

Divergent Perspectives on Educational Research in Juvenile Justice

Heather Griller Clark
Sarup R. Mathur
Kristine Jolivette

Abstract

This article discusses the feasibility of conducting educational research in juvenile justice settings from two divergent perspectives, researchers and juvenile justice agency/facility staff. An inquiry into feasibility, barriers, facilitators, and areas in need of research was conducted with the two groups of participants. Differences in each category, as well as subthemes between researchers and agency/facility staff, are discussed. The implications address the need to ensure rigorous research while also adhering to the facility's processes and procedures and simultaneously improving outcomes for youth. Suggestions for improving research efforts in juvenile justice facilities are offered.

Keywords: *correctional education, juvenile justice, feasibility studies*

Scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines, including education, social work, criminology, psychology, and health, frequently conduct research in juvenile justice (JJ) settings. For some, issues related to delinquency, programming, or recidivism drive inquiry, while others seek to explore broader social issues within a confined setting or with a targeted group of individuals. Still others study the system itself, the individuals within the system, or those who work in the system. The research undertaken may focus on descriptive characteristics of the system, the youth, or the staff; correlations between two or more variables; or evaluations of programs or processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Regardless of the discipline originating the inquiry or the type of inquiry being conducted, the feasibility of conducting research in a JJ setting is impacted by a number of different variables. Vaughn et al. (2012) outlined the challenges of conducting research in juvenile and adult justice settings, from a social work

perspective. The authors referenced difficulty obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval, managing research activities across multiple sites and jurisdictions, planning, and maintaining relationships with key personnel.

Christy Lane and colleagues (2012) discuss the dearth of evaluation or treatment research in JJ settings, referencing many of the same challenges outlined by Vaughn and colleagues (2012). However, Lane et al. also offer concrete recommendations for researchers in overcoming barriers related to obtaining IRB approval, obtaining parent/guardian permission and youth assent, reporting child abuse and neglect, reporting danger to self and others, coordinating with facilities, working with facility staff, the unpredictable release or transfer of youth, and disseminating findings. In addition, they emphasize the importance of coordinating and working with JJ facility staff. Staff and administrator “buy-in” is essential not only to the feasibility of conducting research in JJ settings but also to favorable program or study outcomes (Drakeford, 2002; Mulvey et al., 2010).

In 2013, Jolivette identified and discussed three types of challenges to conducting research specifically in JJ settings: facility-level challenges, educational/school-level challenges, and participant-level challenges. Facility-level challenges included (a) heightened scrutiny in obtaining IRB approval due to the vulnerability of the population and the need to comply with facility procedures and protocols; (b) cumbersome or protracted security clearance and access to facilities for researchers; (c) the type of facility, pertinent to the mission and duration of youth’s stay; (d) attrition of participants due to the transient nature of the youth and the high turnover of staff; (e) a facility focus on safety and security above all else; and (f) the degree to which the facility understands the research commitments. Education/school-level challenges included (a) the fact that the school schedule is heavily influenced by facility processes and negative events such as lockdowns; (b) mandatory education requirements that may be imposed by the facility or the state; (c) variability and inconsistency in the type, length, dose, and quality of the curriculum offered; and (d) removal of youth from education for youth- or facility-initiated reasons such as disciplinary action or court appearances. Participant-level challenges included (a) assent to withdraw from the study, (b) missing data due to incomplete records or facility restrictions to access data, and (c) limited numbers of participants or programs.

The need to understand the challenges confronting researchers in conducting inquiry within JJ settings is fueled by the desire to improve the services youth receive, the conditions within which they receive them and the staff deliver them, and the outcomes they experience. Effective methods for

achieving positive outcomes can only be ascertained through rigorous research. Therefore, it is essential to address the feasibility of conducting research in JJ settings from as many perspectives as possible.

Bowen and colleagues (2009) examined different types of feasibility studies. They identified eight general areas of focus, or constructs, addressed by feasibility studies. These included (a) acceptability, how the recipients react to the intervention; (b) demand, the use of the intervention activities; (c) implementation, the extent, likelihood, and manner in which the intervention can be implemented as proposed; (d) practicality, the extent to which an intervention can be delivered despite potential constraints of resources, time, and/or commitment; (e) adaptation, modifications to an intervention; (f) integration, the level of system change needed to implement an intervention; (g) expansion, the expansion of a successful intervention; and (h) limited-efficacy testing, testing interventions in limited ways. While emphasizing the need for increased rigor, Bowen and colleagues also point out that feasibility studies can be used to test the fit of interventions in real-world settings and suggest that practitioners and community members be involved in conceptualizing and designing feasibility research.

