

The Transformative Power of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Creating a Sense of Belonging in a Place of Oppression and Beyond

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Program

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**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY	5
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1 Key Questions	8
1.2 Methodology	9
1.3 Table of Core Themes	12
2. THE ISSUE	13
3. KEY FINDINGS	15
3.1. Facilitation	16
3.1.1 The Role of Facilitators in Creating Connectedness & Belonging	16
3.1.2 Theme: Building Community	17
3.1.3 Theme: Modeling Behavior	19
3.1.4 Theme: Fostering a Brave Space for Discussion	21
3.2. The Inside-Out Methodology: Fostering Belonging Through Dialogic Pedagogy	22
3.2.1 Theme: The Circle	22
3.2.2 Theme: Small Group Discussions	25
3.2.3 Theme: Icebreakers	27
3.2.4 Theme: Creating Inclusion	29
3.2.5 Theme: Conversations are the Connection	30
3.3. The Social-Ecological Framework	33
3.3.1 Relational, Individual, Community, and Societal Impacts of Inside-Out	33
3.3.2 Theme: Career Trajectory	34
3.3.3 Theme: Upward Mobility	35
3.3.4 Theme: Development of 'Soft' Skills	36
3.3.5 Theme: Breaking Down Barriers/Stereotypes	37
3.3.6 Theme: Healing/Restorative Justice	40
3.3.7 Theme: Creating New Programs Based on Inside-Out Concepts	41
4. RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPACT	42
4.1. Track Alumni Success	42
4.2. Track Recidivism	43
4.3. Partner with Organizations that Focus on Belonging	44
4.4. Use the Inside-Out Model to Reach Other Marginalized Groups	44
4.5. Create a Diverse Institutional Review Board	45
4.6. Use Existing Research to Gain Program Insight	45
5. CONCLUSION	46
BIBLIOGRAPHY	49
APPENDIX	51

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program has been around over 25 years, has 60,000+ alumni, over 1,400 trained instructors and has been taught in multiple countries. Its goal is to create social change through transformative education by bringing college (outside) students inside prisons to take semester-long classes alongside incarcerated (inside) students.¹

The goal of this project was to find out the transformative power of the Inside-Out program, how its methods of a dialogic pedagogy across differences engender belonging and social connectedness, and the impact of the program on instructors and students from a social-ecological lens.

This dialogic pedagogy involves students and an instructor sitting in a circle, with inside and outside students intentionally sitting in alternating fashion to learn as equals, participating in small and large group discussions/exercises, weekly syllabi readings, and icebreakers to begin classes.

The finding suggests that the transformative power of Inside-Out happens partly thanks to a well trained instructor who is part of the learning process and sets the tone using the Inside-Out pedagogy. The process of well timed icebreakers (used to create community and comfort), and shared dialogue that encourages inclusion and connection breaks down barriers and fosters belonging. As a result of their participation in this program, students (both inside and out) have changed career paths and developed social skills, while many inside students have experienced upward mobility and become productive members of their communities once released. In addition, many instructors have come to dedicate their careers to the program.

All eleven inside students, including coaches I interviewed are working, some have college degrees, and some are even working with justice-impacted folks. These findings align with Inside-Out and its mission, and with that of the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC)'s framework for the four dimensions of belonging (the 4Ps) : people, place, power, and purpose. SCSC defines belonging as coming "through our relationships with other people, through rootedness in nature, [...] our ability to influence social, political and economic decision making, and our capacity to find shared meaning and purpose in our lives."² Through Inside-Out, the students come together (people), in a brave space that is created (place), where they gain agency of their ideas and thoughts through dialogue (power), and students and instructors in some cases find (purpose) in their lives.

Throughout this report, I will argue that the success and positive impact Inside-Out has on students and instructors can be a barometer for success, v.s. solely using recidivism rates, which can have many variables that don't equate to upward mobility, only staying

¹ "About Us," Inside-Out, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/about-inside-out.html>.

² "About Social Connectedness," Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/about-social-connectedness/>.

out of prison. This success should garner more support for expanding the Inside-Out Program.

Some recommendations include:

1. Inside-Out should track recidivism (re-incarceration after release) rates to secure possible funding and move policy to procure more college courses in prisons;
2. Broader research should be done to include more inside students, so Inside-Out can show more stories of transformation to affect future funding and policy change, and;
3. Continued expansion of Inside-Out across universities and prisons in North America, as the transformational aspect of the program including upward mobility can impact communities positively.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As a former inside student and current Training Coach of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, I am deeply connected to the program. Through Inside-Out, I had a transformative experience, namely becoming an advocate for Children of Incarcerated Parents. During my Inside-Out course I felt a sense of belonging, and my perception of the criminal justice system changed. Inside-Out, without college credits, a degree or certification, has fully changed the trajectory of my life.

My intimate knowledge of Inside-Out, along with my admiration for the program shows that my position may not be neutral. I am not an outsider reviewing a program, but a believer in its transformative approach. However, I see this not as a weakness, but a strength in my overall understanding of, and advocacy for, the program. I have also worked diligently to use open-ended interview questions, scale questions, and connect with a diverse group of people within the Inside-Out network. The open ended interview questions, as well as the two quantitative questions based on rating the effectiveness of individual Inside-Out methods were developed to induce responses based on the interviewees' own experiences.³

³ See appendix, Fig. 1-1

1. INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to discern and understand the power of the Inside-Out program from a social-ecological framework. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is a semester-long college course usually held inside a prison or jail. It is normally made of 15 campus based students (outside students) and 15 students that are incarcerated in prison or jail (inside students). The Inside-Out pedagogy is centered around students and instructors learning from one another through icebreakers and both small and large group discussions. The group discussions are typically centered around topics related to weekly readings and/or classroom exercises that align with the subject matter of the course (i.e. mass incarceration). The Founder and Director of Inside-Out, Lori Pompa has stated that “Inside-Out is centered on dialogue and collaboration.”

Through this research, I explored how Inside-Out's unique teaching methodology fosters a sense of social connectedness, a feeling of belonging, and a fuller understanding of one's purpose in life and role as an agent of change. After interviewing 40 people across three continents, several themes and impacts became clear. (1) Many people experienced a transformation they credit to this program and the classes taken, (2) inside students experienced upward mobility, (3) outside students changed careers (specifically criminal justice or careers affecting justice-impacted people), and (4) instructors spoke about their dedication to this work.

Understanding how social connectedness and belonging are part of the Inside-Out methodology is an important factor when discussing the evidence showing the transformative properties of the program. Previous research has shown that Inside-Out is structured (a dialogic pedagogy, which uses the instructor as a facilitator

and allows for the students to utilize dialogue to learn from one another) to create a space for a higher order of learning, which is connected to transformative education.⁴ Furthermore, with the help of a facilitator who models how to interact with inside students as classmates, the outside students learn how to treat all students as equal partners and learners in the classroom. As a result, students become willing to learn from one another and take ownership of their capacity to develop new skills in this space. In this capacity, transformative learning can occur.⁵

In tandem with the learning that takes place throughout the semester, another key focus is the holistic development of 'soft' skills (i.e. emotional intelligence, empathy, communications skills), furthering their ability to learn from one another as well as core concepts in the subject being taught (i.e. the history of mass incarceration in the U.S.). Through the engagement and strengthening of these skills, Inside-Out can produce upward mobility and lifestyle changes for inside students, a trend echoed in 9 interviews. The development of 'soft' skills in relation to upward mobility in Inside-Out is important to document, as most studies on college education in prisons primarily focus on quantitative data on folks going back to prison (recidivism).⁶

It is important to note that Inside-Out does not track the recidivism rates of inside student alumni. Rates of recidivism are normally a key metric used to determine funding and policy for prison higher education programs. Recently, prominent philanthropic foundations such as the Ford Foundation and the Mellon Foundation have made

⁴ Brian R. Wyant and Brian Lockwood. "Transformative Learning, Higher Order Thinking, and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program." *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)* 69, no. 3 (2018): 49–67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26864112>.

⁵ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice," *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education* 1997, no. 74 (1997): 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>.

⁶ Emily Pelletier and Douglas Evans. "Beyond Recidivism: Positive Outcomes from Higher Education Programs in Prisons." *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)* 70, no. 2 (2019): 49–68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26864182>.

substantial investments in higher education in prisons with reduced recidivism, with positive program outcomes as a primary reason for investment.⁷ The prominent investments are important, but I would like to agree with previous literature that states, “justifying college-in-prison primarily via the language of reduced recidivism does not sufficiently capture what higher education in prison is currently doing – nor what is possible.”⁸ I will argue that the development of soft skills and upward mobility made evident through this research are other ways to “capture” the importance of higher education in prison. Inside-Out has been around 25+ years, and despite never tracking recidivism is having an impact on inside students today.

