

An Inquiry into Adult Male Prisoners' Experiences of Education

Abstract

Offender learning policy in England and Wales is vocationally focused and thus primarily aims to educate prisoners to increase their employability. Through an analysis of letters written by prisoners and interviews with serving prisoners, ex prisoners and prison staff, this qualitative study investigates prisoners' experiences of education to explore the broad range of ways that such experiences are interpreted. A recurring interpretation involves personal development and this study shows that a range of personal changes and transformations can be attributed to prison education experiences. This suggests that prisoners' interpretations of their educational experiences often go beyond employability.

This study also provides a greater understanding of prisoners' identities by drawing on elements of the research participants' life histories and locating experiences of education within their narratives. This places the study in an in depth human context and as such, it has emerged that prisoners' experiences of education can be better understood in the context of aspects of their life stories. This study reveals that prisoners who have not previously had positive educational experiences are often lacking in personal development and emotional maturity and therefore offender learning should be concerned with developing the 'whole person' in addition to giving prisoners skills for employment. As such, value can be ascribed to personal developments that are not directly related to employability such as the ability to cope with the experience of imprisonment and improved family relationships. By including such findings, this research also shows how understanding prisoners' experiences of education contributes to understanding key themes in prison sociology: coping, masculinity, identity and the pains of imprisonment.

This study concerns issues spanning a range of academic disciplines including criminology, sociology and education. As such, it is hoped that this thesis will be of interest to academics in the aforementioned subject areas as well as prison researchers, future prison researchers, prison teachers, prison staff, professionals in criminal justice, and any person with an interest in contemporary imprisonment.

Helen Nichols
January 2016

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

An Inquiry into Adult Male Prisoners' Experiences of Education

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD in Criminology
in the University of Hull

by

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January 2016

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my friends, Tom Scott and Ben Grasby.

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Acknowledgements

There are a number of people I must thank for their help and support during what has been the most challenging experience of my life. Firstly, I must thank my husband, Richard. He has been supportive during each stage of the PhD process (and long before I must add). Unfortunately for me he has witnessed some times of stress and frustration but he has been able to provide much encouragement in order that I could appreciate the times of success. I must also thank him for providing a much-needed ear to vent my chattering to after countless days writing in my office...his efforts on that front have been nothing short of heroic.

I also need to thank my Mum and Dad who have always encouraged me throughout my education. Having taught me the value of education from an early age and supported me on my rather long learning journey (often with a 'little' financial help here and there – thanks Mum), it is perhaps partially down to them that I have become so fascinated by the experience of education and I am forever grateful for their encouragement, help and support. I would also like to thank my Dad for the help and support he provided during the final year of this PhD, I am extremely grateful for everything he has done for me during this time.

My supervisors Dr Helen Johnston and Prof Gerry Johnstone have been my guides during this study. They have provided me with invaluable advice and helped me to see

the PhD as a continuous learning process, which has been an extremely important part of my personal development. I must also thank Helen further for being a constant support throughout my academic studies. She gave me advice and guidance during both my Bachelors and Masters degrees and helped me through the PhD and PhD scholarship application process. She has been a mentor and an inspiration.

I must sincerely thank the University of Hull for awarding me a PhD Scholarship to be able to pursue my research. I am extremely grateful to have been given this opportunity. Many thanks also go to the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Hull, with special thanks to Sarah Londesborough. Having been a student in the department for what seems like a lifetime, the academic and administrative staff have been a constant part of my university experience. I must thank Prof Peter Young for giving me the opportunity to teach in the department while studying for my PhD. Both being a student and teacher in the department have been wonderful and unforgettable experiences.

I would also like to give special thanks to my friends and colleagues Bill Davies, Suzanne Young, Billie Lister, Tom Cockcroft and Maggie Leese at Leeds Beckett University who have given me an incredible amount of support over the past year. They have helped me to preserve what is left of my sanity (not that there was a great deal there to begin with) and encouraged me to keep going when times have been difficult. I certainly owe them a pint or two.

It is important that I also thank the staff at the Prisoners' Education Trust for their generous help during this research process and in particular Nina Champion for her continuing support of my work. Although in this thesis I do not name the prisons where research was conducted, I would nonetheless like to give special thanks to all of the staff who helped me gain access and arrange my interviews. Their kindness will not be forgotten. I am also extremely grateful to all of the participants involved in this research. They shared with me their personal thoughts and feelings on some sensitive aspects of their lives and I would like to extend my gratitude to each of them.

Finally, I'd like to thank my husband once again. I cannot put into words how much I appreciate the help he has given me throughout this process. Without his support, reassurance and encouragement, this research would not have been possible.

Preface

I began studying criminology in 2004 knowing that I had a particular interest in the prison institution. During my studies, I became more fascinated by this closed community that confines criminals with the aim that they will be punished yet also rehabilitated. For me, the prison became a subject of curiosity that I knew would only be satisfied once I had the opportunity to go there as a researcher and understand what it is really like. As much as I jest with friends and colleagues that I am so interested in prisons because of my love for the film *The Shawshank Redemption*, I sense that it may have had some part to play in the journey towards this research. Although such film portrayals often exaggerate aspects of prison life and culture, they do highlight some of the key themes in the sociology of imprisonment nonetheless. Watching such films as a teenager, I became particularly interested in the themes of identity and coping with the pains of imprisonment. This research has by no means been a personal quest to find a real life 'Red' or 'Andy', but it has certainly tried to move towards a better understanding of the often-complex people prisoners are.

A particular piece of sociological literature that has played a significant role in developing my interest in the prison is Sykes' (1958) *Society of Captives*. This piece of work highlights the nature of the prison community and pays close attention to prisoners, prisoner identity and prison culture with a commitment to uncovering a true picture of prison life. In particular, this piece of work acknowledges the struggle

experienced by prisoners in surviving prison life and the methods adopted to cope with 'the pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958).

The desire to understand prisoners' experiences of education is embedded in my interest in the relationship between imprisonment, education, social control and power: concepts captured in Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). In this seminal work, Foucault discussed the changing nature of punishment between 1757 and 1820. This change involved the eradication of punishment as a torturous and painful public spectacle. Foucault discussed the shift from the physical torture of the body to the creation of docile bodies through the disciplinary punishment of the soul. As such, Foucault argued that the distinction between the prison and other social institutions had become less visible because similar disciplinary techniques of control, through the assertion of power and the use of panoptic surveillance, could be seen in a number of institutions in society including the prison, the school, the hospital, the factory and the asylum - he referred to this as the 'carceral continuum'. By associating these institutions with each other, Foucault grouped the prison with institutions characterized by work, learning and treatment such as the factory that produced something new or modified: educated children, healed patients and reformed prisoners. Foucault described all of the aforementioned institutions as being disciplinary in nature and as such concerned with social control.

When thinking about education and social control, education can be seen as more than just instruction and the transmission of information. It also shapes the people we

want to become by developing our values and beliefs. In serving the state, educational institutions maintain social order and thus enforce social control. Prison education therefore could be seen as some kind of 'double-control' or 'super-control' or perhaps the 'ultimate-hegemony'. Education then in the sociological sense may be identified with social control and the process of developing social control can be seen as being the same as that of education (Payne, 1927).

The focus of this study is prisoners' experiences of education. My own personal experience of school left me thinking about how it had not solely been for the purpose of gaining knowledge and skills for eventual employment. It also played a crucial role in my personal development. It was the liberal aspects of education such as the development of values, morals and personal enrichment that captured my attention when reflecting on my own experience. Combining this with my interest in imprisonment, I have become interested to find out whether prisoners experience education in a similar way despite the employability thrust that underpins offender learning policy. I thus arrived at the theoretical viewpoint upon which this research has been built: that we can think about the purpose, nature and justification of prison education in a way that goes beyond increasing the employability of offenders.

During the course of this research, it became clear that prisoners' experiences of education in prison could not be understood fully when separated from their experiences of education in earlier life. In addition, understanding the prison environment, how prisoners cope with life inside and having an understanding of the

development of offender learning policy came to form an essential context in which this study has been placed. This thesis explores prisoners' past and present experiences of education in the wider context of their life histories and their experiences of imprisonment, supported by the perspectives of prison staff and ex prisoners. Drawing on the work of classic and contemporary prison researchers including Gresham Sykes, Alison Liebling, Ben Crewe, Yvonne Jewkes and a selection of prison education researchers, I have attempted to bring together my own research findings with some of the key themes in prison sociology, desistance theory and an understanding of offender learning policy to build upon existing prison education research.

Chapter One: Why Research Prison Education?

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is about prisoners' experiences of education during imprisonment. The objective of this study is to investigate what motivates prisoners to undergo education, what they hope to achieve from it, and how the experience of prison education sometimes brings about more than the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Educational experiences, as will be evidenced by this thesis, can result in a fundamental shift in prisoners' thinking about who they are, their lives to date and how their lives might be different or indeed better in the future. The core objective of describing and developing emergent themes from such experiences is expanded in this thesis by an account of how those who deliver and shape education (those who constitute the prisoner's 'ecology') understand what they are doing and its significance which often differs from the official policy on prison education and is something they negotiate in complex ways.

In putting forward this objective, a set of key questions have been developed to address the core aims of this study. The key questions are:

- a) What motivates prisoners to undertake education?
- b) What does education mean to prisoners?
- c) How have prisoners' experiences of prison education been shaped by their earlier pre-prison experiences (or lack of experiences) of education?
- d) Can understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change tell us more about imprisonment?
- e) What, if any, kinds of personal changes and developments do prisoners perceive to have taken place as a result of experiencing education?

The questions posed in this research address how prisoners come to engage in education in the prison environment and explore how the resulting experiences can, in part, be formed by prior educational and life experiences. By understanding how prisoners interpret and give meaning to their experiences of education in the prison environment, this research will show the way prisoners perceive the personal outcomes they achieve. These outcomes can go far beyond the employability goal set by offender learning policy and can have a significant impact on improving other aspects of prisoners' lives. Drawing on qualitative research with prisoners, ex-prisoners and staff, this study seeks an in depth understanding of the broader value of education at a time when standards of purposeful activity are reported to be unacceptable and budget cuts are ongoing.

This research incorporates narrative accounts of prisoners' and ex-prisoners' life stories, such as those of previous education and family relationships, and this is integral to achieving an appreciation of the outcomes of prison education and the personal transformations that some prisoners experience. Achieving the core thesis objectives will also involve understanding contemporary imprisonment, the offender learning policy climate and key sociological themes that relate to prison experiences. As will be shown in this study, in some cases, prison education transforms prisoners in terms of their ability to cope with 'the pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958) and this research will explore how and why this is important, given that such benefits of education may only relate to the time an offender spends in prison.

It is particularly important to conduct this research at this time given that prison education is a significant topic of discussion as a number of problems are currently being faced. These problems primarily concern inconsistencies between establishments in assessment, delivery, availability, continuity and Internet restrictions. These issues have been exacerbated by the purported prison 'crisis' during which budget and staffing cuts have had negative implications for offender learning including the termination of provider contracts and reductions in pay for teachers. These issues will be considered

through the accounts of prison staff who provide their own interpretations on the current challenges faced by those who work in prisons to educate prisoners, supervise prisoners and govern prison establishments.

In aiming to advance knowledge in the field of prison education research, this thesis will identify key change indicators that acknowledge what transformations occur in prisoners who engage in education, in addition to the gaining of skills that will potentially make them more employable. It will be demonstrated that education can be a key factor in the process of personal change and transformation for prisoners which is important both during and following a prison sentence. The frustrations experienced by prison teachers will also be revealed, specifically current financial constraints and the changing policy climate, and how these frustrations are often shared by the prisoners they teach. The study will also show that improving or maintaining family relationships is a frequent motivating factor to do education in prison and this exposes the importance of understanding prisoners' broader life experiences and relationships in order to make sense of how and why education in prison is experienced in different ways.

1.2 Understanding Education

The thesis deals with two key issues: prison and education. The combination of the two in prison education is particularly interesting as there are clear disparities in their stated outcomes – one aims to punish and the other to provide personal development. This tension mirrors that which exists in the fundamental purposes of imprisonment – to punish and to rehabilitate. To achieve this aim simultaneously can be challenging as it poses questions regarding the extent to which both can and should be done at the same time and in what measure. As will be seen in this thesis, prisoners and prison staff often have a much broader and richer understanding of what education in prison means which

goes beyond the aim of employability set out in offender learning policy. However, understanding such ways of thinking about education becomes clearer when considering them in the context of models of education. A number of different models are identified in education literature but to think specifically about how prisoners interpret their experiences of *prison* education, this section of the chapter will provide a brief account of the humanistic, liberal and vocational models and how they relate to the present study. To begin this discussion, *Figure 1* below provides an overview of the purpose, method, location and actors involved in these models.

Figure 1. Models of Education

	Humanistic	Liberal	Vocational
Purpose	To engage the 'whole person' intellectually and emotionally	To develop critical thought and imagination	Equip individuals with skills for working life
Method	Academic teaching which integrates intellectual content with feelings	Expose the individual to intellectual disciplines including literature, mathematics, science and the arts	'Learning by doing'/apprenticeship
Location	Academic institutions	Schools and Universities	Environment where skills are required/specialist training institution
Actors	Academic teachers	Scholars	Those located in the world of work such as employers

The humanistic model of education is an approach that engages the 'whole person'. In doing so, it integrates intellectual content with feelings (Lyon, 1971). A humanistic

education is delivered in academic institutions by teachers who are not just academic in their approach, but who also encourage students to show their feelings. Humanistic teachers have been described as 'rare birds' (ibid.) who aim to develop both the intellectual and emotional halves of students – thus making the student 'whole'. Lyon (1971) argued that many of the problems facing our educational institutions today can be traced to the intellectual half-man manifesting his reluctance to feel and deal with feelings of his student (Lyon, 1971: 21-22).

Aloni (2007) suggested that the 'humanistic' tag is attached as a kind of seal of approval ensuring that almost every initiative is something worthy and respectable. Examples of such initiatives can include the empowerment of critical thinking and forming an educational climate of caring and dialogue. Another humanistic initiative that has particular relevance to the present study is authentic learning through one's own life story (Aloni, 2007). The interviews with prisoners and letters written by prisoners analysed during this study identify a specific value in this kind of approach as they reveal a number of important findings that connect experiences of education with prisoners' other life experiences. Interestingly, Dewey (1960) suggested that any knowledge that does not accomplish the liberation of human intelligence and human sympathy cannot be defined as educational. Signs of sympathetic emotion shown by participants in this study play an integral role in understanding that for some, the experience of education provokes an emotional awakening. Understanding the humanistic education model is especially important in researching prison education when reviewing offender learning policy. As will be seen later, a government report on prison education published in 2005 called for prison education to educate the person as a whole, therefore directly advocating a humanistic approach. Despite this there has not been a subsequent demand for this form of education in prisons. In recent years, offender learning policy has become specifically focused on vocation and appears to have removed many humanistic elements that may have existed previously.

Liberal education is primarily concerned with the individual as a unique personality (Winch and Gingell, 2008) whose aim is to develop the ability to reason and think critically and to do so an individual has to be exposed to intellectual disciplines including literature, mathematics, science and the arts (Johnstone, 1998). The purpose of engaging with such disciplines is to achieve the 'supreme human good' of developing critical thought and imagination (Pring, 1995: 184). One might argue that the justification for a liberal education is that cultivating intellect is a worthwhile practice in itself and that this has the potential to benefit wider society through the creation of intellectual beings. The responsibility of the delivery of a liberal education lies with scholars in schools and universities – institutions that are removed from the world of business and the people within it. Advocates of liberal education would argue that people should have broad knowledge and in order to achieve this, it must involve reflection and contemplation in their learning experiences. From this perspective, an educated person will have a broad perspective on the world and on the interrelationship of different subjects. As a result, a cognitive *depth* of knowledge is not enough; it must be matched by cognitive *breadth* (Winch and Gingell, 2008). Liberal education signifies an individual's interest and value *after* they have completed formal education at school - the process of learning is therefore said to be lifelong. Interestingly however, Durkheim's (1973) discussions of moral education suggest that perhaps too much emphasis can be placed on intellect and that education of a moral nature is about becoming harmonious with the world around us and thus becoming a member of society through an appreciation of collective values. Durkheim said that society is the source of all morality, and as such, education in the school should strictly enforce societal rules and thus induce conformity to create morality. He envisioned the schoolmaster as the representative of the authority of society (Ottaway, 1968) and this thesis will demonstrate how prisoners have responded to such forms of authority in the school setting. Durkheim noted:

It is essential to understand that [moral education] means an education that is not derived from revealed religion, but that

rests exclusively on ideas, sentiments, and practices accountable to reason only – in short, a purely rationalistic education (1973: 3).

Dearden (1968), an advocate of liberal education, championed the idea that education involved intellectual *and* emotional development. He also highlighted the importance of autonomy in enabling people to form judgements on what to think and do. He suggested that people should also be able to critically reflect on these judgements and that children needed to be educated to develop the capacity to be reflective and evaluate their own judgements. Dearden's perspective resonates particularly in the findings of interviews in the present study which reveal prisoners reflecting on their own actions and benefitting from providing a critique of their past judgements (something that some of these individuals had never done before). This provokes a discussion about the potential for educational experiences to provide an emotional awakening in some incarcerated individuals.

The vocational model of education is primarily concerned with preparing people for working. The primary aim from this perspective is to equip individuals with the skills they require to successfully carry out tasks at work, at home or in the community (Pring, 1995). This kind of education is often referred to in the context of apprenticeship and other such initiatives which involve 'learning by doing'. To 'learn by doing', vocational education needs to take place in the environment where the skills are required. In cases where the student does not begin training in the working environment, they may attend a specialised training institution to prepare – or in the case of prisoners, this takes place in designated prison workshops. Teaching of this kind in the free community is not in the hands of academics but is rather left to those who are located in the world of work such as employers.

Dewey argued that there is a distinction between vocation and learning a trade through a discussion of the connection of '...thought with bodily activity, of individual conscious

development with associated life; of theoretical culture with practical behaviour having definite results; of making a livelihood with the worthy enjoyment of leisure' (1960:373). As such, Dewey's interest in vocational education is not concerned with adapting workers to existing industry making them 'human capital' in a world of fast paced change. He suggested that the key is to encourage continuous learning throughout life, even when vocational skills have been learned, to achieve the ultimate sense of freedom thus creating individuals and citizens rather than just employees. The vocational model of education is a particularly important consideration in the study of prison education at present as the primary aim of offender learning policy is ensuring that prisoners are equipped with skills necessary to gain employment.

There is a classic debate between liberal and vocational education that has endured since the work of Aristotle and Plato in the fourth century BC. Plato suggested that there were three classes of humans: those who were destined to be workers or traders, those who were warriors and those who were qualified to be rulers. For those destined to be workers, traders or warriors, practical training was given to improve on the required skills. For leaders however, a special programme of liberal studies was developed to sharpen and strengthen intellect (Chambliss, 1996). The distinction between the training of warriors and leaders evolved with time and eventually in industrial society was discussed in the context of "the foot soldiers of the assembly line" and "the captains of industry". Blurring the distinct lines between the liberal education of "the captains of industry" and the vocational education of "foot soldiers", Dewey (1960) argued that the acquisition of critical thinking skills required to cope with turbulent change should not be exclusive to those of higher social standing. Dewey's contribution to this debate was the value he saw in democracy and that '...the dominant vocation of all human beings at all times is intellectual and moral growth' (1960: 362). He argued that a narrow vocationalism without a critical liberalizing dimension could create a passive, subordinated working class. Dewey's emphasis on the potential subordination of the working class through a narrow vocationalist approach to education gives rise to the argument that a passive working class is precisely what employability-focused offender

learning policy strives to achieve. With high rates of recidivism being the central driving force of this approach to offender learning, the critical liberalizing dimension of Dewey's vision for education is not the primary concern for policy makers who need offenders to get into work and thus move away from the prison's revolving door.

Dewey also suggested that vocational education should not strictly be restricted to creating 'human capital' which leads one to consider Weber's 'ideal types'. This term was used in Weber's methodological discussions to refer to the construction of certain elements of reality into logically precise conception (Gerth and Mills, 2009). It is evident that the characteristics of ideal types are not always mutually exclusive and they should be initially seen as unambiguous concepts in order to make early comparisons. As became evident earlier, there is a clear overlapping of the humanistic and liberal models of education in the way that both acknowledge the importance of critical thinking and intellect but differ in their emphasis on the encouragement of emotion, thus demonstrating the lack of 'ideal type'. It is clear therefore that any educational activity is unlikely to be a pure reflection of one model or another but rather a combination of distinctive features of different models.

Education involves the transfer of knowledge and skills through the process of learning. Whether education is vocational or liberal in nature, being educated is a positive and vital aspect of life, which ultimately aims to make people 'better'. The importance of education is reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that all people have a right to education. Article 26 Section 2 further states:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...(UN General Assembly, 1948).

It is perhaps the concept of freedom that most clearly demonstrates the tension between the ideals of education and imprisonment. A sense of freedom can be achieved through the process of becoming educated and as a result, gaining knowledge that enables people to make the choices that direct their lives. On the contrary, prison is one of few places in society that intends to deprive individuals of their liberty and autonomy (Sykes, 1958). Other such institutions that have power over individuals by controlling their behaviour include the army barracks, the school and the hospital – institutions that Foucault (1977) argued were part of a ‘disciplinary society’. In the UK, imprisonment is the most severe punishment imposed on convicted offenders and it serves the symbolic purpose of physically separating those who abide by the law from those who do not. When offenders are imprisoned, the physical structure of the institution serves as a clear reinforcement of its purpose. Large gates, barbed wire, locked doors, high walls and small cells remind prisoners (and the public) that prison is the ultimate punishment and that those who are sent there are, at least for a period of time, undeserving of a place within wider society.

Although prison and education serve as contradictions in their ideals, it is the dual purpose of contemporary imprisonment that reveals their commonalities and thus presents justifications for the education of serving prisoners. The function of the prison is to punish *and* rehabilitate offenders. The aim in doing this is to make prisoners better (law abiding) citizens and therefore fit to rejoin society and, in theory, make some form of contribution. As such, both prison and education involve social control, institutional practices, instruction, discipline and personal transformation. They are both practices that involve investment in people for the benefit of individuals *and* wider society.

Whether or not the separate ideals of prison and education contradict one another, they have been brought together in offender learning practice through the need to rehabilitate offenders. Although prisoners experience the deprivations of liberty and autonomy (amongst others), their right to be educated remains intact and education, as will be seen in Chapter Two, has had a place in the prison regime since the 18th century.

1.3 Educational Provision in Prison

To provide an introductory explanation of what contemporary prison education is and how it is delivered in practice, this part of the chapter will discuss the cost, delivery and organisation of offender learning and the funding provision for offender learners. This will also include a brief overview of types of courses available as well as statistical information on uptake and retention rates for prisoners undertaking these courses.

Prison education programmes are funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Information on prison education funding released by the Ministry of Justice in February 2015 under the Freedom of Information Act included the amount of money spent by BIS and budgets for the delivery of education, information, advice and guidance. Salary costs for BIS and staff working on prison education was not included in the published costings. For the year 2014-15, BIS made a budget of £145,686,000 available to the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) which included £14,000,000 for the delivery of the National Careers Service in custody (Gov.uk, 2015). This budget funds education delivery for those held in adult prisons in England. Budgets were also made available in 2014-15 totaling £1,330,000 to the Open University (OU), the Prisoners' Education Trust and Women in Prison to fund their activity in supporting Higher Education (HE), distance learning and specialist information, advice and guidance services (*ibid.*).

For prisoners studying higher education courses, tuition fee loans are applied for and repaid in the same way as students in the free community. Those wishing to study further education courses (post GCSE) at levels 3 and 4 can apply for Advanced Learning Loans. Although access to higher education courses can be more challenging, recent data from the Justice Data Lab revealed that offenders studying under grants provided by the Prisoners' Education Trust are significantly less likely to reoffend within one year

of release. Of 3,085 offenders who received a Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) grant¹, the one year proven reoffending rate reported in 2013 was 19% - a statistically significant difference from the 26% rate for a matched control group of similar offenders (Justice Data Lab, 2013). The report's sample included those funded by PET to study different courses ranging from Open University degrees to vocational courses and recipients of art and hobby materials. Specific analysis for some of these course groups demonstrates conclusively that Open University courses, creative learning and some further education all had a positive effect in reducing reoffending (Justice Data Lab, 2015). In response to this, Prisoners' Education Trust director, Rod Clarke, said "With the right support from the prison system and with a bit of extra money we could do a whole lot more to reduce crime and prevent people from becoming victims" (ibid.).

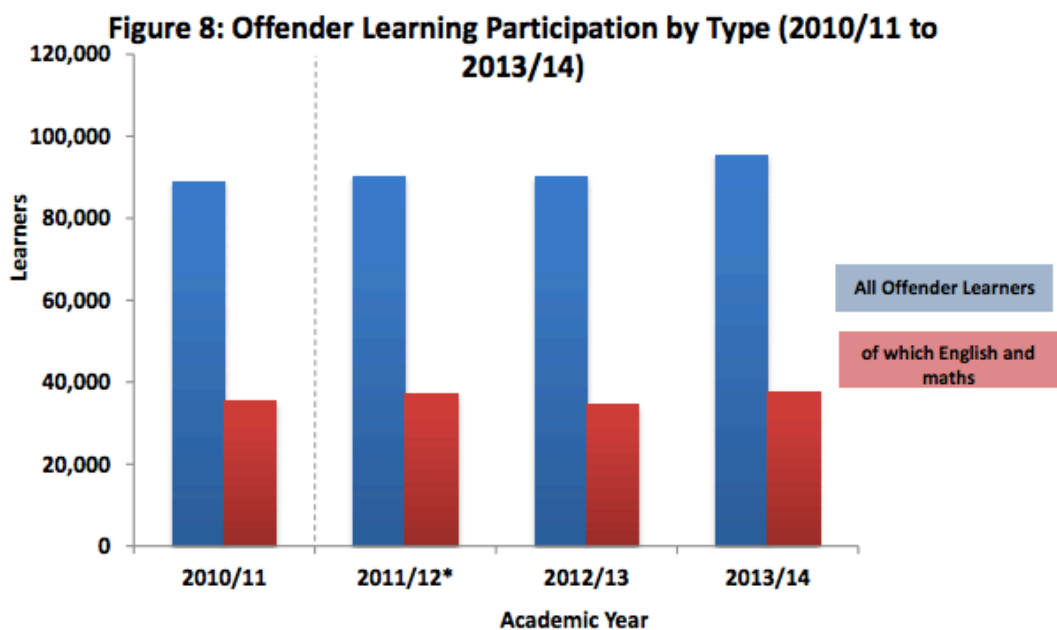
Across the prison estate, prison governors ultimately take the lead role in determining the curriculum for individual prison establishments. However, the core curriculum across the prison estate must include employability skills, English and maths, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), ICT and Equal Regulated Vocational Qualifications (Gov.uk, 2015). As previously discussed, prisoners are also able to apply for further and higher education courses through the Open University (OU). Students who pursue this learning route in prison often begin by studying 'Access' modules as an introduction to the OU and studying at a higher level. The OU identifies these types of courses as being perfect for learners with little or no experience of higher education and they provide an opportunity for learners to develop study skills and confidence (Open.ac.uk, 2015). The Access courses available are divided into three modules – 1) Arts and Languages 2) People, Work and Society 3) Science, Technology and Maths. Access modules are intended to pave the way for further learning towards certificate, diploma or degree

¹ Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) also offer grants for courses below Higher Education Level such as GCSEs, IGCSEs and A Levels. The full distance learning curriculum offered by PET can be seen at <https://fbclientprisoners.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/Access%20to%20Learning/PET%20Distance%20Learning%20Curriculum%202015%20Final.pdf>

level qualifications and additional learning materials for these types of courses can be accessed via the Virtual Campus² (where available at individual prison institutions).

At any one time, just under a third of the prison population attends education classes (Prison Reform Trust, 2010). *Figure 2* below shows a slight growth in offender learning participation amongst prisoners above the age of 18 between 2010 and 2014 with a 6% increase from 89,000 in 2012/13 to 95,000 in 2013/14. Participation in English and maths courses also increased by 9% during this period. These figures represent learners funded via the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) budget.

Figure 2: Offender Learning Participation by Type (2010/11 to 2013/14)



(Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014: 16)

² The virtual campus can be thought of as a customized search engine, which allows secure access to sites, which have internal, and no external, hyperlinks. The virtual campus also provides offender learners with advice and guidance suggesting courses and vacancies available through the virtual campus (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2013).

One of the main obstacles to the participation and completion of courses in prison is the frequent movement of prisoners between prison establishments. This is referred to as 'churn' and has a devastating effect on retention and completion rates (Bracken, 2011). Sudden transfers to different prison institutions prevent learners from completing education programmes and ill-conceived targets exacerbate the problem. As Bracken (2011: 25) has observed 'Forcing providers to commit offenders to lengthy courses, and basing their targets on retention rates is entirely incompatible with how prisons are run in practice'. The National Audit Office (2008) found that approximately a third of all learning programmes started in prison are not completed and that in half of instances, this is due to transfer or release.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This part of the chapter will present the overall organisation of the thesis and explain how the following nine chapters will establish the historical and political context of prison education, review existing research, provide a theoretical framework for the study and establish the research design. The structure of the findings and discussion chapters will also be set out.

Chapter Two will establish the historical and political context of prison education to demonstrate that educating prisoners is not a new practice and to show the enduring survival of prison education since the emergence of the modern prison. It will also review contemporary policy relating to prison education to determine how current policy makers view the role of prison education. This will highlight the current policy focus on reducing recidivism which has a clear emphasis on using education as a means to increase prisoners' future employability. The current conditions in which prison education occurs will also be discussed to explore some of the problems affecting contemporary penal practice. The issues explored include; the rising prison population,

prison closures and reorganization, staffing reductions, increased in-cell hours, increases in suicide and violence and the reduced prisons budget. This will situate the research within the context of the current penal climate. To contextualize these issues further, the chapter will make detailed reference to inspection and Ofsted reports from 2004 to present for the two prison sites accessed for this research.

Chapter Three will further contextualize this study by locating it within the context of existing work on prison education to establish how it will advance knowledge and what it will contribute to the field. It will explain how this research will build upon areas that have been touched upon in past work by considering how motivations to become educated manifest into different forms of personal change and transformation. The chapter will clarify how bringing interviews with staff into the present study and considering more closely prisoners' relationships with their families extends current knowledge. It will also emphasize the value of the biographical context of prisoners' lives as an important reference through which to understand how prisoners interpret the experience of education and what it means to them personally.

The development of a theoretical framework for this research will be discussed in Chapter Four. This chapter will draw on classic and contemporary prison sociology literature to explore key themes that have become particularly important in investigating prisoners' experiences of education. These themes include the pains of imprisonment, coping, masculinity and identity. The chapter will then draw on theories of desistance to discuss personal change, transformation and redemption – concepts which contribute to developing a rationale for how and why the outcomes of prison education go far beyond future employability.

Chapter Five will present the research design and strategy to determine the research purpose, questions, approach and methods. Relevant methodological literature will be drawn upon when discussing the chosen research methods to provide a clear justification for how the study has been designed and undertaken. An overview of the

research samples and sites will be presented followed by an examination of the research methods and the process of negotiating access. The methods adopted to analyse the data will then be explained before exploring the ethical considerations that have been taken when conducting this research.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight will present the findings of the study obtained through documentary evidence and interviews. Chapter Six will draw on the narratives of prisoners and extracts from prisoners' letters to consider how education and other life experiences contribute to the experience of learning in prison. A small number of extracts from interviews with prison staff and ex-prisoners are also included in the chapter to show how different types of participants in the study discussed the same themes and how they relate to serving prisoners' perspectives. The chapter explores the motivations, meanings and interpretations of prison education and questions the suitability of an employment-focused curriculum for prisoners serving long term sentences. It also highlights increasing barriers to higher education and discusses the importance of continued education for prisoners who already have qualifications. In addition, the chapter explores the role of relationships with parents in establishing attitudes towards figures of authority.

Chapter Seven will explore themes relating to staff-prisoner and staff-staff relationships. The chapter will reveal insights into staff-prisoner relationships which are integral to setting a clear understanding of how prisoners experience education. The sometimes strained relationships between education staff and prison officers will also be explored exposing an 'us and them' culture between those employed to teach prisoners and those who lock them up and implement discipline. It will also consider the differences in how individuals working in the prison view their responsibilities and approach their work. In doing so, this chapter will reveal the prison education experience from the perspective of educators and those responsible for supervising and disciplining prisoners in their daily lives.

Chapter Eight will continue the data analysis in the context of personal change and transformation and the extent to which the experience of education can have an influence on the lives of prisoners and specifically, released individuals. Through narrative semi-structured interviews with ex-prisoners, this chapter will discuss in detail the relationship between prison education experiences and desistance through personal transformation. Drawing on the experiences of individuals who have desisted from crime, this chapter will enrich the research with a 'through the gate' account of what education in prison means to those who receive it.

A discussion of the research findings is provided in Chapter Nine to explore the broader significance of the research data by bringing together the outcomes of the data analysis with relevant theory and literature discussed in previous chapters. This chapter will discuss more broadly the implications of the research findings when set in the wider context of the whole prison experience. The key emergent issues which are discussed will answer the core research questions and include motivations beyond employability, authority, the relationship between prison education and desistance, prison sociology and the reality of coping with contemporary imprisonment.

Chapter Ten provides a brief and concise closing to the thesis by summarising the key findings and clarifying the core recommendations that can be made based on the findings of this work.

Chapter Two: The Historical and Political Context of Prison Education

2.1 Introduction

As will be seen in this research, prison education currently faces the challenging impact of budgeting and staffing cuts in the broader context of an apparent 'rehabilitation revolution' which aims to halt the revolving door of the prison through rehabilitative initiatives. To place this research in a meaningful context, it is important to establish the historical and political context of prison education to demonstrate that educating prisoners is not a new practice and to show the enduring survival of prison education since the emergence of the modern prison, despite fluctuating aims of the disciplinary regime.

The chapter will then review contemporary policy relating to prison education to establish how current policy makers view the role of prison education. Notably, recent policy is underpinned by a focus on reducing recidivism. This strategy has a clear emphasis on using education and training as a means to increasing prisoners' future employability. This is specifically important given that the research aims to expose the motivations prisoners have for pursuing education which go beyond becoming more employable. It is necessary to set out this policy benchmark in order for the research to demonstrate further changes and transformations that occur as a result of educational experiences other than an increase in work related skills.

This chapter will also establish the current context and conditions in which prison education occurs. Currently, prisons are reportedly in a state of 'crisis', and the chapter will provide an account of some of the problems affecting contemporary penal practice which include the rising prison population, recent prison closures, staffing reductions, increased in-cell hours, increases in suicide and violence and the reduced prisons budget. This will provide an overview of contemporary imprisonment in England and

Wales, and situate the research within the current penal climate. Many of the issues discussed will be reflected upon during the data analysis later in the study. Finally, the chapter will consider how some of these 'crisis' issues have impacted on education provision in recent times and thus how they may impact on prisoners' experiences of education. This will include a review of some of the key issues highlighted in inspection and Ofsted reports for the two research sites accessed for this study.

2.2 The Origins and Development of Prison Education

Education currently plays a significant role in prison regimes in England and Wales. Educating prisoners however is by no means a new practice and has in fact been part of prison life since the late 18th century. In the 18th century, prior to the implementation of significant reforms, the use and application of punishment lacked consistency and clarity, particularly in the way that sentences for criminals were decided upon. Prison was rarely used as a place for punishment for major felonies and the nominal penalty for crimes such as highway robbery, housebreaking, murder and arson was death (Ignatieff, 1978). Referred to as 'The Bloody Code', the punishments of the early 18th century were often harsh and in a large number of cases resulted in death. Both judges and the public however began to question such a liberal use of this punishment and doubt began to grow about the fairness of this form of punishment for minor infractions (Radzinowicz, 1948). The purpose of imprisonment began to change as it stopped being an institution for the short-term holding of criminals awaiting death or transportation. Prisons began to become more overcrowded due to an increase in sentence lengths and longer terms of imprisonment added to poor living conditions, the spread of disease and dismally low levels of hygiene. Prison reformers began to comment on the state of prisons and question why conditions in prisons in England and Wales appeared significantly poorer than their European counterparts. Perhaps most notably was John Howard's publication *The State of Prisons* (1777) in which he documented his findings

on prison conditions after visiting prisons in England and Europe. In addition to his discovery that living conditions in English prisons were unacceptable, Howard recommended that moral education should be implemented in England and Wales in the same way that it had been in Geneva where 'Great care [was] taken to give [prisoners] moral and religious instruction, and reform their manners, for their own and the public good' (Howard, 1777: 122).

Howard's new way of thinking about prisons and recommendations contributed to the drafting of the 1779 Penitentiary Act, which suggested that prisons should become an alternative sentence to death and the transportation of criminals to America. Although the intended outcome of the Act (creating a network of state operated prisons) would not come to dominate English penal practice until well into the 19th century, it was nonetheless considered 'the most forward-looking English penal measure of its time' (Devereaux, 1999: 405). The Act stated:

If many offenders, convicted of crimes for which transportation hath been usually inflicted, were ordered to solitary imprisonment, accompanied by well-regulated labour, and religious instruction, it might be the means, under providence, not only of deterring others from the commission of the like crimes, but also of reforming the individuals, and inuring them to habits of industry (From the 1779 Penitentiary Act cited in Bender, 1987: 23).

It was planned that two penitentiaries would be built in the London area, however these plans broke down due to 'constitutional objections of the central state entering into the field of prison administration in this way' as it was felt that prisons were still 'a county and borough matter which should be left to local justices' (Soothill, 2007: 33). Following the Penitentiary Act however, numerous counties and towns rebuilt their prisons to conform to the latest thinking about hygiene, reformatory punishment, and solitary

confinement. Governmental authorities began to pay all expenses and to dictate every detail of penitentiary architecture along with every movement in the prisoner's carefully specified daily regime (Bender, 1987).

i. 19th century

The problem of overcrowding and poor hygiene continued into the early 19th century. To cope with increasing inmate numbers, new prisons were built, notably Millbank in 1816 which was the first national prison built to incarcerate those sentenced to long term imprisonment. The 19th century saw a fundamental shift in the conception of the role of punishment inflicted by the state (Morris, 1995). This shift was captured in Foucault's seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), which illustrated the change from punishment inflicted on the body as a public spectacle to a process involving discipline and correction in the confinement of the prison. To highlight the nature of this shift in the context of the development of education within the prison, this part of the chapter will identify significant events that took place beginning with the 1839 Prison Act.

The 1839 Prison Act established new rules regarding the education of prisoners. Prior to the passing of this act, prisoners who were better educated than others were able to provide educational help. It was decided that every prisoner, separately confined³, would be '...furnished with the means to moral and religious instruction, and with such suitable books as may be selected by the chaplain...' (1839 Prison Act, p.4). During the 1850s fear spread amongst the public regarding the existence of a 'criminal class'

³ In the 1830s, it was felt that confinement had become too lenient (McGowen, 1995). One of the most significant changes that occurred at this time was the implementation of a separate system of imprisonment. The separate system was introduced after the Whig government commissioned William Crawford to visit and report on American prisons in 1830. Crawford returned having been converted to the idea of separate confinement and issued a long report recommending its adoption (Henriques, 1972). The separate system was introduced as a way of ensuring that prisoners could not communicate and therefore 'contaminate' each other. It was felt that separate confinement and solitude would give offenders the opportunity to reflect on their criminal and immoral behaviour and concentrate on self-reformation through religious and moral instruction. By the 1840s, there was growing concern about the effect that separation was having on the mental health of inmates.

(Godfrey and Lawrence, 2005: 114). This led to a call for more severe punishment to deter criminal activity. The identification of a 'criminal class' and concerns about violent street crime caused a great deal of anxiety about crime, which was frequently linked to the assumption that the prison was not working. Consequently, deterrence became the primary aim of the disciplinary regime to address this concern.

In 1863, the Carnarvon Committee was appointed to examine discipline in local prisons. The Committee was composed of politicians who firmly believed that deterrence was the purpose of imprisonment and that reform was a problem. Taking a skeptical view of the inability of the prison to reform criminals, the Lords insisted that the strictly penal element of a prison sentence could achieve the deterrent goal of all punishment (McGowen, 1995). Criticism was directed towards the role of labour and education in the penal regime and the Lords favoured prison work that was tough on prisoners. Joshua Jebb, Head of the Directorate of Convict Prisons, argued that due to the short length of prison sentences, there would be little chance of reformation. Despite a belief that prisoner instruction was an interruption to the separate system, it was noted by the Carnarvon Committee that the separate system was not intended to limit cellular and other religious instruction which the chaplain saw fit to provide to any prisoner (Carnarvon Committee, 1863). Thus, education still existed despite a clear focus on deterrence which signifies that even at times when greater severity lay at the forefront of penal practice, the sense remained that some attempt needed to be made to improve imprisoned individuals.

Eventually perspectives began to change and it was thought that deterrence had gone too far. Thus, a balance needed to be sought between deterrence and reform to curtail the worst aspects of the earlier regime. The somewhat excessive emphasis on deterrence had been upheld by the Prison Commission (established by the 1877 Prison Act) chaired by Sir Edmund Du Cane. The Commission relegated education to the corners of prison life as they felt it had less value in the prevention of recidivism than the deterrent experience of hard labour and separation (much in the same way as

Joshua Jebb). As such, any education above the minimum was viewed by the Prison Commission as a needless expense (McConville, 1995).

The Gladstone Committee was appointed in 1894 to make inquiries regarding, amongst other issues, the conditions of accommodation for prisoners and the moral and physical condition of prisoners involved in the prison labour that the Prison Commission had previously championed. In an historically significant shift, the Gladstone Committee argued that both deterrence *and* reformation were important. The Committee made recommendations concerning education in prisons such as the increased distribution of library books and the recommendation that all prisoners should be able to attend classes (Playfair, 1971). It was also recommended that education should be an important part of prisoners' overall rehabilitation which directly challenged the prior view of the Prison Commission. Bringing together reformist and deterrent approaches, the Gladstone Committee has been described as being both courageous and radical in their findings with the fundamental conclusion that prisoners were being treated too much as a hopeless and worthless element of the community (Fox, 1952).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, education came to the fore in this context and one of the first Prisoners' Education Committees was recommended to comment on the provision of education in prison. The Right Honourable Sir Matthew White Ridley was appointed to the Prisoners' Education Committee in 1896 to produce a report regarding the education and moral instruction of prisoners. In particular, the Committee were to consider whether elementary education was being usefully applied in prisons, whether education should be conducted in prisoners' cells or in classes and the extent to which lectures could be introduced with advantage to prisoners and without impairment to prison discipline (Prisoners' Education Committee, 1896). The recommendations proposed by the investigation focused on fixing educational staff, providing education for both adults and juveniles, and providing learning materials including frequently 'refreshed' library books.

The Committee concluded that the education and moral instruction of prisoners had a necessary place in the prison regime. The recommendations regarding prisoners' access to learning materials suggested that they were seen as necessary aspects of prison life and the fact that an inquiry specifically relating to the education of prisoners was conducted at all clearly highlights the reformatory aspect of the prison regime at this time. It could be argued that for an initiative that was once purely a privilege to become a necessity in the same way as it had in wider society⁴, the education of prisoners had become a symbol of reformation and a way to make the experience of imprisonment more humane.

ii. 1900s – 1970s

In the early part of the 20th century, attitudes towards imprisonment and the treatment of prisoners seemed to echo the sentiments of the Gladstone Committee. It appeared that this was a time when there was a willingness to look for the good in people, reflecting a view of human nature fundamental to a theory of rehabilitation. Winston Churchill communicated these sentiments in 1910 when he said 'the mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country' (Winston Churchill, 20 July 1910, cited in Robinson & Crow, 2009: 21).

A number of changes took place in criminal justice practice in the early 20th century which Garland (1985) argued created a 'modern penal-welfare complex'. Garland stated

⁴ In wider society at this time, the Education Act (1870) had been passed. This is considered to be the first time that education had become a priority in policy making as prior to the 19th century, education very much depended on a family's level of wealth as some could afford to send their children to public schools. The Act prescribed that all children should go to school from the age of five to thirteen and most importantly, it demonstrated a commitment to education provision on a national scale establishing a system of school boards to build and manage schools in areas where they were needed. The Education Act 1880 further stressed the importance of school attendance by obliging local authorities to make byelaws requiring school attendance, and provided for penalties in cases where 10-13 year olds were illegally employed, which effectively established in practice the universal education which the 1870 Act had declared in principle (Gillard, 2011).

that the basic axiom of penal-welfarism is that penal measures ought, where possible, to be rehabilitative interventions rather than negative, retributive punishments (2001: 34). In the 1920s the process of reduced dehumanization and humiliation towards prisoners began which involved the abolition of visiting boxes in favour of visiting rooms with tables and chairs in 1921, the permission of conversation in prison workshops in 1922 and the abolition of parti coloured uniform and heavy leg chains in 1924. The period between 1922 and 1947 is considered 'the golden age of prison reform' and at this time, prisoners were allowed to be taught in association rather than in cells. Alexander Paterson played an important role in the reformation of penal institutions as the Commissioner of Prisons and Director of Convict prisons. As a penal reformer, Paterson believed in the rehabilitation of offenders advocating that prison itself was the punishment and that prison was not a place for criminals to be punished. In 1948, the Criminal Justice Act was passed abolishing penal servitude, hard labour and flogging.

The 1959 White Paper *Penal Practice in a Changing Society* responded to the post-war prison population increase and acknowledged the need for a new strategy in penal policy. This was the first document to discuss penal administration as a whole since the Gladstone Report. For discussion regarding the education of prisoners, the White Paper directed those concerned with such matters to the *Report of the Commissioners of Prisons for the Year 1955*. This report noted that the appointment of tutor-organisers continued to take place to the point where almost every prison had either a full or part-time tutor-organiser who was responsible for the educational programme and supervising teaching staff. The way that educational classes and activities were organized in the mid 1950s was directly informed by reports produced by HM Inspectors of the Ministry of Education - the organization then responsible for inspecting prison education.

The 1950s and 1960s symbolized a significant time of change in the prison system. Harsh punishments and a strong emphasis on deterrence caused by a sharp increase in crime rates and public demands for more punitive measures of custody were met with the

emergence of 'the rehabilitative ideal'. This ideal argued that prisons needed to provide necessary treatments in order that human behaviour could be corrected and controlled. These treatments included education and pre-release courses.

The rehabilitative ideal that championed the treatment of prisoners through pre-release courses and education was overshadowed by a number of high profile prison escapes during the 1960s. The escapes led to increased concern about prison security and resulted in a policy proposed by Lord Mountbatten which concentrated the most security on high-risk offenders and allowed much lower security across the rest of the penal estate (Scott, 2007). This was later opposed by Radzinowicz in 1968 - a Cambridge professor who favoured a dispersal policy proposing that Category A prisoners should be dispersed with Category B prisoners in specially designed, high-security training prisons (*ibid.*). This approach led to a heightened focus on security in prisons and resulted in the erosion of the humanitarian goals of imprisonment including education, training, association and living conditions. The rehabilitative ideal collapsed with the treatment of offenders coming under attack theoretically, ethically and empirically. The role of research-based policy and the structures of discipline and normalization, which supported correctionalism, were placed in a new diminished role in policy and practice thereafter (Garland, 2001).

The rehabilitative faith had collapsed and disenchantment with the 'individualized treatment model' gave way to policy built on retribution and deterrence. This severely undermined the clinical approach to offender rehabilitation. In the United States, a study was carried out for the New York State Governor's Committee on Criminal Offences to review rehabilitative programmes for the purpose of informing future planning. The review which investigated 231 studies reported between 1945 and 1967 proved to be a watershed for the treatment approach, and consequently for the rehabilitative ideal. It was declared by Martinson (1974) that 'With few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on criminal recidivism' and thus 'nothing works'. Martinson's

argument has been the subject of much criticism including that relating to the limited measure of recidivism as the criterion of the effectiveness of imprisonment and the nature of reconvictions that took place. It was also argued that the conclusions of the study were based on data that, by that time, was out of date. It has been suggested that Martinson failed to consider the different effects of treatment for different types of offenders as well as a failure to consider offender personalities and social factors in his conclusions.

Although some would attribute the sudden shift away from correctional approaches to empirical evidence of treatment failure (Martinson, 1974; Mitford; 1973), there is an argument to suggest that such a shift could not solely be a result of negative research findings, and it was not necessarily as dramatic as Garland (2001) suggested. Sim (2009) has questioned the true extent of discourse on social welfare within prison regimes leading up to the 1970s and suggested that the death of the rehabilitative ideal, as viewed by scholars, may have been nothing more than a result of rehabilitation policies having never been implemented across the entirety of the prison estate. Sim acknowledged that institutions that did work on this basis, such as the Barlinnie Special Unit and Grendon Underwood (which continues to adopt a therapeutic approach), simply did not subscribe to dominant retributive discourses that have historically underpinned the penal system (Sim, 2009: 6).

iii. 1970s – 2000s

Following the collapse of the once flourishing rehabilitative ideal, the 1979 Conservative Party led by Margaret Thatcher called for a stricter approach to imprisonment characterized by a 'short, sharp, shock'. Despite the purported 'zookeeping' (Fitzgerald and Sim, 1980) nature of custody during the 1980s, the presence of prison education had not been lost. In 1982, the Bill on *Education in Prisons* was introduced, the purpose of which was to ensure that all men and women (convicted or unconvicted, sentenced and unsentenced) should have access to appropriate educational facilities. Such

facilities, it was argued, would enable prisoners to experience a valuable, purposeful and progressive aspect of life and to preserve or acquire the capacity to think honestly and effectively so that they may be able to survive in the community after their release from prison (House of Commons Bill 1982). The Bill also stated that a lack of literacy, numeracy and coping skills had a high rate of coincidence with delinquency and that these skills should be acquired through full-time study in day classes if possible. Interestingly, the paper also stated that giving prisoners the opportunity to engage in education would allow them to form relationships with other prisoners based on shared interests other than a shared interest in crime. The Bill made provision for a duty to provide information, access to daytime and evening education, education departments in prisons, reception and counseling, basic education, general and non-vocational education, vocational education, public examinations and pre-release classes.

In 1990, the HMP Strangeways prison riot led to an inquiry by Lord Woolf. When he reviewed the prison system as a whole, it was found to be in a very poor state. During this inquiry, Lord Woolf reported on the provision of education in prison which uncovered the true extent to which the recommendations set out in the 1982 *Bill on Education in Prisons* had enabled prisoners in need of basic education to make education their daytime work. Exposing the reality of provision, Woolf (1991) reported that education hours were spread unevenly over a large number of prisons and an even larger number of prisoners. He reported meeting many prisoners who said that even at the increased levels of education hours, provision was woefully inadequate. There were long waiting lists to join classes and even those who were accepted for a class could not be sure whether they would be able to attend. Classes were frequently cancelled because prisoners were told officers were not available to escort them to the education rooms (Woolf, 1991). During his inquiries Lord Woolf was accompanied by HM Senior Chief Inspector of Schools who emphasized the importance of changing the attitudes of prison managers and uniformed staff towards education and training. He said that the attitudes had varied between establishments ranging from those he described as being 'more enlightened' to those who had 'more negative attitudes' (Woolf, 1991). The

proposals made regarding prison education suggested that the Prison Service should increase provision for modular education courses and that more broadly, education should be seen as a fundamental part of the life of prisons by being integrated with the other activities and opportunities on offer (Woolf, 1991).