Taking the literature and the challenges associated with conducting research in JJ settings into consideration, the present study combined five of Bowen et al.'s (2009) constructs with four other elements vital to conducting research in JJ settings to create a framework for a multifaceted discussion of feasibility. The nine constructs included (a) *acceptability*, the notion that research is suitable to address the needs of youth served and the staff serving them; (b) *demand*, the notion that the proposed research is needed and likely to be conducted with a specific population/setting; (c) *implementation*, the extent to which the research can be implemented within the entity using a specific protocol; (d) *practicality*, the notion that research can be conducted using existing means, such as resources and adult/youth time and with adult buy-in; (e) *integration*, the extent to which entities need to change to be able to add the research (i.e., intervention) into existing processes and infrastructure; (f) *fidelity*, the notion that adherence to a research protocol is important; (g) *connections*, the notion that the entity is connected to the field and will participate in future research; (h) *social validity*, the notion that youth and/or staff view the research as important to improving outcomes; and (i) *needs*, whether the proposed research matches the needs of the entity.

JJ programs, practices, and youth cannot continue to be under-investigated simply because the challenges involved in conducting rigorous research in these

settings are exceedingly prevalent. There is an acute need for research that has the potential to inform systems change and improve outcomes for youth. To this end, the current study was undertaken to explore how research endeavors in JJ facilities can be improved, from the perspectives of both the researcher and the JJ staff, with the overarching goal of improving outcomes for the youth served and the staff serving them. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1. What do researchers and juvenile justice staff perceive as barriers and facilitators to the feasibility of conducting research in secure juvenile facilities?
2. What do researchers and JJ staff suggest as solutions to improving research efforts in secure juvenile facilities?
3. What do researchers and JJ staff perceive as the main areas of research needed within juvenile correctional facilities?

Method

Participants

The researchers sought to obtain responses to the research questions in an authentic way. Therefore, a stratified convenience sample of participants were recruited from attendees at a national conference for practitioners, researchers, and administrators who work with children and youth with behavior issues across various settings (e.g., typical schools, residential schools/facilities, juvenile correctional facilities). This conference generally attracts a large number of JJ researchers and staff as it has a strand of conference sessions specifically addressing topics of interest to these attendees. The conference is held annually in the Southwest. Approximately 375 people attended the conference the year the study was conducted. Attendees represented 40 states, the District of Columbia, and four countries. IRB approval was obtained prior to all research activities.

Recruitment procedures. The recruitment of participants took place in three ways. First, when conference participants checked in at the registration desk, they were asked if they conducted research or worked in a JJ setting. If they indicated that they did, then they were given a recruitment/consent script and a copy of the survey (described later). They were informed that if they chose to participate, they should turn in their completed survey at the registration desk before the conclusion of the conference. Second, attendees of one 55-minute conference session, specifically focused on the topic of this article, were recruited at the beginning of the conference session. Attendees self-selected all sessions they participated in and were notified that they could attend the session without

participating in the study simply by not completing the consent. No session attendees opted out of the study. At the time of the session, there were 13 concurrent session options. Third, at the conclusion of the conference, several attendees stated that they had lost or not completed the survey they were provided at registration and requested to be emailed an additional copy. Survey questions were entered into Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>), and a link to the survey, along with the consent form, was sent to 24 conference attendees who participated in the JJ strand. Identifying information was not collected, and participants were instructed to delete the email if they did not wish to participate or had already participated. A reminder email was sent 1 week after the first email.

Participant demographics. Data were collected from a total of nine participants. Four participants completed the survey at the conference, two participants attended the conference session only, and three completed the online survey. Of the nine participants, two were males and seven were females. Participants ranged in age from 31 to 53 years old; the average age was 40.7 years. Six were researchers, and three worked in a JJ facility. Participants spent an average of 5.7 years working in or with JJ facilities, with a range of 2 to 12 years.

