

Seven large banners, each a self-portrait created by an inmate from Piedmont Regional Jail, fill a college gallery in rural Virginia. In one image, a young man appears clothed in a kingly robe and crown, a striking image against a mottled grey-green background. The man is not a king in actuality, of course, but as he explained, he would one day like to earn from the important people in his life the respect afforded a king. He scratched the cloak and crown on a photographic negative of himself in which he wears his inmate uniform, an orange jumpsuit and tennis shoes. When the final photograph is printed, however, the etchings of the royal costume blot out the jumpsuit, and the king appears.

This compelling self-portrait is one of several in *Living with Conviction*, an exhibition of photographic images and text, and the result of a collaborative project between students at Hampden-Sydney College—a rural, all-male liberal arts college—and inmates at Piedmont Regional Jail in Farmville, Virginia. During the spring semester of 2005, students ventured past the razor-wire fence, metal detectors, and thick steel doors of the jail to teach their inmate partners basic photography techniques and to engage in writing activities and discussion to explore common ground among project participants. The exhibition was the culmination of a two-semester, interdisciplinary, team-taught, freshman honors course titled Social Documentary: Image, Text, and Context. During the first semester students remained on the college campus and studied the role documentary can play in examining social issues and effecting social change. In the second semester students became teachers and documentarians themselves, thus melding the classroom with the community outside the college gates.

This article explores the role that engaged scholarship, and service learning in particular, plays in linking students' academic learning with practical experiences in the community. In the first section, I present the theoretical underpinnings of our work in a three-fold discussion of service learning, the university as activist community (Dolan, 2004), and transformative research and restorative justice (Zehr, 1996, 2001, 2003). Next, I offer a review of the social documentary course, including an explanation of course goals and objectives and their relation to our work at the jail. Following a brief overview of the ten-week collaboration between students and inmates, I move to a discussion section in which I share excerpts from students' final reflection papers as evidence of the efficacy of service learning; students reported that they gained new insight about the documentary process, rethought their attitudes about incarcerated people, and recognized their civic responsibility to the wider community. In the conclusion of the paper, I examine the rewards and challenges of the project and discuss implications for further studies linking similar populations.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings: Service Learning in the Engaged University, Restorative Justice and Transformative Research in the Community**

Service learning is widely viewed as an effective pedagogical tool as it allows students to link academic learning with experiences in the larger community, provides students with a model for lifelong civic engagement, meets a demonstrated need in the community (Conville & Weintraub, n.d. ), and often provides college students—many of whom are members of privileged groups—the opportunity to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions they may hold about members of marginalized groups. One of the more frequently cited definitions of service learning first appeared in a 1996 article by Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher:

We view service learning as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (p. 222).

My colleague and I created our service learning course, in part, as a response to a request from jail administrators for area colleges and universities to offer inmates instruction in the arts and humanities. Not wanting to simply provide service, but rather to link service with learning, we proposed a year-long academic course for our students that would also address the needs of the jail. We hoped, too, that a course that combined our two interests—mine in political theatre and my colleague's in photography—would interest students in both disciplines. As well, we anticipated that in reaching out to the community, our students of privilege would broaden their worldviews.

Bharat Mehra (2004), in summarizing several essential components of service learning, asserts that the requisite collaboration among service learning participants is a factor both in empowering people in marginalized groups and in fostering acceptance of difference by those in privileged groups. In service learning, both students and community members share equally in the project (no matter what that project might be), developing what Mehra calls an "acceptance of equality of participation in the collaboration" (p.9). Mehra asserts that "empowerment will emerge from an acknowledgment (self and social) of the worth and contribution of every individual participating in the collaboration; larger inequalities will get addressed by providing [community members] with the resources to resist their marginalized status" (p. 9). The importance of this shared participation in dispelling stereotypes did not go unnoticed by the student partners in our project, as I will demonstrate later in this article. Our students of privilege noted again and again the similarities between themselves and the inmates with

whom they worked. Terms of marginalization, such as "convict," "perpetrator," and "inmate," were replaced with their partners' given names, and stereotypes faded quickly as students interacted with their partners, learning about their interests, goals, beliefs and convictions, and future plans once they were released from jail.