Following the murder of 2-year-old James Bulger in 1993 by two ten year-old boys, a moral panic gripped the country signifying a key moment in the intensification of state authoritarianism (Sim, 2004). The reformatory sentiments that had prevailed for the previous three years following Lord Woolf's recommendations was replaced by a shift towards a more punitive regime. The James Bulger murder resulted in public outrage and created a call for harsh disciplinary punishment for the perpetrators and future serious offenders in the form of retribution and revenge (Sim, 2004). Michael Howard, who became Home Secretary shortly after the murder, turned Martinson's infamous words on their head, declaring 'prison works'. Howard believed that the prison could be *made* to work in the fight against crime by turning them from 'holiday camps' to tough and decent but austere penal regimes. The prison population began to increase with the new tough approach to criminal justice not only having prominence in politics, but also in the courts with magistrates and judges being proactive in applying a firmer hand when it came to sentencing. Prison education was targeted and scaled down to meet financial goals and the treatment approach became a matter of control with primary emphasis on drug treatment. The professional cynicism that led to the belief in the 1970s that 'nothing works' gave way in the 1990s to the public and political conviction that 'punishment works' (Sim, 2004). The public and policy makers were brought together forming a united front projecting the strong message of the necessity for harsh disciplinary punishment thus deprioritizing prison education in the prison regime.

iv. 2000 – present

In May 1997, New Labour set out to modernize politics and modernize Britain, proposing reform across institutions including schools, hospitals and prisons. From that time to present, the constant overlapping of the aims of the disciplinary regime have caused confusion about the extent to which the purpose of the prison is to punish and to rehabilitate (although, one might argue that this chapter evidences a history of confusion). In 1997, Jack Straw (then Home Secretary) announced to the Prison Reform Trust that through constructive regimes, prisons could be made to work as one element in a radical and coherent strategy to protect the public by reducing crime (Scott, 2007). The renewed penal optimism of this time had changed the face of English prisons. Focus returned to the aim of making prisons work to reduce reoffending. This was made especially clear in the Halliday Report (2001) *Making Punishment Work*, which asserted that an appropriate amount of a punitive approach was necessary in order to achieve both public protection and a reduction in reoffending through rehabilitation. Taking an actuarial approach, it was decided that correctional sentences should be based upon the risk of future danger that the offender posed to society and that those offenders calculated as being low or medium risk, would serve sentences in the community rather than in prison (Scott, 2007).

Reoffending had become closely linked to the problem of social exclusion and the Social Exclusion Unit published the report *Reducing Reoffending by Ex-prisoners* in 2002. In the foreword written by Tony Blair, he openly stated that he had invested in prison education in order that double the number of educational qualifications could be achieved by prisoners (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Reoffending was costing an estimated £11bn per year by this time and the Prime Minister argued that there had been a failure to capitalize on the opportunity that prison could offer in stopping people offending permanently (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). It had become painfully evident that prison sentences were not reducing recidivism with particular difficulty being found

in reforming young adult males. In 1997, 72% of 18-20 year old male prisoners were reconvicted within two years of release (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

One of the most significant contributions of the 2002 report was the setting out of 'seven pathways to reduce reoffending'. The seven pathways included accommodation, skills and employment, access to healthcare, access to drug and alcohol treatment, relationships with children and families, finance, benefits and debt management and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. The 2002 report showed that '...many prisoners' basic skills are very poor. 80% have the writing skills, 65% the numeracy skills and 50% the reading skills at or below the level of an 11-year-old child' (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002: 6). The report explained that until 2002, education and training were seen as ways to keep prisoners occupied and that despite attempted improvements prior to 2002, prisoners were not being allowed to gain as much as they should from education. Drawing on Canadian research, the report identified that prisoners who did not take part in education courses were three times more likely to reoffend.

In 2004, prison education or 'offender learning' as it had come to be known in penal policy, began to be coordinated by the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) within the Department for Education and Skills to develop and change learning and skills provision for offenders in prison and in the community (Home Office, 2004). Prison education quickly became synonymous with employment and links were created between the Prison Service and employment agencies such as Jobcentre Plus. The newly formed National Offender Management Service published a delivery plan in 2005 which reported that education, which had now been grouped with 'training', was to be developed further. The presumed connection between education, training and future employment became apparent in the delivery plan with the overall focus of Government's policy being to '...support offenders' progress into sustainable employment' (NOMS, 2005: 21). This included the planning and future arrangements for a learning and skills service, the use of sentences constructively to improve employment opportunities, the development of national, regional and local strategies

for engaging employers in providing jobs for ex-offenders, and the placing of employability and employment at the heart of supervision in the community for every unemployed offender (NOMS, 2005: 21).

Policy suggested that prison education and training had become the key to the employment of ex offenders and thus a reduction in reoffending. The publication of the delivery plan introduced a new curriculum offer specified in the 'Offender's Learning Journey', which supported the integration of education and vocational training for the first time, as well as paving the way for a more integrated service between custody and community (NOMS, 2005).

In 2005, the Select Committee on Education and Skills noted that the transfer of responsibility for prison education to the Department for Education and Skills in 2001 had created an important opportunity for the Committee to enquire into the provision of education and training in prisons. This opportunity culminated in prison education being the focus the Committee's *Seventh Report* (2005) which noted that for many years, prison education had not been considered to be important and the alarming number of offences committed by released prisoners could no longer be ignored. The Committee acknowledged their aim, through the report, to 'shine a light' on a subject that had been a low priority for both Government and the general public. The report clarified that the importance of reducing recidivism for the wider benefit of society was considerable (UK Parliament Online, 2011). In the principal finding of the report, it was said to be essential for the purpose of education to be made absolutely clear. It stated:

The purpose of prison education should be understood as part of a wider approach to reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation of prisoners. Although contributing to the reduction of recidivism is of key importance, prison education is about more than just this. It is important also because to provide prison education is the right thing to do and this is an important

point to bear in mind when making policy decisions. Education as part of a broader approach to rehabilitation must consider the full range of needs of the prisoner and continue to support the prisoner on release. Prison education must rise up the Government's agenda. Purpose and commitment must come from Government leadership (UK Parliament Online, 2011c).

The summary of the report clearly identified a great need for education in prisons and it also highlighted a number of key issues surrounding prison education at this time including the lack of necessity to place a large amount of emphasis on employability, the lack of ownership of prison education with regard to the bodies in charge of its organisation, confusion over responsibilities of prison education enhanced by the introduction of the National Offender Management Service, and barriers to the successful delivery of prison education including overcrowding and 'churn' (UK Parliament Online, 2011c).

It could be argued that *The Seventh Report of the Select Committee on Education and Skills* (2005) provided the liberal light in the shadow created by a narrow vocationalism model, which had emphasized the need for the education and training of prisoners to purely create employable ex offenders. It described educating prisoners as being 'the right thing to do' and advocated that education should be seen as a broad rehabilitative initiative that could address the full range of the needs of prisoners, beyond employability. In the following years this view of prison education would be ignored and employability would remain the primary purpose of the education of prisoners.

Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps was published in 2006 setting out firm plans for the overall direction of offender learning from 2006 onwards and focus remained on the application of education and skills training for the purpose of employment. Numeracy and literacy at this time had become embedded within a skills training approach that was characterized by preparation for working life.

The document's key proposition was therefore to ensure that offenders had the underpinning skills to meet the real needs of employers (Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2007).

The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) was established in 2006 and continues to be active today. The organization is not strictly a service, as it does not have dedicated staff or an organizational structure. It brings together existing services concerned with offender learning to provide a more focused strategy to meet the needs of individual offenders. When OLASS was introduced it established contracts between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a series of lead providers with largely geographical responsibilities. The new contracts replaced those originally established by the Prison and Probation Services, and also included the functions formally carried out by the Prison Service's Vocational Training Instruction Officers (Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2007). The role and place of OLASS within the organizational structure of offender learning is more difficult to grasp today however. This is because the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills and the LSC no longer exist and the numerous organisations now involved in offender learning have created a complex system where responsibility and key roles have become blurred. At the beginning of the present study, the complexity of prison education became evident when I made contact with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), who alongside the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and OLASS were responsible for prison education at government level. With a desire to know who exactly was responsible for prison education, this question was posed in a telephone conversation to a BIS representative who replied, "When you figure it out, let me know!"

Contact was then made with the SFA. In a telephone conversation with the Offender Learner Manager for the Skills Funding Agency, it was explained that as part of its responsibilities, the Skills Funding Agency oversaw the work of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). OLASS at that time was in 'Phase 3', which was introduced on 1st August 2009. In OLASS Phase 3, there were six contracted learning providers who

delivered educational courses in prisons across the country. The Skills Funding Agency therefore provided a third party contract within the prison setting. The learning providers who were able to secure contracts for Phase 3 went through an open competitive tender process. The main drive of the OLASS scheme was, and remains, to get as near to the mainstream offer of education as possible.

The beginning of the present study in 2010 coincided with the introduction of the new coalition government and the announcement that there would be a 'rehabilitation revolution'. This was designed to reduce crime and the fear of crime through the prevention of reoffending by ensuring that prisoners learnt the value of hard work during their custodial sentences. In an attempt to halt the revolving door of the prison, the then Justice Secretary Kenneth Clarke proposed a number of reforms. Clarke placed great emphasis on the combination of reducing reoffending *and* punishing offenders effectively. He suggested that prisons should become '...tougher places of hard work and reform for the criminals who should be locked up' (Conservative Party Online, 2010). In light of the announcement of the 'rehabilitation revolution' in 2010, the Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders* was published in the same year. Setting out plans for fundamental changes to the criminal justice system, the Green Paper clearly summarized the need for change in policy ensuring that punishing offenders, protecting the public and reducing reoffending would stand at the forefront of policy. It was argued that the criminal justice system could not continue to be an expensive way of giving the public a break from offenders before they returned to the community to commit further crimes (Ministry of Justice, 2010a).

Following the publication of the Green Paper, it was announced in the summer of 2010 that there would be a review of offender learning as part of the overall reform of the criminal justice system. The review was eventually published in May 2011 stating a plan to:

...be radical and innovative, where it is appropriate to be, in order to make a real contribution to reducing reoffending and to create conditions that would put a greater focus on local influence to meet the needs of the labour market and offender learners effectively (Ministry of Justice, 2011).

The review of offender learning received contributions from a number of organisations, including the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) who confirmed that although more prisoners were taking part in education and skills programmes, the system was not performing well (Ministry of Justice, 2011). The responses to the call for evidence for the review of offender learning came from a broad spectrum of groups including education providers, charities and the voluntary sector. There was a strong consensus amongst those who responded to the call for evidence with regard to what the priorities should be in reforming offender learning. These priorities included:

- Greater local influence over provision for offender learners, both in prison and in the community, in order to equip them better to compete for work in the labour market into which they will be released, with resources distributed according to the needs of learners in prison and with the needs of those serving community sentences taken into account by the FE and skills system;
- Effective partnership working as the key to making local arrangements operate well, with the effective engagement of employers critical;
- The need to focus on the quality of offender learning and implementation of the virtual campus across all prisons, and on the flexibility of delivery in the community;
- Encouraging the take up and continuation of learning and employment opportunities through mentoring for prisoners,

with a focus on transition when leaving prison, as well as for those serving community sentences; and

- A new focus on identifying and meeting the needs of those with learning difficulties and disabilities who are participating in learning and skills, particularly in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2011: 6-7).

Coinciding with the span of this PhD, the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, Nick Hardwick, was in post from 2010 to 2015. In his final Annual Report (2015) he noted that talk of rehabilitation is ongoing with new ministers and that assessed outcomes are at their worst for 10 years. Describing purposeful activity as a 'dismal picture' (p. 13) the report stated that outcomes were only good or reasonably good in 25% of adult male prisons inspected – the worst outcomes since 2005. Commenting on a revolution that is yet to be seen, the report stated:

It is hard to imagine anything less likely to rehabilitate prisoners than days spent mostly lying on their bunks in squalid cells watching daytime TV. For too many prisoners, this was the reality and the 'rehabilitation revolution' had yet to start.

(HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2015: 13)

The report acknowledged the lack of activity places for prisoners impacting access to education and other training and a failing to fill those places that are available with three-quarters of all prisons failing to fully use their activity places (p. 52). These failures have been attributed to poor administration, poor attendance and punctuality and a lack of evidence of staff challenging these issues.

In recent months, the new Justice Secretary Michael Gove has publicized his intention to overhaul education in prisons, giving penal reform groups hope for the future. Speaking at a recent conference of the Prisoner Learning Alliance, Gove called for an

end to the “idleness and futility” of prison life suggesting plans to give prisoners new opportunities to “engage seriously and purposefully in education and work” (Prisoners’ Education Trust, 2015). With plans to give prison governors more control over education and to implement an “earned release” system for prisoners who gain skills and qualifications not yet fully formed, the future remains uncertain for prison education. Following a promised ‘rehabilitation revolution’ that certainly has not amounted to anything substantial during the five-year process of writing this thesis, we are left with a confusing concoction of hope and scepticism for the immediate future.

This review of offender learning has served as a reminder that the primary focus of policy at present is to make prisoners employable and keep them busy with work-related tasks during their prison sentence. It is not my intention in this study to suggest that making prisoners employable is not desirable. However, my concern regarding the current focus of policy is that there are a number of other important benefits of prison education that are not being acknowledged in policy but, as this research will show, are being recognized by prisoners and staff alike. Such benefits may serve to develop offenders as ‘whole people’ as per the humanistic model of education discussed in Chapter One, rather than simply developing their ability to work. These other benefits could include confidence, self-actualization, a sense of empowerment, the re-establishment of identity, the ability to cope with imprisonment and the improvement and preservation of family relationships. The reality that job security following release from prison is at best uncertain highlights the importance of identifying how the experience of prison education can help prisoners to cope with life outside and that purely equipping prisoners with skills for work may not meet the needs of the challenges they will face on release. It is the purpose of this research to actively seek out these ‘other’ outcomes of education to broaden our understanding of how it has the ability to go beyond increasing employability and in addition, instigate personal transformation and change which is integral to post release survival.

2.3 The Contemporary 'Crisis'

To understand how prisoners' experiences can be shaped by the present penal policy climate, it is essential to understand the state of prisons by taking a contemporary snapshot of how they are currently operating. As will be seen in this part of the chapter, the state of the penal system appears to have deteriorated significantly since the announcement of the so-called 'rehabilitation revolution' and this is proving to have a direct impact on how education is being delivered in prisons and thus how it is experienced by those engaging in educational programmes across the estate.

In November 2015, the Prison Reform Trust welcomed the new Justice Secretary Michael Gove's statement that prisoners can become citizens and can contribute and demonstrate the human capacity for redemption. At the same time, the Trust warned that Gove had inherited a deteriorating system whilst being required to carve between 25% and 40% out of its budget over the next five years (Prison Reform Trust, 2015b). The Trust noted the challenges that lay ahead given rising rates of violence and disorder, increases in suicide and self harm and unacceptable standards of purposeful activity in three-quarters of prisons inspected in the previous year. In addition to this, overcrowding and an aging prison population contribute further to a system that has been described in the media as 'a disgrace to modern democracy' (Riddell, 2015).

This part of the chapter will provide an overview of these and other arising issues including the rising prison population, the reduced budget, prison closures, staffing cuts, increasing in-cell hours and increases in violence and suicide. Providing this summary enables the study to reflect the current problems associated with imprisonment more broadly, and this is important as such problems may have implications for prisoners' interpretations of prison education experiences later in the thesis.

i. The Rising Prison Population

In December 2015, the prison population in England and Wales was 85,641. The rate of imprisonment is currently 149 per 100,000 of the population – the highest rate in the European Union. The prison population significantly increased between 1993 and 2012 during which time the population grew by 41,800 to a total of over 86,000. 85% of that increase was seen in those sentenced to immediate custody and 13% were those recalled to prison for breaching licence conditions. The average sentence length has also increased since 2002, now standing at 15.4 months (Prison Reform Trust, 2014: 2).

The 98% rise in the prison population between 1993 and 2012 has been attributed by the Ministry of Justice to two key factors - the courts sentencing more offenders to prison per year (increased 'custody rate') and the increased length of time offenders stay in prison which was later exacerbated by a decline in the parole rate. In addition the lengthening of the license period for most offenders, through changes in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and changes in the law making it easier to recall prisoners, contributed to this dramatic increase. The Ministry of Justice acknowledge that changes in legislation and policy have contributed to making sentence lengths longer for certain offences and increasing the likelihood of imprisonment for breach of non-custodial sentences or failure to comply with licence conditions. This includes:

- Mandatory minimum sentences for a number of offences and introduction of new sentences for public protection (IPPs and EPPs)
- Changes to requirements for failure to comply with licence conditions or breach of non-custodial sentences, making custody a more likely outcome, and lengthening time spent on recall (Ministry of Justice, 2013d: 21).

The Ministry of Justice recently noted that the drastic increase in the prison population

has also been caused by a more serious mix of offence groups coming before the courts (Ministry of Justice, 2013: 2). In particular violence against the person, drug offences and sexual offences have been identified as having a significant impact on the prison population (ibid).

Although such increases in the prison population would suggest a rise in criminal activity, this is not the case as crime levels in 2003 were measured as being lower than in 1991 (Millie et al, 2003: 371). Millie et al (2003) suggested that the main sources of the rise in the prison population have been ‘...changes either in the proportion of people *sentenced* to prison (the ‘flow’ into prison) or changes in the length of time that people are *kept there*’ (p.371). Other factors that also contributed to the increase in the prison population include the introduction of the ‘plea before venue’ procedure in 1997, which resulted in the number of cases sent to the Crown Court for trial decreasing. However, this also saw a threefold increase in the number committed to sentence (Millie et al, 2003), and, an increase in time served for longer-term prisoners.

The increased prison population and the sense of a populist punitive mood are arguably symptomatic of ‘late modern’ society in which traditional certainties and structural sources of trust such as the family, employment certainty and religious belief, have been replaced by uncertainty, lack of trust and lack of public confidence in public institutions (Hough et al, 2003). Matthews (2005) identified a division between those who see this increased punitiveness being ‘...driven from ‘below’ by an anxious and angry general public...’ and those who see it as ‘...a ‘top-down’ process in which ambitious and manipulative politicians play on public fears and anxieties...’ to get tough on crime and increase electoral support (Matthews, 2005: 176). The populist punitive literature (Garland, 2001; Feeley and Simon, 1992; Wacquant, 2001) maintains that the control and targeting of specific social groups (particularly the poor and ethnic minorities) points to a change in the nature of why and how we punish in addition to the extent to which prison sanctions have come to be increasingly used.

ii. Reduced Budget

Describing the government cuts to the prison system in 2010 as 'criminal', the Howard League for Penal Reform have argued that the prison system has been left in a 'dreadful state' (Politicshome.com, 2015). Since the coalition government came to power in 2010, £900m (24%) has been cut from prison budgets (Travis and Morris, 2014). The cuts have taken place as part of the overall plan to reduce the cost of incarceration by £2,200 per year per prisoner. Low-cost models implemented by privately run prisons, such as G4S, have set a precedent that is arguably unrealistic given the problems being faced by inexperienced staff in such institutions in providing appropriate support and implementing control. Private prisons have also been criticized for having comparatively higher rates of drug use and incidents of self-harm amongst prisoners. A further £423m is planned to be saved through prison closures. The National Audit Office (2013) reported in their key findings that the estate strategy's focus is '...cost reduction and this has limited how far it can address quality and performance' (p. 5). The budget cuts are reported by the Prison Reform Trust to be placing overcrowded prisons in England and Wales under 'unprecedented strain' (Prison Reform Trust, 2013) and undermining government plans to transform rehabilitation. The Trust stated that overcrowding and high rates of reoffending are now a fact of life in today's prisons with over 6,000 more people in prison than the estate is designed to hold.

iii. Prison Closures

Recent changes in the prison system have included the announcement of prison closures to replace older and expensive areas of the prison estate. In 2013, the Ministry of Justice publicized the planned closure of HMPs Bullwood Hall, Canterbury, Gloucester, Kingston, Shepton Mallet and Shrewsbury. In addition, closure was also announced for some accommodation at HMPs Chelmsford, Hull and Isle of Wight (Ministry of Justice, 2013a). The planned closures are part of a programme of updating the prison estate to replace the closed establishments with new capacity in the form of

larger prisons and to save an estimated £63m a year through reductions in maintenance and general upkeep costs. In addition, four mini-prisons or “houseblocks” are to be built at HMPs Parc in Wales, Peterborough in Cambridgeshire, The Mount in Hertfordshire and Thameside in London as part of what the then Justice Secretary Chris Grayling called ‘... planning for the next generation of prisons’ (Ministry of Justice, 2013b).

The programme of prison closures has received direct criticism from the Howard League for Penal Reform who argue that the potential for closures to save money and improve decency and safety will only be possible if complemented by a reduction in the prison population (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2015). 18 prisons have been closed or re-roled as immigration removal centres since 2010 resulting in a loss of 6,500 prison places (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014). Although two private prisons have opened, adding 2,100 places, the prison population is now higher than in 2010. Linking back to the previous discussion of overcrowding, the reduction in prison places due to closures has drastically increased overcrowding causing 78 prisons to operate above their Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) level and 10 prisons are holding more than 50% more prisoners than is safe (ibid.).

iv. Staffing Cuts

The Prison Reform Trust (2015) argues that the prison system has been ‘stretched to its limit’ through strict controls on recruitment, high levels of staff sickness, prison closures and transfers to the private sector – all of this in addition to a 23% reduction in prison officers employed in publicly run prisons since March 2010. Research published by the Howard League for Penal Reform indicated that in September 2013, there were 19,325 officer grade staff working in prisons compared to 27,650 in September 2010 (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014). The decrease in staffing numbers detailed in *Figure 3* below, has coincided with increased prison overcrowding and a rise in the number of instances of suicide in custody.

Figure 3. Prison officer numbers by region

Region	Prison officers		% change
	Sep-10	Sep-13	
East of England	2,922	1,997	-32%
East Midlands	2,815	1,816	-35%
London	2,656	2,076	-22%
North East	2,062	1,450	-30%
North West	3,937	2,690	-32%
South East	4,410	2,821	-36%
South West	1,943	1,275	-34%
Wales	820	693	-15%
West Midlands	2,786	2,143	-23%
Yorkshire and the Humber	3,299	2,364	-28%

(Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014)

The impact of staffing cuts on prison life has extended to the safety and wellbeing of both staff and prisoners. Reduced staff numbers means more in-cell time for prisoners due to a decreased ability for staff-supervised movement within prison establishments. This has created the further issue of prisoners having decreased access to time spent engaging in purposeful activity including work and education.

It has been reported by the Ministry of Justice that assaults on prison officers increased by 12% in the months to June 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2014) and that serious assaults on staff increased to 395 incidents up from 300 in the 12 months to the end of June 2013 (ibid.). In the 12 months to the end of June 2014, the rate of assaults on staff increased to 40 incidents per 1,000 prisoners from 36 in the previous year - the highest

rate since 2008. The increase in 95 serious assaults in the 12 months to the end of June 2014 is the highest number of serious assaults on staff recorded since current recorded practices began in 2003. Quarterly data shows that the number of serious assaults on staff has, with the exception of January to March quarter 2014, increased since the beginning of 2012 rising from 60 incidents in January to March 2012 to 120 incidents in April to June 2014 (ibid.).

Amongst the increasing assaults and reductions in staffing numbers, the Ministry of Justice attempted to re-employ over 2000 prison officers on short-term contracts, who had very recently taken voluntary redundancy. The contracts were offered in 2014 to respond to short-term pressures on prisons, which were potentially due to unforeseen increases in prisoner numbers, after the Ministry of Justice spent £50m on redundancy payments (Doward, 2014). The Howard League for Penal Reform reported that the cuts to prison officer numbers impacted every part of prison life – in-cell hours, access to purposeful activity, deaths in custody, violence and serious assaults and riots, protests and other disturbances (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014).

v. Increasing In-cell Hours

In the annual report of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2012-13, it was reported that too many prisoners were locked up for too long every day. The report stated that ‘Only 17% of prisoners surveyed in category C training prisons and 15% in category B prisons said they spent 10 hours out of cell on a weekday’ (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013: 40) – see *Figure 4* below.

Figure 4. Time spent out of cell on a weekday as reported by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2013

	Spend more than 10 hours out of cell (weekday) (%)	Spend less than two hours out of cell (weekday) (%)
Locals	9	22
Category B trainers	15	8
Category C trainers	17	10
High security	12	7
Young adults	15	11
Open	50	2

(HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013: 40)

During random roll checks during the working day, the 2012-13 inspectorate found that on average 40% of prisoners were locked up in Category B prisons - the average across all prisons inspected was 14%. The inspection report identified that the most time out of cell was experienced by those in work and education activities and that there was a discernible difference between the amount of time an unemployed prisoner could spend out of their cell at a local or category C prison (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013). In local prisons unemployed prisoners received between two and four hours unlocked (with the exception of Forest Bank, which offered six hours); at category C prisons they received between three and nine hours (with the exception of The Verne where unemployed prisoners were unlocked all day) (ibid.). At Buckley Hall, unemployed prisoners in some cases spent less than three hours out of cell during the week and evening association periods were particularly short. The impact of such long in-cell hours on prisoners goes far beyond a reduction in purposeful activity and in fact can affect prisoners' ability to eat, make phone calls and shower. The Howard League for Penal Reform stated that as a result of staffing cuts 'Prisoners are spending more

time locked up as association periods and library visits are cancelled due to inadequate staffing hours' (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2014: 5). Time out of cell is directly linked to the discussion of access to purposeful activity, including education, and will be examined in the context of this study's research sites in Chapter Nine of the thesis.

vi. Suicide and Violence

Trends in suicide and violence across the prison estate experienced a sharp increase between 2013 and 2014. 219 deaths in male prisons in England and Wales represented a 25% increase from the previous year. Among the 219 deaths were 85 self inflicted deaths and a further 124 deaths from natural causes. 3 additional deaths were classified as homicides (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014a). Self-harm also showed a concerning increase in the Chief Inspector of Prisons' annual report with over a thousand more incidents recorded from the previous year. The inspectorate voiced concern in their report about the quality of care in custody documentation and the under-reporting of self-harm in some establishments (ibid.). Too many prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide were in segregation with segregation being used too frequently without consideration of the appropriateness of this environment for vulnerable prisoners.

NOMS statistics showed a 14% increase in assaults across the adult male prison estate (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014a). The increase in violence in the year before 2013-2014 was the steepest in the general increase seen from 2005-2006 to present. Most concerning was the 38% increase in serious assaults (ibid.) and the lack of reporting and inconsistencies in data uncovered by the inspectorate. The strategic approach to managing violence was found to vary widely across the prison estate with a general decrease found in resources allocated to violence reduction and support for victims of bullying.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons regularly reports on issues of concern such as suicide, violence and safety across prisons in the system, but one example where the Inspector

stated that the effects of the prison crisis were most visible was HMP Elmley in Kent. HMP Elmley was reported to have experienced a 60% increase in violence, five suicides in two years and 200 men unemployed who spent 23 hours per day locked in their cells (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014b). The 2014 inspection of HMP Elmley revealed an overcrowded prison establishment with a very restricted and unpredictable regime (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2014b: 5). Prisoners were being turned away from work and education due to lack of officer supervision and association periods were being cancelled every day. The media have been instrumental in publicly condemning conditions at HMP Elmley with particular reference to drugs, violence and suicide. Newspaper headlines such as *Surge in violence at Elmley jail lays bare prison crisis* (The Guardian, 2014) and *Inmate found dead in cell at overcrowded Elmley prison* (BBC News, 2014) reported on the outcome of the inspection highlighting instances of mini riots, the routine recording of confidential phone calls and increasing levels of violence. These and other concerns including disruption to visiting times, security issues, rehabilitation schemes and negative staff/prisoner relationships were attributed to staff shortages in the inspection report (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2014b).

2.4 The Impact of Contemporary Penal Policy on Prison Education

Having highlighted some of the key issues that contribute to the current 'prison crisis', it is imperative to consider how these problems occurring across the prison estate have impacted on prison education provision and how it is experienced by prisoners. Having contemplated the retributive discourses that appear to underpin penal ideology and identified the impact of budget cuts on prison resources and the increase in in-cell time, this part of the chapter will discuss the impact of these issues on the current state of prisoners' access to education. In addition, a thematic review of inspection and Ofsted reports from 2004 to the present day for the two prison sites accessed during this research will be presented. This review will focus on themes specific to education

including time out of cell, availability and provision of education, library access and provision, and achievement.

i. Core Issues Impacting Prison Education

Although identifying prison education and other purposeful activity aimed at rehabilitation and reducing reoffending as being vital to prison life, the National Audit Office stated that over many years, 'a large number of prisons have struggled to provide enough for their populations' (2013: p. 28). While all newly built prison capacity should come with activity facilities, problems have arisen with the quantity and variety being provided. The National Audit Office (2013) found that the Ministry of Justice does not plan purposeful activity with the same flexibility as it does security when constructing new capacity. This presents problems in the range of types and amounts of purposeful activity required to support the multitude of developmental needs of the prison population. A lack of long-term flexibility in purposeful activity is evident at the new HMP Oakwood, which was originally planned as a local prison for large remand populations where the typical mix of purposeful activity is not usually implemented. Now only containing sentenced offenders, the change in prison population called for the Ministry of Justice to consider an increase in purposeful activity. Following the denial of the required £5.5m to implement activity, G4S (now running the prison) have struggled to provide the high level of purposeful activity promised during the take over (ibid.).

Education has been affected by the limitations brought about during this period of change including budget and staffing cuts, which have resulted in more in-cell time. As identified earlier in the chapter, the changing nature of the disciplinary regime leaves the real purpose of the prison somewhat uncertain. The impact of this uncertainty has most recently been seen through the imposing of a book ban, which involved

restrictions on prisoners being sent books by family and friends due to security concerns. Although rehabilitation in the form of education (and other programmes) is stated as being part of the 'rehabilitation revolution', the restrictions placed on prisoners being sent books was a reminder of the 'risk society' setting in which contemporary imprisonment resides; where the calculation of risk and managerial ideology meet the proposition that prisoners can be rehabilitated to reduce the risk of reoffending. In essence, the book ban showed that although it is desired that prisoners will rehabilitate and resettle, the risk of receiving packages from the outside world placed restrictions on education materials creating an ideological collision between the risk management nature of managerialism and the remaining elements of the rehabilitative ideal. These sentiments have been perhaps most clearly articulated by Garland who suggested that there are two contrasting visions at work in contemporary criminal justice – '...the passionate, morally-toned desire to punish and the administrative, rationalistic, normalizing concern to manage' (1990: p.180).

The book ban introduced by the then Justice Secretary Chris Grayling was met with opposition and in some cases outrage, particularly from charitable organisations including the Howard League for Penal Reform, the Prisoners' Education Trust and English Pen. It could be argued however, that the imposing of a book ban in fact played a crucial role in publicly highlighting the problems facing contemporary imprisonment. In a telephone conversation between a northern prisons libraries manager and myself, it was noted that one prisoner told her the book ban had in some cases helped prisoners who were at risk of a drastic decline in their mental wellbeing. A prisoner had told her that for some inmates, having more free access to books could induce isolation whereas the ban would force prisoners at this kind of risk to go to the library and engage in a social environment. An education manager from a category A prison interviewed for the present study put another perspective forward. He said

I think it was all about the lack of choice rather than the practicality. It could have been anything really. It could have been toothpaste.

The ban was lifted in December 2014 following a High Court ruling, which declared a blanket ban on sending books to prisoners was unlawful (Travis, 2014a). Mr. Justice Collins said that it was strange to treat books as a privilege when they could be essential to a prisoner's rehabilitation. Although the High Court ruling was very much in favour of prisoner rehabilitation, there was no direct reference made to the importance of books in enabling prisoners to pass the time or to provide a vehicle for mental escape from the struggle of prison life – especially when time in cell appears to be increasing. This highlights the importance of the present study in creating an awareness of the range of beneficial outcomes of educational activities and resources, including coping with prison life.

When Justice Secretary Chris Grayling implemented the book ban in November 2013, prison libraries were often his answer to criticism questioning the ban. Beard (2014) criticized Grayling's reference to prison libraries stating that the impact of cuts in public libraries was also being experienced in prisons. *The Guardian* reported Laura Swaffield, chair of The Library Campaign, as saying that "Library services are getting hacked off at the knees" (Williams, 2014). With prison libraries having suffered from under-resourcing for years (University and College Union, 2006: 112), the prison budget cuts experienced in recent times have contributed to additional concern. The aforementioned staffing reductions have in some cases caused reduced access to libraries (and other purposeful activity) due to a lack of staff to escort prisoners between wings and activity areas. There are a number of innovative programmes provided by prison libraries including Storybook Dads and The Six Book Challenge, which help prisoners to maintain links with their families and encourage reading. Under-resourcing and budget cuts have caused some of these library-based programmes to be stopped due to lack of staff and funding.

The budgeting reforms across the prison estate have also included a reformed funding model for education provision. Moving to a payment-by-results system that has already been adopted by the government's Work Programme has led to an unfavourable response. Co-leader on Offender Learning at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, Alistair Clark, described the move towards payment-by-results as a "perverse incentive to go for the quick win" (Williams, 2012). A further negative response to the new system was put forward by Maria McNicholl, Senior Manager at the St Giles Trust, who suggested that this model "totally and utterly encourages cherry-picking (of the easiest cases)" (ibid.). According to UCU's head of policy, Paul Cottrell, the vocational underpinning of this model in paying on achievement by providing courses that will lead to guaranteed work is unrealistic and severely risks a reduction in more generally life-enhancing learning for all prisoners other than those serving long-term sentences (ibid.).

In August 2014, welfare-to-work provider A4E announced it would be pulling out of a £17m contract to provide education and training in 12 London prisons as it would not be able to run the contract at a profitable rate. Chief executive of the Prisoners' Education Trust, Rod Clark responded by saying "The delivery of education for prisoners across the country is being seriously affected by overcrowding and staff shortages which are leaving people locked up for longer, so they can't get to class and providers struggle to meet their targets. These pressures are having a negative impact on safety and rehabilitation" (Gentleman, 2014).

Barriers have also been created to accessing higher-level qualifications for more academically able prisoners. As prisons are not funded to deliver any education higher than level 2 (including A Levels and other higher level courses), there is no budget to provide prisoners with tutors to teach beyond this level. Prison education departments in some cases are unable to provide level 2 qualifications (GCSE level) and prisoners are becoming increasingly reliant on distance learning via external funding. One might argue that given the apparent increases in in-cell time, distance learning may be ideal for prisoners spending an increased amount of time locked up. The previous director of the Prisoners' Education Trust, Pat Jones, argued however that there are numerous hurdles

to overcome before access to distance learning can be achieved. For instance, Jones pointed out that to apply to study at level 3 or above, prisoners first need permission from everyone in the prison involved in their daily routine and the course must fit with their personal development plan (Tickle, 2012). On acceptance to a distance-learning course, prisoners then face further challenges due to prison restrictions on internet access – especially given that the majority of distance learning now takes place online.

Anne Pike, whose research has particularly focused on distance learning in prison, argues that even internally networked ICT provision is not sufficient to support learners and lack of internet access creates digital exclusion for prisoners (Pike and Adams, 2012). Other attempts have been recently made to alleviate these barriers. The clearest example being the 'Virtual Campus' - a customized search engine, which allows secure access to sites, which have internal, and no external, hyperlinks. This approach also provides offender learners with advice and guidance suggesting courses and vacancies available through the Virtual Campus (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2013). The security concerns that continue to plague discussions of online access for prisoners, particularly through negative media reporting, serves to further remove prisoners culturally from the outside world causing them to be not only physically separated from the free community but also left behind by becoming outdated in technological lifestyle and cultural advances.

For prisoners who do access education, whether through face-to-face classes or via distance learning, perpetual movement between different prison establishments can cause disruption to work and education. The disruption caused by prisoner movement was acknowledged in the 2011 review of offender learning, which stated:

Unavoidable prisoner movement previously meant continual re-assessment, loss of information about prior attainment and a general lack of continuity. Although some of these problems have been resolved, prisoner movement still means many are unable to pursue their learning to a point of qualification. It

means too that the establishment of that important relationship between teacher and learner which so often underpins the most effective learning is hard to achieve consistently in a prison learning environment (Ministry of Justice, 2011: 5-6).

ii. Inspecting Prison Education at the Research Sites

To set the issues raised in this part of the chapter in the context of the two research sites accessed for this study (one category A site and one category C site), inspection and Ofsted reports from 2004 to the present day for the sites have been analysed to draw out specific issues that may relate to the discussion of the research findings. The review will focus on themes specific to education including time out of cell, availability and provision of education, library access and provision, and achievement.

Individual establishment inspection reports are produced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), a statutory organisation which '...reports on the treatment and conditions of those detained in prisons, young offender institutions, immigration detention facilities and police custody' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013: 9). The inspections carried out by HMIP contribute to the UK's response to its international obligations under the Operational Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). It is required by OPCAT that independent bodies monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees at all places of detention through regular visits. Inspection reports include a summary of the conditions and treatment of prisoners based on four tests of a healthy prison – safety, respect, purposeful activity and resettlement. For the purpose of this analysis, focus will be given to the 'purposeful activity' aspect of the healthy prison test within the inspection reports reviewed.

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted inspect and regulate services that '...care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages' (Gov.uk, 2015b). The organisation carries out hundreds of inspections every week throughout England to help providers improve by monitoring their progress and sharing best practice with them. Ofsted inspections usually take place in prison establishments every two to three years. A four-point scale is used to summarise the judgments of inspectors about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equal opportunity (Ofsted, 2007). A grade is given for each point on the four-point-scale – Grade 1 (Outstanding), Grade 2 (Good), Grade 3 (Satisfactory), Grade 4 (Inadequate).

Time Out of Cell

The 2004 inspection for the category C research site found that time out of cell was poor for the 13-15% of prisoners who were unemployed (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2004). This group of prisoners could spend approximately 20 hours per day in their cells. By the following report in 2006, considerable improvement had been made in this area (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2006). Despite a 33% increase in the prison population, there was an increase in the number of activity spaces available for prisoners. Very few prisoners were found to be locked in their cells during the working day and daily allocation of library hours had been made for unemployed prisoners. In 2009, conditions had deteriorated again so the inspectorate returned to their 2003 recommendation that prison managers should investigate why so many prisoners were locked up during activity times. The 2009 report identified that a quarter of prisoners were again locked behind their doors during the day and that 'More prisoners were locked in their cells during the day than the recorded number and take-up of activity places suggested' (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2009: 59) and those who were locked up had no purposeful activity to occupy them in their cells. By 2012, the inspectorate's recommendation to increase time out of cell had not been achieved and there had been no investigation to determine

why so many prisoners were locked up during activity times and on one morning and one afternoon during the inspection, 202 (31%) and 155 (24%) prisoners, respectively, were locked up. A few of these prisoners were engaged in in-cell activities but most were either ‘...unemployed, not required or on induction’ (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2012: 32). Despite having the capacity to provide 8.5 hours out of cell from Monday to Thursday, the establishment was reporting 7.3 hours per day, which was low for a category C prison. Given that these figures were lower than those at the time of the previous inspection, the inspectorate repeated their previous recommendation.

At the category A research site in 2003, the majority of prisoners were employed in some form of work or education. Those unemployed (10%) were spending a maximum of eight hours per day out of their cell rather than the 10 hours expected by the inspectorate. The primary issue identified was the lack of in-cell activity for retired prisoners. In the 2007 inspection report, time out of cell was deemed reasonable and almost all eligible prisoners were assigned to an activity place (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2007). Attendance at activity sessions was found to be effectively managed by wing staff and consequently, only a few prisoners were locked in their cells. Prisoners themselves were positive about out of cell time in their survey responses resulting in unlock time being more favorable than the comparators. In the 2010 report, the inspectorate found that ‘The importance of keeping long term, serious offenders busy and engaged was fully recognized’ (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2010: 5) and that the quality and quantity of activity had continued to improve. Time out of cell for unemployed prisoners was less than those employed however exercise in the fresh air was provided daily and rarely cancelled. In the 2012 report, it was noted that time out of cell was ‘reasonable’ with an employed prisoner being able to have around 10 hours out of cell. Unemployed prisoners had around 3.5 hours out of cell showing a decrease from the previous inspection however most prisoners were engaged in some activity on most days (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2012).

Availability and Provision of Education

Since 2004, inspection and Ofsted reports for the category C prison have highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the availability of educational programmes. In 2004, aside from construction, most areas of work were identified as having no formal training component leading to an accredited qualification (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2004). Some work in assembly workshops, kitchens and horticulture were 'repetitive and non-stimulating' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2004: 65). However, the inspectorate determined that prisoners did receive good training and that a programme of appropriate qualifications was being planned for all work areas. In 2009, focus continued to remain on work related training programmes such as gardening, bicycle repair and fork-lift truck driving – all of which had good or very good standards. Groups taking part in numeracy and literacy at entry level however were relatively small and achievement was poor.

In 2003, the category A research site showed a range of strengths in education availability and provision. In this year the Adult Learning Inspectorate reported training in humanities and general education as 'satisfactory'. There were 278 learners in art and design classes, 66 of whom were working towards general certificates of general education (GCSEs). In addition, 46 learners were working towards a variety of qualifications in English and English Literature, 32 working towards qualifications in French and Spanish, 23 working towards GCSE psychology and 22 towards GCSE sociology (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2003). Despite the strengths identified in the range of courses available to prisoner learners at this time, the Adult Learning Inspectorate identified the recording of assessment as 'poor' and the validity of assessments carried out up to 2003 was 'unsatisfactory'. The poor recording of assessment also made it '...difficult to identify learners who complete[d] tests in less than the allocated time, and who could therefore work more quickly towards achieving the qualification' (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2003: 13).

In 2005, the range of education courses continued to be good at the category A site. Training and awards were offered in physical education, hospitality, food hygiene and food preparation and cooking. 220 prisoners were following programmes in humanities and general education including 22 on an Open College Network (OCN) accredited history of art course and 68 on A Level, GCSE and OCN awards at entry level and levels 1 and 2 in art (Ofsted, 2005). Participation on languages courses continued and 12 learners were working on distance learning university courses. Retention and achievement on physical education courses had improved since the last inspection and these learners were developing numeracy and communications skills through using percentages, multiplication and division on their courses. These learners were benefiting from increased self-confidence through the acquiring of these skills. The 2005 report did note however that many prisoners were working towards qualifications below their abilities and that achievement in numeracy and literacy at entry level was unsatisfactory. There was also 'insufficient use of data' (ibid.) to monitor the performance of education provision which meant performance data was not being used to set targets for improvement.

Between 2007 and 2012, inspection and Ofsted reports for the category A research site reported that the curriculum remained broad and the number of prisoners taking part in higher-level distance learning increased and a few learners were studying for masters degrees. In 2007, learners achieved well on most courses, retention was satisfactory and success rates were seen to vary across courses. Pass rates for literacy were over 80% and 95% for numeracy and learners who failed were often successful on re-sit tests (Ofsted, 2007). Room for development was identified in there being waiting lists to undertake the Sycamore Restorative Justice Programme which was particularly popular amongst inmates. In 2010 and 2012, provision of a range of courses continued to be good and the 2010 inspection report highlighted that some outstanding examples of prisoners' artwork and thought-provoking written work was being produced on some courses. According to the 2012 inspection report, data to record and monitor learner

progress had improved and were used to inform planning (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013).

Library Access and Provision

In 2004, one library assistant and two prisoner orderlies ran the category C prison library. At this time the library was developing a relationship with education and training and providing resources for independent study. Only 35% of the prison population used the library regularly at this time. Items were not catalogued and book and resource lending was not well recorded or monitored (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2004). By 2006, library services had become properly integrated with the education and learning and skills departments and use and opening times of the library had been reviewed (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2006). Daily sessions were allocated to unemployed prisoners to allow for more out of cell time and evening sessions were reserved for prisoners who were employed. In 2009, the category C prison library had four qualified staff and four orderlies. Orderlies had specific responsibilities, which included acting as Toe by Toe mentors. Other sessions operating in the library included Keeping up with the Children and Storybook Dads, and the library staff were working with the local consortium to extend the range and access to learning materials. Both staff and orderlies had received certificates and external recognition for their work (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2009). The main criticism from the inspectorate at this time was the range of the selection of non-English language books available and that bilingual dictionaries were mainly for European languages. In 2012, the inspectorate reported the library at the category C prison as having remained good. Improvement had been seen in the availability of bilingual dictionaries and books for speakers of languages other than English. In fact, dictionaries were available for most of the languages spoken by the prison population and arrangements had been made with a nearby prison to share books and other foreign language publications. A DVD library had been established and 'enhanced' prisoners were able to borrow DVDs to watch during evenings (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2012).

In 2003 the inspectorate reported that no librarian had been in post for 18 months prior to inspection at the category A research site and two prison officers were managing the library. Although the library did not lend audio books or music CDs, there was a small collection of foreign language books, large print titles and books for learners with reading difficulties were available. Small book collections were also available in the healthcare centre and the segregation unit (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2003). In 2003 the library had 517 members who borrowed up to 450 items per week and it was open five evenings per week with all prisoners theoretically having access to two 20-minute sessions weekly. The library was closed at weekends and no computer access was available. The book ordering system was poor with long arrival times and there was a lack of a catalogue for prisoners to identify the types of books they wanted. There were also poor links between the library and the education department at this time.

The following inspection in 2007 reported that a new learning resource centre had opened meaning that learning opportunities were still accessible when the library was closed during afternoons. The library remained closed on weekends, but was open every weekday evening from 5:30pm to 6:45pm for prisoners to borrow books. The range of materials had increased since 2003 to include magazines and music CDs and a larger stock of fantasy and science fiction books. Resources for literacy and numeracy needs were reported to be good and there was a good range of language support materials and vocational books (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2007). A range of books and a catalogue of library resources remained available in the inpatient, protected witness and special secure units.

In 2010, library use was deemed 'satisfactory' by the inspectorate with '...approximately 78% of the population using it over the previous 12 months' (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2010: 16). The library had adequate weekday opening times and librarians facilitated a study centre on weekday afternoons to support Open University and distance learning programmes. The range of library activity in support of the broader regime impressed the inspectorate and access was seen to be equitable for both vulnerable and

mainstream prisoners (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010). In the 2012 report, the library was seen as '...welcoming and well managed with good access' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2013: 15). It was noted that there were good activities to promote literacy and a writer in residence book club had been established. Unfortunately, the Storybook Dads scheme had been stopped. Library orderlies' skills were good, however the inspectorate noted that the fact that these skills were not accredited was a missed opportunity.

Achievement

At the category C research site in 2004, achievement and retention rates were over 90% (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2003). Learners in brickwork were particularly motivated and two had won a regional skills competition. In ICT classes, learners showed good improvement in the development of skills and confidence. 100% of AS level and OCN level 3 art learners passed their courses and learners who were interviewed as part of the Adult Learning Inspectorate inspection took great pride and showed enthusiasm in the quality of their work. All 59 learners entered for entry-level literacy and numeracy qualifications in 2003-09 achieved their qualifications and 82% of level 2 learners were externally accredited for numeracy and literacy qualifications. Most literacy and numeracy learners were making satisfactory progress towards their individual learning targets and almost all of those interviewed reported improved levels of confidence and self esteem (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2003: 27). Five years later in the 2009 Ofsted report, achievements were low in literacy and numeracy at entry level and in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Achievements in work-based learning programmes including bicycle repair, lift-truck, decorating, plumbing and food hygiene programmes were 'outstanding'. In the basic construction skills bricklaying course '...a satisfactory 76% achieved their qualification' (Ofsted, 2009: 8). Achievement on numeracy and literacy level 1 programmes was very good at 90% and 93% respectively however entry-level programme achievement was much lower at 50%. It was also noted that numeracy and literacy skills were being developed when prisoners were working in vocational areas.

For the category A research site, the 2003 Adult Learning Inspectorate reported that the recording of assessments was poor, making it difficult to identify learners who completed tests in less than the allocated time set by the awarding body. Of the 278 learners on humanities programmes, 66 were working towards GCSEs in open college qualifications at levels 1 and 2 in art and design. 46 were working towards qualifications in English and English Literature and 32 learners were working towards qualifications in French and Spanish. Other courses included psychology, sociology, assertiveness studies and oral communications. Approximately 25% of the learners who started their qualifications in April 2002 had achieved them by the time of the inspection. Learners in art, design and English poetry achieved 14 awards in 2002 (Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2003). 220 prisoners followed humanities programmes in 2006. Around 25% of learners who began their qualifications in 2004 had achieved them. The 2005 Ofsted inspection reported that many prisoners only achieved introductory level qualifications when they were working at an advanced level. Retention and achievement in PE had improved considerably since the previous inspection and PE learners were developing numeracy and communication skills during these sessions. Achievement in literacy at foundation level was found to be unsatisfactory and in numeracy this was also the case at entry level and level 1. Achievement and retention rates were good for learners in the main location workshop however there had been no achievement in the workshop for vulnerable prisoners since it opened in November 2004. In 2005 there was insufficient use of data to monitor the performance of education and training provision and the prison was just beginning to obtain standard data. The 2007 Ofsted inspection found learners to be achieving well on most courses with an overall success rate of 79%. On some courses learner achievement rates were low, such as business administration at 47% (Ofsted, 2007). Pass rates on most literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses were high and most learners who completed their courses gained a qualification. Those who failed were often successful on test re-sits and retention was satisfactory. Achievement was also high on art, history and mathematics courses at GCSE level.

Summary

The reports reviewed for the category C research site show that between 2004 and 2012, recommendations to increase time out of cell had not been met and was considered low for a category C prison. Reports in 2004 said that some of the work-based programmes were repetitive and non-stimulating and by 2009, focus remained on work-based programmes where achievement levels were outstanding but uptake and achievement for those studying numeracy and literacy at entry level was low. This suggests that focus shifted away from basic skills to concentrate more fully on work programmes to the detriment of numeracy and literacy delivery and achievement. A positive change was seen in the increase in library staff and orderlies had become actively involved in peer support programmes.

For the category A site, it was reported that by 2012, most prisoners were engaged in some activity on most days and time out of cell was 'reasonable'. In terms of education provision, improvements were identified between 2007 and 2012 with a good breadth of programmes offered, however many prisoners were working at a level beyond that which they were being assessed. From 2003, a new distance learning resource centre had opened and the general range of materials had increased. Having had no librarian in post for 18 months at the time of the 2003 inspections, improvements had been made by 2012 as the library was reported to be well managed with good access to materials.

In summary the reports suggest that generally, both research sites experienced improvements during the period 2004 to 2012 in relation to both educational provision and achievement. The findings of present study will expose the negative impact that recent budgetary changes across the prison estate have had on education provision in these particular sites. As will be seen in Chapter Nine, the challenges that are now being faced in prison education suggest that future inspection reports are likely to identify that curricula are in fact narrowing and that staff are struggling to meet the employability-related goals of offender learning policy. This clearly impacts on how

prisoners experience education and informs a broader understanding of the current state of prison education from the perspectives of both the educated and the educators.

2.5 The Changing Nature of Contemporary Imprisonment and Prison Education

Prison education is deeply embedded in the wider context of the history of imprisonment and in terms of penal policy has received different levels of exposure in policy depending on the overall aim of the disciplinary regime. At times characterized by deterrence, prison education has been typically less visible and has been seen as a 'privilege'. During more reformatory regimes however, prison education became more visible and has been given a prominent position in penal policy. This chapter has importantly identified that despite numerous changes in the disciplinary regime over time, prison education has continued to have a role in prison life.

When it comes to contemporary imprisonment, prison education has been merged with work to form an acceptable part of a regime that aims to revolutionize offender rehabilitation whilst administering effective punishment. In 2005, the declaration that educating prisoners is simply 'the right thing to do' and should be viewed as more than an opportunity to make prisoners employable appears to have been a blip on the prison education policy radar. At the present time when ex-prisoners will find it especially difficult to gain employment immediately after release, consideration must be given to whether the wider benefits can be ignored, including those that equip offenders with the skills they need to cope with the experience of imprisonment. Given that many prisoners will experience being unemployed for a period of time following their release, these other benefits of education in prison may in fact be essential. This study therefore seeks to establish, through exploring the real experiences of prisoners, the extent to which the employability underpinning of prison education is realistic and whether

broader outcomes can be identified in prisoners' interpretations of their own educational experiences.

The underlying retributive discourses highlighted in the first part of this chapter appear to have become visible in the outcomes of prison budgeting strategies. Prisons have become less safe for staff and prisoners and a distinct shadow has been cast over the prioritization of education and rehabilitation more broadly – despite the 'rehabilitation revolution', which claims to value training provision. Changes in education delivery have resulted in it becoming specifically focused on those who have the lowest ability, leaving those of higher ability to pursue education through distance learning, which in itself is challenging to access and undertake.