Materials

Survey. A survey consisting of 10 open-ended questions based on five of Bowen's constructs and four other feasibility constructs was created prior to the conference. The social validity construct was broken into two separate questions, one pertaining to the impact of the research on improving youth outcomes and the other pertaining to the benefits of the research for the staff/facility. In addition to the construct-related questions, we asked survey participants if they had suggestions for improving research efforts in JJ facilities. We also collected demographic information on gender, age, race, highest degree earned, degree area/major, number of years working with/in JJ settings, participant role (researcher or staff), and whether the participant was involved in any current research. This survey was constructed by the three authors who have been working in the field for over 20 years and was reviewed by their research teams consisting of research project staff and JJ staff. Survey questions and the corresponding constructs are provided in Table 1.

Conference session. The published program included a brief description of the session. The session began with the definition of research and examples of what research may look like in a JJ facility from the perspective of staff (e.g., filling out surveys, participating in training, implementing something

Table 1: Feasibility Survey for Juvenile Correctional Researchers and Staff

Question	Construct
1. In your opinion, what areas or topics of juvenile justice need further research? Why?	Demand
2. a) If you are a researcher – does your research match the needs of the agency/facility? b) If you are an agency/facility staff – does your agency/facility have any particular needs related to research project topics?	Need
3. What dynamics exist that impact the implementation of research projects within juvenile agencies/facilities?	Implementation
4. What agency/facility policies or procedures need to be revised to integrate research projects into juvenile justice facilities?	Integration
5. What facility resources and expertise are needed for research projects to be successful?	Practicality
6. How important is it that research address the needs of the youth served within secure juvenile facilities?	Acceptability
7. How important is it that youth data improve as a result of the research project?	Social validity
8. How important is it that agency/facility staff view research project implementation as beneficial and worthwhile?	Social validity
9. To what extent does agency/facility staff view the adherence to research project protocols as important? Are there any barriers to adherence of research project protocols?	Fidelity
10. Do the connections made between researchers and juvenile justice agencies/facilities positively and/or negatively affect the agency's/facility's decisions to participate in future research projects?	Connections
11. Do you have suggestions for improving research efforts in juvenile justice facilities?	

new, being interviewed). The definition of *feasibility* was also provided, and participants had the opportunity to share their perspectives on feasibility. Then the discussion focused on the constructs listed in Table 1. Finally, participants were asked if they had suggestions for improving research efforts in JJ facilities. Although the focus of the conference session was similar to the survey questions, the format created space for a more open discussion.

Data Analyses

A constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), previously employed in JJ stakeholder voice research (e.g., Jolivette et al., 2015; Kimball et al., 2017; Swain-Bradway et al., 2013), was used to analyze survey and conference session responses. Due to IRB constraints, the conference session was not audio recorded; instead, anecdotal notes were written for the session and survey results typed and grouped by question. Two of the authors independently identified barriers and facilitators by reviewing all responses. Then specific responses were grouped as subthemes and named under barriers or facilitators. These subthemes were compared, and if needed, any disagreements were discussed and responses were coded accordingly. Because this exploratory study was focused on gathering information about the views of researchers and JJ staff, all responses were considered in the analysis. Information from the conference session was used to see if the attendees' views corroborate the survey data.

Results

Several barriers related to the feasibility of conducting research in JJ facilities emerged. First, a theme related to *trust* emerged. For example, several JJ staff reported that researchers represent the "ivory tower," lack "credibility" specific to JJ settings, and present no "good reason for why they are coming in" to the facility. One staff participant stated that "researchers need to tell us your experiences with why and how you understand us," and another stated that researchers should lead with how they want to help youth and staff. Researchers also acknowledged this as a challenge, with one stating, "I think that trust is the biggest issue. The facility/agencies need to believe that your research will have a positive impact and will not be used to highlight their deficiencies without providing solutions." Another stated that research "cannot be viewed as one additional project that will disappear as soon as the researcher leaves."

A second barrier-related theme emerged around *gaining permission* or consent to conduct research. JJ staff highlighted concerns with obtaining agency or facility permission. For example, one staff stated that "if they [agency/facility leadership] think you may make them look bad then they will disapprove the request" even if the research may meet an agency/facility need. Another reported that the JJ agency/facility oftentimes has "infrastructure gaps," "IT" (information technology) deficits, or complicated and prohibitive "purchasing" policies that may impact the ability of the agency or facility to grant permission for the research. One of the researchers also acknowledged this barrier, stating

that if “the decision to approve projects comes from a government department, they can block research easily if they are concerned they will look bad.”