Jill Dolan (2004), author of *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance*, also provided an important theoretical underpinning for our work, calling attention to the aesthetic component of our project as well as the potential for the arts to promote social change. Situated throughout her academic career at the center of three fields— theatre and performance studies; lesbian, gay, and queer studies; and women's studies—and in several roles including university administrator, faculty member, scholar, activist, and director, Dolan provides a unique perspective on the intersections of theory, practice, activism, and the arts. While Dolan's art form is performance oriented, her vision for social change easily encompasses the visual arts as well. We shared this vision in our work: we wanted our students to realize that documentary photography can be used as an activist tool.

The premise that underlies Dolan's work is that often artists, activists, and academics work in isolation from one another; in so doing, they miss opportunities to collectively enhance what Dolan (2004) describes as "mutual progress toward social justice, more liberal democratic education, and the flourishing of the arts as a social entitlement and a rich site of critical engagement" (p. 1). She argues that social change would come more quickly if there were more collaboration among the three groups. Progressive academics, Dolan suggests, should craft their messages for wider audiences than the readers of academic journals. Likewise, activists need to "respect and engage the potential of knowledge generated in academic settings" (p. 3). Dolan advocates that we should situate the struggle for social change in the academy, thereby allowing scholars and practitioners to become participants in public life and providing a place where "key political and social issues are worked out " (p. 55). Such a view foregrounds Dolan's "activist vision of the university" (p.55), a vision embraced by faculty members who incorporate service learning as a way to address social inequities. In support of her position, Dolan cites Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff (1995), members of the progressive advocacy group Teachers for a Democratic Culture, who suggest that the "'politicized university'... would look to turn the campus into... a community where empowered citizens argue together about the future of their society, and in so doing help students become active participants in that argument rather than passive spectators" (as quoted in Dolan, 2004, p. 56). We intended to provide a service learning opportunity that would enable students both to become documentarians themselves and, while learning more about the

people with whom they worked, to open themselves up to the possibilities of new ways of thinking about difference and social inequality.

We discovered in the works of scholar, activist, and photographer Howard Zehr (1996, 2001, 2003) a perfect model for our project. Zehr's groundbreaking work in restorative justice and his principles of transformative research thus provided the final theoretical underpinning for our service learning experience. Zehr is widely regarded as one of the founders and foremost proponents of the restorative justice movement, a movement that advocates a visionary way (at least in the United States) of thinking about crime and the criminal justice system. Unlike the traditional approach to justice in the United States—which views criminal activity as a crime against the state more so than an injustice against a person or a community—restorative justice, as Zehr (2001) explains, "says that what really matters about crime is that harm has been done to people and their relationships" (p. 194). In an article based on an address he gave at the 1998 Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, Zehr (2003) writes that restorative justice answers the question, "What does justice require?" in the following ways: "It says that what victims require must be the starting point of justice. It answers that offenders' needs and offenders' obligations are central to justice. It says that the community has a role in justice" (p. 7).

Restorative justice, according to Daniel Van Ness and Karen Heetderks Strong (1997), authors of *Restoring Justice*, encourages offenders to take responsibility for the harm they have caused in an effort to reduce the likelihood of future harm. It recognizes that providing redress for victims is critical, as is promoting the means for offenders to offer reparations. Restorative justice does not leave the problem of crime to the courts alone, but "recognizes the role of community involvement and initiative in responding to and reducing crime" (Van Ness & Heetderks Strong, 1997, p. 41). Of course, in our class we could not provide the means for inmates to offer reparations to the victims of their crimes, nor did we wish to do so. What we could—and did—do, however, was invite inmates to use the creative processes of photography, self-portraiture, and writing as ways to reflect upon their identities. These processes became catalysts for meaningful interactions between our students and their inmate partners.

Transformative research—research that transforms brings researcher and subject together in a mutual relationship of respect. The researcher is not "on the hunt" to uncover and exploit the object of her study, but rather the researcher "aims at social action, building community, promoting dialogue, reducing social distance... giving voice to marginalized people, promoting justice (Zehr, 2003, p. 9). Time and again throughout our work at the jail we returned to Zehr's (2003) principles, relying primarily on his assertion that "transformative inquiry respects subjects by promoting values such as collaboration, participation, empowerment, accountability, confidentiality, acknowledgement of obligations to the subject,

transparency of goals, methods and motives, benefits to the subject, and opportunity for subjects to present themselves in their own voice" (p.9). Zehr (1996) demonstrates this mode of research in his provocative book *Doing Life: Reflections of Men and Women Serving Life Sentences*, a book of portraits and interviews from men and women serving life sentences in Pennsylvania. Zehr photographed the prisoners in their street clothes in front of a plain background and transcribed their interviews verbatim. His primary goal was "to offer an opportunity to see offenders as individuals with their own fears and dreams, rather than as stereotypes" (p. 5). We embraced this goal as well.