This chapter has set out evidence which suggests that prison education delivery is suffering due to reduced budgets and increasing security concerns. Despite the overwhelming view presented in this chapter that prison education is part of a regime fraught with challenges, the continued implementation of education in prisons should be seen positively and this supports further research in the area to better understand the outcomes of an initiative that continues to be a key part of prison life.

Chapter Three: Learning from Existing Prison Education Research

3.1 Introduction

Before reviewing the literature on the sociology of imprisonment in Chapter Four, this chapter will focus on the small body of research specifically on prison education. It is important to locate this study within the context of existing work on prison education to establish how it will advance knowledge and what it will contribute to the field. Little research has been written on education in prisons in the UK and existing literature concerning this subject has rarely been based on primary research. Some research has been carried out however, and this chapter will provide an overview of the published work of Canadian researcher Stephen Duguid and British researcher Anne Reuss. This will be followed by a brief review of the book *Prison(er) Education: stories of change and transformation* (2000) in which the work of prison education researchers Pawson, MacGuinness and Waller will be discussed. A review of a study conducted by the Prison Reform Trust in 2003 and the work of Kevin Warner will also contribute to this chapter leading to the establishment of what can be learnt from these sources about the core themes within this study and what the key lines of inquiry are following on from existing work.

3.2 Overview of Existing Research

i. Stephen Duguid

Stephen Duguid laid the foundation for research on prison education having written numerous articles and book chapters on correctional education from the 1970s to the

present day. Duguid's career has involved over twenty years of experience with prisons, prisoners and prison education. Between 1973 and 1980, Duguid taught on the University of Victoria's Correctional Education Programme which offered courses in European history to students at several federal prisons in British Columbia. From 1984 to 1993, he was the Director of Simon Fraser University's Prison Education Programme which offered degree completion courses in four federal prisons in British Columbia.

In 2000, Duguid published *Can Prisons Work?: The Prisoner as Object and Subject in Modern Corrections*. In this work, Duguid explored various case studies of prison education programmes which 'flourished' from the early 1970s to the 1990s in North America and the United Kingdom which were selected because they gave '...a taste of the potential for variety, innovation and tradition' (Duguid, 2000: 99) in the world of the prison. The case studies selected included the NewGate programmes in the United States, the University of California at Santa Cruz's education programme at the California Institution for Women, Open University courses and the Special Unit at Barlinnie Prison in the United Kingdom, and the University of Victoria – Simon Fraser University Programme in British Columbia, Canada. In making a case for the effectiveness of these kinds of initiatives in inhibiting recidivism and enhancing social integration and citizenship, Duguid's overarching argument emerged that imprisoned criminals could be persuaded to reassess principles of right and wrong. He argued that 'outsiders' providing education courses (rather than therapy or coercion) could change the attitudes of imprisoned individuals most effectively through a more natural process of self-transformation through empowerment, communication of values, and the formation of new interests (Duguid, 2000). Duguid proposed that programmes that have an educational objective seem to have the greatest potential to accomplish breaking down the subject-object relationship in the prison and the criminal justice system as a whole (Duguid, 2000).

Given that Duguid was writing about a time when the treatment model was still adopted widely, he argued education as a potential alternative to this model and that the two

should not necessarily be intertwined as they were in the 1960s. In the example of the Barlinnie Special Unit in the 1970s, Duguid deduced that the implementation of non-criminal community norms can thrive in the penal setting and that the relative sense of freedom achieved by the education experience was utilized by prisoners to experiment with new forms of expression, mainly through art and writing. This, he argued, reflected the 'radical' educational theories of the time and was a challenge to the more traditional educational approaches common in prison (2000: 118). Each of the programmes reviewed by Duguid shared the common core of focusing on the prisoner first and foremost as an individual, a learner, and a subject. Each example explored by Duguid provided insight into the difficulty of sustaining this different view of the prisoner in the face of the authoritarian imperatives operating in the correctional system. He argued that the Barlinnie project only survived as long as it did by literally walling itself off from the prison (2000: 146).

Duguid's own research drew on the cognitive development theories of Piaget (1972) and Kohlberg (1958) to argue that cognitive development and cognitive moral development could result from prison education. Through his research, which considered the content of education courses (via his experience of being a teacher of humanities in prison), he concluded that a liberal approach with a focus on the humanities was the most viable route given the emphasis placed on problem solving and decision-making in these subject areas. Duguid's research also found a lower rate of recidivism amongst prisoner students when compared to a group of offenders who had not studied education courses during their prison sentences.

Duguid's research with Pawson, whose work primarily focused on the philosophy and practice of research, sought to establish whether a link existed between higher education and rehabilitation. Their collaborative study in 1998 involved 654 post-release prisoners who had studied on a liberal arts education course. Duguid and Pawson found that a higher education programme could cause change in a prisoners' economic, personal cognitive or moral outlooks. However, they suggested that whether

such a development actually occurs also depends on criminal histories, family backgrounds, educational and social achievements, the circumstances of imprisonment and the nature of post release environments (Duguid and Pawson, 1998). The study concluded that it is not programmes that work but their capacity to offer resources that allow participants the choice of making them work.

ii. Anne Reuss⁵

British researcher Anne Reuss has been involved in prison education in the UK for over 20 years as both a researcher and prison teacher. Her work in this area began with the publication of her thesis *Higher Education and Personal Change in Prisoners* in 1997 in which she argued that:

... a course of Higher Education in prison can effect change or transformation in prisoner-students who assimilate the course material in a complex process of learning and social interaction which is 'woven', or synthesized into their life experience (Reuss, 1997: 2).

While teaching prisoners, Reuss used observation techniques paying specific attention to classroom interactions and conversations. Her intention was to test the theory that a link exists between studying at degree level whilst imprisoned and personal development or change (Reuss, 1997). The study focused on long-term adult prisoner learners engaged in an intensive and continuous process of studying sociology (see also Parrotta and Thompson, 2011). She argued that the teaching of sociology was significant when taught in the prison environment because of its potential to bring about the transformation of consciousness through the study and understanding of societies and human behaviour (Reuss, 1997). Reuss observed that prisoners involved in Higher

⁵ It should be noted that Anne Reuss' surname is now Wilson. As such her more recent publications are referenced under this name.

Education in the prison setting were able to re-locate their identities into new social structures through considering new ideas, gaining new skills and gaining new knowledge about their understanding of social life. She argued that this had the ability to influence post-release behaviour as students developed the ability to bring together their early life experiences with those in the present to anticipate what might happen in the future (Reuss, 1997).

Reuss identified that prisoners did not always take part in education courses for strictly educational purposes and some admitted to avoiding working in prison workshops. She suggested that this was a way for prisoners to be able to maintain some element of control and autonomy in their prison lives allowing them, through the sacrifice of being paid more for working in the workshop, to 'blank off' prison life by studying education courses. Reuss therefore identified that prison education agendas could differ between those of penal policy and those of prisoners. She also identified that the outcomes of prison education were unique to each individual prisoner by the way that the student synthesized the learning process into conscious experience (Reuss, 1997).

iii. *Prison(er) Education: Stories of Change and Transformation*

Duguid, Pawson and Reuss are three contributors to the publication *Prison(er) Education: stories of change and transformation* (2000) which brings together a collection of research on prison education to determine who prison education is really for by combining anecdote, research and evaluation. The book encourages thinking about the transforming power of education through basic skills and higher education to change the offending behaviour of criminals and was a significant starting point for my own work. The core focus of the book addresses the question 'Who is prison education for: prison or prisoners?' and it proposes that the value of education should be seen to go beyond basic skills and not be dominated by cognitive thinking skills courses. This part of the chapter will provide a concise overview of the book which presented for the first time in Britain, a comprehensive account of education inside prisons.

Following the opening chapter in which Reuss discusses her research (previously reviewed) in the context of the experience of conducting research in the prison environment, Duguid presents a chapter which explores the juxtaposition between theory and practice. He proposes that for those involved in prison regimes, theory plays a role in at least three areas – diagnosing the problem of crime and deviance; understanding the context of prison and the imprisoned; and prescribing cures and predicting outcomes. Duguid argues that prison education involves all three areas. The underlying competing theoretical concepts explored concern the relationship between crime and human nature; whether humans are basically good (based on the existence of a conscience) versus the idea that humans are fundamentally flawed. Based on such theoretical approaches, Duguid considers education as a means by which human ‘flaws’ can be corrected by unveiling the inherent good within individuals. Duguid then reflects on his experience teaching history as part of the University of Victoria Correctional Education Programme in British Columbia which he explains was designed by a psychologist as an experiment to test whether traditional liberal arts courses could lead to individual moral and cognitive growth among prisoner students, and if this in turn would lead to reduced recidivism. Duguid describes how at first he was resistant to such an approach as he thought students would either abandon the programme or simply comply with what the experiments aimed to achieve. However, he observed the success of the programme which led to students becoming more literate, thinking more critically and becoming more aware of social, political and moral issues. In many cases prisoner students were also seen to be considering non-criminal post-release careers. As such, Duguid came to embrace the ‘cognitive-moral development’ theory becoming an outspoken supporter. Returning to the discussion of the relationship between theory and practice, Duguid argued that the ‘cognitive-moral development’ theory validated staff activity on the programme and provided a model for staff to understand the changes taking place among the learners. The main argument of his chapter is that theories do not in fact have to be ‘true’ to be powerful, but that the important element of the theory in this case is that it imposes an identity on the individual.

Pawson's chapter follows introducing prison education research as having an 'absence of evidence in a vacuum of policy' (2000: 63). He argues that the cause of offender education needs the support of hard evidence because otherwise, its practitioners have to fall back on anecdote, which is simply insufficient. In this sense, Pawson proposes that research needs to show that education can slow the revolving door of the prison. In a chapter which provides an account of the evaluation of the Simon Fraser Prison Education Programme, Pawson addresses the complexity of the 'Does prisoner education work?' question arguing that it has become a dangerous oversimplification (2000: 66). Instead, he suggests that the questions posed should include why education in prison works, who it works for, in what circumstances and in what respects. Following a thorough discussion of his methodological approach, Pawson draws together the conclusions established from his evaluative study to ultimately determine whether education reduces recidivism. His conclusions distinguish 'improvers' from 'hard cases' and draw the reader's attention closely to the fact that the benefits of education are not immediate and are certainly not felt overnight. Pawson found that older learners were more prepared to 'put in hard slog' but that there were some younger prisoners who also shared this approach. These tended to be prisoners who were not yet ensconced in criminal culture for whom education was a means of protection enabling them to 'keep their heads down'. For prisoners who experienced a change in identity, this was typically seen amongst those who continued to pursue education post release. Pawson argues that there are not enough inquiries to make a policy case for an expansion of prisoner education and that although the Simon Fraser Programme was a success (in part a result of the choice afforded to the prisoners) the programme was shut down in 1994 highlighting the disposable nature of such programmes at that time.

MacGuinness, a teacher of Basic Skills, Key Skills and ESOL at HMP Whitemoor, presents a chapter which reviews her research of adults' participation in post secondary education at a maximum security prison. To investigate education participation, she focused on two participant groups – one group of A Level and Open University students

and another consisting of 'access' students studying courses between Basic and GCSE level. MacGuinness stresses in this chapter the importance of education in keeping the mind active while enduring a long prison sentence. Through group discussions and questionnaires, she found that the primary reasons prisoners gave for participating in education were to keep occupied, to catch up on missed education opportunities, to improve employment prospects and to challenge (and hopefully disprove) other people's prophecies regarding the outcome of prisoners' lives. In considering the role of education more broadly, MacGuinness notes that the prison removes institutional and situational barriers, such as the middle class character of mainstream adult education as well as the time and cost (2000: 103).

Waller, an Open University Co-coordinator and teacher of GCSE History and Religious Studies at HMP Whitemoor, follows MacGuinness' chapter with an insight into her research on the extent of disjunction and integration in ethnic minority inmates in the education department at a high security prison. Following an examination of the broad theoretical approaches to racism which provides a framework against which to analyse her findings, Waller shows how education can contribute towards personal integration in a number of ways. Acknowledging that the effects of racism can be seen within the criminal justice system (such as in the prison population or statistics relating to the likelihood of stop and search), Waller also details her exploration of her participants' previous experiences and how for instance, experiences of racism at school (some of which were a result of cultural misunderstanding) led to rebellion due to a clash of cultures. Waller exposes the increased disjunction experienced by long term prisoners who are subject to racial harassment leading to feelings of powerlessness and isolation. To research the impact of education on integration, Waller conducted interviews with her own students – all of whom selected to participate were Black British. The findings of her study revealed some difficulties in relationships with white prisoners. Relationships with staff on the other hand were not found to be a source of extreme disjunction. Prison education gave Waller's participants an opportunity to re-forge their identities resulting in normalization, change in self-perception and socialization.

Ultimately, Waller found that the effects of racism experienced by black prisoners could be negated by the experience of prison education programmes.

At the time of writing, Hughes was a doctoral student studying prisoners' experiences of distance learning. She explains in her chapter the process of sampling letters written by prisoners to the Prisoners' Education Trust, which included letters written by both male and female prisoners from prisons ranging in security levels. She noted that many of the letters mentioned links between education courses and future career prospects. In addition, a number of interesting themes emerged including self-confidence, identity, and the use of time. Hughes' work also identified the problems faced by prisoners doing distance learning courses including waiting for post and combining learning with prison jobs and other prison programmes such as behaviour management. Hughes highlighted the advantage of distance learning courses giving more opportunity to women prisoners stressing the often outward unattractiveness of prison education due to low wages, poor facilities and a lack of support from prison staff. More recently, Hughes (2012) conducted further research into the experiences of distance learners in prison. In particular, she explored the 'push' and 'pull' factors that either motivate or discourage prisoners from doing distance learning courses and other activities during a prison sentence. She found that motivations primarily centred on future employment, having something to do, prisoners continuing to study having been students prior to imprisonment and, seeing other prisoners engaging in learning.

Gordon (2000), an ex-prisoner with experience of being educated and educating others in the prison environment, wrote his chapter for his peers rather than for academics to give an insight into prisoners' perspectives on prison education. His chapter details his early memories of school, and the beginnings of his involvement in criminal activity. He recounts being given a mandatory life sentence for murder and tells stories from his experience of imprisonment. Gordon first became involved in prison education in 1978 after finding work in the prison laundry boring and having a desire for mental stimulation. Despite the fact that Gordon was a reluctant learner at first, he found that

doing education helped the time to pass and he eventually became involved in helping to teach prisoners with special education needs. In the chapter, Gordon details his complex educational journey, which included a return to prison after turning to drugs when coping with life in the outside world became too difficult. He completed two teaching courses and a Masters degree in Education. Gordon reflects on his 22-year prison education experience explaining that doing education provided the opportunity for prisoners to mature in an environment where this development is usually put on hold. He also acknowledges how prison education provision has changed so that courses are now contracted out to organizations for profit making. Overall, he saw the stigma of being in prison education diminish over time and noticed prison staff beginning to view education as a positive step forward.

The final chapter of *Prison(er) Education: stories of change and transformation* considers each of the individual contributions in order to envisage the way forward for prison education research. Prison education continues to attract controversy due to arguments from some sections of the media and the public that prison education is a privilege for people who do not deserve it and this will be explored further in Chapter Seven in a discussion on prison staff perspectives on the less eligibility concept. The concluding chapter of the book suggests that this is perhaps the case because the aims of imprisonment and education are opposite to one another (as noted in Chapter One). There are two points in the final chapter that are particularly relevant to the present study. Firstly, it is argued that the practice and delivery of prison education courses seem to ignore the life history and personal identity of the prisoner and that people should be encouraged to listen to prisoners in order to gain such information (Reuss and Wilson, 2000). Secondly, it is suggested that we need to understand exactly what changes happen as a result of the experience of prison education as there are numerous potential outcomes. Both of these arguments form core aspects of the present study and will be explored in later chapters.

iv. Time to Learn

In 2003, the Prison Reform Trust researched prison education from the perspective of prisoners. The study was concerned with the benefits and drawbacks of learning in the prison environment, the relevance of the curriculum to prisoners' diverse needs, the range of resources available and the limitations imposed on learning by prison routines (Prison Reform Trust, 2003). The aim of the study was to improve accessibility to prison education and the quality of service provision by responding to consumer needs. Semi-structured group discussions and questionnaires were used to conduct the study which drew on accounts from a number of respondents including men, women, young and adult prisoners from a range of cultural backgrounds.

The findings of the study addressed a number of issues concerning both prisoners' experiences of prison education and other issues relating to delivery, structure and curriculum. It was found that prisoners did not always feel they had sufficient choice regarding the courses they were assigned to and there were long waiting lists due to limited budget and space for education courses. It was also identified that prison education was not included in many prisoners' sentence plans, particularly those in local prisons serving short sentences. Although some prisoners in this study said they were interested in arts subjects, the overarching message from prisoners was that they wanted to gain skills for employment. However, when they were asked about finding work after release, responses were mixed regarding how likely this would be as many were aware of the negative implications of having a criminal record, despite any academic achievements gained during a prison sentence.

The participants in the Prison Reform Trust's research displayed an overwhelmingly high regard for prison education because they were able to study at their own pace. In many cases, prisoners found teachers to be helpful, although others did speak about feeling patronized at times. It is perhaps because of this that prisoners recommended improvements could be made in prisoner-staff relations to enhance the prison

education experience. The Prison Reform Trust recommended that prison education needed to be made more available to prisoners and that funding increases were required to improve education provision. It was also recommended that waiting lists for courses should be reduced and efficiency in the transfer of prisoners' records between institutions should be improved.

Although the aim of the Prison Reform Trust's (2003) study differed from that of previous prison education research, the findings did not always differ greatly and it is clear that there are key themes that run throughout existing research on prison education. While it is generally agreed by prison education researchers that learning has the potential to rehabilitate offenders it has also been identified that prison education outcomes are dependent on the individual's own interpretation of that experience and as such, outcomes are unique to each person. Prison sociology identifies boredom as a significant feature of the prison experience and this can be a motivating factor for doing prison education. Boredom has in fact has been a major feature of prison education research to date and discussions on the use of time and boredom will also feature in this thesis.

The Prison Reform Trust (2003) acknowledged the work of Reuss, Wilson and others, however the recommendations for future research made in the conclusion of *Prison(er) Education: Stories of Change and Transformation* do not appear to have been undertaken as part of the Prison Reform Trust's study. As previously noted, Reuss and Wilson argued that the practice and delivery of prison education courses seem to ignore the life history and personal identity of the prisoner and as such, new research should seek to gain such detailed information to provide a rationale for why and how it can be important in supporting education delivery. Although the Prison Reform Trust (2003) did conduct the research from prisoners' perspectives, it did not include a great deal of biographical information about the participants, nor did it recommend that the life history of prisoners should be taken into account when providing education in prison. Reuss and Wilson also argued that more needed to be done to understand the changes

that occur as a result of prison education, however the changes reflected in the Prison Reform Trust's study did not appear to go beyond personal transformations already identified in previous research.

v. Kevin Warner

From 1979 to 2009, Kevin Warner was the National Coordinator of Prison Education for the Irish Prison Service. He has been involved in prison education issues at an international level having been a chairperson of the Council of Europe Expert Group on Prison Education and the founding member of the European Prison Education Association. Warner has published widely on prison education and penal policy and in recent years has been engaged in research and writing on prison education, penal policy and prison conditions.

Warner's work particularly focuses on comparative discussions on the purpose of education in prison and how prisoners are viewed, intertwined with penal policy and the purpose of imprisonment more broadly. Warner argues that Anglo-American penal policies characterized by increases in the use of incarceration and the negative stereotyping of prisoners severely narrow and distort the education of inmates (Warner, 1998: 118). He draws clear distinctions between how prisoners are viewed internationally proposing that the type of education provided in different countries mirrors attitudes towards people in prison (Costelloe and Warner, 2014: 175). By comparing two publications from 2005, from the Norwegian and British governments (*Another Spring*, Norwegian Ministry of Education and *Reducing Reoffending Through Skills and Employment*, Department for Education and Skills), Costelloe and Warner (2014) established the clear disparity in perceptions of prisoners between the two countries. In Norway the prisoner is viewed as a citizen with a right to education whereas in England the prisoner is seen as an offender whose risk of reoffending is the primary concern. Costelloe and Warner suggest that seeing a person in prison as a criminal or offender leads prison education to become too concerned with addressing

behaviour. As such, they propose that this negates learning that facilitates personal development in a broader sense and therefore narrows educational aims, curriculum, activities and methods. Warner has argued that the fundamental problem with this correctional approach is that it fails to see education as a human right. The publication *Education in Prison* (Council of Europe, 1990) reported that the right to learn is inclusive of the right to read and write, question and analyse, imagine and create, read about one's own world, to write history, to have access to educational resources and to develop individual and collective skills (cited in Warner, 1998).

Warner's work consistently draws readers' attention to the recommendations set out by the Council of Europe in *Education in Prison* (Council of Europe, 1990). It is in the recommendations of this report that educating prisoners to develop the 'whole person' (as per the humanistic model of education discussed in Chapter One) is stated as a clear aim (Council of Europe, 1990: 8) – a principle that consistently underpins Warner's arguments. The implication of such a recommendation is that education provision should have a broad range and not be restricted by too specific a focus on targeting criminogenic factors. Quite the contrary to this perspective, the growing focus on employability in prisons in England and Wales is argued to subordinate other legitimate goals of lifelong learning such as active citizenship, social cohesion and personal fulfilment (Downes, 2014).

In 2007, Warner acknowledged the work of Duguid (2000) noting how his successful Humanities Programme run by Simon Fraser University in British Columbia prisons was discarded in 1994 by the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) because it did not directly address criminogenic factors. Research funded by CSC later found that humanities courses in fact '...beat those that attempted to address offending behaviour even at their own game' (Warner, 2007: 172) with students on these courses achieving great results in relation to staying out of prison. However, it appears in recent years that Canadian offence-focused programmes have been exported and have had significant influence in parts of Europe, often displacing more conventional education, particularly

in Britain, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries (Costelloe and Warner, 2014). Costelloe and Warner suggest that the loss of the ability to develop individuals via a fuller education was a consequence of what happened in Canada. From their viewpoint, this narrowed perspective caused the person in prison to become seen as an 'offender', rather than as a whole person with all the strengths and weaknesses, relationships, experiences and potential, hopes and fears, that being a 'whole person' implies (ibid.).

3.3 Prison Education Research: Going Forward

Reviewing existing work on prison education reveals a place for the current study to contribute further to this field. This research will provide further exploration into prisoners' experiences of education which will expand and give more focused insight on many areas that have been touched upon in past work. This will be built upon further by considering how motivations to become educated manifest into different forms of personal change and transformation. Bringing interviews with staff into the study and considering more closely prisoners' relationships with their families and setting this in the biographical context of prisoners' lives will present this study as an important reference through which to understand how prisoners themselves interpret the experience of education. It will also address how education is being experienced in the contemporary penal climate which places employability at the forefront of offender learning policy and is facing a great deal of challenges.

Given that prisoners in England and Wales, in Warner's view, have not been exempt from the 'offender' identity and are subject to increasingly restricted access to a holistic education, it is the purpose of this thesis to reintroduce a broader understanding of the so-called 'offender' through their own narratives on their educational experiences and their broader experiences of imprisonment. To explore prisoners' experiences of education more thoroughly, this research will revisit some of the key themes outlined

in existing work, namely identity, self esteem, employment and passing time which are integral to contemporary prison education research. My own inferences relating to such core themes support existing findings in a more detailed biographical context. Additional themes have also been inferred from the data generated by this study to build a more in depth picture of prisoners and their experiences locating them in the wider context of prisoners' lives and exposing other motivations to pursue education in prison. Other motivations that will be explored in this work include those held by prisoners who are already educated. It will also involve a discussion about some prisoners' perceptions of education as 'ticking boxes' and highlight the motivation held by some to help others as a result of becoming educated.

To develop an understanding of the participants' biographical backgrounds, this research also explores experiences of school including altercations with teachers, truancy and bullying. Relationships with parents will also be taken into account given the association between attitudes towards parents and attitudes towards figures of authority later in life. This study will reconsider Duguid's finding that the sustainability of educational programmes between the 1970s and 1990s had previously been limited due to the presence of authoritarian imperatives. Accounts from prison staff including officers and a governor will reveal that some contemporary prison regimes have a vested interest in the success of education programmes, in some cases because of a specific drive to establish a rehabilitative culture in the prison in light of a renewed focus on rehabilitation, albeit within a 'rehabilitation revolution' which is yet to be seen more widely.

The research reviewed in this chapter has noted differing relationships with prison staff, for instance Gordon (2000) acknowledged that, in his experience, the stigma of being in prison education diminished over time and prison staff were beginning to view education as a positive step forward. To develop an understanding of staff attitudes towards education in prison, this research will explore in more detail the relationships

between education staff and prisoners, and, between operational and non operational staff – primarily teachers and officers.

As will be seen in the following chapter, the theoretical framework of this research incorporates desistance theory which brings together the explored themes under the broader umbrella of change and transformation to answer the question ‘What changes?’. In this respect, this work also considers the impact of education experiences on family relationships and how in some cases relationships are rebuilt following processes of shame and redemption. For this reason, the research will also discuss prisoners’ perceptions of repaying a debt to society by becoming educated – a debt which they also feel they have to their families.

The core argument of *Prison(er) Education: Stories of Change and Transformation* is the need to go beyond basic skills and for education to not be dominated by cognitive thinking skills courses. Fifteen years after the book’s publication, the dominant theme underpinning purposeful activity in the prison is employability and access to higher level education remains difficult. This thesis will provide a rationale for looking beyond employability by uncovering the range of outcomes of education courses as seen in prisoner, ex prisoner and staff accounts which reveal how education can and does instigate significant personal transformation and change in those who engage in such programmes.

Chapter Four: Prison Education: Developing a Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

To develop a theoretical framework for this research, relevant topics and concepts will be explored in the context of the broader area of knowledge required to understand prisoners' experiences of education. As such it seems rational to consider prison education within the wider context of the prison itself. It is therefore necessary to explore the prison through readings on the sociology of imprisonment, as this identifies important sociological themes that have become relevant in understanding experiences of education within the prison setting. Existing prison education research has revealed that a change in identity is a core theme in the prison education experience, and this together with other issues will be discussed in a sociological context. Also relevant to the development of the framework is desistance theory which focuses on identity to understand the process of change, and in particular personal change leading to desistance from crime. In this chapter, desistance literature will be discussed with a particular focus on the 'redemption script' concept. Analysis of the present research's empirical data reveals that one of the lesser acknowledged motivations for doing prison education is to alleviate feelings of shame, which creates a desire to 'give something back' to society and relatives. Maruna (2001) proposed that a redemption script allows a person to rewrite a shameful past into a productive and worthy life. As will be seen, the inclusion of aspects of participants' life experiences in the present research shows frequent reference to the use of negative past experiences as a necessary pre-requisite to prevent others from making the same mistakes. This can therefore be discussed further in the context of the redemption script aspect of desistance theory. Bringing together an exploration of relevant sociological themes and desistance theory creates a framework for the present research based on the aim of understanding the motivations of prisoners to engage in prison education programmes and the changes and

transformations that can occur following these experiences. This research will consider in detail the link between experiences of prison education and prison sociology and how transformations experienced by prisoners have an impact on many key sociological themes including coping, masculinity, identity and the pains of imprisonment. Doing so will give greater insight into how prison education can benefit prisoners particularly in the short-term. This point in particular relates specifically to the work of Duguid whose research determined that due to the nature of the post-release environment, the positive outcomes of prison education experiences might only be short lived.

This chapter will begin by drawing on classic and contemporary prison sociology literature to explore some of the key themes that have become particularly important in investigating prisoners' experiences of education. As discussed, these themes will include the pains of imprisonment, coping, masculinity and identity. The chapter will then draw on theories of desistance to discuss personal change, transformation and redemption – concepts which contribute to developing a rationale for how and why the outcomes of prison education go far beyond increased employability.

4.2 Key Themes in Prison Sociology

Crewe (2007) argued that it is hardly surprising that prisons have attracted so much sociological attention because the prison illustrates many of the key issues in sociology such as power, inequality, order, conflict and socialization. When reading widely on the sociology of imprisonment, it became clear that some specific themes within the area should be considered in the present research in order to fully understand experiences of education within the prison setting. The specific themes that have been identified as potentially important to this research are 'the pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958), coping with the experience of imprisonment (Walker, 1983; Liebling, 1992; Liebling, 1999; Medlicott, 2001; Crewe, 2005; Crewe, 2007; Harvey, 2012), masculinity (Sykes,

1958; Newton, 1994; Sim, 1994; Jewkes, 2002; Crewe, 2007) and identity (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1959; Jewkes, 2002).

i. 'The Pains of Imprisonment'

Sykes' *The Society of Captives* (1958) is a significant piece of literature in the sociological study of the prison. Sykes wrote at the height of the Cold War having been motivated by the world's experience of fascism and communism to study a maximum security prison. He felt that this was the closest point of reference to a totalitarian system in American life. He argued that too little was known about the roles played by criminals in prison and how the roles were related to one another (Sykes, 1958). He therefore conducted an exploratory study of the prison as a social system at New Jersey State Maximum Security Prison where the prison officials were cooperative and encouraged the research. Sykes (1958) was interested by the way that in prisons, society had created communities containing hundreds of individuals working, eating, sleeping and living together for many years. He was also interested in the way that men created social order through mutual interaction in an environment that could potentially pose numerous problems. He argued that the prison must be seen as a society within a society. When discussing the 'inmate code', Sykes suggested that the roots of this code of conduct lay in the fundamental properties of imprisonment (Crewe, 2007), which he referred to as 'the pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 1958). The pains of imprisonment described by Sykes (1958) are a key aspect of the sociology of imprisonment in developing an understanding of the deprivations experienced by prison inmates. Exploring the pains of imprisonment set out by Sykes identifies some of the experiences had by the participants in the present study and will enable me to consider how education may be utilized to alleviate the deprivations. Sykes explored the idea of deprivation as a punishment inflicted on offenders by the free community and made clear that deprivation is part of the prison experience shared by all prisoners. He admitted the danger in assuming that all inmates share the same perception of the experience of being incarcerated and showed that the popular consensus among the inmates of New

Jersey State Prison was that life in the maximum-security prison was ‘...depriving or frustrating in the extreme’ (Sykes, 1958: 63). Sykes identified five distinctive ‘pains’ or deprivations experienced in the prison setting explaining that although these deprivations of the modern prison may be the unavoidable implications of imprisonment, they could in fact be just as painful as the physical maltreatment that they replaced (Sykes, 1958).

The first of these pains is the deprivation of liberty, which describes both confinement to and confinement within the prison institution. Sykes suggested that the deprivation of liberty, in terms of the restriction of movement within the prison, was less serious than the loss of regular contact with family in the free community. He explained that enhancing the sense of the deprivation of liberty was the ‘...deliberate, moral rejection of the criminal by the free community’ (Sykes, 1958: 65). Sykes admitted that this may not necessarily apply to some criminals such as the professional thief or the mentally unwell, however his evidence suggested that the majority were affected by losing their membership within society through the process of being given a uniform and a number and being separated from those deemed to be decent and moral individuals. The fact that Sykes noted the deprivation of liberty was less serious than the loss of regular contact with family raises the question as to whether separation from family should be seen as an additional pain of imprisonment. This thesis will reinforce this proposition by highlighting the way that making amends with family members can be a motivating factor for prisoners to engage in education programmes.

The second pain of imprisonment described by Sykes is the deprivation of goods and services. Although he found that prisoners did not go hungry or cold and were given certain amounts of food and exercise on a daily basis, Sykes explained that ‘A standard of living can be hopelessly inadequate, from the individual’s viewpoint, because it bores him to death or fails to provide those subtle symbolic overtones which we invest in the world of possessions’ (Sykes, 1958: 68). The deprivation of goods and services being referred to in this context are not strictly necessities, but rather amenities such as

cigarettes, individual clothing or privacy that provide people with comforts that enrich their lives. In prison, such items are seen as a 'luxury' showing the clear difference between the values ascribed to them in the prison environment and in the outside world.

Thirdly, Sykes identified the deprivation of heterosexual relationships as a pain of imprisonment. During his study, Sykes identified a small number of 'habitual' homosexuals among the inmates who at times were subject to victimization and in some cases rape by aggressive prisoners who had turned to homosexuality as a temporary way to relieve frustration (Sykes, 1958). Sykes was therefore able to acknowledge the seriousness of the psychological impact of the deprivation of the opportunity for heterosexual relationships through some prisoners' displays of sexually aggressive behaviour. He also found that this deprivation caused the arousal of anxieties amongst inmates as their masculinity and male status were being called into question. Furthermore, he said that the meaning given to the world by the presence of women is closed off in prison and '...since a significant half of his audience is denied him, the inmate's self image is in danger of becoming half complete, fractured, a monochrome without the hues of reality' (Sykes, 1958: 72). It is important to note however that unlike prisoners of the time of Sykes' writing, male prisoners today are exposed to the presence of females in the form of prison officers and other prison staff including teachers, librarians and medical professionals. Therefore, although deprived of heterosexual physical and emotional relationships, male inmates today do have the opportunity to have a female audience. Crewe (2006) noted that the modern prison is no longer an all-male environment and that it does not isolate prisoners from the external sexual community in the same way as in the early post war years. It is now the case that there is an inversion of conventional power relations, which works because the relationship that male prisoners have with female officers is distinguishable from the normal role that prisoners associate with the female in the outside community (Crewe, 2006). As will be seen in the findings of the present study, the female prison

teacher can in some instances take on a role which draws on a combination of the caring and disciplinary approaches to their maternal roles in family life.

The fourth pain of imprisonment is the deprivation of autonomy. Similarly to the previously discussed deprivation of goods and services, Sykes argued that the deprivation of autonomy in itself does not necessarily leave the inmate much worse off than the individual in the free community who is also regulated by aspects of life including work and sleeping hours. Sykes referred to this as 'regulation of custom' and identified that in fact the primary cause of inmate hostility in this instance was 'regulation by a bureaucratic staff'. This is because prisoners are not able to make choices for themselves and because they have to live by the agenda of their captors. Sykes argued that:

...regardless of whether or not the inmate population shares some aims with the custodial bureaucracy, the many regulations and orders of the New Jersey State Prison's official regime often arouse the prisoner's hostility because they don't "make sense" from the prisoner's point of view (Sykes, 1958: 74).

When discussing the deprivation of autonomy further, Sykes addressed the way that prisoners were often given no explanation for certain rules and aspects of the prison regime. He said that prison officials fostered this ignorance and that withholding information was often part of prison policy (Sykes, 1958). He explained that refusal to give reasons for many aspects of the prison regime was a tactic used to reduce the risk that prisoners would attack the validity of the law (which will be seen later in this thesis as one of the motivating factors for prisoners to study law today). It was further acknowledged that withholding such explanations could result in prison disturbances as a consequence of prisoners' feelings of weakness and helplessness. Sykes explained that for the adult, who escaped the helplessness of childhood through time, to be thrust back into childhood's helplessness is extremely painful, and the inmate of the prison must

somehow find a way to cope with this (Sykes, 1958). King (1990) discussed the problems caused by the deprivation of autonomy further by identifying what he believed to be the essential ingredients needed to make the perfect recipe for creating the potential for trouble within the prison environment. In this animated explanation, King argued that the 'stock' forming the basis of trouble in prison is created by:

Locking up adult men...against their will, in circumstances which take them away from normal personal and sexual relationships and home, family and community responsibilities, and throw them together with large numbers of other like-situated persons (King, 1990: 447).

King argued that the procedures, which follow the creation of this 'stock', include rendering down the stock by stuffing inmates into confined spaces and surrounding them with inconsistent rules that govern all aspects of their lives. The final 'garnish' comes in the form of wind-ups such as not giving inmates the reasons for certain outcomes and decisions made. This was made clear when King discussed the process of transferring a prisoner to a different prison institution for disciplinary reasons. He said that it is only when the prisoner is in the van that he might find out the next step in the process i.e. which prison he is being taken to. King noted that in some cases, when prisoners make the journey with their face down on the floor, they will not find out where they are being taken until they arrive there (King, 1990). It is the so-called 'garnish' of King's recipe that adds emphasis to the psychological pain experienced through the deprivation of autonomy identified by Sykes.

The final pain of imprisonment identified by Sykes is the deprivation of security, which has been argued to be the over-riding feature of life in most institutions (Jewkes, 2002) and is particularly relevant to the current state of prisons in England and Wales as previously discussed. Sykes noted that despite the existence of patterns of mutual aid and support which may flourish in the inmate population, '...there are a sufficient

number of outlaws who deprive the average prisoner of the sense of security which comes from living with men who can be expected to abide by the rules of society' (Sykes, 1958: 77). Sykes explained that the prisoner is always aware that he will be tested and have to defend himself, his possessions or both at some stage during his time in prison. He suggested that it is this sense of the constant potential for danger that contributes to the pains of imprisonment and that those in the position of having to defend themselves are at risk either by failing *or* succeeding to do so. Those who fail to defend themselves may become an easy target for further attacks from those who wish to gain status through violence and dominance. Those who defend themselves successfully may become a challenge for inmates wanting to enhance their own place in the prisoner hierarchy. The constant fear of danger is therefore a further aspect of the prison experience that challenges inmates' ability to cope.

The pains of imprisonment identified by Sykes, provide a clear understanding of the deprivations that are common to many prisoners, including those who have taken part in the present study. It is important to consider the link between the inmate code and the pains of imprisonment and whether the inmate code can enable prisoners to counteract them. Mathiesen (1965) addressed this by stating Sykes' work must be interpreted to say that the inmate culture or system of values arises as a consequence of these 'pains of imprisonment' and therefore inmate norms seem to stress the solidarity of inmates against the staff population. As such, inmate solidarity serves the function of reducing the pains of imprisonment (Mathiesen, 1965) and the solidarity of the inmate code that is created as a result of a shared experience of the pains of imprisonment becomes, in itself, a defense that counteracts the experience of these pains.

Through the discussion of the deprivations experienced by prisoners in the maximum security prison, Sykes was able to show that for male prisoners, the deprivations they experience can lead them to question their identity in terms of being an adult, being heterosexual, being masculine and being a moral person with a role to play in society. It

is clear therefore that the deprivations experienced by prisoners can induce a struggle to maintain a perception of self and Sykes' identification of the pains of imprisonment plays a key role in our understanding of the challenges that are faced by prisoners when it comes to coping and constructions of identity and masculinity. Having reviewed Sykes' work on the pains of imprisonment, it is important to consider within the present study whether the experience of education in prison might help to relieve some of those pains. This may contribute to uncovering some of the shorter term benefits of prison education, particularly those that may only last for the duration of the prison sentence such as negotiating identity and coping.

ii. Coping

Coping with the experience of imprisonment is problematic. Harvey (2012) states that in prison, 'The existing situation is unlikely to change substantially, and therefore those who are able to manage their emotional distress may be more likely to manage their lives in prison better' (p.69). There is an overlap between the theme of coping and those of identity and masculinity. Both establishing a prison identity and choosing a way of 'doing' masculinity contribute to a prisoner's ability to cope with the experience of serving a prison sentence. Other factors that contribute to coping include time filling activities such as work and education. When discussing 'the pains of imprisonment', Sykes (1958) said that the theme of coping is evident because each deprivation requires the prisoner to cope. For instance, when Sykes considered the deprivation of goods and services, he used the example of cigarettes. Where cigarettes were available, their value in prison gave non-smokers as well as smokers the opportunity to take advantage of an asset that could be used as currency. This could then be used to help prisoners cope with imprisonment, as they were able to trade such items for other commodities in an attempt to make life in prison more bearable. To a certain degree, this also gave prisoners back an element of control and autonomy through having ownership of personal assets - something that would only usually be experienced in the free community.

One of the ways that prisoners find the ability to cope is by adapting to prison life through a process of conformity (Merton: 1938). This occurs when prisoners appear to be relatively satisfied with being in prison and they internalize the official views of themselves and comply with enthusiasm to the demands of the system (Crewe, 2007). Crewe (2007) explains that this is particularly the case for prisoners who identify with conventional values and ideals before entering the prison. Despite some opposition to this suggestion, Crewe (2005) proposed that there are an increasing number of drug addicts going to prison who favour prison life compared to life on the streets. He found that their shame and self-loathing in fact led them to act as model inmates who wanted to prove their moral reformation.

Another way inmates cope with the experience of imprisonment is through the joining or forming of social groups. Prisoners can form groups based on common backgrounds such as locality, religion, age, lifestyle and criminal identity. By becoming part of a group, a sense of strength can be gained by being amongst other prisoners who have had similar life experiences. It could be suggested that the sense of belonging to a group temporarily replaces the deprivation of relationships with family and friends during the period of imprisonment. Mathiesen (1965) observed inmate solidarity and group cohesion during his study at a Norwegian correctional institution finding that cohesive groups were formed during work, in school programmes and various sections of the institution where interaction was possible. In terms of the relationship between solidarity and ethnicity, it was noted by Crewe (2007) that in most prisons in the UK, locality is more important than ethnicity in defining the loyalties of prisoners. As a result, groups from large urban centres tend to be dominant in the informal economy of the prison.

It is important to recognize that not all prisoners are able to cope with institutional life and this inability can result in drug abuse, mental illness or suicide (Liebling, 1992). Crewe (2005) referred to the use of drugs in prison, specifically heroin, in relation to

Sykes' inmate code. He identified that for some prisoners the use of heroin helps them to cope with the problems of imprisonment but that the sanctuary and relief that heroin brings to these men is only temporary, and its acquisition and consumption are accompanied by social, symbolic and economic degradation. He stated that '...whereas the inmate code can be regarded as a collective means of alleviating the intrinsic pains of prison life (Sykes, 1958), drug use represents a largely individualistic response'. Unlike those inmates who subscribe to and abide by the inmate code, the lonely heroin user therefore fails to embody the code of loyalty and collective concern highlighting the 'dog eat dog' nature of the prison institution. Clearly therefore, the use of drugs in prison as a coping strategy has the potential to '...both increase and alleviate the everyday pains of imprisonment' (Crewe, 2005: 477).

The use of drugs is one way that some prisoners attempt to mentally escape from the prison. For other prisoners, temporary mental escape is not sufficient and their inability to cope is demonstrated through suicidal behaviour. Liebling's (1992, 1999) work on suicide in prison revealed that coping is an individual struggle for those whom imprisonment is unbearable. Liebling noted that most of the differences identified between suicide attempters and others were in relation to their accounts of the prison experience (Liebling, 1999). In the case of those who did attempt suicide, they were more likely to prefer sharing a cell, were more likely to be averse to physical education, were less likely to consider classing fellow inmates as friends, were more likely to consider themselves as being alone in prison and were also more likely to consider the disciplinary system as being unfair. Liebling identified "poor copers" as the group most difficult to identify despite being arguably the most preventable. More prisoners in this group had attempted suicide or injured themselves and the significance of the immediate prison situation was potentially most acute in these cases.

More than 70% of the prison population have two or more mental health disorders and male prisoners are 14 times more likely to have two or more mental disorders than men in general (Mental Health Foundation Online, 2012). Much of the literature relating to

mental health amongst the prison population discusses the implications for those prisoners who enter the prison with pre-existing conditions. In some cases however, prisoners who are unable to cope with the experience of imprisonment develop mental illness as a result. Walker (1983) clarified that there is no sound evidence to suggest that imprisonment causes serious mental disorders in mentally healthy prisoners and that those prisoners suffering from psychopathic or schizophrenic disorders usually have histories of treatment before the first time they are incarcerated. This is consistent with the findings of Hassan et al. (2011) who suggested that imprisonment might not have a universally detrimental impact on mental health, even among those with pre-existing mental illness. In fact, this and earlier studies have found that psychiatric symptoms generally stabilized or decreased during custody (Hassan et al., 2011). Walker also said however that the initial impact of imprisonment causes depression in many prisoners, and in some cases suicide attempts are made. Although this kind of depression can be related to prisoners having had a depressive temperament in their ordinary lives and in some instances the depression is an ‘...understandable reaction to the prospect of conviction, stigma, loss of job, rejection by one’s family and deprivation of liberty’ (Walker, 1983: 64).

It is evident that the ability to cope can reduce the risk that prisoners will develop mental illness and demonstrate suicidal behaviour. The literature explains that coping with imprisonment can be achieved in a number of ways including adapting to the culture of the prison and joining or forming social groups with other inmates. In Liebling’s (1992) research, she was able to identify that those prisoners who attempted suicide were more likely to have been bored and more likely to spend their time doing nothing. There is therefore a clear link between coping and the way that prisoners ‘do’ time. Medlicott (2001) addressed this link in her research on the narratives of suicidal prisoners describing one of the prisoners in her study as experiencing the passing of time ‘acutely painfully’ (p.133). This particular prisoner, referred to as ‘Jimmy’ said:

It's just like a matter of waiting for the end of waiting, you know. Killing time before time kills you. Like I say, I am able to retreat into an inner world. And I do write a bit...sometimes I'll just sit there, still, for three or four hours...I'm self-contained in a way (Medlicott, 2001: 133).

It is clear that the use of time and the activities pursued, or indeed not pursued, during a prison sentence can have a direct impact on prisoners' ability to cope or not. With this in mind, the study of prisoners' experiences of education could uncover the extent to which prison education has a role to play in the coping process and whether using time in prison to become educated can enable prisoners to survive the prison experience mentally and physically and potentially prevent suicidal thoughts and behaviour. Considering prison education in this way, as a potentially valuable coping mechanism in prison life, relates significantly to the first aim of prison education in the strategy statement for education in Ireland which states that education can help prisoners 'cope with their sentences' (Prison Education Service, 2003).

iii. Masculinity

In *Captive Audience*, Jewkes (2002) noted that 'Nowhere are the tensions between conscious and unconscious drives, private and social identities, and acceptable or unacceptable masculinities more evident than in the predominantly male locale of the prison' (p.46). She suggested that criminal behaviour in society could be argued (to a degree) to be '...a learned response to the imperatives of masculine hegemony' (2005: 44). While in the prison environment, masculinity is a response to the imperatives of the criminal inmate culture. The 'men's hut' (Remy, 1990) that is the male prison, typically houses those from the lower class who Tolson (1977) suggested have a greater need to display masculine performances than their middle class counterparts, thus acknowledging that masculinity in prison has parallels in the wider culture beyond the prison (Jewkes, 2005a).

Sykes explained that in a society composed exclusively of men, the definition of masculine behaviour is apt to move to an extreme position. He said that by changing the 'criteria of maleness', prisoners have 'erected a defense against the threat of their own involuntary celibacy' (1958, 98). As discussed in the review of the pains of imprisonment, Sykes explained how the deprivation of heterosexual relationships at times resulted in aggression and temporary homosexuality by inmates (who he referred to as 'wolves') resulting in inmates expressing their masculinity through their physical power and dominance over others. Furthermore, Newton (1994) noted that in men's prisons where access to heterosexual activity is denied, homosexuality is redefined as being acceptable as long as it involves some form of domination and exploitation.

In her 1994 article discussing gender theory and prison sociology, Newton argued that in the prison a hypermasculine ideal operates which abhors femininity and is also characterized by aggressive homophobia. She suggested that on entering the prison environment, men naturally revert to behaviour that is typically characterized as 'male' and that men do this by presenting themselves as the opposite of weak or feminine. Therefore, according to Newton, men in prison will present themselves in a way that is strictly non-feminine - a presentation of self that refrains from displaying any characteristics that are associated with homosexuality, such as femininity or physical and emotional weakness.

Jewkes (2002) described hegemonic masculinity as '...a structural device which understands the production and re-production of masculine attributes, attitudes, and behaviours as outcomes of social processes and inequalities which are upheld at every level of society' (p.51). Discussing hegemonic masculinity in prison, she noted that overt macho behaviour should not only be associated with the 'underclass' or the psychopath. Jewkes acknowledged that white-collar criminals and those from the middle classes will have their masculinity tested in various ways by the deprivations of imprisonment which attack the core of hegemonic masculinity to which all men are encouraged to aspire

(2002: 55). Interestingly, she further noted that the most violent man is not necessarily the most powerful in the prison hierarchy and that the volatile offender is actually more likely to be marginalized than respected. Not all inmates adopt a hegemonic masculine role in the prison and it is important to note that there can be a danger in focusing on the hyper-masculinity of men's prisons because it can give the impression that the prisoner world is a lawless jungle, without moral baselines (Crewe, 2007) - the danger here being that the kindness which exists in prisons may be ignored. Sim (1994) recognized that manipulation and violence couldn't serve as a representation of all men in prison in pursuit of an appropriate level of masculinity. He reminded us that 'Fear is a constant factor in the daily lives of many prisoners' and that not all prisoners are '...fearless, manipulative and violent hard-men' (Sim, 1994: 111). In fact, Sim noted that some prisoners make the choice to adopt non-coercive strategies to deal with the encroachment of male and penal power on their lives. Such prisoners pursue education classes, gain a deep understanding of the prison rules and refuse to become involved in violent or coercive behaviour (Sim, 1994).

With this in mind, and in particular paying attention to Sim's observation that those prisoners who choose to avoid violence may attend education classes to do so, it is important to consider within the present study whether the experience of prison education alters the way that inmates 'do' masculinity. Thus, those who engage in prison education courses may be less likely to demonstrate overt masculinity in the form of violence and excessively dominant behaviour and the present study will consider whether this is in fact the case. Pursuing this issue during the analysis of the research data may develop a deeper understanding of how the experience of education can cause change and transformation in prisoners with regard to the type of masculine role they choose to adopt.

iv. Identity

The theme of identity appeared throughout Sykes' (1958) exploration of 'the pains of imprisonment' and is clearly linked with masculinity in the way that prisoners present themselves in coping with prison life. As noted in the previous chapter, identity is a theme that consistently brings together the findings of existing research on prison education in acknowledging how education can instigate the renegotiating of prisoners' conceptions of self.

Goffman (1959) argued that the way we present ourselves is dependent on our audience. He likened it to a performance and suggested that we have both front and backstage 'selves'. The front stage area is the environment in which the performer is able to present the self he has constructed for an audience to see. Goffman said that the individual's performance front of stage could be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his actions maintain certain standards. In the prison environment, this could involve creating a macho appearance giving the audience (other prisoners and prison staff) the impression that the performer (prisoner) is able to cope in the prison environment and should not be challenged. It is in the backstage area that Goffman said individuals are able to construct the illusions and impressions of themselves to then present to an audience in the front stage area. Goffman suggested that it is in the backstage environment that the performer can relax and step out of character (1959). Goffman explained that the back region of a performance is '...typically located at one end of the place where the performance is being presented, being cut off from it by a partition and guarded passageway' (Goffman, 1959: 98). He stated that the backstage area is a place where the performer can expect to have privacy without the intrusion of audience members. With this in mind, it is interesting to consider the extent to which this occurs amongst the prison population in order that prisoners are able to construct a suitable identity that is appropriate within the prison culture, while using the time spent in their cells to be themselves and nurture their 'real' identity. Goffman suggested however that in some cases, the performer can be fully taken in by his own act and

therefore be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality that he stages is in fact *real* reality (Goffman, 1959). During the course of the present study, it has been important to investigate the extent to which prisoners are aware of their own front and backstage behaviour and whether the education experience has had an impact on their presentations of self. It has also been important to consider whether prisoners adopt the interview space as a backstage area in which they are able to be themselves in spite of a researcher audience.

The study of identity of the prison population has continued to be an area of interest for prison researchers. More recently, Jewkes (2002) discussed the issues of self and identity in the prison, stating:

...Prisoners may call upon a wide range of external resources and experiences that constitutes their habitus, drawing on the specific interpersonal relations (family, work, style, cultural preferences and so on) that mark them out as being different from the rest of the inmate population and at the same time, hailing the dispositions and resources that enable them to engage with, and integrate into the prevailing culture (Jewkes, 2002: 40).