Researchers frequently cited gaining permission to conduct research from university IRBs or consent from parents/guardians as more of a barrier than agency or facility permission. This notion was acknowledged unanimously among the researchers in the conference session discussion. Two specific issues were highlighted: (a) Separate and additional approvals and ethics committees are required for JJ research even though the research interventions are not different from those used with the same-aged populations in typical educational settings as standard practice, and (b) the multiple procedural “check marks” needed to be demonstrated in the application due to the vulnerable population (i.e., minors, youth with disabilities) and setting (i.e., incarceration) often trigger months of revisions between the researcher and the board prior to approval. Researchers’ survey responses corroborated this finding; they indicated that “IRB delays or prevents including youth and their voice” and the “IRB and access to the students [are] critical but they are a highly vulnerable population.” Another stated that “ethical considerations impact implementation. [It is] difficult to receive approval to speak with/survey young people.” Yet another indicated, “I’ve run into issues with getting consent from the parents/guardians of minors—not because they are unwilling, but because they live far away and are not consistent with sending back signed documents or answering the phone.”

A third barrier was categorized as *priorities*. Participants agreed that, situationally, there is a philosophical difference in how JJ staff, administrators, and researchers view the purpose of a JJ agency. For example, some have more of an “adult corrections perspective” while others have more of a “juvenile corrections perspective.” Participants clarified that, at times, these divergent perspectives have resulted in “shifting energy from youth to other areas because of system barriers.” One JJ staff illustrated this by reporting that different disciplines within the facility (e.g., education, security, treatment) may need to focus on their particular objective and “may be operating in isolation,” preventing or limiting research activities with a facility-wide lens. JJ staff and researchers also reported having “arguments over monies to get things [research] done” with facility administrators. Participants also stated that “administrators are disconnected with line staff” as “those who work with kids directly [may] want to do this [research]” and that this causes a “breakdown between line staff and those in higher education.” Also, some participants had the opinion that JJ “administrators are politicians”; thus, their decisions may not consistently reflect the needs of youth and staff.

A fourth barrier to the feasibility of conducting high-quality research was identified as *contextual variables*. One JJ staff stated that it is a “negative cycle because [the facility is] too short staffed to pull front line staff to be part of the discussion to identify [research] needs.” Another also identified the lack of “staff coverage to engage in research tasks on the job” as a barrier. Even researchers commented, with one stating, “I think they are often busy with their day to day and find it difficult to fit the extras in.” Another proffered that “fitting research into the daily schedule” may be a barrier to adherence to research project protocols. Scheduling was also mentioned as a contextual variable by a couple of researchers, “although there is technically a schedule to adhere to, service personnel often take students at a whim without consulting others” and “I do think scheduling is important so with that in mind I would urge JJ facilities to adhere to a consistent daily schedule.” In addition to issues related to a lack of staff, time, and scheduling, one JJ staff noted that the “[facility] leadership has changed and they are not as educated on programs and interventions,” which has limited the ability to engage in research.

To address the barriers to feasibility, participants offered numerous facilitators or solutions. These solutions were also coded and themes emerged. The first theme was related to connections and a “need for *relationship building* between the researcher and facility people.” All the participants in the conference session agreed that the researcher is responsible for facilitating and “maintaining long-term relationships with the facilities.” A researcher stated as a survey response, “I think it often comes down to respect between researchers and personnel at JJ facilities, which is largely the responsibility of the researcher.” One said that “the facility/agencies need to believe that your research will have a positive impact.” Another stated that it was important to have “a chance to connect with facility personnel before the study to begin building a relationship.” Yet another indicated that “connections are very important! It is important for the JJ staff to see researchers as real people with cred in the field, boots on the ground experiences of researchers is valued and improves [the] relationship.” Another researcher noted the importance of relationship building, stating that “the researcher needs to develop a strong rapport with the staff at JJ facilities. The researcher is a guest; there’s no guarantee s/he will be invited back.” This perception was shared by another researcher, who said, “I think that some researchers try to conduct without developing a relationship and it ends up hurting others being able to work with that agency at a later date.” Other suggestions related to relationship building included not speaking as “researchers” or “practitioners” because “we are all in it for the youth” and

that researchers and staff should “integrate” and “sit at the table together so all voices are heard.”