### **Laying the Groundwork: An Overview of the Classroom Experience**

During the first semester of our year-long course, students enrolled in Social Documentary: Image, Text, and Context remained on the college campus and examined the power of social documentary—works comprised of visual, performance, and written texts—to probe social issues, construct realities, shape identity, and challenge preconceptions of what it means to be human.

Our goal in the first semester was three-fold. First, we wanted to provide a historical context for documentary work in the United States. We included in this study the works of documentary photographers such as Jacob Riss, Lewis Hine, James Agee and Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Paul S. Taylor, and Wendy Ewald, as well as documentary playwrights Eve Ensler, Anna Deavere Smith, Moisés Kaufman, Eric Bentley, Emily Mann, Studs Terkel, and writers from The Federal Theatre Project. The artists we chose all used their documentary projects to raise awareness of such social issues and injustices as child labor, poverty, homelessness, mental illness, racial violence, hate crime, homophobia, the emotional toil of war, and workers' rights. Throughout their studies, students began to realize that social documentarians could, in fact, make a difference by using their art form—be it photography, writing, or theatre—to expose society's inequities.

Second, we sought to impress upon our students the immense responsibility and ethical obligation documentarians hold to the people with whom they work. Several guest documentarians—director and playwright Attilio Favorini, photographer Laura Chesson, and photographer and author Howard Zehr—talked with our students about their work. We also traveled to the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and attended a lecture and discussion presented by Matt Herron, a photographer lauded for his images documenting college students working to register southern black citizens to vote during the 1964 "Freedom Summer."

We also read and discussed *Doing Documentary Work*, written by Robert Coles (1997), a founding member of the Center for Documentary Studies. In his text Coles (1997) writes extensively and eloquently about the moral and psychological tensions experienced by the documentarian—the many "questions that confront us explicitly or by implication as we who take stock of others also try to live our own lives with some self-respect" (p. 49). We anticipated that our students of privilege might experience, as James Agee (1941) experienced in the creation of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a sense of being overwhelmed by what we find when we venture out from those places of privilege. Coles (1997) reminds us to be self-reflective, to consider carefully "our responsibilities to those with whom we come to spend our time, to whom we pose questions, or whom we ask to pose while we go click, click, click" (p. 74).

Finally, our third goal, which grew directly from the second, was to provide our students with a framework for thinking about the social constructions of difference and the experiences of people in marginalized groups. Knowing that we had chosen a population that seemed quite different from our class of mostly upper-middle class, white, southern, seventeen and eighteen year olds, we realized we needed to lay the groundwork carefully and thoughtfully. At first glance it seemed the only commonality among the participants (excluding the two female teachers) was that they were all male.

We understood that our freshmen students' views of inmates were influenced by images of criminals presented in the media and popular culture. Katheryn Russell (1998), in *The Color of Crime*, notes the widely held but inaccurate view that blacks are responsible for the majority of crime. She attributes the public's skewed perspective, in part, to the media. As examples she points to images of black suspects in "reality" police television programs cursing and harassing police officers, black men in rap music videos engaging in activities associated with drug dealing, and black men presented on the nightly television news as the perpetrators of violent street crime. Russell (1998) believes that rhetoric is also partly responsible for these misperceptions. For example, the term "black on black crime" yielded over one thousand articles in a LEXIS/NEXIS search, while a search with the terms "white crime" or "white-on-white crime" yielded fewer than fifty. Russell (1998) speculates that "the skewed focus on Black crime by journalists and academics may simply reflect society's skewed concern with street crime. By this reasoning, because Blacks are responsible for a disproportionate amount of street crime, they receive a disproportionate amount of attention by academics and the media" (p. 116). While this rationale might explain the attention paid to crimes committed by blacks, it does not explain why so little media attention is focused on crimes committed by whites. In our class discussions, we examined white privilege (McIntosh, 1998) as one possible explanation for this phenomenon. Admittedly, our white students had difficulty

accepting this concept at first. They realized that blacks in the United States were often disadvantaged by the color of their skin, but found it difficult to acknowledge that their own "whiteness" afforded them special advantages or privileges. Gradually students began to see that they were privileged by the fact that others did not assume that they were criminals (or potential criminals) or that they lived in poverty. They also realized that others, especially black men, did not enjoy this privilege.