“Inside-Out has changed the trajectory of my life. It’s changed the composition of my family tree. I have a Bachelor degree, I’m formerly incarcerated, a convicted felon, and still on parole. Today, I’m a facilitator for a job that requires a bachelor degree.”⁹

1.1 Key Questions

The primary questions I investigated were:

1. What role, if any, did the facilitator play in creating connectedness / belonging?
2. Does the Inside-Out methodology (learning that takes place through dialog) create a sense of belonging? If so, how?
3. How has the Inside-Out experience affected you individually, in relation to others, in your community, and societally?

⁷ Erin L. Castro, “Racism, the Language of Reduced Recidivism, and Higher Education in Prison: Toward an Anti-Racist Praxis,” *Institute for Critical Education Studies* 9, no. 17 (November 1, 2018): 1–14, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14288/ce.v9i17.186357>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Chris Patron (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 12, 2023.

1.2 Methodology

In order to understand Inside-Out and its impact, I conducted a combination of focus groups and interviews, through which I was able to connect with 40 individuals: 7 inside students, 11 outside students, 18 instructors, and 4 training coaches.¹⁰ Using qualitative research methods, I wanted to understand how instructors and students gauged their experiences in the Inside-Out program, with a particular focus on whether the program fosters belonging, and how the program affected participants from a social-ecological perspective: How do class participants including instructors feel Inside-Out has impacted them personally, intrapersonally, with community and societally-after the class is over?

This framework was important on three fronts, (1) since Inside-Out does not track recidivism, knowing the transformation of inside students and the positive impact they have in relation to others, in their community, and societally can prove the program's success without tracking recidivism rates. (2) It was important to know in what ways Inside-Out's transformative education impacts instructors and outside students after they take a college course inside a prison alongside incarcerated people. (3) Lastly, connecting Inside-Out with SCSC's mission of belonging and social connectedness (the 4 P's: people, place, power, and purpose). Looking through a social-ecological lens, we are able to see how the belonging that begins in an Inside-Out class is perpetuated in the lives of students and instructors after the course, in relation to their relationships and communities.

This method consisted of both focus groups and one-on-one interviews

¹⁰ Training coach is a formerly incarcerated inside student now working for the Inside-Out Training Institute to help train future instructors.

conducted on Zoom with open ended questions. Two survey questions were asked to rate the effectiveness of specific methods (i.e. facilitation, icebreakers) that Inside-Out uses in its dialectic pedagogy. In particular, I wanted to know how strong the methods are in creating a sense of connection and belonging. In total, there were 5 focus groups: two with 7 outside students, two with 6 instructors, and one with 4 inside students. I also conducted 22 one-on-one interviews with 4 outside students, 3 inside students, 3 training coaches, and 12 instructors. Due to scheduling conflicts, one questionnaire was collected from a training coach using the same questions asked during the Zoom calls.

Each of the 40 people I interviewed—representing 4 countries and over 18 universities and colleges—received a questionnaire and were given a research consent form that allowed for anonymity. More importantly, they were given the option to review all quotes that would be used in this report.

The limitations to my findings include:

- I did not build identity questions, such as race, gender, or sexual identity into the questionnaire. This will limit the ability to show how intersectionality plays a role in the success of Inside-Out's students and alumni.
- The inability to speak to inside alumni who are still incarcerated due to the time it takes for ethics to be reviewed. This limitation hindered me from seeing the impact of Inside-Out on those who have since been released v.s. those still incarcerated.
- There has been limited research on how to track holistic personal transformations, or social/soft skills gained through prison education programs

like Inside Out; most research instead focuses on tracking recidivism rates and solely uses this barometer to determine the value of prison education programs.

- Timeline constraints with many interviews, and only 4 months to complete the project; having more time would have allowed for a deeper analysis of the data to develop further insights to affect programmatic change.

I urge more research to be done on the intersectionalities of Inside-Out and how the class diversity and make up between inside students, outside students and instructors may/may not impact the success of the program. Research should also be conducted with inside alumni that are still incarcerated, to learn what holistic transformation looks like for them. With limited research in the area of holistic or gained social skills regarding those who take college classes in prison, it is important that more research be done to document qualitative information on the success of students.

My interview questionnaire was broken down into 4 key categories: questions on facilitation, questions on Inside-Out's methodology, questions concerning impact, and questions about the social-ecological model. Through interviews, I developed a 5th category for unexpected findings. Under each question category emerged several interesting and enlightening themes. Under the category of facilitation, 3 themes emerged: Building Community, Modeling Behavior, and Fostering a Brave Space for Discussion. For the category of Inside-Out methodology and its impact there were 5 themes: The Circle, Small Group Discussion, Icebreakers, Creating Inclusion, and Conversations are the Connections. Under the category of social-ecological framework, are 6 themes: Career Trajectory, Upward Mobility, Development of 'Soft' Skills, Breaking Down Barriers/Stereotypes, Healing/Restorative Justice, and Creating New Programs

with Inside-Out concepts. The last thematic category of unexpected findings is, Liberation, Humanity, Challenge Stigmas, and a New Way to Teach.¹¹

These themes will build on my argument that Inside-Out is a transformative learning experience that changes lived in both measurable and intangible ways.

1.3 Table of Core Themes

Category	Theme
Facilitation	Building Community
	Modeling Behaviour
	Fostering Brave Discussion Space
Methodology	The Circle
	Small Group Discussions
	Icebreakers
Impact	Creating Inclusion
	Conversation are the Connection
Social-Ecological Framework	Career Trajectory
	Upward Mobility
	Development of Soft Skills: Emotional Intelligence, Empathy, Communication Skills
	Breaking Down Barriers/Stereotypes
	Healing/Restorative Justice
	Created New Program/Inside-Out Concepts
Unexpected	Liberation
	Humanity

¹¹ This category does not have its own section, as I used quotes from these themes throughout the report.

	Challenge Stigmas
	New Way to Teach

2. THE ISSUE

Inside-Out is best known for producing transformational educational experiences, with most of this evidence emerging from an examination of student comments, which sometimes includes writing assignments at the end of the semester.¹² Even part of Inside-Out’s mission statement talks about creating opportunities for a transformative education; “Inside-Out’s mission is to create opportunities for people inside and outside of prison to have transformative learning experiences that emphasize collaboration and dialogue, inviting them to take leadership in addressing vital issues of social justice.”¹³

In the findings, there is evidence to suggest that the transformative power lies in both the art of facilitation as well the pedagogical tools/methods that Inside-Out uses, which are vehicles for belonging and connectedness. More importantly, I found that the success and positive impact of the program for both students and instructors, and upward mobility and development of soft skills for inside students, can be barometers used in place of recidivism rate.

A 2013 meta analysis of prison education programs found that educational classes reduce recidivism rates by 43% and lead to positive post release employment

¹² Brian R. Wyant and Brian Lockwood. “Transformative Learning, Higher Order Thinking, and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program.” *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)* 69, no. 3 (2018): 49–67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26864112>.

¹³ “About Us,” Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/about-inside-out.html>.

opportunities.¹⁴ Recidivism rates remain the most common indicator or metric that prison education programs measure. However, as previously noted, Inside-Out does not track recidivism rates. Instead, Inside-Out has historically aimed to collect people's stories and experiences, focusing on the positive impact the program has had on people's full selves or lives. This begs the question, is recidivism the only metric that college and/or educational courses in prisons should track, and is it even the most crucial? What about people's success and stories? What about their accounts of transformation?

"Inside-Out has strengthened my intercommunication skills. It has given me more confidence. It has inspired me and restored my hope in our justice system. This program has allowed me to network and meet amazing people, which has led to wonderful opportunities. Together I think we will continue to achieve progress in our communities, as well as society as a whole."¹⁵

Inside-Out is able to make people feel valued, seen, connected, and creates lasting change. Here is how an Inside Student felt the program changed his life:

"Inside-Out, it's gonna change the trajectory of my life. I wouldn't have been able to pursue a bachelor's degree [...]. I was an introvert. In the classroom initially [I was] intimidated, but I was able to develop effective communication and express myself [...] also have empathy [...]. I will continue to pursue my masters next year"¹⁶

Inside-Out takes this a step further: not only are there positive outcomes for those incarcerated, but since the class is made up of inside and outside students, college students also walk away with new perspectives, and even new career paths.

Outside students aren't engaging in charity, they're meeting other classmates on the

¹⁴ MNEESHA GELLMAN. "Afterword: Reflections on Bringing College to Prison." In *Education Behind the Wall: Why and How We Teach College in Prison*, 186–98. Brandeis University Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jhjv6j.16>.

¹⁵ Miranda Gileo (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), questionnaire written by the author, questionnaire completed July 14, 2023.

¹⁶ Danny Camarena (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Inside Student Focus Group (Zoom), June 22, 2023.

same playing field and building skills. As noted by one outside student, “I was hired as a case manager at a correctional facility and Inside-Out helped prepare me for that job.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, one of the limitations in this report was the inability to interview current inside students, or people who are currently incarcerated. I found it difficult to reach inside students who are no longer incarcerated, because the majority of them are not connected to Inside-Out’s listserv.¹⁸ It is through listserv that I sent my initial email blasts to solicit for interviews. The inside students I was able to interview were recommended by former instructors, or I knew them personally. As a result, I was only able to interview a total of 11 individuals. In total, Inside-Out has had over 60,000 students and trained over 1,400 instructors, so although 40 is a significant number of people to engage over a four month period, this number pales in comparison to the total number of instructors or alumni.

