

# CREATIVE FATHERHOOD BEHIND BARS: THE READ TO YOUR CHILD PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

More than one-half of incarcerated people in the USA are parents of minor children. Family literacy and read-aloud programs not only provide these parents with ways to connect and communicate with their children, but also encourage children's learning and literacy development through creative means. Research on such programs, however, is scarce. This article presents an analysis of one such family literacy program operating in a rural Pennsylvania prison. Using qualitative data, the authors describe the Read to Your Child/Grandchild (RYCG) program and the experiences of the 11 fathers who participated in the program in fall 2018. The article examines how the program bridges gaps between fathers and children in communication, physical presence, and literacy development; the unique benefits the program's components afford its participants; and the fathers' acts of creativity and creation while in a restricted carceral setting.

**Palavras-chave:** Correctional education. Family literacy. Incarcerated fathers. Incarcerated parents.

## INTRODUCTION

“...it’s hard to get creative with things when it comes to a child when you’re in prison. Because the environment sort of dampens your imagination, you know, and your creativity.”

(John, 2019)

John and ten other incarcerated fathers had various reasons for joining the Read to Your Child/Grandchild (RYCG) Family Literacy Program at a rural Pennsylvania prison. Some men wanted to better connect with their children (both those they knew well and those they had never met or barely knew); some wanted to be more “present” in their children’s lives, even if not physically present; and some wanted to create lasting artifacts that children could enjoy over and over (Prins, Stickel, & Kaiper-Marquez, 2020). However, all these fathers agreed that this program offered, or afforded, a means of creativity and connection that is otherwise unheard of in the prison system (Stickel, Prins, & Kaiper-Marquez, accepted).

As John noted in the above quotation, prison is a place that “dampens your imagination...and your creativity.” Although prisons, both in the U.S. and internationally, have implemented programs to foster inmates’ creativity and capacity for learning (e.g., Brewster, 2014; Tett, Anderson, McNeill, Overy, & Sparks, 2016), and many of these programs are positively related to inmates’ attitudes, self-discipline, and greater participation in prison programs (Brewster, 2014; Cohen, 2009; Stevens, 2000), there is little research on parents’ experiences in and perceptions of these programs. Consequently, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: How does RYCG support the creativity of incarcerated fathers? What affordances do the various program components offer the fathers? Lastly, how do incarcerated fathers perceive ways that RYCG shapes their relationships with their children?

The RYCG program was created over a decade ago and is offered in most state correctional institutions (SCIs) in Pennsylvania. RYCG’s aims are to offer incarcerated individuals and their children/grandchildren shared literacy experiences while stressing the importance of family literacy for enriching one’s life (PA DOC, 2013) and to maintain a foundational connection between the incarcerated individuals and their children/grandchildren, one that they may build upon after release (PA DOC 2019a). Participants select one or more

books, provided by the SCI, for their child/ren (aged 12 or under) and are video recorded reading the book aloud. During the recording, participants can add a personal message to their child. Parents may make one video per household, but children in the same household may each receive a book. At this SCI, the fathers also make individualized scrapbooks for each child. These scrapbooks, the DVD, and book are sent to the child, pending the custodial caregiver's consent.

Drawing from observations and interviews with program participants, this article describes how the multiple affordances of the program helped foster fathers' creativity and attempts to connect with their children. We argue that with a program such as RYCG, particularly with the affordances its components offer, fathers are able to reinforce the importance of education and literacy practices for their children, establish ways to be present in their children's lives while not physically being near them, and find outlets for their own creativity that they can share with their children

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **PARENTAL INCARCERATION IN THE U.S.**

In 2017, there were more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in the USA, including 1.49 million in state and federal prisons (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019a) and 745,000 in local jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2019b). Of these, over one half were parents to minor children (Glaze & Maruschak, 2010). In addition, more than 2.7 million children currently have a parent behind bars (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). In Pennsylvania, where this study takes place, two-thirds of incarcerated individuals are parents (PA DOC, 2019b).