In the beginning, our students—each of whom was white, male, and upper-middle class—viewed the incarcerated participants in our upcoming project, the majority of who were black (socioeconomic statuses unknown), in abstractions and stereotypes. As well, we suspected that our students had begun to "other" the inmates, first aggregating the inmates on the basis of their master classes (such as race, class, sex, and sexual orientation) or the classes students assumed the inmates would occupy (such as incarcerated, black, and poor) and then dichotomizing them into a group of people essentially different from themselves (Rosenblum & Travis, 2003).

In fact, when we asked our young men to reflect on their initial concerns about working in the jail, their comments pointed to concerns about difference. One man wrote that he hoped he wouldn't "look stuffy"; another wrote that he was "a little nervous about how they will see us knowing that we are students from Hampden-Sydney College. . . . my biggest fear is that they will not care about what we are trying to teach them and that they won't make an effort to learn." Another student remarked: "I'm a little worried that they won't understand our 'professional' relationship, but I doubt that any of them will make me seriously uncomfortable." One student expressed his concern about the inmates' ability to understand and comprehend the photographic concepts and skills taught in the course. This same man noted that he was "most eager to discover the similarities between myself and the inmates . . . [although] I'm a decent, law abiding citizen who would never be caught dead in a jail cell, whereas the inmates each committed a crime." A couple of the students' remarks revealed their insecurities: "I am mostly nervous about the way I will be received by the inmates at the jail, and I am uncertain whether I will be able to maintain a confident appearance even though I may be a little uncomfortable on the inside." His colleague wrote that "I am nervous in general about meeting the group of inmates and getting settled into the routine of visiting the jail. I am always nervous, however, when I am going to be introduced to a new group of people and/or a new setting." Many of the young men also noted their excitement about the project and their eagerness to begin their work at the jail.

Many of the students' concerns were addressed and somewhat assuaged after Howard Zehr talked with them and shared his photographs and experiences of working with inmates. We also invited a Hampden-Sydney psychology

professor who had completed several years of research in prisons to talk with our students. She, too, dispelled many of the stereotypes—and resultant fears—that the students held, insisting that the work our men were about to undertake was valuable, necessary, and welcomed by the inmates. At the end of the fall semester we visited the jail and met with the superintendent, a teacher, and several officers, one of who took us on a tour of the facility.

### **Life on the "Inside": Creating Images, Creating Understanding**

In the second semester students began their work at the jail. Through the simple act of teaching photography—and using the images as springboards for discussion—our students experienced firsthand the debunking of stereotypes about incarcerated people, the transformative power of art in giving voice to people in marginalized statuses, and the rewards that come from civic engagement when working with others in pursuit of a common task—in our case, creating an exhibition of images and text about the lives of incarcerated people.

Prior to the first session at the jail, my colleague Professor Pamela Fox, an accomplished photographer and teacher, gave the students a crash course in pinhole photography, equipping them with the requisite knowledge for their work at the jail. Our students constructed pinhole cameras out of cereal boxes, took and processed photographs, and prepared PowerPoint presentations on photography and social justice topics to share with their inmate partners. In mid-February we began our work at the jail.

Following Zehr's method of transformative research, our students served as teachers and partners, which provided a way for our students to engage the inmates in a common creative task, picture making, that both empowered the participants and gave each man—college student and inmate alike—the opportunity to present himself in his own voice. Over a period of ten weeks, our students taught their partners basic photography techniques—including the construction and operation of pinhole cameras, digital imaging, and image and text manipulation—and engaged in writing activities and discussions designed to examine stereotypes. As Zehr (1996, 2001, 2003) and Mehra (2004) theorized, the result of such open and equal collaboration was that social distance lessened between the members of our group.