3. KEY FINDINGS

The power of Inside-Out is enabled by having a well trained facilitator who uses the Inside-Out tools that by design, engender belonging and social connectedness. These tools help produce an environment of inclusion, where students feel welcomed and develop a sense of belonging that eventually helps transform the lives of all involved. The instructor is a key cog in this dynamic, by using tools learned in instructor training to build community, learn how to model behavior, and foster a brave space. The facilitator and students are able to create this space with the help of the Inside-Out tools such as the circle, small group discussions, and icebreakers. With these tools enabling

¹⁷ Nicole Thompson (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student Focus Group #2 (Zoom), June 27, 2023.

¹⁸ An email list of instructors, former students, and other professionals staying connected to Inside-Out.

social connectedness and belonging, students began to feel included and become willing to learn through shared dialogue, which helps create the transformative education.

Inside-Out's ability to create a transformative education experience gives students and instructors an opportunity to transform their lives individually, relationally, in their communities and socially. This has been documented with accounts such as upward mobility, changes in career, development of soft skills, the ability to heal from trauma, and developing classes and programs using the Inside-Out model.

3.1. Facilitation

3.1.1 The Role of Facilitators in Creating Connectedness & Belonging

Coming into a prison setting for the first time or taking a college course for the first time can be very nerve wracking and challenging. Inside and outside students are both coming into new and potentially daunting environments. At the start of any Inside-Out class, the instructors need to take the lead and set a tone in order to build community and comfort, so that all students are able to thrive and have meaningful challenging conversations whilst feeling safe to do so. Dialogic pedagogy is only effective if people are really engaging in conversation as equals.¹⁹ In the interview, analysis phrases like “set the tone,” “set the stage,” “making folks feel comfortable,” “creating an environment to learn,” came from students as well as instructors. Themes such as building community, modeling behavior, and fostering a brave space came up as key pieces explaining the role a facilitator has in creating a sense of belonging in a class.

¹⁹ Lori Pompa, M. Crabbe, E. Turenne, “Inside-Out Instructor’s Manual,” (2018).

3.1.2 Theme: Building Community

In Inside-Out, the instructor is not a lecturer; instead, everyone is learning from each other through shared dialogue. As such, there is a strong need to build a sense of community where everyone feels comfortable, valued, and heard. This approach is fueled by a 6 day intensive Instructor Training, where interested faculty learn from a team of formerly incarcerated coaches and experienced instructors. This team of facilitators teaches incoming instructors how to build “classroom communities dedicated to dialogue, critical reflection, experiential learning, and responsible collective educational inquiry.”²⁰

The instructor in Inside-Out is instrumental in building a classroom where all students respect one another, which allows students to be comfortable sharing (sometimes traumatic) lived experiences, learning from one another, and feeling safe to be vulnerable in the process.

One inside student explained how the instructor made them feel comfortable, which later led to them openly sharing and engaging in the learning process.

“Everyone is super nervous coming in [...]. The facilitator played a huge role in making everyone comfortable in the room, comfortable enough to go deep and speak on whatever [...] able to share anything [...], be comfortable with other people accepting your thoughts and ideas.”²¹

An Inside-Out Instructor goes on to further explain that they are not just lecturing, but are part of the learning process, and even the community building process:

“The facilitator doesn't have to really do a whole lot, they can kind of take a backseat, make sure they're asking the right questions, make sure they're looking for things that might pop up that need to be addressed. But

²⁰ Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell, *Turning Teaching inside out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²¹ Inside Student #1 (Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 22, 2023.

I think the beauty of Inside-Out to me is [that] it takes you, as an educator, out of, [the] “I’m doing things to you, or for you” [mindset] and into the “I’m doing things with you.” And so you’re not lecturing, you are building a community.”²²

The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC) believes “social connectedness means working towards a society where everyone is valued, seen and heard; where everyone can exercise their agency [...] where solidarity, trust and cooperation pave the way for community.”²³ Some interviewees noted that the content of the class is often secondary to how the facilitator builds community or a feeling of connectedness among students.

For Inside-Out, the goal of building community starts before the first foot enters the classroom door. Each semester, the instructor meets with all the students individually to let them know what to expect and to explain the Inside-Out methodology. In interviews, instructors stated that this process sparks rapport immediately. The intentional act of holding a one-on-one meeting prior to the semester encourages some of the outside students to be at ease as they enter the prison space, while empowering inside students and letting them know they are equals. Eight students and instructors have stated that bringing the class together in this way, and building community, are big roles that the facilitator plays in creating a sense of belonging.

3.1.3 Theme: Modeling Behavior

Ten instructors and 6 student interviewees mentioned the importance of modeling behavior to create a sense of belonging while facilitating an Inside-Out class.

²² Derrick Franke (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 10, 2023.

²³ “About Social Connectedness,” Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/about-social-connectedness/>.

“The role of the facilitator is critical [...]. I would go around the circle and shake each person's hand [...]. I have had people say, “I’ve never had anyone in your kind of position come to me and extend their hand and say, ‘How are you today?’” The facilitator is important, but not the only important role.”²⁴

Shaking the hands of all the students helps exemplify the care and compassion that former students discussed during interviews.

“If instructors are not mindful, caring, compassionate, and able to model appropriately, then I can't imagine producing fruitful situations in the class [...]. I think facilitators play a huge role.”²⁵

Nine of the 16 people who thought modeling behavior was important cited “setting the tone” as crucial when asked about the facilitator's role in creating a sense of social connectedness or community. One inside student remarked that this helped him feel at ease.

“The facilitators set the tone for the class because we all—the inside and outside students—come with certain preconceptions, and fears and concerns and anxieties, and they put everyone at ease because of their warmth, [their] genuine concern. The connectedness and this belonging comes from them.”²⁶

Facilitators talked about instructor vulnerability, and the need to be genuine in order to meaningfully invite students to do the same.

“I think the potential role for a skilled facilitator to cultivate belonging is profound [...]. Setting the tone and kind of coaching it, I would also think of it as modeling it [...]. A facilitator creates a space for genuine human connection and belonging through modeling their own vulnerability, that's part of how we feel a sense of belonging [...]. I think when you embody

²⁴ Anonymous Instructor (Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 28, 2023.

²⁵ Charleen Justice (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student Focus Group #1(Zoom), June 19, 2023.

²⁶ Thomas Burke (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 7, 2023.

your own vulnerability—particularly as a facilitator—from the first moments, it invites everyone else to step into vulnerability and belonging as well.”²⁷

The Inside-Out instructor training models the classroom setting of inside and outside students through hiring formerly incarcerated people to help co-facilitate the 6-day long intensive.²⁸ Using incarcerated (when training was held inside a prison) and formerly incarcerated²⁹ folks to co-facilitate in the 6 day long intensive training helps incoming instructors to see formerly incarcerated people as leaders, sparking their own process of de-stigmatization.³⁰ The instructors are trained to model behavior such as people's first language when talking to inside students, making sure to not use the word “convict” to address their fellow classmates, and/or greeting and shaking the hands of all the inside students before class begins. By setting the example and showing the students how to treat one another, the instructor is setting the tone to create an environment of respect and equality for a class mostly made of students across many differences, but also physical barriers (i.e. prison fences).

3.1.4 Theme: Fostering a Brave Space for Discussion

As part of my research, I attended the 86th International Instructor Training program and completed the 6 day intensive course via Zoom. On day 3, we had a brainstorming session on creating a brave space in the classroom. During this session, all the trainees had an opportunity to say what a brave space feels like and/or looks like

²⁷ Becca Pickus (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Instructor Focus Group #2 (Zoom), July 6, 2023.

²⁸ Norman Conti, Linda Morrison, and Katherine Pantaleo, “All the Wiser: Dialogic Space, Destigmatization, and Teacher-Activist Recruitment,” *The Prison Journal* 93, no. 2 (January 24, 2013): 163–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885512472654>.

²⁹ Since Covid-19 (2020) pandemic majority of the training is held on Zoom.

³⁰ Norman Conti, Linda Morrison, and Katherine Pantaleo, “All the Wiser: Dialogic Space, Destigmatization, and Teacher-Activist Recruitment,” *The Prison Journal* 93, no. 2 (January 24, 2013): 163–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885512472654>.

to them. We discussed the importance of allowing students to be seen and heard in class in order for a dialogical pedagogy to exist. A poem was read called “An Invitation to a Brave Space” written by Micky Scott-Bey Jones (a former inside student).³¹ After reading the poem, we discussed how to create this kind of space in our own classrooms. A very intentional part of the training is to give incoming instructors the tools to create an environment for transformative learning to take place. I believe a brave space creates a means for a person to have agency, to be heard, and to have the power to make decisions for themselves.