Another solution theme focused on buy-in or *commitment*, both commitment of the researcher to the facility/youth and commitment of the staff/facility to the research. JJ staff suggested that researchers ask the staff and facility “what do you need” before imposing researcher-focused ideas. A researcher indicated that “without buy-in from the staff, there will likely be issues regarding fidelity or even levels of enthusiasm that can affect students.” Another stated that it is “important if there is buy-in then staff support and assist with implementation fidelity.” Yet another said, “I think this goes back to buy-in. Researchers need to demonstrate why adherence to protocols is vital for research to be successful.” A JJ staff participant noted the importance of “buy-in,” stating that “if research results show that changes to programs that administration supports are not effective you need staff buy-in; change is difficult.” This final comment addresses both *relationships* and *commitment*:

For researchers, I think it’s important to present as a person who cares about the kids long before one tries to establish oneself as a researcher. We may have PhDs, but JJ staff are the folks on the ground working daily in facilities. Sometimes volunteering in a facility is helpful before approaching administrators and staff about conducting research.

A third theme around solutions to improve feasibility pertained to *communication*. Suggestions in this area included the need to (a) “work on communication across entities” such as education and security, facility leadership and frontline staff, and researchers and facility staff; (b) “disseminate [the findings] across all levels including hard copies”; (c) “share out findings with all staff especially front-line staff”; (d) “ask their [staff] opinion”; (e) have “more consultation with staff—have them on steering committee”; (f) “more communication and a sharing of results of how to make decisions based on results”; and (g) “understand their needs and goals and present our research in a manner that is consistent with those goals and needs.” JJ staff stated that researchers should “lead” with how the research would “make [their] job easier” and to “talk before giving [them] data forms” to complete. Thus, researchers should be explicit in the “reason behind why we are doing this.” They also stated a need for researchers to “step out of the expert role” (e.g., using the prefix Dr. in conversations, “don’t talk to me, listen to me”) and “invite [staff] to participate in other activities—including socials—to gain more ideas” on the topic. One

researcher suggested that if facilities provided a “key site contact for researchers who have an understanding of [the] research process,” it might improve the success of projects.

Another theme was related to education or *training*. One JJ staff suggested that the researcher and JJ leadership and staff should engage in “extra conversations before data collection.” These conversations would allow all parties to thoroughly understand the details of the research project, the purpose for the data collection, and how the data collected will be shared and used. Participants also suggested that “upper management interact with all staff and ask them questions” related to the research or create a “symposium—get them together across disciplines” as a means to disrupt the facility silos. Others mentioned a “need for more follow-up,” a process to “avoid handing off responsibilities” during and after a research project to minimize disruption of a potentially helpful intervention, and “time for professional development/training; access to fidelity forms and implementation resources.” One stated, “I think it’s important for staff to have at least a fundamental knowledge of teaching and the importance of adhering to protocols.” Another comment stressed the importance of both *training* and *communication*: “Education and communication are beneficial in obtaining staff buy-in, especially if we are asking staff to take on increased workload or additional duties.”

The final solution to improve feasibility related to *streamlining procedures*, specifically for obtaining IRB approval and accessing information. This was mentioned in various ways by researchers: “faster IRB process, less layers of approval”; “quicker/smoothier ethics approval and access to the facilities, employees, youth”; “finding an agreed upon confidentiality and access agreement would be very helpful”; and “easier access to de-identified youth information.”

When asked the social validity questions (i.e., How important is it that research address the needs of the youth served within secure juvenile facilities? How important is it that youth data improve as a result of the research project?), all participants indicated that it was “very important,” “extremely important,” “highly important,” “crucial,” or “should be the main focus.” One stated that improvements in youth data are “important, but not the sole reason for doing research,” clarifying that

youth data may not improve on the intervention being tested but that doesn’t mean there aren’t positive effects elsewhere. Further, it’s good to know what doesn’t work (although publishing non-effects is another issue we face) so we can better determine what does.