In addition to the photography work, from time to time our students presented mini-lectures to the group on topics such as "art as social action," "photographic composition techniques," "prison writing, art, and theatre projects," and "historic and contemporary documentary photographers." Each student also completed an integral project task. While it may have been easier and more efficient for us as teachers to "run the show," the students learned a great deal and

took pride in their individual jobs: designing and building a prototype pinhole camera out of a cereal box, directing publicity efforts for the project, designing a portable darkroom, processing negatives and scanning images, editing images and text, documenting our process, and planning the exhibition and opening reception. In spite of bad weather, lockdowns at the jail, scheduling difficulties, and construction delays, the students and their inmate partners persevered in creating a social documentary project that culminated in a public exhibition of participants' works, opening first at the college and then at the jail. The final exhibition of photographs, many enlarged to banner size and many that interwove images and text, represented a true collaborative effort among participants. Perhaps most importantly, however, our students—and to some degree those people who attended the exhibition and saw the strength, compassion, and conviction the images revealed—took from the partnership a greater awareness of the misconceptions associated with stereotyping, as well as an understanding of the social constructions of difference and social inequality.

### **Discussion: Students' Reflections on the Service Learning Experience**

Reflection, an essential component of the service learning experience, connects the service activity with academic goals and objectives. It encourages critical thinking as students consider their role in the project, the situation(s) leading to community need, their relationships with their community partners, and their own role in effecting social change (Conville & Weintraub, n.d.). Following their work at the jail, students were required each week to complete a three-part journal entry designed by Ed Zlotkowski (2000). Each entry consisted of a descriptive section outlining what transpired in the session, a section with the student's personal response to the experience, and a final section in which the student linked the service learning experience to the issues and themes covered in the first semester of the course. Students also completed a final reflection paper. This paper was the culminating work of the course, and in it students analyzed their experiences on both scholarly and personal levels. Below, I share excerpts from students' writings, used with their permission. When appropriate, I link these student comments to the theoretical underpinnings relevant to our work, as discussed primarily by Mehra (2004), Dolan (2004), and Zehr (1996, 2001, 2003).

Some of the students' comments point to the efficacy of service learning in lessening social distance among people separated by differences in race, class, age, and life experiences—a concept integral to Zehr's (1996, 2001, 2003) goals of transformative research and restorative justice. Even while participants maintained appropriate professional distance, the social distance between them and their partners lessened dramatically, as indicated in this student's response:

I will really miss working, hanging out, talking, and getting know all the men. It has been a lot of fun and a great learning experience. Before we started visiting the jail and working with the men I used to think that all the people who were in jail were bad people, when really they are not all bad. The men we have been working with opened my eyes to this and helped me to really see that we are a lot alike except for the fact that they got caught when they made a mistake. We all make mistakes and we have to deal with the consequences.

One student, who had earlier expressed the sentiment that he would "never be caught dead in a jail cell," came a long way toward understanding difference:

I found a new and interesting appreciation for inmates; they are much more than their crimes: they are people. The social distance between them and me was greatly lessened—a bridge was built between my world and theirs... My entire view of jails and inmates has been changed drastically by this eye opening experience.

Another student discussed an important goal of transformative research: building community with one's research partners. His experiences led him to a new understanding of and respect for the humanity of incarcerated people, as evidenced in this quote:

When I arrived at the jail [for the last session] I was surprised to realize that I was sad. I think that in the end we had somewhat overcome the process of "othering" the inmates. I feel like that is a main objective of a documentarian and we pulled it off. I have learned what it is like for an outsider to experience what it is like to be on the inside of the jail. I have seen for brief periods of time what it's like on the other side of the razor wire. [The inmates and college students] are obviously separated by the bars and concrete of the jail and the gates of our college, but as Zehr stated through his works, those may be the only differences that lie between us.

Mehra (2004) notes that the equality of participation in service-learning projects leads to the empowerment of people in marginalized groups and the fostering of acceptance of difference by those in privileged groups. This recognition is demonstrated in the following student's comment, an indication that, over time, the two separate groups of students and inmates merged into one, a group of men working collaboratively toward a common goal:

Social distance did in fact lessen between the two groups—so much that at the end we considered ourselves one group, a group of citizens that came together to send a message to others. The inmates examined themselves, shared their thoughts, and exhibited their feelings. It is the attitudes exhibited in the text and

the emotion on the faces in the pictures accompanying this text that portray messages of hope, of pride, and of joy that defy the environment [of the jail].

The students, of course, were not the only people who benefited from their project. As Mehra (2004) suggests, the socially marginalized inmates found a way, through the images and text they created, to express themselves to those on the “outside,” as well as others inside the jail. At our final visit to the jail we presented each inmate with a portfolio that held reproductions of his work, news articles about the project, promotional materials, and an exhibition catalogue. Each man poured over the contents of his portfolio with a sense of what can only be described as unabashed pride. The officers at the jail told us that once the inmates returned to their housing units, they shared the materials with other inmates. In addition, our inmate partners were pleased to find that people in the community were interested in their work and eager to learn about their experiences. After the exhibition opened at the college, we transported it to the jail for a second public opening. We held a private artists' viewing for the inmates and students before visitors arrived. The pride the inmates felt was palpable. Here was their work, on exhibition, for a community to see.

As part of the reflection process we asked our students to consider not only their personal growth, but also the effect the experience had on them as citizens in the larger community. Did this experience give credence to the vision we shared with Dolan (2004) of an activist university whose curriculum looked toward social justice and used the arts as a site of critical engagement? One student, whose project task was to spend countless hours processing negatives for the exhibition, wrote:

Seeing the faces of our audience as they stood enthralled in front of the images I've spent so much time working on made all my efforts worth it... When I see an image of Mr. Kidd that I've seen a hundred times before, some of the content of the image is sullied by the context from which I view it, but when our audience saw the same image at the exhibition opening they saw the banner with fresh eyes... Sharing our inmate partners' works with the community was one of the most satisfying experiences I've had working on this project because it allowed the entire community to share in the learning and teaching that we undertook at the jail.

This student recognized that through the art of photography he could influence viewers' attitudes toward incarcerated people. He saw himself as James Agee and Walker Evans likely viewed themselves, as social workers educating the rest of us by forcing us to see hidden communities with fresh eyes.

Other students noted an enhanced sense of civic responsibility that is, according to Bringle and Hatcher (1996), one of the defining characteristics of service learning:

Working at the jail facilitated my helping others express themselves in ways they may not have otherwise experienced. I believe it is everyone's responsibility to act in ways to better their surrounding community, and through this project I feel we have done that. Good citizenship requires reaching out to others, even when one may be reaching in an uncomfortable place.

Another young man wrote that "I enjoy volunteering, so it's extremely likely that I'll do it again. The jail experience was an amazing one, and increased my appreciation for diverse people." His colleague concurred:

Through our project at the jail I have seen the impact that can be made by getting involved [in the community]. The comments that people made when they saw the exhibition of the work that we and the men did really showed how [our civic involvement] can change people's views of certain aspects of society. I believe that we all have a role and responsibility as human beings to help others in need and to be involved in our communities. It is important that we do get involved because we can really make a difference by doing so. It may be a small difference or a large difference, but nonetheless it is important that we all do something.

Another young man approached his role as a citizen somewhat philosophically:

I was proud to have been a member of this class because it taught me that in order to move forward with my life, I have to be able to understand what my life means in the social context. Without contributing to the community, life is simply a process. Contributing to the group of people with whom we worked made me feel needed for the first time at Hampden-Sydney.

Other students discussed the efficacy of service learning in linking the principles of the classroom with practice—in our case, documentary practice—in the larger community, which is perhaps the primary role service learning can play in the academy. As one student wrote:

In working with the men at the Piedmont Regional Jail, I found that I was able to learn about the art of documentary not only by studying those that came before me, but by actually getting out there and doing the work. In seeing the men on the other side of the bars, I have come to understand that we should not ignore those from whom we are separated.

In all, students' responses reflected realization of the goals we, as teachers, had envisioned for the course: academic learning, lessening of social distance between partners, and an awareness of one's civic responsibility to address issues of marginality and social inequality. Designing our course following Dolan's (2004) vision of the activist university and Zehr's (1996, 2001, 2003) principles of restorative justice and transformative research, and in light of Mehra's (2004) observations about the efficacy of service learning in reducing marginality proved extremely helpful and, we believe, was integral in the success of the project.

While we accomplished the majority of our goals for the course, there were limitations to the process that likely affected the outcome of the work and that may affect subsequent projects with similar populations. These limitations concerned the vicissitudes of working within the jail itself and the single sex populations with which we worked.

The rewards of working with incarcerated individuals were many—the men with whom we worked were eager learners, forgiving of the missteps and naiveté of our freshmen students, and adept in expressing themselves through the various photographic techniques we offered. There were also challenges in working in a jail, challenges we discovered as our work progressed. Jail administrators were primarily concerned, of course, with security, so there were times when we were not able to meet with the inmates because the jail was under "lockdown." Because our students had limited availability and couldn't miss other classes to make up the missed sessions, we simply had to limit the scope of the photography course we offered the inmates. The materials we could bring into the jail were limited, as well. For example, no scissors were allowed, which meant we had to precut all of the materials needed to make the cereal box pinhole cameras. The manipulation of negatives, normally done with razor blades, had to be done with pushpins, the inventory of which was extremely important. We brought eight pushpins into the jail and took eight pushpins out. Extra staff had to be on hand during the days we worked in the portable darkroom that was set up in an exercise yard. Although the additional officers, two men with rifles standing guard outside the exercise area, were friendly, they certainly cast somewhat of a pall on the artistic process! As well, jail populations fluctuate for various reasons, which meant that group members were not always present. For example, one of the inmates who began the project was removed from the class halfway through the project because of alleged insubordination toward a guard.

The all-male population of Hampden-Sydney College was limiting in some respects as well. Jail administrators insisted that we work only with male inmates, at least for our first service-learning project. They felt that our male students would likely be more comfortable working with male inmates rather than with a coed group. Of course, this meant that there are many unanswered questions about how this documentary photography project might work with a

population of men and women. It would be interesting to see how our male students would respond to incarcerated women, especially how they might characterize a "woman inmate," and how their initial concerns about the project might differ. Given the opportunity to do the project again, we would ask jail administrators to allow us to work with both men and women. Coed institutions might also provide a very different dynamic in a project where the college students are both men and women.

The work we completed at the jail has prompted me to engage in further study, with a slight change of focus, about the role of service learning in reducing social distance, lessening stereotypes, and fostering civic responsibility. In fall 2006 I will explore the effectiveness of theatrical performance as a unique laboratory for cultural negotiation, in light of its dual role of mirroring and shaping cultural meanings through the power of its imaging. I will again bring together Hampden-Sydney College students and inmates, and this time, having already secured the blessings of the jail administration, will work with both men and women inmates at Piedmont Regional Jail. We will work together to create a performance piece in the "theatre of testimony" or "documentary theatre" style, an artistic exploration of incarceration, identity, stigma, and privilege. The students, actors in an upper-level theatre course, will interview inmates and be interviewed by inmates, and in collaboration with inmate participants, compile a script for performance. Additional source material may be drawn from print and visual media, journals, letters, public records, articles, and popular culture texts. Both students and inmates will participate as actors in the production, embodying and voicing the identity of the "other." I am primarily interested in the shared experience of performers during the research process and in performance—their interactions, self-discoveries, and disruptions of assumptions about one another.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, through sharing our experiences behind the bars of the Piedmont Regional Jail, I hope that this article will inspire others to implement similar projects within their own universities and community groups. Zehr's (1996, 2001, 2003) transformative model of research proved effective for our young scholars and inmate participants, as it allowed them to work together on equal terms, each group engaged in mutual collaborative inquiry. Following Dolan (2004), we found that the arts provide a "rich site of critical engagement" (p. 1) where stereotypes and misconceptions about people from disparate groups can be interrogated in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect. In particular, the use of pinhole photography provided both inmates and students a "way in": because participants were actively engaged in a common creative task

requiring no prior knowledge or specialized skills, social barriers were lessened, and to a large degree, differences of race, class, education, incarceration, and age proved irrelevant. It was through the content of the images and discussions about those images that participants' voices emerged, allowing each man to express his inner convictions on his own terms. Thus, following Mehra (2004), I argue that this project not only provided inmates the opportunity to resist their marginalized status (to demand, in a sense, that our students see them as people, not as the sum total of their crimes), but also it provided our young students the opportunity to develop new ways of thinking about their own privileged status. Such awareness inevitably led students to question their role as future leaders in a diverse and unequal society, and led many to recognize their potential as agents of social change. In short, this project offered our partners at the jail a voice and an opportunity to be heard through the mediums of image and text. Our students also found their voices as responsive citizens in the larger community that exists outside the college gates.

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