“The facilitators play an important role, it's their responsibility to ensure the Inside-Out model is carried out in every class, [...]. Inciting each individual classmate to share creates connectedness and belonging, [...] providing a safe space to all students to openly share thoughts, ideas and perspective[s].”³²

“The facilitation is ideally helping people connect the material to their own lives in ways that allow them to understand one another better, understand themselves better [...] and to give them opportunities to stretch beyond what they're accustomed to, in terms of both listening and sharing [...]. When they do that, they feel appreciated, respected, heard [...], they (students) feel like a necessary part of the endeavor [...]. Those are all constituent elements of belonging.”³³

Both of the quotes above, the first from a former inside student now training coach, and the second from an instructor, demonstrate how the job of the facilitator is to provide a space for the students to feel seen and heard. Fostering this space helps create a sense of belonging. The second quote shows a facilitator understanding their role in creating this space, allowing students to feel heard, appreciated, and respected.

³¹ See Appendix Fig. 2.

³² Miranda Gileo, (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), questionnaire written by the author, questionnaire completed July 14, 2023.

³³ Shaul Cohen, (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

According to the interviewees, the Inside-Out instructor plays a pivotal role in creating a sense of belonging for the class. This is done by building community and modeling behavior, which in turn helps them to create a space where the students are active participants and leaders in the dialogic teaching process. Students becoming brave enough to be open to learning from others and utilizing their experience as context to help change perspectives of their classmates is the foundation created by the facilitator.

"I think the facilitator plays a huge role [...] when you have a professor who is engaging, and pushing students to be their best selves, and out of their comfort zones [...]. That creates a space where everyone can be heard and then also pushes everyone to challenge themselves while still understanding the outside limitations of an oppressive system."³⁴

3.2. The Inside-Out Methodology: Fostering Belonging Through Dialogic Pedagogy

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program uses many methods in its innovative pedagogy. During interviews three methods that were mentioned more than any other were the “circle”, icebreakers, and small group discussions.

3.2.1 Theme: The Circle

The “circle process” is a vital piece to Inside-Out class. This tool was mentioned by 27 people during focus groups and interviews when the question of Inside-Out methodology was asked.

In all discussions, it's either a large group (entire class) or small group discussions (3 to 6 individuals), and the students are always seated in a circle. The process of having everyone in a circle symbolizes community, which is vital for those

³⁴ Madison England (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 6, 2023.

incarcerated, as they have been separated from their communities. Folks are able to speak directly with one another, eye-to-eye, versus having an instructor in front of the class lecturing to them.³⁵

Traditionally, Indigenous communities use talking circles to bring folks together, in order to teach, listen, and learn. Talking circles give communities the opportunity to express their thoughts in large groups whilst recognising the value of the speaker.³⁶ Just as the circle has historically been used by Indigenous communities to create a space where everyone can participate as equals, Inside-Out similarly uses the circle as a foundational tool to create a brave space for everyone to learn in. This format of sharing and communication has proven very successful in creating spaces where there is reciprocity in the way people feel heard, valued and that they belong.

Inside-Out is intentional in dissecting classroom power dynamics and creating open discussion. It focuses on the “decentering of the instructor [...] and the bringing in of the students into the center.”³⁷ One such aspect of these dynamics is having the inside and outside students sit around the circle in alternating inside-outside order. This is part of what fosters inclusion, belonging and connection from the very start; that each inside student is sat next to an outside student, and vice versa.

"I think Inside-Out is very special in the way that it sets up that dynamic from the beginning [...]. Each group is different, but if we set people up [in] every other chair, if we ask a good question, if we let people ask embarrassing questions, and then get people in a room and have them

³⁵ “About Us,” Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, accessed August 1, 2023, <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/about-inside-out.html>.

³⁶ Paulette Running Wolf and Julie A. Rickard, “Talking Circles: A Native American Approach to Experiential Learning,” *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 31, no. 1 (January 2003): 39–43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2003.tb00529.x>.

³⁷ Gabby Yearwood (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 14, 2023.

*talk, that methodology is very strong, and [...] I've never seen that not work."*³⁸

Specifically, inside students shared their experience of not feeling lost, or being able to hide in the circle, and the importance of the circle in empowering and encouraging eye contact with others.

*"[It's a] very effective style, because you don't feel like you get lost in the numbers of a class when it's that personal. Everybody's in this circle, and obviously a circle is complete, right? It's gonna keep going around and around and around. You're always gonna be together in a circle versus columns of people in a regular college class. In a circle, you're forced to look at each other and talk to each other and have eye contact, and there's no cell phones in there. The circle was a very holistic kind of setting."*³⁹

Some instructors said the circle had power, and compared this format to restorative circles. I also believe the circle had power. When I walked into my first Inside-Out class in 2014 and saw chairs aligned in a circle, my first thought was, "this is weird." However, by the end of the semester, I felt that the circle had given me an opportunity to be heard and to be seen, as there was nowhere to hide. For the first time in my life, I felt a sense of belonging in that circle, because when I talked about my lived experiences, I could see the eyes of everyone listening to me. That class was what some would call my "intellectual espresso," making me feel rejuvenated.

"That's the power of the circle, really going back to restorative justice, [if] you get people in a circle long enough, eventually, they'll begin to dance. You know, George Carlin said once [...] [this] initially causes anxiety, it initially causes a little bit of fear. And much like in a restorative conference,

³⁸ Katie Dwyer (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 21, 2023.

³⁹ Paul Boyd (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

*[...] emotions go from fear to anger and maybe uncomfortability, to a place of connection, relief and joy. I think that Inside-Out does the same thing.*⁴⁰

In my analysis, the circle was mentioned 27 times by people I had contact with in this process, which indicates how important this tool is, both to those taking the course and the facilitators.

3.2.2 Theme: Small Group Discussions

Small group discussion was another powerful Inside-Out method mentioned many times by instructors and students. Most classes start in a large group (a normal group is 30: 15 inside students, 15 outside students), and once a topic or group activity is determined, people are divided into smaller groups. Since small groups are only 3 to 6 students, they are an effective way to empower students to be more involved, allowing them to share in a more intimate space, without the pressure of a larger group's eyes and ears; a potentially anxiety-inducing situation for some. The groups typically have an equal number of outside and inside students. The facilitator gives the class a task to perform in the small groups, whether it be the prior week's readings or a question such as, "What are prisons for?" These small groups give the students an opportunity to connect more deeply, and have their voices heard in a way that might not be possible in a larger group, further strengthening peer to peer connections.

*"So much of what goes on in Inside-Out is based on sharing, discussing, and listening to what everyone else has to say [...] I think that's conducive for connection."*⁴¹

⁴⁰ Derrick Franke (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 10, 2023.

⁴¹ Charleen Justice (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student Focus Group #1 (Zoom), June 19, 2023.

An inside student talked about the importance of accessing the emotional side of your brain in a shared dialogue environment, and how that organically produces connectedness and belonging.

“There's studies that show that we access the emotional side of the brain when we are in a shared dialogue environment versus just a teacher up front lecturing [...]. The way the class is set up creates the connectedness and belonging organically. I never had this connectedness with classmates while I received my Bachelors on a college campus.”⁴²

For a class that is only on average 15 weeks long to produce a more meaningful sense of connection or belonging than a multi-year Bachelors is a profound statement. When there is shared conversation and no competition with other students, this creates a setting where individuals are more open and receptive to new ideas and to learning from one another.

“Creating community and belonging around shared conversation, shared reading and then not having the stress or anxiety about competition about tests and exams helps create a classroom dynamic in which students can be really open and receptive with each other.”⁴³

Shared dialogue, the meaningful and barrier breaking conversations, and the small group sizes were all mentioned by those interviewed in this project as an important Inside-Out method. I believe the small group discussions were very impactful in my Inside-Out class. The smaller group was a space where even more thoughts and ideas spawned from, because there were people who felt more comfortable speaking in the smaller group versus the larger group. Through the small groups, ideas were able to make it to the entire class, as we always reported back our thoughts to the larger group after the small group exercise was over.

⁴² Inside Student #1 (Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 22, 2023.

⁴³ Lauren Mayes (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Instructor Focus Group #1 (Zoom), June 27, 2023.

3.2.3 Theme: Icebreakers

The Inside-Out Instructor's manual talks about icebreakers being important to alleviate the participants' anxiety, to connect with classmates without being personally intrusive, and as a way to help build community.⁴⁴

One icebreaker that was mentioned often was "The Wagon Wheel." This exercise involves inside and outside students forming two concentric circles and sitting across from one another as the instructor reads a question, for example, 'what was the last book you read?' Then, 3 minutes are given to discuss the question. The non-invasive questions allow students to get to know one another, not as 'inmates' or 'college students,' but as fellow human beings.

Interestingly, none of the 11 inside students I interviewed referred to the 'icebreakers' as being the most important part of the program. As someone who's taken the class, I believe the reason for this is that the class takes place in prison. This is the space that inside students utilize daily and are living in, rather than a new environment they're trying to acclimate to. In turn, trying to get acclimated and feeling comfortable in a new environment via icebreakers is more important to instructors who are trying to build community, and outside students who are trying to get comfortable in an unknown environment.