In this clear illustration of the way that prisoners adapt their own identities to be in-keeping with prison culture, Jewkes explained that inmates use the experience of their own relationships from the free community to establish themselves as an individual while at the same time ensuring that the identity they have created for themselves from these experiences fits into the existing culture of the prison institution. Jewkes suggested however that at the same time as integrating themselves into the prison culture by adapting their identities appropriately, prisoners still try to hold on to their pre-prison selves through contact with friends and families, the continuation of occupations or hobbies, or through consumption of popular cultural artifacts that were

important to them on the outside (Jewkes, 2002). It is also through taking part in activities in prison such as education courses or manual labour that inmates are able to establish their in-prison identities, which might include 'student' or 'bricklayer', allowing inmates to escape, even if only temporarily, from their 'prisoner' identities. It is important for prisoners to have the opportunity to establish an identity for themselves in line with the type of prison work or education they do. As previously discussed, some prisoners also find importance in accentuating their masculinity through the adoption of an overtly masculine identity. In the same way that adopting a 'student' or 'bricklayer' identity allows a prisoner to temporarily escape the struggle posed by being a 'prisoner', one could argue that adopting an overtly masculine identity allows prisoners to temporarily escape the vulnerability and emotional weakness that can form part of the experience of imprisonment. Jewkes pointed out however that the adoption of certain labels, although not inherently negative, could still prove problematic in particular circumstances. She argued for instance that student inmates sometimes face ridicule or hostility from fellow inmates and especially from staff because in a society where advanced levels of education are '...at odds with the habitus of the majority', and where a large number of the population are illiterate, education does not always have a high premium placed on it in terms of social standing in the hierarchy of prisoners (Jewkes, 2002: 41).

It is clear that establishing an appropriate identity as a prison inmate can be a complex and challenging process. Establishing and maintaining an identity that allows a prisoner to fit into the existing culture of the prison makes for an essential coping mechanism throughout an inmate's time in prison. For Clemmer (1940), fitting in to the existing patterns of prison life and culture, especially for men who are new to the prison, can result in the process of prisonization. He proposed that the aspects of prisonization which were operative for all inmates included:

Acceptance of an inferior role, accumulation of facts concerning
the organization of the prison, the development of somewhat

new habits of eating, dressing, working, sleeping and adopting of local language, the recognition that nothing is owed to the environment for the supplying of needs, and the eventual desire for a good job [in the prison] (Clemmer, 1940: 300).

Clemmer explained that the influence of these prisonization 'factors' was sufficient to give inmates characteristics of the penal community, disrupting their personality enough to make the adjustment to *any* community thereafter almost impossible. Clemmer's concern was that the process of becoming 'prisonized' would lead to a deepening of the criminality and 'antisociality' of inmates. He said prisonization would happen depending on five factors. The first was that the prisoner might have a personality that made him more susceptible to prisonization. The second was the kind of relationships that the prisoner had with people on the outside. The third was whether or not the prisoner became affiliated with primary or semi-primary groups in prison. The fourth was the role of chance i.e. the chance that the prisoner might affiliate with certain types of inmates depending on the work gang he was assigned to, the cell house he lived in or the cellmate he lived with. The fifth and final factor determining prisonization was whether the prisoner accepted the codes of prison culture.

Clemmer made it clear that prisonization was an individual process that could vary in tempo depending on the individual and their circumstances. Also, he identified that in some cases prisoners could become partially prisonized depending on their exposure to the 'prisonizing' factors. He said:

The speed with which prisonization occurs depends on the personality of the man involved, his crime, age, home neighbourhood, intelligence, the situation into which he is placed in prison and other less obvious influences (Clemmer, 1940: 302).

He also noted that the process of prisonization could change in speed depending on events that could occur while the inmate was in prison, for example, divorce.

Clemmer's work suggests that in order for prisonized inmates to successfully reintegrate into society, the prisonization that takes place during their sentence would have to be minimal. Wheeler (1961) proposed that this process was 'U-shaped' because inmates who had recently entered the prison and those who were about to leave showed high-conformity responses and a greater attachment to the values of the broader society. As such, he said that inmates who were in the middle phase of their sentence conformed the least to conventional standards and were thus more deeply embedded in the prison culture. One may question the extent to which, according to this proposition, those about to leave prison are genuinely conforming. It may be the case that to prevent problematic issues arising during the release process, a conforming identity is a natural front adopted by prisoners at the end of their sentence. It is also interesting to consider whether 'partial prisonization' is possible and whether certain aspects of prisonization are in fact necessary for prisoners to be able to cope with the experience of imprisonment during the majority of their custodial sentence. With this in mind, it would be noteworthy during the present study to consider whether education during imprisonment can help prisoners to cope with the experience of imprisonment, thus replacing the need for prisoners to engage with prisonizing factors.

Prisoners' perceptions of each other can drastically change the prison experience by creating opportunities for inmates of high hierarchical status to take advantage of those perceived as being particularly vulnerable. Jewkes noted while it may be possible for prison inmates to assume certain outward characteristics in order to help them to fit in with aspects of the prison culture, 'such traits are likely to be little more than façade, constructed to mask the real personality beneath' (Jewkes, 2002: 44).

Having noted that some prisoners who study education courses in prison may adopt a 'student' identity, it is important to consider the extent to which this is the case among

the participants in the present study. To build upon the findings of existing research, exploring the participants' perceptions of themselves may contribute to broadening our understanding of how and why prison education can have an impact on the identities adopted by prisoners and in what specific ways.

4.3 Desistance: Personal Change, Transformation and Redemption

The ability to cope, the presentation of self and presentations of masculinity are all subject to change in the process of adapting to prison life. It will become apparent in this thesis that prison education experiences in some cases have the ability to change or transform prisoners in a number of ways. These changes may relate to how they cope with the experience of imprisonment, how they present themselves to others, or how they perceive their own identities. As will be seen in the data chapters, the changes that participants acknowledge can often relate to desistance theory and in particular the 'redemption script' (Maruna, 2001). In the present research, this is often demonstrated through a desire to help others after release from prison – particularly helping young people (as will be seen, a number of participants felt they could 'save' young people from a life of crime). Consequently, in the present chapter which aims to develop a framework for studying prisoners' experiences of education (and understanding the outcomes of such experiences), desistance literature must be considered in order to understand how education can cause change that leads some prisoners to seek redemption. As will be discussed, desistance theory focuses on themes such as identity to understand the process of change, and in particular personal change leading to desistance from crime.

Maruna (1997) identified that few phenomena in criminology are as poorly understood as why people desist from crime. Traditionally, desistance is understood to be an abrupt end to criminal behaviour caused by significant life events. McNeill et al. (2012) define

desistance as ‘...the long-term abstinence from criminal behaviour among those for whom offending had become a pattern of behaviour...’. In perhaps its most simple form, desistance can be understood to be the point at which a person decides to quit the life of crime (Maruna, 2001). Explanations of desistance differ and range from the idea of a natural “aging out of crime” (Glueck and Glueck, 1940) to having a steady job and a good relationship. However, these perspectives are easily criticized. For instance, as the offender ages, they may simply become better at avoiding detection by the police or they may move towards less risky types of criminal activity (Maruna, 2001). However, it appears from other perspectives that desistance is a likely outcome for most offenders as criminality is not a permanent state of being. From this viewpoint, perpetrators in fact drift in and out of criminal activity over time (Matza, 1964). Less favoured explanations of desistance include offender rehabilitation and the deterrent effect of imprisonment. Others have chosen to link desistance from crime to internal transformations (Gove, 1985) including:

1. A shift from self-absorption to concern for others.
2. Increasing acceptance of societal values and behaving in socially appropriate ways.
3. Increasing comfort with social relations.
4. Increasing concern for others in their community.
5. Increasing concern with the issue of the meaning of life.

The desistance process is argued to be an unlikely outcome of imprisonment as the prison experience disrupts normative processes by cutting off opportunities for achieving success in employment and other key life events such as marriage (Maruna, 2007). It is suggested in fact that no institution is better than the prison at separating individuals from their social responsibilities and civic duties (ibid.). Despite this, purposeful activity in prison does have the potential in some cases to cause change in prisoners, including but not limited to those stated by Gove (1985). The desistance model works in the belief that the offender is a person - a person who has the ability to

change. This thesis will argue that in some cases, education experiences can be the catalyst for this change.

Personal identity is seen as a critical factor in the desistance process with identity considered a lifelong project continually reconstructed by new experiences and information (McAdams, 1993). In the Liverpool desistance study, Maruna (2001) conducted a systematic comparison between self-narratives of desisting ex-offenders and those of a sample of active offenders to analyse the sociocognitive aspects of desistance. The study attempted to specify the cognitive adaptations and self-schemas that may help ex-offenders 'make good' and stay that way (Maruna, 2001: 38). The core focus of the study was to understand the meaning that narrators gave to events in their own stories while the desistance process is actively taking place. Arguing that the self-narrative is '...increasingly understood as a critical part of an individual's personality and inner self' (Maruna, 2001: 39), Maruna was interested in developing an understanding of participants' conceptions of their own identity through narratives of sequential life events. Relating his findings to Goffman's (1961) 'reverting to an unspoiled identity', Maruna proposed that rather than discovering a new identity, desisting offenders look to their past to reestablish an old self in order to desist (Maruna, 2001: 89). Maruna described the process of selecting the historically positive aspects of identity as freeing one's "real me" (Maruna, 2001: 95) from external constraints, often through empowerment from an outside source.

The external source may in some cases be education or educators within the prison environment and this thesis will argue that the sense of empowerment achieved through educational experiences can contribute to personal change and the reestablishment of one's conception of their own identity. Behan (2014) examined Irish prisoners' civic engagement through interviews with adult male prisoners, which involved exploring motivating factors to do education in prison. In a participant's own statement, he said:

I think when a person comes to prison there is a long time to

reflect on their past, present and future. When a person ends up in prison, irrespective of the length of time, there is something wrong in that person's life, prison gives a person an opportunity to change and I think education is a main factor in a person changing (Behan, 2014: 24).

It is clear in Behan's study that some participants were forced to reconsider their past actions and in doing so their past identities. Participants' identified that in some cases, lack of education had played a role in the route to prison and pursuing education was a potential way to 'get out'. Although initially for many prisoners who pursue education, the primary motivating factor may be boredom and finding a way to pass the time to cope with prison life, deciding to do education creates an opportunity to develop skills that are previously unrealized instigating a process of reconsidering conceptions of self. In Behan's study, some participants saw education as much a part of the regime as any other timetabled activity that exerted control over the prisoner overseen by those who were part of the coercive system. In one particular case, a participant was able to overcome this initial cynicism when their potential was recognized for the first time. As such, the empowerment achieved through encouragement from an external source, as noted by Maruna (2001), had changed the way that this participant viewed teachers and the academics whose literature had been recommended to him.

It would perhaps be rather simplistic to suggest that there is a clear and direct correlation between prison education and desistance from crime – and this is not the intended argument of this thesis. However, the changes that can be caused by prison education experiences (whether transformations in conceptions of self through the realization of one's own abilities or the development of trust of authority figures who can in fact empower prisoners) are still positive changes for hard-to-reach individuals that must not be ignored and which can be changes that contribute, if only in part, to the process of desistance.

Particularly relevant to this thesis is the 'redemption script' aspect of desistance discourse. Maruna (2001) suggests that the redemption script begins by '...establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator – a victim of society who gets involved with crime and drugs to achieve some sort of power over the otherwise bleak circumstances' (p. 87). The redemption script allows individuals to rewrite a shameful past and "give something back" to society as a display of gratitude (Maruna, 2001: 87). This redemption sequence enables something good to emerge out of otherwise negative circumstances (Maruna, 2001: 97) and results from the individual finding some reason for the negative parts of their lives. Maruna (2001) identified that replacing deviant careers with occupations in professional counseling seemed to be an increasingly popular path for former deviants who desist from crime and drugs. As will be seen later, this is particularly evident in the present study where numerous prisoner participants expressed a specific desire to draw on their life experiences to educate young people and encourage them to lead a purposeful life to avoid a life of crime and frequent imprisonment.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the key themes in the sociology of imprisonment that contribute to a broad understanding of the prison experience and the challenges faced by inmates when trying to adapt to and survive prison life. The themes of 'the pains of imprisonment', coping, masculinity and identity have been presented in the context of prison life through a combination of early and contemporary literature. The interrelated nature of these themes has emerged as it appears that establishing a prison identity and a way of outwardly showing one's masculinity are coping mechanisms that are used by inmates to adapt to and cope with 'the pains of imprisonment'. Identity has also been considered further in the context of desistance theory to show that education can empower prisoners and be a catalyst for change and transformation. In this area of

research, desistance is an important element of the theoretical framework in understanding the role of the education experience and the extent of this role in the process of change.

The chapter has acknowledged the importance of understanding that the way in which people choose to present themselves is a reflection of their surrounding environment, their experiences within that environment and their responses to them. Through reference to desistance literature, it has also been identified that the experience of imprisonment can provide a period of reflection on personal identity and that education in prison can have a key role in identity renegotiation.

An in depth exploration of who prisoners are and how they have experienced education (as described in the present study both from the viewpoints of the prisoners themselves and prison staff) should therefore be seen within the broad concepts of the pains of imprisonment, coping, masculinity, identity and the much broader context of desistance. In turn, this is clearly related to the ability of prisoners to adapt to the prison environment. Taking into consideration the themes discussed above, it will be important to discover what impact prison education can have on enabling prisoners to reconsider their own approach to their identity and the way that they cope with the challenges of the experience of imprisonment. Consequently, it is intended that this will generate a broader understanding of the meanings that prisoners give to education experiences and the range of personal changes that can emerge as a result.

Chapter Five: Research Strategy, Design and Methods

5.1 Introduction and Overview

This chapter will present the research design and strategy to determine the research purpose, questions, approach and methods. Relevant methodological literature will be drawn upon when discussing the chosen research methods to provide a clear rationale for how the study has been designed. An overview of the research samples and sites will be presented followed by an examination of the research methods and the process of negotiating access. The methods adopted to analyse the data will then be discussed before setting out the ethical considerations that have been taken when conducting this study.

As explained in Chapter One, the purpose of this study is to present a detailed understanding of how prisoners experience education with a particular focus on motivations to undertake education in prison. This study also explores how these experiences of prison education can sometimes bring about more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills. The broader objective of this study is to look beyond knowledge and skills to appreciate what changes and transformations can take place in prisoners' lives as a consequence of experiencing education. 'Experience' in this research specifically refers to meanings and interpretations that prisoners and ex-prisoners ascribe to the outcomes of their own engagement with education in prison. To contribute to a more in depth understanding of these experiences, accounts from prison staff involved in the education process are also considered. As stated in Chapter One, the key questions of this study are:

- a) What motivates prisoners to undertake education?
- b) What does education mean to prisoners?

- c) How have prisoners' experiences of prison education been shaped by their earlier pre-prison experiences (or lack of experiences) of education?
- d) Can understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change tell us more about imprisonment?
- e) What, if any, kinds of personal changes and developments do prisoners perceive to have taken place as a result of experiencing education?

To achieve the research objectives and answer the key questions, a qualitative research design has been adopted to generate in depth data. Taking an interpretivist epistemological position, qualitative research stresses an understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman, 2012). The aim of this research approach is to understand the meaning people attach to their social interactions. In this sense, it has been important to adopt this approach in the present study to draw out the meanings that the participants give to their own experiences and interactions in the context of the delivery and receipt of education in the prison environment.

When aiming to produce a study with the meaning and interpretation of experience at its core, the kind of data required is rich and insightful data that answers the research questions and also tells us something more about the lives of the people being researched. With an interest in the lives of those who have experienced imprisonment and how other life experiences may have shaped their attitudes towards education, it has been important to draw out some biographical information to contribute to the richness of the data collected and analysed. In this study, this was achieved through the collection of documentary and interview data.

5.2 Research Sample and Sites

The research sample was selected from three specific population sources:

- a) Serving prisoners
- b) Ex-prisoners
- c) Prison staff

Two samples of serving prisoners were involved in this study. The first sample were the writers of 80 letters to the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) from various prison establishments - all of which were adult male prisons. The second sample were 13 serving prisoners at a category C prison who were interviewed. A further three interviews were conducted with ex-prisoners who are now accomplished academics at universities across the UK. To compliment this, 13 prison staff members at a category A prison were interviewed. The staff sample comprised of 5 teachers, 2 librarians, 1 writer in residence, 2 education managers, 2 officers (both male) and 1 governor.

To understand the nature of the research sites and the locations at which the research samples were identified, it is necessary to provide an overview of the population and education provision at those prisons. The site accessed for interviews with serving prisoners was a male category C training prison. All offenders at the establishment are over 21 and most are under 45 years old. The minority ethnic population is approximately 18%; 75 are foreign nationals. The prison's occupational capacity is 689 of which 607 offenders are in employment, learning or skills provision. The average stay at the prison is 10 months and approximately 7% of offenders are on short sentences ranging from three weeks to six months. About 50% of offenders serve sentences of three years or more. As regards educational provision at the prison, the contracted learning provider is The Manchester College (TMC). This contract provides Skills for Life provision, art and design, information technology and a range of other education and

vocational courses. TMC subcontracts its construction courses to a local college. The prison offers a range of learning and skills provision including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in recycling operations, performing manufacturing operations, distribution, warehousing and storage, business improvement techniques, physical education (PE), horticulture, cycle repair, parenting and family learning. The prison subcontracts its delivery of NVQs in some workshops to a local college group. A wide range of external agencies and voluntary sector organisations are involved in preparing offenders for resettlement following release (Ofsted, 2009).

The site accessed for interviews with prison teachers, a writer in residence, librarians, officers and a governor is a high security prison for category A and category B male offenders. The prison was opened in 1987 and includes a Protected Witness Unit and a Special Secure Unit for Exceptional Risk Category A offenders which is opened as required (at the time of access, this unit held 5 prisoners). 580 offenders are in the main prison, of whom 56% are classified as vulnerable offenders. Currently 57% of the population have been sentenced to life imprisonment. The remainder have determinate sentences ranging from 4 to 30 years and of these, 54% have sentences of over 10 years. The age range is from 18 to 79, with 29% of the population under 30 years of age, 55% under 40, 45% over 40 and 8% retired and not obliged to attend work or education. 73.8% of the population is classified as white and 23.59% of the population are from minority ethnic groups. The average length of stay depends on individual circumstances but the annual turnover is at 43%. Offenders are rarely received from courts and many stay for long periods before being moved on to other establishments. Only 20 offenders have been released in the last twelve months. Most education programmes are contracted to City College Manchester. The college is also responsible for the information, advice and guidance service. A multi-skills construction training vocational course is subcontracted by City College Manchester to a local college. A range of education and training courses are offered on a part-time basis and some 85% of the population regularly participate in learning and skills training. Accredited vocational training programmes include the Prison Information and Technology Academy (PICTA),

construction multi skills, Braille work, physical education (PE), and catering at national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 and 2. The chaplaincy provides restorative justice courses. Drugs and alcohol awareness and assertiveness programmes are offered by City College Manchester. Contract workshops offer employment, for example, in textiles, Braille work, cycle repair and light fitting assembly. The library is provided by local library services (Ofsted, 2007).

5.3 Data Collection Methods

i. Documentary Data

Documentary analysis is typically associated with historical study; however, documentary research methods have often been incorrectly considered a monopoly of professional historians and information science specialists (Mogalakwe, 2006). It has been argued that documentary research in social science is a useful and under-utilized approach that can be adopted by researchers in the full confidence that it is a research method that requires rigorous adherence to research protocol (ibid.). In prison, letter writing is not a 'dying art' (Plummer, 1983) as in the outside world, but rather essential in enabling prisoners to remain in contact with the outside world on a regular basis. The letters analysed for this study were sourced from the Prisoners' Education Trust and have provided a valuable insight into the experiences of prisoners who are applying to do education courses in prison, as well as those who have recently completed a course of education. The sample of letters contained important elements of narrative that allowed for a clear understanding of prisoners' experiences of education throughout their lives and during a prison sentence. The rationale for using such personal documents is to '...reveal a life as it was lived without the interference of research' and as such these documents can reveal '...people's view of themselves and the world' (Cargan, 2007: 57).

The Prisoners' Education Trust awards on average 260 education grants per month to prisoners currently serving custodial sentences and during the period 2009 to 2010, over 2,300 grants were awarded. Applications for funding, all of which are for distance learning courses, are often supported by letters written by the prisoners to tell the Trust a little about themselves. In the letters analysed, prisoners explained why they wanted to do an education course during their sentence and why they had the potential to make good use of that qualification in the future. These letters also had the potential to be rich in further information about the histories and identities of the prisoners themselves. Many of the prisoners writing the letters took the opportunity to say something about themselves, their past experiences, their experiences of previous prison education courses, their experiences to date of imprisonment and information about their family backgrounds. This kind of information can help to gain a better understanding of who prisoners are and how education may have changed some aspect of their lives.

Prisoners wishing to study distance learning courses during their sentence are advised to seek information from the education department in their prison of residence to ask for support, course brochures and funding information. The PET describe distance learning for prisoners as being able to reach those who are not able to attend classes for security reasons and enables them to be offered a wide range of courses. They also explain that distance learning offers continuity of study in cases where prisoners are frequently transferred between institutions and enables them to use their time in prison constructively - especially during lock down hours (Prisoners' Education Trust Online, 2012a). Although prisoners who wish to apply for funding do not need qualifications, they are advised to consider the suitability of their chosen course in terms of their own abilities and whether there is sufficient time left in their sentence for them to complete the course in full. Where applicants apply to do a course with the aim of being employed in a particular work area, they are advised by the PET to take into consideration whether that employment field is a realistic goal for a person with a criminal record. The

Prisoners' Education Trust considers applications once per month and does not usually award grants of more than £500 per application. In a report published in *Inside Time* (a national newspaper for prisoners), advice was given to prisoners by the Trust regarding applying for education funding. To make applications as strong as possible, the Trust offers the following advice:

1. Make sure that the letters tells us about you; what are your hopes? What matters to you? What is your experience of education? What is it about this subject or course that makes you want to do it? How does it relate to your experience before prison? What difference do you hope it will make to your future?
2. Show us that you have thought about future plans.
3. Don't use the letter to tell us the course details; we can look those up! (Inside Time Online, 2008).

The letters analysed in this study were sourced during two separate data collections. The first data collection was conducted on 7th February 2012, a date agreed in advance with the Director of the PET via email correspondence. Due to the vast amount of letters available (over 3000), the focus was where I would most likely find letters that contained information about the prisoners' current and previous experiences of education as well as further information about their lives. Initially, it seemed most likely that prisoners would write about their previous experiences of education when explaining their reasoning for wanting to be funded by PET to do an education course. For instance, it was expected that some prisoners might state that their reason for wanting to do education in prison was due to previously poor experiences of education resulting in them having few or no qualifications. For this reason, half of the total sample was taken from the file of letters that accompanied applications for course funding. In aiming to understand prisoners' experiences of education prior to *and* during imprisonment, it was also important to select letters that were likely to contain information about

prisoners' experiences of doing education during a prison sentence. It was decided therefore that the second half of the total sample of letters would be taken from the 'Good News' file (as named by the PET), which contained letters from prisoners thanking the Trust for funding their education courses. It was expected that these letters would be written with a retrospective view of recently completed courses and therefore include evidence of writers recounting their experiences of doing education in prison and what effect, if any, it had on them personally. In total, 20 letters were sampled from each file and it was agreed with the Trust that the letters would be analysed anonymously to protect the identities of the prisoners.

The 'Good News' file contained a significantly smaller number of letters than those available in the file that accompanied funding applications. It was possible therefore to read through the whole of this file and choose letters that showed evidence of prisoners writing about some specific themes that will be discussed later in this chapter. This selection process therefore used a purposeful sampling method, which meant selecting information-rich cases for in depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). The criterion sampling method was then used in order to review and study all cases that met a predetermined criterion of importance (*ibid.*). The criterion in this case was that at least one of the predetermined themes could be identified in the letters. The generation of these predetermined themes will be discussed later in the chapter. Letters were more likely to be chosen where multiple themes could be identified and also where there was evidence of other themes emerging that might contribute to a more in depth understanding of prisoners' experiences of education. It is important to make clear that during this process of data collection there was a limitation on the number of cases that could be used as the number of letters analysed had to be agreed with the PET in advance. During the first data collection, this was limited to 40 letters in total (20 of each type of letter). Due to the large volume of letters in the files containing prisoners' applications for funding, a random sample of letters was initially taken before selecting 20 letters on the same

sampling basis as those chosen from the 'Good News' file. The full sample of 40 letters were then photocopied and taken for analysis.

A second sample of letters was collected on 18th June 2012. The purpose of the second data collection was to select another sample of 40 letters to analyse and establish whether any further emerging themes could be identified. In addition, I felt collecting another sample would benefit the research by broadening the understanding of themes that could be identified in both the first and second data collections. During the second data collection, letters were only taken from the files containing those supporting applications for funding as the 'Good News' file had already been searched in its entirety during the first data collection. The second sample of letters were selected using the purposeful sampling and criterion sampling methods once again as these methods had proven effective during the initial analysis phase of the first sample. The data gathered in the first data collection contained interesting and insightful letters that were rich in data and had allowed for an initial development of a broader picture of what this research may be able to uncover. Prisoners' experiences of education appeared to be varied and the personalities of the writers were emerging in the letters allowing me to understand more about prisoners and their individual experiences.

As this research is concerned with adult male prisoners, all of the letters in the total sample (80) were selected having identified that they were written by prisoners from adult male institutions. The letters were filed by the PET according to their institution, therefore appropriate institutions were chosen at random and the letters contained within those institution files were then selected based on the sampling methods discussed previously.

The advantage of adopting this research method was its unobtrusive nature which provided a way to study social behaviour and experiences without directly affecting participants. The technique allowed for the collection of data about individuals without their direct knowledge or participation. By adopting Webb's (1966) recommendation of

using multiple methods, this research draws attention to the fact that interviews or questionnaires should not automatically be the preferred research method for a social science study as all techniques have different methodological strengths and weaknesses. The unobtrusive method of conducting a documentary analysis provided an opportunity to prepare for the interviews in this study by enabling me to become aware of some of the more sensitive issues that prisoners and ex-prisoners may discuss during the interview sessions.

ii. Interviews

The interview environment played a crucial role in the successful conduction of all of the interviews. The interviews with serving prisoners at the category C prison were carried out in a small room in the prison library, which was an ideal space for two reasons. Firstly, prisoners did not associate this area with the presence of prison officers or psychologists, thus avoiding any misconceptions of my role and the purpose of my being there. Secondly, using this space to conduct the interviews minimized disruption to the daily routine of the prison (a priority for the gatekeepers when negotiating access for the fieldwork). The location of these interviews was as neutral an environment as possible and its use was also convenient for prison staff.

The interviews with prison staff at the category A prison site were conducted in a private office which provided a confidential space for staff to speak about their personal opinions, experiences and perspectives. Although a small number of staff appeared slightly cautious about what they chose to tell me, the larger majority responded well to the privacy of the interview space and this was evident by the accounts they chose to divulge, some of which posed direct criticisms to working conditions, working relationships and the current state of prisons and penal policy.

The interviews with ex-prisoners took place at university campuses, which were the work places of the participants, in private offices meaning that in all cases, the interview environment was safe, familiar and comfortable.

A semi structured approach was taken to conducting the interviews with serving and ex-prisoners while at the same time drawing on some elements of the narrative interview method to evoke the meaningfulness of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1988). Drawing on Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approach⁶, I adopted two specific stages of the free association narrative interviewing method by using open-ended questions and eliciting stories. Unlike Hollway and Jefferson (2000) I did not purposely avoid 'why' questions in any of the interviews in this study because quite often this question was necessary and encouraged participants to speak in more detail about choices they had made, actions taken by others and experiences they had had. In some interviews, I did return to participants' disclosures (as done by Hollway and Jefferson) and used their wording to show that I had listened to what had been divulged (Gadd, 2011). However, I also engaged in discussions with participants about topics they introduced as and when they arose.

This approach to research interviewing engages some feminist methodological characteristics. DeVault and Gross (2012) explained that interview research involves gathering participants' reports and stories, learning about their perspectives, and giving them voice in academic and other public discourse. My intention for these interviews was to encourage the participants to speak freely about their experiences of education in prison and to set the story of those experiences in the context of other life events. Crewe suggests that this kind of interview approach is appropriate to understand the '...biographical pathways that have brought prisoners to the prison' (2013: 20). Crewe

⁶ In response to the limitations of survey and questionnaire research, Hollway and Jefferson adapted the psychoanalytic technique of free association and applied it to interviewing thus developing an interview style designed to '...facilitate the production of the interviewee's meaning-frame' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:32) by using open ended questions, eliciting stories, avoiding 'why' questions and following up using respondents' ordering and phrasing. Employing this method derived from free association encourages interviewees to draw on the emotional meanings of significant life events and the impact that such events have on the shaping and renegotiating of identity.

took this approach to pursue his interest in uncovering how prisoners' past experiences of other kinds of institutions shape their adaptation to imprisonment and suggested:

Since prisoners are so used to being disbelieved, un-recognized, and un-trusted, listening to their life stories in an active and attentive way is a powerful act. Because imprisonment almost always diminishes their sense of individuality, interviews that ask them who they are as individuals, not just as prisoners, communicated that their humanity is being taken seriously (Crewe, 2013: 20).

Drawing on Crewe's rationale for conducting life history interviews, the appropriate way to understand how prisoners experience education has been to consider their past including (but not limited to) previous experiences of education. Rather than asking serving and ex prisoner participants closed questions for the purpose of gaining short and direct answers, a topic guide was used to navigate respondents through their own story telling and to encourage them to speak freely and at a length of their own choosing. The objective was to have the storyteller elaborate, with feeling, upon what had happened in his life; thus seeking the "insider's" viewpoint on the life being lived (Atkinson, 2001).

Topic guides were particularly useful during the interviews with serving prisoners as I had not been permitted to use a tape recorder. The security department of the category C prison had deemed the possession of a tape recorder to be too high a security risk therefore detailed notes were taken paying close attention to the recording of direct quotes. Interviews with ex-prisoners were recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed. In both cases, the topic guides were in place to ensure that not too much time was spent on the discussion of issues that were not in the interest of this research. However, participants were not stopped if their narrative appeared to lose sight of the topic of discussion as other, potentially insightful, themes may have emerged. Stopping

participants abruptly while talking may have also made them feel uncomfortable and given them the impression that they were saying the wrong thing. This would have almost certainly reduced their confidence and could have had an adverse effect on the remainder of the interview. It was intended therefore that by using a topic guide and a semi structured interview approach (with some elements of the narrative approach), control of the interview would be shared between the participants and myself in order to bring out the necessary information, while at the same time giving the participants freedom to speak at a length of their own choosing.

The topic guide used for the interviews with serving category C prisoners was set out in eight parts. The parts included research and interview information, participants' personal information, childhood, school, the prison experience, the experience of doing education in prison, family life and plans for the future. For the interviews with ex-prisoners, the topic guide included sections on childhood and early life, stories of school, experiences of crime, experiences of prison, education in prison and change and transformation. The topic guides were designed to ensure that these participants, despite their differences in 'prisoner' and 'ex prisoner' status, would reflect on the same key stages in their lives in order that similarities and differences could be clearly identified. As will be seen in the data chapters, this resulted in common themes and experiences being drawn out from both sets of interviews with the additional insight from the ex prisoner interviews into what happens, or rather what can potentially happen, after the prison education experience and what personal changes can actually occur.

Interviews with staff were slightly more structured in nature as this set of interviews were not designed to specifically draw out significant life events or biographical accounts. Staff were however encouraged to discuss topics at a length of their own choosing which at times involved them divulging information of a biographical nature. This was most often the case when staff reflected on their own experiences of education and how they used such reflections to consider the experiences of their learners. When

interviewing teaching staff, I was interested to understand what it was like to teach in the prison environment and to understand how prison teachers felt learners responded to them. I was also interested to uncover more about the reality of the struggles that are reportedly being faced across the prison estate which were discussed earlier in the thesis. To gain a broader understanding of the nature of prison education, operational staff (officers) were interviewed to explore their perspectives on education programmes. This also uncovered important data regarding the nature of staff-prisoner relations and relationships between staff which highlighted divisions between those employed by the prison and the educators employed by external organisations (see Chapter Seven). A topic guide was used to navigate the staff interviews, which covered topics including motivations to educate prisoners, challenges of working/teaching in prison, positive aspects of working/teaching in prison, prisoners' motivations to do education, meanings and interpretations of education, change and transformation, the prison 'crisis', staff-prisoner relations, staff-staff relations, and thoughts on less eligibility. Due to security restrictions, half of the interviews with staff were digitally recorded and transcribed and the other half were recorded in writing using the same recording system adopted during interviews with serving category C prisoners.

When carrying out all of the interviews during this study, I ensured that there was a certain amount of chat in which personal views and experiences could be exchanged between the participants and myself (Bosworth et al, 2005). Bosworth et al (2005) argued that without such informal communication, respondents could find it difficult to understand the goals of the research. Once again referring to the feminist approach to interviewing, DeVault and Gross (2012) saw strategic disclosure on the part of the interviewer as another dimension in feminist interviewing, whether it means sharing personal information or a willingness to reveal research interests and political comments. This was an important element of the process of establishing and building rapport which will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

5.4 Negotiating Access and Securing Cooperation

i. Access to Letters

Access to the letters was initially agreed with the Director of the PET after a period of email correspondence during which the purpose of the research was discussed. A date for the initial data collection to take place was then agreed. Before the data collection process could take place, the *Prisoners' Education Trust: Researcher Access to Data Form* was signed granting permission for the letters to be used for the purpose of this study. The form stated that all prisoners assisted by the PET are informed that the Trust may quote from their letters and that in such cases anonymity is ensured. Prisoners are given the option to inform the Trust if they do not wish their letters to be quoted. In terms of the use of such documentation by researchers, it is stated under point 4 of the form that:

The Trust is committed to assisting researchers, believing that this enables mutual benefit, provided we recognise the validity and approve the theme of the proposed research. Researchers may have access to summary data (which does not identify any individuals) for research purposes, and to individual case data, provided they have signed a confidentiality agreement and work in compliance with our data protection policy. They may quote from individual case documents...provided they adhere to our procedures regarding anonymising (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2012b).

ii. Interview Access

Gaining access to a prison to conduct the interviews with prisoners began with the completion of the IRAS (Integrated Research Application System) application process. The application was submitted via the IRAS system to the National Offender Management Service in February 2012 to conduct the research at a category C men's training prison as it was felt that an establishment of this category would be likely to hold a larger number of inmates with prison education experience. In the following months the proposed prison institution accepted the application and planning began between the prison and myself regarding when and how the interviews would take place.

I was invited to take part in a two-day induction course at the category C prison in October 2012, which was actually for new staff members, but it was convenient for me to attend as it included information and training regarding health and safety, fire safety, alarms, the reporting of incidents, equality, conditioning and the use of keys. Following the induction, I arranged the times and dates of the interviews with the Business and Performance Management Officer (BPMO) who was my liaison regarding all interview organization matters throughout the research process. The cooperative relationship established between myself and the BPMO was key to the organization of the interviews (and on occasion the reorganization of interviews that had been originally planned for days that became no longer appropriate due to issues concerning the day-to-day running of the prison). As with all research, but especially in a closed environment such as the prison, access and its negotiation was a continual process which was renegotiated at each stage with each gatekeeper, from the governor, to the security team, to the BPMO.

In order that my presence would cause as little disruption as possible to the prison establishment (something emphasized by NOMS), I set out a list of dates on which I was available during the research period. The BPMO took a copy of the listed dates and used

them to schedule the interviews. The interviews took place over a two-week period in November 2012. Of the 15 interviews scheduled, 13 were successfully carried out with an average interview time of 1 hour. In total 13 hours and 10 minutes of interviewing was conducted. The two interviews that did not take place were cancelled due to a participant deciding not to take part at the last minute and in the other instance, the interview room had been double booked and was being used by prisoners to record stories to send home to their children as part of the Storybook Dads project.

It was decided before beginning the interviews that although I had taken part in keys training on one of the induction days, I would not have a set of keys during my time at the prison. I agreed with the BPMO's suggestion that it would be better that I did not have keys so that I would always have an officer with me when I was moving between different areas of the prison. She explained to me that her primary concern during the time I was at the prison was my safety, therefore ensuring that I was escorted when in the establishment would be the most appropriate course of action. An officer was assigned to escort me between the gatehouse and the prison library (where the interviews took place) throughout my time at the prison and she was also responsible for sending for the participants and on occasion personally bringing them to me when it was their turn to be interviewed. This officer was not present in the interview room during the interviews but would accompany me when I needed to move to and from the library to other areas of the prison.

Interviews with staff, including 5 teachers, 2 librarians, 2 officers, 1 writer in residence, 2 prison education managers and a governor, took place at a category A prison in June and July 2015. Access to the prison was granted via the same IRAS application form initially submitted to and accepted by NOMS in 2012, followed by a meeting with the prison governor. During the meeting with the governor, we discussed the progress of the research to date and how interviews with staff would provide a valuable insight into staff perspectives on prisoners' experiences of education and their own experiences of being educators in the prison environment. We also discussed the potential value in

uncovering staff perspectives on the current state of education provision in prisons in the contemporary penal climate and how this may contribute to a better understanding of how policy-related challenges impact on learners in prison. As a governor who had (and continues to have) a clear commitment to supporting prison research, the negotiation of access to conduct the interviews bore no specific challenges but rather provided an encouraging perspective on the potential outcomes of the present study. So as not to become restricted by the high security nature of the category A prison environment, it was decided that the interviews would take place in the gatehouse and outer buildings of the establishment, which were more readily accessible to a researcher. The planning and organisation of the interviews was arranged between myself and the Head of Reducing Reoffending at the prison who took note of the types of staff I wanted to interview and arranged the interview dates and times on my behalf. On the interview dates, I was provided with an office in which to conduct the interviews and the recruited staff attended as per their allocated appointment times.

Three ex-prisoners were interviewed for this study in addition to serving prisoners and the aforementioned prison staff to draw on their accounts of education throughout their lives including experiences that took place in prison. The interviews were organized via email correspondence between the participants and myself and took place on three dates in June and July 2015. The interviews were carried out in private meeting rooms on the campuses of two UK universities – the work places of the three participants. For the purpose of anonymity, the location and names of these universities will not be disclosed.

ii. Recruiting Participants

The recruitment of serving prisoners at the category C prison was led by the gatekeeper (BPMO). My only pre-requisite regarding the selection of these participants was that they needed to have experienced doing some form of education during this or another prison sentence. I made it known that I would be interested to speak to prisoners who

differed in sentence length and age, however I also stressed that I was flexible and that any willing participants would be welcome to take part in the study. Given the nature of the category C prison as a training prison with a goal of 100% work or education, the majority of the prisoners would have fitted my sampling criteria.

Having explained to the BPMO that I wanted to conduct fairly lengthy interviews (as opposed to the suspected 20 minutes that prison personnel suggested that prisoners would be able to 'last'), she suggested that she would select the participants herself with the advice of other prison staff to reduce the risk that I would come across any prisoners who might have been particularly uncooperative. Although it was helpful that participants were pre-selected based on the likelihood that they would be more inclined to speak at length, it also acted as an important reminder of the power held by the gatekeepers at this point in the study. 60 prisoners were chosen from an alphabetical list. Invitations to take part in the study were sent to those who 'came out of the hat' to see if they would be interested to take part. I only found out that invitations to take part had been distributed when at the beginning of many of the interviews, I asked the participants if they knew what the interview was about and they would often refer to me as being 'the lady on the leaflet'. I learned that leaflets containing brief information about the study had been put under the cell doors of those invited to take part.

There were however two serving prisoner participants that I *did* select myself. During the course of my time at the prison I began to notice that two of the library orderlies I had gotten to know were quite different from any prisoner I had interviewed. Their personalities did not seem to fit in amongst the participants I had been interviewing and I was intrigued about their stories. Consequently, I made it known to the library staff that I would be interested in having the opportunity to interview them for this reason. A quick phone call by one librarian to the officer who accompanied me around the prison enabled me to 'exchange' two people from the list of willing participants for the two orderlies and I eventually had the opportunity to speak with them. At no point during my time at the prison did I see the list and was therefore unaware of who had been

‘exchanged’ in order for me to conduct the interviews with the two orderlies. Although the interviews with the orderlies did not prove to be significantly ‘better’ in terms of the richness of the data produced, there was certainly a clear sense between myself and these participants that a rapport had already been established during our informal discussions in the library area meaning that this process did not form a core part of the interviews in these cases.

The Head of Reducing Reoffending (HRR) at the category A prison where interviews with staff took place was my key contact in the process of recruiting participants. As a fellow prison researcher studying for a postgraduate degree at the time of the staff interview planning, the HRR had a personal understanding of the importance of the data collection process and clarified with me on a number of occasions the types of prison staff I wanted to interview. On clarifying that I would like to speak to operational staff as well as educators, the HRR put out a call to colleagues within the prison who were in those staffing categories. The staff participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and the HRR contacted me frequently providing me with updates on the progress of the recruitment process prior to the confirmation of the interview dates that were suitable to the staff interviewed. As such, it was an advantage that this contact had an idea about the research process as someone without this knowledge may not have kept me up to date so frequently, if at all.

The ex-prisoners interviewed for this study were recruited through existing connections. All of these participants were academic colleagues who had served prison sentences and had some interest in prison education but more specifically education in the context of the desistance process. I contacted each of the participants directly and was fortunate in that they were all not only willing, but also keen to contribute their own stories to this study. I negotiated with the participants to arrange convenient dates on which the interviews could take place.

iv. Establishing and Building Rapport

Messerschmidt (1999) argued that interviews can and will 'tell it like it is' given sufficient trust and rapport. For me to have expected prisoners, ex-prisoners and prison staff to be willing to tell me about their lives, a rapport had to be established between the participants and myself in order for them to feel comfortable sharing their stories. It has been essential during this study to remain mindful that the participants (particularly serving prisoners and ex-prisoners) are vulnerable people and so it had to be expected that some aspects of their life stories could be difficult to share, especially with a stranger. To establish a connection or rapport with participants, I felt it important to share at least part of my own story with them in return through reciprocal conversation. Oakley (1981) discussed the importance of taking this kind of approach in her research, arguing that researchers must invest their own personal identity in the relationship established with participants.

For the purpose of establishing a rapport with the participants in this study, I felt that sharing part of myself with them was not only necessary, but that it was also the right thing to do. By this I do not mean divulging extensive details about my life that could compromise my privacy, I mean this in a much more subtle way. Finding a shared like of certain foods, music, TV programmes, films, or even talking about a topic currently in the news was sufficient for the participants to be able to see enough of my personality to be comfortable in exchanging information and establishing a comfortable relationship. Establishing a rapport during this research was about showing the participant I did not simply want to adopt a 'researcher' persona, but that I was also there as an individual like them - that I was a real person who liked 'regular' things. I like pizza, I like gangster films and the TV series *The Sopranos*. Why not share this type of information with someone who I am asking to tell me about some potentially dark times in their life or, in the case of staff, the challenges that face them in their work? This process took us away from our 'researcher' and 'interviewee' personas and allowed us to meet on common ground in a process of humanization. When I had been able to

establish this connection, I then knew that the time was right to introduce the participants to my 'researcher self' - the part of me who was there to find out about them for the purpose of the study. Introducing my personal self and *then* my researcher self to the participants seemed to create a positive atmosphere in the interview space and admittedly allowed *me* to relax a little as well as the participants.

Some may disagree with this kind of approach as it could result in 'over-rapport' in a temporary relationship that the researcher can leave more freely than the participant (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). I would argue however that establishing rapport is a process that involves forming a connection between the interviewee and interviewer for the purpose of creating a sense of trust and honesty in the interview space. Without this, I find it difficult to understand how an interviewee would want to play an active role in providing the interviewer with personal information.

Establishing rapport did not only happen at the beginning of each interview, it was something that happened throughout the discussions as I got to know the participants better. I allowed our conversations to divert into matters concerning the shared interests previously noted as and when they arose to ensure that the interview environment remained positive and flexible. This was also an important process in some interviews where participants had not spoken at length about topics that were introduced at the beginning of the interview. I could see in cases where rapport was built rather than immediately established that participants would revisit these topics unprompted and tell me more about them once a more secure sense of rapport had been created. Liebling (1997) acknowledged this process of returning to certain topics in her study on incentives and earned privileges. She said that participants would return to a topic, change their first response – go deeper, and become fluent, trusting, more open, and the interview would unwind (1999: 158). This aspect of the research experience allowed me to feel that I didn't always have to push the participants to talk to me about certain topics. I learnt that if I had patience and allowed the participants to direct some parts of the interviews themselves in a way that they felt comfortable, more

often than not, the information that at first appeared to have been skipped over, emerged later on.

5.5 Data Analysis

i. Documentary Data Analysis Method

To conduct the documentary analysis on the prisoners' letters, it was decided that a method typical of content analysis would be used. Content analysis comprises of a three-stage process and can be used to analyse a number of different forms of data including both transcribed interviews and personal writing. The first stage of the content analysis process as described by Cargan (2007) is to define as precisely as possible what aspects of the content are being investigated, keeping in mind the research question and the need to be consistent in its use in order to ensure reliability of the technique and the validity of the findings.

The second aspect of content analysis includes the formulation of categories, otherwise known as coding. Codes are labels and coding is the process of putting those labels against pieces of the data. The pieces may be individual words or small or large chunks of data (Punch, 2005). Coding is carried out in order to index data by themes and categories from which analysis can be conducted. In order to generate an in depth understanding of prisoners' experiences of education, I decided that an analysis of themes should be conducted.

The coding process was carried out in two stages of theme identification. In the first stage of coding the data, predetermined codes were set out to identify particular themes that could then be searched for in the letters. The predetermined codes were constructed based on the findings of previous prison education research and key themes

detailed in the data from the Social Exclusion Unit's 2002 report *Reducing reoffending by ex-prisoners* which forms a statistical account of the social characteristics of prisoners. This statistical information can be seen in *Figure 5* below:

Figure 5. The social characteristics of prisoners

Characteristic	General population	Prisoners
Regularly truanted from school	3% ³³	30% ³⁴
Excluded from school	2% ³⁵	49% of male and 33% of female sentenced prisoners excluded from school ³⁶
Left school at 16 or younger	32% ³⁷	89% of men and 84% of women ³⁸
Attended a special school	1% ³⁹	23% of male and 11% of female sentenced prisoners ⁴⁰
Have no qualifications	15% ⁴¹	52% men and 71% women ⁴²
Numeracy at or below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year-old)	23% ⁴³	65% ⁴⁴
Reading ability at or below Level 1	21–23% ⁴⁵	48% ⁴⁶
Writing ability at or below Level 1	No direct comparison	82% ⁴⁷

(Social Exclusion Unit, 2002: 19)

The themes identified from this source symbolize what is already known about prisoners' experiences of education, which includes the educational abilities of prisoners. This therefore allowed for the identification of themes that I expected to see in the prisoners' letters, which when identified, would confirm the validity and contemporary relevance of my pre-existing knowledge. The predetermined themes were as follows:

- Doing prison education to lead to potential employment
- Experience of prison education enabling prisoners to create a new identity
- Experience of prison education increasing self-esteem
- Previous positive experiences of education

- Previous negative experiences of education
- No qualifications achieved before imprisonment
- Qualifications have been gained before imprisonment
- Experience of school truancy
- Experience of school exclusion
- Left school before the age of 16 (compulsory age)
- Experienced encouragement to be educated
- Did not experience encouragement to be educated/experienced discouragement

In the second stage of coding, an open coding approach was taken with the aim of seeking to identify further themes that emerged from the letters. The aim was to broaden the depth of my understanding of prisoners' experiences of education beyond information pertaining to the predetermined themes. The second stage of coding, being open in nature, allowed for further and arguably less predictable themes to emerge which could broaden the research findings as they included themes about prisoners' personalities and lives - themes that were not restricted to topics directly related to education but that would nevertheless help to understand the meanings prisoners attached to educational experiences. This process is known as developing an 'emergent fit' which involves negotiating between categories that emerge through the data analysis (Ezzy, 2002). It is argued that through a process of comparison of emergent themes with preexisting categories, a new and more sophisticated understanding of the experience in question can be developed (Ezzy, 2002).

The third and final stage of the content analysis process was to select which items were to be examined. For the purpose of this study the themes, both predetermined and emerging, were plotted on a large grid to show all of the letters, represented by an alphanumerical code that I had assigned to each of them, and the themes that had been identified in each. The initial process of plotting the themes allowed me to be able to identify any noticeable trends in the themes being identified and whether those trends differed between the two types of letters being examined. In doing so I was immediately

able to see that there was a higher concentration of prisoners writing about education potentially leading to employment amongst the letters supporting applications. I was also able to determine that the letters from the 'Good News' file showed a higher concentration of prisoners writing about self-esteem and coping with imprisonment.

In carefully analyzing each of the 80 letters in the sample, it became apparent that a number of them were particularly interesting in their own right - that is, they demonstrated evidence of important themes (predetermined and emerging) but they were also interesting in their whole content in telling the reader something more about the lives of the writers. In identifying this, 13 letters of the 80 were selected because as a small collection, they uncovered evidence of a range of the pre-determined and emerging themes and they were also extremely interesting case studies in themselves. The documentary analysis has therefore been based on these 13 letters to create a thematic analysis of the high concentration of topics that emerged from the selected information-rich case studies. In addition, one more letter was selected for analysis because it demonstrated evidence of a prisoner taking the opportunity to write to the PET as a way of documenting his life history – something that was particularly fascinating to read that I felt needed to be shared with a wider audience.

ii. Interview Data Analysis Method

In order to compare the documentary and interview data, the method of analysis for the interview data was the same as the way in which the documentary data was analysed. When the interviews had been transcribed, a process of content analysis was used to conduct a thematic analysis on a set of predetermined themes and a set of emerging themes.

For the interviews with serving prisoners, the predetermined themes were a revisiting of those identified during the documentary analysis. To highlight the fact that the predetermined themes set out in the documentary analysis could also be identified in

the interview data, the following formed the predetermined group for the interview analysis:

- Doing prison education to lead to potential employment
- Experience of prison education increasing self-esteem
- Previous positive experiences of education
- Previous negative experiences of education
- No qualifications achieved before imprisonment
- Qualifications have been gained before imprisonment
- Experience of school truancy
- Experience of school exclusion
- Left school before the age of 16
- Experienced encouragement to be educated

These were selected to form the predetermined themes for the interview analysis, as they were the most frequently occurring of the predetermined themes in the documentary data. In focusing on these I was able to use the interviews to broaden the detail of the emergence of the themes and establish whether or not those participants interviewed identified them as frequently as the writers of the letters and whether they were discussed in the same way.

The analysis of interviews with ex-prisoners and prison staff also adopted the content analysis approach. The data produced by the interviews with ex-prisoners was analysed focusing on the same predetermined themes that had been used for the documentary data and the data produced by interviews with serving prisoners. In addition, focus was given to the themes emerging from ex-prisoners' narrative accounts, which included relationships with parents, allowing for a broader discussion on the subject of authority which in turn corresponded with staff interview data on staff-prisoner relationships. As will be seen, the analysis of ex-prisoners' narratives also broadened the discussion of change and transformation in attempting to answer the question as to what actually

changes following prison education experiences. Data produced by interviews with staff was analysed to gain staff perspectives on the themes discussed by letter writers, prisoners and ex-prisoners. This data was also used to further understand the challenges faced in the changing penal policy climate discussed earlier in the thesis to generate an operational level conception of how such changes are being experienced 'on the ground'. The culmination of the analysis of the whole data set from the various sources has resulted in an understanding of contemporary prison education in a multi-dimensional way and has created an appreciation of understanding prison education experiences in ways that go beyond the purposes of this practice as set out in policy documentation.

5.6 Ethical and Methodological Considerations

When embarking on a piece of prison-based research, which requires access to a secure institution and the people contained within, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration. These include a combination of practical, ethical and methodological issues, which can potentially affect the way in which the research is carried out.

In this study, potential ethical issues relating to the wellbeing and safety of the research participants and the researcher were considered carefully. These issues included gaining the consent of the research participants and ensuring that the research was conducted in a fair way that ensured confidentiality. Each of the interviewed participants in this study were given a consent form to review and sign (See *Appendix A* for Prisoner/Ex Prisoner consent form, and *Appendix B* for Staff consent form). In order to ensure that all participants understood the study and the consent form, I read through the form with them before they signed it to make explicitly clear that they were able to stop their participation in the interview at any time and that if they chose to do so, anything they

had told me prior to making this decision would not be recorded and would not be used in the study.