Parental incarceration has a range of consequences for children, including lower high school GPA (maternal incarceration only; Hagan & Foster, 2012), lower non-cognitive school readiness (Haskins, 2014), greater likelihood of becoming justice-involved (Conway & Jones, 2015), increased externalizing behavioral problems (Geller et al., 2012), decreased reading scores (DeHart, Shapiro, & Hardin, 2017), and lower educational attainment as adults (Mears & Siennick, 2016). As a response to rising parental incarceration and concerns about its effects on parents and children (particularly children's education), prisons, non-profits, and other

entities have offered family literacy (FL) programs that often focus on reading to or with children.

## **FAMILY LITERACY**

Outside of carceral settings, FL programs and practices have been found to support children's school success (Paratore, 2001), writing development (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999), and later educational and literacy outcomes as teenagers and adults (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). While there is significantly less research on FL programs for incarcerated parents, there are numerous studies on the outcomes of *parenting* programs for incarcerated parents and their relationships with children (e.g., Collica-Cox & Furst, 2018; Kampter, Teyber, Rockwood, & Drzewiecki, 2017; Troy et al., 2018). In his critique of research on incarcerated parenting, Muth (2018) challenged the prevailing perspective that parenthood, and particularly fatherhood, is suspended during incarceration. Rather, he found that FL programs enable incarcerated parents to remain in contact with their children (Muth, 2006).

FL and read-aloud programs in correctional institutions vary in their focus and design. For instance, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) integrates family literacy into its academic programs, transition programs, and support services (Hudson River Center for Program Development, 2001). A more customary approach is to offer stand-alone FL programs or projects. For instance, Reading Unites Families in Maryland offers a "literacy Saturday" in which fathers and children participate in literacy activities (Gardner, 2015). Similarly, in "Daddy and Me," a New York Public Library Correctional Services program, fathers attended librarian-led trainings and classes on children's literacy and were audio-recorded reading a children's book (Higgins, 2013). Other programs involve parents in reading books for children by phone or compact disc (Quinn-Kong, 2018). Research in the U.K. and Canada similarly shows that FL programs have enhanced incarcerated fathers' involvement in their children's literacy practices and their awareness of children's development (Nutbrown et. al, 2019); helped keep families together (Brown, 2017); and promoted parent-child bonding and parents' and children's literacy skills (Finlay, 2014). All such programs link incarcerated parents with their children through reading and other FL practices, with the goal of nurturing parent-child relationships and fostering literacy (Zoukis, 2017).

Although these findings are optimistic, there is scant research on FL programs for incarcerated parents and how these programs play multiple roles in the lives of incarcerated parents and their children. In the following sections, we seek to explore what creative affordances one such program, the RYCG FL program in Pennsylvania, has on incarcerated fathers and their children.

## **AFFORDANCES**

The term *affordances* was coined by psychologist James Gibson (1979) to describe what the natural environment offers, provides, or furnishes living beings. This concept has since been adapted to understand the possibilities for action offered by artifacts and technologies (Hutchby 2001; Lee 2007; Pozzi, Pigni, & Vitari 2014), including digital technologies in educational settings (e.g., Alexander, Powell, & Green, 2011; Ilomäki, Lakkala, & Paavola, 2006). Within this paper, we draw on the idea of affordances and specifically center on Norman's (1990, 1999) concept of *perceived* affordances. As Norman argued, "affordances result from the mental interpretation of things, based on our past knowledge and experience applied to our perception of the things about us" (p. 219).

Expanding on Norman's work, Hutchby (2001, p. 444) contended that "affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object". Hutchby noted that technologies are not blank slates open to any possible interpretation but, instead, "render available different (though sometimes overlapping) ranges of uses..." (p. 448). Consequently, affordances are both objective and subjective (Pozzi et al., 2014).

Drawing from literature on affordances, and particularly perceived affordances, this paper explores how the multiple components of the RYCG Program – namely, its use of reading, writing, scrapbook making and video recording – afford certain types of creativity to the participants that otherwise are not available during incarceration. Moreover, we seek to reveal how these multiple affordances fostering fathers' creativity influence the relationships they experience with their children. In the following section, we describe the methods we used to explore these affordances and their role in the participating fathers' creations.