"The initial wheel exercises instantly gets you to the point where you see only similarities and humanness with everyone else in that space [...] starting out with the likeness, as opposed to difference and othering, was something I thought was done [...] intentionally and effectively."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Lori Pompa, M. Crabbe, E. Turenne, "Inside-Out Instructor's Manual," (2018).

⁴⁵ "Jennifer" (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 19, 2023.

“Starting the class with icebreakers and a question [...] that worked in breaking down the room and making people feel more comfortable.”⁴⁶

Icebreakers were seen as bringing people together and cultivating the ability to see the humanity in those across from you. Instructors were particularly aware of this process, and all 12 of them mentioned it in interviews.

“There are similarities and differences, and as a result, we know that the stereotypes that we all hold, because we're humans, start to dissolve layer by layer. So the ice breakers, all help to connect and for all of us to recognize the humanity of everyone.”⁴⁷

“Creating those open icebreakers where people can share and find connections, where they never thought they could and think in ways that connect everybody [...] We all have hurt, we all love, we all have dreams, we all wish to connect at a deeper level. And icebreakers are a way to connect everyone.”⁴⁸

A weekly Inside-Out class normally starts in a large group of all the students and the instructor in a circle, then moves into icebreakers, then later to small group discussions. In analyzing the themes involving Inside-Out methodology, a thread that continues to be woven is that of connection and belonging. The question is, “How does a student feel that connection and belonging?” The next two themes ‘Creating Inclusion’ and ‘Conversations are the Connection’ will detail how interviewees understand belonging within the Inside-Out context. These themes aim to answer how belonging and connection can be created through the Inside-Out methodology.

⁴⁶ Nicole Thompson (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program) Outside Student Focus Group #2 (Zoom), June 27, 2023.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Cobbina (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 6, 2023.

⁴⁸ Schannae Lucas (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 11, 2023.

3.2.4 Theme: Creating Inclusion

Both inside and outside students talked about the feeling of being heard, being seen, and how the circle, small group discussions, and the icebreakers made them feel like they belonged in the space. In particular, when the circle is mentioned, the folks I interviewed talked about how the circle allowed them to look into the eyes of their classmates, have no place to hide, know there was an open seat for them, know they had a role to play in the space, and know that they will need to contribute. Through dialogue, inside and outside students quickly discover that they are more alike than different, even though some are coming from a college campus, a place of liberty, and some from prison, a place of oppression and confinement.

A space where people are learning, feeling heard, being included and empowered to be brave enough to share their experiences is not the norm in prison. In my experience being vulnerable and sharing life experiences in prison could make you a target to be taken advantage of by other incarcerated people. Through Inside-Out only 15 inside students are selected out of an entire prison to take part in a class that creates inclusion and agency makes this space rare. An inside student talks about the rarity of the space that Inside-Out creates:

“This rare space [creates] the opportunity for people with different backgrounds to establish common ground and a sense of community. Learning that we are all more alike than we have previously realized.”⁴⁹

An outside student talks about how sitting in a circle every week feels equalizing:

“Sitting in a circle every week [...] really jumps out in my mind as something that was equalizing [...] walking into a space and immediately seeing a space for you to sit, and everyone knows that you are coming

⁴⁹ Miranda Gileo, (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), questionnaire written by the author, questionnaire completed July 14, 2023.

and you're accepted there. I think [this] really is part of the methodology that to me, is something that was useful for creating connectedness or belonging."⁵⁰

Instructors talked about the need for the methodology in order for connection and belonging to occur, but at times do not understand how it is all happening:

"I do believe that the Inside-Out methodology is central to creating the sense of belonging [amongst the class]. Some of the specific pedagogical components that cultivate a sense of belonging include the seating arrangements, the icebreakers, the intentional arc of the semester, and the awareness that we start the semester not knowing each other and the importance of initial activities that, as quickly as possible, create connections on a human level that start to break down a perceived or perhaps feared sense of difference."⁵¹

More than half of folks interviewed mentioned the idea of inclusion. As tools like 'the circle' begin to give people a feeling of agency, empowerment and inclusion, then the sense of belonging and connection can be realized. Would these tools engender belonging and connection without creating inclusion? SCSC believes that "reciprocity, respect, and recognition are the values of social connectedness."⁵² All three values are needed in order for meaningful inclusion to be created, and through multiple methods, Inside-Out creates the space for true inclusion, and subsequently belonging, to thrive.

3.2.5 Theme: Conversations are the Connection

Inside-Out pedagogy is designed around dialogue between students as well as the instructor. As discussed previously, this dialogue occurs both in large and small groups. The conversations arise out of the lesson plan and through activities that are designed so that everyone is able to be involved in the discussions. The flow of

⁵⁰ Paige Hill (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 19, 2023.

⁵¹ Becca Pickus (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Instructor Focus Group #2 (Zoom), July 6, 2023.

⁵² "About Social Connectedness," Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/about-social-connectedness/Samuel>.

Inside-Out is also intentional; after a sense of community has been built, or after some walls have come down through icebreakers, it's then time for the big conversations to begin. Conversations are the thread that weave the experience and pedagogy together. "The material makes for great conversations and contrasting thoughts [...] it's the small groups..and conversations that make the connectedness [...]."⁵³ One instructor talks about the transformative power of the methodology being the dialogue.

"I think about it as transformative education [...]. And so I feel the potential for this transformation to get to know each other and to principally break down those walls, get through all of those misconceptions [...] every single class. The potential for transformation is there through the methodology of dialogue."⁵⁴

Research suggests that critical thinking normally occurs in classrooms that encourage participation and multiple viewpoints.⁵⁵ Inside-Out intentionally encourages students to learn from one another regardless of their position as 'incarcerated students' or 'college students'. Learning from one another's life experiences is part of the critical thinking that Inside-Out creates.

"I just thought, the variation of discussion (moving from large groups to small groups) made it so it was always fresh, you were always getting fresh perspectives, you were always learning new things about each other in different kinds of ways. And so I think dialogue based learning is really positive [...] it couldn't have been done another way [...] that's the biggest part of it."⁵⁶

Another student talked of what each one brings to the table:

⁵³ Tamir Bell (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Inside Student Focus Group, June 22, 2023.

⁵⁴ Javier Perez (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Instructor Focus Group (Zoom), July 6, 2023.

⁵⁵ Brian R. Wyant and Brian Lockwood. "Transformative Learning, Higher Order Thinking, and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program." *Journal of Correctional Education (1974-)* 69, no. 3 (2018): 49–67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26864112>.

⁵⁶ Rylie Hager (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 7, 2023.

“The methodology is so amazing, because it's not only the learning that we're going to do, it's what we each bring to the table that makes that learning so significant.”⁵⁷

I heard over and over, passionately, how powerful learning from one another was. Prisons and colleges are diametrically opposed institutions in many ways: one is a place of oppression and confinement, and one is a place of questioning, learning, and ultimately freedom. That is part of what makes Inside-Out so impactful; the understanding that people who on the surface have so many differences, can and should learn from one another through dialogue. Does this happen because the students begin to realize that they are more similar than what may be suggested to them by both society and the institutions they represent?

In the past, Maclaren has suggested that the power of Inside-Out is in the revelation, through dialogue, that students have many commonalities. But, it's their differences that are used to be able to learn from one another. With this idea, self-transformation begins.⁵⁸

In the book *Turning Teaching Inside-Out*, Bumiller talks about the potential for transformative learning in Inside-Out being linked to students being able to transverse the physical and ideological boundaries of prisons and universities. They explain that the crossing of these boundaries is theorized as the engine for transformation, and because Inside-Out creates a space for dialogue, personal redemption can occur, and the possibility to produce agents of change exists.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Joseph Schwartz (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 3, 2023.

⁵⁸ Kym Maclaren, “The Magic Happens Inside Out: A Reflection on the Transformative Power of Self-Expression and Dialogical Inquiry in Inside-Out Prison Exchange Courses,” *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 22, no. 4 (October 2015): 371–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2015.1075045>.

⁵⁹ Simone Weil Davis and Barbara Sherr Roswell, *Turning Teaching inside out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

The next section is focused on the impact the Inside-Out class has on people from a social-ecological framework. Through this lens, we will be able to see how the transformative process that may happen by taking an Inside-Out class shows up in the lives of students and instructors.

3.3. The Social-Ecological Framework

3.3.1 Relational, Individual, Community, and Societal Impacts of Inside-Out

How has the Inside-Out experience affected you individually, in relation to others, in your community, and societally?

What happens after the Inside-Out class is over? What is the impact this class has on the students and instructors? With transformative learning, ideas and thoughts are changed. Does the power of Inside-Out change the lives of those involved in the class? If so, how? With the documentation about the effects that college classes and/or higher education in prisons has on reducing recidivism, it was important to know if positive outcomes are produced through the transformative learning experience of Inside-Out. Since Inside-Out does not track recidivism, a social-ecological lens was used to see the effect Inside-Out had on participants once the class was completed. The social-ecological lens is viewing how participants in the Inside-Out program has applied its transformative properties personally, relationally, in community, and societally. Using this framework gave me an opportunity to see if Inside-Out impacts lives beyond the classroom, and if so, in what ways.