A JJ staff agreed, stating that “the goal should be to effect positive change in the youth we serve. The research may show that certain programs are not effective, but [that] would be helpful to assist in replacements for these programs.” A researcher summarized their perspective, stating,

Populations of youth served in JJ are the most vulnerable students in the country considering the prevalence of disabilities, homelessness, trauma, and other characteristics that make this population marginalized even prior to arrest. When students are in JJ, we have the opportunity to get to know them in a way that we can't in regular academic settings. It's an opportunity we need to seize and capitalize on in order to learn how to best serve these students both in JJ settings and beyond.

The primary areas in need of research, as voiced by the participants, focused on the necessity to better understand “what treatment modalities are known to work, how to address fidelity, and the effectiveness” of them. For example, the sharing of reputable JJ websites, as well as curricula and interventions validated with a JJ population, may be helpful as part of the research proposal discussions. One JJ staff participant stated that future research for the units should focus on (a) overall “treatment of youth,” (b) “behavior management,” and (c) “education” opportunities on the unit. Another participant stated that JJ facilities should conduct research that impacts and incorporates a “whole youth approach.”

When asked if their research matched the needs of the facility/agency, most researchers stated that their research agendas did match the interests of the facilities but acknowledged that “the facilities are more interested in practices that improve programs a bit faster.” Finally, when asked what topics need further research, participants indicated (a) interagency collaboration, (b) recruitment and retention of effective teachers, (c) evidence-based practices, (d) effectiveness of multiple treatments/interventions, (e) youth perceptions of JJ and transition, (f) transition, (g) recidivism, (h) school connectedness, and (i) engaging families.

Discussion

This study explored the views of researchers and JJ staff regarding how research endeavors in JJ facilities can be improved, from the perspectives of both JJ researchers and JJ staff, with the overarching goal of improving outcomes for the youth served. Although the information is gleaned from a small sample, it illuminated the research-to-practice gap that continues to exist. Using Bowen's (2009) feasibility constructs as a framework and special education research

guidelines from Council for Exceptional Children (2014), barriers, solutions, and needs from the perspectives of JJ researchers and staff were identified. In terms of the barriers, more commonalities than differences in the views of JJ researchers and practitioners were noted. Both groups identified a lack of trust and communication between JJ researchers and staff as barriers. In addition, they identified the process of gaining permission or consent to conduct research as cumbersome, time-consuming, and bureaucratic. JJ staff highlighted the procedural and structural concerns with obtaining agency or facility permission and recognized that priorities within the facility are different for education, security, and treatment and that this makes the process of implementation of research more fragmented and difficult. Similar to previous research, researchers in this study noted difficulties in conducting empirical research in the JJ facilities (Holosko et al., 2014; Jolivet, 2013). Both groups recognized that high turnover, a lack of staff, and issues of time and scheduling were additional contextual factors limiting the feasibility of research. In terms of solutions, both JJ researchers and staff shared their views about improving communication and building relationships before engaging in research. The importance of training and streamlining the processes and procedures were also viewed as facilitators.

JJ staff viewed research as somewhat inaccessible and removed from their daily operation. They indicated their preference for research that yielded immediate actionable items and more concrete guidance on practices in their day-to-day work (Love et al., 2016). Researchers, on the other hand, viewed the long-term needs of youth reentry and capacity building of JJ staff as important. As far as specific areas of need were concerned, JJ staff highlighted the importance of implementing evidence-based practices; however, they also indicated the need for more assistance with how to select, adopt, and properly implement these practices with the youth they serve.

This disconnect between researchers and practitioners highlights the need for researchers to better communicate with practitioners and vice versa. Staff turnover, institutional culture, insufficient integration of evidence-based practices into organizational culture, and limited funds for training and professional development contribute to issues of feasibility when implementing research. There is a pressing need to ensure that JJ staff are equipped with the latest research and evidence-based strategies that work in these settings.

Limitations

When reviewing the results of this study, two primary factors should be considered. First, the sample size is too small to understand the complexity of

the issues, but it does provide a sample of perspectives. This study focused on gathering information from only two groups. The information obtained from these researchers and staff is limited by their experiences within the settings they represent and may not be indicative of all JJ researchers and staff in other settings. Research focus, procedural guidelines, and implementation of research may be different in other JJ settings, which would affect the results of the study. Despite the limitations of this study, the information obtained from these two groups is valuable, supports prior research (e.g., Bridge Project; Jolivet, 2013), and points to the need to continue inquiry into JJ settings for research purposes. Second, although Bowen's feasibility constructs were utilized to generate survey questions and facilitate the conference session, the depth of each construct was not fully explored. More in-depth interviews would add to a better understanding of the views of JJ researchers and staff with all of Bowen's feasibility constructs.

Future Directions

This study highlights several opportunities for future directions. First, more research is needed to understand the role of contextual variables so that they may be addressed to move research forward in JJ settings for the benefit of both youth and staff outcomes. The understanding of potential research sites and specific JJ agency/facility contextual variable barriers could be collected via anonymous staff surveys, conversations with agency staff, and conversations with those who have conducted prior research in the same facility. Second, there is a continued need for integrating JJ staff voice into every step of JJ research, beginning with design and continuing through implementation and dissemination. Researchers need to include JJ staff, in particular frontline staff, in perceptions on JJ research while also developing interventions for youth. JJ staff voice could be gathered through focus groups, roundtable discussions, interviews, or surveys. Third, researchers should conduct needs assessments and/or data reviews to assist JJ agencies/facilities with identifying what their critical youth need areas are, such as academic, behavior, social/emotional, mental health, and/or transition. Then, in partnership, a research plan could be developed. Fourth, and as shared by our participants, data access and sharing continue to be a barrier even after research in the JJ settings has begun. An a priori memorandum of agreement (MOA) may be able to address this. Also, it may be helpful for the MOA to be revisited throughout the project especially if key personnel (e.g., facility directors, legal staff, research and development staff, principal) leave the agency prior to research completion. In relation to data

sharing and access within the MOA, how such data will remain confidential and/or be shared through dissemination processes should be revisited to keep the lines of communication open. Fifth, researchers need to go beyond grant-based funding priorities by developing a continuous and predictable presence in the JJ facility and with staff instead of using a “hit and run” approach for a specific grant and disappearing after data collection (K. Lane, 2017; Thompson et al., 2017). For research to be an integrated and sustainable part of a JJ facility, researchers need to develop a highly collaborative and long-term partnership with JJ agencies/facilities. JJ staff and researchers need to jointly engage in all research activities, including (a) identifying relevant research questions, (b) designing interventions, (c) collecting data, (d) implementing the intervention, (e) reviewing findings, and (f) disseminating the results and lessons learned (Thompson et al., 2017).

Implications

It is essential that researchers and JJ administrators and practitioners continue to work together to improve the feasibility and increase the rigor of research done in these settings, in part, to provide better interventions and services for youth with emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD). Youth with and at risk for EBD are much more likely to experience school failure, drop out, and become involved in the JJ system (Baglivio et al., 2014). They are also more likely to receive services from more than one child service agency (Leone & Weinberg, 2012) and require more individualized assistance when reentering the community (Griller Clark et al., 2011). Therefore, it behooves researchers, special educators, and JJ staff to provide evidence-based interventions and practices that promote successful postrelease engagement for these “disconnected” youth.

Conclusion

Both JJ researchers and agency/facility staff recognize the research-to-practice gap and that current practices are not meeting the needs of youth with and without disabilities. Researchers tend to find evidence in practices that are supported by sound research and methodological rigor. JJ staff value what works for their youth based on their own beliefs and day-to-day experience (Smith et al., 2013). Both groups value research but have different expectations from it. JJ researchers are looking for scientific solutions, and JJ staff value applicability and practicality in these solutions. By establishing collaborative partnerships and developing a common goal around research, researchers and staff can join together in conducting better research for the benefit of youth who are involved in the JJ settings and those who serve them.

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Biographical Sketches

HEATHER GRILLER CLARK, PHD, is a principal research specialist with the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. She is a national expert on reentry of youth from the juvenile justice system.

SARUP R. MATHUR, PHD, is a professor of special education in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. She is nationally recognized for her work in the field of emotional and behavioral disorders and juvenile delinquency.

KRISTINE JOLIVETTE, PHD, is the Paul W. Bryant and Mary Harmon Bryant Endowed Professor in Special Education and Multiple Abilities at the University of Alabama. Her focus is on youth with and at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders served in juvenile corrections and systemic change within such settings using multitiered systems of support with interventions to address the whole youth.