IDJJ Blended Learning Model. This is especially important for Black males from poor communities who make up an inordinately large portion of the U.S. incarcerated juvenile population.

**Final Reflections**

A moment in an elevator initiated this research, but it has been 40 years in the making. Transforming education through technology has been in the background of all of my career choices. A critical moment in my literature review was reading the firsthand account of two brave educators addressing an assembled group in 1789 at the Walnut Street Jail (Teeters, 1955). A woodcarving on page 52 depicts a cannon that the warden had placed and aimed at inmates to induce fear of what could happen if anyone even tried to educate the incarcerated. This case study is an effort to better understand and address the education of today’s incarcerated youth using modern technology. Similar to barriers
encountered by reformers in 1789, this research effort attempts to overcome these obstacles so as to move forward the education provided to incarcerated youth.

Included in Teeter’s (1955) account, is the image of a weather vane in the shape of a key on the cupola atop the Walnut Street Jail. The old English origin and definition of the word key is “serving to open or explain.” My hope is this research will unlock a new chapter in the debate over juvenile incarceration in the United States. The image displayed in Figure 17 is in the shape of a key and provides a graphic overview of the IDJJ Blended Learning Model and programs that would be similar in its purpose, goals, and structure.

![Figure 17. The IDJJ Blended Learning Model key.](image)

As seen in Figure 17, the bow of the key provides the purpose to be unlocked. In the case of the IDJJ student and modern high school education, the purpose is developing “College and Career” readiness. The barrel of the key is “Education,” which consists of the knowledge and skills students require for this readiness. The tip end of the key is
called the pilot. In this case, technology is the pilot. Technology is the lead end guiding the key into the lock. Thus the key represents the transformation of education through technology. The pins are what makes each key unique and are the essential parts of the key that fit into the lock allowing the lock to open. These are labeled with four letter Ps. The Ps represent personalized perceptions, pathways, partnerships, and progress, which constitute the uniquely student-centric IDJJ Blended Learning Model.

This research study suggests that blended learning can be a highly successful instructional approach for educating incarcerated youth. I believe the one-to-one personalized pedagogical approach to learning combined with computer technology that allows for more individualized instruction and continuous progress monitoring will both reduce recidivism and open more possibilities and pathways that lead to a successful life after incarceration. An even greater belief is that, through introducing a blended personalized educational model in all schools, we will avoid having youth enter the criminal justice system in the first place and experiencing the demoralizing existence that awaits them if they do not have a proper education.
REFERENCES


Cusick, G. R., Goerge, R. M., & Bell, K. C. (2009). From corrections to community: The juvenile reentry experience as characterized by multiple systems involvement. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.


R.J. et al. v. Jones, 1:12-cv-7289, Consent Decree (N. D. Ill, December 6, 2012)


APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

*Teacher Interview Questions*

Please note that the questions are open-ended due to the inductive methodology and there may be follow up questions specific to the Blended Learning Model. Specific follow-up questions could ask participants to expand on their thoughts.

1. Please share with me some of your thoughts and observations about the Blended Learning Model as you have seen it implemented during your time working at the IDJJ. How does it compare with other curriculum delivery models you may have used? What do you like about it? Is there anything that you don’t like about it?

2. Have instructional resources for students changed with the implementation of Blended Learning? If so, specifically refer to technology, textbooks, and any other resources you or the model provide.

3. Has accountability changed for you and/or your students with the implementation of Blended Learning? If so, how?

4. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about teaching in IDJJ or about the Blended Learning Model?
Administrator Interview Questions

The following will be the questions asked of the superintendent, principals, and GradPoint coordinator.

1. Can you give me your observations and thoughts about the Blended Learning Model as you have seen it implemented over your time working at the IDJJ? In what ways does it differ from other education programs for incarcerated youth that you have been involved with? What do you like about it? What might be changed or improved?

2. Have relationships changed between and among teachers, students, and staff with the implementation of a Blended Learning Model? If so, how have they changed?

3. Has accountability changed for teachers, students, and administrators with the implementation of Blended Learning? If so, in what way has it changed?

4. Is there anything else you want to tell me about IDJJ or the Blended Learning Model?