With transformative learning, everyone – outside, inside students, and lectures – have the opportunity to think more critically and change their perspectives. Through documenting the transformed lives of participants within the program, Inside-Out can set

itself apart from other prison education programs. People's stories and experiences are a valuable tool in demonstrating the transformative power of holistic programming.

In this section, I will highlight 6 themes generated by interviewees, Career Trajectory, Upward Mobility, Development of Soft Skills: (emotional intelligence, empathy, communication skills), Breaking Down Barriers/Stereotypes, Healing/Restorative Justice, and Creating New Programs with Inside-Out concepts.

3.3.2 Theme: Career Trajectory

For some of the instructors who I interviewed, Inside-Out has shaped their careers, their identities, and their teaching methods in other college courses they teach.

"Inside-Out helped bring me back to my core of who I am. Even though I was working on social justice related research and teaching [...]. Inside-Out kickstarted a deeper focus in that arena. In 2020, I thought, okay, if I can't do Inside-Out, then what am I going to do? How am I going to help be part of this change that I think Inside-Out represents? Today I am Acting Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion." ⁶⁰

"The degree of mentoring from our inside students, our inside leaders. I am truly the adult person in the world - the woman, the teacher - I am because of the encouragement and pushing from [these] men [inside students] that were all different ages [with] very different life experiences from me."⁶¹

3.3.3 Theme: Upward Mobility

Prior to Inside-Out, many current and former inside students had never taken college courses. However, after the program, many are now pursuing degrees, have obtained degrees, or are working in social justice fields. Their Inside-Out experiences have given them the confidence and hope to transform their lives and their future. When

⁶⁰ Carole Gibbs (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 30, 2023.

⁶¹ Katie Dwyer (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 21, 2023.

formerly incarcerated people return home, there is stigma in the community and it becomes difficult to find employment to provide for their families. Ten days after my release from prison, I was co-facilitating a college course on the campus of the University of Michigan. This job not only provided resources for my family, but it also was confirmation for them that I was making better decisions in my life.

The findings in a previous project indicate that prison education programs are worth investing in, because education enhances problem solving skills, increases chances of obtaining employment once released, and helps reduce recidivism.⁶² Many inside students, myself included, feel and speak on how Inside-Out has changed their lives.

“Inside-Out, it’s gonna change the trajectory of my life [...] I wouldn’t have been able to pursue a bachelor degree [...]. I was an introvert in the classroom [...] initially intimidated [...], but I was able to develop effective communication and express myself [...]. Also I have empathy [...] today, a lot of my support network are either professors that taught Inside-Out courses, or students [...]. Inside-Out has been very instrumental in my life [...] I will continue to pursue my masters next year.”⁶³

“Inside-Out was a direct effect personally, to where the tools I got, the learning I received, the experience and the network [changed my trajectory]. Now I have a non-profit, JAM (Juvenile Advocacy Mentorship). The non-profit, helping the community, is a residual to a lot of things that came from Inside-Out [...]. I was able to go to the University of Oregon [...], it was like a prison to school pipeline, as opposed to the school to prison pipeline I experienced as a young person.”⁶⁴

In some cases, Inside-Out helped students realize their potential:

⁶² Amanda Pompoco et al., “Reducing Inmate Misconduct and Prison Returns with Facility Education Programs,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 16, no. 2 (May 22, 2017): 515–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12290>.

⁶³ Danny Camarena (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program) Inside Student Focus Group (Zoom), June 22, 2023.

⁶⁴ Shawn Mcweeney (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

“It was because [of] Inside-Out that I was able to really figure out who I am, and understand what my potential is and what my capacity is [...]. [I asked myself] Well, what else can I do? In recognizing what my own needs were coming home, and not being prepared. Reentry has become very important to me. And fortunately, I hooked up with a really great nonprofit that we're doing really good work with. [I'm] doing virtual reentry programming, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. Inside-Out helped me get here.”⁶⁵

3.3.4 Theme: Development of ‘Soft’ Skills

Inside and outside students talked about having empathy for fellow classmates and for other people in their lives for the first time. Students also discussed having better communication skills and emotional intelligence after completing Inside-Out class.

“Empathy was something that came heavily in this class [...] being more understanding and compassionate with whoever I meet [...] I’ve been able to gain strengths and new perspectives.”⁶⁶

The program helped impact this student transition from being incarcerated to going to college on campus:

“Well, it's had a big impact on how I wasn't as awkward my first day on campus [Rutgers University] as I thought I was going to be. That played a big role. I didn't really know how big of a role being in an Inside-Out class would [make] once I was released [...] I would watch the other guys, you know, four of us going to campus every day, right? And two of the guys had never had any Inside-Out classes, just classes where a professor came to teach [...]. Inside-Out helped me adjust to campus life socially and the other guys struggled with that.”⁶⁷

An outside student talked passionately about how the class changed her view of society:

⁶⁵ Joseph Schwartz (Inside Student, Training Coach Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 3, 2023.

⁶⁶ Sophia Carrion (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student Focus Group #2 (Zoom), June 27, 2023.

⁶⁷ Paul Boyd (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

“The Inside-Out program really gave me a framework for an ethos of community-based work and learning in community with people, and doing things for social impact. On a personal note, learning more about [the] public health aspects [of] the drug epidemics facing our communities, to have more compassion in my personal relationships and [with] family members [...]. [I’ve started] thinking through problems more holistically [...] from a policy standpoint, the federal detention center in Philadelphia is right in the middle of the city [and] looks like any other skyscraper, except people aren’t allowed to leave. [I’m] thinking critically of where people are being placed.”⁶⁸

Other studies show that outside students become more empathetic to those in the carceral system after taking this class.⁶⁹ One of the ways the transformative power of Inside-Out is shown is when students are able to recognize their change in worldviews and expand their empathy.

3.3.5 Theme: Breaking Down Barriers/Stereotypes

Breaking down barriers and stereotypes was the most prominent theme within the social-ecological framework. Fifty percent of the people interviewed spoke about the importance of Inside-Out in breaking down barriers and stereotypes.⁷⁰ When students going into the criminal justice field are able to learn alongside incarcerated people and break down personal biases and stereotypes around those incarcerated, it becomes an important tool to humanize criminals.⁷¹ When professionals linked to the criminal justice system, such as prosecutors, probation officers, and police officers practice the humanization of people impacted by the criminal justice system, it results in more

⁶⁸ Paige Hill (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student focus Group #1 (Zoom), June 19, 2023.

⁶⁹ Cassandra Philippon et al., “Learning with the Others: Perspective-Taking and the Future of Criminal Justice in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program,” *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, February 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2023.2182898>.

⁷⁰ 14 instructors, 3 Inside students, 3 Outside students.

⁷¹ Ibid.

peaceful interactions, more progressive sentencing and prosecutions, and even an increase in non-violent mental health interventions. An outside student talks about how the dehumanizing people were “toxic for their soul”:

“Personally, Inside-Out has helped me see the humanity in the world. People who have committed crimes are demonized, they are not given empathy or understanding, and I didn’t have empathy for them once upon a time [...]. Walking around with that black and white, judgmental attitude, filled with hatred, is toxic for the soul.”⁷²

Another outside student likened Inside-Out to a piece of clothing, remarking how these various perspectives are part of one societal whole and system.

“Inside-Out is like a piece of clothing. For example you put it one way, then flip it the other way. It’s two different things you see, two different perspectives per se, but it’s still one entity. so Inside-Out to me is like taking different perspectives and unifying them.”⁷³

Some instructors talked about stereotyping inside students as not having enough education or not being smart. Breaking down barriers and stereotypes is a critical outcome with Inside-Out that helps people to unlearn the assumptions that are socially constructed, which claim that ‘people that are incarcerated can’t be smart.’ Others recognized the importance of using the voices of those inside as idea generators and inclusion of their voices in decision making.

“[I remember thinking] these guys are so smart. And then I had to think about like, okay, so why wouldn’t they be? You know, but even I had that bias as if just because those people are incarcerated, that they’re not going to be smart or intelligent, right? [...] I have met so many guys on the inside, they can run laps around me intellectually.”⁷⁴

⁷² Tamir Budner (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

⁷³ Nicole Thompson (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Outside Student Focus Group #2 (Zoom), June 27, 2023.

⁷⁴ Jennifer Cobbina (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 6, 2023.

"Inside-Out helps me see people who are incarcerated as collaborators, as co-conspirators, actually, as the idea generators with a set of perspectives and ways of approaching problems that need to be included in the conversation and in decision making. We need to not only make sure we understand people's stories and see them as human, which we often don't, but also flip who needs to lead and be at the table when we're figuring out how to try to solve problems."⁷⁵

Hearing the passion in the voice of one instructor about how Inside-Out has made him more egalitarian showed me just how impactful this program can be for everyone involved.

"I've been doing Inside-Out almost half my career [...]. I learned early on [that] people often aren't heard, they aren't asked what they think, what they need [...] if you give them that opportunity they are going to tell you things [...]. Everybody should be heard and respected. Inside-Out has made me more aware [...] more egalitarian."⁷⁶

Is this the result of instructors being part of the learning process and not just being present as lecturers or providers of information? From the response of instructors I would say that 'yes,' the pedagogy of Inside-Out that makes everyone part of the learning process through dialogue has impacted instructors' lives in many ways. The program has clearly impacted their identities, changed their careers, enabled them to constantly challenge the status quo, and changed their students' experiences.

3.3.6 Theme: Healing/Restorative Justice

Many people I spoke to talked about the program as being similar to other restorative practices, because of the focus on dialogue and active listening. Two

⁷⁵ Carol Gibbs (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 30, 2023.

⁷⁶ Shaul Cohen (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

interviewees expressed that the class acted as a personal space for healing and restorative justice.

“Jennifer” bravely discussed how her Inside-Out class helped her get through a very emotional legal case where she was a victim of a sexual assault on campus while enrolled in an Inside-out class.⁷⁷ It was hard for her to imagine the offender in her case going to prison and experiencing the same conditions as her current classmates. This gave way for her to design a restorative justice option for the perpetrator who assaulted her, which was for the first of its kind on campus. Going through with the class after the assault also helped “Jennifer” work through her feelings and anger. Ultimately, it also helped her family challenge their beliefs on the retributive system versus a restorative one.

“On the other side of my experience [of] seeking restorative justice over something punitive, it humbled my family in a way because they had to recognize that while I was choosing what I truly felt was best for me and best for the individual [...] it made them (my family) question their beliefs.”⁷⁸

Like “Jennifer,” an instructor intimately discussed how her Inside-Out classes also guided her healing process. She was able to work through her sister’s murder by engaging in dialogue and conversation with her students – ultimately creating a collaborative healing process for everyone involved.

“The healing opportunity for healing [the death] of my sister [...]. If you go back to the idea of we are all one [and] to be able to dialogue [the] experience, [it has] a certain healing (restorative justice) [quality]. Even though it wasn’t directly them in dialogue with the victims whose lives they had taken, or the actual person who had taken my sister’s life, it was a safe space where we could open up and share those feelings [and]

⁷⁷ “Jennifer” was a pseudonym chosen by the interviewee.

⁷⁸ “Jennifer” (Outside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 29, 2023.

*address them, each person from their own life experiences. That has been a very significant aspect of why Inside-Out has meant so much to me on a personal level.*⁷⁹

3.3.7 Theme: Creating New Programs Based on Inside-Out Concepts

Being able to model Inside-Out in other programs was important to two instructors and an inside student. The former inside student talked about the impact Inside-Out had on him and that he wanted to recreate that magic.

*"I'm still involved with Inside-Out right now. I always make time and space for Inside-Out because it's impacted me [...] now how can I recreate this inside-out "magic" [...] the class I help co-facilitate (Art and Agency) now, it takes on some of the same dynamics as Inside-Out."*⁸⁰

An instructor now uses formerly incarcerated people to co-instruct her on-campus decarceration activism class:

*"When the pandemic hit, I created a new class in summer 2020, which I call my decarceration activism class [...] and whatever honoraria funding, whatever research funding I can access, I use to hire the folks from my Inside-Out classes or from the Theory Group⁸¹ who have come home. For example, a lot of former juvenile lifers have come home. And so, this campus-based class centers on dialogic learning and lived experience as expertise, and uses a lot of the Inside-Out pedagogical approaches, but in this class the former inside students aren't the University students' peers; now, they're co instructors with me."*⁸²

Another instructor excitedly discussed how the experience with Inside-Out helped create a program to send children to college:

⁷⁹ Danielle Strickland (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, June 27, 2023.

⁸⁰ Tamir Bell (Inside Student, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Inside Student Focus Group (Zoom), June 22, 2023.

⁸¹ An Inside-Out Think Tank made up of selected Inside-Out Alumni and Instructors located at Macomb Correctional Facility in New Haven, MI

⁸² Becca Pickus (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), Instructor Focus Group #2 (Zoom), July 6, 2023.

“I realized the importance of mentoring other black men, so I created something called the Urban Youth Leadership Academy, which works with middle school students, it's like an academic pipeline program, similar to AAU, or any type of music program, we work with students as early as fifth grade, all the way till they get to college and beyond [...] seeing the work that we were able to do in the inside, that I was able to model.”⁸³

“Based on many years of experience, we recognize that Inside-Out creates an environment in which transformation can happen to people on many levels.”⁸⁴ This is a direct quote from the Inside-Out Instructor’s manual. For the 40 people I interviewed, it highlights that this class impacts people in many transformational ways: personally, intrapersonally, professionally, and communally.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPACT

The following recommendations are a result of the findings of this report, and focused on expanding Inside-Out and more comprehensively evaluating the program.

4.1. Track Alumni Success

My first recommendation is to develop a system to track former inside students’ successes. With evidence of the transformational aspect of the program and the upward mobility trends that inside students spoke of in this report, I believe tracking and documenting program success would be useful in attempts to secure more funding. The development of critical thinking and communication skills will help students navigate the challenges of reentry. The new skills obtained will give them the ability to contribute to society and support their family upon release from prison.⁸⁵ A

⁸³ Juwan Bennett (Instructor, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program), in discussion with the author, July 7, 2023

⁸⁴ Lori Pompa, M. Crabbe, E. Turenne, “Inside-Out Instructor’s Manual,” (2018).

⁸⁵ Emily Pelletier and Douglas Evans. “Beyond Recidivism: Positive Outcomes from Higher Education Programs in Prisons.” *Journal of Correctional Education* (1974-) 70, no. 2 (2019): 49–68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26864182>.

comprehensive tool that tracks program outcomes and long-term success of previous students could also help convince lawmakers at the federal and state level to allow the Inside-Out program to take place at more correctional facilities.

4.2. Track Recidivism

Inside-Out should track recidivism. Although recidivism rates are not an all-encompassing measure to determine funding allocation, I recommend Inside Out track recidivism, as it is the metric most commonly used to measure the success of educational programs in prison. Funding associated with increasing prison education often comes with the attached expectation of reduced recidivism rates. Therefore, in tracking recidivism, Inside-Out can position itself to be able to receive more funding to further expand the program.

However, it's important to note tracking recidivism does not always paint an accurate picture of post-prison success. For example, recidivism does not take into account or calculate upward mobility or lifestyle changes. Someone who was previously incarcerated may not find a job that pays them over the table, they may not pay their taxes, take part in their kids lives, or try to engage in their community, but if they don't go back to prison, then we deem that a success. What if, like Inside-Out, that person had experienced or been given different opportunities to better reintegrate into society? Compare that to some of Inside-Out's success stories, like people starting non-profits, working in justice organizations or going back to school; recidivism, though an important measure, doesn't seem to measure enough. Nonetheless, it is frequently used as a core measure for funding educational programs in prison, therefore Inside-Out should adopt

a system of tracking recidivism rates to help secure more funding. This should be done in tandem with tracking other successes and experiences.

4.3. Partner with Organizations that Focus on Belonging

Inside-Out should create a partnership with SCSC to perpetuate social connectedness and a sense of belonging. The qualitative evidence gathered in this report, along with survey questions (graphs located in the appendix), show that Inside-Out creates connectedness and belonging in its classrooms. This impact, coupled with SCSC's mission that every human should have a sense of belonging and the capacity to share resources, can expand belonging to more incarcerated people, not only in Canada and the U.S., but throughout the world.

4.4. Use the Inside-Out Model to Reach Other Marginalized Groups

Use the Inside-Out model to reach more underprivileged populations (i.e homeless, military veterans, elderly, foster children) to bring a sense of belonging and connection. With 69% of the community I interviewed feeling that a sense of belonging and connectedness happens in an Inside-Out class within the first 2 to 3 sessions, I believe the Inside-Out model can be replicated to serve underprivileged populations.⁸⁶ Developing workshops tailored to underprivileged populations that utilize Inside-Out methodologies could help build community and create belonging for more people. The workshops can be tailored to each community by surveying the people about what topics they would enjoy talking about, or concerns they would like to address.

⁸⁶ See appendix Fig. 4

4.5. Create a Diverse Institutional Review Board

Create an IRB (Institutional Review Board) to include inside students who are currently incarcerated, using the same research questions to determine how taking an Inside-Out class has affected them from a social-ecological framework.

What does holistic transformation look like for someone who took Inside-Out but is still incarcerated? How does participating in Inside-Out affect someone's institutional misconduct record? Is more education sought after taking Inside-Out? These, and so many more comparative questions, could be answered with a broader study.

4.6. Use Existing Research to Gain Program Insight

Utilize the evidence obtained in this study to do more in-depth, qualitative research coding, and gain more insight into the program. As the research fellowship was only 4 months, there was limited time to gather interviewees, engage in the research, conduct interviews and write a meaningful report. The 40 interviews I was able to conduct are full of rich information and experiences; I recommend additional time be dedicated to understanding and coding the interviews with the aim of developing further insights to affect programmatic change.

During this important project, I had inside and out students tell me that the one-on-one interview or focus group rekindled their excitement for Inside-Out, and that as a result, they are finding ways to get involved with the program or help justice-impacted folks.

By partnering with SCSC, local carceral settings, non-profit organizations, as well philanthropic organizations, and implementing the above recommendations, Inside-Out

has the opportunity to increase funding streams, access more resources, continue to expand, and impact more people.

5. CONCLUSION

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange program has proved itself a transformative learning experience for both instructors and students, inside and outside alike. The transformative power, sense of belonging and connectedness occur because of well trained facilitators, the dialectical pedagogy, the Inside-Out methods (the circle, small and large group discussions, icebreakers, intentional timing), and through bringing people together as classmates and equals. This is what a dialectic pedagogy is designed to do; through connection, help students overcome societal barriers, biases, and stereotypes, learn from one another as equals, and see each other as fully human.

With 25+ years of success, Inside-Out should continue to expand to more colleges and penal institutions to bring this transformative education to people who lack a sense of belonging and connectedness. The program should promote holistic measures that show success as well as utilize the documented achievements in upward mobility to help drive policy and funding. At its core, Inside-Out helps to challenge society's view that those incarcerated are somehow less than human. As Norman Conti and co-authors point out in *All the Wiser Dialogic Space, Destigmatization, and Teacher-Activist Recruitment*, "through structured encounters with [incarcerated and formerly incarcerated facilitators], trainees come to see, speak, and behave in ways that subvert conventional understandings of the stigma imposed on those in prison."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Norman Conti, Linda Morrison, and Katherine Pantaleo, "All the Wiser: Dialogic Space, Destigmatization, and Teacher-Activist Recruitment," *The Prison Journal* 93, no. 2 (January 24, 2013): 163–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032885512472654>.

I feel that the Inside-Out methodology and facilitation lines up with Mezirow's theory on transformative learning: the process of effecting change on our structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences.⁸⁸ From a socio-ecological framework, those interviewed talked about stereotypes being annihilated and barriers being broken down, about having empathy for those incarcerated, and inside students feeling true empathy for their victims, and wanting to create better outcomes by changing their lives. People credit these successes and impacts to the program. Mezirow outlines the process of transformative learning as beginning with educators helping learners become aware of their assumptions, and then facilitating learners to participate in discourse.⁸⁹ He further notes that effective discourse happens when facilitators create a situation where learners have equal opportunity to assume various roles of discourse.⁹⁰

This research has some parallels with Inside-Out and transformative learning theory, and I believe highlights how Inside-Out is fundamentally transformative. I believe Inside-Out is set apart from a regular college class inside a prison or on a college campus, both of which are extremely important, due to its ability to create belonging and deep social connection through its dialectic pedagogy. By taking college-based students inside carceral settings, Inside-Out not only has the potential to transform the lives of those incarcerated, but also the potential to alter the lives of the outside students. Seeing the impact from a social-ecological perspective on multiple groups (inside students, outside students, and instructors) in this study with a small sample size, I

⁸⁸ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice," *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education* 1997, no. 74 (1997): 5–12, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

believe Inside-Out would benefit from a larger scaled project to help promote the success of the program, which should help in funding and expanding the program.

One instructor shared that Inside-Out makes her students feel and act differently:

"One thing I was thinking about in terms of cultivating the sense of belonging, I think about the Maya Angelou quote - I am not going to repeat it perfectly - but the gist is that 'you don't remember what people told you, what people did, you remember how they made you feel' [...]. In the winter 2020 semester when we had to move all our classes online in mid-March, my students had been inside, maybe, two to three times at most. Compared to a full semester, they had barely even started. And yet, I continue to have students from that semester email me years later saying that those 2 or 3 times learning with their inside peers remains the most formative educational experience they've ever had. And I have to believe that's because of how the experience made them feel: they felt [a] sense of belonging, they felt [a] sense of human connection, even during just two or three class sessions."⁹¹

Another instructor talked about how the program has had an impact on them, unlike any other class they've taught, saying, "Breaking down in the garage and crying [...] no other class does that to me."⁹²

However, the deeply transformative nature of the Inside-Out program was best illustrated by this instructor, who powerfully stated: "I had to go into a prison to have the best teaching experience. I had to go into a prison to find care and to find my own self worth."⁹³

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APPENDIX

Fig. 1

QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS/ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS

CORE QUESTIONS FOR ALL FOCUS GROUPS:

1. What does Inside-Out mean to you?
2. What impact do you think Inside-Out had on you?
3. What role do the facilitators play in creating the Inside-Out experience?
4. What role if any did the facilitator play in creating connectedness / belonging?
5. Does the Inside-Out methodology (learning that takes place through dialog) create a sense of belonging? If so, how? How was it sustained?
6. How has the Inside-Out experience affected you individually, in relation to others, in your community, and societally?

Fig. 2

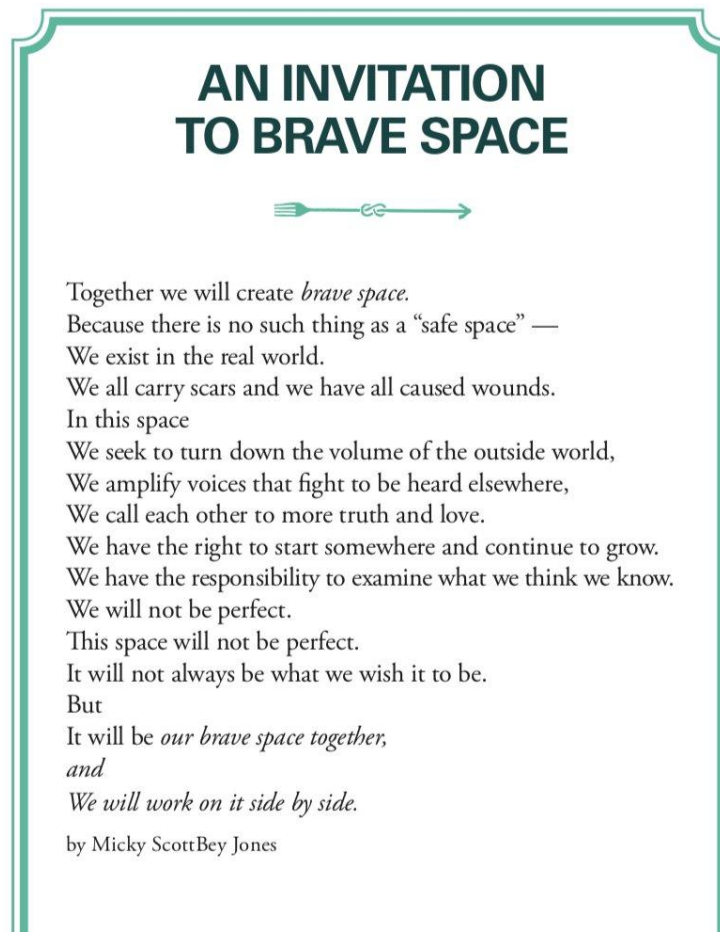


Fig. 3

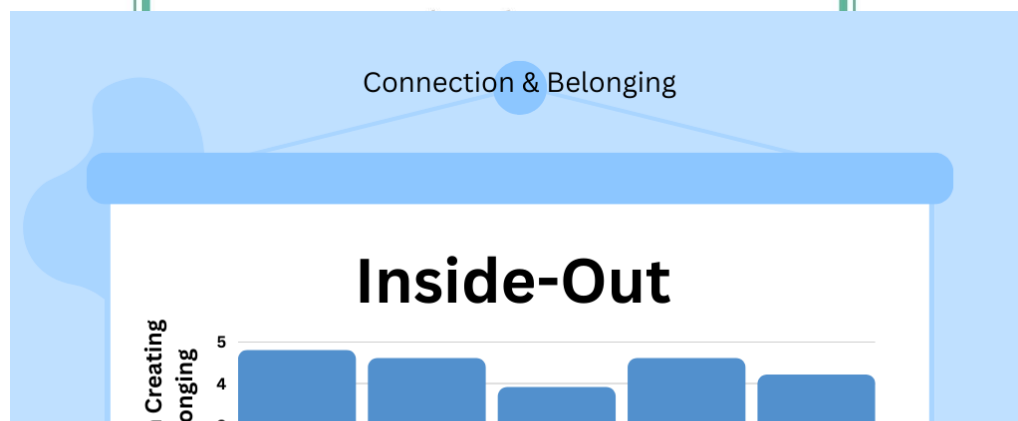


Fig. 4

Belonging and at What Stage?

IF YOU FELT A SENSE OF BELONGING THROUGH YOUR INSIDE-OUT CLASS, AT WHAT STAGE OF THE CLASS DID YOU FIRST HAVE THIS FEELING?