In recognizing the *Code of Ethics* set out by the British Society of Criminology, it was essential to ensure that potential physical, psychological, discomfort or stress to individuals participating in research was minimized. Conducting interviews with vulnerable prisoner participants meant considering the potential harm that could be caused by discussing emotionally sensitive topics. Such topics were therefore approached with caution and participants were frequently reminded that they need only discuss topics that they felt comfortable talking about.

Another point for consideration when acknowledging the challenges faced by prison researchers is the role that emotion plays in the research experience (Liebling, 1999; Liebling, 2014; Jewkes, 2012). Having acknowledged that prisoners are a vulnerable participant group, it must not be forgotten that researchers themselves can become vulnerable when exposed to a challenging environment and speaking with participants who may engage in sensitive, emotion-provoking and potentially disturbing discussions. Sparks et al (1996) noted that the researcher entering the prison for the first time (as I was in 2012) is therefore in a weak and vulnerable position. Jewkes (2012) argued that those prison scholars who do not disclose their own emotional responses to the challenging environment of the prison are doing a disservice to those who follow them, for instance, doctoral students who are often anxious about approaching the field. Discussing her own personal experiences of emotion while conducting prison research, Jewkes recounted a conversation she had with an inmate serving his 33rd year in prison. As this prisoner was sentenced shortly after she was born, she found that while he told her his stories of imprisonment, he was at the same time recounting the world in which she had grown up. She said:

His honesty made me warm to him and I left the prison that afternoon feeling genuinely uplifted for the reason (as I *now*

understand it) that the stories we shared integrated my life and work and connected my life with that of another (Jewkes, 2012: 69).

Jewkes (2012) acknowledged subjective experience and emotional responsiveness can play a role in the formulation of knowledge that can deepen our understanding of the people and contexts we study, thus emphasizing the need for researchers to see the importance of their own research experiences as part of the overall research study. As such, the emotions of the researcher can be considered to constitute data (Liebling, 1999). It is for this reason that, where appropriate, reflexive notes have been made within this thesis to acknowledge my own responses to participants and the way in which I used my own personal reactions to interpret the data.

ii. Problematizing the Audience of the Serving Prisoner

The way the data was collected will have undoubtedly had an impact on the data generated. This is because the research methods involved different audiences, one visible in person and one not. Thinking about the audience that the participants were speaking to draws me to consider my perception of how honest I felt the participants were being and whether those who were writing to an invisible audience were more likely to tell the truth than those interviewed in person, or indeed, vice versa.

The audience in the case of the letters was the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET). Because two different types of letters have been analysed in this research, it is important to deal with them separately when considering the impact of audience because the two types of letters had different purposes. In the case of the letters written to support applications for funding, the audience appeared to play a crucial role in the construction of the letters and the way in which the writers wrote about prison education. The purpose of these letters was to explain to the Trust why they should fund the writers to do a distance learning course. Because the writers of these letters aimed to gain

something that could change their experience of imprisonment for the better, the letters were clearly more tailored to achieve this. The tailoring was focused around the primary discussion of employability. The writers of these letters appeared more likely to say that they wanted to do prison education because it would help them get a job on release and it became clear that this is what they felt was expected of them. During the documentary analysis process, I began to get the distinct impression that regardless of what the writers of these letters wanted to gain from their educational experience, they felt it would be more likely to happen if they were to say they wanted to do prison education for reasons that were in line with offender learning policy. This clearly shows therefore that for prisoners who had not yet done education courses in prison, the acceptable and justifiable reason to give for doing so was to become more employable. In this respect, the audience for these types of letters appeared to have a direct impact on the way that the letters were written and the reasons that the writers gave for wanting to do an education course. This suggested to me that the honesty of the writers could have been compromised because their audience had the power to accept or deny their application for education funding. However, this should not discredit the fact that some of the writers genuinely wanted to do education to become more employable. Some might have wanted to do education to cope with the experience of imprisonment or for other personal reasons, but may have written in their letters that they wanted to study to become more employable because they thought their audience would find this a more acceptable reasoning.

When it came to the 'good news' letters that were written retrospectively about the experience of doing education in prison, the writers did not seem to have the same view of their audience as those writing letters to support applications. Through the overt emotion and vulnerability displayed by some of the writers, it could be seen that the audience for their letters i.e. the PET, was not preventing them from admitting vulnerability and emotion and saying that the experience of doing education in prison had helped them to cope with being in prison, rather than solely making them more employable. Although the audience for this type of letter was the same as the

application letters, it seemed that a combination of the purpose of the letter and the experience of education had changed the way that the writers spoke to their audience. It could be argued that because nothing specific, such as education funding, was being sought from the audience in the case of these letters, the writers had no reason to feel obligated to say that they wanted to do education because it would make them more employable. This, combined with the emotional awakening that seemed to be experienced by some of the writers, made these letters appear more likely to be honest accounts. It seemed to me when reading these letters that the writers would not voluntarily show their own personal emotions and vulnerability unless they were being honest, because such displays can be considered weak in prison culture.

In the interviews with prisoners at the category C prison, I was the audience and was face to face with the participants. I was able to have discussions with them and prompt them to talk to me more about issues that were of interest to me during our discussion. The participants were therefore able to interact with their audience and the audience with them, as opposed to the writers of the letters who would most likely never come into physical contact with their audience. The discussion of honesty in relation to the interviews can be looked at from two perspectives. Firstly, the participants were physically able to see that their audience did not belong to any organization or profession that had involvement with their sentence plan. The advantage of this was that the participants could see that I was impartial and that I was not there to make any formal assessment that would have an impact on their prison sentence. I felt that this in many cases made the participants feel at ease and allowed for conversations to take place that included a number of different insightful topics.

The second perspective is that myself being the audience in these interviews could have had a negative impact on the interview data. I wondered at times about the extent to which the participants were always telling me the truth. It was rarely the case that I felt participants were not being truthful, however, when I did feel this, it was because a certain amount of bravado was being displayed. It was interesting that the bravado

seemed to be adopted for the participants' benefit rather than mine. These albeit rare displays of overtly masculine behaviour appeared to act as a way for participants to impress themselves or reassure themselves that they weren't 'breaking' or being emotionally vulnerable. Displaying an element of bravado also in some cases seemed to be a way for participants to justify their criminal behaviour in a way that allowed them to see their behaviour as being trivial or even comical. Despite this, for the most part I felt the participants were being honest during the interviews because the majority were open in telling me about issues that were sensitive in nature and thus showed them as being emotional, vulnerable individuals.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a rationale for the methodological approach taken in the present study. It has been clearly established that in order to understand prisoners' experiences of education, elements of prisoners' and ex-prisoners' life histories need to be investigated. In addition to this, including the perspectives of operational and non-operational prison staff has embedded an additional dimension within the data. As such, the documentary analysis and interviews conducted in this study have been carried out in a way that has not negated the possibility of themes emerging that are not directly related to education, but nonetheless contribute to understanding prisoners' experiences of education in some detail. Adopting some aspects of the narrative and feminist approaches to conduct this research should draw the reader's attention towards the importance of the voices of those at the heart of prison education experiences (both those who have been taught and those who teach and supervise). However, this chapter has made it clear that the voices of this research have been both heard *and* read. Using a combination of methods has been identified as essential to the data analysis as well as being an important part of preparing for the interviews.

Chapter Six: Experiencing Education: Views from the Inside

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will address the first three questions posed at the beginning of the research:

- a) What motivates prisoners to undertake education?
- b) What does education mean to prisoners?
- c) How have prisoners' experiences of prison education been shaped by their earlier pre-prison experiences (or lack of experiences) of education?

The remaining two questions will be addressed in Chapter Eight.

The present chapter will draw on the narratives of prisoners and extracts from prisoners' letters to consider how education and other life experiences contribute to the experience of learning in prison. A small number of extracts from interviews with prison staff and ex-prisoners are also included in the chapter to show how different types of participants discussed the same themes and how they related to serving prisoners' perspectives – however, analysis of these kinds of data (staff and ex prisoner interviews) is for the most part contained in Chapters Seven and Eight.

The main themes to emerge from the analysis in this chapter, which explores motivations, meanings and interpretations of prison education are; the questionable suitability of an employment-focused curriculum for prisoners serving long term sentences, increasing barriers to higher education, the importance of continued education for prisoners who already have qualifications and the role of relationships

with parents in establishing attitudes towards figures of authority (including educators). As will be seen in this chapter, the narratives presented are subject to interpretation and significantly, do not always produce consistent links between experience and outcome. For instance, one participant's negative schooling experience may result in a fear of the classroom environment and a lack of confidence in the value of education, whereas another participant may reflect on such an experience as a missed opportunity, which then becomes a motivation to engage with education in prison.

It should be noted that the extracts from the letters used in this chapter (and others) are written as they were initially written in the letters. Although this does mean that many of these quotes include spelling and punctuation mistakes, it seemed rather cumbersome to flag up each and every spelling and punctuation error. I also felt that correcting mistakes in the letters might take away part of the character of the writers, which is something I want to preserve as much as possible. Throughout the three chapters which explore the findings of this research (Six, Seven and Eight), a number of long, verbatim quotations have been used. This approach has been taken to enable the reader to see the original data and thus how the findings emerged. This creates a sense of transparency in the process of data analysis and offers readers a greater depth of understanding of the data generated (Cordon and Sainsbury, 2006).

6.2 Introducing the Prisoner Interview Participants

Alongside the analysis of 80 letters written by prisoners to the Prisoners' Education Trust, 29 interviews were conducted with serving prisoners, prison teachers, prison librarians, a writer in residence, prison officers, a prison governor and three ex-prisoners. This chapter will primarily focus on the content of letters and the interviews with serving prisoners. At the beginning of each interview with serving prisoners I got to know a little about them to form the introduction to our discussion and the information

gained from this will be reviewed in this part of the chapter. I asked each participant their age, whether this was their first time in prison, the length of their sentence, the amount of time they had served to date, the crime for which they had been sentenced and how they felt they were coping with imprisonment. This was an important aspect of the interviews which contributes to locating experiences of education within a broader biographical context of the participants' lives which has previously been absent from prison education research. For the purposes of anonymity, each of the 13 prisoner participants interviewed for the study have been given an assumed name.

"James"

James was 24 years old and had served approximately nine previous prison sentences. His first prison sentence was 28 days long. On this occasion he had been sentenced to six years and nine months of which he had served 38 months to date. He was initially sentenced to six years for burglary but was then given an additional nine months for smuggling drugs into the prison earlier in the sentence. He said that the amount of money that could be made from doing this was too tempting as a single tablet that could be sold for £2 on the outside, could be sold for £50 in prison. When discussing the crime for which he had been convicted (burglary), he was clearly emotionally affected. While talking, he looked down and played with his hands as he recalled the incident. He said:

I don't know why I did it.

Throughout the remainder of the interview, James repeatedly referred back to the burglary explaining how ashamed he was. He said he couldn't believe he had committed that crime. He explained that when committing burglary, he would steal items from the chosen house, put them in the boot of the car that was in the garage and then steal the car containing the items. When I asked James about his overall experience of imprisonment, he said:

It's easy but it's a waste of life.

He added that prison life had become normal for him and that he wished his first prison sentence (at the age of 18) had been longer. He felt that this would have deterred him from committing further crime and said that he strongly believed in the deterrent potential of mandatory sentencing. He said:

If I'd had a bigger sentence at the start I'd never have come back.

James then went on to say he was certain that prison life had made him paranoid and that he couldn't stand the thought of people talking about him behind his back and "*taking the mick*". When asking him about what aspect of imprisonment he felt was most difficult, he immediately said that it was being away from his family. He said:

If I didn't have family, I wouldn't be bothered (about being in prison).

He also talked about how his friends on the outside now had jobs and families of their own. This had left him feeling left behind and alone.

"Paul"

Paul was 22 years old and had been in a Young Offenders Institution on one occasion prior to his current sentence. His sentence length was ten weeks and he had served eight weeks to date. The offence for which he was sentenced was assault on a police officer while under a curfew order. Recounting the incident, he explained how he had been out of the house and his curfew time was approaching. When he returned home he found that his mother had gone to the pub and taken the house key with her leaving him unable to get into the house. He left the house in case the police turned up and found him outside and thus breaking his curfew. On returning to the house with his

mother, two police officers arrived and entered to ask questions. Paul, who referred to himself as having “*multiple personality*” became aggressive with one of the police officers for entering his house. His mother then tried to attack the same officer and was taken into the kitchen by the other. Upon seeing his mother being taken away by a police officer, Paul became enraged and head-butted the officer he was arguing with. Laughing, he said to me:

I head-butted the cunt!

When I asked Paul about prison life, he described it as “*easy but awkward*”. I questioned what was awkward about being in prison. He replied:

Well, you can’t just go down the pub can you.

When talking about being in prison and the crimes he had committed, he kept referring to himself as being a criminal. I asked him if this is how he truly saw himself and he said:

I look at myself as being pretty fucked up to be honest.

It was clear from the beginning of the interview that Paul was an extremely troubled young man. He found it difficult to concentrate and quickly shifted from being amused to being angry a number of times.

“Kevin”

Kevin was 32 years old and had been sentenced to a four-and-a-half-year prison sentence for robbery. To date he had served four months of his sentence and had previously been in prison approximately 20 times. He said that prison had been a constant part of his life since the age of 15. He said:

It has always been too easy to make money by doing crime.

Kevin was quick to define the prison experience as being “*too easy*”. However, having said that prison was easy, I later learnt that he had taken the decision to cut off all contact with friends and family in the outside world. He said that having contact with friends and family is what would make his sentence difficult (see also Farber, 1944; cited in Cohen and Taylor, 1972: 72). His decision to cease contact with those in the outside world was constantly reaffirmed when he saw other prisoners struggling to cope following phone calls made to family and partners. He said he sometimes saw prisoners get into arguments with their partners on the phone and that because the phone calls were so short, the arguments were left unresolved and in the confines of the prison, this was extremely difficult to cope with.

“Andrew”

Andrew was 31 years old and had been sentenced to 3 years and 11 months for burglary. He estimated that he had been to prison a total of 10 to 15 times. His previous convictions were mainly vehicle related (e.g. driving with no insurance, driving while banned). He explained that he began burgling at the age of nine. When I asked him about the experience of being in prison he said:

People doesn't know what it is to be bored until they've been in prison.

Andrew also told me that he thought inmates should have to make more of a contribution towards the cost of their prison cell (e.g., electricity and heating) to replicate responsibilities in the free community.

“Dean”

Dean was 28 years old and serving a four-year sentence for aggravated burglary. To date he had served 11 months of his sentence. This was the second time he had been in prison; however, his first prison sentence had been when he was 18 years old. I asked Dean about the circumstances under which he had been given his current prison sentence. He told me that he had been made redundant and as part of his redundancy received a £27,000 pay out. When the redundancy payment eventually began to run out, he took the opportunity to sell stolen cars to earn extra money. He said that at the start of his sentence he did not cope well with imprisonment but that now he was coping as well as he could. This was the first interview during which I physically saw a participant struggling with the experience of being in prison. His quietness and body language amplified this giving the strong impression that he was finding it difficult to cope with institutional life.

“Mark”

24-year old Mark was serving a three-year sentence for burglary and to date he had served nine months. This was not his first time in prison. Since the age of 13 he had been in prison on approximately 10 or 11 other occasions. He said that this had been the most difficult sentence he had served so far because he now had a two-year-old daughter. Prior to his current prison sentence, he worked as a leaflet distributor and sold drugs on the side. Mark was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety in his early teens. He said that he had seen a lot of *“terrible things”* in the country he lived in when he was young and that psychologists had ascribed the cause of his mental state to *“suppressed memories”*. Mark said he nearly ‘broke’ when coming to prison because he was leaving his girlfriend and baby. He had since separated from his girlfriend and said that things were much more manageable now. Prior to this, his relationship had caused him a lot of stress.

“Darren”

Darren was 45 years old and serving a 20-year sentence for drug importation. To date he had served eight years of his sentence. In the past he had served six other prison sentences, all of which were short-term. Prior to his current sentence, Darren had not been to prison for 17 years. He said that the opportunities for rehabilitation in the current prison establishment were limited. He felt the way that prisoners were assigned to education/rehabilitation courses in the prison was not based on the needs of individuals, but based on the prison's need to fill courses and tick boxes. He said instead, prisoners needed life skills. When I asked Darren how he was coping with the experience of imprisonment, he said he was *“just getting on”*. He then said *“time goes fast because I fill it up”*.

Darren's attitude towards prison education was very negative and this will be shown in a further discussion about prison education 'ticking boxes'. It became apparent however that prison education had some impact on Darren as he told me it had made him more aware of the importance of education more broadly, and in particular, the education of his 10-year old daughter. He had become very supportive of her education to the extent that he would reward her educational achievements with *“books rather than sweets”* to encourage her to continue to make an effort at school.

“Joe”

Joe was 28 years old and serving a 40-month prison sentence for street robbery of which he had served 36 months to date. He had served one previous eight-year prison sentence in 1999. He spoke about his crime explaining that he was trying to get the 'street robbery' verdict changed to 'assault' as he had decided to find the victim and return his wallet to him a few days later.

He described the experience of being in prison as “easy” in comparison to when he was previously in prison in 1999. In 1999 there was no television or library access and because of this, during his current sentence he saw them as privileges. In terms of the aspects of imprisonment that he *did* find difficult, he explained that healthcare was hard to access. He explained that he was taking part in dermatological drug trials, which required regular scheduled blood tests and that on numerous occasions the blood tests had been cancelled and this was causing disruption and confusion with the drug trial.

He said that there was one prison officer that he and other inmates got on with particularly well because this officer had shared part of his personal story with the inmates. For instance, the inmates were aware that this officer’s wife was ill and because of this, they supported him and respected him for sharing this with them.

“Mike”

Mike was 38 years old and serving a four-year sentence for possession of drugs with the intent to supply. To date he had served two years of this sentence and through the course of his life he had received three prison sentences in total. Mike explained that he had been diagnosed with slight schizophrenia, paranoid psychosis and drug induced psychosis. He had also been sectioned under the Mental Health Act earlier in his sentence.

He served his first prison sentence when he was 29 years old and he didn’t find it difficult. He said that prison was harder now because he found that “*it’s the same thing*” and it “*gets boring*”. He said that he was finding himself trying to give young prisoners advice but he knew they wouldn’t listen because he had had a similar attitude when he was their age.

Mike felt that imprisonment had had a huge impact on his life. He had aged, he had no children and he was not in a relationship. As a member of the Muslim faith, he practiced

his faith as a way to relax and think about things. He said that on an evening he would just be calm and use his time to remember his religious teachings to think. Some prisoners would ask him about his religion through interest and there had been no negative treatment towards him for being a member of the Muslim faith.

I said to Mike that a number of participants had told me prison was easy and that I wondered what he thought about this. He said:

"People say prison is easy because they've got to put on a front...some of them will be in tears when they're alone".

"Dave"

Dave was 21 years old and serving his first prison sentence. He was serving a 20-month sentence for grievous bodily harm and to date had served three months. The incident had occurred when he was drunk on a night out with friends. Dave described going to prison as being *"like starting a new school"*. He then said *"It's not easy, it just gets easier"*.

Dave explained to me that the most difficult part of imprisonment was not being able to move on from situations that took place on the outside. He said:

...the last memories you have of the outside are what you're left with.

Before going to prison, Dave and his girlfriend had split up. He told me that this was the last experience he had in the free community and as such was something he had continued to think about. He said on the outside people can move on from such things because life naturally moves on but in prison, nothing changes and therefore it is difficult to progress.

“Richard”

Richard was 27 years old and this was his first time in prison. He was serving a five-year sentence for wounding with intent. He had served one year and eight months to date. Richard did not immediately reveal to me the nature of his crime. It later transpired that he had stabbed his then girlfriend during an argument after they had both been drinking. He explained to me that if he hadn't picked up a weapon *“it would have been a different story and probably a different sentence”*. However, it had been decided that because he picked up a weapon, it proved his intention to cause a greater amount of harm. He kept saying throughout the interview that he couldn't believe that it had happened. He said that this was also the attitude of a number of people who lived in his village. Richard then told me about his first night in prison. On that night, one inmate died, one covered himself with toilet paper and set fire to himself and another slashed his wrists. He described this as being a terrifying experience. For the first 6 months of his sentence he was depressed and suicidal. At one time he drank a bottle of clothing detergent to attempt suicide. He joked that it was actually quite embarrassing because it just made him very sick. He said *“people who say prison is easy aren't normal”*.

His experience of prison had been better following the first 6 months and he felt much better at the time of the interview. Other prisoners had come to know his personality and if new prisoners came on to the wing who were quiet or *“a bit geeky”*, they would always be pointed in his direction. He explained that other prisoners were also quite protective of him because of his quiet and gentle nature, as they knew that if anyone were to attack him, he would not fight back.

“Pete”

Pete was 41 years old and serving a nine-year sentence for attempted murder. This was the second time he had been to prison. The first time was in 1997 when he had been on remand. He was released after a few months having been found not guilty; although he

admitted to me that he was actually *“guilty as sin”*. He had been trafficking large amounts of drugs for approximately four years and had, as a result, been earning £7000 per month. The incident of attempted murder happened because he found out that his wife had been having an affair. Four months prior to this, he found out she was having an affair but he forgave her. Referring to his reaction to the most recent affair he said:

I don't know what happened, I just lost it.

He explained to me that this was an isolated incident and that he had never raised his hand to his wife before this. When he found out about her having an affair the first time, he said jovially in front of some of her relatives:

If she does it again, I'll kill her.

One of Pete's wife's relatives stated this as evidence in court. From that point he knew what was going to happen and he said that he often thought about what would have happened if he hadn't said those words. He told me that he hadn't meant it literally but he understood that the judge was right to give him the custodial sentence given the evidence presented. Pete said if he had been the judge, he would have given the same sentence. When I asked him how he had been coping with being in prison he said:

You've just got to get on with it.

“Jeff”

Jeff was 44 years old and serving a 22-year sentence for drug trafficking. He claimed to have pleaded guilty to benefit from a discounted sentence length. This was the second time he had been to prison. He had served a five-year sentence in the early 1990s for what he referred to as a *“cannabis conspiracy”*. To date, he had served 10 years of his 22-year sentence. He explained to me that he was arrested in Spain with *“a group of*

Columbians". He was then extradited to the UK for trial. He understood the reason he was caught was because British police in Spain were using Spanish intercepts to gather intelligence on him. The trial had fallen apart in Spain, which is why he was then extradited to the UK for the trial that resulted in his sentence. Jeff told me that the only bad thing about being in prison was being away from his family. He didn't want prison visits from them because it was too difficult for him to cope with. He also said that it was during the first six or seven years that he really felt what he was missing, but after that, it "*didn't really work anymore*" because he had become used to it. He described prison as "*boring but not difficult*".

He had made his cell like a home with matching bedding and curtains and it was important to make it comfortable. He said:

The Government can't take what's most important to me, my children and my memories. And by the nature of my crime I automatically go to the top of the prison hierarchy.

6.3 Prison Education: Motivations, Meanings and Interpretations

Introducing the prisoner participants (whose narratives are particularly prominent in this chapter) and paying attention to other parts of their experiences highlights the psychosocial element of the analysis of this data. As suggested by Smith (2006), one of the most striking developments in recent criminology is the revival of attention to the individual biographies of people who offend and their inner experiences (see Jefferson, 2002; Gadd and Farrall, 2004). Providing some information about the participants' sentences, the crimes for which they were imprisoned and their initial thoughts on the prison experience in the previous part of this chapter tells us something about the serving prisoners who have participated in this research. As previously noted, it is

essential to incorporate experiences of imprisonment more broadly to gain an understanding of how education may impact on this. To uncover experiences of education in the prison environment in a more detailed and in depth way, this part of the chapter explores what motivated prisoners to do education at all and how, once experienced, they interpreted and gave meaning those those experiences. This part of the chapter will explore the motivations, meanings and interpretations that prisoners themselves associated with prison education beginning with the theme of employment before exploring other emerging themes including education for the educated, learning the law, helping others, passing time and ticking boxes.

i. Employment

In the collection of letters written by prisoners to the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), one of the most common reasons given for wanting to study was to increase employability in order to find work on release. As acknowledged in earlier chapters, increasing employability is currently the primary goal in offender learning policy. A prisoner's own acknowledgement of this goal was identified in 'Letter 7'. The writer introduced himself as 22 years old with 2 years of his sentence remaining. He stated how aware he had become of the problem of unemployment and was requesting funding to do an introductory law course in order that he might have a realistic chance of employment on release. This writer explained that in 2010 he had been funded by PET to do a level 3 diploma in Fitness Management. He discussed how his attitude towards education had changed over the years saying:

As far back as school ive always done fairly well achedemically however I always felt I was Just going through the motions with littel direction about where I wanted to take things further. I believe that not having any quantitive future goals or ambitions led me into crime. While prison is undoubtedly negative, it does

give you an opportunity to evaluate not only whether you did wrong but more importantly how to do what is right.

As this letter continued, it became apparent that the writer had experienced the problem of churn as it had taken him some time to be able to successfully submit an application due to unforeseen circumstances. These included administrative errors, mislaid application forms and prison transfers. He explained that the period of time during which he had been unable to apply for education funding had made him more aware of his desire to engage in purposeful activity to stimulate his mind. Evidently, delays in prisoners beginning and completing education courses is a concern as it leaves them idle without the mental stimulation created by the experience of doing education.

This writer then went on to discuss his goals for the future. He aimed to start his own fitness business providing personal training in clients' homes. The fitness course he completed in 2010 was therefore very relevant to this employment goal. He wanted to study the introductory law course through intrigue as a result of his own experiences. He was interested to find out the way that law is taught and compare it to his experiences of the law in practice. He felt that this course would give him the skills to analyse, evaluate and draw conclusions to give him the necessary tools to have a realistic chance of avoiding becoming part of an increasing re-offending statistic. Interestingly, when this writer talked about the importance of increasing his employability, he did not however address how realistic his planned route to employment was. Because this writer did not tell his reader audience about the crime he had committed and the full length of his sentence, it was difficult to consider the implications that his particular crime may have had on his future employment prospects. This person was writing from a category B prison which meant that although he had not been given a sentence in a maximum-security prison, it had been deemed necessary by the court that he should be in a prison where it should be made very difficult to escape due to the level of threat he potentially posed to the public. The likelihood that he would be able to establish a successful personal fitness business that would require him to

enter people's homes by himself on a regular basis seemed doubtful based on what can be understood about him through his letter. This is concerning given that his successful resettlement may have been based to a large extent on him achieving this goal. It is interesting, from this letter, to consider whether prisoners are being given sufficient advice by support staff to be able to create *realistic* and *achievable* employment goals, as recommended by PET.

In Letter 19 the writer actually demonstrated to the reader his newly learnt skills having said he thought he had better 'brush up' on his Maths. It may be that the writer talked about his Maths skills specifically to prove his suitability for studying the course for which he had requested funding - 'Introducing Environment'. He said:

*So I thought I had better brush up on my Maths for instance π or Pi is the Greek Equivalent of Roman p and is used **in** Maths to represent the Ratio of the Circumference of a Circle to its Diameter $\pi = 3.14, 3.142, 3.141592653589793238462643382795$ But even then it's not a hundred per cent exact. Somebody has calculated it to two Billion Decimal places (BUT THEY SHOULD GET OUT MORE HA! HA!).*

These demonstrations of knowledge continued throughout the letter moving on later to algebra and a discussion about how he could calculate how much weight a wooden beam of a certain length would be able to support. These demonstrations led to the writer's conclusion about how such knowledge would help him in his chosen course and to eventually become a qualified engineer. He explained that he had always been in the "building game" and that he had seen on the news recently that the government was "crying out for engineers".

In the extract above the writer used humour, something that would not necessarily be expected from a letter of this kind. However, humour was found in more than one letter in this sample. For example, in 'Letter 63' (from the 'Good News' file), the writer said:

Once again, THANK YOU, my future looks very bright – (not orange – haha)...

Although some might argue that using casual humour in a letter that is supposed to be formal to a degree is not appropriate, my own interpretation is that the use of humour demonstrated the prisoner as a person who had not forgotten how to be able to find certain things amusing despite the emotional strain caused by the experience of imprisonment. The extract showed the use of humour relating to a well known television advert for the mobile phone network Orange© and this, I believe, was the writer's way of connecting to the real world, reminding the reader that he was not completely cut off from some aspects of life that people in the free community engage with on a daily basis (see Jewkes, 2002: 116).

During the interview with Mike, he said that he had enjoyed education in prison more than he had at school. He found enjoyment in gaining new knowledge and explained that he had always chosen to do education when in prison because he felt he should better himself. Mike had completed courses in CLAIT (computer literacy and information technology), Literacy, Numeracy and Drug Awareness. He felt he would gain more from these types of courses because the certificates didn't say 'HMP' on them unlike some of the more vocational courses. For Mike, he proposed that this would give him more options for employment when he was eventually released. Speaking about the importance of education he said:

You don't realize the importance of education when you are young.

He told me that he would find himself wishing he could go back in time and tell this to his younger self. He saw prison education as using time wisely and said:

It's given me time to reflect and think about what I feel I need to do...getting a trade, working, getting a property and getting my life settled.

The interviews with prison teachers and education managers revealed a broader discussion about the employability aspect of prison education and the evident need for differentiation in how we think about the purpose of prison education across different prison categories. It was noted during the course of these interviews that the funding being provided is for employability skills rather than social skills and that there is a lack of interest in prisoners who are not within the last two years of their sentence. One teacher commented:

Once I knew about the employability farce, I thought it's fair enough for lower category prisoners, because they're going to go back into the outside world. But when you get a prison like this one (category A) where it's unlikely they'll get out, there's a different reason for education. I don't think they realize that by keeping them busy and keeping their brains going it's stopping them from doing something disruptive.

(Teacher D)

It was evident from this set of interviews that prison education staff have been put in a position whereby employability has to be central to teaching and learning. It was made clear that all education now has to be delivered under the umbrella of 'employability' meaning that education staff are finding themselves having to be more creative with their planning and delivery to adapt the courses to deliver some things that aren't seen

as relevant to what they want to teach. Some teacher participants were particularly vocal about the suitability of employability-focused education for category A prisoners.

I don't think for one minute it's about employability, who's going to employ them? There's people leaving university and not getting jobs... Employability for me just doesn't come into it - I have to put it into my teaching, but it's difficult for me to tell a lie.

(Teacher E)

The category A prison staff presented the embedding of employability into the education curriculum as an unrealistic burden that had created a barrier to delivering the course content that they felt appropriate to their learners. As will be seen later in the thesis, the majority of the staff interviewed knew their learners well - in some cases they had known them for more than a decade. As such, they had very specific ideas on the kind of curriculum they felt appropriate for their learners. Encapsulating the views held by most of the prison educators interviewed, a participant said:

Employability is what we hear about all the time now. We're a secondary thing now instead of education for its own sake. It's just a conveyor belt you know - get em through, get em through quick; they want people through a lot quicker now. It's all a business plan and it's all about making money.

(Teacher A)

The tone of this perspective echoes the sentiments of those who are not in favour of a payment-by-results system, which was previously noted as having received unfavourable responses. It was noted that Paul Cottrell, UCU's head of policy saw this system as severely risking a reduction in more generally life-enhancing learning for all prisoners other than those serving long-term sentences. The views expressed by the participant above however suggests that even prisoners with long sentences are being

affected by the new system due to the inability for prisoners to stay on courses for longer durations. Comparatively, the writers and category C prisoners who discussed education for employability did so describing it primarily as a means to an end (or at least a potential end). The likelihood of actual employment after release was not discussed by these participants and some seemed oblivious (or perhaps numb) to the challenges they faced ahead when attempting to find employment when released.

ii. Education for the Educated

One of the most interesting themes to have emerged from the letters was that a number of prisoners had had very positive and successful educational experiences in the past. Having become so used to seeing statistics relating to the lack of educational attainment of the prison population, these findings are refreshing given that prison education opportunities are primarily directed at those who are educationally deficient. The Bromley Briefings Factfile 2010 stated that ‘48% of prisoners are at, or below the level expected of an 11-year-old in reading, 65% in numeracy and 82% in writing’ (Prison Reform Trust, 2010: 50). Therefore, it has been important to discover that some of the participants’ experiences of education have been quite the opposite. These glimpses of the positive role that education has played in some prisoners’ lives create a different picture of prisoners’ educational pasts than one might typically expect to see. In ‘letter 58’ the writer introduced himself as a *“bright individual with a strong thirst for knowledge”*. He said he wanted to make constructive use of his time in prison and it was immediately evident after reading only a couple of sentences of this letter that it had been written by an educated individual. The writer’s written expression and sentence construction went beyond that which might be expected in such a collection of letters, especially having seen so many that demonstrated writing difficulties. The following extract shows this writer talking about his previous achievements in education.

Throughout my time at school, I was always considered to be amongst the handful of the most gifted and talented students of

my age group, always achieving the highest of exam results and completing work to an exceptional standard. During this time I also made some great accomplishments such as being entered into a Junior Mathematics Challenge, which was targeted at fourteen to sixteen-year-olds, when I was only thirteen. Over 200,000 entries were submitted from schools nationwide, of which the highest scoring 6% of students were awarded gold certificates. To this day, I am proud to be in possession of one of these gold awards which I achieved with a score of 100% in the test.

Half way through the letter the writer revealed that he was excluded from school at the age of 15. He said that unfortunate circumstances and a troubled childhood contributed to continued misbehavior and resulted in him being sent to a Secure Training Centre after being charged for committing grievous bodily harm. Between going to the Secure Training Centre and beginning his current prison sentence, the writer took part in virtual classroom courses from home limiting him to sit GCSE examinations in Maths, English and Science at foundation level (meaning that he would only be able to achieve a maximum C grade). The next steps taken by this writer in pursuit of his education demonstrated his significant dedication to learning. He said:

With a great deal of persistence, I was able to convince the relevant people to make an exception and apply for me to sit the higher paper for my Maths exam which concluded in my achievement of an A in Maths, and three Cs in English and Double Science, as opposed to the twelve A-A that I was predicted whilst at school.*

Although he achieved an A grade in GCSE Maths, the writer was clearly aware of the gap between what he eventually achieved and what he felt he should have achieved given

his academic ability. He was clear in his assumption that this occurred as a result of being in custody during an earlier part of his life. After achieving only 4 GCSEs, he was not able to apply to go to college to study Maths, Physics, Business and Accounting as planned and instead he took part in work experience in motor vehicle engineering. He then decided to pursue a national diploma in general engineering and in an attempt to avoid any potential distractions, he relocated to study this course. Living alone was more difficult than he had imagined and despite having two part-time jobs, he resorted to selling drugs to live more comfortably. This resulted in him being charged and sentenced just two weeks before the end of the two-year course.

Describing his experiences since being in prison, this writer explained that he had been trained as a Toe By Toe mentor to help prisoners he described as being 'less fortunate'. This description of less educated prisoners emphasized that he continued to value education as he considered himself to be more fortunate than others with limited educational abilities. The elements of his life story that he chose to tell and his clear educational ability exposed this writer as seemingly not a typical candidate for prison education application, or indeed for prison itself. The way in which the letter had been written gave very little information about the more difficult times in this person's life, especially the events that led to his school exclusion. One could argue that this omission in information is significant, as the writer had chosen not to divulge more than very brief details about how he went from such academic success to exclusion from school and eventual imprisonment. When reading this letter, I felt that the writer had written continuously about his education as a way of distracting himself and his audience from distressing experiences such as his troubled childhood. It is also evident that the writer seemed to use his educational success as a way of neutralizing the mistakes that he made in the past by writing far more about his positive educational experiences than anything else. This writer differentiated himself from other prisoners as being more educated than those 'less fortunate'. An interesting question that arises from this is how we can justify providing prison education opportunities for inmates who are already educated, and this will be discussed later in the chapter.

During the interview with Mark, he spoke about not wanting to take part in supporting the learning of other offenders because he would find it frustrating that some people were so “stupid” and “thick”. Mark also commented on the fact that he didn’t like the classroom environment and that this must have been because of his negative experience of school. Other participants shared a fear of the classroom, one being the writer of ‘Letter 73’ who said:

I was initially quite fearful and anxious about being in a classroom due to old memories of school and a lack of belief in my ability to succeed so the correspondence route was perfect for me. I was able to study in my own time and didn’t have to worry about comparing myself with others as I would’ve done in a classroom setting.

Mark went on to tell me that he had wanted to do level 3 qualifications in prison but that the rejection of funding applications had prevented him from being able to do so. He had never experienced any negativity from other inmates for choosing to do education, however his brother who had served time at a different prison had been “given grief” for this. Mark felt he personally had quite high status amongst his group of friends in prison and that this made prison life much easier. He said that he put on a show in front of other inmates but that he could then be himself when alone in his cell. This clearly reflects Goffman’s (1959) concept of ‘backstage’ and ‘front stage’ presentations of self whereby interactions with other people happen on the ‘stage’ and away from this area, ‘performances’ could be prepared. In the case of Mark, his backstage was his cell where he did not feel he had to put on a show for his inmate audience and was able to engage with his true self - part of which involved writing poetry. Although Mark was very much aware of the way he switched between his backstage and front stage identities *and* the fact that he was happy to tell me he did this, I wondered which identity I was witnessing during our discussion and whether the

audience I provided was sufficient to cause him to be his front stage self during some parts of the interview. Mark then spoke to me further about his poetry, which was important to him because it was “*a piece*” of him which may well have been part of the process of nurturing his backstage self. He said that it made him very glad that he was good at English because it meant he was able to write poetry every day.

Speaking about his experience of education generally, Mark said that education had given him satisfaction and the ability to express himself with a better range of vocabulary. I got the impression that having a better grasp of English language and vocabulary made Mark feel superior to other prisoners, or at least made him feel somewhat separate from those who lacked educational ability. I wondered whether his good grasp of English and vocabulary had been one of the tools he had used to gain his self-professed high inmate status. Regardless of whether or not this was the case, it had certainly allowed Mark to retain some sense of outward confidence.

Interviews with education staff further highlighted the barriers to higher-level education that Mark discussed. All of the teachers interviewed made a point of discussing their disappointment and frustration in the retraction of higher-level qualifications being delivered in the classroom meaning that they were only able to take learners to a maximum of level 2. One teacher participant said:

We used to be able to offer GCSE and A Level and we can't do that anymore. We had more success rates with GCSE programmes than functional skills in some cases. There needs to be a more seamless progression of education opportunities - because of funding constraints there is this more obvious cap appearing on what's available.

(Teacher C)

Returning to the argument discussed in the previous part of this chapter about the need to differentiate education for long-term prisoners, the same participant added:

The funding for long-term inmates needs to be looked at differently. It has to be more challenging for them; otherwise it can be frustrating for them.

(Teacher C)

Revealing more about the move away from the face-to-face provision of higher-level qualifications, another teacher said that funding had been retracted because courses at GCSE level and above were not seen as relevant to adults. Discussing this point further the participant was frustrated by the fact that they were no longer able to teach GCSE but had to teach employability which they regarded as odd because they saw the chance of prisoners being able to use the employability qualification as no greater than using GCSE or A Level. I too would argue that the retraction of face-to-face GCSE courses seems strange given the increasing number of jobs that require GCSE English and Maths qualifications in order for an application to be considered.

It is therefore evident that teaching staff and prisoners alike have found frustration in the limitation on higher-level courses for more educated prisoners – such courses are now only accessible via distance learning. It was clear when speaking to prisoners and staff that both wanted the ability to push prisoners to reach their potential but that there is now a significant barrier which has reduced opportunities for further and higher education and made it more difficult for those wanting to pursue these goals.

iii. Learning the Law

During the process of analyzing the letters, I noted that a number of prisoners were applying to the Prisoners' Education Trust for funding to study law courses. A common reason for this was wanting the opportunity to understand their rights as prisoners and

to ensure that their own experiences were in accordance with their legal rights. In 'Letter 48' the writer explained that he would like to study 'Starting with law'⁷ - a course available through the Open University. He explained:

*After completing this course it will alot easier for me to understand my legal rights and rights of society. This course will help me **in** understanding my legal responsibilities, examine how these affect me and other people at different points and stages of life.*

Although the extract suggests the writer wanted to study law to understand his rights and legal responsibilities, he was not entirely clear about his interest in the way that understanding the law might affect him. Given the powerlessness experienced by the prison population, learning about law may have been an attempt on the part of the writer to regain some sense of control. Understanding the law would mean that he may gain some knowledge held by those who have power over him. This argument was supported by the interview with Paul who actively sought to learn more about the law relating to the possession of drugs. In the case of this interview, Paul wanted this knowledge to eventually be able to 'catch out' the system. This could have also been the writer's reason for wanting to study the law. This highlights the important point about the way in which some prisoners actively seek to learn about the law during prison sentences as a reaction to the deprivation of autonomy (Sykes, 1958).

The writer of 'Letter 48' had a different reason for wanting to study law - one that was certainly unique amongst participants in this study. He explained:

...it was my late father's wish that I study law like my sister who is a qualified barrister.

⁷ *Starting with law* explores key legal concepts such as legal capacity and the rights and responsibilities of the individual, beginning with childhood, through to adulthood and finally into old age (Open University Online, 2012)

In a letter that said relatively little about the prisoner directly, the above statement says a great deal. Upon finding out that he was in part acting on the wish of his late father, I was able to understand that his motives for wanting to be educated were not simply to improve himself because it was the right thing to do or to regain some sense of control. This writer's reason for wanting to do education was certainly, in part, a result of his consideration for the goals his father had for him. This suggests that the bereavement he had experienced had a lasting impact and that the stark contrast between his and his sister's lives was a persistent reminder of this. Through his words, the writer revealed himself to be a person who was not only trying to follow the life course (see Jewkes, 2005) that his father had envisioned for him, he was also trying to cope with his sibling having already achieved this. He repeatedly wrote about wanting to be a responsible person, which given his circumstances not only meant that he wanted to act in a responsible way towards others, but also that he wanted to be responsible for himself. He wrote:

I want to be responsible in order to change myself and achieve something.

Given that the interviews with prisoners in many cases highlighted a sense of disillusionment with the law (as in the aforementioned interview with Paul), it was initially surprising to find that this was not stated as a motivating factor to study law in the letters analysed. A 2011 report in *The Guardian* discussed the story of Malcolm Lang, a serving prisoner studying for a law degree during his sentence. The report told of Lang's motivation through disillusionment with the law as a result of his personal experiences and noted that prison officers told Lang it was not suitable for prisoners to study law and actively tried to dissuade him from pursuing this educational route (Moorhead 2011). Due to such difficulties and in some cases dissuasion experienced by prisoners wanting to pursue studies in law, The Longford Trust introduced the Patrick Pakenham Awards as part of their scholarship programme. The aim of the annual

scholarship is to offer support to young serving and ex-prisoners who wish to continue their rehabilitation by going to a UK university or equivalent institution to read Law (Longfordtrust.org, 2015).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, it is evident that the nature of the letters analysed could inhibit the true motivation for doing education to be stated in some cases. When applying for funding, it appears that there is an understandable reluctance to mention motivations that could be read negatively. With this in mind, my initial surprise at the lack of such content in prisoners' letters was quickly altered, as it would be unlikely to find many letters written to the Prisoners' Education Trust (if any) that state feelings of disillusionment towards the criminal justice system or feelings of injustice for fear of being unsuccessful in an application for funding. Evidently however, interviews with serving prisoners found evidence of some being more forthcoming about negative attitudes and feelings of disillusionment.

iv. Helping others

Prisoners' perceptions of educational experiences appear in some cases to drive an ambition to educate others using the expertise of their own life experiences. Data from the present study shows that having an understanding of what it means to be educated can motivate prisoners to encourage others to learn. Throughout the course of the data collection for this study, there were numerous mentions by prisoners and staff alike of peer mentoring programmes operating within prisons. Peer mentoring schemes capitalize on the shared understanding and commonality that prisoners can have with one another in terms of language, culture and experience to create the availability of more support for prisoners (South et al., 2012). The nature and scope of peer intervention schemes vary widely and some of the models currently in place include Prison Listeners, Health Trainers, Toe By Toe reading mentors and the St Giles Trust Peer Advice Project (ibid.).

Given the educational nature of the Toe By Toe⁸ scheme, this was most frequently mentioned by participants both during interviews and in the letters analysed. The writer of 'Letter 10' explained that he had been a Toe By Toe rep for a number of years, which he described as being a therapeutic experience and as a result of this he applied to be a listener⁹. Describing the experience of helping others as being 'therapeutic' suggests that helping other prisoners pursue their education could in turn act as a coping mechanism for 'listeners' by giving them some form of responsibility and can help to develop a sense of self worth.

A librarian participant however raised an issue which considered the caution that now needs to be taken when appointing Toe By Toe mentors. The librarian explained that as a result of the change in prison education rules causing a "*bums on seats in classrooms*" approach to be taken followed by the need to get prisoners through education courses quickly, prisoners were becoming mentors even in cases where they were not necessarily suitable for the role. The Librarian said:

Some will apply to Toe By Toe or be a listener because they want to keep their Enhanced and that's not good. If their heart's not in it, they're not helping other prisoners. And when prisoners are on Enhanced they cost more, they're paid more - so if they're not going to be a mentor or something else like if they're an appellant, they can't have their enhanced - which saves the prison money.

(Librarian A)

⁸ Toe By Toe is a reading scheme designed to dramatically change the reading age of the student. As a result, Toe By Toe students also benefit from an improvement in their spelling abilities (www.toe-by-toe.co.uk).

⁹ 'The Listener Scheme is a peer support scheme whereby selected prisoners are trained and supported by Samaritans, using their same guidelines, to listen in complete confidence to their fellow prisoners who may be experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide' (Samaritans Online, 2012).

In such cases, the motivation to help others is found to be driven by a need to maintain an Enhanced IEP level – thus the incentive in some cases becomes linked to the privileges gained by Enhanced status including additional visits, additional time for association, more private cash, higher rates of pay and where possible better surroundings. Another issue raised by this participant that must not be ignored is the potential for recent government cuts to impact on the IEP scheme. The concern here is the potential for prisoners to be discouraged to achieve Enhanced status as a mechanism for saving money – something that this participant alluded to very strongly.

v. Passing Time

A theme that constantly emerged from the letters was making good use of time in prison by studying. The theme of time has been discussed in the literature on the sociology of imprisonment (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Coyle, 2005; Medlicott, 2001; Matthews, 2009) acknowledging time as a core challenge in the prison experience. 'Prison distorts time, it deprives it of its use-value while riddling it with an institutional, alienated and amorphous rhythm. Stress, tension, nervous and psychosomatic diseases all derive from this institutional imposition of time' (Ruggerio, 1991:74; cited in Jewkes, 2002: 10). The time spent serving a prison sentence has come to be known as 'doing time' (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Coyle, 2005; Medlicott, 2001; Matthews, 2009) by prisoners and prison sociologists alike. It has been argued that the passage of time is central to the experience of imprisonment and is a key discussion in the sociology of imprisonment and punishment. It is suggested that institutional confinement transforms the way that time is experienced and that time in prison is 'wasted' rather than 'spent' (Matthews, 2009). In their 1972 study on long-term imprisonment, Cohen and Taylor found that the emptiness of time and personal deterioration over time was one of the major concerns of their participants. Matthews (2009) explained that because during a prison sentence the present is placed in suspension, the ability to link the past to the future is limited as the meaning of time is 'lost'.

The strict routine of the prison inevitably results in a sense of the loss of control of personal time and can create the perception that time has been lost or has become suspended. Highlighting that time is important to all people, Matthews (2009) argued that time is one of the few attributes, which the rich *and* the poor possess in roughly equal quantities. He said 'What, therefore, could be more reasonable than that those who transgressed the law should be given a form of punishment whose effects would be experienced equally by all?' (Matthews, 2009: 37).

On more than one occasion during this study, prison staff commented on the need for prisoners to have something to do to pass the time for the sake of their own wellbeing. The prison governor interviewed said:

Education has to be stimulating and interesting to occupy prisoners' time and maintain their mental health and wellbeing.
(Governor)

Interestingly, all of the teachers interviewed for this study were in agreement with the governor's view that passing time was an important part of education in itself. Many of the teacher participants spoke of how they had frequently imagined themselves as a prisoner and had come to understand the often-desperate need for something productive to do to get through each day. It was a common argument that the mental stimulation achieved through educational activities enabled the passage of time with an enhanced ability to cope with the challenges faced by their imprisoned learners. One teacher said:

The value in education is that they need something to keep their brain exercising, it stimulates their thought process. It will hopefully make them a better citizen on release and a better prisoner on the wings. Hopefully they will be a better individual in the outside world. That's why it's sometimes disappointing

that we are restricted as to how far we can take them in their education.

(Teacher C)

An example of the discussion of time from the set of letters was in 'Letter 4'. This writer was applying for partial funding for a social sciences course to "extend [his] knowledge into new areas". He left higher education at the age of 22 and had not studied since. He explained:

I am very keen to push myself to study at this level to keep my mind active, to stretch me and, of course, to make a useful use of my time here.

The way that he wrote about wanting to push and stretch himself to study at a higher level described how he wanted to use his time in prison to challenge himself and discover the extent of his own intellectual abilities. As a person who had already experienced higher education, one would assume that this was an enjoyable experience given his choice to return to education at a difficult time in his life. He went on to say:

...I want to see if I can do really well at this. Setting difficult but achievable target will help provide purpose and demonstrate to potential employers that my learning abilities are (hopefully) a good standard and refreshed.

This reason the writer gave for wanting to do education in prison was particularly interesting. Explaining that he wanted to show potential employers that his learning abilities had been refreshed (and not deteriorated during time spent in prison) showed that he was looking to the future with a realistic perspective on what potential employers may question. It is possible that potential employers would want to know whether this person's learning abilities had been compromised as a result of the

experience of imprisonment. Therefore, the writer was able to show that one of the reasons educated prisoners may continue to study while in prison is not only for the purpose of making constructive use of time, but also for the purpose of refreshing, nurturing and preserving existing intellect and educational abilities.

One interviewee in particular acknowledged the issue of time during imprisonment. In my discussion with James, he described being in prison as a “*waste of life*”. James referred on more than one occasion to his age when talking about how his life was being wasted. He said:

I see prisoners who are 40 and 50 years old who still act 20 years old because they don't know any better, because they haven't learnt anything new.

When we spoke about this, it seemed to be something that disturbed him to a large extent. I could see him contemplating what it might be like to be a 40 or 50-year-old prisoner, rather than being 24 as he was. It seemed that what he had identified was an in-prison age stasis - a black hole of time that he was very much aware of and that he could see emerging in front of him. This experience discussed by James supports Jewkes' (2005) argument that the feeling of being in stasis while the world moves on only serves to intensify the experience of ageing and fears of physical and mental deterioration. James seemed to be significantly affected by this and seeing this had an impact on me personally. He spoke quietly with his head down and his fingers clasped together, moving them irritably as he became a little anxious at times. I felt it appropriate to remind James that he was 24, not 50, and that if he were to remain focused on his goal of working with children in the community (as we had discussed), then he would not have to experience being older in prison. It appeared that the pure thought of the experience of aging in prison was enough to make James consider imprisonment more deeply. It was clear that the passing of time was an issue that would remain present in his mind during his sentence.

Mike also felt that his time was being wasted in prison, despite studying numerous education courses. He had brothers and sisters who were successful in their careers and family lives. At the age of 38 it had become clear to Mike that enough time had passed during this and other prison sentences that he was beginning to lose the opportunity to achieve certain life goals. He told me that he thought by the age of 38 he would have a wife, children and a stable family life. Evidently for Mike, these missed opportunities would serve to be the most devastating aspect of his imprisonment. Not only did he not have a wife or children, his siblings' achievement of these things, in addition to career success, served as a constant reminder of what was missing from Mike's life and what he feared he would never be able to have. He was therefore experiencing a period of liminality, a complete stasis of self with only the ability to see others living his life goals.

