

Public Abstract

First Name:Jenny

Middle Name:Lynn

Last Name:Norell

Adviser's First Name:Robert

Adviser's Last Name:Watson

Co-Adviser's First Name:Cynthia

Co-Adviser's Last Name:MacGregor

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Transformative Learning Experiences of Women Offenders in the 4-H LIFE Program

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of offenders and their transformative learning process as it relates to shifts in their understanding of parental roles within the context of the 4-H Living Interactive Family Education (LIFE) program.

Brock (2010) noted ten precursor steps that could lead to transformative learning. Phenomenology provided a research methodology for collecting data on the transformative learning experiences of offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. This qualitative study utilized data collected over a two-year period at two correctional facilities with participation in the 4-H LIFE program. Four participant groups included: (1) offenders, (2) Department of Corrections staff, (3) Volunteers in Corrections, and (4) 4-H program staff.

The findings supported the research questions: (1) offender women did experience transformative learning as evidenced through the ten precursor steps, (2) participants experienced a shift in their perceptions of parenting, (3) traditional visits were more structured events with specific rules and regulations, (4) 4-H LIFE visits were more flexible with structured programs for families to engage with one another. This research created an impetus for codifying an advanced curriculum for offenders in the 4-H LIFE program. Future research is needed to provide depth of understanding for the ways in which 4-H LIFE transforms the participants.