## **METHODS**

We selected qualitative research methods that would help us understand the father's perceptions of and experiences in the RYCG program. Specifically, we drew upon the ethnographic tradition (Wolcott, 1999) by using observation, detailed description, interviews, and analysis of artifacts (scrapbooks) to elicit participants' emic meanings. The research team included two faculty members (white women) and two graduate students (one white woman and one African American woman). Although we had not conducted prior research in prisons, we collectively had a variety of experiences with formerly incarcerated people and considerable experience establishing rapport with research participants and adult learners who experience social exclusion because of their social class, educational level, or other vectors of inequality.

We chose this SCI because of its active RYCG program and proximity to Pennsylvania State University, where we work and study. The SCI advertised RYCG in fall 2018 by posting a flyer on prison bulletin boards. The teacher who oversaw RYCG gave each father who enrolled in the program a flyer about our study. We then held an informational session about the study, and all 11 RYCG participants volunteered to be part of the research. We took several steps to ensure ethical treatment of incarcerated research participants, a population that has often been exploited by researchers (Gostin, Vanchieri, & Pope, 2007). We emphasized that the study was voluntary; that their decision to participate would have no bearing on parole or other decisions by SCI personnel; and that there was no compensation. We sought to affirm participants' dignity and self-determination by asking them to choose a pseudonym or use their real name or nickname. As a form of reciprocity, we donated children's books for RYCG, sent fathers a thank you letter and a certificate (these items are considered in parole hearings), and asked the teacher to share copies of our RYCG presentations and papers with those still incarcerated.

The fathers' ages ranged from 28 to 48 (average = 35), with total (lifetime) incarceration time varying from 20 months to approximately 15 years (average = 8 years). Participants' self-identified race/ethnicity was African American (6), white (2), multiracial (2), and Hispanic (1). The fathers had varying levels of education: three did not complete high school, three had a high school degree or GED® diploma, four had attended college but did not have a degree, and

one had a bachelor's degree. Fathers had one to eight children, with most fathers (7) having two children (five of these fathers had children in the same household).

The SCI's rural location makes visitation difficult, particularly for fathers whose families lived several hours away. Seven of the fathers had more than one previous visit with the child who received the video (hereafter, focal child), but in most cases visits were infrequent. Four fathers had little or no previous face-to-face contact with at least one of the focal children because the child was very young or not yet born when they entered the SCI, the child was in foster care in another state, or other reasons. Three of these fathers had communicated regularly with the child since entering the SCI. As Rundy put it, the program provided them with a chance to "build a new relationship" and strengthen their "bond" with their child. The remaining seven fathers had pre-existing relationships with the focal children, even if they were not custodial parents. In addition, three fathers had participated in RYCG at a previous SCI.

We collected data in three stages from November 2018 to February 2019. First, we observed and wrote field notes while the teacher video-recorded the fathers. In all, fathers made 18 videos (four fathers made two or more); videos lasted 22 minutes on average. After videotaping, one or two researchers interviewed each father in a classroom. We also took notes on the scrapbook contents and asked men (in some cases) to read aloud the letters they wrote to their children. Interview topics included father's pre-incarceration education and literacy practices; relationships with children and involvement in their literacy, learning, and education in and out of prison; and experiences in and reflections on RYCG. We also interviewed the RYCG teacher and the SCI administrator overseeing educational programs at the SCI. Finally, we conducted follow-up interviews in February 2019 with four out of five fathers who heard back from their child about the video. One father was released soon after the video was sent; the other five fathers may have heard back, but did not alert the RYCG teacher. Follow-up interviews inquired about children's responses to the DVD, book, and scrapbook, how fathers felt about their children's reaction and RYCG overall, and what they learned from the program.

We used content analysis to analyze field notes and verbatim transcripts (Patton, 2015). We started with codes derived from interview topics (e.g., what fathers liked about RYCG) and created new codes to refine these topics and capture other data (e.g., being "present" without physically being present").

## FINDINGS

### CREATING THE RYCG COMPONENTS

The RYCG program at this SCI includes three components: the book read for the recording, the video recording, and the scrapbook created by the fathers. This section provides a brief description of the process of creating each component. At other SCI sites, RYCG has included creative activities such as making an artistic backdrop for the video recording.

**Choosing a book.** Fathers could choose one or two books to read to each of the focal children. The prison sorted the books into grade level and/or age range. Some fathers, like Scho, used the grade levels to select books for their children, whereas other fathers, like Carl Jung, LaDiDaDi, Malik, and Ron, focused more on subject matter. Other fathers, like Jon, Brandon, El Jefe, and Ron, chose books they had connections to as well; for example, Brandon chose the book *Corduroy* because he remembered his own mother reading it to him as a child. Whether for its relevant content, emotional connection, or matching age level, the fathers used their knowledge of their children to select appropriate books to read and send their children. Thus, the very act of choosing a book for their children was an integral way for the fathers to create a connection to their children.

**Creating the scrapbook.** Fathers used classroom time and various resources to create a scrapbook for each of their children. The teacher coordinating RYCG photocopied pages out of activity and coloring books, printed coloring pages from websites, and photocopied the personal photos the fathers selected. The scrapbook contained a variety of these and other items, including activities created by the fathers, drawings, and written messages or letters. Some fathers also sent additional items such as a feather, a leather pouch, candy, and cards.

The scrapbook component afforded fathers the greatest opportunity for explicit creativity. Some fathers drew upon prior creative activities when making the scrapbook. For example, Brandon had developed a character, the dog Buster Brown; he would draw illustrations of Buster's adventures and send these to his girls for them to write accompanying text. Brandon continued this activity by drawing pictures of Buster Brown in the scrapbooks for his daughters. Conversely, John, quoted at the beginning of this article, initially "worried" about coming up with activities for the scrapbook. He saw prison as dampening his creativity,



particularly when concerning his young son. John used the activity books the SCI provided to tailor the scrapbook to “what he’s into right now and use that as our benefit in teaching him.” In his finished scrapbook, John’s creativity flourished: he even created original activities for his son, such as construction paper cut-outs to build a house.

**Making the video.** The fathers described themselves as being acutely aware of the purpose of the video while recording. For example, Rundy “couldn’t stop smiling while [reading] because I know he [his son] [was] looking at me.” Fathers also described recording as emotional, nerve-wracking, or awkward. Several fathers included messages for their children at the beginning or the end of the video. In each of the four videos he made for his children, Scho also included a message for the children’s mothers, thanking them for their care, support, and “having [his] back” throughout his incarceration. Scho was the only father to include messages for the children’s mothers. Regardless of the elements they chose to incorporate in their videos, the video recording afforded fathers a unique opportunity for creation unusual within the incarcerated context.

## **AFFORDANCES OF RYCG COMPONENTS**

The components of the RYCG—and the video in particular—offered unique benefits, or affordances, specific to their mediums. These affordances included the rare opportunity to make and send a video from inside a prison, a more realistic conveyance of the father’s image (versus a simple photograph), and the repeatable and lasting nature of the various components (Prins, Stickel, and Kaiper-Marquez, 2020).

Carl explained that, despite how easy videos are to make and send in the outside world, making a video recording within SCIs is “just unheard of... The video is something that you can’t do anywhere else” apart from RYCG. As John pointed out, participating in the program as a whole allowed him to create something unique: “something special for him [son] that’s the only one that exists in the world.” Several fathers noted that the video component was particularly important because it allowed their children to see them, particularly in a positive endeavour like reading aloud. Carl described the video’s ability to show “body language” as an important dimension for making it “more lifelike.” Scho similarly specified that video can convey a sense of authenticity because “You could see if they’re putting on a show or if they’re

being fraudulent.” Rundy related that his son doesn’t really know me that well. He has pictures of me... and he says, ‘That’s Daddy’... But I want him to really get to see me, hear me, hear my... voice coming from me [rather than] just see a picture and then hear a voice, but can’t put it together. The video enabled him to do just that.

Lastly, by participating in RYCG, the fathers created unique artifacts that were lasting and repeatable. In our follow-up interview, Rundy said his son asked his mom to run the video over and over. John observed that “you can watch a video today, you can watch a video tomorrow, the next day, the next day, and the next day.” Therefore, although John might call home when his son, David, doesn’t want to talk, David can use the video and scrapbook whenever he chooses. Jones mentioned this repeatable, lasting nature of these artifacts as a main reason he wanted to participate in RYCG, saying he hoped his child “makes it her business to tell mommy every night to put the video in.” Malik noted his son was so attached to the scrapbook that he took it to school, while Scho’s daughter brought her book to school to read aloud during class story time.

## **REINFORCING PARENT-CHILD CONNECTION**

RYCG showcased how the participating fathers could enact their parenthood despite their incarceration. The fathers used the various RYCG components to help establish and/or reinforce their connection with their children and to convey the important life messages they in their parental roles deemed important.

**Involvement in child’s development and life.** The RYCG program allowed fathers to engage in new ways with their children’s development and their lives. In videos and scrapbooks, fathers were able to create messages, activities, and visuals to encourage children and their literacy development. For example, Scho tailored the four scrapbooks to his children’s needs: in the scrapbooks for his young children, he wrote 1 to 100 to support their numeracy skills, and he included math problems in the scrapbook for his teenage daughter. He saw the scrapbook not only as a keepsake for his children, but also as a tool for helping their educational development, saying he tried to think about how he might “possibly help them in any situation where, ‘You remember that book I gave you? Try to look at it and study it...whenever you’re having problems.’”

Like Scho, several other fathers included activities such as math problems, number lines, matching games, mazes, and activities about manners, feelings, and self-care. By including and creating these items, the fathers found another way to be a positive presence in their children's lives. LaDiDaDi, for example, saw this program as an avenue for nurturing his children's literacy development and encouraging them to pursue a positive life path:

Actually with this program, like, it's a big standout if you got a kid. Like, read to your child... that's just something that's just installed to you like, yeah, let's read to your child... You going through a trial and tribulation like this while being incarcerated, you surely don't want your kid to ever have to come to the extent to, you know, break the laws and stuff like that and you know, unfortunately landing here in a prison like this. So any type of step-up tool as a father that you think that you can take advantage of, especially being incarcerated, is really decent.

For fathers like LaDiDaDi and Scho, a program such as RYCG was an important and rare opportunity to be involved in their children's educational and emotional lives. Further, as we explore below, it was a way to be present in the growth of their children while not physically being near them.

**Being present.** Incarceration not only separates fathers from friends and family, but also creates new obstacles for communication and involvement, particularly for parents of minor children. During this study, communication at all Pennsylvania SCIs was hampered because of a lockdown. Employees and inmates became ill via synthetic drugs in print mail, so mail is now sent to a contractor that photocopies original letters before sending the photocopies to the SCI and destroying the originals. Communication with children is further hindered by the nature of children's lives; as John pointed out, his four-year-old did not always want to talk when John could call, and the long drive to the SCI made in-person visits difficult. Thus, incarcerated parents deal both with physical absence and limited communicative modes.

As a result of these limitations, fathers tried various methods to stay involved and present in their children's lives. Rundy practiced the ABCs with his sons on the phone. Brandon created Buster Brown illustrations that encouraged his children's writing and creativity. Both John and Scho mentioned keeping up with their children's schoolwork by receiving Individualized Education Program reports from preschool and talking with the children's mothers, respectively. Yet despite these efforts, the fathers mentioned difficulties in remaining

present for their children. RYCG not only established a distinct line of communication between fathers and children, but also allowed for a new, more creative way to be present.

As described earlier, many participants saw the visual component of RYCG as particularly important. El Jefe pointed out that this visual component helped reinforce the relationship between his son and him; Ron similarly expressed that the video allowed his son Omari to see his dad's image—see that his dad looked okay—and understand that, despite being incarcerated, he was “still dad.” Rundy also thought the video would help establish him as “daddy” because it would allow his son “to really get to see me, hear me, hear my... voice coming from me [rather than] just see a picture and then hear a voice, but can't put it together.” This was particularly true because many of the fathers described the video as a medium for conveying their genuine, “more lifelike” selves.

Other fathers, like Malik and John, emphasized that the program was a way to be involved in their children's lives despite the distance. Although John questioned the relevance of sending the video, he realized it was a new way for his son to see him:

“Sometimes I'll look at, like, the program and I'll say... what's he going to get out of a video? And then... you don't really look at it that way. A four-year-old looks at it as like, there's dad... Without the long drive.” As Malik put it, RYCG was a way to “interact with your kids without being there.”

As Malik put it, RYCG was a way to “interact with your kids without being there.”

**Conveying Parental Messages.** The program created an opportunity for the fathers to show themselves as parental figures through more traditional messaging. These messages included an emphasis on: the importance of reading, literacy, and schooling; respecting people like mothers and teachers; and making better choices than they did to avoid incarceration.

Many of the fathers, in both their interviews and in the RYCG video recordings, stressed the importance of schooling and of reading. Within the videos, fathers modelled reading to show their children the importance of engaging with books; LaDiDaDi particularly emphasized this connection for his children:

Because one thing is, you reading to 'em, they see actually you holding a book. And those images just, you know, it just kinda like install in their brain... it kinda encourage them to say 'I should pick a book up and read the book.'

As LaDiDaDi pointed out, the video recording in particular affords this visual connection for children because they not only hear their fathers reading aloud, but also see them with the book. As the SCI principal explained in her interview, the modern world is very visual. Thus, images of fathers reading might further “install” in children the importance of literacy.

Many fathers not only hoped to convey the importance of reading and literacy, but of school in general. Scho told his 14-year-old daughter, Mo’nique, that life without education can “get dark.” He emphasized that math, which his daughter struggled with, could help her see through falsity: “the world is built on numbers... People can lie, but numbers don’t lie.” Ron also underscored the importance of education and said he knew that his son Omari would “do well.” In his interview, Ron noted that his mother and grandmother were adamant about Ron graduating from high school, and Ron was similarly adamant that all his children likewise graduate.

Lastly, RYCG allowed fathers a chance to offer the wisdom they gained through what many labeled as their own mistakes. For some fathers, like John, Ron, and Rundy, they explained their incarceration as mistakes for which going away was a consequence. As Ron described it, “daddy made a mistake and needed a time out. It’s like if you made a mistake and you have to go to the corner because you did something wrong, daddy did something wrong.” In the follow-up interview with Ron, he expressed the hope that his son might learn from his own incarceration. Rundy likewise hoped to use his incarceration to relate to his sons’ own lives explaining “Parents mess up too sometimes.”

Though Scho tried to explain his incarceration in videos to all his children, it was to his teenage daughter he offered up his own experiences in detail as life lessons from which he hoped she might learn. Scho described his life mistakes and his incarceration poignantly:

But the truth is, I went about life wrong. You're probably wondering to yourself, what exactly does he mean by that? Well, the first bad decision I made was leaning towards the streets more than going to school and receiving an education by completing and graduating high school... The things that I saw in the streets captured my interest more than learning about boring history or confusing science... The streets accepted me for who I was and provided everything that I thought I needed... I began getting into trouble, arrested, receiving felony on top of felony. Once you receive a felony on your record, it becomes much harder to find an honest job, especially without an education. When you look at your choices in life and make the right decisions, you'll be rewarded with much promising future. Being that I did the total opposite, I'm

being rewarded with not being able to be around for holidays, birthdays, school events, or the precious moments of seeing you grow into a beautiful young woman.

Scho and the other fathers did not hide their incarceration or its reasons from their children, but rather sought to explain it to their children, in age-appropriate ways, in the hopes that their children might learn larger lessons from their fathers' mistakes.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research sought to explore three dimensions of the RYCG program: the capacity of the program to support incarcerated fathers' creativity; the affordances the program components offer participants; and the way the fathers perceive the program shapes their parent-child relationships. The RYCG program facilitated fathers' creativity through the various program components that fathers were able to tailor to their children. Whether by recording the videos, designing and constructing scrapbooks, writing letters, or devising messages for their children, the artifacts emanated from the fathers' creative work. These creations were particularly special because of their singularity (they were uniquely created for each child), their rarity (they were the only video recordings allowed within SCIs), and their lasting, repeatable nature (they could be re-read and re-watched). Though these products demonstrated a tangible act of creation, the program also encouraged creations of another kind. By participating in RYCG, the fathers created a new and unique line of communication with their children and sought to (re)position themselves as a positive presence in their children's lives.

RYCG's components ultimately helped serve two important parental functions and thus, reiterate fathers' paternal roles. Firstly, and particularly important for those with little or no prior contact with their children, fathers saw the program as helping their children understand the nature of their relationship with their father. As detailed in the previous section, many of the fathers saw the video component in particular as an important opportunity for their children to see their fathers and, in the words of Ron, know that they're okay and "still dad." Secondly, the fathers could use their creations to convey life messages they were trying to teach their children. In this sense, then, the fathers used the multiple components of RYCG to enact their

parental roles. This allowed, as Rundy phrased it, the fathers not to be a burden to their children but rather a positive presence.

As Muth's (2018) work illustrates, parental incarceration may be perceived as pausing the parent-child relationship, particularly in the case of fathers, who are assumed to "re-enter" the lives of their children only when released. As we found, incarceration makes it difficult to remain present in children's lives. Though some fathers, such as John, Scho, and Brandon, gave examples of trying to keep up with their children's lives, several fathers mentioned the difficulty of remaining an active, and positive presence, and some described feeling, as El Jefe phrased it, "behind" in their children's lives. RYCG is one way to combat the notion of the parental role being suspended during incarceration, since the program allowed fathers to "interact with [their] kids without being there" and helped establish the fathers as positive presences for their children.

Though the fathers in this study richly conveyed their experiences in the RYCG program, this project is only a small step in understanding family literacy in carceral settings. Our findings suggest pathways for research on topics such as other types of family literacy and read-aloud programs worldwide; the short- and long-term consequences of these programs for incarcerated parents and their children and families (e.g., parent-child relationships, children's social-emotional well-being, parent and child literacy practices, re-entry outcomes); and the role of demographic variables (e.g., race, social class, linguistic background) in shaping these outcomes.

This study offers a glimpse of how fathers used the RYCG program to be creative parents within the constraints of a prison setting. The fathers in this study were able to enact their parental roles despite their incarceration, and used the affordances provided by the RYCG program to be a creative, positive presence in their children's lives.

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## **PATERNIDADE CRIATIVA ATRÁS DAS GRADES: O PROGRAMA LEIA PARA SEU FILHO OU FILHA**

### **RESUMO**

Mais da metade de pessoas encarceradas nos Estados Unidos são pais/mães de crianças menores. Programas de letramento familiar e de leitura em voz alta não apenas proporcionam a esses pais e mães maneiras de se conectarem e se comunicarem com suas crianças, mas também encorajam a aprendizagem e o desenvolvimento do letramento através de meios criativos. Contudo, são escassas as pesquisas sobre tais programas. Este artigo apresenta uma análise de um programa de letramento familiar em uma prisão agrícola no estado da Pensilvânia. Utilizando dados qualitativos, as autoras descrevem o programa Leia para seu(sua) filho(a)/neto(a) (cuja sigla em inglês é RYCG) e as experiências dos 11 pais que dele participaram no outono de 2018. O artigo examina como o programa preenche lacunas entre pais e crianças na comunicação, presença física e desenvolvimento do letramento; os benefícios especiais que os componentes do programa proporcionam aos participantes; e os atos de criatividade e as criações dos pais em um contexto restrito de encarceramento.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação em prisões. Letramento familiar. Pais encarcerados. Pais e mães encarceradas.

## **PATERNIDAD TRAS LAS REJAS: EL PROGRAMA LEE A TU HIJO O HIJA**

### **RESUMEN**

Más de la mitad de las personas encarceladas en los Estados Unidos son padres or madres de hijos menores de edad. Los programas de alfabetización familiar y de lectura en voz alta no solo proveen a estos padres maneras de conectarse y comunicarse con sus hijos, sino que también promueven de formas creativas el aprendizaje y el desarrollo de la alfabetización de los niños. Sin embargo, las investigaciones sobre tales programas son escasas. Este artículo presenta un análisis de uno de estos programas de alfabetización familiar que se ofrece en una prisión rural de Pennsylvania. Utilizando datos cualitativos, las autoras describen el programa *Read to Your Child/Grandchild* (RYCG; “Léele a Tu Hijo/Nieto”) y las experiencias de los 11 padres que participaron en el program en otoño 2018. El artículo examina cómo el programa cierra brechas entre padres e hijos en cuanto a la comunicación, la presencia física, y el desarrollo de la alfabetización; los beneficios únicos que los componentes del program ofrecen a los participantes; y los hechos de creatividad y creación de los padres en un contexto de restricción carcelaria.

**Palabras chave:** Educación correccional. Alfabetización familiar. Padres encarcelados. Padres y madres encarcelados.

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