The concept of liminality was developed by Van Gennep (1908) who argued that when an individual experiences a lifecourse transition, they change status and they must be separated from their previous position within social structure. They must then occupy a liminal space which disengages them from both their past and future roles, before finally being incorporated into a new, relatively stable and well-defined position in society. Walker and Worrall (2006) discussed liminality by arguing that losses such as this become more difficult with the passage of time. Although Walker and Worrall discussed this issue in the context of the indeterminate sentencing of women prisoners, their arguments are relevant to Mike's case nonetheless. They suggested that factors including the ticking of the biological clock make a prison sentence a greater punishment for women than men (Walker and Worrall, 2006). However, it was apparent that during his sentence Mike was experiencing the same kind of personal struggle. Where Walker and Worrall discussed the dilemma of women approaching and passing childbearing age, I also noticed that Mike shared this struggle through the realization that he did not have any children and he did not have a stable relationship that he felt would make this possible. He was concerned about his failure to experience certain expected life events - primarily getting married and having children. It has been argued that a failure to

experience such events can pose a serious challenge to an individual's self-identity (Jewkes, 2005) and this was certainly evident in Mike's case. He appeared lost within himself and unable to locate his current place in his lifecourse.¹⁰

As previously noted, there were participants in this study who discussed the way that education could alleviate some of the difficulties faced concerning the passage of time in prison such as those described by Mike. Kevin was very frank in saying that he felt prison education was purely a way of passing time. Over the course of his prison sentences he had completed courses in brick laying (referred to as 'bricks' by prisoners in this establishment), English, Maths, iMedia, Advanced Literacy and Art. At the time the interview took place Kevin was still studying Art and there were others like him who had completed a long list of courses.

For Andrew, taking part in a welding course was a way to pass the time. He described it simply as "*something to do*". He didn't feel that education in prison had been of major importance to him, it was just a way to fill the day. He didn't see education courses as being useful in other ways and he said that in prison, people should be learning life skills such as how to pay bills, how to look for work and how to take care of themselves on a day-to-day basis. From Andrew's perspective, people keep coming back to prison because they don't know how to take care of themselves in the most basic of ways on the outside.

vi. Ticking Boxes

In several of the interviews with serving prisoners, education was described as a 'box-ticking' activity. By this they meant that the government were 'ticking boxes' by providing prisoners with educational opportunities. They felt that in doing so, it made

¹⁰ 'The notion of lifecourse implies not only a chronological order and pattern as we make the transition from one stage of life to the next, but it also connoted an 'ideal' whereby significant events of rites of passage...occur at the right time' (Jewkes, 2005: 367).

policy makers look as though they were doing the right thing by giving prisoners the opportunity to better themselves. These participants were therefore suggesting that education was not being provided in prison because it could genuinely help prisoners to reform but that providing prisoners with education somehow made the government and indeed prison establishments look outwardly better - presumably because they would then be seen to be more humane and proactive in rehabilitating the prison population.

This was a view expressed by Darren who told me that he had done a number of education courses during his numerous terms of imprisonment because there was *"nowt else to do"*. Darren described himself as having been rebellious until he was 21 and therefore was unwilling during this time to engage in education courses in prison. When he arrived at the current establishment he was not given a skills assessment and was assigned to a 'bricks' course. He felt that he was just filling a place on a course so that the prison would look like it was operating as expected. During a prison sentence that Darren had served some 17 years before, he learned to read and write to be able to write letters to family and friends. To Darren, education in prison was now only a time-filling activity and not something that changed the overall prison experience drastically or indeed the prisoners who engaged in such initiatives. He felt very negatively towards those doing courses relating to drug addiction saying, *"Druggies are pampered"*. In his opinion, if prisons didn't provide drug treatment programmes, they would be *"worried they'll get sued"*.

From Darren's perspective and indeed the perspective of some other prisoner participants, the main purpose of prison education is to uphold the image of the prison. It was suggested by some prisoners that courses such as 'victim awareness', which is done via paperwork in prisoners' cells, are delivered in a way that is not in line with the purposeful image being projected by policy makers. What I understood from Darren's perspective in particular was that prisoners who did not engage well with education were not necessarily opposed to the delivery of education programmes. However, what

appeared to be a point of frustration for some was the delivery of education courses that did not seem to have a meaningful purpose. In the case of the victim awareness course, which was discussed during my interview with Andrew, neither the process nor the outcome of the course appeared to have any real value due to a lack of opportunity to discuss the topics in a meaningful context. Andrew therefore experienced this course as being pointless with very little resulting value.

An interview with a prison teacher corroborated these findings. The teacher said:

The learners would not come down to education to do paperwork relating to victims and health and safety. So they come to education and I let them do some other activities that they can get something out of on the condition that they do their paperwork in their cell.

(Teacher D)

The types of courses characterized by a lack of personal engagement (where engagement with others is arguably essential) could become a source of frustration rather than a source of a meaningful experience for prisoners. Providing prisoners with educational activities that are experienced as having little meaning for prisoners and staff alike evidently creates the feeling of being fobbed off with 'box ticking' activities that result in achievement that is only experienced by those who run the establishment.

In the same way that some prisoners identified education as a box ticking activity, some teachers also viewed the employability elements of the curriculum as such. For both prisoners and (as will be seen later) teaching staff, it became evident that some aspects of education created boundaries to progression through the sense of having to do something because it is a rule made by 'those above'. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, and mentioned briefly herein, it is not only prisoners who experience limitations and barriers when it comes to education and this in part creates the 'us and them'

attitude that prisoners and prison teachers together have in common against the prison authorities.

6.4 Shaping Prison Education Experiences: Families and School

When discussing educational experiences with serving prisoners and ex-prisoners, a number of recurrent themes emerged that were also identified in the letters analysed. These themes focused on issues surrounding experiences of school and also, participants' relationships with their parents when they were of schooling age. This part of the chapter will explore some of these issues to provide additional biographical accounts on how experiences of school may have shaped attitudes and approaches to doing education in prison.

i. Relationships with Parents

Discussions of participants' relationships with their parents were particularly evident in the interviews with ex-prisoners. Of the three ex-prisoners interviewed, two described strained relationships with their fathers – both of which involved strict physical discipline. One participant said that on reflection, family life had been quite dysfunctional due to the fear of physical discipline from his father. The participant then described becoming desensitized to these kinds of feelings, which impacted on the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures at school. He said:

We would laugh when we got caned and would think to ourselves 'you should see what my dad does at home, this is nothing!'

(Participant 2)

The same participant described how there had been a great deal of pressure to do well in school from his parents. Rather than through encouragement, this pressure came in a negative form, as the participants' parents would compare him with other children who were achieving better results. In addition, a language barrier meant that it was not possible for the participants' parents to help with schoolwork at home or read to him on an evening. He reflected on this as being particularly significant given the ability to compare his own experience to that which he had created for his own children (see Boswell and Wedge, 2002). The other ex-prisoner participant who had experienced a negative parental relationship (Participant 1) described how his father would refer to him as a *"sissy"* and *"soft"* and would frequently encourage him to be tougher. On one occasion, the participant's father encouraged a fight between he and the next-door neighbour and shouted at him to continue being aggressive throughout the altercation. It was the participant's feeling that his father's time in the armed forces had created a need for overt hegemonic masculinity to be expressed and this was instrumental in his approach to parenting.

In both cases, the strained relationships with their fathers had caused the aforementioned participants to be resentful of their fathers and of authority in general. Despite their fathers' encouragement of school at times, the physical violence that occurred for disciplinary purposes caused a rebellious reaction, which manifested itself in two different ways. Whereas one participant became overtly rebellious inside and outside of school and saw teachers in a similar way to his father (Participant 1), the other participant found himself becoming increasingly introverted and isolated from both his father and others – including other children at school which had a significant impact on the participant's ability to form and maintain relationships throughout his later life (Participant 2).

In contrast to these experiences, the third ex-prisoner participant (Participant 3) had always maintained a good relationship with his parents, who made a conscious effort to

ensure that he had an enjoyable schooling experience. This participant had refused to attend school following *“a couple of incidents of bullying by teachers”*. Consequently, his parents, who had become concerned that he may have had difficulty with authority, decided to send him to a boarding school that took a liberal, non-authoritarian approach to education delivery. Although the participant described himself as *“playing some anti-authoritarian cards”* during this schooling period, he reflected on the overall experience fondly and with appreciation for the fact that he had been schooled in a holistic way in what he described as a *“learning community”*.

The significance of relationships with parents is evidently important in the forming of views on authority more broadly. Despite the fact that the aforementioned participant (Participant 3) continued to show some anti-authoritarian behaviour at school, he considered this to be no more than the *“usual amount of mischief”* expected of any child. In the case of the participants who had particularly negative relationships with their fathers (Participant 1 and Participant 2), this contributed in some part to how they viewed authority figures, including school teachers and had a significant impact on their overall experience of school in earlier life.

ii. Altercations with School Teachers

Many of the participants in this study described particularly negative experiences that had occurred during their time at school. These incidents often involved altercations with teaching staff and reflected the negative feelings participants described as having towards authority figures as discussed above. In the case of serving prisoner participants who had negative experiences at school, for instance an altercation with a teacher, their speech and body language would change during our discussion to demonstrate anger. These participants tended to show frustration and became physically agitated when recounting such instances. This demonstrated that despite the years that had passed since these incidents occurred, the anger caused was still present within the

participants. Three specific incidents involving teachers were discussed in the interviews with Kevin, Mark and Joe – all of which resulted in school expulsion.

Kevin's schooling ended at the age of 15 when he was expelled for making a teacher cry. The teacher was female and he described her as being small in size and therefore an easy target. She had come to school with a new hair style and Kevin took the opportunity to mock her about this by running his fingers through her hair. The incident became out of control causing other staff members to become involved in the situation.

Mark, who at the beginning of our interview had not disclosed the fact that he had been expelled from school, later returned to this issue of his own accord and decided to tell me that he had not decided to drop out of school as he had previously stated. Following an argument with his woodwork teacher, Mark lit a cigarette in the classroom to provoke him. The teacher's reaction to this was to pin Mark against the classroom wall causing a bruise to his arm. Mark went on to tell me that the next day, his father went into the school and pinned the teacher against a wall in retaliation which reflected the aggression that other participants had described as being part of their own fathers' character. Mark was expelled despite his father's attempts to resolve the situation, albeit violently. Later in the interview, Mark revealed that in his first year of secondary school, he was bullied for being clever so he *"decided to give it up to be the class clown"*. He told me that he didn't think he would have ended up being expelled or eventually in prison had he not made this decision and always wondered whether he might have achieved his goal of becoming an English teacher if he had continued to apply himself to his studies and take a different attitude towards his school teachers.

When Joe told me his story of a violent altercation with his teacher, I was particularly interested to learn that this was the kind of behaviour his father had encouraged – in fact, Joe's father had specifically taught him to not comply with people of authority. The incident involving Joe occurred when he had misbehaved in class causing a teacher to grab him by his shirt. To get away from his teacher, Joe removed his shirt and at the

same time grabbed a piece of wood and swung it at the teacher. The teacher immediately went to report the incident during which time Joe went outside and brought a dead pigeon into the classroom, which he smeared across the teacher's desk. Joe described his overall schooling experience as being negative until he went to an exclusion school. He said that the teachers and teaching assistants were mainly ex police and ex army officers who he described as being "*the biggest teachers*" he had ever seen. He told me that he got on particularly well with one teacher who had 'put him in his place'. The teacher showed him physically that he was in control by pinning him down during a PE lesson as a result of his bad behaviour. This caused Joe to respect this teacher immediately. It was perhaps the case that this teacher was communicating with Joe in the only way he understood at that time – the way that his father had taught him was appropriate.

The relationship between prisoners and their prison teachers can be strained, which in some cases is a continuation of the relationships and attitudes experienced at school. Kevin felt that the teachers he encountered in prison presented themselves as being overtly superior to inmates. His attitude towards prison teachers appeared to have been specifically shaped by an occasion when he didn't agree with a teacher that a word was in the dictionary. Upon showing the teacher that it wasn't, thus proving them wrong, he was still told that he was incorrect. This experience caused the continuation of Kevin's negative feelings towards authoritative figures in an educational setting. It also enabled me to consider in more detail the cause of the altercation he had experienced with a teacher at school. I inferred from Kevin's pre and post prison experiences of education that a problem with authority could have been the root cause of his inability to view teachers in a different way and suggested that the altercation with a teacher at school was an opportunity for Kevin to experience a sense of dominance over an authority figure.

Mark appeared to carry his experiences of school with him into the prison environment. During our discussion, he commented on the fact that he didn't like classrooms and that

this must have been due to his negative experience of school. Joe on the other hand felt that in comparison to school, prison education was more structured and easier because classes were smaller and teachers had more time to spend with each individual. When it came to thinking about what prison education meant to Joe, he explained that it had given him the opportunity to use his time properly and had stopped him from judging people. In this case, the experience of education in prison had enabled Joe to reconsider his perception of his father's encouragement of anti-authoritarian attitudes. In addition, Joe revealing his homosexuality to his anti-authoritarian, racist and homophobic father and marrying a black man before being imprisoned had also been a significant step towards the reparation of his father's negative influences. The attitude shift experienced by Joe was inextricably linked to his relationship with his father, which then appeared to have altered his view of others, including teachers, through his study of social and cultural differences.

The relationship between prisoners and prison teaching staff was uncovered further during interviews with prison staff and will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

iii. Approaches to School Education

As seen in the previous part of the chapter, attitudes towards education are often shaped by the influence of parental figures. This was particularly the case for Joe whose father had actively encouraged him to pursue an anti-authoritarian attitude both in and outside of school. However, despite altercations with teachers and other negative incidents, participants' approaches to education were not always lacking in effort or interest. Rather than expressing a complete lack of interest in school, some participants spoke of being easily distracted and struggling to remain focused on school work, which is arguably not uncommon amongst non-prisoners. It was also common for prisoner interview participants to speak about the enjoyment of the social aspect of schooling, which often caused disinterest in taught classes.

Kevin was one such participant who explained that when he did go to school, he would get on with work when he could but would find it difficult to stay focused for whole lessons at a time. He found schoolwork boring and like many of the participants (and many people in wider society for that matter), found the company of his friends much more appealing. Of all of the interviews with prisoners, the participant who spoke in the most detail about the enjoyment of the social aspects of school was Mike. Mike had enjoyed school and said that he “*got on well*” there. He described himself as having been “*boyish but well behaved*”. He told me that at school he was not a trouble-causer and that he had very much valued the friendships he had made. He said:

People used to say that I was a ‘group’ person and that I wouldn’t be able to cope after school without my friends...I guess they were right.

It became apparent that Mike had experienced a significant sense of loss when leaving school - both of friends *and* a sense of belonging. As previously noted in this chapter during the discussion on passing time, Mike’s experiences of loss of attachment occurred periodically from leaving school and then through numerous prison sentences, which systematically continued to disconnect his social bonds (Hirschi, 1969) to his family and his life goals.

I noted when speaking with a number of the participants that when they recalled their experiences of school, their manner and body language would change. Regardless of whether experiences of school had been positive or negative, the participants appeared to temporarily revert back to the temperament of their old ‘school selves’. For instance, when participants talked about pulling pranks and being ‘boyish’, they would speak and act in a way that appeared mischievous. They would giggle and almost give themselves a reminiscent pat on the back for having triumphed in their frivolous ventures.

It is important to note that the research data showed a variety of school experiences and perspectives on school education. This has already been seen in the discussion on educated prisoners who had previously applied themselves to education in a positive way. Pete was another participant whose experience of school was very good. He described his school as being quite strict but that he got used to it quickly so it *“wasn’t unpleasant”*. He talked about having to have his uniform on properly and following all of the rules. He attended school until the age of 16 and achieved Bs and Cs in his CSEs. He particularly enjoyed Physics simply because he liked gaining new knowledge and he became very good at it. He described his school experience as being *“just normal”* and he also said that he *“didn’t truant or anything”*. He had good friends and was a good student.

iv. Truancy

In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit reported 30% of prisoners had been regularly truant from school (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). In 2012, the Ministry of Justice reported on a longitudinal cohort study of prisoners summarizing the results of the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) research. The study, which involved a sample of 3,849 prisoners, found 59% of prisoners reported having been regularly truant suggesting a significant increase, within this sample, from the 30% in the Social Exclusion Unit study in 2002 (Ministry of Justice, 2012). The report also noted that the likelihood of truancy did not differ for prisoners of different sentence lengths but that those who had reported regular truancy were more likely to be reconvicted following release (p. 15).

Although in the present study there were instances of prisoners having had positive experiences of school and not becoming involved in truancy, such as in the case of Pete noted above, truancy was an unsurprising common factor in a number of participants’ stories. Kevin said that he was often truant from school. Despite his mother and father separating when he was young, he recalled that on a number of occasions when he was truant, he would return home to find his father’s car parked outside. Although his father

did not play a very significant role in his life, the role that he did play was primarily disciplinary. Seeing his father's car outside his mother's house always meant that he had *"been found out"*. Dean also admitted he had been truant with friends *"every now and again"* and that in doing so he had become part of the *"wrong crowd"*. In a discussion about James' experience of school I learned that he spent much of his time in school thinking about how he could be making money instead of being in a classroom. He had a group of older friends with whom he was often truant. He explained that he found it difficult to see his older friends making money and was often truant with them; he estimated that as a teenager he would attend school for approximately one week in every four.

Many of the stories of school truancy involved such discussions of being with the 'wrong crowd', being impressed by and following older children's examples of truancy and coming to value making money above education. There was however a very different story of truancy which was particularly disturbing. This came from Darren, the oldest of the prisoner participants interviewed. He was 45 years old and serving a 20-year sentence for drug importation. His childhood experiences had left a lot to be desired due to his mother having a gambling addiction. This addiction had been part of his mother's life since his father had left when Darren was 4 years old. During the time that his parents were together, his father would regularly beat his mother. Darren then recalled his truancy from school. He remembered a truancy officer coming to the house regularly at which point his mother would lock him in a cupboard to hide him. He said that she found it easier to lock him in a cupboard to avoid detection by the truancy officer than to encourage him to attend school and engage in education.

v. Bullying

The discussions with serving and ex-prisoners uncovered experiences of school bullying. This often revealed a direct connection in bullying leading to truancy to avoid instances of violence. Prisoner participants told me the names they were called by bullies

including “*stinky kid*” (Darren) and “*posh boy*” (Richard). In such cases, the bullying experiences evidently had a lasting impression on the participants, although most participants did not outwardly display a specific difficulty in coping with such memories. However, in two specific cases, these experiences intensified feelings of isolation and loneliness and resentment towards others significantly.

When Paul told me that he had experienced bullying as a child, his sometimes aggressive and confrontational manner during our discussion made a little more sense to me. He described himself as having been a “*quiet kid*” and this caused him to “*twag off most of school*”. Through his truancy, Paul became involved with the travelling community and traveler culture, which involved fighting, drugs and crime. Paul described this experience by saying “*it gave me a head change*”. He talked about returning home feeling physically and mentally tougher than the little kid he had once been at school. Paul said that from that point, he wasn’t going to allow anyone to get the better of him again.

Paul’s story had clear similarities with that of one of the ex-prisoners interviewed. This participant’s father had been in the army during the participant’s schooling years causing him to move to different schools frequently with the inability to settle. The participant said:

Because my father was in the army, my education was destroyed.

(Participant 1)

He described primary school as being a happy time, however at secondary school he was bullied. He explained that having thick red hair and being shy and timid made him an easy target. He then said:

I refused to go to school because of fear. My father marched me into the school and the head master said he'd sort it out. But then he told the teachers who told the kids which made it worse!

(Participant 1)

Throughout the interview, the participant described his father as being a typical army father – hyper masculine, constant displays of bravado and a lack of tolerance for his son being “soft”. His father would tell him “*how to punch kids*” and would show him how to deal with bullies. There were frequent references during our discussion to feelings of isolation and loneliness, which were further impacted by teachers not knowing the “*army kids*” as well as the local children due to their frequent movement between schools. By the time the participant was 15, he had come to a stage where he didn’t go back to school. The lack of belonging and constant bullying had overshadowed his interest in art and writing and he no longer saw school life as possible but rather “*a waste of time*”. As will be seen in Chapter Eight, the sense of isolation and the resentment towards others caused by the bullying and the lack of attention from teachers filtered into the later parts of the participant’s life and eventually led to a specific desire to commit crime as a show of power over others.

In discussions of bullying and other instances where participants considered themselves to have experienced victimisation, I considered how this related to participants’ conceptions of how they had victimized others through their crimes. In each of the interviews conducted with serving prisoners, I spoke with the participants about the crimes they had committed and the extent to which they had thought about the impact they may have had on their victims. It was through having such discussions that I was able to identify some participants adopting techniques of neutralization – in one instance a participant used this terminology directly. ‘Techniques of neutralization’ is a theory of delinquency put forward by Sykes and Matza (1957). They argued there was evidence to suggest that delinquents do feel guilt and shame and that it was important to value this to be able to move away from the generalization of the delinquent as being

'...a hardened gangster in miniature' (Sykes and Matza, 1957: 665). In this theory, Sykes and Matza suggested that prior to committing a crime, young delinquents went through a process of neutralizing the deviant behaviour they were about to commit to make the violations acceptable. Sykes and Matza proposed five techniques of neutralization including the denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners and the appeal to higher loyalties.

Despite the fact that the theory is concerned with explaining how young offenders neutralize their offending behaviour prior to committing a crime, it is possible for it to be applied to the neutralizing explanations that some adult male offenders in this study retrospectively gave for the crimes they had committed. During the interview with Mark, he told me that he regularly stole cars for joy riding. I asked him how he felt about taking something that belonged to someone else. He said without hesitation, "*they've got insurance*".

He told me that he never really thought about the people whose cars he was stealing. Taking into consideration the techniques of neutralization theory, it could be argued that in saying his victims had insurance, Mark was neutralizing his behaviour retrospectively by adopting the denial of injury and the denial of the victim techniques. By saying his victims had insurance, meaning their possessions would be replaced, he was suggesting there was no real victim as a result of his crime and that it had not caused anyone to be physically harmed. This shows therefore that the techniques of neutralization theory has a significant part to play in explaining how adult offenders can and do neutralize their behaviour retrospectively when considering their past actions. During the interview with Mark when he neutralized his behaviour through the explanation that his victims had insurance, it became apparent that whether he genuinely believed this or not, it helped him to cope with and justify the actions he had taken. In doing so this allowed Mark to separate himself from other types of offenders - those who caused physical harm to their victims and those who take possessions that are irreplaceable. From my perspective, the technique that Mark had adopted was not

just a way for him to explain the lack of severity of his crime, it was also a way for him to maintain his own conception of self - that he was not a bad person who caused harm to others.

In the case of the ex-prisoner participant who experienced loneliness and isolation due to frequent bullying, the technique of neutralization he appeared to adopt to explain his criminal actions was a more complex application rooted in sense of being rejected by society. He said to me:

I had a hell of a chip on my shoulder...the way to get back at people was to be a criminal. I admired criminals with power and liked the way they dominated people with fear. I wanted people to fear me to get back at them. I wanted to turn the bullying on others.

(Participant 1)

Perhaps the most applicable technique of neutralization in this case is the denial of the victim. In continuing to see himself as a victim for the years of bullying he experienced by his peers, his father and to some extent his teachers, the participant had been able to 'block out' the victims of his crimes through the reasoning that he had already been rejected by society and that the crimes he committed against others were deserved. He actively sought out targets by way of gaining a sense of control and creating a new powerful identity for himself. He said:

I watched programmes and read up on the mafia. This became my main aim in life. I needed to get a reputation, so if someone was disrespectful to my mother, I would rob their shop at knife point for instance. I did this at an off licence where the shopkeeper was rude to my mother. After I did it, it made me feel

like I could do this again. I got a sense of being in control and building a reputation.

(Participant 1)

6.5 The Long and Short-Term Benefits of Prison Education

This chapter has identified that prisoners' educational abilities and experiences prior to imprisonment can vary greatly. Some participants in this study formed part of the proportion of the prison population who enter the prison with a distinct lack of education – the proportion who are 'entry level' and have become the primary target of employability-focused offender learning policy. The data reveals however that there are prisoners who are educated to higher levels prior to entry to prison and this leads to considering how the benefits of prison education can be both long-term and short-term.

In considering why educated prisoners need access to education during imprisonment, rather than thinking about long-term benefits such as employment, thought needs to be given to the short-term or 'in-prison' implications. Letter writers and prison education staff interviewed for this study said that doing education in prison can be a therapeutic experience providing a mental escape from the prison environment. Education also provides prisoners with a way to use time constructively – something previously discussed in this chapter. For those prisoners who are already educated to compulsory level or higher, having access to education can provide comfort in being able to do something familiar and fulfilling. Although engaging in prison education may not necessarily result in a major increase in employability for these prisoners, it can be argued to be important nonetheless by providing an opportunity for prisoners to protect themselves from the pains of imprisonment through the adoption of coping mechanisms.

During the data analysis process, a clear distinction emerged in the way that interviewed prisoners and prisoner writers spoke about their experiences. The main difference I was able to identify when reviewing the letters and the interviews as two separate sets of data was that the data generated by the letters was more likely to detail the long-term benefits of doing education in prison, whereas the participants in the interviews were more inclined to talk about the short-term benefits. The long-term benefits I refer to mainly included future employment. The short-term benefits of doing education in prison refer to benefits that help prisoners during their imprisonment. These include key themes in the sociology of imprisonment: the passing of time and coping with the experience of being in the prison environment.

In the documentary analysis, two types of letters were analysed. The first were letters written to the Prisoners' Education Trust supporting applications for funding for distance learning courses. The second set of letters were those from prisoners who were writing to thank the Trust for having received funding for courses that they had completed. It became evident that those prisoners writing to the Trust supporting an application for funding were more likely to discuss the long-term benefits of doing education in prison. As discussed in an earlier chapter, it made sense that prisoners who were applying for funding would be more inclined to state a reason for wanting to do so that was in line with offender learning policy. These prisoners therefore were more likely to say they wanted to do education for the purpose of becoming employed on release. I wondered when reading the letters whether these writers felt that saying they wanted to do prison education to pass the time or cope with the experience of imprisonment would make the success of their application less likely. It became interesting when reading the 'Good News' letters that the writers seemed to be more comfortable in saying they had benefited from the experience of doing education in prison in the short-term - that it had been a comfort to them and that it had helped them to cope with the overall experience of imprisonment. Evidently, whether or not the writers of the 'Good News' letters had focused on the long-term goals of prison

education in their application letters, having had the experience of doing education, they had realized the wider benefits of the experience of education to the extent that they were comfortable in telling the Trust about them.

The application letters however predominantly showed prisoners talking about how they felt they would benefit from the long-term benefits of doing education, such as future employment. For instance, in 'Letter 33', the writer wrote about wanting to help young people in the future to prevent them from becoming involved in criminal activity and eventually experiencing imprisonment for themselves. Other writers wrote about how doing prison education would help to improve family relationships and help them to become more socially acceptable by gaining employment. The letters that showed writers discussing the long-term benefits of prison education also tended to show less emotion than those who wrote about the experience of prison education retrospectively. This suggests that the experience of doing education cannot only help prisoners in the long *and* short-term but that it can result in a perceived personal transformation in the form of an emotional awakening. A prison teacher corroborated this suggestion during our discussion by saying:

They might come in big and muscly but then they don't have to show that side of their character to me. They do change and the way they portray themselves becomes different.

The letters as a whole set tended to demonstrate writing about the long-term benefits of prison education, the interviews with prisoners however were different. The majority of the prisoner interview participants talked about prison education as having short-term benefits that were experienced during the course of the prison sentence. It was only a small number of participants who suggested that they intended their prison education to result in long-term developments such as becoming employed. Some participants said that doing education in prison simply gave them something to do to prevent boredom, as there was nothing else that could help them to pass the time. The

participants were not hesitant in telling me that they engaged in prison education for such purposes and it did not appear they felt the need to have goals in line with becoming employed and thus in line with offender learning policy. This was interesting given that the staff interviewees from a category A prison had commented on a number of occasions that the goal of employability was specifically not applicable to their inmates. The interviews with category C prisoners revealed however that this view can also be held by prisoners on shorter sentences, despite the need for them to consider employment being more immediate.

So why did the different types of data show such clear patterns in the way the prisoner participants viewed their prison education, specifically in terms of the outcomes of their educational experiences? I propose that the reason for these differences was the audience to which the participants were presenting their opinions. As discussed in Chapter Five, in the case of the writers of the letters, their audience was the Prisoners' Education Trust who would determine (or had already determined) whether doing a distance-learning course in prison would be possible for them. The audience for the interview participants however was me – a person with no power over the course of the participants' sentence plans and no ability to alleviate the pains of imprisonment through the granting of financial support to access purposeful activity materials.

6.6 Conclusion

The foregoing interview and documentary data drawn upon in this chapter begin to answer the first three questions posed by this thesis as described in the Introduction. These in turn were developed with the intention of exploring one of the broad aims of the thesis showing that prisoners' own motivations for and interpretations of educational experiences go beyond employability. Although some participants did state that they were motivated to do education to become more employable, other factors

such as coping and mental escape were identified. Interviews with prison teachers raised concern regarding the suitability of an employment-focused curriculum for prisoners serving long-term sentences, where the prospect of release is much further in the future or highly unlikely at all. As such, going forward it must be recommended that education delivery is differentiated across the prison estate to meet the needs of prisoners of all categories. With this in mind, of particular concern to teaching staff at the category A prison was the decreasing amount of higher level education courses to occupy, stimulate and challenge long term prisoners meaning that their ability to cope with prison life may be being impaired.

Another issue was raised for consideration when contemplating prisoners' motivations to help others through educational peer mentoring schemes such as Toe By Toe. The linking of Incentives and Earned Privileges to those schemes increases the risk that some prisoners may be more highly motivated by the benefits of the privileges available than by the benefits of the supportive work itself. One librarian in particular was concerned that this was beginning to have an impact on the quality of support provided through peer mentoring.

It has become clear in this chapter that prison is not just a place for those who are poorly educated. It has been found that already being educated does not mean the experience of prison education loses value as the outcomes can be valued in the short term to cope with the experience of being in prison. For prisoners who have already achieved education qualifications prior to imprisonment, doing education in prison can provide a temporary mental escape from the prison environment thus assisting with the ability to cope with the experience of imprisonment. Education for these prisoners can also form the process of self preservation whereby existing intellect and ability can be maintained if not further challenged.

This chapter has importantly considered how prisoners' previous experiences of school can shape their approach to prison education and their views of education broadly. In

particular, stories of school in some cases revealed difficult relationships between prisoners and their school teachers. By considering relationships prisoners had with their parents in earlier life, it has become evident that issues with authority in some instances originated from strict parental discipline, in particular from fathers. These anti-authoritarian attitudes are sometimes developed in relationships in school life, and are eventually imported into the prison education environment. The data produced by interviews with prison staff highlighted the need for further discussion about relationships between prisoners and teaching staff to understand more about the experience of prison education. This and further discussions about the nature of relationships between teaching staff and other prison staff, which has created an 'us and them' culture in the prison environment that prisoners themselves are aware of, will be seen in the following chapter.

Chapter Seven: Educating the ‘Hard to Reach’

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to further contribute to understanding how prisoners experience education by considering the challenges and rewards faced by educators and appreciating the impact that their experiences in the workplace may have on learners. As detailed in Chapter Five, interviews were conducted for this part of the study with prison staff at a category A prison including 5 teachers, 2 librarians, 1 writer in residence, 2 officers and 1 prison governor. When speaking with prison teachers, their experiences of educating learners in the prison environment revealed insights into staff-prisoner relationships (which were further revealed during conversations with officers), which are integral to setting a clear understanding of how prisoners experience education. It also became apparent that the relationships between education staff and prison officers were sometimes strained and created an ‘us and them’ culture between those employed to teach prisoners and those who locked them up and implemented discipline. The awareness of this divide was present in all staffing areas (librarians, teachers, officers and governor) and some interviewees explained that prisoners were also acutely aware of this as it mirrored their own varying relationships with different types of prison staff.

This chapter will explore these relationships in addition to discussing motivations to work in the prison environment and the challenges and rewards experienced on a daily basis by those working in the prison. It will also consider the differences in how individuals working in the prison view their responsibilities and approach their work. In doing so, this chapter will reveal the prison education experience from the perspective

of educators and those responsible for supervising and disciplining prisoners in their daily lives.

7.2 Motivations to Teach in Prison and Teachers' Views on Prison Education

Existing research on staff-prisoner relationships (Liebling and Price, 1999; Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling et al., 2011) has typically focused on the development and function of relationships between prisoners and prison officers. 12 years after their original 1998 study, which found positive relationships at HMP Whitemoor, Liebling and Price returned to the prison to conduct a repeat study after the 2008 report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons found 'distant relationships' between staff and prisoners. The study commented on prisoner relationships with teachers and it was noted that education was facilitated by staff who were trustworthy in the eyes of many prisoners because they were not commissioned to gather security information on prisoners and only viewed them as learners (Liebling et al., 2011). To further explore the relationships between teachers and prisoners to contribute to understanding how education is experienced by prisoners, this chapter will begin by investigating what motivates teachers to work in the prison environment.

At the beginning of each interview with prison staff members (teachers, librarians, officers, a writer in residence and a governor), we talked about the nature of working in the prison environment and how they had come to work there. This exposed how the nature of one officer's work had impacted his ability to socialize in the outside world with non-prison workers and he found himself becoming more socially isolated as time passed. I was therefore interested in what motivates people to work in prisons and in

particular, what motivates educators to teach in prison if those who work in this environment can potentially be affected by their work in personal ways.

From the outset there appeared to be a contrast in different teachers' approaches and experiences of teaching in prison, and this was clear from the beginning of the individual discussions when I asked teacher participants what motivated them to teach in a prison. Most of these participants had seen their jobs advertised or had been directly asked to take up their posts leading on from a previous position on the outside with local education authorities. There was one teacher however who was especially passionate throughout our discussion about working with prisoners – a view that recent research has suggested is held by many teachers across the prison estate (Rogers et al., 2014). When asked her motivation for doing this work, she said:

I really wanted to pass my experience on of being a catering manager. Teaching in prison intrigued me. It's a job you can either do or you can't, and I absolutely love it. Learning means a lot to me, I left school and couldn't spell and I thought I was really thick. My one wish was be to really intelligent because it empowers you and broadens your horizons.

(Teacher E)

This particular participant's motivations to teach in prison related very closely to some prisoner and ex prisoner participants' motivations for doing prison education. She shared some prisoners' and ex-prisoners' experiences of having previously felt uneducated and having little confidence in her own abilities and found her own determination to become educated as a catalyst to help others. She understood how it felt to feel limited by a lack of educational skills and qualifications and as will be seen later in the chapter, she used this to form good relationships with her prisoner students.

A writer in residence at the category A prison was also interviewed. She, like the aforementioned teacher, was particularly passionate about working with prisoners. She said:

I became interesting in working in prison as a teacher or in some form of education following prison voluntary work. It is so interesting it just spoils you.

(Writer in Residence)

From the brief insight I gained into educators' motivations for teaching in prison, it was immediately clear that prison teachers appeared to occupy two distinct camps. On the one hand, there were those who saw their work as just that, work. On the other, there were those who were distinctly passionate about how important their work was and they appeared to have become emotionally invested in their work and the learners they supported. These inferences will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter when considering the differing relationships between teachers and prisoners.

In the same way that staff sometimes had differing motivations to teach in prison, so too did their views on other aspects of prison education vary. Once again there were a number of camps in which teachers' views on education could be placed. There were those who were confused and dissatisfied by the employability core of the prison education curriculum, and this became very clear when expressing their views. There were however a variety of views on education in prison ranging from education for the sake of education (reflecting the core of the liberal model of education discussed in Chapter One) to the need for education so that prisoners were better able to cope with incarcerated life. The following extracts reveal these views from different types of prison staff:

Employability is what we hear about all the time now. We're a secondary thing now instead of education for its own sake. It's

just a conveyorbelt you know - get em through get em through quick. They want people through a lot quicker now. It's all a business plan and it's all about making money. I fought for a prisoner who was being kicked off the class who wasn't working fast enough for the college. When they push employability they're missing the point. We're trying to keep them in the classroom as long as possible and they're trying to get them out!... It shouldn't be about money, it should be about education for education's sake. What they get out of that is invaluable in terms of their own development.

(Teacher A)

I can see why people think it's a waste of money because if they're a serial killer they're not going to be rehabilitated so you think 'what's the benefit of OU'? But for others if it's going to have a positive impact on other people then it's worth it. It benefits different individuals in different ways, a lot of it depends on the prisoner. If it's someone who can change then it's going to benefit wider society, for serious offenders they're getting a good deal doing education. It's better for the people who are going to progress. There are some you teach that you don't like that you're never going to have that rapport with because they're just cold.

(Teacher B)

I don't think we should have to pay for it. I prioritize and support the ones who are willing. At least we've tried to do something,

even if it doesn't work. Once you've given prisoners access to something it would be hard to take it away.

(Officer B)

The only measurable thing you can get is a certificate - but what it's done for them spiritually, subconsciously, and psychologically - you can't measure that can you. If I were in here, I'd be looking at books to keep myself going. Some people just smoke all day in their cell and you can't do that can you.

(Education Manager A)

For me, from the ground up, initially it should be more about making sure they've got the skills and ability to cope. For our lot, there's some who can't even fill out their canteen sheet - and then they trust the wrong person to fill it in for them and someone might order them something they don't want or that they're not supposed to have if they're Muslim. This can also be a problem when they copy the same canteen sheet by copying the previous week and then it changes and they don't know which boxes to tick. This can be very disruptive for prisoners even if it only seems trivial - but it's only trivial for us because we can go to shops and get what we want. It can cause massive issues for prisoners for months, just over something as simple as yoghurt. I think education is about escape, getting out of the environment and doing something you perceive as normal. You can absorb yourself into what you're doing. It takes you out of where you are.

(Librarian A)

*Education helps a lot with impulse control - stop, think, analyse.
Education keeps prisons safe places. Education is the great
leveler.*

(Education Manager A)

*The basics are so important, how to get to somewhere on time
for instance. There needs to be more acknowledgement of the
soft skills - social skills that enable them to fit back into society.
Then employability comes after.*

(Education Manager B)

The above statements from staff which reveal in some detail their views on prison education, contribute to a broader understanding of the meaning that those involved in the process ascribe to prison education practice and its purpose. Certainly for staff at the category A prison in question, education has immediate short term benefits in making the prison environment a safer place for all who live and work there. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is important in itself so that prisoners are able to cope with the deprivations experienced during a prison sentence. In their 2011 study, Liebling et al. found that psychological survival in prison was ‘...partly about finding humanity and recognition in relationships with staff or peers, but that it was also about finding an interest or passion for something’ (p.38).

7.3 The Challenges of Teaching in Prison

Chapter Two of this thesis discussed some of the key challenges currently affecting the prison system including staffing and budget cuts and increases in rates of suicide and violence. It was noted that the delivery of prison education is also suffering in the so-called 'crisis' due to reduced budgets and increasing security concerns. During discussions with prison staff I asked if they felt prisons were in crisis and whether they had been impacted by any significant changes. I also asked about the broader challenges of teaching in the prison environment. This part of the chapter will report on staff responses to these issues and discuss how the prison environment and the nature of the learners present challenges for teaching staff.

i. Is there a crisis?

Chapter Two discussed the changing nature of the contemporary prison system and the changes that are orchestrating 'crisis' factors. I was interested during the data collection process to know how prison staff had experienced this and whether their perceptions of the changes amounted to a crisis situation. Teaching staff spoke of a narrowing curriculum and interestingly, one prison teacher had never heard of the recently overturned book ban discussed earlier in the thesis.

We've noticed a lack of staff and it may endanger our safety. There are cameras in the classrooms so now we're waiting for officers to go because we've got these cameras now. Everyone's being squeezed and we're feeling it. The prisoners think the same as us.

(Teacher A)

It's narrowed our curriculum quite a lot, but other things have gone like critical thinking, history, Spanish - they've all been cut. They're the things that people with a longer sentence need to be doing...The book ban? What's that? The prisoners haven't said anything about the book ban but they do sometimes moan about not being able to get dictionaries, which they used to be able to get through a charity, but they don't anymore.

(Teacher B)

We have experienced the changes because what we do now is different to what we did before. We used to be able to offer GCSE and A Level and we can't do that anymore. We had more success rates with GCSE programmes than functional skills in some cases. This was particularly good for overseas prisoners where there was a language barrier, but they could communicate through maths. There needs to be a more seamless progression of education opportunities - because of funding constraints there is this more obvious cap appearing on what's available. The funding for long-term inmates needs to be looked at differently. It has to be more challenging for them, otherwise it can be frustrating for them.

(Teacher C)

For staff teaching practical courses, which require equipment and materials, concern was expressed regarding the amount of time they waited for orders to arrive. They spoke about how this causes frustration for them and for the prisoners in their classes who wanted to progress in their learning. They said:

The budget cuts have impacted a lot. They were going to close my workshop down until I realized I could do some work under

this umbrella of employability. I ordered some materials 16 months ago and some of it arrived last week. They didn't expect the workshop to carry on that long so they just didn't order it. The prisoners always ask if the materials have arrived and I get the blame for it. We're now not replacing people - we used to have four admin and we've just got one now and she's snowed under. We've got a lot of supply teachers now too, because of the cuts they can't always offer them morning and afternoon and half a day is hardly worth it.

(Teacher D)

With our teaching resources we have experienced it. For the NVQ they only get two books each but I have to fight for them. Some of my equipment needs renewing. I put in orders over and over again and you have to watch your budget all the time. You have to make the best of what you've got and enjoy that.

(Teacher E)

The impact of budget cuts had also been experienced in the library. Librarians spoke about feeling isolated from discussions on changing budgets and that when budget cuts did occur, they had to consider the kinds of books they ordered more carefully to ensure they got the resources that would benefit people the most. One librarian said:

We have to get our money's worth out of it.

(Librarian B)

When speaking with education managers, I was told that although there were now fewer classes running and a reduced curriculum, prisoners still had jobs to go to. The problem, as identified by one education manager, was the lack of money to run more classes, and this resulted in empty classrooms. The same participant was also concerned

about the introduction of bonuses in the workshop for productivity. He argued that this reduced incentive for education because education courses were not a prerequisite to work in the workshops. He said that this was causing crucial employability steps to be missed. Another education manager was concerned about the impact of budgeting cuts on staff. He said:

There is a crisis. There have been budget cuts without questions. Staff took voluntary redundancies and now they're being asked back on lower wages. Staff are getting fed up so those that can do are getting out! I think these problems could lead to the next Strangeways. Control is moving away from the establishment. There are too many hoops to jump through to authorize roles that are clearly needed. All of this is demotivating.

(Education Manager B)

Feelings of demotivation were also shared by a prison officer who said:

They're phasing out the older officers to get in the younger, cheaper ones. They cut too many staff too quickly and now staff are coming back and having to go to different prisons that are the most understaffed. Older staff [paid] at 30K are a luxury now and these are the staff they're cutting.

(Officer A)

My discussion with the governor revealed his awareness of staff concerns and the impact that staffing cuts could have on safety. He regarded the focus on safety as a constant question. When I asked him if he personally thought the prison system was in a state of crisis he said:

Crisis no, but significant pressures, yes. Staff are feeling less safe and less valued.

(Governor)

As identified in Chapter Two, whether prisons are in 'crisis' or not is to some extent a matter of opinion. Prison staff interviewed for this study were feeling the impact of budget cuts and it became apparent that there were concerns for job security from both teachers and officers. Concerns regarding safety due to fewer staff and, as noted by the prison governor, staff feeling less valued, shed a great deal of light on current working conditions for prison staff. It should be noted however that staff did not give me the impression that this was detrimental to the operation of the category A prison itself which was praised in its most recent inspection for dealing very effectively with challenges that many other prisons find difficult to manage (HM Inspector of Prisons, 2013).

ii. The Challenges of Prison Education

Staff awareness of budgeting and staffing cuts was evident and visibly empty classrooms caused some teachers to feel demotivated. As previously noted, staff were also working with a reduced curriculum in which employability had to be embedded meaning they were not always able to deliver programmes they felt entirely appropriate for their learners. In the light of such difficulties together with the nature of the working environment, I was interested to learn about what teachers identified as the most challenging aspects of teaching in prison. One teacher commented specifically on the sometimes difficult nature of working with prisoners. He said:

There's no question you form relationships with these guys and you like some of them and to see them in that environment is quite a shock. Unless you've worked in prison you don't really get it.

(Teacher A)

Another teacher spoke about having to remind himself that he worked in a prison with offenders while at the same time trying to only see them as students. He said:

I had to remember at first where I was working. I had to wear two different hats - one teaching in the community and the other in here. I had to make sure I didn't talk about my own personal circumstances...I have only become involved in prisoners' crime backgrounds when it is necessary. I try not to ask because I don't want my perceptions of the learners to alter. This is fair to them. Some of them are potentially very difficult individuals and we have to remember that they are here for severe crimes, not minor repetitive crimes. When I first started, I was very aware that I had young children and that some prisoners were here for child criminality - I knew some were so I always deliberately try to avoid finding out. The less you know about their background, the more fair you can be - there's no baggage, it's what I see in front of me. The biggest challenge is constantly being aware of security issues and knowing that you can't always do what you want to do. I do try to help if I can. I don't find management in the classroom environment as challenging as I initially thought - I don't feel fearful.

(Teacher C)

None of the staff interviewed reported feeling fearful of prisoners but all were aware of the need to prioritize security, even when it came to prisoners they had known for over a decade. I was interested in the way that there was a distinct challenge in how teachers were able to gain the trust of their students while at the same time never being able to

trust them fully to ensure they remained security conscious. A catering teacher discussed this saying:

...at Christmas when you want to bring sweets in but you can't. I can't send them a Christmas card even when they bring them to me. I tell them straight. The biggest problem here is I've got some really talented guys here but they are too high risk, you can't have the A cats in the kitchen.

(Teacher E)

Another staff member identified the challenging nature of no longer having an understanding of prisoners' backgrounds to inform lesson planning and approaches to teaching. She said:

We used to have champions in each wing which would help inform the tutors for lesson planning but it's not confidential anymore and its all done in class so you can't get as much information about the prisoners anymore. We used to know about their upbringing because it helps to understand their behaviour more and you could approach them from a different angle and build a rapport.

(Teacher B)

As discussed previously in this thesis, understanding prisoner learners' biographical backgrounds needs further attention. However, this is not only significant in furthering prison education research. The interview extract above shows the need for prison teachers to have this information in order to understand their learners. Chapter Six showed how some prisoners had admitted to having a fear of the classroom environment due to negative experiences at school. As such, it would be important for prison teachers to be aware of such information to inform their teaching and learning

sessions. The prison governor also spoke of a process of depersonalization when it came to education. He said:

Education feels more distant than it ever has done. It can feel like an upward battle because of the nature of the prison and the prisoners - risk, age, sentence length...with these prisoners it can feel like - prison education and then what? The prison system inherits the social and academic problems of society in the form of prisoners. This progressive ideology is not shared across the whole prison...Money is the main barrier to education. There is an increasingly depersonalized environment hardwired against personalization. We have to pursue the whole person approach and I don't think we put the person in the journey as we should do.

(Governor)

The education process in prison goes beyond the classroom and also involves support from the library. Librarians supporting prisoners also spoke to me about the challenges they faced in their working lives. One librarian said:

A lot of the time prisoners come to the library for support with books, for example, A Level guidebooks. We had a study centre to support the OU students but then when the education regulations changed, the OU students weren't allowed to get funding for OU if they had more than 3 years left because it wasn't seen as a good use of time. So the study centre had to close because 90% couldn't get funding. Then the rules changed again so it was all about bums on seats in classrooms - they were paid per learner per hour. They weren't getting money for OU students in classes. So the OU students had to go.

(Librarian A)

The difficulty faced by library staff therefore was how they could support students who study via distance learning when facilities and funding did not always enable this to take place. I asked teachers about this and was told that they provided informal support where possible, particularly if learners were studying courses that teachers had studied themselves. It was interesting to find that the challenges faced when educating prisoners never involved the prisoners themselves. No teachers complained of excessive disruptive behaviour, fear of safety or confrontation from learners. It could be the case that this is due, in part, to prisoners no longer being forced to attend education at this institution. An officer told me that now, those who were in education wanted to be there and this made more sense to them:

Now that they're not forced to go, you've got about 38 who actually want to be there. It's good that the disruptive ones aren't there any more. My own education was disruptive so I know what impact that can have on those who want to learn. So I can empathize.

(Officer A)

However, at a category A prison which holds some of the country's most serious offenders, it was significant to find that the main challenge of teaching in the prison environment were the staffing and financial barriers to education that impacted on staff as well as prisoners.

7.4 Positive Aspects of Educating in Prison

Despite the identification of specific challenges faced by prison teachers and their colleagues, the prison staff participants were all able to share with me some of the positive aspects of teaching in prison. The majority of the teachers I spoke with discussed this in the context of the outcomes of their work and the changes they observed in their learners. Before referring to those conversations, I note below the response of one participant who spoke about the nature of teaching work in prison. She said:

For me it's just meeting people that you're never going to meet in your day-to-day life. You're never bored at work and looking at the clock. A real bonus is having class sizes of 9-10 - you get real satisfaction from that. You get to teach people from all over the world and getting to know about where they've come from.

(Teacher B)

Referring to the outcome-based positive factors, other teachers said:

It's a bit of normality for the men. They get a lot of hassle from officers and coming down to education means they can have a bit of normality.

(Teacher A)

Seeing the change in attitudes towards education and learning. You make a breakthrough when you feel they respect you and what you're trying to do for them. I find this when I get the comments back from them. If I didn't think I was making a difference any more, I wouldn't do it.

(Teacher C)

In the workshop they can make things for their family and learn some skills. The best thing for me is coming here and working with the men. The worst thing is working for The Manchester College and constantly doing paperwork to justify what I'm doing.

(Teacher D)

I love it because they love food, they're really enthusiastic. My waiting lists are huge. My peer partner is very talented. I sometimes think he knows more than me! They've let him start making sour dough bread and it keeps him really steady - he doesn't take the mickey and brew with it. I think it would break his heart if they stopped him. He watches my back and tells me if people take stuff. It's always a really happy environment - I think they keep me going. My work is now my whole life.

(Teacher E)

Teaching staff were aware that the satisfaction that came from their work was centred on the learners' experiences and progress. They were also aware however that the men they saw in education may be very different from how they are perceived by officers supervising them on the wings. There were frequent references to prisoners making positive progress who prison officers may have viewed as troublesome in their

experience. This and other differences in staff-prisoner relationships will be discussed later in the chapter. An education manager acknowledged this saying:

In education it's something we're giving them, but this is different to being on the wing - and this needs to be broken down.

(Education Manager A)

7.5 Staff-Prisoner Relations

During interviews with prisoners at the category C prison, it was found that negative experiences of school had been mirrored in some approaches to prison education. For Kevin, teachers in prison felt superior to inmates and he disagreed with prison teachers as he had done with teachers at school. Irwin and Cressey's (1962) importation model suggested that inmate culture was developed from behaviour brought into the prison from the external community by inmates. They argued that the inmate code was a prison adaptation of the criminal code that already existed in the outside world. It seems fitting to apply Irwin and Cressey's concept to the importation of past experiences of education thus illustrating the previous point that the way prisoners engage with education and education staff can be determined by previous experiences and imported into their prison lives.

Negative relationships with prison teachers were not shared by all prisoner interviewees, in fact, they were rare. Dean said that he found prison education very different to the experience of learning at school because in prison, he had the freedom to be quite independent. Dean's attitude towards prison teachers appeared to be very different to Kevin's, despite having had a negative attitude towards a particular teacher

at school. He said that in prison, without the sense of overbearing authority from teachers, he was able to gain a sense of enjoyment from doing educational courses.

Discussions with teachers at the category A research site revealed positive relationships with prisoners and were consistent with the findings from interviews with the majority of prisoners at the category C prison. Although staff were aware of the clear boundaries that must be adhered to in their relationships with prisoners, some were open to sharing how their relationships with learners had developed to go 'beyond the call of duty' to create a positive learning environment for themselves and for prisoners.

You've got to be more than a teacher - you have to be a psychologist as well sometimes.

(Teacher A)

Some of them are almost like friends because I've known them for so long. You become blasé to the things they've done but not towards security. I don't really want to know what they've done. There was one guy who was completely insane, and he used to do strange things and I just thought he was walking about with this pen like a knife. He'd also eat his cornflakes out of his sink in his cell. The men who come into the workshop know if they start kicking off the privilege of being in the workshop will be taken away and I have that respect from them.

(Teacher D)

I'm the grandmother. I can put them in their place. I have sons and I treat them like that. I take some under my wing a bit. If they nick stuff they know they're out. If they've been in the seg and they ask for a bit more food I'll say "go on then" - but it's important that they don't see kindness for weakness. They all say

that they think a lot of me and look after me. They tell me about their grievances often about things moving slowly. I sympathize when it's about something to do with a family member. They do see me different from officers because of the authority. I'm never aware that I'm teaching men who are doing really awful things - I tell them I don't want to know what they've done. We see their human side in education. If you've got any compassion in your heart you've got to have a kind word sometimes. I'm like a mother figure. When you're a mum like me, you know that all you want for your children is the best and I tell the lads in here that I want the best for them. I do sort them out.

(Teacher E)

Two of the statements above showed teachers acknowledging the difference in the way that prisoners saw teachers and officers. Other teaching staff discussed this further. They said:

They have a different relationship with tutors than with officers. Officers are there to make them do certain things but we're there to educate them so they see us as helping them. You don't feel that you're going to be attacked in a classroom whereas officers might do. You never feel like your life is going to be in danger. Sometimes you think to yourself I wonder why they're here because they just seem normal, it's best to just see them as a learner rather than to think about the crime they've committed - so sometimes it's best not to know.

(Teacher B)

If someone is wearing black and white, their role is discipline. If I'm in as a civilian I am an enabler for something. The relationship

we have with prisoners is different and we often see a different person to those seen on the wings and we're often told that by officers. We're not there to act as the disciplinarian. I know if I was to wear black and white that the initial interaction would be different - there'd be far less trust.

(Teacher C)

Prison officers were very clear on their views on their relationships with prisoners. They were aware that their relationships with prisoners differed from that of teaching staff. The officers I spoke with were clear about their relationships with prisoners and did not reflect the sometimes negative image portrayed by teachers:

Prison's like a school playground with all the bravado - that's what it is, but many are good as gold. It's important for people to have a role model. Sometimes I do have to be a "prison officer" but I'm respected.

(Officer A)

These relationships are about common sense. There have to be boundaries. I'm old fashioned in that I use surnames. I keep my promises when I'm helping prisoners.

(Officer B)

Liebling and Price described the common sense aspect of prison officer work in their first Whitemoor study as being a refined skill. It is important to note however that the officers interviewed distinguished themselves from 'other types' of prison officers – the ones who prefer to just “*bang up and lock up*” (Officer B). The officer who mentioned the use of surnames in fact stated that other, younger officers had used his first name in front of prisoners on numerous occasions when he specifically asked them not to do so. He said:

Some people just want to bang up and lock up and aren't there to communicate. Some younger staff call me by my first name in front of prisoners even when I ask them not to. Some new staff just pass on prisoners' queries when they don't know the answers to questions instead of going and finding out the answers. New staff aren't as careful - they'll go on toilet breaks without telling other officers who only find out they're gone when they end up having to look for them.

(Officer B)

The distinction therefore between prisoners' relationships with teachers and officers was not as black and white as one might assume and from the extract above, it appeared that this could be particularly the case with new, younger staff who did not always have the same work ethic as those with more experience. When speaking with officers about this, there seemed to be a sense of resentment of new staff who were 'undoing' their work. The two officers interviewed had a very clear ethos on the nature of their work and the care element of their disciplinary roles. The next part of this chapter will discuss staff-staff relations in the context of teachers and officers, however it has been important to note the tension that had occurred in some cases between different prison officers.

7.6 Staff-Staff Relations

It emerged from the interviews with prison staff that there was some strain in the relationships between teachers and officers. The previous part of this chapter noted staff making clear distinctions between their work, with one teacher commenting on how he would have a different relationship with prisoners if he were wearing black and

white. In both the interviews with staff at the category A research site and prisoners at the category C research site, I heard stories of deliberate sabotage of prisoners' academic work. Jeff told me how the prison had lost several pieces of his coursework (this was confirmed by staff at the prison) and he was now in the process of re-doing it all. I gathered from what Jeff had told me that there was a lack of urgency on the part of prison officers to investigate his lost work and that this gave the impression of a lack of enthusiasm about prisoners accessing higher level education courses. When speaking with a teacher at the category A prison, he told me a similar story. He said:

A guy had made a model steam engine and it was sent to another prison instead of Koestler. When he got it back, pieces were missing and it was damaged. He sued the prison. Quite often things do get broken and it's deliberate. Sometimes it's because of the jealousy.

(Teacher A)

This teacher did say that there were some good officers who were caring, but there are also those who want to “*bang them away*”. He then said:

They [officers] see inmates getting an education for free and perhaps past a level they're at. There is a divide [between teachers and officers].

(Teacher A)

As noted previously in the chapter, teachers talked about how officers would suggest that the view of prisoners gained by teachers in the classroom is very different from the men they see on the wing. They said:

Officers say "you don't see the real person, you don't see what we see".

(Teacher C)

One of the officers might say he's a right nightmare, and I say "really?" We try to get along with officers, some you can and some it's difficult to. Some are very good but there are the odd ones who treat us like prisoners as well and we all moan about them together. But they'll get all the hassle from them on the wings don't they.

(Teacher B)

The sense of an 'us and them' relationship between staff who educate and support the education of prisoners and prison officers was corroborated by a librarian who said:

There is always that us and them. They are prison staff and we are just contracted staff. Prison staff will go overboard on things that they think we should or shouldn't do. If you ask prison staff a question, we are sometimes made to feel we don't know a lot. Some are great but others see us as second-rate staff because we haven't done prison service training. Before I got here, library officers used to get special payment for doing it, and when I first came I had to battle to get them to acknowledge me because their payment had been stopped to catch up with my wages and it was like "she's come in and taken our payment". We only do one group for retired prisoners on a Friday morning, they don't necessarily want to come down and socialize with the younger prisoners. The Dedicated Search Team turned up on a Friday morning and cancelled the session. I was kicked out of the library because I'm not allowed in there when they're doing the search.

*I couldn't do any work so I ended up in the office in the chapel.
There's not always a lot of care for what the library is about.*
(Librarian A)

An education manager was certain that the divide existed because teachers and librarians are civilians. He was however confident that changes were taking place to bridge this gap in staff relations. He said:

Prison officers are more on the discipline side hence why they're called 'discipline staff'. We tend to be 'the reform' and the prison officers tend to be 'the punishment'. But there are officers who are now being trained to be more empathetic to try to get prisoners to conform in the less authoritative way.
(Education Manager A)

The officers interviewed in this study were very supportive of education for prisoners and of the education staff (see also Braggins and Talbot, 2005). I knew therefore that I was talking to 'the good ones' the teachers had referred to. When it came to discussing staff relationships with the officers, they were more concerned about new officers as previously noted. Their particular concern was the way that new officers communicated with prisoners, which they felt lacked care and compassion. The officers also suggested that newer staff in some cases were somewhat 'work shy' and would leave duties to other officers where they could. This was often the case when prisoners asked them for information. Whereas the more experienced officers said they would get information for prisoners when they could to support them, they suggested that new officers did not see this as part of their role and would tell prisoners to speak to a different officer. The concern raised by officers during our discussions was the emergence of a new working culture amongst younger staff, which was operating alongside the 'old way of doing things', causing a clear divide within the prison officer team. For these participants, being a good officer related to Liebling et al.'s (1999: 83) finding which argued the need

to ‘...be good at *not* using force, but still getting things done’ and ‘...using legitimate authority, and being in control without resorting to the full extent of their powers’. Moreover, it meant ‘...establishing relationships and investing those relationships with real aspects of one’s personality’. On their return to Whitemoor, Liebling et al. (2011) found some dispute about whether newer or older staff were considered ‘better’ or ‘worse’ and that younger staff seemed less tolerant of prisoners (p.23).

On the discussion of relationships between teachers and officers, the governor said:

I am acutely aware of the divide between operational and non-operational staff. There are limited times of interaction. The fact that education staff work for a different organization reinforces this divide.

(Governor)

7.7 Less Eligibility

Although the staff I spoke with were very much supportive of rehabilitation - particularly the governor who was especially passionate about his belief in redemption, change and rehabilitation – I wanted to know how they felt about the less eligibility concept which they saw as being particularly prominent in the public arena. I wanted to understand how they viewed the distinction between punishment and rehabilitation given the time they spent in the prison environment.

In many conversations, talk turned to PlayStations and pool tables and the frustration that staff experienced when reading tabloid media representations of luxury in prison. One teacher said:

What the public don't understand is that prisoners have to be enhanced to receive these things (PlayStations etc) so they have to earn them. Banging them up for 23 hours a day is going to turn them into some kind of beast.

(Teacher A)

A librarian was also particularly vocal about this issue:

Prisoners don't have choices like people on the outside. Prisoners have to pay for their consoles. Because while they're playing on that they're not causing mischief and it really prevents the amount of damage done in prison. They can only have consoles if they're enhanced - they have to be behaved etc. The restrictions on it are actually a little bit harsh. Prisoners need to escape from the environment for their own sanity. It keeps the discipline regime in the prison - it stops assaults on staff and prisoners. Try to make the person who comes in a better person when they go out.

(Librarian A)

Another teacher admitted that their view had changed over time saying:

Before I got involved in working with offenders, I thought people should be thrown in a pit and given water every now and again. Coming into this prison I've seen the education and at the end of the day, they're locked up and that's the punishment. There isn't much else you can do but educate.

(Teacher C)

The view of most of the education staff was that something had to be done to try to release better people back into society. They said:

This is an opportunity that prisoners have got. They have the time and the support to do something and it's important they make the best of the opportunity they can. They are going to be released. The less risky they are when they get out the better.

(Teacher A)

We have got to try to put them back into society...You can't keep their crimes over their heads.

(Teacher E)

A lot of these people will be released at some point, they could well be your next-door neighbour - who do you want as your next-door neighbour? I think these arguments are driven because it makes the headlines. There are of course some criminals for whom prison is the right place for them - but they are in the minority. Anybody could be inside - circumstance or don't know any different. Also, you only get a television if you're enhanced and you have to pay for it and the wages aren't very big you know. To dispel the myth, not everybody who does OU is getting funded, so they're in the same position as students on the outside but with a whole range of barriers.

(Education Manager A)

During a discussion with one of the librarians, I was particularly interested by her take on the concept of 'deserving'. She likened prisoners to smokers in her explanation of the distinction between deserving and needing. She said:

They might not deserve it but they need it. If someone who smokes has a lung problem they need treatment, they don't necessarily deserve it. A lot of these guys haven't learnt the core skills that are so tiny for adults. I can understand people saying that because you do have public libraries closing - but I still think we need it, if we can do some good, it's worth it. Storybook Dads is a perfect example of this. I don't think any learning should be stopped because it can only be a good thing. It almost seems like rewarding the bad guy and I do understand that but when you see what it can do... What we're trying to do is make it as safe as possible to release people.

(Librarian B)

When talking to me about how the public viewed prisons and prisoners and how working in the prison environment had shaped, and in some cases changed, their own views on what prisoners deserve and what punishment means, two staff also spoke to me about how they themselves are perceived. One of the education managers said:

We're on our own in the middle of nowhere, and no one likes the prison service.

(Education Manager B)

Echoing this sense of isolation, a prison officer said:

We only get publicity when something goes wrong, we don't get in the paper for doing something right. I would never say in public that I'm a prison officer. We're not heroes like policemen and firemen. I'd like people to be aware about the potential for danger that prison officers face every day.

(Officer B)

This extract alone says a great deal about the way that some officers feel differentiated from workers in other public services. Arnold et al. (2007) identified that 'Officers often perceive 'others', including the public, as caring more about prisoners than prison officers. They share a wariness about revealing their occupation to outsiders' (p.484). From this perspective, it could be argued that the isolation prison officers can experience likens them to the prisoners they supervise – or at least creates an opportunity for some kind of empathy. This enhances the view of the prison as a microcosm of wider society (Sykes, 1958) where a closed society exists behind prison walls. Officers and other staff spoke of how many staff lived locally meaning that prison work had become a major part of workers' private lives. It is unsurprising therefore that some prison staff feel unable to relate to other public service workers, or rather public service workers' inability to relate to them. Although the focus of this study is not concerned with an in depth understanding of the lives of operational staff in prisons, it has been important to note these emergent issues to encourage awareness of the challenging nature of prison work and to consider how such issues may have an impact on the way that prisoners experience education in the prison environment.

7.8 Understanding Prisoners' Experiences of Education Through Accounts from Staff

This chapter contributes to understanding how prisoners experience education by appreciating the challenges and rewards faced by educators and appreciating the impact that their own experiences in the workplace have on learners. By identifying that teachers no longer have access to biographical information about the prisoners they teach, it is possible to question how this may create a barrier to the development of teacher-prisoner relations and depersonalize the way that prisoners are taught. As an

educator myself, I appreciate how knowing certain biographical information about students can result in my needing to differentiate taught sessions. By not having this information, teaching staff will find it more difficult to understand their students and thus students' experiences of the education process may be directly affected. Speaking with teachers in the maximum security prison environment has also further enhanced understanding of why helping prisoners to cope with the experience of imprisonment through education is so important. Particularly for long term prisoners, education can help to stabilize behaviour and create a safer environment revealing a much broader role for education in the operation of the prison regime.

This chapter has also revealed that with supportive operational staff, the education experience does not have to end when prisoners return to the wings. The presence of supportive officers on the wings provides prisoners with additional encouragement to attend classes and reinforces the message that education can have a positive impact on their time in the prison environment. It was noted however that not all officers share such enthusiasm or encourage prisoners' education to the same extent and thus, more focus needs to be given to communicating to operational staff the importance of their role in supporting offender learners.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed a number of issues concerning the experience of teaching and supporting learners in the prison environment and it is clear that some prison teachers are particularly passionate about their work and are able to identify changes that occur in their learners - whether it be simply the gaining of a qualification or some other change in their personality and character. Staff spoke about their concerns regarding the narrowing curriculum discussed earlier in the thesis. In addition to a reduced curriculum and reductions in budgets resulting in empty classrooms, staff who

taught practical subjects had to wait for significant periods of time to receive essential equipment.

It was identified in this chapter that the learning environment in prison provides a sense of normality where prisoners are able to temporarily escape from the struggles of prison life. Teachers were always aware of security but not concerned about their safety. None of the teaching staff said they were afraid when teaching but acknowledged that they would have been more concerned if they had they been an officer.

The Council of Europe stated:

Prison by its very nature is abnormal, and destructive of the personality in a number of ways. Education has, among other elements in the prison system, the capacity to render this situation less abnormal, to limit somewhat that damage done to men and women through imprisonment (1990: 15).

Some of the teachers I spoke with were particularly emphatic about the need for prisoners to experience aspects of normality and this is what they felt they were able to provide through education. Especially in a category A prison where prisoners are serving long-term sentences, staff stated that having a 'normal' experience was a particularly important part of helping prisoners to cope with being in prison.

Officers interviewed for this study were very supportive of educating prisoners. They, like the education staff, knew that prisoners were benefitting from education in a range of ways that included preventing negative behaviour. Keeping prisoners occupied with meaningful activity was stressed as being of the utmost importance. This is why one teacher (and a prisoner discussed in the previous chapter) was frustrated by the paperwork nature of some courses that specifically required personal interaction e.g. victim awareness, as they didn't view this kind of activity as being meaningful.

A clear divide was identified between education staff and operational staff and all participants including the prison governor acknowledged this. Education staff spoke of an 'us and them' attitude which implied that staff didn't understand each other's perceptions of prisoners. The experienced officers interviewed however were supportive of education but made it clear that they personally were different from many of the newer prison staff who did not tend to communicate well with prisoners. It may be therefore that the primary divide between educators and officers might be particularly evident with newer, less experienced officers whose approach to work is reportedly very different from their more experienced colleagues.

At the core of this issue of a divide between education staff and officers is the fact that education staff are not employed by the prison but by an external agency (in this case The Manchester College). This difference was exemplified at a seemingly trivial level by a librarian who told me that they did not receive vouchers at Christmas whereas staff employed by the prison did. This however caused a feeling of devaluation and also a lack of reward for their work. Difficult staff relations in prison is an ongoing issue, however an education manager did say that work was being done to bridge this gap through staff training to encourage officers to be more empathetic towards prisoners.

With regard to motivations to educate prisoners, this chapter has clearly revealed a number of motivating and demotivating factors. Educators were motivated by passing on their knowledge, small class sizes, committed learners who demonstrated little disruptive behaviour, seeing real change in prisoners' attitudes and thus making a difference, and helping prisoners to cope with the pains of imprisonment. A number of the factors that demotivated educators can be linked to the so-called prison 'crisis'. These included reduced funding and a reduced contracted curriculum, reductions in staff and redundancies, empty classrooms, extended ordering times for books and other resources. In addition to these factors, staff found a sense of a lack of appreciation by

the hierarchy, the feeling of 'us and them', a reduced knowledge of prisoner backgrounds and the possible deliberate loss of prisoners' work.

Chapter Eight: Discovering Transformation through Education

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four of this thesis, it was proposed that prison education experiences in some cases have the ability to change or transform prisoners in various ways and that these changes may relate to how they cope with the experience of imprisonment, how they present themselves to others, or how they perceive their own identities. As seen in the previous chapter, learners engaged in prison education programmes often present themselves in a different way to teachers than to officers and this is due to the differing nature of their relationships with these types of prison staff. Teachers at the category A prison were able to identify changes in the prisoners they taught and some prisoners interviewed at the category C prison were open to sharing experiences of change from their own perspectives. The changes that prisoners acknowledge can often relate to desistance theory and in particular the 'redemption script' (Maruna, 2001) where prisoners speak of salvation for themselves or others. This chapter will continue the data analysis in the context of the final two core thesis questions:

- What kinds of personal changes and developments do prisoners perceive to have taken place as a result of experiencing education?
- Can understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change tell us more about imprisonment generally?

This will involve exploring evidence of personal change and transformation and the ways in which prisoners interpret their experiences of education as having a transformative impact on their lives. The chapter is supported by the accounts of three ex-prisoners' experiences of desistance through education, which will be explored in case studies to

determine the role of education in the desistance process. This will provide further discussion on change and transformation from the perspectives of those who have desisted from crime and all of whom are now active prison researchers. Data will also be drawn from interviews with serving prisoners, prisoners' letters and interviews with prison staff to explore the relationship between prison education experiences and the potential for desistance through personal change and transformation.

8.2 Identifying Types of Change

On analyzing the data generated by this study including letters written by prisoners, interviews with serving prisoners, interviews with prison staff and interviews with ex-prisoners, it has been identified that the kinds of personal change perceived by prisoners and prison staff can be broadly categorized into three groups – personal change, change concerning relationships and change resulting in a desire to repay a debt to society. This part of the chapter will present evidence of these categorizations thematically to consider in more detail what change actually occurs as a result of experiencing education in the prison environment.

i. Confidence and Self-Esteem

It was noted earlier in the thesis that the letters of thanks from prisoners to the PET (the 'Good News' letters) tended to say more about the emotional character of the writers than those accompanying funding applications. Reflecting on their experiences of doing education in prison, the writers of these letters displayed emotion more overtly than those writing to apply for funding for education and this suggests that the experience of doing education has the potential to play a role in developing emotional maturity. As such, prisoners appear to feel less pressure to show certain types of masculinity or bravado through an increased confidence in displaying emotion. As explored in Chapter

Four, displaying an overtly masculine identity during imprisonment is an important part of prison culture that can enable offenders to survive prison by reducing the risk that they are seen as being a vulnerable target (Crewe, 2007; Jewkes, 2002; Sim, 1994). The evidence from these types of letters suggests that prisoners who have taken part in education courses present themselves more emotionally than prisoners who have not. Emotion and vulnerability are not characteristics that easily fit into the overtly masculine culture of prison life. It may be therefore that for some prisoners, the process of becoming educated and achieving a greater sense of self-esteem, confidence and emotional maturity reduces the need to adopt a hegemonic masculine identity. This suggests that overt masculinity is projected by prisoners, in some cases, to hide a lack of confidence and self-esteem, which could in part be caused by a lack of educational ability.

In my discussion with Richard, a prisoner at the category C research site, he said *“education classes have brought me out of my shell a bit”*. The increase in confidence that Richard experienced by doing education was somewhat surprising given the sometimes-challenging nature of the classroom environment that he described. He explained that in some cases he had been *“targeted for getting on with work”* and how some prisoners had shouted at him during classes saying, *“He’s got his head down, the boffin!”* Richard said he was able to ignore comments such as these as he hated confrontation – something that other prisoners on the wing were aware of and who would protect him from those who mocked him for his quiet nature. Richard explained that education had taken his mind off everything and given him the confidence and ability to integrate better with other prisoners, especially those who were older and interested in education.

Prison teachers and librarians also identified increased levels of confidence in the learners at the category A research site. One teacher in particular spoke about the lack of confidence she saw in those prisoners from different social backgrounds, whether from different countries or different types of communities within the UK. She said:

A guy with a traveler background had no self-esteem and he's got his level 2 now. There's always people who start to want to respond to you, I enjoy turning their attitude around.

(Teacher B)

She said that where prisoners from the traveler community were seen to be lacking in confidence, she would pair them with a mentor with a similar background where possible so they could be supported by someone who understood their lifestyle and culture, which appeared to put them at ease. A librarian I spoke with said:

People do open up to you when they get to know you - to ask about more information when they've got the confidence to do that. I see most change in the reading groups...One of the changes I've seen is the way they come to the group and some will argue with each other. They learn to wait for someone to finish and they learn that it's alright to disagree with people - but no prison talk, they don't have to keep up the wing persona. There's a social thing going on and we get some lovely feedback from them. Over the weeks they learn that they can do that with each other - it takes time to have the confidence to do things.

(Librarian B)

I learnt through these discussions that confidence often resulted from educational activities when prisoners had the additional support of their peers. Although this research has found that prisoners' relationships with their teachers are often positive, there is still a need for prisoners to be able to communicate with others who are also engaged in similar activities to achieve an increased sense of confidence. This was the case for Richard who found he was able to better interact with other prisoners, particularly those doing education and this is corroborated by the above extract from

my discussion with the librarian. She explained that when she left the reading group area, she could hear prisoners giving each other advice and support on both education and non-education issues and that learning to talk to one another in the reading group context had opened up the opportunity to be confident in providing each other with additional support.

ii. Conceptions of Self and Identity

A number of letter writers and interviewees in this study talked about changes in their conceptions of their own identity and how a change had occurred through taking part in education courses. The writer of 'Letter 77' for instance referred to his own identity, allowing the reader to understand the way he saw himself. He said:

I managed to gain a score of 87% in my TMAs (a 1st) so its fingers crossed for the exam. Not bad for a old street junkie who was as good as dead 3 yrs ago.

Although the writer was not absolutely clear about the identity he felt he had recently adopted, what *is* clear is that he identified his past self as being a 'street junkie'. He did not say whether he still considered himself to be this way, however, by pointing out the stark contrast between achieving educational success and being a 'street junkie', he acknowledged that a personal transformation had occurred. In other letters, prisoners referred to themselves as a 'student' having adopted a new identity through doing education courses.

The writer of 'Letter 64' detailed the education courses that he had completed during his sentence so far. These included 'The Arts and Humanities', 'Exploring Psychology', 'Introduction to Counseling and Welfare', and 'Crime and Society'. Describing the experience of doing these education courses, he said:

It has been an interesting journey which I have gained knowledge; understanding, emotional maturity, confidence, self-esteem and self-worth from. I feel now that I can implement structure to my life through it, I understand and can also feel what finding oneself is and for the first time I have aspirations.

Having been able to 'find himself' and being able to realize what he was capable of (much in the same way as the participants in Maruna's desistance study), it could be said that this writer experienced a personal enlightenment. What is especially interesting about the above extract is the way that the writer talked about having aspirations for the first time. This clearly shows that prior to experiencing education in prison he did not have life goals or aspirations - or at least not goals or aspirations that had been born out of experiences of education. Therefore, this suggests that aspirations were neither developed at school nor at home. It was not made clear in this letter however *why* this was the case. The letter did not say whether this lack of aspiration was through lack of encouragement by parents or family members or whether it was perhaps due to unwillingness on his own part. What is important however is the evidence this letter produces of prison education resulting in personal change and development.

Earlier in the thesis I referred to a conversation with Joe, a serving prisoner at the category C research site, who had been strongly encouraged by his father in his earlier life to have an anti-authoritarian attitude and to be outwardly aggressive to others of different social and cultural backgrounds. Joe studied for an A Level in Social and Cultural Diversity during his sentence and explained "*I probably did it because of what my dad was like*". When it came to talking about what prison education had done for Joe and what change he may have experienced, he explained that it had given him the opportunity to use his time properly and had stopped him from judging people. The revelation that Joe had also made his homosexuality known in recent years meant that the change in attitude he experienced was a combination of lifestyle change and

education driven by the experience of his upbringing and relationship with his father. As will be discussed later in the chapter, the role of family in the process of change has emerged as a clear motivating factor for pursuing education. In the case of Joe, the motivation was driven by the need to make good the negative impact of his father's influence.

One of the teachers interviewed also spoke about changes in attitude.

It's the equivalent of switching the light on in some cases when negative attitudes change to being keen and supportive to others. In one case, one prisoner has become a very positive influence on the inmates around him - they ask him for advice. I'm often asked by psychology if this man has changed and as far as I'm concerned, if it is an act, he's been doing it for a very long time (10 years)!

(Teacher C)

He described the identification of change as being *"initially down to personality and their ability to engage"*. Other teachers spoke of change in personality and prisoners becoming *"completely different people"* even if prisoners themselves didn't outwardly admit that a change has taken place. Another teacher said that some prisoners were open to discussing the transformations that had occurred.

It can be anything from personality, they quite often mature themselves with the realization they're not going anywhere. It could be a confidence issue, once they get their head into the regularity of going to prison, I've seen people going out the other end a different person. The inmates recognize their own development and they'll talk about their increasing self-confidence.

(Teacher A)

I was interested when speaking with ex-prisoners to understand how experiences of change were considered retrospectively and the extent to which transformations had occurred during prison sentences. For one ex prisoner, the experience of change occurred specifically after leaving prison.

In prison I realized I had a chance to redeem my education. Education made me feel human because of how the teachers were with us. Part of the probation for my wrongly accused crime in 2000 included anger management. It involved a lot of role-play and led me to desistance completely. Having to talk about things all the time, and after this, I identified as a student. At this time I'd just started my Masters. The anger management was like counseling. In anger management I was an offender and across the road at university I was a postgraduate. Prison didn't change me but the education helped. The thing that changed me was the anger management. The probation officer said it was a metamorphosis. It was clear what changed; I learnt remorse. I started to think of the victims, because before we all saw ourselves as victims. Every crime I'd committed it was someone else's fault, but by the end I realized I did have a choice.

(Participant 1)

When considering the issue of change from this retrospective position, it became apparent that for this participant education in prison had provided a starting point for transformation and that imprisonment itself hadn't changed him. In terms of the kind of change that had occurred, this participant was particularly emphatic about learning to feel remorse and considering choice during incidents of criminal activity through an anger management course that was part of his probationary sentence. It was interesting to hear about the experience of having a dual personality that was separated by a road between the participant's university and the location of the anger management class. He talked about crossing the road as being the difference between being a student and still feeling like an offender suggesting that past identities are never fully forgotten.

This was corroborated in a discussion with another ex prisoner who explained:

There's still elements of my [old] identity that you can see, I still am who I am - I can still get in bad moods. It's alright to say about desistance, but there's part of you that will revert back to your old self. I live in fear of overstepping the mark, it's about managing it - just like an alcoholic. I'm squeaky clean now because I'm an ambassador for others like me. I'm straight. There's the additional pressure because you've got a stake in conformity. There are still the pressures of life to negotiate which can make it worse for people like us. You don't forget the kickings you've got from the police, so you're always on the look out - you don't lose that, it's a protection thing. I don't want to completely lose who I am or forget who I am. Goffman talks about the stigmatized living in two worlds, and that's me.

(Participant 2)

In my discussions with ex-prisoners about the concept of change and the potential for education to instigate transformation, I was reminded of the struggle faced when leaving prison, even by those who have achieved academically and become respected members of the academic community. The two aforementioned ex-prisoner participants were particularly emphatic about communicating the reality of living with a dual identity, which has become a focal point in the emergence of British Convict Criminology in recent years (see <http://www.convictcriminology.org/bcc.htm>). These issues will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter in an analysis of the ex-prisoner participants' case studies.

iii. Rebuilding family relationships: shame and redemption

In a number of the letters collected for the documentary analysis, evidence of prisoners writing about the effect of their imprisonment on their families was identified. The writers of such letters considered how the process of doing education in prison might help to improve family relationships and demonstrate to relatives that they were making constructive use of the time being spent away from them. 'Letter 53' was written by a prisoner who was 29 years old and serving a 13-year sentence in a category C prison for "*various offences*". He wrote:

*While in Custody I decided that I Would educate myself, So that
on my release I Can lead a more Constructive life and Show my
family that With all the pain and hurt that I brought to the Whole
family I am Capable of making a life and future for myself.*

This writer began by saying that he wanted to do education to be able to lead a more constructive life on release - an aspiration stated by numerous prisoners in the sample of letters collected for this study. However, there was something very significant about the way this particular writer acknowledged that he had caused his family pain by committing crime and being given a custodial sentence. The use of the words 'whole

family' especially emphasized that it was not only parents or a partner who had been affected, but rather *all* family members. The awareness that this writer had of the effect of his own actions gave me an immediate sense that he was a vulnerable person who felt he had not only brought shame upon himself, but also on his family. In many letters that showed writers talking about family, much of the emphasis was placed on doing education in order to be able to find employment on release to support relatives financially. This letter was therefore particularly interesting as it was more concerned with the family's perception of the individual. Encouraged by a desire to show his family that he was capable of making a successful future for himself, the writer stated that he had done every education course that was available to him including a course in 2007 called 'Understanding Children'. Having completed this course, he explained that his next goal was to pursue a course in Health and Social Care.

The writer of 'Letter 72' also acknowledged the benefits that education had on changing his relationship with his family. Before discussing this aspect of the letter, it is firstly important to acknowledge the way that he wrote about the pains of imprisonment. In this letter it appeared that prison education could not only be transformative in terms of developing the characteristics and personalities of individual prisoners, but that it could also transform the experience of being in prison. Having been granted art materials by the Prisoners' Education Trust, the writer said:

My paintings have given me hope and pleasure in a very very grim environment. So much of prison life/sentences is punitive and about punishment that it is very hard to try and stay motivated. By doing painting I have brought beauty into a place where there is non...

For this prisoner, the ability to paint in his cell allowed him to achieve a sense of escape from the pains of being in the prison environment. He had also been able to physically change his environment through artistic expression to one that was at least more

aesthetically pleasing. This short letter continued to be rich in information when the writer went on to talk about the effect his paintings had on his family life.

I have been able to hand out paintings when my wife and son has visited me and in some small way I have been able to give my love to them thru the paintings.

In this open and emotional statement, the writer demonstrated that his educational materials had given him the ability to show love to his wife and child in a different way. This presented the writer as an emotional person who had, through the use of art, been able to produce something from inside the prison to give to his family when they visited as a symbol of his dedication to them. It also allowed him to show that he was making constructive use of the time that he was away. This letter was particularly interesting as the writer clearly did not feel compelled to talk about how his increased educational ability had improved his employability. His openness and emotion gave me the sense that he was being honest and my interpretation of honesty appeared to be directly linked to letters that showed the emotion and vulnerability of the writer. Because vulnerability is not a desirable characteristic to be adopted by those in the prison environment, being vulnerable or emotional arguably carries with it some element of risk. For this reason, my interpretation is that prisoners demonstrating vulnerability or emotion, even in their own private letters, would not risk allowing themselves to feel this way unless it was for the purpose of being truthful.

During my discussion with Richard, he spoke about his family at some length. When Richard was introduced in Chapter Six of this thesis, I noted that he had told me the people who lived in his village could not believe that he had committed his crime and that he had been given a prison sentence. Richard said that as a result, elderly members of the village community often took flowers to his mother as if she were grieving a loss. The sense of bereavement through death can be argued to have strong links with the sense of loss experienced by the families of prisoners. 'Aftermath' is a self-help group for

the families of serious offenders. An Aftermath chairperson described this sense of loss experienced by the families of prisoners as a 'living death' during which relatives would experience many of the emotions of bereavement but with constant reminders of how their situation differed as they supported the offender through the criminal justice process, prison sentence and beyond (Condry, 2007: 28). For Richard's mother, the constant reminder not only came from supporting him through the criminal justice process but also through the regular receipt of flowers from elderly members of the community. When it came to discussing doing education in prison with Richard, he said:

I decided I had to do it.

Richard had spent a lot of time during his sentence thinking about his family and this made him decide that he needed to do something positive. He enjoyed "*showing off*" his certificates to his mother and would give her some to take home when she visited. I gathered from this that regularly giving his mother certificates to take home was a way of staying connected to his family and keeping his presence in their home. It also appeared to be a way of showing them that although he was in prison; he was making the most of the time by trying to better himself through education which resulted in positive change.

iv. Access to Children

I was interested to find during interviews with serving prisoners that some spoke to me about 'hypothetical change' – about potential scenarios, which, if they came to fruition, would apparently guarantee a change in their attitudes, and cause them to desist from crime entirely. In the interviews with Andrew and Mark, they spoke about their children and explained that a main priority for them on release was to secure regular access to their children, if not full custody. Andrew was the father of three children aged two months, 11 years and 15 years old. Although his son had recently been expelled from school, he did not want to show his disappointment for fear that his son would stop

visiting him in prison. He also told me that he was concerned his son would follow the same path in life that he had taken. One of the most unforgettable moments in this part of the research was during my discussion with Andrew. Continuing to talk about his son, I asked him what his son wanted to be when he grew up. I saw Andrew realize at that moment that he didn't know and this was because he had never asked. He looked genuinely shocked and was a little lost for words having realized that this was something he should have known as a father. When talking further about his family and the example that he was setting for his children, he said that committing crime was worth the risk to provide for his children. He then said:

If my children lived with me, it'd be a different story. I wouldn't commit crime at all...I'd be happy to be skint.

Mark also spoke to me about his children. The mother of his daughter was often out of the home drinking and using drugs and he didn't want his daughter to be brought up by her. He therefore aimed to gain custody of his daughter when released but understood that his convictions would make this difficult. Ideally, he wanted his mother to gain custody of his daughter and said that he would live with them both. He said:

If I ever have full custody of my daughter, that'd be it. I wouldn't commit crime anymore or even associate with old friends.

I asked him whether the aim of *eventually* gaining full custody of his daughter would be sufficient for him to completely desist from criminal activity as there was no guarantee that having custody of his daughter would be possible following his release. He hesitated and struggled to answer this question and eventually said:

If I come back [to prison], I'll just deal with it.

According to the literature, desistance is not a likely outcome of imprisonment as the experience disrupts normative processes by cutting off opportunities for achieving success in employment and even marriage (Maruna, 2007). As noted in Chapter Four, it is argued that no institution is better than the prison at separating individuals from their social responsibilities and civic duties (ibid.). There was a very clear admission on both participants' parts that committing further crime was a very real possibility, however both were adamant that this would definitely not be the case if they had custody of their children. Both of the participants in the given examples were wholeheartedly convinced that having custody of their children would immediately end their criminal careers and as such, they both understood their children to be the key to their desistance. In the case of Andrew, because his children did not live with him, he felt the need to commit crime to buy them things they wanted so when they did see him, they had a positive experience. He said that if his children lived with him, he wouldn't commit crime and he would be "*happy to be skint*", suggesting that the emotional gains of committing crime in order to give his children material possessions were far outweighed by the opportunity to have responsibility for the care of his children on a more permanent basis.

In the case of offenders who commit crime to achieve this strain-fuelled (Merton, 1938) end of providing luxury items for their children, the Classical School theory is evident in the making of such calculated decisions - the risk of being convicted of crime being worth the benefit of providing for their children in order that they could be seen as being good fathers. It was suggested by both of these participants however that such calculations would not need to be made if they were able to play a more significant role in the lives of their children. The care of children could be linked to Maruna's (2007) finding that offenders experienced a sense of self worth and purpose when participating in caring roles such as providing respite care or staffing charity shops voluntarily. As a result, we must consider whether fathers having adequate access to their children has a role to play in contributing to existing theories of desistance and whether being given

more individual responsibility as a parent could lead to a considerably reduced risk of re-offending amongst the adult male prison population.

Neither of the aforementioned participants identified education in prison as a route to change or suggested that they had changed in any way as a result of the experience of imprisonment. Their focus had become primarily concerned with gaining custody of their children on release and they suggested that this condition would lead them to a crime free life. I was concerned on reflecting on these interviews about the future of these participants whose potential for change was reliant on an uncertain future possibility. Andrew had been disillusioned by the paperwork-based format of the victim awareness course he took part in during his sentence. He didn't feel that education in prison had been of major importance to him and he saw there being little incentive for prisoners to change. Mark, who was discussed earlier in the thesis as having developed front and back stage personas and enjoyed writing his own poetry privately in his cell, had been denied funding to continue his studies at a higher level. Both therefore seemed to have little faith in the educational opportunities within the prison and their attention had turned to the future. It could be suggested that in such instances, a lack of faith in purposeful activity available in the prison and thus a lack of engagement could lead to the development of a sole focus on potentially unrealistic long-term goals that both men admitted would likely result in a return to prison if not achieved.

v. Repaying Debt

A change that some participants discussed was a transformation in their attitude towards society. As previously noted in an extract from a discussion with an ex-prisoner (Participant 1), many prisoners consider themselves to have been victims at some point in their lives and as such can have negative attitudes towards the society that has imprisoned them. For some of the letter writers, repaying their debt to society began with education which reinforces Pring's (1995) argument that education is a human good that can enable a person to be seen as 'good' by wider society. The writer of 'Letter

77' referred to completing a counseling course as "another feather in my cap towards my career goal". In making it clear that he wanted to repay his debt to society he said:

I know in my heart that the greatest amends I can offer society is to get a career where I may offer help to others like myself. This would never have been possible if you had not had faith in me in the beginning.

In this case the writer clearly showed that repaying his debt and becoming a good member of society could be achieved through being educated for the purpose of being able to help others. However, this has led me to question whether being educated alone is sufficient to classify a person as being 'good'. When considering that many prisoners find it difficult to find employment on release, it is important to contemplate whether having become educated alone makes them a better person in the eyes of society or whether employment is the key to successful reintegration.

Other letter writers were particularly emphatic in their desire to repay their debt by helping young people. The writer of 'Letter 33' was applying for a grant for art materials to do artwork in his cell. Discussing future education opportunities, he explained that when he was ready and able to do so, he would like to study for a course that would teach him to help younger people. He wrote:

...id also like if I could get any help with learning how to help younger peopel who is Just starting to fall into this mad life ive lived. coz ive lived this life and I know if I had someone like me to help me when I was younger I beleave it could of helped.

This writer aspired to be able to help young people as a way of preventing them from having to experience the life that he had lived. Clearly this writer felt that his life could

have been very different with the right guidance. Other writers shared the same goal of helping young people:

If I am given the grant to carry on my education it would mean a lot because I feel the next chapter in my life is to pass my life experience to other's so they know the consequence of wrong doing.

(Letter 53)

Ultimately if I can take my experiences and share them with others to prevent them leading the same type of life I did then that's an achievement for me.

(Letter 41)

Prisoners' perceptions of the educational experience appeared in some cases to drive an ambition to educate others with the expertise of their own life experiences. It could be argued therefore that having an understanding of the potential positive outcomes of being educated can motivate prisoners to encourage others to learn. The extracts above also show that in the case of some prisoners, they themselves want to play a role in this process by becoming an educator.

8.3 The Role of Education in the Desistance Process

To reveal more about the role of education in the desistance process, this part of the chapter will provide case studies on the three ex-prisoners interviewed for this research. It is evident that the process of education in prison provides a vehicle for a number of types of change to occur, some of which have been discussed already from the perspectives of prison staff and serving prisoners with some brief insights from ex-

prisoners' stories concerning their identities. By discussing in more detail the case studies of the ex-prisoners interviewed, the role of prison education can be considered in more depth in the context of the lives of active 'desisters'. I feel this to be particularly important not only to highlight 'success stories' but more so to provide accounts that help to understand the often-complex lives of those who have experienced imprisonment and prison education and desisted from crime in challenging circumstances – particularly the personal test of stigmatization. This will show that despite successful desistance and the completion of a range of education programmes, the ability to see oneself as having 'made good' can be a lifelong struggle. The accounts are particularly interesting given that all three of the participants are now academics actively researching imprisonment and thus their reflections on their experiences were done with reference to literature and theory at times thus including both their personal and professional views on education and desistance.

In Chapter Six, the ex-prisoner participants' experiences of school and relationships with parents were discussed alongside those of serving prisoners. The following case studies will review in more detail the earlier lives of the participants and the context in which these experiences occurred. They will also explore the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment and the direction of their lives following release.

i. Participant 1

The first ex-prisoner participants' father was in the Royal Air Force, which caused him to move frequently between schools. The participant was in fact born at an RAF camp. When he was 13, his father was demobbed and moved the family back to his hometown, which the participant described as "*a rough area*". I asked him about the other members of his family. He said:

My mum was a typical housewife of that era. She looked after the home and kids, she didn't go to work. We were the typical

nuclear family. My mother was very nurturing and my father was jealous of the attention we got. He was very cruel like that. I would see my mother with a black eye and I got some cock and bull story. I had one older sister who protected me from that situation. I was a timid child and got bullied a lot. I didn't like rough games, I kept myself to myself. My sister would work on the car with my dad and I'd help mum in the kitchen.

It was at this point that the participant told me that his father would call him a “sissy” and “soft” (as noted in Chapter Six). He then described his father as being very masculine and traditional and at times referred to him as having been cruel. When he was 15, the participant’s parents announced they were getting a divorce and that he had to choose who he wanted to live with. This was the point at which he began to “harden up” because of the huge gap that was left by not having a father figure. At the same time, his sister met her future husband and moved out of the family home. He saw his father occasionally and said that his father often made it clear that their meetings were inconvenient. For a time, the participant’s father remained in the family home. He said:

My father kept his own money and food to himself - even though he always had money. Sometimes dad would forget to lock his food cupboard and that's when I started stealing. I also started stealing from mum and dad's wallets to buy Elvis cassettes - that was the start of the deviant behaviour. I took money from my father and he brought the police round and I was threatened with borstal. That scared me. He didn't do this when he knew that I'd taken from my mum and my sister, only him. I should have bought clothes because I always wore hand-me-downs, but I only ever remember buying Elvis cassettes. Once I started working, at 16, this all stopped. I did a few apprenticeships. It was very weird times for me, there was so much going on.

At this point, he began to tell me about his grandfather.

Once my father moved out, his father moved in because he'd fallen out with his wife and he'd taken my mother's side in my parents' divorce. Even though he was a lodger, he took control. I started to see my father in him when he started to control me; he was exactly the same. He had no control in his own house so he came into our home and started to dominate. He liked my mother more than he should have which was one of the most disturbing things I experienced at that age. I'd become quite disturbed with it all.

At the same time, the participant started seeing a child psychologist at the suggestion of his mother. Unfortunately for the participant, the confidentiality of his sessions with the psychologist was lost when he told his mother what had been said. The participant's mother then told his grandfather with the participant present at which point he decided he had to deny everything that was being said.

At the age of 17, he moved out of his mother's home and lived with a neighbour. He had become close with the neighbour's family and found him to be everything that he aspired to – he had good morals and didn't beat his wife or children. Although the neighbour was a man of large stature, he didn't feel the need to prove himself physically. The participant decided to join the army to attempt to straighten himself out. He was turned away from the RAF due to his record of mental health treatment and recalled this as being the first time he was stigmatized. He said:

I was a very emotionally disturbed kid. When I got turned away from the RAF I realized I was going to get labeled so I started lying about my past.

When he wasn't able to enter the RAF, he joined the army. It was at this point he began drinking because he hadn't been able to socialize. He said that when he would drink it would make him think about his family and would make him cry when he wished his parents would get back together. He described himself as doing impulsive things and "going AWOL". On two occasions, he was put in military jail on his return. He said:

That was the worst prison I've ever been in. I was bullied from morning to night - it was all about discipline. Staff were just bullies. All bullies remind me of my dad. When in military prison I was stripped of my identity and kept separate all the time. It mirrored how I felt in school. I always felt isolated.

After the participant was dishonorably discharged, he moved back in with his mother. Having been in the army he thought of himself as "a bit of a tough guy" and described himself as having "a hell of a chip on his shoulder". Having experienced bullying by his father, at school (as discussed in Chapter Six) and in the military prison, the participant decided that the way to get back at society was to be a criminal. He admired criminals with power and liked the way they dominated people through fear. He began watching programmes and reading up on the mafia. His main aim in life became achieving a sense of power and gaining a reputation.

Following incidents of criminal activity, he was bailed to a hostel. He described himself as "a drinker" and at the hostel began associating with a skinhead. They robbed a debt collector and during the incident the debt collector was stabbed. Knowing that the police were looking for them, they decided to break out of the hostel to "go on a rampage" which involved burglary and breaking into cars – however the participant wouldn't do this because he felt he still had some morals. The police caught them in the street and the participant was eventually sent to a category B prison.

He described the prison as having a very masculine culture and it was still in the days of slopping out. He said that by this time, he'd developed a sense of masculinity to survive.

I fell in with it quite well because I had the military experience. I did blend in quite well. Sewing mailbags was boring as hell so I refused to do it. I got sent back to my cell and that's when I started education. Being in a routine and having discipline made it not so bad because I could deal with that. I couldn't stand my fellow young prisoners. All I wanted to do was mix with the older convicts. We were segregated because of our age. When I became 21 and the screw said you're a fully-fledged criminal now I felt really proud...I was more normal in prison and a better person in prison than outside.

At this time, the participant was in youth custody within the prison. Having refused to sew mailbags, he spoke with a prison officer who he referred to as “one of the nicer screws” who then helped to put him on to an education course. He started doing English, maths and geography in classrooms. He said:

I loved being in classrooms, which was weird because I hated school so much. I did education the whole time in youth custody. Release disrupted my education.

After release from youth custody, the participant enrolled at a local college to study O Level psychology, English literature and sociology. He spoke about how he began to like education, enjoying the structure and realizing that he did “have a brain after all”. He explained that this made him feel that there might be an opening in his life and that he may be able to get a good job. He then said:

...but I had this other life that was haywire. I was drinking and was on probation. I told my probation officer that it was my ambition to kill somebody because I'd read in a book that Ronnie Kray had said that. It was like I was acting out a film, I was acting out other people's lives because I didn't have one. I then got recalled.

He spent another four months at the category B prison he had previously been in during which time he took up education again. He achieved basic English language level 1 and tried to keep up with education after leaving prison. However, this was difficult. He said:

I was like a Jekyll and Hyde character. My uncle came on the scene and was supportive. I moved down south to stay with him to find work. I worked in hotels washing up and started to improve myself, but I still had the drink. He was a drinker too, but he was educated and brought me back into education - but we were both drinkers. I'd drink between shifts and the stress in the hotel kitchen got on my nerves.

The participant described the hotel trade like being part of a family again; in fact, this is what continued to draw him in to this kind of work over time. However, he never held a job down for more than a few weeks because drinking was a constant problem. He explained that in some instances alcohol would lead to criminal activity, primarily fighting.

He then went to work in France as a chef at an activity camp for children. At the end of the season he was asked to stay on as the camp caretaker. During this time, a relationship that he had been involved in came to an end. Unable to emotionally cope with the breakup of the relationship he stopped eating, drank more alcohol and began to self-harm. After going to the hospital following a particularly serious instance of self

harm, he was brought back to the UK to see his GP who referred him to a psychiatric hospital – the same hospital where he had been an outpatient as a teenager. After sobering up he returned once again to education and went to a local college to do an access course. After failing the exam for the access course he returned to drinking alcohol as a reaction to his distress. He went to another college to study A Levels but found that he struggled in a class full of teenagers. When I asked him what he wanted to gain by studying A Levels, he said that he thought it was *“the power of getting an education”*.

At this time, the participant moved with his mother and uncle to a village. He told me that the village got him down because he and his family were made to feel like outsiders. At the time the participant was bodybuilding, which made him stand out. He explained that he was treated like an outcast and felt this was primarily due to a class division, as villagers knew where the family had previously lived. The crime for which the participant served his longest prison sentence occurred in the village pub when he stabbed a man whose wife he had been seeing. He explained that he felt exhilarated after the attack and that a huge pressure had been lifted having taken control and realized that people would fear him.

The participant was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment following the incident. During the remand period, he continued education and began studying A Level psychology once more. He told me about his experience in court.

I took my learning certificates to court. The judge said that I let emotions get the better of me. He said that I should use the rest of my time to educate myself. I found the judge inspiring and we've been writing to each other ever since. In prison, after the stabbing, I started mixing with some serious criminals while doing education - living this double life. At the same time, one of

the lifers helped me with my OU and application to uni for after parole.

When asking the participant more about his experience of education in prison, he told me that the only negative person he encountered was a teacher who didn't agree that he should be applying for a place at university. She said that her daughter had never done anything wrong in her life, yet she couldn't get into university. He explained that the officers however were very helpful. They would do photocopying for him because they thought it was worth doing to help something positive.

Reflecting on what education meant to him, the participant said:

In prison I realized I had a chance to redeem my education...The main thing I remember is getting that first degree gave me an identity. When I got my Masters I was a normal person. My PhD is life changing. I see it opening doors. Its all about identity though, I'm still striving for that now. It'll always be there. It's not about doing a qualification to get from A to B, it's my life. This PhD is my whole being, it's the chance to have a career for the first time in my life and the rest of my life is stabling up. I'm in a position to have a stable life now.

Commenting more broadly on education he said:

A lot of prisoners have bad experiences through no fault of their own. And giving them the opportunity to redeem themselves can give them the chance to do what I'm doing, to give something back. Education should be open to everybody.

Through my discussion with this participant, I learned that education was something he frequently returned to between various episodes in his life. It appeared that his desire for status and to get back at those who had victimized him served as a regular distraction from his educational progress. This distraction often manifested itself through problems with alcohol and a constant struggle of feeling isolated. He highlighted the feeling of having two identities despite the fact that he had considered himself to be a successful 'desister'. The participant, now studying for a PhD, had come to see education as a life changing opportunity that would further enhance his already changed identity from 'criminal' to 'student' and he had changed the way he viewed the acquisition of power from committing crime to gaining knowledge.

ii. Participant 2

The second ex-prisoner participant grew up in London, his parents having met in London when they moved there from outside the UK. On reflection, the participant described his family as being quite dysfunctional. He said that his parents had nothing and were always working to try to make a better future for themselves. As discussed in Chapter Six, part of this participant's childhood involved being beaten by his father, something that was commonplace in his parents' culture. By instilling aspects of their culture in their children, the participant said that this created problems establishing an identity. He told me that he would always try to rebel against his parents and said:

*I grew up with a dual identity and bad attachment to my parents
in many ways.*

Having established in Chapter Six that the participant's father was the disciplinarian of his childhood household and would hit the participant and his siblings with a belt, he said he was normalized to aggression and violence and became desensitized to physical discipline. He then said:

The kids I went round with were in a similar situation - we had the same things in common. We all liked risk taking and the excitement.

Talking further about himself and his friends he said:

At school I was average probably, I could read and write. I was ok in those terms. But at school I was always being naughty from the juniors...We were the bad kids and you like being the bad kid because it's status...There were always teachers saying you're going to be nothing and end up on the dole. We used to get the fire extinguishers and spray people and be chased by teachers. We'd taunt the teachers when they'd chase us. We used to bunk off together, we got suspended for that, for fighting, vandalism. Once I got caught with a blade and they called my mum down (we had issues with other schools).

The participant said that when he was a child, life was about being tough and getting the girls through hyper masculine behaviours and this gave him status. The participant left school with “15 mediocre CSEs” and started a roofing apprenticeship. He had grown apart from the friends he had made in school but continued to stay close with those who lived in his neighbourhood. He explained that they were all in the building trade. He described himself as having a strong work ethic, which he felt came from his mother and father. At the same time, he was regularly engaging in criminal activity. He said:

We'd go to football and cause trouble. I'd get arrested every week, go to court some of the times. I was angry, and I still am - I was a ball of aggression. I think I've got quite high levels of testosterone. If I didn't have the childhood that I did, maybe that aggression would have been channeled more positively.

The participant explained that he was always working. He had his own roofing company but still had a parallel life that he didn't see as crime because in his words, he was "*using Matza's neutralization techniques*". He said that the criminal aspect of his life wasn't to do with money. He explained:

I was just angry and that's why I was into football hooliganism. We had people doing lots of victimless crimes for us, economic crimes. There's a hyper masculine thing in working class environments. I defined myself as a roofer, because I was always working. It's only now that I realize I was involved in a lot of stuff.

He then told me about the crime for which he was convicted. He said:

I'm not a career criminal. I was selling drugs and that's what I actually got convicted for. Me and my mate were into shifting drugs. Someone was supplying us large quantities and we'd sell it on. We had an ounce in the car and a few grand in my pocket - loads of police were round the corner waiting for us. The police found the drugs and arrested me. I wouldn't say anything because there was more in the flat. My co D [co defendant] gave them our address.

When the participant went to court, he wasn't given bail. He was on remand at a category B prison and his parents later bailed him out. He reflected on his feelings about prison saying:

I thought this is shit. Prison's shit, at the end of the day prison's shit. Who wants to be locked up like an animal?

While out on bail, the participant went to a doctor who suggested he tried therapy. It was at this point that education began to play a significant role in the participant's life when his therapist suggested that he do something positive like studying, whether he ended up with a prison sentence or not. The participant therefore began an access course studying psychology. He said:

I got my head down because I had a goal. I got a taste for it. I hated school, but once I started the access course before I was sentenced, I thought this is mind-blowing. I got the bug for using my mind. I was good at it because I could relate it so much to myself. I've got an analytical brain because of those traumatic childhood experiences.

It was while studying on the access course that the participant met his wife who, as our discussion continued, was evidently the most significant impact on the participant's experience of change. He said that being with her, someone from a different (middle class) background, had taught him a lot about life. He explained that his wife had never broken the law so they were "two extremes" but she was an incredible motivator and continuously encouraged him to keep up with his studies. The participant then said:

Then when my court case came up, I got found guilty of possession with intent to supply a class A drug and went to prison - my co D didn't. Me and my wife stayed together. We got married in prison. She stood by me and sorted the tutors so I could continue the access course via distance learning. She was sending me in the books. I ended up doing a year and a half in prison - it could have been so much longer. I was studying but I could handle myself. I wasn't trying to be anything different to the other prisoners.

A month after the participant was released from prison, he started studying for a degree at university. He said:

I was shitting myself. I was out of my comfort zone, prison was fine because I'd adapted to it. I got my head down, the prison officers were fine with me and they facilitated the process [education] - they knew I was trying to do something. I remember walking through the [university] gates and thinking, please get me through this. There's a big fear of failure in me. If I'm doing something, I've got to do it properly - whatever it is. In the first couple of days of uni I thought these people feel alien to me. I got my first essay back and got a 62 and thought what a relief. By the second year I was getting 70s and I thought, I could get a first here. I still did a couple of things dodgy but then I decided to give up everything, I gave up the roofing company, everything. I wanted to forget everything else, I just wanted to get this goal. I gave up a lot but I came out with a first. I'd proved to myself that this prick from a working class environment, that was a roofer, never seen as bright, his teachers used to call him thick, has now come out with a first class degree.

I was interested to learn that it wasn't until the participant went to university that he realized not everyone committed crime. Crime had become such a normal aspect of life that he presumed all people were involved to some extent. The participant was open to saying that there were still elements of his 'other' personality in his identity and he had the feeling of living in two worlds. Emphasizing this point, he told me about an occurrence at an event he had attended following the completion of his PhD when he had become an academic. He said:

I was at an event, and someone from a very privileged background who had influence said education is a privilege. I thought to myself, education is a privilege for the people who are born with the ability to access it. Why is it a privilege? It's a right. He had no understanding what prisoners have had to go through. Even when you put aside the empathy, it's logic. If you can turn around these people [prisoners] and change their lives, it will have social and economic benefits, it's that simple. People need 'the other' to make themselves feel good. People born into a life of privilege have no conception, they don't understand these people. People need to have an open mind about it. I understand the need to consider victims, I get all that, but I also think it's just going to get worse unless we do this.

The discussion I had with this participant further enhanced my understanding of the struggle faced by 'desisters' to maintain a new identity that also incorporates the old. For this participant, although through education and the support of his wife he had established himself as a successful academic and researcher, it was clearly important to him to retain his sense of self and not forget the events that had shaped his life so far. Education was not the only thing that had instigated change for this participant. The way he spoke about his wife and family showed that the husband and father he had become was based on considerable reflection of his own upbringing. This process of reflection combined with dedication to his family and a realization of his own educational capabilities all contributed to his experiences of change and transformation while at the same time preserving the core aspects of his identity – particularly a strong work ethic and a resilient sense of pride.

iii. Participant 3

The third ex-prisoner participant had a significantly different story to those already discussed. Knowing the other participants personally and the nature of my research, he was initially uncertain of the value that his story might bring to this study. While the stories told by the previous participants are often familiar amongst the prison population, there are also those who grew up in different circumstances and come from different backgrounds. It is therefore important to consider the story of a person who, although had a very different background and upbringing, has the same shared experience of imprisonment as the other participants. Part of the purpose of doing so is to bring a realistic element to the research by showing that prison is not only reserved for those whose upbringings have involved challenge and trauma and to show that education can be a positive experience shared by all.

This participant was the eldest boy in his family and so from his experience, had the freedom to fail and break the boundaries. His two older sisters found education a form of constraint and the breaking of rules by them wasn't accepted. He described his relationship with his parents as *"reasonably good"* and explained that testing authority was something he could do at school with his friends, but when he was at home, he couldn't do this, or at least it had to be hidden. As discussed in Chapter Six, this participant was educated at a boarding school that took a holistic approach to education in an environment he described as a *"learning community"*.

Having been inspired by an A Level geography teacher, the participant went to university to study Environmental Science. He hated the course and left after two years of study. With a *"commitment to a hedonistic lifestyle"*, which the participant described as *"quite routine in the 1970s"*, he became interested in radical ecology and anti-nuclear power movements. He explained that he had learnt a lot from the informal education at university (societies, unions) and that universities were in a state of high animation. There were various radical campuses around and he would attend anarchist

conferences. After becoming torn between protesting and university, the participant became an activist and involved himself in various groups and selling radical pamphlets. He and some friends also set up a bookshop and taught themselves printing to print fanzines and leaflets, or “*agitational leaflets*” as the participant put it. He said:

It was very wild times. I was working in the bookshop and living in a large squat. The world was going to change and we were going to change it. We protested on campus about arms companies coming to recruit science students. We occupied the chancellor’s office – it all seemed very important at the time.

I was intrigued to find out what led this participant to a prison sentence. He explained:

I had produced a fanzine. I had an interview with U2 on their first tour and I interviewed Bono, and I'd just been protesting in Belfast to help the political prisoners. I put a “recipe” in the back of the pamphlet, which said go out and burn something or something fairly rhetorical like that. I was visiting my sisters in London, turned on the TV and the riots in Brixton had erupted. I got back to my hometown and my friends said “the cops are looking for you, go somewhere!” So I went home and was pulled out of bed at five the next day. I was arrested for conspiracy and the Explosives Act and other things. It was a series of unfortunate events that looked really bad but there wasn't any serious intent to start a riot. I'd been arrested before for graffiti campaigns and shoplifting - it was part of the lifestyle. I was signing on the dole and didn't have a lot of prospects, plus there was lots of distracting music to listen to. The court case showed I was in serious trouble; I could have had a life sentence. I had to plead not guilty; I said I was a pacifist etc. The court case didn't go very

well, the barrister wasn't available on the day and they tried to convince me to do a deal - I wouldn't do it. I was found guilty.

The participant spent three months in a category B/C prison. He felt lucky to have a short sentence and met someone there who was also “on the squat scene – a good friend to have”. He then told me about his experience of prison.

There's no way it wasn't an eye-opener, the grinding dullness of prison time, the sense of the ordinariness of the people you meet there. There was a period of overcrowding, at one point we were four to a cell and it was in the days of slopping out. I worked in the workshops - assembling the signing on forms for the DHSS. It just felt like a senseless waste of time. It's only really in the last few years when reading the literature on the mortification of self etc that it's hit home about how much it applies to the experience...I did feel a little different from other inmates but it was odd how there were different points of connection. There were people who I was glad I wasn't sharing a cell with. It was like being in a school playground again, learning to cope, learning to negotiate space. The work I had done previously was on political imprisonment and this was something very different. I never really thought much more about it...It wasn't full of terrible people, it's a horrible place full of quite regular people.

The participant explained that his parents almost completely refused to acknowledge what had happened. He said that in upper or middle class life, there's an assumption that you don't have a record. He said:

I boxed the experience off, I mean, what do you do with this? It's been a very private thing...There's no way I can say I'm a hard

nut and done time - but it's not completely immaterial. When I did prison research I knew it would be weird going back into prison - I didn't disclose my sentence during interviews. You can't assume identification with other people. Some would say you really should have had someone do this who has been inside - and I would think "well how long would they need to have done to qualify?"

I asked the participant more about being in prison and the relationships he formed there with staff, if any. He said:

Some of the officers knew it was a political offence [I was in for] and questioned a book I was sent. In the end they just leafed through it and gave me a funny look and gave me it. One officer initiated a couple of conversations with me, saying "we're [officers] more institutionalized than the prisoners here, everyone here [officers] will have family members here who are prison officers, we live in the same place and work in the same place". He said "half the people here shouldn't be doing this job". He resented being seen as a screw. He knew the contempt in which most prisoners held prison officers, which hurt him. It's not a job you brag about.

Following his prison sentence, the participant had become disenchanted with university and went to a local college to do a qualification in printing. This better enabled him to do what he wanted to do and he gained his first job back at the university he had previously studied at. Following this, he moved to London to work with children who were at risk of getting into trouble. At the interview for this job, the participant's prison sentence was seen as beneficial in that he had some insight into what the kids were going through – being interviewed by the police, being in police cells and going to court.

At the end of our discussion, the participant reflected on his experiences. He said:

If you go to the local court, nobody can tell you there isn't a class society. We were in cells with buckets and a knackered radio thinking in twenty years' time they'll probably have a telly and that would be outrageous luxury. But even so, you're sitting thinking, would you like to eat your meals in your toilet at home? Things are changing but they're still so similar – the sense of grinding dullness, the routines.

He also spoke about his views on prison education.

I'm rather skeptical of the value of education in prison. I don't like it being sugar coating a bitter pill. Some of the teaching staff and education staff remind me of people looking for a quiet, easy life. There are a few very well motivated prison teachers and projects, but they aren't the norm or the mainstream. Through great teachers, some men are having potentially life changing experiences - but this is not the mainstream. The teachers have targets that they have to achieve with the most challenging learners.

Although this participant had a much shorter experience of imprisonment than Participant 1 and Participant 2, his relationship with education combined with his prison experience enabled him to have an important insight on the education of prisoners. He acknowledged that prison is not full of 'monsters' but rather people who were surprisingly normal and suggested that there were some very well motivated prison teachers. The above extract from my discussion with this participant corroborates the findings of the present research – it highlights the target-based nature of prison

education but also acknowledges that some men in prison are having potentially life changing experiences. It was also interesting to note that despite their social differences, both this participant and Participant 2 acknowledged the poor conditions in prisons despite the having of televisions and other 'luxuries' in cells.

My discussions with ex-prisoners served as a welcome reminder that although prison education (and education more broadly) can be a significant factor in change and transformation, release from prison introduces a new set of challenges. For prisoners who do experience change in their identity and conception of self, the inevitability of stigmatization leaves some negotiating the reality of living in two worlds – one's "own" and the world of the "normals" (Goffman, 1963). It could be argued that one of the core issues in successful desistance is the process of maintaining these dual identities through a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation. This specifically highlights the personality disruption addressed by Clemmer's prisonization concept which stressed the difficulties that ex-prisoners face in adjusting to life in the community after a prison sentence. Although the ex-prisoners interviewed may not have become 'prisonized' having engaged in education (in two cases) thus 'fending off' the prisonization process, the challenges faced in the perpetual renegotiation of identity on release into the community and thereafter are nonetheless experienced. This part of the chapter has also shown, as previously argued in this thesis, that prison is not just a place for the uneducated, or those from broken homes or indeed those who did not engage well with education at school or those-whose relationships with parents were difficult.

8.4 Conclusion: What Changes?

As stated in Chapter Four, Reuss and Wilson (2000) argued that we need to understand exactly what changes happen as a result of the experience of education as there are

numerous potential outcomes and the present study is able to advance this knowledge. This chapter has thematically explored indicators of change including identity, confidence, family relationships and attitudes towards society to present a coherent review of the changes and transformations experienced by prisoners themselves – some of which have also been identified by prison staff. These indicators have also been explored in the context of desistance through the narratives of ex-prisoners to identify the role of education within the desistance process. The evidence suggests that education alone does not necessarily lead to desistance, but rather education combined with other factors including family support and self-reflection can lead to desistance processes. The discussions I had with ex-prisoners brought to the surface the importance of identity in the desistance process and the way that education can help prisoners and ex-prisoners to create a new identity for themselves. At the same time, ex-prisoner participants made me aware that while changes occur, there are aspects of identity from criminal pasts that remain constant and that ex-prisoners in some cases are left to continuously negotiate between identities. In the same way that one teacher referred to having to wear ‘two hats’ in a previous chapter, so too do ex-prisoners. In the case of the ex-prisoners interviewed, two in particular spoke at some length about the sense of having a dual identity and living in two worlds. On the one hand, the development of a passion for learning resulted in the experience of empowerment through having knowledge and a new kind of status. On the other, ex-prisoners were still coping with their previous experiences of crime and imprisonment. In the case of Participant 3, this was a recent development having previously blocked out the prison experience for a considerable time.

At present, organisations with a vested interest in researching and understanding prison education, such as the Prisoners’ Education Trust and the Prisoner Learning Alliance, are beginning to develop theories of change to measure the so-called ‘unmeasurable’ to answer the question ‘What changes?’ The findings of this study show that changes and transformations experienced by prisoners who engage in education courses are primarily concerned with identity and personality – often with the gaining of confidence

and a sense of empowerment through having knowledge, a new interest and being able to think critically and analytically. Through a reconsideration of one's own identity, prisoners in these cases are able to envisage a new or different life for themselves, which can involve future work and helping others or can begin with the reparation of relationships with family members. Although the identification of change relating to 'soft skills' is certainly not as straight forward as measuring academic success with qualifications, the evidence shows that change can and does occur in offenders who engage in education programmes and that education programmes themselves (often complimented by other factors) have a significant role to play as a catalyst for change.

Chapter Nine: Discussion: The Broader Significance of the Research Findings

9.1 Introduction

This research has considered the history of prison education delivery and policy and discussed the current objectives of offender learning provision. Reviewing offender learning policy historically clearly shows that prison education (and more broadly, offender rehabilitation) is not a new practice. Education has been part of the prison regime since the 18th century when learning was focused on the religious and moral instruction of offenders. Although education was focused on religious teachings and improving morality, this resonates with the findings of contemporary prison education research - that learning in prison can effect a significant change in offenders. The underlying principle of prison education since the 18th century has been rehabilitation whether this be through religious and moral instruction or through employability-focused offender learning policy. The means by which this overarching aim is achieved has changed in terms of the content of learning programmes. Presently, prisoners can gain educational qualifications ranging from basic numeracy and literacy to vocational qualifications as well as higher education degrees via distance learning. It is evident that education courses are primarily directed at those who are educationally deficient and as such, the higher the level of qualification sought the more difficulties prisoners are likely to face gaining access to them. As seen in this thesis, there are now increasing barriers to education courses beyond Level 2 as a result of recent budget cuts which has a direct impact on prisoners' experiences of education and their attitudes towards the education courses that are on offer.

This chapter will explore the significance of the research findings by bringing together the outcomes of the data analysis with relevant theory and literature discussed earlier. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how this thesis contributes to the 'absence of evidence' described by Pawson (2000) on research on prison education. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight have set out the findings of the research by analysing data from prisoner, ex-prisoner and staff interviews, and the analysis of prisoner letters to create a detailed understanding of experiences of prison education from a diverse range of sources. This chapter will discuss more broadly the implications of these findings when set in the wider context of the whole prison experience. It will be presented as answers to the initial research questions. In answering the core research questions, where appropriate, a number of key themes will be set out which reveal the core issues emerging from this study to advance knowledge in this field. The key themes are employability, coping, family, preservation, normality, prison is 'easy', budgets, staff and prisoner relationships, identity and desistance, and prison sociology.

9.2 What motivates prisoners to undertake education?

i. Employability

As discussed in Chapter Two, education became synonymous with the goal of post-release employment following the creation of the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit in 2004 and this led to employment becoming a key focus in the National Offender Management Service's delivery plan in 2005. Policy since that time has continued to focus on employability as the core aim of education provision in the prison and this was shown in Chapter Two in the Inspection and Ofsted reports on the category C research site where (as reported in 2009) focus continued to remain on work related training programmes, while groups taking part in numeracy and literacy were small and achievement was poor. It was noted in Chapter Two, and is reinforced here, that making

prisoners more employable through education initiatives is of course a highly desirable outcome and it is not the intention of this study to devalue the importance of increasing the employability of offenders and ex offenders because of the beneficial effects that employment can have in reducing recidivism. However, as the present study has shown, consideration must also be given to the need to generate realistic expectations of future employment for prisoners at the start of their prison sentences and to value other important outcomes of education that may not directly result in employment, but that are important nonetheless in the process of change and transformation and coping with life in society after release.

Employability as a motivation to engage in prison education was particularly evident in the letters written to the Prisoners' Education Trust as part of applications for funding. It has been noted however that this motive to do education may not be entirely reliable from this set of data given the power the audience has over the individual in deciding whether or not funding access is granted.

Staff at a category A prison were particularly emphatic about how unsuitable an employability-focused curriculum was for learners with long-term sentences. Educators were finding difficulty in embedding employability within the curriculum while at the same time ensuring learning sessions were meaningful and enjoyable for learners. Words used to describe employability by these participants included "*farce*", "*a lie*" and they described how an employability focus had turned education into a "*conveyor belt*" which ignored the education of the 'whole person'. Evidently, the concern for increasing employability should be concentrated on those in lower category prisons whose release is more imminent. This research has highlighted however that the embedding of employability across all curriculum areas, in all categories of prisons, has placed restrictions on the opportunity for, in the words of one teacher, "*education for its own sake*".

ii. Coping

The ability to cope with prison life is essential for all prisoners, but particularly so in the context of long term prisoners. It was noted in the 2010 inspection of the category A research site that the importance of keeping long term, serious offenders busy and engaged was fully recognised. In such cases, using education to develop employability is clearly unrealistic, but education provision should continue nonetheless because of the ability for education to become a mechanism for coping with prison life. The letters analyzed in this study showed that some prisoners wanted to do education to gain employment, but that those writing retrospectively were more comfortable in saying that they needed something to do to pass the time and to cope with being in prison. Therefore, this research has found that prisoners' stated motivations to do education differ depending on whether they are speaking about this prospectively or retrospectively. Perhaps expectedly, those who are prospective learners, and also importantly prospective recipients of education funding from the Prisoners' Education Trust, are more likely to state motivations that are in line with offender learning policy (i.e. employment), whereas those writing retrospectively often admitted that they had actually wanted to do education because they were bored or because they needed something to occupy their time.

The outcome of the 'unseen' motivation of coping with prison life through educational opportunities was described by an education manager as psychological, subconscious and spiritual – and at the same time, unmeasurable. Although coping as a motivation to do education is not stipulated in current employability-focused offender learning policy in England and Wales, it was noted earlier in the thesis that in Ireland, the strategy statement for education includes the acknowledgement that education can help prisoners 'cope with their sentences' (Prison Education Service, 2003). Given the data provided in this thesis which evidences the importance of education as a coping mechanism from the perspectives of both prisoners and educators, it is imperative to recommend that coping should be acknowledged more prominently in offender

learning policy as an important aim, motivation and outcome of the prison education experience.

iii. Family

Having explored the wider contexts of prisoners' lives in interviews, it has become clear that the discussions often lead to reflections about family. The Prison Reform Trust's (2003) study and Hughes' (2012) research drew on some narratives involving prisoners' life histories, which allowed prison education experiences to be set in a slightly broader context. The present study has done this in more depth and provides reinforcement of the fact that prisoners are individuals with often-complex histories who have important stories to tell. For some of the participants, education was something that had been taken away from them in earlier life through choices made by their parents and as such, education as a significant life experience becomes inextricably linked with the family aspect of prisoners' biographies.

Not all discussions in this work regarding family have been negative as, in some cases, family has been revealed to be a clear motivation to pursue an education in prison. This has served to demonstrate to family members that prison time can be put to good use for personal growth and improvement and as a clear demonstration of a new life path for the prisoner. Some participants (even those who did not value education in prison) spoke about their changing attitudes towards education in terms of the value they now ascribed to their children attending school and receiving an education. Recent proposals by Justice Secretary Gove have begun to recognize the significance of the families of prisoners and this issue is now emerging in policy. In a recent reform, homework clubs and parent evenings have been introduced wherein incarcerated fathers can meet their children and have sessions with teachers invited into jail. The reform has been introduced following the recognition that lack of contact with loved ones has often been one of the key reasons for repeat offending. This combined with the number of participants who spoke of the problems associated with being separated from family

suggests that family separation may be an additional ‘pain of imprisonment’ to add to Sykes’ (1958) deprivations.

9.3 What does education mean to prisoners?

This research has revisited some of the key themes outlined in existing studies, particularly identity, self esteem, employment and passing time. These themes remain integral to contemporary prison education research and this study has explored themes in the broader context of significant events in prisoners’ lives to add a biographical dimension to the inferences drawn. In doing so, and incorporating the perspectives of prison staff and ex-prisoners, more has been discovered about what the experience of education means to prisoners who engage with such initiatives. In very few cases, education had no meaning whatsoever and it was revealed that some prisoners saw certain types of educational activity as ‘box ticking’ – this was corroborated by a teacher from a different category of prison but was familiar with the impersonal nature of courses that were done purely on paper (some aspects of which actually involved ticking boxes against issues that in fact require reflection, discussion and deliberation). For the majority of participants however, the experience of education did have some meaning, meaning that often went beyond becoming more employable or helping the time to pass.

i. Preservation

In Chapter Two, the 1982 Bill on *Education in Prisons* was reviewed. The purpose of the Bill was to ensure that all men and women in prison should have access to appropriate educational facilities. It was argued that part of the provision of such facilities was to preserve or acquire the capacity to think honestly and effectively so that prisoners may

be able to survive in the community after their release from prison (House of Commons Bill 1982). The concept of preservation was also highlighted in MacGuinness' (2000) work which stressed the importance of keeping the mind active, particularly during long sentences.

It became evident in the present study that education is important for those who may already have education qualifications. As discussed in Chapter Four, imprisonment disrupts normative processes and the physical and psychological impact of imprisonment can create a sense of hopelessness which induces a loss in sense of self worth and confidence. As noted by MacGuinness (2000) and the 1982 Bill, education can provide a way to value, nurture and preserve existing knowledge and skills. This present research shows that this can provide an opportunity for individuals to show family members and employers, following release, that they still have the abilities they had gained prior to imprisonment and therefore that the prison experience has not 'broken' them. Furthermore, the issue regarding increasing barriers to higher level education programmes emerges here. Despite the fact that the inspection reports for the category A prison (discussed in Chapter Two) noted a broad curriculum and an increase in learners studying higher level courses in 2012, interviews with teachers in the present study suggested a reduction of such provision. Higher levels of education are becoming more difficult to access for imprisoned learners and support for those studying via distance learning sometimes relies on the good will of teachers who are not officially employed to support them.

ii. Normality

Clearly, prison education means more than simply delivering employability and participants' narratives have uncovered some of these other outcomes. Prison education has been shown to give life on the inside more meaning and this is particularly true of those prisoners who have been given the opportunity to help support and mentor their peers in order that their own time in prison becomes more rewarding as a

result of their ability to contribute to the educational development of others. Providing a source of mental stimulation, education also creates an opportunity for prisoners to have a 'normal' experience in an abnormal environment. This has been found to be particularly important in the maximum security prison where the absence of normality is even more apparent and the deprivation of freedom is experienced in the extreme. Reuss (2000) noted prisoners using education to 'blank off' prison life, and it is proposed by this study that this is achieved through the creating of 'normal experiences' within the learning environment. It has been found that educators are acutely aware of the need for escape, normality and absorption in doing something to mentally take prisoners out of where they are. For educators, creating such opportunities has to be followed by helping prisoners with "*the basics*" such as getting somewhere on time – abilities that prepare prisoners for the 'normal' expectations of the world outside. Only then can employability begin to be implemented into the process of education.

9.4 How have prisoners' experiences of prison education been shaped by their earlier pre-prison experiences (or lack of experiences) of education?

Investigating prisoner writers', serving and ex-prisoner participants' previous experiences of education has explained why some had negative experiences of education in the prison. Where prisoners have previously had negative relationships or altercations with teachers at school, they are sometimes unable to find personal resolution regarding these incidents and as a result find it difficult to engage well with prison teaching staff. It must be noted however that not all who have negative experiences at school reflect this in their learning in prison. Uncovering past experiences of education identifies that some prisoners experience education positively for the first time during a prison sentence and they reflect on school as a missed opportunity. Identifying this has been important in order to acknowledge that this kind of positive

personal development and intellectual maturity is possible despite negative experiences in the past. This further highlights the individual nature of prison education experiences and thus supports Duguid and Pawson's (1998) argument that it is not necessarily prison education programmes that work but rather their capacity to offer resources that allow participants the choice of making them work. It could therefore be argued that two prisoners with negative experiences of school would not necessarily both struggle to engage with education in prison or have a positive relationship with their prison teachers. It would be their personal interpretation of the opportunity of access to course resources that would determine engagement or lack thereof.

Negative relationships with figures of authority, sometimes a parent, can contribute to poor engagement with school teachers. This highlights the broader issue of the relationship between attitudes towards authority and the education system whereby a disdain for authority becomes directly linked to how education is viewed and particularly how relationships with teachers are formed. With regard to authority, the experience of education in prison can provide an opportunity to re-think conceptions of authority where teacher's approaches are not perceived as overbearing.

It is clear from the above that the effects of previous experiences of education of prisoners can be complex and sometimes contradictory. However, an early understanding of such experiences by the teaching staff could better inform the educational needs of the individual prisoner which would in turn be useful to both the prisoner and the teacher experience. This issue is repeated and reinforced by the discussion in 9.6.

9.5 Can understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change tell us more about imprisonment?

i. Prison is 'easy'

One of the core questions set out at the beginning of this study asked whether understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change could tell us something more about the whole experience of imprisonment. Through the participants' narratives, themes emerged that were not directly related to experiences of education, but were important in their own right in gaining a better understanding of the participants, the prison environment and the context in which the experience of prison education is set. Conversations with some prisoners, ex-prisoners and officers revealed descriptions of the prison as a "*school playground*" and in depth discussions with serving prisoners enabled an exploration of the sometimes controversial view that prison is said by some to be "*easy*". A number of serving prisoner participants initially described imprisonment in this way, however these descriptions were often accompanied by a "*but*":

...easy but a waste of life (James)

...easy but awkward (Paul)

...easy in comparison to 1999 (Joe)

... easy apart from being away from my kids (Pete)

Descriptions of the prison as being 'easy' mirrors some media headlines in recent years which have suggested that prison is a lax environment with an absence of punishment. Examples of such media representations include '*Inmate boasts of 'luxury' life in prison*'

(Edwards, 2008) and *'Gordon Ramsay: 'I can't believe how easy life is in British prisons''* (Wardrop, 2012). These representations have primarily been presented by the tabloid media giving audiences of such publications the impression that prisoners are provided with material comforts that are not always available to people on the outside (Jewkes, 2002; Sparks, 2007). However, it was clear through conversations with serving prisoners, that 'easy' from their perspective was related to the lack of responsibility which is implicit in many elements of life in the outside world meaning that basic needs are taken care of (Maslow, 1943). Prisoners are therefore relieved of some of the stressful realities of everyday life that are experienced in the free community and this lack of responsibility can lead some prisoners to describe imprisonment as 'easy' or 'easier'. However, where an individual may consider prison 'easy' or 'easier' than their life on the outside, this does not immediately suggest that they view prison as being an ineffective form of punishment, but rather may reveal how they have lead their lives on the outside. This relates back to the discussion of human needs that have been missing from people's lives. For some prisoners, the discipline, routine and structure of prison life can 'fill a gap' in their previous experiences of the outside world, and some participants in this study freely admitted to fitting into prison life quite easily as it provided aspects of certainty in a life that had previously been characterized by uncertainty, lack of routine and instability.

ii. Budgets

A number of issues have been raised in this work which have negative impacts on both the educated and the educators. As well as the well known issue of 'churn', recent budget cuts have reduced access to courses beyond Levels 1 and 2 meaning that the 'good' range of courses identified in the inspection reports (for both research sites) may be reported differently in the near future. These current issues have caused frustration amongst both prisoners and teaching staff. Waiting lists for courses and teaching equipment add to this problem creating disillusionment with education for some. Many prisoners reported already feeling disillusioned having experienced courses which felt

like 'box ticking' exercises with no real meaningful outcome. However, when it comes to reporting educational achievement in official reports such as those previously reviewed, the completion of such courses despite their lack of meaning or value for prisoners will be recorded as a positive outcome.

Whether the funding issues currently being experienced can be described as a 'crisis' or not is not a core concern, but, however we choose to label this issue, the outcomes are evident. Fewer books, empty classrooms, long waiting lists for learning resources and equipment, curriculum cutbacks and a focus on getting prisoners through courses quickly suggests a less than encouraging outlook for current prison education and educators who are now facing the added challenge of embedding employability within all curriculum areas. This also paints a drastically different picture from that established in the review of the reports discussed earlier which suggested broadly that matters concerning education were improving. The present research identifies how recent budget cuts have affected those at operational level and how this impacts prisoners' experiences of education. Some teachers have had to modify learning with prisoners in order to embed the necessary employability elements of courses so that they can continue running practical courses which prisoners enjoy and value. In addition, with teachers now having a reduced amount of biographical information about prisoner learners, there is less opportunity to differentiate the delivery of teaching sessions in a way that considers specific information about prisoners and their previous experiences in order to tailor education to individual prisoner backgrounds and needs. Prisoners' previous experiences of education have been identified as having a significant impact on their attitudes towards education and consequently a lack of knowledge of these issues can lead to frustration and demotivation for both inmates and staff.

Crisis or not, budgets have been significantly reduced across the prison estate recently and an 'easy' target is clearly education. While this is driven by an overarching reduction in overall public sector funding, a reduction in education in prisons might also be viewed as an 'easy win' populist move by Government appeasing those in the general

population who may feel that prisoners 'have it too easy' in prison. Given that budget reductions will inevitably continue, prisons must look at additional ways of delivering education, and this would be, and in some cases already is, to involve the recruitment of external local expertise which could be freely available. These might include volunteer teachers from a local university or teacher training college. One such scheme, Learning Together (based on the Inside Out programme developed in the United States), has recently completed its first cycle of delivery in which academics from Cambridge University taught at HMP Grendon to a combination of Cambridge and Grendon students. Encouragingly, the Learning Together Network is now beginning to expand with partnerships between universities and prisons being developed across the country and this includes a partnership which I have personally established and am leading having felt motivated to be involved in improving access to higher level education as a result of the research I have carried out.

iii. Staff and Prisoner Relationships

It was highlighted in Lord Woolf's (1991) report following the highly publicised disturbances at Strangeways in 1990 that the attitudes of prison managers and uniformed staff towards education and training needed to change. Woolf proposed that attitudes had varied between establishments ranging from those he described as being 'more enlightened' to those who had 'more negative attitudes' (1991). In the Time to Learn (2003) study discussed in Chapter Three, prisoners recommended improvements could be made in prisoner-staff relations to enhance the prison education experience. This study has presented an opportunity to consider staff attitudes towards education and relationships (staff-staff and staff-prisoner) more closely.

This research has shown that relationships between prison teachers and prisoners can vary, with some being particularly vocal about the boundaries that need to be set in order to remain mindful of security concerns. This supports Lyon's (1971) proposition that some teachers are reluctant to feel and deal with feelings of students. In the prison

setting however, this reluctance is born out of caution given the nature of the students in question and the need to be mindful of the dual role of teaching in prison – both teaching students, and upholding the requirements of a secure institution. There were some teachers however who had achieved this balance in the challenging environment of the prison who may have been described by Lyon as the humanistic ‘rare birds’ who aim to develop both the intellectual and emotional halves of students – thus making the student ‘whole’ (Lyon, 1971). Attitudes towards prisoners being educated more generally have been found to vary amongst educators. Despite this however, even those who could understand why the wider population may see it as a *“waste of money”* or *“don’t think we should have to pay for it”*, could see why education remained an important aspect of the prison regime. This primarily centred on educators’ opportunities to see evidence of change in their learners which resulted in a mutual respect in the learning environment. The overarching attitude of teachers is that regardless of underlying opinions, something had to be done and that education at least provides an opportunity for the possibility of personal development and change. Although most of the staff interviewed in this research were generally positive about education, it was made clear that not all prison staff are entirely supportive of prisoners having access to higher education and in some cases staff can feel threatened or aggrieved in some way by prisoners studying courses that are at a higher level than staff may have achieved themselves. The controversial issue of deliberate sabotage to prisoners’ work was discussed by participants at both research sites with examples of such cases being given. It should be noted however that such instances appeared to be a rare occurrence but nonetheless should be considered in further discussions about how a shift in institutional culture could prevent such cases arising in the future.

It has emerged that an issue impacting prisoners’ experiences of education can be seen in the nature of relationships between different types of prison staff. This is particularly the case between two groups; experienced and new officers, and education staff and officers. It has emerged through the present research that there may be a different culture between new and more experienced prison officers which is characterized by

their differing approaches to supporting prisoners. Although the officers interviewed in this study outwardly valued education in the prison, especially in terms of creating calmer prisoners and a safer environment, the concern was evident that new recruits had a different work ethic that lacked the empathy and caring that was being shown by more experienced staff. Although the remit of this study has not been to research the training process that officers undertake, the impact that different approaches to prison officer work has on supporting and motivating prisoners should be taken into consideration more carefully in the planning and delivery of staff training.

Between education staff and officers, the tensions lie in the fact that firstly, they have different employers (the prison and external agencies) and thus rewards and privileges are applied differently, but in the same working environment leading to resentment in some cases. Secondly it is clear that many prisoners often view educators and officers very differently. This difference leads to educators being able to see positive values and characteristics in some prisoners which are not perceived by officers. It may well be that there will always be some friction between operational (officers) and non-operational (teachers) staff given the differing nature of their training, work and their relationships with prisoners. However, to ensure that all staff in the prison communicate the value of education to encourage uptake, a shift in the culture of the prison itself is needed at an institutional level. To achieve this more widely, it may be that the role of ex prisoners who have valued and benefitted from their experiences of education during their time in prison, such as those who have taken part in the present study, may have a significant role in working with prison staff to explain how far a little empathy and encouragement from officers can go.

9.6 What, if any, kinds of personal changes and developments do prisoners perceive to have taken place as a result of experiencing education?

i. Identity and Desistance

Although it was suggested in Chapter Four that education and desistance do not necessarily have a direct or consistent causal relationship, the present study shows that the broader outcomes of education such as improved family relationships and the ability to reflect and renegotiate one's conception of self establishes that a relationship between education and desistance can exist. Education can lead to the beginning of the desistance process if that educational experience results in personal change and transformation which then empowers the individual through the gaining of confidence, self esteem and self actualisation. This may be in the form of employment specific skills, but also extends to other attributes that can help prisoners to cope following release from prison into a society that stigmatises those with criminal records. During the time immediately following release, employment may not be an immediate option in which case ex offenders are faced with a significant challenge to their ability to survive without again resorting to crime. The coping skills developed and the self confidence achieved from an education experience can help those released to maintain a sense that they can be 'someone else' and that a return to an old identity is not the only choice they have. Such outcomes of education were identified in this study during conversations with ex-prisoners and it was made clear that these processes of change, whether through education or some other developmental activity, must continue post release in order for individuals to cope with life after prison. The present research reveals that changes in identity can occur during a prison sentence through engagement in education and that those released who continue to cope with the 'deliberate, moral rejection of the criminal by the free community' (Sykes, 1958: 65), face the challenge of the continuous

renegotiation of their identities. These findings support existing literature on the role of personal identity in the desistance process where identity is considered to be a lifelong project (McAdams, 1993). The constant renegotiation of identity that forms an embedded aspect of desistance stems from the initial reconception of self which can be born out of an educational experience. Education in prison can create the initial realisation that the prisoner can be someone else – someone whose identity can be shaped by personal abilities that they previously did not have or that they had not previously had the opportunity to realise.

To understand how prisoners perceive experiences of change and transformation through education, the participants in this study (including staff) were asked to consider their own experiences in order that key 'change indicators' could be identified. The findings of this study show that the changes experienced by prisoners (and also seen by staff) can vary and are sometimes difficult to articulate clearly as the individual prisoner can be described as simply 'being different' to before. In comparison to observing change in the context of the achievement of qualifications, the ability to identify transformations relating to 'soft skills' are much more difficult to quantify but despite this the study has been able to show that identity lies at the core of these perceptions of change. Ex prisoners in particular were able to describe how having the option to be seen as someone different, as someone who has knowledge and abilities and therefore has choices, creates an opportunity to be seen as a different kind of person both internally and to others outwardly. The ability to see oneself as 'student', 'confident' or 'knowledgeable' or even just a 'person' rather than a 'prisoner' or 'ex offender' carries with it the ability to feel empowered to confront the challenging nature of imprisonment and life after prison.

ii. Prison Sociology

This study has found that understanding prisoners' experiences of education can contribute to discussing key themes in prison sociology in the context of the broader

outcomes of prison education. The themes of coping, identity, masculinity and the pains of imprisonment have featured numerous times in this work, both in a review of existing literature and in relation to the data analysis. As such, these themes become interlinked in terms of the impact of educational experiences on individual prisoners. The main premise of this discussion therefore is that prisoners' experiences of education can:

- a. reduce pressure on adult male prisoners to adopt and display hegemonic masculine traits;
- b. help prisoners to cope through mental escape by focusing on a meaningful activity thus reducing the pains of imprisonment; and that education;
- c. can allow prisoners to re-create their identity and cease seeing themselves as a 'prisoner' or 'offender'.

Adopting a 'student' identity in the prison environment can involve an element of sacrifice. For instance, in the Prison Reform Trust's (2003) study, it was noted that some prisoners were put off doing education because it meant that they would have to sacrifice spending time in the gym and receive lower pay. Interestingly, this feeds into the broader discussion about the potential relationship between experiences of education and masculinities as in some cases, the reduction in displaying overt masculinity may begin when *choosing* to do an academic education course as opposed to other 'masculine' activities such as using the gym or doing a manual labour training course. Reuss and Wilson (2000) argued that we need to understand exactly what changes occur as a result of the experience of prison education as there are numerous potential outcomes. This study has shown that there are outcomes that may be less obvious than others, some that are internal that may not produce employees but rather, people who have developed a sense of self and the ability to not feel compelled to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity as part of the role they play in prison culture. Although hegemonic masculinity exists in all areas of society, Sykes (1958) noted that in a society composed exclusively of men, masculine behavior is apt to move to an extreme position and thus, hegemonic masculine traits and behaviors in this environment are

amplified. The present research found when analysing letters written by prisoners that those who had done an education course were more likely to be open to writing about their lives and their emotions – particularly in terms of reflecting on their previous behaviour and the reality of the struggle of life in prison. This suggests that these types of admissions do not appear to reflect the typical hegemonic masculine identity that is often associated with adult male prisoners who may describe prison as ‘easy’. The study therefore suggests that education has the potential to reduce prisoners’ feelings of compulsion to display hegemonic masculinity, which may extend to involvement in violence or other behaviour that secures a place in the prisoner hierarchy. This sentiment was echoed by prison staff who explained that education can be the “*great leveler*” and has the potential to reduce ‘mischief’ and disruptive behaviour through impulse control in the wider prison environment, not just in the classroom.

9.7 Emerging Issues

The previous parts of this chapter have provided answers to the core thesis questions and I believe have further developed and increased our existing knowledge of prison education experiences. However, it is important to further develop this discussion by providing more detailed insight into the emerging issues that have developed from the themes already discussed. This discussion of emerging issues highlights more specifically the inferences I have drawn from this research concerning family, the need to differentiate education across this prison estate, relationships between prisoners and teachers, the importance of prisoner biography, the impact of budget cuts and the ‘myth’ of easy prison time.

This study reveals a range of motivations to do education in addition to those more commonly seen across prison education research such as becoming employable and passing time. These include satisfying the wish of a late parent, striving to better oneself

having brought shame on family members, helping young people to avoid entering a life of crime and attempting to narrow the gap between one's own educational status and that of siblings. This further identifies that family has a clear bearing on motivations to become educated and that the preservation of relationships with others on the outside is a significant factor that helps to continuously motivate prisoners throughout their education experiences.

It is evident that motivations to do education can and should vary across different categories of prison establishments. For those in the maximum security estate whose release is by no means imminent and in some cases will never happen, education is motivated by a need to keep the mind active and to fill time with activities that, according to prison staff, discourage negative behaviour both on and off the wings. The prevention of negative behaviour can also be a conscious motivating factor on the part of the prisoner who makes the choice to adopt non-coercive strategies [such as pursuing education classes] to deal with the encroachment of male and penal power on their lives (Sim, 1994). In this study, this was seen in those who wanted to 'keep their heads down' who had no interest in confrontation or prisoner status.

Prisoners' relationships with their teachers vary, and this can sometimes be attributed to negative past experiences of school, or more broadly issues with authority that in some cases stem from physical discipline during childhood. Although it is agreed that security considerations must be adhered to at all times during education and thus prisoner-teacher relationships must be carefully negotiated, it became apparent in this research that those teachers who took a more humanistic approach to educating prisoners were more outwardly passionate about the work they do and the meaning it had for those they educate. In this sense, this research has identified examples of models of education (discussed in Chapter One) in the approaches taken by the teachers interviewed. There was a clear divide between the 'humanists' and the 'vocationalists' which determined how well or not teachers knew their students personally and thus the kind of educational environment they were able to create. As such, it has been

determined that those teachers who formed closer relationships with their student did not do this at the sacrifice of security. In doing so, they in fact created an atmosphere of reciprocal respect in which a consideration for rules and regulations was shared by prisoners and teachers alike and teachers felt supported by their students.

It has become clear in this research that there is value in encouraging prisoners to recount their life stories. This has a clear link to discourse on identity and the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959). I have found that this is important for two specific reasons. Firstly, determining prisoners' previous experiences of education can help understand why they do or do not engage well with education in the prison environment. Secondly, the process of prisoners being encouraged to discuss their life stories is an important exercise in itself. Many serving prisoners in this study said that talking about their lives during the interviews gave them the opportunity to think about things in a way that they hadn't done before. Sharing their life stories appeared to have been an important reflexive exercise, which enabled them to comment on their own past actions and experiences in a constructive way. At present, prisoners are not given the opportunity to discuss their pasts in detail during the OASys¹¹ process and the only part of the process that touches on this is a self-assessment questionnaire, which is designed for prisoners to record their opinions about themselves. OASys does involve a short interview with offenders, however the interview is focused on risk assessment, offending behaviour and inter-personal behaviour. As prison teachers now have a lack of biographical information about their learners to inform teaching and support, it is recommended that the OASys process should include offenders having the opportunity to tell their stories verbally. By telling their stories on entry to the prison as part of the OASys process, relevant departments involved in prisoners' sentence plans (including education) could be informed of such information in order that prison staff have prior knowledge of specific experiences that prisoners have had. This may then indicate that they require additional support or that alternative approaches should to be taken during

¹¹ OASys is the IT based Offender Assessment System, developed jointly by the Prison and Probation Services (HM Prison Service, 2005).

education or other rehabilitative programmes. Including this process on entry to prison would also create an opportunity for prisoners to preserve their civil identity by reflecting on the people they are and the kind of people they would like to become.

Clearly, budget cuts in recent years have had a significant role to play in how education in prison is managed and delivered and therefore experienced by prisoners, and this study has drawn out some of the specific issues being experienced at an operational level. In a piece of work that has endeavoured to understand how prisoners experience education, the role of teachers has, unsurprisingly, emerged as particularly significant, especially when discussing how they are coping (or not) with meeting the demands set by a reducing budget and an increasing need to embed employability into all areas of the curriculum, despite the fact that some of the prisoners they teach will never be released and therefore never have the opportunity to be employed.

This chapter has provided a discussion which has explored the insights developed from the data generated by the interviews and documentary analysis carried out in this study. It strongly suggests that the outcomes of education include but also go beyond the focused goal of employability, and this discussion has highlighted the broader outcomes evidenced in this research. It has also emphasised that prisoners and educators alike share challenges in the wake of an austere penal policy climate whereby budget cuts have further prioritised employability-focused education, even for prisoners who may never be released from custody. The following, and final, chapter will bring this thesis to a close by briefly summarising the key findings of this research and proposing how we may need to think about prison education differently going forward.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This study had been conducted to address a core set of questions:

- a) What motivates prisoners to undertake education?
- b) What does education mean to prisoners?
- c) How have prisoners' experiences of prison education been shaped by their earlier pre-prison experiences (or lack of experiences) of education?
- d) Can understanding prisoners' experiences of education and change tell us more about imprisonment?
- e) What, if any, kinds of personal changes and developments do prisoners perceive to have taken place as a result of experiencing education?

Through detailed data analysis, this research has uncovered that in addition to motivations already identified in existing research, such as passing time and gaining qualifications for employment, prisoners are also motivated by issues concerning family including the repairing and maintaining of relationships and in some cases they are motivated by the need to achieve redemption from shame. For prisoners, education can have a range of meanings including mental escape, self preservation or for others who are disillusioned by education, no meaning at all other than 'ticking boxes'. It has been identified that some prisoners' previous negative attitudes towards education are imported into their prison education experiences meaning that attitudes towards teachers reflect a disdain for authority which can originate from strained relationships with parents. For other prisoners, education in prison is about making up for previously missed educational opportunities and can result in increased self esteem, confidence and empowerment through the realization of one's own abilities. Investigating prisoners' experiences of education in this study has revealed the nature of contemporary imprisonment and has specifically highlighted the detrimental impact of recent budget cuts on numerous aspects of the the prison experience. Finally, this

research has identified that identity and the conception of self lies at the heart of processes of change and transformation that can be instigated by an educational experience and becomes a continuous process of renegotiation following a prison sentence.

Experiences of education play a significant role in developing a broad range of skills, abilities and transformative personal attributes. They allow ex-prisoners to fit into society and to have something in common with others in the free community thus creating a much needed sense of belonging. If offenders are to have any chance of successful resettlement without re-offending, they must be given the opportunity to experience education and to interpret how they feel it could be best used for their own personal development. Prison education therefore cannot continue to be *primarily* focused on prisoners' lack of skills that they need to become employed. It should also focus more broadly on prisoners' lack of educational experience that has caused a deficiency in personal development, emotional maturity and opportunities for change. More acknowledgement also needs to be given to the ability of education to give prisoners the confidence and self esteem to personally manage the prison experience and to cope with life after imprisonment, particularly if that doesn't immediately result in employment.

The inspection and Ofsted reports reviewed in Chapter Two show that from 2004 to 2012 there appeared to be a general improvement in education support and achievement in the prison environment. The present research however has suggested that this progress may be being negatively affected by budget cuts and as such, future reports may begin to tell a different story. Interviews with both prisoners and staff revealed a frustrating reduction in support for education as well as fewer books, a reduction in curriculum diversity and limited access to higher education and materials. Empty classrooms and long waiting lists for courses and equipment are leading to disillusionment for both prisoners and staff. Frustrations over rapid throughput of prisoners on courses, 'box ticking' and the need to embed employability, sometimes

artificially in popular courses, are increasing the problems. A reduced emphasis in providing prison teachers with information on prisoner biographies and a lack of engagement in any early counselling of new prisoners in terms of realistic expectations of their future employability is adding to the general air of dissatisfaction and frustration. The interviews with both staff and prisoners have also highlighted the sometimes fraught relationships within the staff at prisons and this can also impact on the way that education is experienced by prisoners.

As stated in Chapter Nine, a way forward in improving educational provision in prisons to broaden the currently employability-focused curriculum will be to involve expertise outside of the prison establishment such as that residing in universities. As described in the previous chapter, examples of such initiatives are beginning to be implemented across the country as well as those which are involving local and national businesses. In addition, inviting ex-prisoners who have clearly benefitted from in-prison education to consult with prisons actively seeking to establish a rehabilitative culture (such as in the case of the category A prison accessed for this research) would be particularly powerful in reinforcing the positive role of education in delivering a broad range of benefits which are potentially life changing. It is clearly also of great importance that penal reform organisations continue to communicate to the new Justice Secretary the effects of the budget cuts before the frustrations discussed culminate in a real 'crisis' in prisons in this country.

The writer of 'Letter 14' was a prisoner at a maximum-security prison and I feel that his words encapsulate a number of the arguments presented in this thesis:

...I have now satisfied the requirements for a Batchelor of Arts (Honours) Open Degree. I have completed the degree with an Upper Second-class Honours overall classifications. Words cannot express, how proud I feel at this moment having achieved

this qualification, or, the difference it has actually made to my life.

I was raised in a single parent family on a rough council estate where crime and anti-social behaviour was the rule rather than the exception. Consequently, I did not receive the benefit of a formal education, on the contrary, I arrived at prison approximately 10 years ago and could hardly spell. Despite this, I have overcome the personal and practical obstacles placed before me, and through hard work and determination, have come to realize what I am actually capable of. What vulnerabilities I may have had have now diminished, and I now feel a sense of empowerment with which I can face the world...

This is a striking example of the fundamental life change which can occur inside the prison as a result of education and it is clear that the likelihood of this prisoner becoming employed will be enhanced by the evident increase in his confidence and maturity gained by education which is not solely aimed at employability. I believe therefore that, based on the research in this thesis, we must think about prison education in a way that looks beyond employability and incorporate ways of thinking that embrace the broader outcomes of learning in prison.

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Appendix A: Consent Form for Prisoners & Ex-prisoners

The University of Hull
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Consent Form for Research Projects Involving Interviews

Information for participants:

The purpose of this research project is to find out about the experiences current prisoners have had of education during their lives. This includes experiences both before going to prison and during a prison sentence. Participants will be asked during the interview to talk about their own experiences of education and the impact that it has or has not had on them at different times in their lives.

TITLE OF STUDY: An Inquiry into Adult Male Prisoners' Experiences of Education

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Helen Nichols

- I confirm that I have understood the nature of the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
- I understand that the researcher will interview me, and my responses will be transcribed and stored on a computer for analysis ☐
- I understand that the results of all the interviews will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic journals and in conference proceedings. ☐
- I understand that in the research report I will remain fully anonymous and any information I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my Identity to an outside party. ☐
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used. ☐
- I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

Appendix B: Consent Form for Prison Staff

The University of Hull
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Consent Form for Research Projects Involving Interviews

Information for participants:

The purpose of this research project is to find out about the experiences current prisoners have had of education during their lives. This includes considering the perspectives and experiences of those who work with prisoner learners. Participants will be asked during the interview to talk about their experiences of working with prisoner learners, and more broadly, working in the prison environment.

TITLE OF STUDY: An Inquiry into Adult Male Prisoners' Experiences of Education

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Helen Nichols

- I confirm that I have understood the nature of the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐
- I understand that the researcher will interview me, and my responses will be transcribed and stored on a computer for analysis ☐
- I understand that the results of all the interviews will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic journals and in conference proceedings. ☐
- I understand that in the research report I will remain fully anonymous and any information I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my Identity to an outside party. ☐
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used. ☐
- I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name:.....

Date:.....

Signature:

