

**PRISONER LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES OF PRISON EDUCATION WITHIN  
THE TOTAL INSTITUTION OF THE PRISON: A LIFE HISTORY  
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

By

**Jane Carrigan**

Bachelor of Arts  
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M.Sc. Applied Social Research

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Supervisor: Dr. Catherine Maunsell  
Auxiliary Supervisor: Dr. Paul Downes  
Department of Education  
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra

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## Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Jane Carrigan

ID: 56269331

Date: 30/1/2013

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## **Abstract**

### **Prisoner Learners' Perspectives of Prison Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison: A Life History Methodological Approach**

**By Jane Carrigan**

The objective of this thesis is to access adult male prisoner learners' experiences of prison education in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish prison setting with the purpose of analysing, using Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution, the role prison education plays both within individual lives and within the total institution of the prison in order to offer suggestions for reform of prison education and educational practice in general.

A life history methodological approach was adopted for this work and the life histories of eighteen adult male prisoners, who were attending prison school within the total institutions of Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick's Institution and Limerick Prison, were collated. Prisoner learners in these three prison sites were interviewed, at least twice, and transcripts of interviews were subsequently coded and analysed thematically.

This thesis takes place within a theoretical framework which primarily uses Erving Goffman's concept of a total institution but also includes Michel Foucault's examination of prison and power. In addressing the fundamental research question as to how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, two related sub-questions emerged and are addressed in this doctoral work. These pertain firstly to the institution of the prison itself, how it operates and its impact on prison education participation and secondly to prisoners' previous educational and life experiences.

The narratives of those confined are largely absent in the work of both Goffman and Foucault and this lacuna is addressed in this thesis. Data generated from the life history interviews revealed prisoner learners to be knowledgeable agents who were able to discuss, reflect and critique their previous educational and life experiences as well as offer their perspectives of both prison education and their decision to engage or re-engage with education within the context of imprisonment.

Eighteen recommendations are made in the conclusion of this research and these recommendations have implications for both penal and educational policy and practice.

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Finally, I am indebted to the eighteen individuals who shared with me their educational and life experiences. The narratives that I was privileged to listen to as part of this research have stayed with me and I hope this thesis does justice to the lives of those who shared them.

## **Glossary**

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ACO	Assistant Chief Officer
CDVEC	City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee
COE	Council of Europe
CPT	Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EBD	Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties
EPEA	European Prison Education Association
FACE	Forum for Access and Continuing Education
HRB	Health Research Board
HSE	Health Service Executive
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
IPEA	Irish Prison Education Association
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust
IPS	Irish Prison Service
ISM	Integrated Sentence Management
JCFJ	Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice
LCA	Leaving Cert Applied
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OU	Open University
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
NCAD	National College of Art and Design
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
PBREC	Prisoner Based Research Ethics Committee
REC	Research Ethics Committee
SEN	Special Educational Needs
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee

## Chapter One: Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to access adult male prisoner learners' experiences of prison education in a 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish prison setting with the purpose of analysing, using Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution, the role prison education plays both within individual lives and within the total institution of the prison, in order to offer suggestions for reform of prison education and educational practice in general. Goffman defined a total institution as "a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life" (p. 1) and he identified a range of organisations as examples of a total institution, one of which was the prison. From his examination of total institutions, and as part of the research process in this thesis, the features of a total institution were collated and categorised under three specific headings: the existence of mortifications or attack on inmates' sense of self; the formal administration of a total institution, which included the existence of a privilege system, the staff-inmate divide and the organisation of time; and lastly the development of an institutional "underlife", a space within a total institution but not necessarily always within its control. Goffman acknowledged that every total institution may not experience these features to the same degree, however, as this thesis concentrates on the total institution of the prison, it is degree to which the prison, in an Irish 21<sup>st</sup> century context, exhibits the features identified which is the focus of this work.

This thesis adds to Goffman's analysis of a total institution by empirically examining prisoner learners' experiences of the total institution of a prison. A distinctive aspect of this thesis is that the research was conducted in multiple sites. One criticism of Goffman's provision of examples of total institutions had been that it may seem to imply that all total institutions, even ones that share the same aim, are homogeneous (cf. Davies, 1989). The decision therefore to access prisoner learners' perspectives in three prison sites addresses this criticism and builds on Goffman's insights as, in addition to exploring the degree to which the prison exhibits the features of a total institution, it allows for a comparative analysis across three prison sites to be made.



The fundamental research question this thesis examines is how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of a prison? The validity and relevance of this question emerges from the context of a prison system which seeks both to contain people as part of their punishment and to offer inmates opportunities to rehabilitate and become “valued members of society” (Irish Prison Service, 2010). The importance and significance of this thesis is illustrated by the lack of research on what it means to be imprisoned in Ireland (cf. O’Donnell, 2008), and in particular, what prison education means for those who participate in it (cf. Wilson, 2007). Thus while reports from the Irish Prison Service (IPS), statutory bodies (e.g. Prison Visiting Committees, Office of Inspector of Prisons), civil society organisations (e.g. Irish Penal Reform Trust), and government sanctioned inquiries (such as the McBride and Whitaker reports) reveal some important information on how the prison, and education within the prison, operates, the voices of those confined within the prison, and particularly those attending prison school, are often absent. This thesis addresses this gap.

This thesis also focuses exclusively on the experience of adult male prisoner learners. Data from the Irish Prison Service (Annual Report, 2010) had revealed that, in line with international research, the majority of prisoners are male (87.6%). While this implies that imprisonment itself is a gendered process, it influenced, combined with evidence to suggest that men are underrepresented in adult education programmes in Ireland (cf. Maunsell, Downes, and McLoughlin, 2008; O’Connor, 2007; Department of Education and Science, 2000; Owens, 2000) the decision to concentrate on the experience of adult male prisoner learners.

The timeliness of this research is illustrated by growing academic and policy interest on both prisons and prison education. The need to include prisoners in the discourse on rights to education has been argued by Munoz (2009), who as UN special rapporteur on the right to education acknowledged the lack of research and debate on prison education and argued that prisoners’ views should be sought in this regard. In Europe, the right of prisoners to access educational opportunities while in prison has been supported by a number of policy documents (e.g. the European Prison Rules, updated in 2006; Council of Europe’s *Education in Prison*, 1990). In 2010 the European Commission organised a major European conference on education and training which documented the range of prison education projects, funded by the Commission, that

have occurred since 2000. As a result of the conference a review of previous research in the area of prison education and training was commissioned and the subsequent document by Hawley (2011) while acknowledging the general consensus that prison education plays a positive and rehabilitative role, also reported the limited research in this area.

National and international data on prisoner profiles depicts a picture of social and educational disadvantage and the literature revealed that Ireland, in common with other industrialised countries, has a prison population that is mainly male, urban and from lower socio-economic groups. The White Paper on Adult Education (Department of Education and Science, 2000) in Ireland acknowledges that prisoners are a group that have often experienced educational disadvantage and makes specific reference to prisoners and ex-offenders stating that:

research has consistently shown that offenders generally come from the most marginalised groups in society and typically are at high risk of being unemployed, unqualified, addicted, experiencing multiple disadvantage and finding it exceptionally difficult to re-integrate into the labour market. (p. 175)

Nationally, the growth in the prisoner population and the recognition that the numbers of those confined reached, in 2009, its highest level since the history of the state, also supports the timeliness of researching how a prisoner learner experiences attending a school within the total institution of the prison.

There have been some empirical studies in relation to prisoner learners' experience of prison education in Ireland. Costelloe (2003), for example, surveyed prisoners, both male and female, who were pursuing third level qualifications while incarcerated and Oates (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with prisoners and staff to explore barriers to prison education. This thesis builds on these contributions to the emerging and under-researched field of prison education by exploring, in three prison sites, prisoner learners' experiences of education both prior to and during their incarceration within the total institution of the prison.

While this thesis is located within a theoretical framework which mainly draws on Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution, the theoretical perspective of Foucault (1977) and his examination of prison and power in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* did contribute to the theoretical framework adopted. Goffman's (1961) analysis of a total institution was based on his ethnographic work in a psychiatric hospital and although he makes numerous references to prison and considers it an example of a total institution, his work is not specific to the prison. Foucault's (1977) theoretical work on the other hand was specifically about the emergence of the prison and was a useful complement to Goffman's analysis. In particular, Foucault's linking of the prison and other institutions in society such as educational ones, in terms of the disciplinary techniques employed, was constructive both in developing the implications of the research question posed and in furthering the analysis of data gathered as part of this thesis. What are missing from both theorists' writings in relation to total institutions, prisons and power, are the voices and words of those who are confined within a prison setting specifically. This thesis adds to the work of Goffman and Foucault by providing a prisoner learners' perspective on life, and specifically education, both prior to and within the total institution of prison in Ireland.

In addressing the fundamental research question in this thesis as to how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, two related sub-questions emerged. These pertain firstly to prisoners' previous educational and life experiences and secondly to the institution of the prison itself, how it operates and its impact on education participation. For Goffman (1961), participants' previous life experience is important because of his argument that this impacted on how inmates adjusted to a total institution. It was also important in terms of Foucault's (1977) work as he linked the institution of the prison with other institutions in society including educational ones and indeed argued that some institutions established a trajectory from their institution to the prison. The identification of these related questions and the positing of them are important in understanding, and ultimately answering, the fundamental research question of how prison education is experienced by prisoner learners confined within the total institution of the prison.

The selection of a life history methodological approach was an important dimension in this thesis, and its use facilitated prioritising the voices of prisoner

learners. As a methodology, it has traditionally been used in research with groups who have been marginalised and treated as “other” in society (cf. Goodson, 2001 for overview of the use of life history methodology in sociological research). Through accessing prisoner learners’ experiences of prison education within the total institution of a prison, using a life history approach, consideration is given to the impact of the institution on the individual as well as their earlier life and educational contexts.

The work of Finnish researchers, Antikainen, Houtsonen, Kauppila and Huotelin (1996), and their employment of the life history methodology in discovering the meaning of education, in the everyday lives of individuals, was influential in this thesis. Their work illustrated the appropriateness of the life history method in both interviewing people of different ages and social classes, including adults from marginalised ethnic groups, and in drawing attention to how education is life-long and can play an important role in individuals’ lives. In particular Antikainen et al’s work provided a model of how life history data could be presented.

Antikainen et al’s (1996) presentation of data was recognised as an appropriate way of conveying narratives revealed through a life history methodology and in line with their study, life history profiles based on individual life stories are included in the three analysis chapters in this thesis. The inclusion of these profiles further places the prisoner learner at the heart of this thesis and underlines the fact that the prisoner learners who participated in this research were more than research subjects but were people with a life story and educational history. Life history profiles are also employed to illustrate key points and issues raised in the analysis chapters. The extensive use of quotes from participants in the analysis chapters underscores the desire to place the voice of the prisoner learner at the centre of this thesis. Antikainen et al’s (1996) use of grounded theory, in which theory is discovered through the data rather than having pre-conceived theories, was not replicated in this thesis however. Instead a coding template based on the research question, theoretical framework and literature review was created before analysis began and was added to during the analysis stage. This use of template analysis to more effectively interpret emerging themes was adopted in order to introduce a more structured and systematic method of analysis and in acknowledgement of the importance of the theoretical underpinnings in this research study.

Eighteen life histories of prisoner learners over the age of 18 were collated in three prison sites: Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick's Institution (both based in Dublin) and Limerick Prison (based in the south-west of Ireland), all of which were categorised as medium security institutions, with St. Patrick's Institution further categorised as an institution for young offenders under 21 years. Data was collected over a five month period and over twenty-nine hours of interviews were recorded and almost eight hundred typed pages of transcripts generated. Throughout the fieldwork phase, it became clear that the prisoner learners who participated in the life history interviews were knowledgeable agents, reflective and critical about the institution of the prison, their own lives and prison education. They were not limited to or defined by their incarceration and/or their knowledge of prison education but, as emerged from the life history interviews, were individuals who had entered their confinement with ideas and beliefs formed and informed by their lived experience. It is envisaged that this thesis will act as a counter balance to prison deprivation literature which often characterises prisoners as subordinate.

In the context of this research, prison education is taken to mean attending the school within the institution of the prison and participants and prisoners who engaged with the prison school are identified by the term *prisoner learner* while adult learners in the outside community are denoted by the word *learner*. The term *student* is used to refer to children and young adults engaged in learning within the primary and secondary school systems. Some inconsistency in the language is in evidence in circumstances where reference is made to work in which the authors use other terms. Goffman (1961) for instance frequently refers to *inmates* in general and also uses the term *patient*.

By placing the voice of the prisoner learner at the centre of this thesis it becomes possible to analyse the role that attending the prison school plays within the total institution of the prison and within the lives of prisoner learners. The use of a life history methodological approach, with a particular focus on educational lives, means that the provision of a prisoner learners' perspective on prison education will have implications for both education in general and also how prison education is and could be delivered within the total institutional setting of the prison. The following section explains and clarifies the structure of this thesis.

## **Structure: Prisoner Learners' Perspectives of Prison Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison: A Life History Methodological Approach**

This thesis begins by outlining the theoretical framework that has been adopted. Chapter Two analyses the work in particular of Goffman (1961) and his concept of the total institution as well as the arguments Foucault (1977) elucidated in *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. A number of other theorists, including Bourdieu, Giddens and Freire, were consulted and considered before the theoretical framework was finalised and adopted. Both Goffman and Foucault's work, however, set the theoretical parameters of the overall thesis and this framework was vital in posing and refining the research question and in shaping the construction of the literature review chapters. The literature review is structured into two chapters. The first literature review chapter, Chapter Three, concentrates on what is known about the general profile of prisoners incarcerated, with a focus on their educational experiences. The link in the literature between educational attainment and imprisonment is also documented together with analysis of the literature on the impact of early school leaving. Literature related to life within the total institution of the prison, both sociological studies and accounts from former prisoners, are also delineated.

The second literature review chapter, Chapter Four, examines literature in relation to prison education in general before providing a review of official reports and analysis of prisons and prison education provision in Ireland. In analysing the learning environment of the prison, literature related to the relationship between prisoner learners and teachers and prison officers is reviewed, as are a range of studies related to motivation to engage in education, within the context of confinement within the total institution of the prison. Goffman had observed the discrepancies between a total institution's official aims and the actual reality of them as experienced by those who live within them. Thus this chapter includes analysis of the policy and practices of Irish prisons and the prison education services in Ireland. The chapter identifies the aims of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and reviews its annual reports as well as reports from civil society organisations. International models of prison education are then identified and the provision of education in Ireland is contextualised and critiqued.



The methodology chapter, Chapter Five, provides a rationale for the research design and the methodological approach, the life history, which was utilised in the study. The life history approach was an important dimension to this thesis as it elicits and gives validity to the perspective of the prisoner learners themselves. Prisoners are considered a particularly vulnerable population and have in the past been subjected to research that would nowadays be considered unacceptable (Shuster, 1997). In light of this, it was necessary to carefully address the ethical implications of this research and to engage with a robust process of ethical approval. The proposal to carry out this research was approved by the Research Ethics Committees [RECs] of both the Irish Prison Service and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. In the methodology chapter the ethical implications of the research undertaken and the particular challenges involved with a life history approach are analysed and the chapter also includes an account of the construction of the interview schedules before detailing the sampling frame used and how access to prisons was negotiated. The chapter also provides clarification on how data was collected, coded using NVivo, and analysed. Analysis of the data from the life history interviews, using template analysis, resulted in identifying a number of themes and these themes were subsequently organised into three chapters (Chapters Six, Seven and Eight).

In interpreting the data, Goffman's theoretical perspective of a total institution and the identification and categorisation of the features of a total institution, which were collated as part of the research process, were concretised using prisoner learners' experiences. The decision on the structure of the analysis chapters was made on the basis of the theoretical framework, literature review and template analysis of the life history interview transcripts themselves. The prison context and living within it was a theme in which prisoner learners returned to throughout the interviews and its impact on their lives and their decision to return to education was critical. Therefore, the analysis section begins in Chapter Six with a focus on prisoner learners' perceptions of the total institution of the prison and, from the perspective of prisoner learners, what life is like within it.

The second analysis chapter, Chapter Seven, analyses prisoner learners' previous educational and life experiences as revealed in the life history interviews. It does so in recognition both of Goffman's argument that knowledge gained in past life

experiences impact on how individuals experience a total institution and that prison confinement does not obliterate prisoner learners' personal and educational history but may impact on their experience of confinement and cause participants to reflect on those past experiences (Liebling and Maruna, 2006). Prisoner learners' previous life and educational experiences have implications for decisions by prisoners to engage with prison education and prisoner learners' interpretation of these experiences is addressed in this analysis chapter. The final analysis chapter pertains specifically to the prisoner learners' experience of prison education and begins by analysing prisoner learners' perspectives on prison education and how this compares to their experiences of education prior to incarceration within the prison. The range of motivations and push/pull features, identified through the life history interviews, are presented and analysed. The obstacles to attending the prison school, as identified by prisoner learners, are analysed as are suggestions which emerged from the life history interviews as to how improvements to prison education could be implemented to address obstacles and enhance the experience of prison education as well as widening access and participation.

The final concluding chapter, Chapter Nine, extricates and discusses particular issues which emerged during the course of this doctoral work and, in offering conclusions to this research, provides suggestions for reform and potential areas of further research.

In addressing the research question of how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of a prison this thesis adds to the emerging but under researched field of prison education. The dearth of literature on prison education (Hawley, 2011; Munoz, 2009) and what it means to be imprisoned in Ireland (O'Donnell, 2008) has been acknowledged. This thesis addresses this gap and provides a perspective on prison education and life within a total institution from the point of view of prisoners in three prisons in Ireland and accesses, through use of a life history methodology, the experiences of prisoners who have chosen to engage with prison education. Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution was critical to this thesis and, the data which emerged from the life history interviews with 18 prisoner learners can be interpreted as concretising his concept of a total institution. Goffman (1961) had drawn attention to the importance of participants' previous life experience in considering how

inmates adjusted to a total institution. Previous life experience was also important to consider in terms of Foucault's (1977) work in which he argued that other institutions, e.g. reformatories, lead to the prison. There is a sense in Foucault's work however that education is done to people, yet this thesis seeks to examine, from a prisoner learner perspective, how education is experienced by prisoner learners who choose to both access and participate in prison education while within the total institution of the prison.

The research undertaken in this thesis builds on the insights of both Goffman and Foucault but importantly adds to their work by placing the voice of the prisoner learner at its centre. A more detailed examination of Goffman and Foucault's writings and how their work contributed to the theoretical framework chapter is presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework Adopted in Exploring Prisoner Learners' Perspectives of Prison Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

This thesis argues that through examining Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution within a 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish prison context, the role prison education plays both within the total institution of the prison and within individual lives can be analysed in order to offer suggestions for reform of prison education and educational practice in general. It does so by focusing on the educational experiences of prisoner learners through the theoretical lens of Goffman mainly (particularly his text *Asylums*), complemented by Foucault and his work on the emergence of the prison (1977). In concentrating on prisoner learners' experiences of prison education within the total institution of the prison therefore, this thesis is located at the intersection between the sociology of punishment and the sociology of education.

Although Goffman and Foucault were near contemporaries, both examined the existence of institutions in general and prisons in particular using very different methodologies. Goffman's (1961) ethnographic study *Asylums*, based on his observations while working in a psychiatric hospital, formed the basis of his concept of a total institution and drew attention to how an institution, which separated people from the general population and controlled eating, sleeping and other activities, impacted on inmates. His work is central in understanding how the self is affected by a total institution. The focus of this thesis is primarily underpinned by Goffman's early work, in particular his seminal work *Asylums* (1961), but also *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1968). Foucault's writings on the institution of the prison, and related institutions, are instrumental in analysing how the institution of the prison came into being and how power and knowledge through discourse emerges. Foucault's argument that power is ubiquitous and surfaces through discourses, which often produce institutions which support it, provides a link with Goffman's idea of the total institution. Foucault's influential text *Discipline and Punish* (1977) in which he explores the emergence of the modern prison was particularly valuable in developing the theoretical framework used in this thesis however references are also made to some of his earlier work, *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003).

Both Goffman and Foucault, although working in different continents, produced works on the topic of “madness”. In *Asylums*, Goffman analysed the ways in which human behaviour is constituted in face to face interaction in the institutional setting of a psychiatric hospital while in *Madness and Civilisation* Foucault links the emergence of institutions to deal with “madness” in seventeenth century France, firmly and unequivocally to the socio-economic conditions of the time. Foucault’s work has been described as “top-down” in the sense that it addresses an entire system of thought whereas Goffman’s research is positioned as “bottom-up” i.e. concerned with individuals and their social relations with others (Hacking, 2004; Dwyer, 1995). In *Asylums* and *Discipline and Punish*, both Goffman and Foucault begin with extreme cases i.e. how people are defined and treated within a total institution. However their approach to these cases is different. Goffman’s research begins, for instance, with the individual and focuses on how the self was defined and understood in relation to others. While Goffman is concerned with observations of day to day interactions in an institution, Foucault’s work provides a broad historical analysis of the development of prisons through which analysis of the individual becomes dwarfed by the analysis of the wider socio-economic and political conditions that prevail.

In relation to this thesis, Goffman’s (1961) research was a useful point from which to understand the workings of an institution and how individuals responded to it, and Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) was beneficial in understanding the role prison plays in society and in seeing connections between the prison and other institutions such as hospitals and schools. Both theorists address the working of power within the context of confinement and although Goffman is the dominant theorist used in this research, both Goffman and Foucault’s work, in relation to a total institution and the prison itself, help set the parameter of the theoretical framework that has been adopted herein.

Though both Goffman and Foucault made use of literary, historical, and academic sources, and also, in Goffman’s case ethnographic fieldwork, to support their arguments, the words of those who are confined within a total institution are missing and this thesis specifically addresses this lacuna. In building on insights from Goffman and Foucault, this thesis adds to their work by providing a perspective on life within a total institution from the point of view of inmates of a modern prison system in Ireland

and accessing, through use of a life history methodology, the experiences of prisoner learners who have chosen to engage with prison education.

The rationale for using a life history methodological approach is provided in Chapter Five, however as Foucault (1977) has observed the role of biography has entered criminology in the sense that knowing about the biography of the criminal has become an essential part in deciding the level of penalty crimes warrant. While Foucault argues that the introduction of the biographical is important in the history of punishment as it establishes the criminal as existing before the crime and even outside it, the rationale for the use of the biographical approach in this thesis is the opposite i.e. through use of a life history approach the prisoner learner is established as a person rather than criminal who existed before their entry into prison. The individuals interviewed therefore are not limited to or defined by their incarceration and/or their knowledge of prison education but rather are individuals who entered their confinement with ideas and beliefs formed and informed by their lived experience. The interviews themselves therefore have the potential to add to the discourse of punishment and education, arenas in which the voices of prisoners are often not heard (cf. O'Donnell, 2008).

In addressing the research question posed by this thesis, which is, how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, Goffman's theory of a total institution is fundamental; however Foucault's analysis of punishment and the role of prison in society is complementary to the theory of a total institution and vital in order to understand the institution of the prison and its links with other institutions in society. Therefore although Goffman is the dominant theorist, Foucault's *Discipline & Punish* is frequently drawn upon throughout this thesis. This chapter begins with an acknowledgement of the process of selecting and refining the theoretical framework which underpins this thesis. A definition and explanation of Goffman's idea of a total institution is then provided as well as a critique of it as a concept. Features of a total institution are identified and extracted from Goffman's work. The features are then analysed and an investigation into the relevance of these features to prison education is also given. The work of Foucault (1977) and specifically his account of the institution of the prison is subsequently analysed and critiqued with a particular emphasis on its relevance to prison education and the fundamental research



question posed in this thesis: how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison?

### **Refining the Theoretical Framework**

Neither Goffman nor Foucault could be described as specifically educational theorists and while their perspectives are crucial in providing the theoretical framework of this thesis, the work of others more specifically associated with education were also consulted and the work of Freire (1996) and Bourdieu (1977) were, for example, influential in the early stage in shaping the theoretical framework. Freire (1996) viewed education as the “practice of freedom” and his philosophy stressed the need for learners to reflect upon their own situation and structures that were oppressing them and to actively fight against those structures. Thus the learning process can be seen almost as a counter against an oppressive regime. Critical reflection plays an important role in his work and his theories could easily be applicable to a prison setting (cf. Oates, 2007 as an example of such application). Freire’s concept of the banking system of education, a system which he argued treats learners as empty vessels to be filled and serves the interests of the oppressors, his attention to the relationship between education and politics and his argument that education is not neutral provided a useful context for considering the role of education within a prison. So too did Bourdieu’s (1977) work and in particular, his concept of *habitus*.

Bourdieu was keen to overcome the traditional sociological dichotomy between an objectivist and subjectivist approach and sought to reconcile the two through his concept of the *habitus*, which refers to a person’s disposition to behave and think and incorporates issues such as socialisation through family, class and the educational system. Bourdieu argued for example that schools can reproduce inequality by perpetuating certain values and codes of behaviour that may be alien to certain groups. The concept of *habitus* has been used by numerous researchers as a theoretical underpinning including Darmody, Smyth and McCoy (2008), for example, who use the idea of *habitus* as one part of their theoretical framework in order to understand how the individual and institutional *habitus* shape student outcomes in relation to truancy in Ireland. Bourdieu’s work showed the effective use of both theory and empirical data, and he highlighted the important role of education in social reproduction. While

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been criticised as being overly deterministic, leaving little room for agency (cf. Jenkins, 2002) nonetheless his work was useful in raising important questions regarding the role and purpose of education; does it promote change, for example, and give opportunities for less privileged groups to better themselves or does it keep in place existing division, and simply re-produce social inequalities? These questions were relevant in addressing, as this thesis does, prisoner learners' experiences of prison education within the total institution of the prison and also their previous educational experiences before incarceration.

As well as Freire and Bourdieu's educational writings, the work of the sociologist Giddens (1984) and in particular his theory of structuration was also examined. His theory provides a useful alternative to the classifying of prisoners as completely passive, powerless and oppressed (Jewkes, 2002) and his view that people are never entirely powerless even when confined is useful in order to understand the decisions adult prisoners make to participate in education while in prison. He notes that by looking at "critical situations", situations where established modes of accustomed daily life are drastically undermined or shattered, the nature of routine can be probed. Giddens' idea that structures can be understood as both constraining and enabling corresponded to Foucault's view of power as having both positive and negative dimensions. According to Giddens, in analysing the contextuality of gatherings, the context of the physical environment must also be included and thus settings of interactions are important with settings being used by social actors to sustain meaning in communicative acts. The importance of considering the physical setting lead me again to Goffman (1961) and his concept of the total institution and it is Goffman's work, complemented by Foucault's (1977) writings on the prison that are ultimately used as the theoretical framework underpinning this doctoral work.

### **Goffman's Concept of the Total Institution; Features of a Total Institution and Their Relevance to Prison Education**

This thesis accepts the premise that learning is situated and cannot be separated from both the cultural and situational context in which it takes place (Jarvis, 2006; Munoz, 2009). Therefore in order to critically analyse the experiences of education within the structures of confinement, it is necessary to consider the impact of the

institution which confines individuals (in this case prisons) on those who choose to attend educational classes within it. Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution is crucial in this regard and a fundamental element to the argument that prison education can be understood and potentially reformed within the context of confinement. Goffman defined total institutions as institutions in which all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same authority with a corresponding breakdown in the barriers that normally separate three areas of an individual's life i.e. sleep, play and work. They are also institutions in which daily activities take place in the company of others all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. Goffman's analysis of a total institution is based on his experience of a psychiatric hospital where he spent a year carrying out ethnographic fieldwork with over 7,000 inmates. His explicit aim was to learn about the social world of the hospital inmate and to this end, under the appearance of being an assistant to the athletic's director, he spent his days with patients and avoided sociable contact with staff. Although Goffman uses the example of a mental hospital in particular, his work also deals with total institutions in general. He explicitly acknowledges that prison serves as an example of a total institution and even though his work on the subject of total institutions is based on his fieldwork in a hospital setting, he makes numerous specific and detailed references to prisons in *Asylums*; indeed out of the book's total of 326 pages, 76 of them contain references to the prison.

Goffman (1961) acknowledges that "what is prison-like about prisons is found in institutions whose members have broken no laws" (p. 10) and in this vein he provides a wide variety of examples of total institutions, including the prison, and distinguishes total institutions, based on their use, into five distinct groupings:

- Institutions which exist in order to care for those who cannot care for themselves e.g. homes for the blind, the aged, the orphaned.
- Institutions which exist in order to care for those who cannot care for themselves and may be, albeit unintended, a threat to the community e.g. TB sanatoria, mental hospitals.
- Institutions, which are there to protect the community from perceived dangers, e.g. prisons, jails, prisoner of war and concentration camps.

- Institutions established in order to achieve a task e.g. army barracks, ships, boarding schools, work camps.
- Institutions designed as a retreat from the world and a training ground for the religious e.g. convents, abbeys, and monasteries.

The list of institutions Goffman (1961) identifies as examples of total institutions is a wide-ranging one. It includes institutions in which people are sent to recover from illness, institutions to which people are sent to as part of their punishment for crime and also institutions in which people can, for example in the case of convents and monasteries, elect to enter. Goffman acknowledged, although only briefly, the variations among the five groups of total institutions and his emphasis was on the features that they shared in common. He discusses these attributes or features throughout *Asylums* and in his examination of the key features of a total institution, Goffman considered total institutions from both an inmate and staff perspective. The following table was compiled based on his work and included here in order to explicitly isolate and consider these features for the purposes of this thesis.

Table 2.1 Features of a total institution

<b>Mortifications - Attack on inmates' sense of self</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role dispossession</li> <li>• "Civil death"</li> <li>• Information: Lack of access and corresponding lack of control over information given to authorities</li> <li>• Loss of property</li> <li>• Loss of sense of safety</li> <li>• Exposure to the physical conditions of an institution</li> <li>• Forced contact with people</li> <li>• Surveillance</li> </ul>
<b>Formal administration of a total institution</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The privilege system</li> <li>• Staff-inmate divide</li> <li>• Structure of Time</li> </ul>
<b>Development of an institutional underlife</b>

Goffman (1961) admits however that there is a conceptual problem with the list of examples of total institutions that he provides in that none of the characteristics identified can necessarily be shared by every total institution but rather "what is

distinctive about total institutions is that each exhibits to an intense degree many items in this family of attributes” (p. 17). The degree to which the prison, in an Irish 21<sup>st</sup> context, exhibits these features is explored in this thesis and the following section focuses on the features of the total institution, beginning with what Goffman terms “mortifications”.

### **Mortifications: Impact of a total institution on a sense of self**

According to Goffman (1961) total institutions have a number of key features that impact on those incarcerated within them, features that begin from the moment of entry and which involve an attack on an inmates’ sense of self. He names these features “mortifications”. The admission procedures which may include weighing, searching, fingerprinting, listing personal possessions for storage and being made to strip are examples of these mortifications and leads Goffman to conclude that the first curtailment of self begins when a person is admitted to a total institution and a barrier is placed between the inmate and the wider world. Among the extensive list of mortifications that Goffman identifies is role dispossession and Goffman acknowledges that while some roles may be re-established post-release others are irrevocable. It may not be possible for example to re-establish a career post-incarceration and time spent with children, family and loved ones can never be regained. Indeed, Goffman explicitly notes that total institutions are incompatible with maintaining meaningful relations with family. Control over how you look and present yourself to others may also be affected by confinement within a total institution with equipment usually used to maintain appearance likely to be taken away. Property dispossession may also occur with inmates not provided with individual lockers or spaces and/or being subject to searches and confiscation of personal items. Goffman acknowledges too the “civil death” that may take place i.e. when inmates lose rights, such as voting, usually afforded to a citizen. Inmates entering a total institution may also fear for their safety and Goffman observed that this loss of a sense of safety provided the basis for anxieties about disfigurement to emerge.

Admission to a total institution involves, according to Goffman (1961), “a kind of contaminative exposure” (p. 31) in which “territories of the self are violated; the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded

and the embodiments of self profaned” (p. 32). The inmate can be exposed to contamination caused by physical and sometimes unhygienic conditions; Goffman identifies, for example, having to “empty one’s own slops” as one of the most obvious types of contaminative exposure. This exposure is amplified when it involves another human being who can observe the inmate. In a total institution therefore there is a loss both of physical comforts and of self-determination with a “disruption of the usual relationship between the individual actor and his acts” (p. 41) as unlike other situations, in a total institution people cannot distance themselves from a mortifying situation, including inmates’ visitors as Goffman observed how prisoners and mental patients could not prevent their visitors from seeing them in humiliating circumstances. Forced social relationships, with other inmates and with staff, within a total institution are likely to occur within a total institution and this lack of privacy or “interpersonal contamination” (p. 35), as Goffman calls it, is a source of mortification. Communication and access to information are also areas within a total institution that are affected with inmates often required to give information regarding themselves or make such information available to staff that they would ordinarily keep to themselves. Inmates are likely to face restrictions on communication or access to information as within a total institution “characteristically, the inmate is excluded from knowledge of the decisions taken regarding his fate” (p. 19). Goffman recognised, that in the context of a total institution, in which people may not know what is going to happen to them nor be familiar with the workings of the institution in which they find themselves in, information became “a crucial good” (p. 252). This may have implications for prison education, in terms of how information on what classes are available in each prison, and how prison education can be accessed, is disseminated. Goffman’s account also recognised the role surveillance played within the institution. In a total institution spheres of life are desegregated so that one action in one sphere can be used by staff as a comment in another sphere meaning that inmates’ behaviour is constantly being monitored. The inmate, as a result, is constantly exposed to judgement and Goffman found that often authority was directed at items of conduct such as dress, deportment and manners. This indicates both the importance given to obedience but also indicates how authority is directed at the micro-level.

Many writers, apart from Goffman, have also noted the negative effects of institutionalisation on inmates (e.g. Sykes, 1958; Clemmer, 1940) however Goffman’s



account of the culture of mortifications that inmates face within a total institution are significant in relation to this thesis as, in addressing the research question of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the institution of a prison, it is necessary to consider if such a culture of mortifications exists within an Irish prison environment and if so, then how are prisoner learners' experience of attending a school within a total institution impacted by it.

The management of a total institution was also identified by Goffman as a feature of a total institution and the following section considers this feature in more detail.

### **Formal administration of a total institution**

The bureaucratic managing of the needs of a large group of people is a key fact of a total institution and has in itself important implications for three features in particular; firstly the existence of a privilege system as a means to how obedience is achieved, secondly the explicit divide that exists between a large group of inmates and a small supervisory staff and finally the strictly controlled structure of time. Goffman (1961) argued that a privilege system existed in tandem with the mortification process and thus while the admissions procedure saw the beginning of the mortification system it also marked the introduction of the inmate to the "house rules" (p. 51) of the institution. Goffman understood this privilege system as a way in which an inmate could help protect or re-create a sense of self particularly in the face of mortifications that confinement within the institution causes. Elements of the privilege system include rewards and privileges given in exchange for obedience to staff, gratifications that may mean little in civil society but take on a new importance within a total institution e.g. rewards that include permission to talk to others or to light a cigarette. Indeed Goffman observes that it is perhaps the most important feature of inmate culture within a total institution is "the building of a world around these minor privileges" (p. 52). Through the privilege system, co-cooperativeness is obtained from persons who, as Goffman states, often have cause to be uncooperative. Privileges are, according to Goffman, so important within a total institution that withdrawal of them takes on particular significance thus punishment becomes an integral element of the privilege system. In particular Goffman noted that inmates can be moved within a total institution

as part of an administrative system of either punishment or as a reward for their cooperation, however it is the system itself that is intractable: “the inmates are moved, the system is not” (p. 54).

The divide between staff and inmates was identified as a feature of a total institution and Goffman acknowledged the basic split that occurs between a large group (inmates) with limited or no access to the outside world and a small supervisory staff who usually operate an eight hour day. He found that both groups may tend to see themselves in terms of narrow and hostile stereotypes with social mobility between the two groups extremely restricted and may even be formally prescribed. Goffman’s fieldwork led him to conclude that staff often saw inmates as “bitter, secretive, and untrustworthy, while inmates often see staff as condescending, highhanded, and mean. Staff tends to feel superior and righteous; inmates tend, in some ways at least to feel inferior, weak, blameworthy, and guilty” (p. 18).

Communication between the two groups of staff and inmates is controlled and exists in the context that inmates are aware of the power staff have. The obligation to request permission from staff for items that one could use on one’s own on the outside for example, places inmates in an almost childlike position and the submissive role that the inmate must now assume also places any request open to a response from staff and thus a request can be denied, granted, ignored, subject to comment or delayed. Goffman’s account of the relationship between staff and inmates and his characterisation of it as a conflict between the dominant and the dominated, has implications for this thesis for how prisoner learners experience attending a school within the institution of a prison.

The managing of a large group of people within a total institution also leads to daily life being regimented and within a total institution all aspects of the day’s activity are tightly scheduled with one activity leading on to the next and the sequence imposed “from above” (p. 17) and thus “time” and how it is structured becomes an important feature of total institutions. Inmates have little control over time within total institutions and Goffman found that a strong sense of time being wasted emerges as a result. Goffman argues that the harshness of a regime in an institution alone cannot account for this sense of time and life being wasted; rather Goffman notes that it is necessary to

recognise the social disconnect caused when entering a total institution and the failure (usually) to acquire within institutions gains that can be transferred to outside life and Goffman acknowledges that this may include certified training/education. This sense of time being wasted contributes, according to Goffman, to the emphasis placed on what he calls “removal activities”, activities which so engross the inmate that they allow the inmate to forget their actual situation so that “if the ordinary activities in total institutions can be said to torture time, these activities mercifully kill it” (p. 67).

The rigid structure of time within a total institution can involve enforced activities. According to Goffman (1961), these various enforced activities often are part of the rational plan designed to fulfil the official aim of the institution. However Goffman also drew attention to the role of work, carried out by inmates, within a total institution and found that inmates often choose to work and such work frequently had benefits associated with it, including material benefits such as greater access to food, clothes, sports equipment but also other benefits such as a chance to meet people, including inmates who were stationed in other sections of the institution. These benefits could reduce the impact of the total institution on the self and allow what Goffman called “secondary adjustments”, “practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means” (p. 56), to be made. By doing such work, the inmate implies to officials that it is being done because of appropriate (in the sense that they serve the institution) motives. Goffman also observed that many patients participated in activities in order to present it as evidence to family and employees on the outside that they had been treated and that many felt that by participating they were improving either their possibilities of being discharged quickly or at least how they are perceived by those in charge. Goffman found that “one of the most general reasons for taking on an assignment was to get away from the ward” (p. 201) and his analysis of the role of work within the institution provides an interesting point as to whether prison education also offers the same potential advantages.

Despite the advantages that may be gained through work, Goffman did acknowledge that the motivation to work is affected once an individual enters a total institution to the extent that “the individual who was work-oriented on the outside tends to become demoralised by the work system of the total institution” (p. 21). Indeed, he

argues, even with motivation to work there may be so little actual work that inmates may suffer boredom. Goffman's account though of how inmates make "secondary adjustments" as a means of managing time and space in a prison environment, which is already tightly controlled, may have resonance with prisoner learners and this thesis addresses this issue by exploring prisoner learners experience of both the prison itself and prison education and how, in particular, the former impacts on the latter. Goffman's own definition of a total institution identified the bureaucratic nature of its administration; however, it is in this context that an area of life within the total institution but outside of its control becomes an important characteristic of a total institution. Goffman identifies this feature as the institution's underlife.

### **The development of an institutional underlife**

Goffman (1961) observes that an underlife differs according to the type of establishment and notes that institutions which are total will likely be rich in an underlife as "the more time that is programmed by the organisation, the less likelihood of successfully programming it" (p. 183). Goffman, in his work, bore witness to the efforts and resourcefulness of individuals who adjust to institutional life so as to maintain a sense of self and used "make-dos" i.e. when people use available artefacts in a manner that was not officially intended. In total institutions these make-dos tended to be focused on particular areas such as personal grooming and Goffman cites a number of examples in which inmates used ingenious ways to have more control over their own appearance e.g. turning hospital issued trousers into summer shorts.

Goffman, however also identified the presence of "free spaces", spaces which are ruled by what Goffman states "less than usual staff authority" (p. 204). Goffman observed that the staff knew of these places but either stayed away or relinquished their authority once they entered them. In Goffman's study free places were often used as the scene for forbidden or tabooed activities e.g. the patch of wood behind the hospital was used occasionally as a place to drink, or the area in the grounds used as a location for poker games. Goffman found that free places seemed to be employed on occasion for no other purpose but to escape wards, again underscoring, as he did in his analysis of the role of work in an institution, the need to "escape" while remaining within the institution. Goffman noted that many types of work provided patients with access to

“free places” and he found that while the provision of a free place may be an incidental aspect of the job, it seemed to be the main benefit of some work tasks as free places “seemed pervaded by a feeling of relaxation and self-determination, in marked contrast to the sense of uneasiness prevailing on some wards. Here one could be one’s own man” (p. 206).

Goffman also acknowledged that among total institutions, it is prisons in particular that may allow the conditions for “secondary adjustments” to flourish and importantly these adjustments can provide an inmate with evidence of some control over their environment. Drawing on Bettelheim’s (1960) recounting of experiences in concentration camps, Giddens (1984) had noted that only prisoners who were able to maintain some small sphere of control in their daily lives were able to survive; this assertion is reminiscent of what Goffman (1961) refers to as the “underlife of the institution” (p. 180).

### **Total Institutions as a Site of Contested Identities and Their Impact on a Sense of Self**

Goffman, who was associated with symbolic interactionism, had an interest in the social construction of society and the roles that people play. His study of patients and his ethnographic approach allowed him to explore the concept of self-image and identity and the effect of an institution on these concepts and it is clear that identity and how identity is negotiated within the interaction order is an important theme in Goffman’s work. As in Berger and Luckman’s (1967) work, Goffman in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959) understood all actions to be social in nature and he analysed daily life from this perspective. Goffman (1959) outlined, for example, the social world as being like a drama with individuals putting on a performance in order to convince others about who they are; thus by presenting themselves in particular roles the individual develops identities. A focus on how we define ourselves may be a feature of contemporary life however this focus on identity is intensified within the confines of a total institution where the existence of a consumer culture is limited and people’s desire to distinguish themselves through their preference for particular products e.g. clothes, piercings, cosmetic surgery, physical exercise, to name but a few, may be severely curtailed. Thus, the total institution of the prison in

particular becomes a site of contested identities or as Giddens (1984) termed “a site of struggle and resistance” (p. 154).

Giddens (1984) acknowledges that Goffman placed a great deal of emphasis on inter-personal trust: on tact, collusion, resolving tensions in the social fabric and having a concern with the protection of social continuity. In other words, Goffman’s actors want to appear credible to others and want or need to make a good impression. In particular Goffman recognises that identity can be spoiled, and is often a matter of imposition and resistance, claim and counter-claim, rather than a consensual process of negotiation (Jenkins, 2008). In *Stigma* (1968), for instance, Goffman is concerned about how individuals manage the discrepancies between their “virtual social identity” (how they appear to others) and their “actual social identity” (which closer inspection would reveal them to possess). In his earlier work, *Asylums*, Goffman (1961) relates these issues to how inmates live within a total institution.

In *Asylums* Goffman (1961) found that a sense of injustice and bitterness against the world develops amongst those imprisoned and that inmates may react to their fate by a concentration on the self and an increase in self-pity. While entering a total institution and being incarcerated involves a series of mortifications or attacks on the self, there are a number of ways in which the self can re-organise itself including, as discussed, accessing the privilege system and importantly through support from other inmates. The criteria for which people are judged on the outside e.g. clothes, job, material wealth, cease in the prison context to provide effective means for judging other inmates however in a total institution, smaller units may emerge such as cliques or pairs of inmates who provide assistance to each other and provide physical/psychological/emotional support. Goffman notes that “strong religious and political convictions have served to insulate the true believer against the assaults of a total institution” (1961, p. 65). However apart from religious or political allegiances, opportunities for solidarity to develop among inmates are limited. Prisoners’ strikes or riots are the exceptions rather than the rule. Other inmates too may act in their own interests e.g. stealing, robbing and informing authorities on activities of other inmates and thereby undermine any sense of group solidarity. Goffman observes that this context probably explains the premium placed on what he calls “removal activities” (p. 67). They are described by Goffman as voluntary, unserious pursuits which succeed in

lifting the participant “out of themselves” and for a short while forgetting the situation they are in, in other words activities that “kill time”. The examples that Goffman gives include field games, lectures, and importantly art and woodwork classes, and also TV watching. Goffman’s observations facilitate the questioning as to whether prison education is also fulfilling this role. While Goffman acknowledges that these activities help inmates withstand the psychological stress caused by assaults on the self (which are characteristic of a total institution) he notes that it is “precisely in the insufficiency of these activities that an important derivational effect of total institutions can be found” (1961, p. 68).

An important point in Goffman’s (1961) account of a total institution is that inmates’ previous background and life history does affect how inmates experience a total institution. Goffman acknowledged that in order to work a system effectively you have to have an intimate knowledge of it and he provides a number of examples where patients in the hospital setting where he was based were able to make the most of their situation because of their knowledge of the timing of events and in doing so would be able to gain more food, secure more reading material or gain more information about how further benefits could be achieved. The value of institutional knowledge was recognised too, albeit it in a negative way, by the authorities in the hospital in which Goffman undertook his study, and he observed that “in Central Hospital, as in prisons, there is a desire on the part of the staff to keep new inmates away from old ones, lest the new, through friendship or economic exchange, learn the tricks of the trade” (p. 252). Goffman found that inmates who had had experience of what he terms “other situations of deprivation” (p. 193) and were street wise were able to very rapidly discover how they could work the system. He recognised that for some inmates the level of adaptation needed is minimal, they may, for example, already have extensive experience of a total institution e.g. from orphanages, reformatories, jails, hospitals and this institutional knowledge is beneficial in adapting to life within another institution. Thus inmates may experience the same institution differently based on their own social background and past experiences. He cites an example of an upper-middle class prisoner serving a sentence in England who reported looking forward to the long hours prisoners spent locked up; seeing those hours as an escape from the masses of the other inmates and the shouts of prison officers and a chance to “escape” through reading. It is evident from this example though that the inmate had the psychological resources to make positive

use of a time that was, by his own account, viewed negatively by many of his fellow inmates, however it is also evident that he had the literacy skills necessary to read books and the material resources of actually having books at his disposal. Goffman's example draws attention to the need to take into account prisoner learners' previous educational, and indeed life experiences, and this is specifically addressed in this thesis through the use of a life history methodology and justifies also the inclusion of a specific analysis chapter allocated to exploring prisoner learners' previous educational and life experiences.

It is clear that imprisonment affects inmates' sense of identity, and although, in some specific contexts, imprisonment can be viewed positively (as in a rite of passage or in a political struggle) in general, as Goffman (1961) observes, those who do emerge from confinement within a total institution are often stigmatised. The impact of a total institution on a person is illustrated in Goffman's observations that many inmates will suffer anxiety over release from a total institution; he attributes this anxiety to a number of factors. Firstly the individual may be unwilling or unable to reassume responsibilities from which the total institution freed them. Secondly, there may be a "loss or failure to acquire habits currently required in wider society" (p. 71) which Goffman calls "disculturation". Thirdly, the inmate may be aware of the stigma s/he may face on the outside and finally, and ironically, release may come just when an inmate has learned to successfully adapt to prison life. Thus, the institution of the prison emerges as a particularly relevant site to consider the impact of the total institution on individuals.

Goffman's analysis of a total institution provided the main theoretical basis of this thesis, however Foucault's work in relation to the prison was particularly useful in drawing attention to the links between how power is exercised in the prison and in wider society. The following section illustrates his theoretical perspective on prisons as contained primarily in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

### **Foucault's "Complete and Austere Institutions": The Discourse of Punishment and its Relevance to the Prison and Beyond**

In his influential work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) Foucault attempts to provide a history of the modern prison system. Thus, unlike



Goffman, his work deals exclusively with the institution of the prison. Foucault begins with an account of a public execution in 1757 followed by an account of prison rules and timetables in 1837, the two events illustrating the change in practice in France from punishment as spectacle to punishment as reform, with the prison system effectively replacing the “theatre” of punishment. Foucault argues that under this new system the criminal is objectified and the power to punish is re-organised with codification, definition of offences, fixing of a scale of penalties, and rules of procedure being some of the many ways introduced in which punishment becomes systematised. As Garland (1986) acknowledges, Foucault’s argument is that this change in punishment is a reflection of a deeper change in the system of justice as it leads to a new concern regarding knowledge of both of the criminal and the reason for the crime, and also leads to a desire to correct the criminal. Similar to Goffman’s definition of a total institution Foucault describes the prison as having “almost total power over the prisoners” and he describes prisons as “complete and austere institutions” which, “must assume responsibility for all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude to work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind” (p. 235).

### **Dual function of prison**

Foucault, unlike Goffman (1961) specifically addresses the purpose of the institution of the prison and argues that the theoretical and practical shift which occurred in how criminals were punished created a dual function of prisons with prisons used as a means of detention and also given the additional charge of reforming individuals. Sentences were then seen not just as an act of punishment but were intended to correct, reclaim and cure. Thus punishment moved from being centred on torture to being about the loss of wealth and rights. However, Foucault does qualify that loss of liberty has never functioned without an additional element of punishment that involves the body itself e.g. rationing of food, corporal punishment, solitary confinement, sexual deprivation and argues that imprisonment has always involved a certain degree of physical pain. This leads Foucault to contend that there is a trace of “torture” in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice; a trace that has not been overcome but has been enveloped increasingly by the non-corporal nature of the system. Although Foucault does not use the Goffman term “mortifications”, it is clear he does

refer to losses that inmates incur upon incarceration and the physical conditions of the institution which prisoners must endure.

Although Foucault argued that the body can never be separated from punishment, the focus of a disciplinary system is on reform or what Foucault termed “the soul”, “the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (p. 16) of an inmate, all of which can be manipulated and fixed as if it were a machine. The shift from a public execution response to crime to a more hidden penal system has also meant, Foucault argued, that the apportioning of blame has been re-distributed. With a public execution the shame and horror of execution enveloped both the executioner and the condemned; however with the end of a public spectacle justice keeps its distance from punishment and “those who carry out the penalty tend to become an autonomous sector” (p. 10). This leads Foucault to argue that with the development of penal procedures a whole host of subsidiary authorities have emerged who also make judgements and have effectively taken the place of executioners in the modern prison system. Foucault includes, in this list, psychiatric or psychological experts, magistrates, members of the prison service and crucially for the purpose of this thesis, educationalists; with Foucault categorising all as potentially involved in a process of punishment and correction. Thus, in having a dual function, the techniques of correction form, according to Foucault, part of the institutional framework of detention and both observation and control of prisoners’ day, key features that Goffman identified too, play a role in the corrective purpose of the prison. The similarity of Foucault’s account to Goffman’s is evident in Foucault’s treatment of these two distinct issues: surveillance and the structure of time.

### **Surveillance**

Foucault described the prison as “omni-disciplinary”. He maintains that prison was always more than just the deprivation of a prisoner’s liberty and constant surveillance and punishment of infringements was one way in which the prison’s role of transforming individuals could be achieved. Foucault argues that reformers of the prison system (which he states existed almost as soon the prison system began) recognised the role of the prison to reform and he identifies a number of mechanisms reformers advocated in order to facilitate this reformation. To support his argument, he relates the two American systems of punishment, the Philadelphia system with its emphasis on the

total isolation of the prisoner and the Auburn system of punishment which allowed inmates to work and eat together but only in total silence and required each inmate to return each day to their individual cell. In both systems isolation is used to bring about a change in the inmate. The Philadelphia system endorsed absolute isolation in order that prisoners were alone to reflect. Thus prisoners were not just isolated from the rest of society but also from other prisoners. Supervisors in this model of punishment did not have to exert force but rather communication was used as a means of control as in the absence of any communication with another person, a warden's words uttered to a prisoner took on particular significance. This example resonates with Goffman's account of a total institution in which communication and access to information were impacted by incarceration within a total institution. In the Auburn system silence was physically enforced on prisoners during the day and inmates were only allowed to speak to the warders with their permission and in a low voice. A hierarchy was thus maintained with advocates arguing that inmates learned, in a system maintained by surveillance and punishment, to respect authority. Again this resonates with Goffman's (1961) account of the institution reinforcing the low status of inmates. At the heart of these debates among these two models was what Foucault termed "coercive individualism" (p. 239) caused by the ending of any relationship that was not supervised by an authority and arranged according to a hierarchy. Thus Foucault is able to argue that "the theme of the Panopticon- at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualisation and totalisation, isolation and transparency- found in the prison its privileged locus of realisation" (p. 249). In attempting to achieve the objective of transforming the individual, how a prisoner spent their day in the prison, as can be seen from the examples cited above, took on particular importance.

### **Structure of time within complete and austere institutions**

Foucault's work emphasises the coercive nature of the institution of the prison and this omni power over inmates and the reformation of individuals takes several different forms including imposing habits on inmates through regulation of prisoners' time. The prison makes it possible to quantify punishments according to the variable of time and in his history of the development of the modern prison system, Foucault acknowledges the importance of time and the timetable. The opening pages of *Discipline and Punish*, for example, detail a timetable in a prison for young offenders in

Paris and it is interesting to observe how education becomes an element of “reformation”. The day described was a busy one with inmates rising at 5am in the summer and 6am in the winter with labour for nine hours included in daily routine alongside two hours of instruction in which classes consist “alternately of reading, writing, drawing and arithmetic” (p. 6). While Foucault refers to prison education only fleetingly, he does describe the power held over individuals as a “total education” (p. 236) which “takes possession of man as a whole”. He acknowledges that a certain education does take place through the regulation of waking, sleeping, activity, rest, the number of meals allowed and the quality and rationing of food. It becomes clear, however, that the education that Foucault is referring to is the informal learning by inmates as to how to live in a total institution.

Like Goffman (1961), Foucault was also interested in the issue of work in the prison. While Goffman was more positive about work within an institution and the benefits that inmates may gain from it, Foucault argued that through work in the prison, prisoners are transformed into “docile” workers and become “both the cogs and the products” (1977, p. 242). The use of penal work is, according to Foucault, not for profit or even the learning of a new skill but rather for the creation of a power relation which is “an empty economic form, a schema of individual submission and of adjustment to a production apparatus” (p. 243) in which staff are tasked with producing bodies that are both docile and capable. Work becomes, to use Goffman’s term, a “removal activity” (p. 309). Yet historically, Foucault argues that work was seen from the earliest days of the prison as an agent of transformation with idleness seen as the enemy. This is a point already made by Foucault in relation to how madness came to be treated as in *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), for example, Foucault draws a link between the emergence of the houses of confinement that appeared in seventeenth century France, institutions that were designed to confine the poor, unemployed, prisoners and the insane, and the socio-economic conditions of the time. For Foucault these institutions were set up to deal with the threat of idleness, i.e. the problem of begging and unemployment, that faced Paris and their creation was a response to the economic problems facing Europe at that time. The creation of the Hôpital was a new solution in the sense that exclusion was replaced by confinement, at the expense of the state but, as Foucault argues, at the cost of individual freedom. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault returns to this “threat” of idleness. Foucault’s contends that the wider conditions of society influence, and are

influenced, by the institution of the prison. In the context of work for example, Foucault cites a widespread press campaign in workers' newspapers in the 1840s on the unfairness of prisoners being paid for work and the impact it was having on wages for those who were "free". Nonetheless Foucault acknowledges that in reality the amount that was produced in the prison system would have limited impact on the general economy. Work in prison he maintains is useful not for its production value but for its impact on humans as it demands and imposes order and regularity, provides distraction and imposes a hierarchy and surveillance. Such a contention raises questions as to whether, in the context of this thesis, prison education can be understood, from the perspective of prisoner learners, in this way.

The role of surveillance and the structure of time are features that Foucault (1977) identifies in the institution of the prison and these features can also be found in Goffman's (1961) account of a total institution. Foucault's features of the institution of the prison however differ from Goffman's in two particular ways. Firstly, Foucault views prison as part of a carceral network and this network is not confined to merely other total institutions, and secondly Foucault argues that the prison institution is in fact a contradictory system given to reforming behaviour that it in itself creates. These two characteristics, identified by Foucault, are explored further in the following sections.

### **Prison as a contradictory system**

Foucault argued that prison is a place of absolute control over prisoners, a place of surveillance and observation and yet abolishing the prison is unthinkable because it has become so closely linked with the functioning of society. Yet in his most trenchant criticism of the prison he contends that the prison itself, although tasked with reforming the individual does in fact create what Foucault calls "the delinquent" and it does so through the type of existence it imposes on its inmates. The institution of the prison produces delinquents and makes possible and even encourages delinquents to be loyal to one another and creates the space for prisoners to meet and it is in these "clubs" (p. 267) be they in the workshops, classrooms or yards that "the education of the young first offender takes place" (p. 267). This point was also made by Clemmer (1940) who argues that prison was and remains "a school of crime" stating that within a prison, prisoners were "prisonized" rather than rehabilitated i.e. assimilated into a "prison

culture” and institutionalised to the extent that they were less able than ever before for life outside.

Foucault critiques the “arbitrary power of administration” which he argues “operates in the form of an abuse of power” (p. 266) and is liable to encourage inmates to acutely feel the sense of injustice, making it impossible to teach respect for the law it is applying. He identifies and critiques the fundamental principles of the prison system arguing that the same propositions are repeated “from one century to the other” (p. 270). Among those principles is the principle for penitential education i.e. “the education of the prisoner is for the authorities both an indispensable precaution in the interests of society and an obligation to the prisoner” (p. 270). Although Foucault accepts that prison should educate its inmates he questions how it can be done within the institution of the prison: “the prison should educate its inmate, but can a system of education addressed to man reasonably have as its object to act against the wishes of nature?” (p. 266).

One of Foucault’s arguments is that the prison is a failure in terms of penology (e.g. failure to reduce crime, tendency to produce repeat offenders, negative impact on families of prisoners etc.), but despite this it has not been abandoned. Foucault posits that this is because the prison as an entity carries out a number of specific functions including dividing the working class against themselves and upholding and supporting the role of the police. In other words, the creation of the criminal and the prison is a politically useful act. The politicisation of crime is a point that has been made by other sociologists and criminologists too including Bauman (2000), Christie (2000), and in an Irish context O’Donnell (2008). It is clear that Foucault uses the prison to make sense of events in wider society; therefore his work is broader than Goffman’s as he is not just concerned with the total institutions that Goffman lists but rather sees aspects of a total institution in other areas of society. Foucault is able therefore to analyse prison as a microcosm of society and thus the wider theme that Foucault embraces is how power and domination is achieved in the modern world and how individuals are constructed within that world. This has implications for individuals who have been incarcerated in the prison, and particular implications for how those individuals experience prison education and the following section examines Foucault’s identification of prison as part of a carceral network.

### **Prison as part of a carceral network**

Foucault argues that the prison is a natural consequence of a hierarchy of other institutions and that it should not come as a surprise if many “delinquents” or inmates of the prison have spent time in institutions that form part of what Foucault terms a carceral network. He notes that while it is widely assumed that these institutions lead away from the prison, Foucault argues that in fact they lead to it. Thus “the prisoner condemned to hard labour was meticulously produced by a childhood spent in a reformatory, according to the lines of force of the generalized carceral system” (p. 301).

This assertion provides further validation in this thesis for a life history methodology which takes into account prisoner learners’ previous educational and life experiences.

Although Goffman (1961) did provide an extensive list of institutions which could be termed total institutions, Foucault also moves beyond Goffman’s typology of total institutions as he argues that the principles of control and surveillance have moved beyond the prison and into society in general. This growth of disciplinary networks includes medicine, psychology and education as Foucault argues that all assume an ever greater share of the powers of supervision and assessment. Thus “in its function, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating” (p. 303). Foucault (1977) concedes that prisons; these “complete and austere institutions” assume responsibility for the individual much more than can be found in the school or army with the prison controlling physical training, aptitude to work, behaviour, moral attitude and state of mind. Nonetheless he contends that “the prison is like a rather disciplined barracks, a strict school, a dark workshop...” (p. 233). This quote illustrates Foucault’s linking of asylums, factories, schools and prisons; places that resemble each other because of how they subject those within them to observation and classification with a view to controlling behaviour and establishing a norm. Thus what links the court, the school, the asylum and the prison is how they treat a departure from the norm. Foucault stated that perhaps the most important effect of the carceral system is that it succeeds in making the power to punish natural and legitimate.

The following section provides a critique and analysis of both Goffman and Foucault's work in relation to the prison and also identifies what this thesis will add to their contribution to the field.

### **Goffman & Foucault: A Critique of Their Approaches in Relation to Prison as a Total Institution**

Goffman (1961) gives an account of a total institution based on his ethnographic fieldwork within the confines of a psychiatric hospital and his work could be seen as limited in that it is not specific to the prison. A more significant concern however with Goffman's work is that it does not present the voices or views of those who are incarcerated and it is not clear what they think or feel about the confinement they experience within a total institution. While Goffman does convey a sense of the resourcefulness of individuals and their capability to adapt to varying degrees to the demands of the institution without being able to hear inmates' voices or discover what they think of the situation they find themselves in, it is somewhat disconnected from the lived experience of the inmates. Javier Trevino (2003) made a similar point and argued that Goffman's work fails to fit into traditional models of ethnography and, for example, does not include details of the physical layout of St. Elizabeth's, nor describe the day to day goings on. This thesis particularly addresses this gap in Goffman's work by focusing on prisoner learners' experiences of the total institution of the prison and specifically on their experiences of prison education. Unlike Goffman (1961), Foucault's (1977) work is specific to the prison and again, unlike Goffman, he does address and challenge the purpose of the prison system. Although Foucault only briefly discusses prison education, he refers to institutionalisation as the "total education" that prisoners receive and importantly, although he acknowledges the principle of prison education as a principle in existence since the modern prison system began, he questioned how it can be achieved within the context of the prison. There is a sense however in Foucault's work of prison being "done" to people and he describes a system in which inmates are reduced to "docile bodies" in a system which inculcates docility. Yet this thesis seeks to examine, from a prisoner learner perspective, how prison education is experienced by those who choose to participate in it. This thesis adds to the work of Goffman and Foucault by conducting life history interviews with prisoner learners currently participating in prison education. As such it concentrates on the



experience of prison education but also takes into account their views of prison culture and prisoner learners' previous education and life experiences. For Goffman, inmates' previous life experience is important because of his argument that this impacted on how they adjusted to and experienced a total institution. It was also important in terms of Foucault's work as he argued that other institutions, despite the rationale presented, often lead to the institution of the prison.

Foucault (1977) states that the prison has always been a focus of projects, debates, experiments and theoretical statements. The popularity of the subject matter of a prison to a diverse range of people, from politicians, philosophers, sociologists and journalists, reinforces Foucault's linking of the prison itself with other institutions but also reinforces the point that societal decisions regarding crime and punishment can reveal a society's fundamental values and illustrate the fact that there is nothing inevitable or innate about those decisions made. Significantly, missing from this diverse group of people however are educationalists and this thesis, in providing a prisoner learner perspective on prison education, is an attempt to address this gap.

Goffman's work has been critically examined and contested. Jenkins (2008) for example praises Goffman describing his work as "approachable and subtle" and emphasised his inter-disciplinary approach noting that his work combines "sociology, social anthropology and social psychology in a manner that challenges petty disciplinarity" (p. 90). Goffman's style however while highly literary and perhaps therefore highly readable is unconventional. Shilling (2000) acknowledged, for instance, that he has been described as both vague and abstract, while Stones (1998) also notes that Goffman has been termed a maverick scholar who did not follow particular formulae in academia.

One obvious evaluation of Goffman's analysis of a total institution is that the application and understanding of a total institution is a very broad one. As noted, his examples of a total institution include orphanages, work camps, hospitals, monasteries, prisons, boarding schools and army barracks. A second point however is the position of the prison and boarding schools; Goffman's own listing of categories of total institutions differentiates between them which raise the question as to where prison education within a total institution would be positioned. A third point is that knowledge

of even one of these categories of total institutions would show that there is diversity among total institutions even when their purpose is the same i.e. although they may share common characteristics, institutions can vary e.g. the experience of boarding schools may be different depending on which school you attended. Davies (1989) develops this point and while acknowledging the usefulness of Goffman's analysis, he draws attention to the fact that it does not recognise the diversity in some total institutions. As a result, total institutions are made to appear much more homogenous than they are in practice. Davies goes on to argue that the degree of "formal administration" will differ in different total institutions and he identifies three key variables which should be considered in analysing any total institution: the degree of openness or closedness in each institution, the explicit purpose of each institution and the modes of eliciting compliance by staff as perceived by the inmates. Davies argues that some categories of total institutions may in themselves contain different types based on their own particular ethos and ideology and he draws attention to the need to focus on factors that may impact on individual institutions e.g. the atmosphere or culture of a specific institution. In other words, using the example of a school, it is logical to expect that even similar type schools may be experienced by learners in different ways not because of different facilities but because of factors which are often not tangible, for example, teachers' and learners' expectations, morale among learners and teachers, interpretation of rules, approachability of teachers and staff or the degree to which democratic participation (if the structures exist in the first place) are encouraged. The potential differences of institutions, even among those of similar purpose, may have particular relevance to prison education in general and specifically the experience of prison education by learners in different prisons in the sense that prisoner learners are unlikely to experience prison education in the same way. The issue therefore of the prison school climate is addressed in this thesis through exploring the data in relation to prison life. Specifically the interviews explored how prisoner learners' experiences of prison education compared with their experience of education outside of the total institution of the prison.

In relation to Davies' (1989) criticism that Goffman's analysis of total institutions may give the impression that all total institutions are more homogeneous than they are in practice, Goffman did observe that there can be differences in how a total institution operates even *within* one type of institution and he gave the example of

the ward system in which different conditions in different wards can frame a person's conception of themselves and their response to the situation they find themselves in. Davies' critique of Goffman's concept of a total institution leads him to create a more nuanced typology and by identifying the aims and distinctions between total institutions he produces the following table:

Table 2.2 Examples of total institutions and their purpose

Degree of closure	Purpose of total institutions		
	External task to perform	End in itself	Transmogrification
<b>Closed</b>	Slavery	Labour camps	Prisons
		POW camps Internment camps Concentration camps	Brain-washing Re-education camps
<b>Intermediate</b>	Armed forces Jannisaries Mine compounds	Homes for aged or incurables Monasteries	Asylums
			Boarding schools Therapeutic communities
<b>Open</b>	Merchant Navy Lumber camps	Kibbutzim Ashrams	Orphanages
			Sororities

*Note:* From "Goffman's Concept of the Total Institution: Criticisms and Revisions." by C. Davies, 1989, *Human Studies*, 12(1-2), p. 89.

As can be seen from Table 2.2, Davies argues that the aims of a total institution can be categorised in three ways. Firstly some can be categorised as ones that constitute an "end in themselves" i.e. inmates are effectively dumped and isolated away from the rest of society and conventional social order. Secondly some can be understood as ones that have an external utilitarian task to perform which could be of an economic or military nature and finally some can be identified as ones that seek to transform or educate or reform people. Of particular interest to this thesis and its analysis of prison education is the placing of the institution of the prison between the "end in itself" category and the "transmogrification" category which underlines the concept that prison can stress either containment or rehabilitation (interestingly asylums and orphanages are also placed in this "in-between category"). Davies' discussion of how compliance is achieved in each institution and his positing of two key questions, namely, how closed

or open are total institutions and how bureaucratic or “formally administered” are they, are pertinent questions. This point is also made in Culbertson’s work (1975) who, in his research into how incarceration affects juveniles noted that previous research had suggested that young offenders’ self-concept depreciates the longer they are in prison; however he found the impact of self-concept was dependent on the type of institution they were incarcerated in. Davies argues that using the concept of a total institution becomes complicated, as often total institutions exist within highly varied social and cultural environments. It also raises the possibility that some total institutions may be, in effect, more “total” than others. This has particular importance in this thesis as the research was carried out in three prison sites which were all categorised as medium security prisons, appearing on paper at least as similar in terms of purpose and provision.

There have also been multiple critiques of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (cf. Garland, 1986; Giddens, 1984; Hacking, 2004). Indeed as Stanley Cohen (1985) acknowledges “to write today about punishment and classification without Foucault is like talking about the unconscious without Freud” (p. 10). Garland (1986) too acknowledges that Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* has had an enormous impact in a number of intellectual areas but has also “fundamentally changed” (p. 866) the way intellectuals think about punishment and prisons. However there are a number of common specific criticisms which have been identified. Firstly Foucault has been criticised for portraying subjects as merely passive agents, subjected to and made by the power structures that surround them. In three principal chapters in *Discipline & Punish* for example, Foucault maps out the techniques and principles of disciplinary power and describes how bodies are trained and moulded to become efficient but docile machines. Giddens (1984) makes the point that there are not really “agents” at all in Foucault’s work but rather “bodies”. Shilling too (2000) acknowledges this point and argues that “Foucault is insufficiently concerned with lived experience” (p. 80). Butin (2001) also agrees that Foucault did not emphasize notions of resistance within *Discipline and Punish* although the positive aspect of power is acknowledged by Foucault in it, albeit briefly:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes,” it “represses,” it “censors,” it “abstracts,” it “masks,” it

“conceals.” In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1977, p. 194)

Goffman’s work provides a counter to this criticism when he acknowledges the existence of an underlife within institutions in which inmates demonstrate their resourcefulness in adapting to the restrictions caused by their confinement and the lack of attention to the lived experience of inmates is explicitly addressed in this thesis by adopting a life history methodology in which the individual prisoner learner voice is prioritised.

A further criticism of Foucault is that he does not provide alternative forms of power or suggest alternative forms of regulation. As Garland (1986) states “it is written as if its author were ‘outside’ of power and therefore outside of society as well” (p. 880). However, as stated at the outset of this chapter, the explicit aim of this thesis is to discover how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of a prison with a view to offer suggestions for reform. There is also potential for recommendations to be made regarding education provision outside of prison and confinement in general. Finally, according to Garland, Foucault has also been criticised for failing to supply adequate evidence for the historical claims he is making and while accepting that Foucault’s work has limitations as an historical study, nonetheless Foucault’s analysis of power, both in the prison and beyond, provides a useful framework, in combination with Goffman’s work, in which to analyse the role of education within the context of confinement.

Shilling (2000) had identified both Goffman and Foucault as influential figures in shaping social constructionist views of the body and his analysis of their contribution, albeit in relation to the body, rather than total institutions, is useful. He argues that a problem with a social constructionist approach is that although we learn about social forces and its impact through social constructionism there is less emphasis on what it means as part of a lived experience. In this thesis, prisoner learners and their perspectives on prison education are placed at its centre and in so doing so, this thesis addresses this criticism of Goffman and Foucault’s writing as, through a life history methodological approach, prisoner learners reveal themselves to be knowledgeable

agents, reflective and critical about the institution of the prison, their own lives and prison education.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

The principal research question posited in this thesis is how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison? The theoretical framework adopted in this thesis primarily uses the work of Goffman and his concept of a total institution but also draws on the work of Foucault as revealed in his key text *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. This chapter began by defining Goffman's "total institution" and acknowledged the wide variety of examples of total institutions which Goffman had distinguished, according to their use, into five distinct groups. Institutions as diverse as orphanages, boarding schools and monasteries are included in Goffman's list of total institutions. An analysis of the concept of a total institution was provided in this chapter and key features extracted from Goffman's account. These key features included what Goffman termed "mortifications" i.e. the attack on a sense of self which occurs when a person enters a total institution. Other features such as the formal administration of an institution and the development of an underlife were also identified.

Although Goffman does show the resourcefulness of individuals in adapting to a total institution, his portrayal of a total institution is at times a frightening and depressing one. A dominant theme therefore to emerge from inmate culture is that the total institution itself reinforces a low status among inmates. The existence of mortifications, in particular, within a total institution forces consideration as to how prison education can operate in such circumstances, circumstances in which the institution itself may be a place where inmates have concerns for their safety and are aware of their lowly position. Goffman's identification of the multiple mortifications that inmates may be subjected to has relevance also to this thesis in terms of how the total institution can impact on both prisoner learners' motivation to participate in education and their experience of attending the prison school.

The strong sense among inmates of time being wasted or destroyed was another theme to emerge from Goffman's (1961) account of a total institution. This sense of

time being wasted emerges within the context of an institution in which inmates are incarcerated and have little control over how time is spent and this sense contributes, according to Goffman, to an emphasis placed on what he calls “removal activities”, activities which so engross the inmate that they can, momentarily, forget their actual situation. This too has significance in terms of whether education within the total institution of the prison also fulfils this role. Goffman’s assertion that work outside the total institution is different to work within a total institution also illustrates the impact the institution has and this may have implications in this thesis for how education, which prisoner learners have experienced in the wider educational community, is then experienced or understood within a prison setting.

Goffman’s identification of the means by which inmates could re-organise their sense of self and his analysis of the underlife that exists within institutions was analysed and considered in this chapter. Goffman’s work has particular relevance to the fundamental research question of how prisoner learners experience attending a school within a prison and raises questions in relation to whether education can be used as a way to re-organise a sense of self, and the relationship, if any, between the prison school and the concept of an underlife. Goffman’s pessimistic portrayal of a total institution and how the individual is impacted by being confined within it was analysed and the analysis raises important issues in relation to prisoner learners’ perceptions of prison education within a prison and how motivation to learn may be impacted. This thesis seeks to explore whether Goffman’s finding that inmates, incarcerated and with little control over how time is spent, develop a sense of time being wasted or destroyed, is also borne out by data collated as part of this thesis.

Goffman’s observations too on the contentious relationship between staff and inmates have particular significance for this thesis. His description of the divide that occurs between staff and inmates within a total institution raises questions with regard to the relationship between prisoner learners and prison officers and also with teachers and the possible implications the staff inmate divide has for how prisoner learners access education classes within the prison system, and their motivation to begin engagement with the prison school and to maintain such engagement.

The chapter then analysed and critiqued Foucault's seminal (1977) text *Discipline and Punish* and acknowledged Foucault's many arguments including in particular that modern punishment had become a hidden part of the judicial process. The chapter also referred to Foucault's argument that prison has moved beyond the deprivation of liberty to become in itself an instrument of control. Both Goffman and Foucault address the issue of surveillance, structure of time and work within the prison/total institution and this was analysed within the chapter, in particular its relevance to how education is experienced within the prison. Foucault differed from Goffman in his concentration on the institution of the prison specifically and in his depiction of prison as contradictory institution and one that is part of a carceral network of not just other total institutions but other institutions in general.

The chapter acknowledged that both Goffman and Foucault were concerned with the power of institutions, Goffman from the point of view of its impact on the individual and Foucault from the point of view of what changes in the penal system meant and means for society as a whole. As Giddens (1984) stated of them; "both accord great importance to the socially and historically fluctuating lines between enclosure and disclosure, confinement and display" (p. xxvi) and Foucault's analysis, in particular his attention to how the body is impacted by punishment, has obvious links with Goffman's work. This thesis argues that through examining Goffman's concept of a total institution within a 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish prison context, complemented by the theoretical perspective of Foucault (1977), prisoner learners' perspectives on prison education can be analysed in order to offer suggestions for reform of prison education and educational practice in general.

Goffman's (1961) analysis of how a total institution affects individuals and Foucault's (1977) assertion that the emergence of the prison marks the institutionalisation of the power to punish raise important issues in this thesis in relation to its fundamental research question; how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison? In order to address the issues raised by the theoretical perspectives offered by both Goffman and Foucault, the literature review itself is structured into two specific chapters, each addressing concerns which emerged from the theoretical framework.



## Overview of Literature Review Chapters

The first review chapter, building on Goffman's insights regarding inmates' previous life history, as well as Foucault's view of prison as part of a carceral network, considers literature on what is known about the life individuals had experienced prior to incarceration, with a particular emphasis on educational experiences. In the theoretical framework chapter the main features of a total institution in Goffman's (1961) work had been identified and these features included the existence of mortifications, the formal administration of a total institution, and the presence of an institutional underlife. Cognisant of these features, this first literature review chapter, Chapter Three, includes a review of literature on prison life. Goffman (1961) had noted that those who are released from a total institution often tell us important things about those institutions and in reviewing literature on prison life attention is given to both sociological studies and accounts from former prisoners.

Goffman's (1961) examples of mortifications included a loss of sense of safety, forced contact with people, surveillance and a lack of both access and control of information, and this raised the subject of how the prison specifically, as a total institution, operates in Ireland and how education exists within it. In view of Goffman's theoretical insights on a total institution, and Foucault's insights on the prison specifically, the second review chapter, Chapter Four, begins by reviewing the empirical literature on prison as a learning environment, relations between prisoner learners and staff and the motivations to engage in education while incarcerated. Goffman (1961) had also observed the discrepancies between a total institution's official aims and the actual reality of them as experienced by those who live within them and this chapter includes a review of policy and practice, as documented in official reports, of Irish prisons and prison education and in doing so provides contextual information on the operation of prisons and the structure of prison education in an Irish context.

### **Chapter Three: A Review of the Literature on Prisoners' Previous Educational and Life Experiences and Life Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

The key research question in this thesis is how do prisoner learners experience prison education within a total institution of a prison? In order to address that question fully however it is necessary to consider what is known about the prison population and their educational and life experiences.

Goffman's (1961) contention that inmates' previous background and life history affect how inmates experience a total institution, combined with Foucault's (1977) argument that the prison is part of a carceral network and operates as a means of control similar to other institutions in society, including educational ones, raise the issue as to what is known about people incarcerated in our prisons, their educational and life experiences before incarceration and their experiences of prison life in general and prison education more specifically. This chapter, building on these theoretical insights, focuses on reviewing literature on the previous educational and life experiences of those who have been incarcerated within the total institution of the prison in addition to reviewing literature related to life within the prison.

Foucault (1977) had drawn attention to the connection between the incarceration of inmates within institutions and economic, social and cultural conditions and this chapter commences by considering the influences that impact on which individuals society imprisons and begins by providing a historical context for considering patterns of incarceration in Ireland. Literature on what is currently known about the profiles of those who are imprisoned is reviewed and both international and national statistical information about prisoners are cited. The chapter then progresses to analysing studies related to the educational background of prisoners with particular attention to the relationship between educational experiences prior to incarceration and imprisonment. The work of O'Mahony (1993, 1997) in Ireland is referred to in this section and so is the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan and Kett, 2003) which revealed the literacy skills of the prison population and compared the results to the general population. Literature on prison life and what it means to be imprisoned is then considered and emerging themes identified.

## **Patterns of Incarceration Within the Total Institution of the Prison in Ireland**

In 2009, the year in which data for this thesis was collected, the numbers incarcerated in the 14 prisons in Ireland passed the 4,000 figure for the first time in the history of the Irish state (cf. Rogan, 2011 for overview of prison policy, including references to numbers imprisoned, from the 1920s, and throughout the twentieth century to the present). Kilcommins, O'Donnell, O'Sullivan, and Vaughan (2004) demonstrate however how Ireland has incarcerated large numbers of people throughout its history, although not always within the confines of the prison. There was, since the creation of the Irish state, extensive use of other institutions including industrial schools, Magdalen laundries, reformatory schools, psychiatric hospitals and asylums, all of which correspond to Goffman's definition of a total institution. These institutions operated as a means of incarcerating individuals who had offended not just the legal code but often also the nation's social, moral and religious codes (Raftery and O'Sullivan, 2001) and illustrate the relationship between those imprisoned and the socio-cultural values of society. Many of the inmates of these institutions were also poor and their placement within these institutions intensified their position as a marginalised and vulnerable population. A number of these institutions are no more (i.e. Magdalen laundries, industrial schools) or, in the case of psychiatric hospitals, have fewer people incarcerated within them now. The numbers of people resident in psychiatric hospitals has, for instance, significantly reduced throughout the latter part of the twentieth century; the Health Research Board (Daly and Walsh, 2011) in their census of such hospitals revealed that there had been a reduction of 17% since 2006 in the number contained and in fact the number of people in psychiatric units and hospitals has declined by 86% since 1963 (cf. Kilcommins et al, 2004, for overview of incarceration trends particularly in relation to psychiatric hospitals and prisons). In contrast however to the declining rates in psychiatric hospitals and the closure of institutions such as industrial schools and Magdalen laundries, prisons in the Republic have seen a rapid increase in their numbers. O'Donnell (2008) for example documents how in broad terms, the number of prisoners increased by 1,000 from 1981 to 1991 and by another 1,000 from 1991 to 2001, and from then the growth has continued albeit not at the same pace. The previous chapter cited the many examples of total institutions that Goffman had identified, yet the popularity, in terms of the numbers confined within them, of one

type of total institution, the prison, and the decline of other types of total institutions in Ireland is worthy of consideration.

The fact that prisons in Ireland now contain more people within them than at any time in the history of the state may suggest, on the surface, that more crime is now being committed, however further analysis, including an examination of the cultural patterns of incarceration, reveal the existence of other possible explanations. The sociologist Bauman (2000), for example, observed how prisons were “nearly everywhere enjoying a building boom” (p. 212). In particular Bauman draws attention to how increases in the prison population can be seen in countries such as Canada and Norway, countries which have traditionally been associated with lower rates of incarceration. Gartner and Kruttschnitt (2004) from a United States’ perspective argue that punishment has changed in America over the last three decades of the twentieth century and measure these changes by four indicators: an increase in the prison population, the prioritising of concerns about public safety and victims’ rights over concepts of rehabilitation, the politicisation of penal policy and the hardening of public sentiment towards criminals. While Gartner and Kruttschnitt (2004) locate these changes in the US, Pratt (2000) has argued that significant changes to penal policy are taking place in English based jurisdictions at the present time. Garland (2001), in the UK for example, has argued that harsher sentencing, increased use of imprisonment, the building of supermax prisons and anti-social behaviour orders all signify a more punitive approach to crime. Garland also created a list of indices to document this more punitive approach and his indicators include the four outlined by Gartner and Kruttschnitt but also others such as: the reinvention of the prison, new management styles and working practices, the commercialisation of crime control, expanded infrastructure of crime prevention and the creation of a perpetual sense of crisis. While O’Donnell and O’Sullivan (2003) have critically assessed and evaluated whether all of Garland’s indicators are applicable to modern Ireland, they accept that while some have not yet emerged, “several are present in strong form” (p. 57). Among the indicators they cite to support this argument are the increased role of the victim in the criminal system, illustrated by the introduction of victim impact statements in 1993 and what O’Donnell and O’Sullivan see as the consolidation of the prison as the centre of the criminal justice system. In a later publication, O’Donnell (2004), would also attribute the apparent

contradiction between falling crime rates and increase prison places to the politicisation of the debate about crime and the popularisation of phrases like “zero tolerance”.

Bauman (2000) uses statistical evidence of the increased number of prisoners world-wide as the foundation of his argument that increases in prison building and also who is incarcerated within them are linked to cultural concerns about law and order. He contextualises what he sees as the increased demand for punishment and retribution as a consequence of the social disconnect felt by people in modern industrialised societies. Echoing Harvey’s (1990) description of postmodern society as a “culture of strangers”, Bauman argues that sections of the population have been targeted “as a threat to social order” and that imprisonment is seen as “an effective method to neutralise the threat, or at least calm the public anxiety which that threat evokes” (p. 213). His argument too that spatial confinement has been used throughout history to deal with people who were either difficult to control or inassimilable is a point also made by Foucault (1977 and 1967). Garland (2001) had based his influential argument on the rise of punitiveness on the experiences of the US and the UK however O’Donnell and O’Sullivan (2003) have commented on how, given our close cultural and geographical links to those two countries, it is interesting that Ireland is not more similar in terms of the shaping of its penal policy. No privatisation of prisons, for instance, has taken place in Ireland and O’Donnell and O’Sullivan state that the “perpetual sense of crisis” (p. 57) that Garland described as characterising the US and Britain’s response to crime appears to have been transient in Ireland. Rogan (2011) notes that a criticism of Garland, and also of Foucault’s work, is that it suffers from generalisation and that as such it fails to take account of the impact and importance of individual actors and agency.

### **Data on Prison Population Profiles: Mental Health and Addiction**

In reviewing the literature on prison populations, three areas in particular emerged strongly: the mental health of prisoners, the impact of drugs and addiction on prisoners and the social and educational disadvantage that many prisoners have experienced. The Irish government’s mental health policy, *Vision for Change* (Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, 2006) reported that figures related to mental illness, addiction to alcohol and addiction to drugs, among prisoners, were “far above” (p. 138) those prevailing in the general population and it also drew attention to the lack of

services for previously long-stay mental health service users and identified this group as having a risk of homelessness, isolation and, of particular relevance for this thesis, of being inappropriately imprisoned. Smith, O'Neill, Tobin, Walshe and Dooley (1996) had found in their study that rates of mental illness were higher in prisoners than would be expected for the general population in Ireland and they re-iterate the quote uttered by Gunn (1978); "not only do prisons generate psychiatric problems but they also collect them inappropriately and act as unofficial mental hospitals for individuals who should be in health care" (p. 181). Smith et al acknowledge that the site chosen for their study, Mountjoy Prison, may have a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders than other prisons due to the fact that the prison, as a committal prison, is obliged to accept all referrals whereas other prisons may have some say in who they accept. Importantly too these authors note that their study showed that there were proportionally much higher rates of serious substance disorders in the prison than mental illness and that this has also been reflected in similar studies undertaken in England and Wales (cf. Taylor and Gunn, 1984; Gunn, Maden and Swinton, 1991). Internationally Kelly (2007) found that there is a high prevalence of enduring mental illness in prison populations and Fazel (2002) in a systematic review of 62 surveys from 12 countries, on the subject of mental disorder among prisoners, found that 10% of males and 12% of female prisoners had major depression. Fazel also found that 3.7% of male and 4% of female prisoners had psychoses, such as schizophrenia. As such Kelly (2007) argues that the links between mental illness, deprivation and imprisonment can be seen as a form of societal or "structural" violence which results in the systematic exclusion of individuals with mental illness from full participation in civic, social and political life. Pollock, Hogan, Lambert, Ross and Sundt (2011) also note that prison itself is often seen as psychologically debilitating and, as a result, inmates' mental health can deteriorate during a prison term.

Addiction issues faced by prisoners and the presence of drugs in prison has been acknowledged by a number of Irish studies (Dillon, 2001; Long, Allwright, Barry, Reaper Reynolds, Thornton, Bradley & Parry, 2001; Long, Allwright & Begley, 2004). O'Mahony (1997) found in comparing two surveys of prisoners, conducted in Mountjoy Prison in 1986 and again in 1996, that the proportion of the prison population that had used drugs other than cannabis had doubled from 37% to 77%. In his later survey, he reported that almost one fifth of those in his sample of 108 prisoners had admitted to an

alcohol problem or receiving treatment for alcoholism. O'Mahony found too that heroin was, for a large majority of those sampled, the first drug of choice and indeed 45 prisoners, reported that they had used heroin while in prison and six prisoners stated that their first ever experience with heroin had been while they were in prison. Dillon (2001) in her qualitative study of 29 prisoners in Mountjoy Prison which set out to explore the nature of drug use among prisoners found that Mountjoy Prison was influenced by a drugs culture. Participants reported that drugs impacted on everyone in the prison setting, including prisoners without a history of drug use, and staff, and that 17 out of the 29 respondents in the study stated that they were continuing to use illicit drugs while in prison with four stating that they had their first experience of heroin while incarcerated. Long et al (2001) in a study of prevalence of antibodies to hepatitis B, C and HIV in entrants into Irish prisons reported that use of injected drugs and infection with the hepatitis C virus are endemic in Irish prisons and almost a fifth (29/156) of prisoners who were injecting drug users in the study reported that they had begun injecting while in prison.

The Report of the National Steering Group on Deaths in Prisons (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999) found that there were 11 drug-related deaths in Irish prisons between 1990 and 1997. Concern over rates of suicide in prison have also been raised. Dooley (1997), for example, had reported a marked increase with 43 deaths in custody occurring between 1988 and 1996, of which 29 were considered to be suicide. Corcoran, Keeley, O'Sullivan and Perry (2004) in their study of attempted suicide in Ireland, included three prisons in their study and found that while episodes from the prisons accounted for just 3% of all cases monitored in their study they concluded that attempted suicide is a significant public health problem in Ireland and that prison suicide attempts were more likely to involve men, self-injury and repeated attempts.

### **Data on Prison Population Profiles: Social and Educational Disadvantage**

Data from Ireland on prisoner profiles also reveals a picture of social and educational disadvantage (O'Mahony, 2002; Dillon, 2001). O'Mahony (2002) argued that the characteristics of the prisoners he interviewed in Mountjoy Prison are the same for most developed countries; "they tend to be young, urban, undereducated males from

the lower socio-economic classes” (p. 620); a point also reiterated in Bacik, Kelly, O’Connell and Sinclair’s (1998) analysis of the association between community deprivation, District Court appearances and sentence severity. O’Mahony’s (1997) writings illustrate the relatively homogenous nature of who we imprison in Ireland and acknowledged that prisoners, as a group, tended to come from backgrounds of deprivation. O’Mahony (1997) found the two surveys he conducted of prisoners in 1986 and 1996 to be similar in terms of criminal history profile and sociological profile. He did note though a number of changes between the two samples which seemed to indicate deteriorating circumstances. In 1986, for example, 13% of prisoners came from families that had experienced parental separation or desertion, in 1996 this figure had doubled to 27%. The number of prisoners whose fathers had been in prison had also doubled from 7% in 1986 to 15% ten years later. Evidence of disorder in people’s lives had also increased; the rate of marriage, for example, among prisoners interviewed in 1986 was 26% (still low when compared to the general population) however in 1996 this was further reduced to 18% and 50% of married prisoners were separated from their families in 1996 compared to 29% in 1986.

While these results should be put in context, Mountjoy is the committal prison for 20 out of 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland and operates as a remand prison for all the more serious cases being heard in the Dublin courts, nonetheless O’Mahony’s work does provide an indication of the background that many prisoners have. This can be interpreted as a reflection not just of who commits the most crime but also what crimes society chooses to punish (cf. Bacik, Kelly, O’Connell and Sinclair, 1998). Bauman (2000) for instance, although writing in a general context rather than referring specially to Ireland’s penal policy, makes the point that only rarely do people “at the top” become imprisoned (p. 218). The McBride Commission (Committee of Inquiry into the Irish Penal System, 1980) acknowledged too that “the majority of those who end up in prisons are born in socially disadvantaged circumstances and come from the most deprived sectors of society in terms of income, housing, education, opportunity, mobility, environment etc” (p. 29), a point made also by the Whitaker Report (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985) and also by the White Paper on Adult Education (Department of Education and Science, 2000).



The picture of disadvantage among prisoners is also reflected in international literature. Munoz (2009) acknowledges that although the reasons for imprisonment are varied, the prisoner population generally reflects backgrounds of social disadvantage and contains a “disproportionate number of people from poor, discriminated and marginalised groups” (p. 5). The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) in the UK found that many prisoners have experience of social exclusion and estimated that prisoners were, among other things, 13 times more likely to have been in care as a child, 13 more times to be unemployed, 10 times more likely to have been a regular truant and two and a half times more likely to have had a family member convicted of a criminal offence. Paton, Crouch and Camic (2009) also found, in their qualitative study of young offenders in the UK, that there was a prevalence among their participants of exposure to both adverse and traumatic life experiences and their study documents the experiences offenders had, which included exposure to violence, instability, financial deprivation and the absence of a parent figure. Lisak and Beszterczey (2007) identified among the 43 life histories of male death row inmates in the US, that 31 had six or more of the eight risk factors that are commonly used in quantifying childhood adversity and found that abuse was multigenerational and linked to intergenerational substance abuse. Almost all men in their study had experienced serious instability in school and instability in both relationships and employment were common, as were criminal behaviour and incarceration (prior to a capital offence) being committed.

There is, as demonstrated by the studies cited, general agreement that prisoners have often experienced disadvantage and may also have particular needs with regard to mental health and addiction. These findings have implications for the key research question posed in this thesis i.e. how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison? With this research question at the centre, the following section concentrates on what is known about the educational profile of prisoners and analyses the relationship between their earlier educational experiences and imprisonment.

### **The Link Between Earlier Educational Experiences and Imprisonment**

In Ireland, the MacBride Commission linked the problem of crime with education and in acknowledging the relatively high crime rate among a small section of

society questioned whether it “may be due more to a failure in education and learning than to an innate propensity for crime” (p. xii). O’Mahony (2002) would make a similar connection, some two decades later, arguing that the educational profile of prisoners indicates that the majority of prisoners have failed at the education system and that the education system in turn has failed them. O’Mahony’s analysis of the educational profile of Mountjoy prisoners reveals, in terms of educational attainment, that there were no marked improvements in the situation between 1986, when he did his initial survey, and in 1996, when he repeated the process. The proportion of prisoners leaving school before 16 years of age increased from 78% to 80% and the proportion of prisoners who had stayed at school or obtained a qualification after the age of 16 had declined from 11% to 7%. In O’Mahony’s 1996 sample 80% had left school before the age of 16 with 29% reporting that they had difficulty reading and writing and 21% admitting to functional illiteracy. Only a quarter had taken public state exams and O’Mahony states that of those who had taken exams, in many cases these had been undertaken through the prison school. O’Mahony (2002) also refers to the several thousands of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who leave school early and he locates the main causes not within individuals but in school structures and the failure of an educational system to create effective programmes which target those who are disadvantaged. It is a point echoed by Morgan and Kett (2003) who in analysing the Prison Adult Literacy Survey state that “perhaps the clearest evidence of educational failure among prisoners is the fact that 63% of the sample said that they had played truant regularly while in school” (p. 20).

Other Irish studies have also noted the link between poor educational attainment and imprisonment (e.g. Dillon, 2001; Seymour and Costello, 2005). The figures and studies cited in this section could be interpreted as highlighting the prison as, to use Goffman’s phrase, a “storage dumps for inmates” (p. 73), particularly inmates who are early school leavers. While this interpretation is overly deterministic nonetheless it does draw attention to literature which is focused on theories of crime (cf. Marsh, 2006; Garland and Sparks, 2000; McLaughlin, Muncie and Hughes, 2003) which have included the classical school of criminology (dating back to Enlightenment thinking) which emphasised crime as a rational approach, and the positivistic theories which focus on the characteristics and causes of a criminal type. McLoughlin, Muncie and Hughes (2006) have acknowledged a broadening of focus on criminology to encompass

a more critical approach and more recent literature on causes of crime tends to include a focus on “risk factors”. Indeed O’Mahony (2009) identified the risk factor prevention paradigm as the dominant discourse today in juvenile justice. The National Crime Council’s (2002) report on the subject of causes of crime makes use of this approach and identifies academic and school factors as one factor among five; other factors include socio-economic deprivation, family background, neighbourhood and community factors and individual factors. While the advantages of the risk factor prevention paradigm is that it acknowledges that there are many different pathways to criminality and avoids the pitfalls of exaggerating the role of one or two factors, nonetheless O’Mahony (2009) argues that it fails to account for issues including personal agency and socio-cultural context and is unable to deal with reasons for adult onset offending. However, within the risk factor paradigm, it is notable that education is only one factor among many possible factors as to why people commit crime and the debate over causes of crime is an on-going one.

### **Educational Profile of Prisoners**

Empirical evidence to support the position that those in prison in Ireland have particular educational needs is provided by comparing the International Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan, Hickey and Kelleghan, 1997) and the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan and Kett, 2003). The comparison also illustrates the wide gap in terms of educational qualifications that exists among those in prison and those in the community. Prisoners had been excluded from taking part in the International Adult Literacy Survey (along with residents in other institutions such as hospitals and psychiatric facilities) and the Prison Adult Literacy Survey sought to replicate the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The exclusion of prisoners as part of the international surveys is on-going; the forthcoming Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for the Initial Assessment of Adult Competencies Survey (PIAAC), which is due to be published in 2013, also excludes prisoners from participating as, in common with IALS, the sample unit remains the household. This means that individuals confined to institutions are again, due to methodological decisions, excluded and indicates that such exclusion has become routine. The exclusion of prisoners and others confined in institutions from these international studies means that their needs are also likely to be excluded or curtailed in any policy developments or

initiatives which emerge on the basis of the data. Murray, Kirsh and Jenkins (1998) note for example that “it is usual practice to exclude the institutional population from national surveys because of the difficulties in conducting interviews in institutional settings” (p. 9). The US Survey of Adult Literacy, the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) however differed in this regard – while the survey itself was similar to IALS it did include a prison component when it was administered in 1992 and again in 2003. In comparing the prison population with the general population it found that in every age group examined (16-24, 25-39, and 40 years or older), incarcerated adults had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy level than adults in the same age group living in households (Greenberg, Dunleavy and Kutner, 2007).

The IALS (OECD, 1997) revealed that (using a scale of 1-5) nearly one quarter of the population in Ireland has literacy levels rated at the lowest level (Level 1). The survey drew attention to the close links between lower scores and lower educational levels and the association between low levels of literacy and low levels of participation in second chance education and training. It also highlighted the lower levels of literacy among older age groups; this had been attributed to a cohort effect i.e. the presence of an older age group who had less access to secondary education due to fees being required prior to 1967 (Denny, Harmon, McMahon and Redmond 1999; Morgan and Kett, 2003). However, while the survey did clearly demonstrate substantially lower levels of literacy in older age groups it also revealed poor levels of literacy among the 16-25 age groups which indicates that free secondary education and more educational opportunities had not eradicated the problem. By replicating the IALS survey within the Irish prison system it was possible for Morgan and Kett (2003) to compare results between the prison and the general population. The comparison revealed that the Irish prison population has a much larger group with very poor literacy skills compared to the general population.

Results from the Prison Adult Literacy Survey emphatically showed how a younger age group had literacy problems and indicated that a significant number of prisoners had almost no literacy skills. The survey also revealed the presence of a large number of prisoners, young males in particular, whose skills were limited to the extent that it would be difficult for them to meet the challenges of modern life (Morgan and Kett, 2003). Data from the survey provided a much more detailed breakdown of results

at Level 1 or below than the general IALS survey did. Both surveys gave participants a “screening test” that measured literacy at an elementary level and participants had to successfully complete this level before being allowed to proceed. In the prison survey however, due to the large number of prisoners who were unable to complete this screening test, a level called *Pre Level 1* was introduced, the presence of which is in itself indicative of the very low levels of literacy. Results from the prison survey revealed that almost 23% of male respondents were unable to complete the screening test and that more than 50% of the prison population was at Level 1 or below, as opposed to 25% of people in the general population survey. Importantly the prison survey also found that, among prisoners, the younger you were the more likely you were to have poorer literacy skills. As Morgan and Kett (2003) state, this is at odds with results from the general population and they suggest that this may be because older and younger people are in prison for different types of crime or because older prisoners may have engaged more with literacy activities while in prison. However, explicit in the data is that there remains a younger cohort that is emerging from compulsory education with, despite developments in education in Ireland in recent decades, significant literacy difficulties. The latest report from PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment) in their international survey of the literacy level of 15 year olds also indicated a decline in the reading literacies of Irish students since the previous 2000 survey (Perkins, Cosgrove, Morgan and Shiel, 2011), although factors involved in this decline and a critique of how comparisons can be made have also been put forward. Cartwright (2011) for example, while accepting a decline had occurred identified several limitations to the PISA methodology and warned that results may reflect changes in test taking behaviour that is specific to PISA and that, as such, generalising these results to the larger educational context in Ireland would be “misleading and potentially dangerous if allowed to influence policy” (p. 41).

While research has shown how the educational and life profile of prisoners is relatively homogenous, the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan and Kett, 2003) drew attention to the considerable differences in literacy levels that existed among prison institutions in Ireland. Morgan and Kett’s work also illustrated the differences in literacy levels between the prison institutions; Table 3.1 illustrates these findings and the prisons which made up the research sites (Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick’s Institution and Limerick prison) as part of this thesis are highlighted in bold.

Table 3.1 Percent at each literacy level in each prison

Prison	% per level		
	Pre-Level 1	Level 1/2	Level 3/4/5
Arbour Hill	---	50.0	50.0
Castlereagh	20.0	40.0	40.0
Cloverhill	32.3	54.9	12.9
Curragh <sup>a</sup>	10.0	30.0	60.0
Cork	20.0	48.0	32.0
Fort Mitchel <sup>a</sup>	---	80.0	20.0
<b>Limerick</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>17.6</b>
Limerick Women's	---	80.0	20.0
Loughan House	27.3	36.4	36.4
Midlands	26.7	66.7	6.7
<b>Mountjoy Men's</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>25.7</b>
Mountjoy Women's	20.8	45.9	33.3
Portlaoise	40.0	33.4	26.7
Shanganagh Castle <sup>a</sup>	25.0	62.5	12.5
Shelton Abbey	16.7	33.3	50.0
<b>St. Patrick's</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>20.0</b>
Training Unit	----	50.0	50.0
Wheatfield	13.3	43.3	43.4

Note: From *The prison adult literacy survey results and implications* (p. 38), by M. Morgan and M. Kett, 2003, Dublin: Irish Prison Service.

<sup>a</sup>This institution is no longer open.

Results from Table 3.1 have implications for prison education within particular institutions and may also highlight how a “one size fits all” model may neither be applicable nor appropriate. Morgan and Kett (2003) offer two possible explanations for these results. Firstly, as noted previously, within the prison, younger people tended to do less well than older people, therefore the age profile of those within the institutions may explain the differences among institutions, i.e. institutions with younger inmates tended to have prisoners with lower levels of literacy. This may explain, for example, why St. Patrick’s Institution and Shanganagh Castle, which had prisoners below the age of twenty-one had a particularly high number of prisoners with low levels of literacy. Secondly, Morgan and Kett found that analysis revealed a strong association between type of offence and literacy performance; inmates incarcerated for sex offences for

example tended to have better literacy scores (the same was true of drugs offences) in contrast to those imprisoned for violent and property offences. Arbour Hill prison for example, which traditionally incarcerates sex offenders had no one assessed at pre-level 1 in contrast to Mountjoy Prison (25.7%), St. Patrick's Institution (33.3%) and Limerick Prison (41.2%). Again these results should be interpreted within the context that a level three level of literacy was considered the minimum to cope with the demands of modern everyday life and as Table 3.2 illustrates just over 70% of male prisoners have a literacy level of less than level three.

Table 3.2 Literacy level of male prisoners

Literacy level	%
Pre-Level 1	22.7
Level 1/2	48.1
Level 3/4/5	29.3

*Note: From The prison adult literacy survey results and implications (p. 36), by M. Morgan and M. Kett, 2003, Dublin: Irish Prison Service.*

The differences between prisoners' levels of literacy illustrates that all prisoners, and indeed all prisons, are not the same and, with particular relevance to this thesis, as a consequence prisoner learners within such prisons may not experience prison education in the same way. The heterogeneity amongst prisoners regarding literacy levels also underscores the suitability of employing a life history methodology as it further acknowledges and values the variety of the individual's lived experience. The reporting in the survey of lower levels of literacy among institutions with a younger age profile, in particular, is notable and could be interpreted as an reflection of the current education system and weaknesses inherent in it especially as the educational profile of prisoners is in stark contrast to recent OECD figures (2011) which indicate that over 90% of young people in Ireland now successfully complete upper second level education.

In the context of more young people than ever now completing upper second level education Kellaghan's (2002) observation on how, as retention in the education system in general increases, the consequences of "failure" for those who don't succeed become much more serious, seems more valid and convincing than ever. It is a point

also echoed by Field (2006) who argued that lifelong learning, while playing a central part in the processes of inclusion, also ironically, legitimates existing inequality and leads to a widening gap between those who are information-rich and those who are information-poor. It illustrates too the possible existence of the “Matthew effect” (acknowledged by Downes, 2011 as well recognised in the field of psychology) in which, in terms of education, those who are more educated are more likely to pursue further education.

The link between poor educational attainment and imprisonment has been made in a number of international studies (e.g. Pettit and Western, 2004; Noonan, 2004; Sabates, 2008). In Australia, Noonan (2004) noted that the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for adult prisoners and offenders (ANTA) indicated that less than one quarter of prisoners have completed secondary school and that a large number have limited literacy and/or numeracy. The strategy also indicated that intellectual disability was noticeable amongst male prisoners. The gap between an inmate population and the general population regarding educational attainment is further illustrated by Wolf Harlow (2003) who state that approximately 41% of inmates in U.S. State and Federal Prisons in 1997 had not completed high school or its equivalent. This was in comparison to 18% of the general population who had also not completed high school. Hetland, Eikeland, Manger, Diseth and Asbjornsen (2007) in their study of the educational background of the total prison population in Norway found that, although Norway has a generally high educational level, there is a gap in educational levels between inmates and the general population. The authors found that the percentage of prison inmates with primary and lower secondary education as their highest attained educational level is almost double of the general population. Only 35% of inmates under twenty-five had completed one, two or three years of upper secondary education whereas, in comparison, 74% of the general population, again under 25, had completed three years of upper secondary education. The authors found that inmates had an educational level that was comparable to the general educational level of the general population in Norway almost twenty-five years ago. A more recent comparative study involving Norwegian prisoners and prisoners from Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden (Eikeland, Manger and Asbjornsen, 2009) also found that prisoners compared unfavourably, in terms of educational qualifications, to the general population in their respective countries.



Sabates (2008) argues that while education is potentially a huge influence on young people's propensity to offend, he contends that the reality is much more complex and involves dealing with the complexities of individuals, families and social structure. Using a mixed method model he found that an increase in educational attainment among three cohorts of young people in England was associated with reductions in conviction rates for most offences but not for violent crime. He concludes his study by stating that while education may have a role to play in crime reduction, it should not be presented as a simple solution. Cognisant of this proviso, there is however a body of literature in Ireland linking early school leaving with imprisonment and the following section explores the implications for early school leaving, and its relationship with imprisonment, in more detail.

### **Implications of early school leaving for individuals**

Educational disadvantage has been described as "a situation whereby individuals derive less benefit from the education system than their peers" (p. 1, Combat Poverty Agency, 2003) and this description is closely linked to the definition of disadvantage as defined in the 1998 Educational Act which defines it as "the impediments to education arising from social or economic disadvantage which prevent students from deriving appropriate benefit from education" (Section 32,9). While the term has been critiqued (cf. Kellaghan, 2001; Spring, 2007) educational disadvantage has, since the 1990s, featured prominently in national policy discourse (Smyth and McCoy, 2009). The introduction of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme in 2006/2007 in order to address the issue of educational disadvantage through the provision of a more integrated approach, is testament to the recognition that educational disadvantage is a significant issue (cf. Weir, 2011 and Department of Education and Skills, 2011a, 2011b for evaluation of the DEIS programme). Early school leaving has also attracted significant policy attention in Ireland (Byrne and Smyth, 2010; Downes and Gilligan (eds) 2007). Smyth and McCoy's (2009) work on early school leaving and its consequences for adult outcomes noted that, in addition to the impact on the individual, early school leaving leads to substantial costs to society including higher expenditure on welfare, health and, of particular relevance to this thesis, prisons. Indeed they noted that early school leavers have poorer employment prospects, poorer health levels and lower wage earning potential. The specific links between education

and health have been made in a number of studies e.g. Higgins, Lavin and Metcalfe, 2008; Freudenberg and Ruglis, 2007; Health Service Executive (HSE), 2008. Darmody et al (2008), in their study of truancy also acknowledge the general consensus that poor attendance levels have substantial costs for the individual and wider society with early school leaving likely to lead to economic disadvantage and persistent truancy being linked to engagement in criminal activity. The HSE (2008) have highlighted the strong relationship between early school leaving and substance misuse and this link has also been acknowledged by others (e.g. Downes, Maunsell and Ivers, 2006; Morgan, 2001) and has been recognised by the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008. The National Crime Council (2003) also identified early school leaving and substance misuse as correlates of crime.

When school patterns are examined, Byrne, McCoy and Watson (2009), who analysed data from the *School Leavers' Survey* (2007), found that although the level of school completion remained stable from mid 1990s onwards, every year almost 9,000 young people leave school before completing their Leaving Certificate. Analysis of early school leaving in Ireland has tended to focus on young people who have left second level education before completing the Leaving Certificate exam, however Byrne and Smyth (2010) note the presence of a small but still significant group of children who do not make the transition from primary to secondary education; with numbers varying from a low of 724 in 2001 to a high of 1,165 in 2007. Overall however, early school leaving patterns in Ireland differ significantly by gender (Byrne et al, 2009; O'Connor, 2007; Smyth, 1999) with young men continually over-represented in the early school leaver group. This however is not simply a national phenomenon; female retention rates now exceed male rates in most western countries (OECD, 2008).

Research indicates a strong association between early school leaving and school absences (Smyth 1999; McCoy, Kelly and Watson, 2007). However, Darmody et al (2008) found that very little research has been undertaken in the Republic of Ireland on truancy. According to their study, international research has identified a variety of causes of truancy including the expectational climate of the school and the academic ethos but also relationships between peers and teachers, the curriculum, discipline in the school and boredom. As a result of the wide number of factors that cause truancy, those who truant from school do not constitute a homogenous group. Nonetheless their study

found that truancy had a significant relationship with later life chances. Darmody et al's quantitative study used two theoretical strands: Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which was referred to in the previous chapter, and secondly resistance theory i.e. interpreting truancy as a form of resistance to the school culture and values. In line with international research the study found that male students were significantly more likely to truant in their last year at school than female students. It also found that truancy levels vary significantly by social class background. Students from unskilled manual households are more than twice as likely to truant as those from higher professional backgrounds. The social mix in schools was also found to be predictive of truancy patterns; with those attending disadvantaged schools significantly more likely to truant while those attending fee paying school were less likely to truant. While the authors of the study acknowledge that truancy could be seen as a measure of student resistance to the middle class values and norms of the school system they importantly note its ineffectiveness as a strategy as it "serves instead to reproduce social class inequalities in educational and labour market outcomes" (p. 12). In essence their study illustrated that truancy is a class issue with students from professional backgrounds significantly less likely to skip classes than their students from working class backgrounds. An earlier study had also identified the importance of class, Smyth (1999) found that higher rates of dropout were reported in predominantly working class schools than middle class schools even controlling for individual social background of students, which suggests that the social class composition of a school has an impact on retention.

The importance of background is illustrated in Bourdieu's (1977) reproduction theory which focuses on the impact of a child's home life and in particular the acquisition of "cultural capital" which, he argues, means that middle class students, more familiar and comfortable with the dominant culture of the day, will fare better in the school environment. However, Byrne and Smyth's (2010) review of the literature on early school leaving outline a number of key factors in which family background is only one. These factors include: the school climate, relations with teachers, interaction with peers and family background and circumstances. Byrne and Smyth found that schools themselves play an important role and can impact on drop-out rates, for example, there was greater retention in schools where there was a positive school climate with good relations between teachers and students and a greater sense of ownership felt by students over school life.

Byrne and Smyth's mixed method study found that some schools and classes had a culture of early school leaving. They identified a number of key factors of early school leaving; in particular the impact of negative relations with teachers, the classroom environment itself and interaction with peers. Many learners, for example, reported difficulties in interacting with their fellow classmates which in turn lead to further disengagement from school. Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin and Royer (2008) in a Canadian study, consisting of interviews with 80 high school "dropouts", also found that peer rejection was a significant trend that lead to the shortening of the educational journey of participants. Other studies have noted that peer motivation plays a role in continued engagement with education generally especially in the context of students at risk of early school leaving (e.g. Downes, 2011; Ivers and Downes, 2012).

Schools' decision to "stream" or group children according to their academic ability was also associated with a greater drop out of students from lower stream classes (Smyth, 1999). Byrne and Smyth's (2010) study found that experiences in school were also influenced by how groups based on ability were established within the school. The study found that poor interaction with peers tended to be more prevalent in schools using streaming and tracking practices and that it was clear that students could distinguish the type of class to which they had been assigned. In schools with a mixed ability base, Byrne and Smyth found that young people who were early school leavers reported an increase in isolation, which was compounded by their low academic attainment in relation to their higher achieving class mates, and perceived that teachers treated them less favourably. Conversely, in schools which practiced streaming according to ability, young people allocated to lower stream classes reported disruptive behaviour in class as a common occurrence and their experience of school was characterised by negative relations between teachers and students and lower teacher expectations. Both Lessard et al (2008) and Byrne and Smyth agreed that dropping out of school was a complex process, with family circumstances, school environment and peer and teacher relationships all playing a role.

Byrne and Smyth's (2010) work is particularly relevant to this thesis as it too made use of a life history methodology. On the basis of 25 life histories gathered from participants who had left school they were able to identify three types of school leavers:

those who disliked primary school and had attendance issues or academic difficulties at an early stage; those who enjoyed primary school but who found the transition from primary to secondary difficult; and those who enjoyed primary school but who became disengaged in junior and senior cycle. This typology highlights the advantage of a life history approach; an approach which is able to go beyond a simplistic analysis and become, as Byrne and Smyth themselves note, an effective methodology for capturing the complexity of school leaving and the multifaceted reasons why young people leave school. Through the use of the life history interview, Byrne and Smyth were able to identify the many push and pull factors which influence decisions to leave school; life outside school can for example operate as a “pull” away from education, and life within the school can operate as a “push” to leave. Yet Byrne and Smyth found that the number of young people who fitted into the first two categories of the above typology (i.e. those who disliked primary school and had difficulties/attendance issues from an early stage and those who liked primary school but found the transition to secondary difficult) seemed to suggest that early school leaving had more to do with the “push” from negative experiences of school rather than the “pull” of the labour market. Interestingly the use of “push” and “pull” factors to explain early school leaving has also been used to some extent in prison research to explore why prisoners engage with education while in prison and is explored further in the following chapter.

### **Analysing power relations in schools and prisons**

Dunne (2010) acknowledges the existence of Foucaultian interpretations of the school as paradigm examples of disciplinary institutions “on a continuum with the prison or the psychiatric hospital” (p. 10). Devine (2003) for instance found that Foucault’s analysis of power in modern society provided a valuable framework for analysing power relations between adults and children and argues that there are fundamental links between the micro practice of what happens in school and the macro practice of what takes place in broader society. She notes for example the dichotomy created by institutions between those who are institutionalised and those who are not and how in a disciplinary society attention is focused on those who are judged to be outside the norm and who are perceived to need intervention. In Goffman’s (1961) work in a psychiatric hospital, this distinction was between those judged insane and sane and Devine states that in school, this distinction is between the adult and the child.

Implicit in the exercise of power is the notion of otherness which is a point also illustrated in Goffman's *Asylums*. Devine found that the experience of otherness was experienced by children in school and cites a number of examples including: absence of consultation about what they did in school, absence of control over time and space and lack of consultation as to what the school rules should be. Devine's research found that children felt a lack of ownership over the school itself and interestingly Devine noted that, for most children in the study, being a child was equated with being curtailed and constrained due to their status as children with the sense of otherness being communicated through the dynamics of power and control between teachers and pupils but also present in peer relations where there were dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in peer culture. The idea of the offender as outsider has been made by Goffman and others including Christie (2000) and Becker (1963) who argued that in the criminal justice system of a modern society an offender is "symbolically forced outside the normal life of the social group" (p. 192) so that he becomes an outsider, or "other".

The link between school and prison has been made by Foucault (1977) who argued that the model of the panopticon (where everyone can be supervised) as a means of social control has exerted influence over both schools and prisons. In Foucault's view this has important implications for society and the link between prisons and schools has been made by others (cf. Devine, 2003; Dwyer 1995). Foucault (1977) maintained that prison and schools are both disciplinary institutions and interestingly Hodge and Tripp (1986), who examined audience responses to the Australian television soap opera *Prisoner Cell Block H*, also revealed that school children formed a significant part of its audience and that young people were making links between their experience at school and the prisoners' experience.

A common metaphor in education is one of pathway/journey with the positive connotations the metaphor contains of actually reaching somewhere more positive than the place left. Foucault (1977) however drew attention to the creation of "delinquents" by institutions and while acknowledging the assumption that many institutions lead away from the prison, he argues that in fact they can lead to it. Raible and Irizarry (2010) in the US, in a similar vein, refer to the trajectory from school to prison, using the term "school to prison pipeline" (p. 1196). They argue that there is an under examined link between the surveillance role played by teachers in public schools and

the over representation of particular ethnic groups in the US penal system. In assessing this trajectory from school to prison Raible and Irizarry note the concern expressed by an array of professionals, including educators and prison activists, at the escalation of suspensions and expulsions. Foucault (1977) had also argued that what links the school and the prison is how they treated a departure from the norm.

The issue as to whether prisoner learners' experience of education has resonance with their current experience of incarceration is of particular importance and significance to this thesis as, apart from contributing to the sociology of punishment and education, it also facilitates consideration on where experiences of prison school compare to both previous experiences of education and general experiences of incarceration. The often negative experience of education and indeed life experiences that prisoners, in general, have encountered is also of relevance to this thesis and its objective to discover how prisoner learners experience prison education within a total institution of the prison. In order to examine fully the context in which education within the prison takes place and the learning environment that prison can provide, literature on what it means to be imprisoned within the total institution of the prison was sourced and critically reviewed.

### **Prisoner Perspectives on Life Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

In an Irish context, Behan (2006) acknowledges that "we know relatively little about the reality of prison life or the effect it has on the individual" (p. 264), a point also made by O'Donnell (2008). The question on what it means to be imprisoned was however explicitly addressed in Liebling's (2004) study of quality of life which was carried out in five UK prisons. The research, in seeking to identify key dimensions of prison life and analyse the prison world as perceived by prisoners revealed that respect was a key value in prison and relationships with family and friends (and maintaining and developing those relationships) were also an important aspect of prisoners' lives. Liebling's study found that prisoners' isolation from family life impacted on prisoners, with family problems identified as a key concern and missing family and tension in the prison cited as two of the main stresses of imprisonment. Complaints, by participants, in Liebling's study regarding family contact included a lack of opportunity for visits, the manner in which visitors were treated and the searching procedures that visitors had to

endure; indeed Liebling reported that some prisoners made a decision not to see some family members and friends based on the conditions visitors faced.

Liebling also found that boredom, particularly at the weekend, was a feature of prison life. However, similar to Goffman's (1961) account, the study highlighted the advantages that were derived from work and engagement in structured activities. She found that activities were "a catalyst for change" (p. 315) and provided prisoners with a sense of purpose and increased self-confidence. Even work deemed meaningless or unrelated to potential opportunities outside of the prison were nonetheless seen as having benefits e.g. they provided opportunities to interact with others (staff and prisoners), and, depending on the activity, increased access to phones, showers, money and gave prisoners a sanctioned reason to be out of their cell, something to do and helped time pass more quickly. She noted how much of prisoners' sense of personal development derived from individual activities such as reading, studying in a cell, religious activities and also the role of helping others. The study found that having a job or other activity was positively related to scores on other dimensions e.g. relationships, trust, respect and fairness.

Liebling (2004) reported that fewer than half of the prisoners interviewed thought they could "be themselves" in prison. In essence this demonstrates the impact that incarceration can have on identity and illustrates how the prison is a site of contested identities, which both Goffman (1961) and Giddens (1984) conceptualised. Wilson (2004) in her ethnographic study in UK prisons also concluded that the major concern of those in prison was not to become institutionalised. Wilson uses the concept of the **third space** to draw attention to prisoners' sense of agency in maintaining this sense of self. The concept refers to the space that emerges following the collusion of two worlds i.e. the institutional world and the desire of the individual to retain a social and individualised lifestyle and Wilson makes the point that the more a person becomes separated from the outside world the more important it becomes to keep aspects of that world in existence. The resulting tension is resolved by the creation of a third space in which prisoners create a way of being and living that maintains a sense of self. As Wilson noted, the concept of the third space (which she did not invent but acknowledges its use with other marginalised groups) resonates with Bourdieu's (1977)



notion of habitus but also resonates with Goffman's (1961) identification of the development of an institutional underlife as a feature of a total institution.

Jewkes' (2002) UK study which explored male prisoners' use of the media within prison and how it relates to their sense of identity also illustrates this point. While Jewkes agreed that prisons are essentially mortifying environments, she supported Giddens' view that people are never entirely powerless, even those who are confined; a point which is absent in Foucault's work (1977). Jewkes' argued that, based on her findings, it was the ability to maintain a pre-prison sense of self and also a public identity for presentation during social interactions with others that was required to survive a prison sentence. Choosing what television programmes to watch may seem at first glance to be what Goffman referred to as simply a "removal activity" but Jewkes found that making decisions regarding television programmes and newspaper choice allowed prisoners to structure their time and provided a continuity for inmates with their pre-prison life. While acknowledging that this could be interpreted as also normalising the prison experience, the ability to make those choices also gave prisoners a sense of control over their environment and was found to encourage affiliation with other inmates who were also making the same or similar media choices. Again, like Goffman's "removal activity", Jewkes noted that it could also be used as a way of literally tuning out of prison culture or figuratively removing yourself from prison life. Interestingly Liebling's (2004) study noted that most prisoners talked about "escape" or "special places" when they talked about well being in the prison system and for one prisoner, for example, the gym was a place where he could forget he was in prison. It will be interesting to see if the idea of education is also conceptualised by prisoner learners in this way.

Hockey (2012), in an academic piece which reflected on his experience of incarceration as a teenager, noted the similarities between the person he became in prison and Foucault's (1977) description of the "docile body". He argued that this subdued state may develop through the erosion of interest in pursuits and in the absence of active cognitive engagement caused by the institution itself. The narrowing of focus that occurs within a total institution is, in his observations, illustrated in prison by inmates engaged in cell based and passive pursuits such as reading and watching television. Thus, while Jewkes (2002) views television watching in much more positive

terms, Hockey's account views it as an illustration of the institution inculcating docility. Hockey's work has relevance to this thesis as, although he does not specifically mention prison education, he draws attention to the impact the total institution has on motivation and in prioritising immediate as opposed to long-term goals.

Liebling (2004) acknowledged that although sub-groups developed in prisons, relationships with other prisoners were complex. Many sociological studies of prison life have noted that the relationship between staff and prisoners and among prisoners themselves tends to be characterised by mistrust and hostility (e.g. Clemmer 1940; Goffman, 1961; Sykes, 1958). Sykes (1958) had argued in his early sociological study of prison life that while social interaction with others could help alleviate somewhat the pain of imprisonment, there was a "moral code" in the prison with loyalty to each other as the key dominant value and the harsh treatment meted out to prisoners who "rat" on each other was testament to that. Yet despite what is often written about the institution of the prison, Liebling (2004) argues that it would be wrong however to see prison as a place without trust but rather argues that trust exists in different ways. She notes for example that there are trusted positions in the prison e.g. the listeners (Samaritan trained volunteer prisoner counsellors) and argues that only in places of maximum physical force is there no room at all for trust.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Goffman's (1961) work drew attention to the "mortifications" which individuals faced when confined within a total institution. Goffman had included in his list of mortifications the "civil death" that that occurs on entry to a total institution and he used the example of a loss of rights, such as voting, to illustrate his point. In May 2007 Irish prisoners were permitted to vote for the first time. The turnout however was low with Behan (2012) reporting that nine out of ten prisoners did not exercise their right. Based on interviews with fifty adult male prisoners in Dublin, Behan identified a number of reasons why this was and while some reasons were the same reasons as citizens outside the prison may have e.g. apathy, cynicism towards politics, alienation from civic society, others related to the impact of imprisonment itself and provide insight into what life within the total institution of the prison was like. Reasons included lack of institutional support, a complicated registration procedure that would pose difficulties for those with literacy difficulties and confusion about how to register for the postal vote. Behan (2012) found that some

prisoners were unaware that they had to register with an outside address and revealed to Behan that their decision not to vote was based on a concern that the prison address would appear on their voting card. This highlights the stigma that exists with imprisonment and also the information gap within the institution. There was also a fear expressed among participants that postal votes in the prison could be made public via the media. Behan found that this fear and sense of alienation from authority meant that “some prisoners refused to accept that the prison would not examine their postal voting envelope or that the returning officer would protect their privacy” (p. 28). Goffman had identified information, access to it and control of it, as a feature of a total institution and the lack of information regarding voting combined with the fear that voting patterns would be made public, illustrate Goffman’s features of a total institution within an Irish prison context. Behan’s (2012) work also serves to highlight the sense of powerlessness that many inmates felt and the impact that sense of powerlessness has on active citizenship. In this context, it is interesting to note Rogan’s (2011) finding that one of the striking features of Irish prison history is the paucity of organisations established by prisoners themselves, again reinforcing Goffman’s view that the institution itself results in a sense of low status among inmates.

Goffman (1961) observes that those who are released from a total institution often tell us important things about those institutions and there have been accounts from former prisoners about their time in prison (cf. Carnochan, 1995, for example, for overview of the impact of the institution of the prison on literature). Nellis (2002), in an account of how the genre of prisoner autobiographies has developed in a British context in the later part of the twentieth century has argued that these works serve as a reminder that prison incarcerates individuals with life experiences, rather than simply prisoners who all think and act the same. Hockey (2012), who was a repeat offender in his youth, described, in an academic rather than literary piece, his experience of incarceration in Britain as one of confinement with a fixed daily routine and a lack of desirable stimuli. He identified the management of time as the principal challenge faced by inmates and noted that one of the ways he passed time was to focus on the next thing to look forward to, be it a meal or a visit. The result of using “time markers” and immediate goals as ways of managing small amounts of time was that the immediate becomes magnified and the trivial details of day-to-day life took on particular importance. James (2003) who served a life sentence in a British prison, and wrote about life within the prison,

also identified the challenge of managing time, observing that “prison life is mostly a continuous repetition of the same day, over and over again. Finding a purpose and a meaning beyond ‘punishment’ can be a struggle” (p. 75).

A relatively recent collection of stories from prisoners in Mountjoy Prison in Ireland (Hunt, 1999) also provides some, albeit, limited detail of prison life; however overwhelmingly the key theme which emerges is that prison life is characterised by drug use and boredom. Indeed Hunt recounts that the book, which consisted of the writings of prisoners on their life and experiences was rejected by one publisher on the grounds that “too many of the stories have a similar theme” (p. 23). Earlier works about imprisonment by Irish authors Behan (1970) and Mahon-Smith (1945) also share common themes: both for example lament the sheer boredom of prison life and the comfort they got from religious services. Both accounts serve as an illustration of how prison is a site of contested identity, Behan, for example, tells of his attack on another prisoner, which is presented as an act of self-protection, so as to ultimately avoid himself being attacked later on. This need to develop a *hard-man* persona was also recounted by Mahon-Smith who reports the boasts prisoners would make regarding the violent crimes they had committed and then his surprise on discovering that their offences were as relatively innocuous as begging or small scale theft by deceit. Mahon-Smith, on at least three occasions, makes the connection between being in prison and being in school, underlying the connection later made by Foucault (1977) between the two institutions. Mahon-Smith tells too how the experience of being a prisoner was akin to being a child in need of constant supervision while also subject to a tense atmosphere in which every act (no matter how seemingly trivial) was magnified in importance, an observation which echoes Goffman’s identification of the institution reinforcing the low status of inmates. Behan’s account does reveal how important books were to his survival; he movingly tells of allowing himself only certain numbers of pages to read each night, so as to make his allotted book last the week. In this sense reading seems to fulfil what Goffman referred to as “removal activities”. Mahon-Smith too reveals the solace that books provided, describing them as “escapes from mental torment” (p. 127). While Behan’s (1970) account reveals the threatening atmosphere and the potential for violence among prisoners, it is important to acknowledge that he describes in detail the friendships and support that were present among prisoners too. Fine (2003) in a collection of academic essays on public schools in the US acknowledges that schools

can be contradictory spaces and be both repressive and liberating and in prisoners' accounts of life within the prison, the prison itself appears contradictory, where examples of violence and terror alongside examples of qualities such as trust, friendships and helpfulness can be found. It is within this environment that prison education is located and the following chapter reviews literature in relation to prison education in general before reviewing the literature in relation to policy and practice in Ireland specifically.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

In order to address the key research question in this thesis of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, this first literature review chapter focused on what the literature reveals about the prison population and began by analysing literature on the characteristics of prisoners in general. It found that Ireland, in common with other industrialised countries, has mainly a prison population that is male, urban and from lower socio-economic groups. Attention was also drawn to the cultural patterns of incarceration in Ireland where confinement has been used as a means of control against groups who have transcended not just the legal code but the moral and social one. The concern both internationally and nationally regarding the mental health of prisoners was documented with a number of studies suggesting that prisoners have more mental health problems in comparison to the general population. Evidence also emerged in the literature of the widespread availability of drugs in prison and addiction issues faced by prisoners. The numbers of prisoners presenting with mental health concerns combined with drug misuse in prison could potentially impact on participation in prison education.

This chapter analysed the link between educational experiences and imprisonment and cited evidence to demonstrate how prisoners come from backgrounds that are, in general, educationally disadvantaged. Results from the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan and Kett, 2003) provided empirical evidence that prisoners in Ireland have particular educational needs and revealed the wide gap in terms of literacy ability that exists between those incarcerated within the total institution of the prison and the general population. The implications of early school leaving were also considered in this chapter and it was found that family background was only one factor, among many,

in understanding individual's relationship with school; other factors included the school climate, interaction with peers and relationships between students and teachers. The literature demonstrated how prisoners enter the prison with experiences of life including knowledge of education, school, and family, all of which they may draw on while in prison and underscores Goffman's assertion that, because of people's different life experiences, not everyone will experience a total institution in the same way.

Literature on life within the total institution of the prison was sourced and reviewed in this chapter and revealed the general monotony of prison life, characterised by a need to manage time and an environment also impacted by threats of violence. The following chapter reviews literature specifically related to prison education and also reviews reports on policies and practices related to prison institutions in Ireland and the education that is provided within them.

## **Chapter Four: Within the “Total Institution” of the Prison: A Review of Literature in Relation to Prison Education and Current Policy and Practice in Prisons in Ireland**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature in relation to prison education and to critique, through analysis of reports, the official picture presented in relation to prison institutions in Ireland and the provision of education within them. Foucault (1977), as discussed in Chapter Two, had drawn attention to whether the institution of the prison, with its objective to both detain and reform the individual, is capable of education provision beyond providing inmates with an “education” on life within a total institution. Hawley (2011), at the behest of the European Commission, reviewed previous research on prison education and training and found that the extent of the literature available on this topic is relatively limited. The lack of research has also been noted by Munoz (2009), and Wilson (2007) writing from a UK perspective, also states that education in prison is given little attention and is confined to general overviews, government perspectives and small-scale studies.

Nonetheless literature on this topic was sourced and this chapter begins by identifying what the literature reveals the purpose of education within a total institution to be. It then considers the prison itself as a learning environment and documents a number of international studies and their findings in relation to prisoner learners’ perspectives on prison education. Features of a total institution identified in Goffman’s (1961) work included the existence of a staff-inmate divide and relationships between prisoner learners and both teachers and prison officers. These two particular features emerged in a review of the literature on prison education and are addressed in this chapter.

The previous chapter had documented literature on prisoners’ lives and acknowledged that prisoners, in general, have experience of disadvantage, including educational disadvantage. Literature on life within a prison found it characterised by boredom, violence and threats of violence, and a sense of time being lost or wasted and needing as a result to be managed. In this context, the issue of motivation to engage in education is an important one and one that emerges from the literature as an area of

significance. The chapter also identifies the various structures of prison education in existence internationally before contextualising Ireland's model of prison education.

The importance of analysing and critiquing the official picture, presented in reports, of life within the total institution of the prison was suggested by Goffman (1961) who argued that the official goal of the institution provides a doctrine or framework through which all actions can be interpreted. He stated that although a total institution may seem, "the least intellectual of places" (p. 81), a concern over words and how events and conditions are verbalised come to play a central role. Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is also to provide policy and practice information on prison and prison education provision in Ireland by reviewing the available literature from a range of sources including the Irish Prison Service (IPS), statutory bodies such as the Office of Inspector of Prisons, and civil society organisations such as the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT). As such, the chapter identifies the mission statement of the IPS and analyses its own reports and other official documents in relation to it. Statements in relation to the physical conditions of prisons, and in particular the institutions in which research for this thesis was conducted, are also documented.

The final section of this chapter concentrates on the type of education available in prisons in Ireland. The aims of the prison education service are identified and a description of the educational approach used in prison education nationally and the categories of subjects taught are provided. The particular challenges involved in prison education provision in Ireland are identified and the new initiative of Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) in the prison system, in which education plays a role, is documented. The rates of education participation in prisons throughout the state, as reported by the Irish Prison Service, are provided and a critique of those figures is given.

### **Education Within a Total Institution**

The previous chapter began by acknowledging the historical existence in Ireland of an institutional response to social problems. This institutional response also brought with it an emphasis on behavioural reform of which education in some total institutions seems to have played a role, albeit a limited one. The Commission to Inquire into Child



Abuse (the Ryan Report), for example, reported in its 2009 findings (numbers 6.36 and 6.37) that the standard of education in industrial schools was poor despite the fact that they were funded by a national school grant and teachers were paid in the same way as in ordinary national schools. The report concluded that many inmates emerged without being able to read or write and were condemned to low paying jobs as a result. In essence, inmates seem to have been “taught” only their pre-determined place in society and it was clear that academic qualifications were not seen as a priority for these inmates. This example is particularly relevant to this thesis as the industrial schools were being run largely by the same religious orders who were also running schools in local communities just as in the prison system today education is delivered by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) who also are also the main providers of adult education in the state (Carrigan and Downes, 2009; Maunsell et al, 2008). Yet the standard of education being provided in the total institution of the industrial school was tangibly different to the standard of education being provided on the outside even with the same providers in operation (Raftery and O’Sullivan, 2001). Those incarcerated in industrial schools and reformatory schools seemed to be treated as “other” by society and this impacted on their educational provision. This raises the question as to whether Irish prisons today occupy a similar space in society with the corresponding effects on education; a question which relates to the objective of this thesis which is focused on how prisoner learners experience education within the total institution of the prison. With this research question at the centre the following section explores the purpose of education within the total institution of the prison.

### **The purpose of education within the total institution of a prison and its impact on the curriculum**

Hawley (2011), in reviewing the literature on prison education, reported that the different types of prison education and training found in Europe can be separated into three broad typologies; the first one is embedded in an academic ideology and provides a broad curriculum, the second focuses on basic and vocational skills and is more geared toward employability while the third focuses on “correctional education” and provides life skills of different types such as anger management. The focus on prison education for employment purposes for instance is illustrated by the amount of attention given to it in Hawley’s (2011) review of the literature on prison education. Yet Munoz

(2009) argues that the frequent focus on employment objectives is narrower than what is required by respecting a right to education. The existence of these different types of education and training seems linked to the purpose in which prison education is judged to have and Hawley (2011) identified views that prison education should lessen the damage caused by imprisonment, that it should be focused on employment purposes and that prison education should focus on reducing recidivism.

These areas that Hawley (2011) identifies are not mutually exclusive, the Council Of Europe (COE, 1990) report on prison education, for example, accepts that prison does damage people and that prison education may help alleviate this while also acknowledging that education can help people turn away from crime. Reuss (1999) makes the point that education in prison can mean different things to different people; some may see it as a way of keeping prisoners occupied, others may see it as a security risk while prisoners themselves may view it as a strategy to cope with prison life or an opportunity to gain further skills/qualifications or simply as a place within the regime where it is permitted to express opinions. While acknowledging that prison education can mean different things to different stakeholders, Hawley's (2011) report illustrates the existence of competing philosophies related to the purpose of education within the prison and the implications that these different philosophies have on the type of educational courses on offer.

Warner (2002a), writing from an Irish and European perspective, categorises two general approaches to prison education. The first is what Warner terms "an Anglo-American model" which he argues is based on negative stereotyping, vengeful attitudes and a massive increase in the use of incarceration. The second model is what he calls a "European one" which is based on the COE (1990) *Education in Prison* report. Implicit in Warner's analysis is the role individual countries' penal policies have in shaping education provision in prisons. Under what he terms the "Anglo-American" model the principal focus is on courses that are geared towards changing behaviour. Thus, in a very real sense, it restricts the content of courses on offer. Warner interprets this focus on corrective educational courses as a failure to acknowledge education as a human right and uses the broad categories of "Anglo-American" and "European" to illustrate the existence of different characteristics and trends however he acknowledges that what he terms the "European" model of prison education is not the one that is most followed

internationally at the present time, nor, he accepts is it even recognised in many parts of Europe. Indeed, Downes (2011) in a comparative report of twelve European countries found that there were differences in prison education provision with a variety of approaches in use. Conversely Warner also accepts that strains of what he termed the “Anglo-American” model can be found in countries other than the US and Britain and also that even within those countries there were examples of what he termed “progressive practice” (p. 731). Nonetheless, he argues that the distinction made, despite the simplification and generalisations it involves, is a useful one.

Hawley (2011) acknowledged the debate in the literature as to whether prison education should be compulsory or voluntary. Warner (2002a) is critical of mandatory education which he reports as becoming increasingly common in UK and US prisons, seeing it as “anathema to good adult education practice” (p. 730), arguing that by using a mandatory approach to classes, education can be seen as part of the punishment. This has lead Wilson (2007) writing from a UK perspective to observe that “for many prisoners, education is something that has been done to them, taken away from them, imposed, ordered and required” (p. 197). Both Warner (2002a) and Behan (2006), writing from a European and Irish perspective, suggest that prison education should be located within an adult education tradition with a corresponding broad curriculum. Warner (2002a) in particular acknowledges the merits of this paradigm which he argues values the learner’s life experience and offers both a personal development aspect and an opportunity for the learner to participate in the shaping of their learning journey. Hawley (2011) recognises too that the adult education model can offer an alternative to many prisoners’ negative pre-prison educational experiences. The value of having a broad curriculum that was not centred on modifying behaviour was made by Liebling (2004) and Duguid (2006), who both acknowledged the therapeutic value to be found in pursuing art-related subjects. Duguid (2000) had in earlier work referred to the importance of the “liberal arts” model in encouraging critical thinking and communication. Hawley noted too that engagement in arts and cultural activities can also, in effect, act as a gateway to further learning.

It is clear from the literature that there are differences as to what the purpose of prison education is and these differences have implications for both what types of

courses are on offer and, more significantly, how the effectiveness of prison education is measured.

### **Measuring the effectiveness of prison education**

Measuring the success or effectiveness of any educational experience is complex and fundamentally linked to its aim and the previous section has illustrated a lack of agreement in the literature as to what the purpose of prison education is. Behan (2005) acknowledges, alongside Munoz (2009) that the merits of prison education are often located within a narrow recidivism framework and cites this emphasis and its use as the sole means of measuring prison education as damaging to the debate about education within prison as a whole. He makes the point that this framework (besides being a narrow one) does not take into account the nature of the regime, the conditions present nor the length of the sentence; all conditions, as Warner (2005) also notes, outside of the control of both teachers and prisoner learners. Behan (2005) argues that an alternative discourse in relation to recidivism and prison education should be created although he acknowledges too that even in the limited framing of recidivism as a measure of success there is evidence to suggest that prison education works (cf. Torre and Fine, 2005; Duguid, 2000).

The inadequacy of measuring prison education in terms of recidivism is highlighted by Foucault's (1977) argument that prisons do not work and inmates are in fact condemned into a cycle of recidivism: "Although it is true that prison punishes delinquency, delinquency is for the most part produced in and by an incarceration which, ultimately, prison perpetuates in its turn" (p. 301).

The ineffectiveness of long periods of incarceration on serious juvenile offenders was, for example, one finding to emerge from a longitudinal study involving 1,354 serious juvenile offenders in the US which sought to identify factors which lead young offenders to continue or desist from offending (Mulvey, 2011). Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell and Naples (2004) acknowledge that studies into desistance (abstaining from criminal behaviour) have recently "come of age" (p. 271). Despite this fact Liebling and Maruna (2006) note that little of this work has focussed on the role of the correctional system. They note that the outcome favoured in prison effects research is recidivism, yet

they cite evidence to support the suggestion that imprisonment has become integral to the cycle of delinquency and crime. O'Donnell, Baumer and Hughes (2008) in the first national study of recidivism in the Republic of Ireland found that more than one-quarter (27.4%) were re-imprisoned after one year and almost half of prisoners (49.2%) were re-imprisoned within four years. Burnett and Maruna (2004) as part of a 10 year follow up on a sample of 130 men who had been part of a 1992 study "The Dynamics of Recidivism" found that "long-term, persistent offending may be related to a fatalistic mindset that one's destiny is out of one's control" (p. 399). On the other hand, a strong sense of self-efficacy and control over the future may be associated with desistance. Thus while prison education is not mentioned specifically in Burnett and Maruna's study, the role of education in increasing a sense of self-efficacy and hope for the future suggest more appropriate contexts in which the effectiveness of prison education could be framed. Indeed the Whitaker report in Ireland (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985) acknowledged that education in prison provides the opportunity for increased self-esteem and self-improvement, which it saw as realistic objectives. In an Australian study, Spark and Harris (2005) found that increased self-esteem was one of the main outcomes achieved from those participating in education programmes and argued that while this outcome was highly valued among prisoner learners it was underrated in a model that focuses on vocational training.

Defining success in any educational process is difficult and there is an interesting parallel here between the dominance of the measurement of education within a recidivism framework within the prison and an employability one within the community (cf. Jarvis, 2004; Maunsell et al 2008). Costelloe (A. Costelloe, personal communication, May 16, 2012), former Chair of the European Prison Education Association, believes too that the pressures to provide "value for money" and the increasing emphasis on an employment focused approach is one that is not unique to prison education but is being felt by the adult education sector as a whole. In terms of primary education, Devine (2003) also recognised the presence of and tensions between outside discourses, a child centred discourse and an economic discourse, on the school. Evidence of the economic discourse was found to be present in school practice through the emphasis that was placed on schooling as preparation for securing a job with teachers, for example, stressing the importance of discipline and the promotion of a strong work ethic. While Devine recognised the more caring dimension of the child

centred discourse, she noted it was fundamentally concerned with children's individual needs and wants rather than their rights. This was captured in Devine's finding that teachers often justified the level of control over time and space on the basis that children "need" it.

Munoz (2009) recognised that prison education is judged by its impact on recidivism, reintegration and specifically employment outcomes on release but argues that it is much more "than a tool for change" (p. 4) and is an imperative in its own right. He also noted that prison education cannot be isolated from the environment in which it takes place and the following section examines the literature on prison as a learning environment.

### **Prison as a Learning Environment**

Foucault (1977) identified a number of principles of the prison of which penitential education was one. Yet he argues that these principles or prepositions are repeated "from one century to the other" (p. 270) and argued that the prison itself was producing "delinquents" while at the same time attempting to reform them. Foucault's work draws attention to how education has, from an early stage been part of the prison institution. Torre and Fine (2005) acknowledge, for example, that it was in 1870 that the American Correctional Association Congress first endorsed education within prison. Despite the differing views regarding the precise purpose of prison education, Hawley (2011) found widespread consensus that it plays a positive and rehabilitative role and contributes to prisoners' successful re-entry into society. However as Munoz (2009) acknowledges, when prison education does take place, it often does so "in an environment inherently hostile to its liberating potential" (p. 5).

Munoz' finding identifies the dichotomy between the environment of the total institution and the role of education within it. This distinction was also made by Behan (2006) and Duguid (2006) who argued that educators face a challenge in creating a positive learning environment within a prison where the rigid daily routine imposed by the institution seems to work against prisoners deciding to take control of their lives. This echoes Goffman's (1961) finding that the total institution itself creates a feeling of low status among inmates, and in doing so, encourages passivity.

Ironically however, the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (Morgan and Kett, 2003) found the amount of literacy practices undertaken by prisoners increased while in prison. Nearly three times as many prisoners reported undertaking more writing activities on a daily basis while incarcerated than they did before they were imprisoned while the numbers who read magazines while in prison was more than double the number that read magazines outside of it. Hawley (2011) notes that this finding illustrates the increased literacy opportunities that the prison itself presents and which could be built on by educators.

Munoz (2009) acknowledges that education is embedded in its location and context and cannot be separated from it. The context of the prison as a site for education is also acknowledged by Costelloe and Warner (2003) who argue “While the principles must mirror best practice on the outside, its rationale must be appraised within the prison context” (pp. 2-3). This point is also made by Liebling (2004) who draws attention to the introduction of programmes into a prison without understanding the context of the prison environment; for example she questions the use of an anger management programme in a prison where prisoners may be continually intimidated. The arguments made by Munoz, Costelloe and Warner, and Liebling reinforce the need to consider the culture of the prison and the learning environment it provides.

The physical context of the prison is an important consideration too in delivering education. Warner (2002a) notes for example, that overcrowding and the resulting infringement on personal space makes learning more difficult. A number of studies however have identified how the particular architectural design of prisons can be used to improve education provision. Downes’ (2011) European comparative report highlighted, for example, the use of wing based education within a number of English prisons. This flexible approach to education delivery, the report argues, may help in relation to overcoming problems of space but also has other consequences such as engaging more prisoners, increasing the profile of learning and creating a foundation that could support peer learning initiatives. Similarly Wynne (2001), writing from the perspective of a teacher in a high security prison which housed political prisoners in the Republic of Ireland, reported on the success of having a wing based dimension and the importance of having classrooms “in the heart of the prison and scattered throughout every landing” (p. 40). He describes the benefits of having, as a result of a wing based

dimension, a highly visible presence in the body of the prison. Downes emphasised however that wing based education should not be seen as replacing a prison education centre but rather should be seen as complementary to it.

Goffman (1961) had found that inmates with strong convictions, be they religious or political, were able to protect themselves from the full impact of a total institution. Irwin's (2003) work in relation education among paramilitaries imprisoned in Northern Ireland is interesting in this regard. The successes of the education programme lead Irwin to argue that the model of education which developed with this particular cohort (which was also wing based) could be incorporated into contemporary educational models for use within prisons and adult educational programmes generally. Irwin acknowledges that those who were designated as political prisoners endured different treatment to other prisoners including being afforded a large degree of autonomy on the wings. She describes how both loyalists and republican prisoners appointed an official in their ranks to negotiate with the authorities to ensure they had a stake in the educational programmes on offer. The model used therefore allowed these prisoners, many of whom had negative experiences of education and who were also hostile to the prison regime, and gave them the autonomy to influence their learning activity, the pedagogy employed and to negotiate the curriculum. She cites the importance given to peer and collaborative learning as the most significant theme emerging from paramilitary prison learning and acknowledges and highlights the use of student representatives. Irwin's account reveals the opportunity parliamentary prisoners had to develop skills of representation and this seems particularly important to consider in respect of Rogan's (2011) acknowledgement, referred to in the previous chapter, of the lack of organisations created by prisoners themselves in Ireland. This lack of voice within the prison system also echoes Devine's (2003) recognition that many children in school have also experienced an absence of consultation and of control over time and space.

A number of international studies have sought the views of prisoner learners within the prison system (cf. Spark and Harris, 2005; Wilson, 2007). Torre and Fine's (2005) study, for example, which investigated the impact of college in a maximum security prison for female prisoners in New York State, found that engagement in education while in prison enabled the prisoners to see themselves as active rather than



passive subjects and develop a sense of responsibility and agency. As part of the four year study, qualitative interviews with twenty former prisoners (who had been also learners in the prison) were conducted. The authors report that participants revealed that the pursuit of a degree in prison was an important personal accomplishment and cited the importance of not just the credential but the process of learning itself which included reading, revising, participating in intellectual conversations, becoming a mentor, and meeting new friends. The participants revealed that the experience cultivated skills needed to assess options, make choices and also to develop persistence in the face of obstacles. Also in the U.S. Smiling Hall and Killacky (2008) used qualitative interviews with ten prisoner learners in order to gain their perspective on education within a prison. As a result of their interviews, a number of themes and sub-themes emerged including the revelation that these students' perceptions were not framed by a recidivism argument. The study revealed the importance of motivation in attending class and the role family members in particular played. Another major theme was regret of prior decisions, and the data found that motivation to attend class was linked to regrets over past events including leaving school early and being imprisoned. Literature on prison education in relation to motivation is examined later on in this chapter.

Smiling Hall and Killacky's (2008) study revealed a development of qualified teachers being replaced by inmate tutors who have achieved the equivalency of a high school diploma and the authors of this study call for this system to be assessed for effectiveness. Yet from their study and interviews with prison personnel, this use of inmate tutors was not undertaken for pedagogical reasons or for empowering inmates but purely for budgetary reasons. Indeed the data from the study revealed that participants had mixed feelings about the use of inmate tutors; feeling that the tutors either did not help as much as they were supposed to or were simply overwhelmed by the task they were being given. The perceived lack of professionalism and effectiveness indicated a desire among participants to have teachers rather than just inmate tutors and the study illustrates the importance of individuals with requisite teaching qualifications within the prison system. It also illustrates how something which is generally regarded as a positive in education (i.e. peer education) can be, in certain circumstances, used to replace existing professional teaching roles rather than complement the existing service. Hawley (2011) in her review of the literature states that many studies have

recommended that prison education programmes should try to encourage prisoners to act as mentors and tutors and acknowledges, to this end, that two European funded projects have been established to encourage the use of peer mentors to support, in terms of outreach and access, hard to reach groups of prisoners' engagement in prison education.

Importantly Smiling Hall and Killacky (2008) note that the voice of the prisoner learner was very different to what the literature had lead them to expect; the observation of the disparity between the literature reviewed and the voice of the prisoner learners illustrates the importance of the prisoner voice and this thesis, through the use of the life history methodology seeks to place the prisoner learner voice at its centre.

### **The staff-inmate divide? Learner-teacher relationships within the total institution of the prison**

Goffman (1961) had identified a staff-inmate divide as a feature of a total institution and had found that the relationship between staff and inmates was often illustrated in terms of negative and hostile language. This has relevance to this thesis in terms of how education provision within a total institution is impacted. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Goffman analyses, from the perspective of a theatrical performance, the ways in which individuals control and manage the impression of themselves that they transmit to others. He notes how control of impression management and in particular how others will treat/respond to individuals is achieved through an individual's attempt to define the situation. The idea of teaching as a performance is not new however as the following quote suggests:

You can't ever let them get the upper hand on you or you're through. So I start out tough. The first day I get a new class in, I let them know who's boss.....You've got to start off tough, then you can ease up as you go along. If you start out easy-going, when you try to get tough, they'll just look at you and laugh. (Becker, 1952, as cited in Goffman, 1959, p. 23)

The above quote reveals the nature of teaching as performance but also raises questions regarding how useful such an authoritarian approach is and how appropriate it

is (both within and outside the context of a prison) particularly with learners who may have had negative experiences of education previously. Both the quote above and the examples that Goffman provide in his work illustrate not just the role that is being performed by the teacher but also the positioning of the relationship as one of domination and control. This raises the question as to how then is this relationship impacted when it takes place within the confine of a total institution, and specifically when it takes place within the confines of a prison?

Goffman (1961) had observed that in prison, staff actions are often justified in the name of security. He also argues that the management of inmates is generally rationalised in terms of the aims of the institution and this usually entails the provision of, what Goffman describes as, “humane technical services” which are provided by professionals hired to perform these services. Professionals joining a total institution on this basis however are likely to become dissatisfied; Goffman notes that there may be a “feeling that they cannot here properly practise their calling and are being used as ‘captives’ to add professional sanction to the privilege system” (p. 87). The sharp divide between staff and inmates observed by Goffman in a total institution is not in evidence with this group of professionals hired by the prison to provide these “humane” services; rather Goffman, in describing these professionals as “captive” makes a link with the inmates of a total institution. In other words, Goffman positions these outsider professionals and inmates as on the one side, a side in opposition to the prison itself but who are condemned to operate within it. Goffman’s observations and the literature review suggest that the relationship between learners and teachers within the prison is worthy of investigation.

Downes (2011) in a comparative European study of prison education identified the issue of prison officer resistance to prison learning and Torre and Fine’s (2005) study in the US found that correction officers were as a group largely ambivalent about the college programme on offer in the prison and almost all agreed that it should not be publically funded. However, Hawley (2011) acknowledges the role of the prison officer in motivating and supporting prisoners in accessing education opportunities in the prison, a point also made by the Prison Education Trust, Inside Time and RBE (2009) in the UK.

The challenges of teaching in a prison have been documented, though admittedly much of the literature is dominated by North American and British perspectives. Davidson (1995) for example cites the difficulties facing prison teachers in both the US and Canada; difficulties include costs being cut, tendering of teaching contracts and volunteers rather than teachers being used. Thomas (1995) too outlines the numerous difficulties he faced while teaching in a prison in America. He cites problems with, among other things, staff interference and the physical conditions of the classrooms and the prisons themselves not being conducive to study. Wright (2005) acknowledges the culture shock that novice prison teachers experience when they begin to teach within a prison environment, with new rules and practices that are not found outside the prison environment. He recounts his disbelief, for example, at almost losing his job when, as a new prison teacher, he inadvertently left his teaching equipment unattended. Wright also cites the ritualistic pattern of time, a feature of school culture in general, as also being itself shaped and reframed by the institution of the prison so that the institutional time of the prison, marked by actions such as visits, searches, and lock-ups, punctuate and control the school day. Behan (2006), in his analysis of pedagogy within the prison, addresses the challenges that prison educators face and distinguishes between prison authorities and justice departments and their attempts to change the individual and what Behan sees as educators' efforts to challenge the individual. Goffman (1961) had found that there were spaces within the total institution that it was possible to engage in "removal activities", and by doing so challenge the institution's imposed monotony. Behan (2006) argues that the prison school, was one of the few places within the prison in which prisoners have the freedom to express themselves. Nonetheless there is agreement in the literature that prisoners face institutional and dispositional barriers in accessing prison education.

### **Barriers to accessing prison education**

Munoz (2009) acknowledges that prisoners are a highly marginalised group "that faces endemic violations of its right to education" (p. 4). He identifies, among the barriers to accessing prison education that prisoner face, dispositional ones including the impact of previous educational failure, low self-esteem, drug and alcohol abuse, disadvantaged childhood and communication, mental-health and learning difficulties.

Downes (2011) highlights also the impact of many prisoners' past experience of education and their experienced alienation from the educational system as a result.

Overcrowding in the prison was acknowledged as impacting negatively on education provision (cf. Downes, 2011, Warner, 2002a). The Whitaker Report (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985) had stated that the possible rehabilitative effects of education and training are offset by overcrowding, idleness and squalor, states which it said dominated most Irish prisons. Indeed overcrowding, and the resulting effects on levels of tension and hygiene for example, was identified as a barrier to education in prison by Downes (2011) who found that it was a pervasive theme among national reports from twelve European countries. These views of the Whitaker Committee indicate the dependent relationship of prison education on the prison itself and underline the link between prisons and the political, social and economic world outside.

A report by the Prison Education Trust, Inside Time and RBE (2009) in the UK also identifies overcrowding a barrier but identifies a range of institutional challenges faced in prison education such as: the constraints involved in operating in a regime which prioritises security, prisoners moved at short notice; limited access to books, resources or information; variations among different prisons in relation to communications technology (ICT) and no email communication with teachers and no internet access. Hawley (2011) found in a review of the literature that ICT generated more comment than any other area of the curriculum. The importance of ICT tools is also made by Eikeland et al (2009) who emphasise the lack of ICT as another barrier for prison education. They acknowledged how access to a computer is essential for students undertaking educational programmes today e.g. for writing and researching assignments and communicating with teachers and that "without access to a computer, students are more or less denied access to the arena where education takes place" (p. 204). Munoz (2009) also found that education was affected by the lack of computer and internet access and that security was cited as the reason for limiting opportunities to access the internet with some states providing no access at all.

However the Prison Education Trust report found that the main barriers to prisons accessing learning in prison appears to be systematic and practical rather than

personal/motivational e.g. the most common reason (p. 12) given for not availing of prison education was that they were “not allowed” to start a course (24%), closely followed by “lack of advice about courses” (17%) and “nothing was available at my level” (17%).

Oates (2007) who, as part of a Master’s in Education, conducted qualitative research in Irish prisons (specifically Mountjoy Prison and the Training Unit, which is a separate prison to Mountjoy, although on the same prison site), focused on student perspectives of prison education and identified a number of barriers to learning within the institution of a prison including institutional barriers (e.g. landings being locked meaning access is delayed or denied, those on “protection” not receiving any education), financial barriers to participation, dispositional barriers (e.g. nervousness, negative experience of education in the past) and time as a barrier (e.g. class hours, prison transfers). Teachers also reported low self-esteem and personal issues as reasons which stopped prisoners getting involved in education and the presence of drugs in the prison system also emerged as a significant theme and was reported by both teachers and students as having an impact on participation. Her findings echo Foucault’s (1977) contention that while support for prison education in theory is there, the reality is often different.

One of Foucault’s (1977) arguments is that the prison is not a standalone entity but rather is influenced and influences wider society. Davidson (1995), in a similar vein, argues that schooling in prison does not exist in isolation and indeed cannot avoid being caught up in the “power and politics of crime and social control” (p. 3). It occupies therefore a precarious position within the prison system and due to its reliance on the prison (it is itself vulnerable to economic, political and social conditions) is susceptible to outside influences. In effect, similar to the school system on the outside, prison education does not exist in a vacuum. Forster (1998) positioned prison education between tolerance and support/endorsement and argued that it is something which is “tolerated and at times encouraged” but it “carries neither the over-riding priority of security and control nor the professional ‘rights’ of other specialisms such as medical care” (p. 71). Irwin (2003) also acknowledges how the prison classroom is embedded within the confines of a prison system and that this context is both influential and limiting in the sense that although the prison is authoritarian and independent within its

walls it is also vulnerable to shifts in public policy as the government responds to public feelings about crime and punishment. Munoz (2009) has highlighted the role the media, through its influence of public opinion, has in impacting on prison education, and he argues that this influence, combined with politicians willingness at times to reflect fears generated regarding crime and punishment has resulted in a reluctance to embed prisoners' right to education in legislation. These views are underscored in Forster's (1998) seemingly contradictory identification of the prison as both powerful and vulnerable. Again this emphasises the precarious position that prison education, as a concept, finds itself in. This insecure position is recognised even within the COE report on *Education in Prison* (1990) which acknowledged that tension can exist between a prison regime and the pursuit of education and cited a Norwegian study which found that when there is a conflict of interests between education and the prison, it is the educational interests which are forfeited.

Despite the institutional, dispositional and situational barriers that prisoners may face in accessing education within the total institution of the prison, there is evidence that prisoners have accessed education when it is available and the following section of this chapter reviews the literature in relation to motivation to do so.

### **Motivation to avail of prison education**

A number of studies have addressed the issue of motivation to engage in education within the confines of the total institution of the prison. Costelloe (2003), for example, examined third level education in Irish prisons in order to discover the profile of participants who were undertaking it and their motivations. The focus of the research was not on educational provision but rather was on the prisoner learners themselves; their experiences, motivations and perceptions. A mixed method approach was applied with a questionnaire used to create a typology of third level prisoner learners and informal unstructured interviews used to explore the motivations of a sub-sample of those students. The completed postal questionnaires (n=56) revealed that the profile was clearly delineated along gender lines with only one female student participating in third level education. Costelloe's typology suggests two types of third level prisoner learners. The first is older, more educationally advantaged and whose motivation is framed by a desire to improve on qualifications already achieved in order to have better

job prospects on release from prison. The second type is younger, more educationally disadvantaged and who is undertaking third level study while in prison in order to use their time constructively and is less motivated by the need to find employment. In the qualitative phase of the research, the data revealed that the most common reason given by students for engaging in education was to alleviate boredom and to promote a sense of self-development. However, other reasons featured also and Costelloe identified six additional ones; to make their families proud, to improve employment prospects, to have a sense of personal achievement, to help their case when it was back in court, to pursue old interests or develop new ones and to make constructive use of time while in prison. All of the reasons identified illustrate the multifaceted nature of motivation to engage in education within the institution of the prison.

Costelloe's study highlighted the push and pull factors present in prison education (cf. Byrne and Smyth's, 2010, identification of "push" "pull" factors in young people's decision to leave school). Liebling's (2004) comprehensive work on prison life acknowledged the benefits prisoners gained from structured activities and found evidence of how involvement in work or education programmes "transformed the prison experience for most prisoners" (p. 314). Many of the changes prisoners wanted to see made to prison life, according to Liebling, were related to activities, development and provision of courses and similarly, Spark and Harris (2005) in their study of female prisoners' experiences of prison education in Australia found that prisoner learners were more likely to emphasise the role of education in the present. They identified a variety of reasons why people participated in education including the desire to improve their mental health and self-esteem, staff-relations and feeling a sense of responsibility to family members to make the most of their time in prison. Spark and Harris note that these reasons were different to policy makers' and government's concern of post-release outcomes in relation to employment.

Eikeland et al (2009) also explored the reasons why prisoners participated in education while in prison. As a result of conducting a quantitative study which examined the educational background and needs of prisoners in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the authors drew attention to the link between motivation to engage in prison education and the length of sentence to be served. They found that approximately one-third of all Nordic prisoners participated in prison educational



activities. However, crucially it found that participation decreases with shorter prison sentences. The report outlines a number of reasons why prisoners seem to believe that it is impossible to begin (and of course complete) a course of education within a short period. Firstly, they speculate that prisoners may consider that education is something which takes a long time; secondly, they may feel that to make progress you need time and thirdly, that the educational system itself gives the impression to prisoners that education is time consuming and will take longer than a short prison sentence allows. Fourthly, they cite that prisoners may not be adequately informed that some educational activities are short-term and lastly, it may not be clear to the prisoner whether it is possible to continue their course post-release and in the community. These reasons create an obstacle for prison education. The authors lament the fact that the potentially positive experience of prison education is more likely to be availed of by longer term prisoners rather than shorter term ones. Lack of interest was another reason why prisoners opted not to avail of education while in prison and the authors' speculate that this lack of interest may lie in prisoners' negative previous experience or they may not have received enough information from the prison authorities concerning prison educational options. The authors note however that the prison environment itself can be a source of motivation and that prisoner's experiences of learning environments impacts on their motivations rather than vice versa. In other words the prison environment could provide a "push" to engage in education. In all five Nordic countries, prisoners who were participating in prison education revealed that their main motivation was to make constructive use of their time while in prison. The second most frequently cited reason was to improve one's prospects on the labour market after release. Both of these could be characterised as pull factors.

Motivation is a complex area and while the "push" and "pull" factors have been highlighted in this literature review, an important consideration is prisoner learners' own view of their future. Spark and Harris (2005) found that inmates' desires and goals are rarely considered in the design and delivery of education programmes. Smiling Hall and Killackey (2008) found that most of the literature they had sourced did not discuss the future plans or goals of inmates but rather focused on the need for prisoners to avail of education in prison in order to get a job and stay out of prison. The data from their qualitative interviews with prisoner learners revealed that in most cases most participants had put a great deal of thought into what would happen to them on release

and saw education as just the first step in achieving their goals. Leondari (2007) and Husman and Lens (1999) both agree that school and education are both by definition future orientated. Leondari, for example, makes use of Houle's (1961) work which found that goal orientation is a prominent factor in most of the models which have been developed to explain participation in adult education. Husman and Lens (1999) note that parents and teachers often stress instrumentality, which refers to the perceived utility of current tasks for valued future goals, and they argue that perceived instrumentality has been shown to influence educational attainment, self-regulation and cognitive engagement. However, importantly, while perceived instrumentality is shown to enhance student motivation, it does so only for students who have a positive attitude to their individual future. Leondari (2007) acknowledges too that a number of factors may limit or distort adult learners' views of what is possible for them including past academic experience, socioeconomic status, and psychological well-being as well as low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Downes (2011) is clear however that motivation to learn in a prison must be seen in the context in which learning takes place, a view which is shared by Costelloe and Warner (2003). However, there are different models of education structures in existence and the following section outlines the different models of education that have been identified by a European study and provides a context from which the structure of prison education provision in Ireland can be understood.

### **Models of prison education**

Having undertaken a comprehensive review of how prison education is organised in different countries, Langelid, Maki, Raundrup and Svensson (eds, 2009) identify five models of prison education structure and note that each model brings its own advantages and disadvantages. The authors classified the structure of prison education where teachers are employed by the educational authority rather than the prison institution as an "import model" and as one in which the educational authorities have responsibility for education in prisons. This "import" model is found in Ireland (and also some other European countries such as Norway, Estonia and Iceland). Under this model, which is based on the principle of normalisation (cf. Downes, 2011), the same courses are offered in prisons as in the community and the teachers have the same

level of competencies. Education in prison is also considered the equivalent to education offered elsewhere in the community. The following table outlines the five models of prison education and includes a brief description of each.

Table 4.1 Models of prison education

<b>Model of prison education structure</b>	<b>Description</b>
Export Model	Teachers employed by the educational authorities. Educational authorities bear the responsibility of the syllabus, organising and financing of education. Prisoners must be allowed to leave the institution of the prison in order to participate in the community.
Self-Supply Model (a)	Teachers employed by the Ministry of Justice. Prisons and Probation Services have ultimate responsibility for education.
Self-Supply Model (b)	Sweden has modified the self-supply model and the Prison and Probation Services have employed regional headmasters in the prisons. The National Agency for Education gives the Prison and Probation Services responsibility for carrying out adult education that corresponds to education in the community with the same certificates issued.
Import Model	Teachers are employed by the educational authorities. Educational authorities have responsibility for education in prisons. Education in prisons is considered equivalent to education offered elsewhere in the community.
The Contract Model	Teachers are employed by the educational authorities and contracted by the Prison and Probation services with the Prison and Probation Services having ultimate responsibility. Prison education is dependent on the length of contract.
Combination Model	Teachers are employed by both the Ministry of Justice and the Educational Authorities and both share overall responsibility.

Langelid et al (2009) identify the self-supply model and the import model as the two which are the most common in Europe. In the “self-supply” type of prison education, the prison has ultimate responsibility for the delivery of education (including financial responsibility). While prison education is carried out under the supervision of an Education Department, under this model, teachers are employed by the Prison and Probation Services. Langelid acknowledges the advantages of this system in which teachers are members of staff and work to the rhythm of the prison as opposed to the academic calendar. Nonetheless they also identify the clear disadvantages of this system. Under this model, pedagogical aspects of prisoners needs may not be prioritised and, as teachers are categorised as “prison teachers” as opposed to simply “teachers”,

there is a danger that teachers can become isolated from the state school system and effectively restricted to teaching only within the prison.

Within the “import” model Langelid et al (2009) also identify a number of advantages and disadvantages. As teachers are employees of the educational authority this model allows greater independence from the prison system while minimising the risk of teachers losing contact with the educational environment of the state system. As the educational authorities have financial responsibility for education within the prison system the threat of resources being allocated away from educational needs towards the needs of the prison institution is also removed. There are disadvantages however and Langelid et al note that while, in principle, this model implies access to the same course options as in the community, this is unlikely to be the case in practice given that prison institutions contain smaller numbers in comparison to the community. They note too that teachers employed in this system will work according to the school system in the community and will be closed during holiday periods. Wright (2005) in his work on teachers in the prison system had noted how the “ritualistic patterning of time” (p. 25) an important dimension of school culture, becomes shaped and punctuated by the operations of the prison so that events such as Christmas, usually a joyous time and important event in a school calendar, is within the institution of the prison “reframed by teachers and prisoners as a period of prisoner loneliness and pain” (p. 25). Under the prison education structure however, it is at precisely this key time that prisoner education services will be closed. The financial independence envisaged by Langelid et al under this model is tempered by the location of educational services within the total institution of the prison, which is under the control of the Irish Prison Services. Thus, while teacher allocations for prisons remain unchanged in recent years, the Jesuit Centre for Faith & Justice (JCFJ, 2012), based on a written response to a parliamentary question, report that the Irish Prison Service cut “most aspects of its financing of prison education by approximately half between 2008 and 2010” (p. 65). This cut, while not affecting the numbers of teachers involved in prison education, is likely, in terms of facilities and resources, to have implications for how prison education can be delivered.

The complexities of how prison education is structured, both nationally and internationally, has implications for comparative studies of prison education and also impacts on how research findings from other countries can be applied to an Irish

context. The following section reviews literature in relation to official reports related to prisons in Ireland and what they reveal about the total institution of the prison and the education that is provided within it.

### **Within the Total Institution of the Prison: Analysis of Official Reports**

Goffman (1961) had noted that “many total institutions, most of the time, seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates” (p. 73) but despite this they are often presented as rational organisations with an objective or objectives that are officially supported and approved. He argues that although the stated goals of a total institution are often not great in number, it is “widely appreciated” (p. 81) that they often fall short of its aims. In this context, it is important to consider the aims of the Irish Prison Service (IPS). The IPS, in its mission statement, declares:

The mission of the Irish Prison Service is to provide safe, secure and humane custody for people who are sent to prison. The Service is committed to managing custodial sentences in a way which encourages and supports prisoners in their endeavouring to live law abiding and purposeful lives as valued members of society. (Irish Prison Service Annual Report, 2010)

As evidenced in its mission statement, it sees its task as two-fold; to contain those sent to prison in a safe, secure and humane way and secondly to support prisoners who are endeavouring to become “valued members of society”. Warner (2010) draws attention to an earlier government document (Department of Justice, 1994) in which prisoners had been referred to as “valued members of society” rather than people who are, as the IPS depict, “endeavouring” to become valued members and he argues that the IPS’ qualification of that phrase is significant and representative of “a move from an accepting to a less accepting attitude in official policy” (p. 5). Warner, similar to Goffman, acknowledges the importance of official pictures of prisoners and argues that these official pictures have an impact on policy and practice. Pollock et al (2011) writing from a US perspective, found that in mission statements from modern prisons “purposeful statements about the value and significance of what specifically should happen behind prison walls are in short supply” (p. 63). This in turn has implications for education provision within the total institution of the prison.

The Irish Prison Service, as part of its remit, publishes an annual report and as well as detailing issues related to human resources, finances and prison building, the reports contains many statistics related to the operation of the 14 prisons in the state including numbers of committals, cost of providing prison spaces, numbers of prisoners in each institution, length of sentences, and age and gender profile of prisoners. The sections of the reports which detail how the IPS deals with its aim were of relevance to this thesis as they contain information not just on how the total institution operates but also provides indications as to how prisoners may be impacted by incarceration and the effect this may have on their motivation to engage in prison education, their actual participation in education and the constraints on prison education in general.

The IPS (2010) report, for instance, showed that, in a population survey conducted during one day in the prison, 4,440 people were in custody; this is an increase of almost 9.9% on the comparable 2009 figure (4,040). The report also revealed 87.6% of prisoners were male and 82.8% of prisoners were aged less than 40 years. The majority of prisoners committed were Irish nationals (10,702, 77.8%) while other EU nationals (excluding Irish) accounted for 1,777 (12.9%) of persons committed. The IPRT (2009) acknowledge that while in comparative terms Ireland has a relatively low prison population, Ireland has a very high rate of committal i.e. the number sent to prison and this is explained by the high use of short sentences of three months or less. The IPS (2010) acknowledge for instance that of 17,179 committals in 2010, committals under sentence of less than three months increased by 27.9% on the 2009 figure, i.e. from 5,750 to 7,356.

The IPS state that its mission is to provide safe and secure custody for prisoners, however one of the features of a total institution which had been cited by Goffman (1961) was the loss of a sense of safety and analysis of reports on Irish prisons regarding violent incidents indicate that this would seem to be the case. The IPS (2010) report, for instance, that 1,014 incidents of violence occurred during that year. The Committee for Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on its visit to Ireland in 2006 (Council of Europe, 2007) and again in 2010 (Council of Europe, 2011) was concerned by the increasing level of inter-prisoner violence which it said was fuelled by the widespread availability of illicit drugs and the existence of a gang culture. It reported that the problem of violence appeared to be

particularly rife in three prisons it visited (Limerick, Mountjoy and St Patrick's Institution), notably the three prisons sites visited as part of this thesis. Indeed the Office of Inspector of Prisons (2009) found that Mountjoy Prison could not provide safe and secure custody for prisoners. A number of exceptionally violent incidents have occurred in Mountjoy Prison in recent years including a riot in July 2008, a hostage taking incident in 2009 and the killing of a prisoner by another prisoner in July 2009. The Prison Chaplain's Report (2010) also identifies violence as a major problem and states that "the culture of violence has become so pervasive that large numbers of prisoners request to be placed 'on protection'" (p. 5).

Being "on protection" means that prisoners are segregated from the main prison population and, given the focus of this thesis on prison education, this can impact on prisoners' access to education, and indeed to many other services (JCFJ, 2012). The 2010 IPS annual report states that 841 (17%) of the prison population (on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010) were on protection and of these 502 were able to be accommodated in separate landings where they still had access to activities including school, workshops, and the gym. However the remaining 339 (just under 7% of the prison population) were on, what the IPS referred to as, a "restricted regime" and noted that "in extreme cases these persons may be under such threat that they can have absolutely no contact with other prisoners" (p. 20). The Prison Chaplain's Report (2010) reported that in December 2009, 972 prisoners (20% of the prison population) were on protection. It noted in particular that in St. Patrick's Institution one in four inmates were on protection with most of them locked up for 23 hours a day with no access to workshops and education limited to a two hour period per week. The Office of the Inspector of Prisons Report on Mountjoy Prison (2009) stated that the numbers on protection in Mountjoy Prison accounted for approximately one sixth of the prisoner population at any one time. It noted that the areas where prisoners were on protection were accommodated were "consistently overcrowded" (p. 11), an issue that will be returned to later in this chapter.

It is clear that many prisoners go on protection because of a perception that they are at risk in the prison. The CPT reports (Council of Europe, 2011; 2007), which stated that Mountjoy Prison remains unsafe for prisoners and prison staff, interpreted the increase in the numbers of prisoners seeking the protection of management as a testament to this, while the IPS (2010) argue that the majority of prisoners who seek to

go on protection do so at the committal stage which indicates that they are doing so not because of fear of random acts of violence in the prison but because of issues which occurred on the outside e.g. gang rivalry, drug debts, and perceived cooperation with gardaí. The administration of the total institution is shown to be impacted by these developments and the increasing numbers on protection is likely to impact on prison education services, principally the ability of prisoners to access teachers. It is also likely, given the restrictions it potentially places on access to educational and indeed other services, to undermine the second part of the IPS' mission statement which stated its commitment to support and encourage prisoners in their efforts to become valued members of society. Whatever the reason for prisoners being on protection, the high numbers indicate that the total institution of the prison is not perceived by prisoners, and certainly in some cases the institution itself, as a safe environment for all prisoners.

As well as a loss of sense of safety, Goffman (1961) had also identified forced contact with others, which takes place within a total institution, as another example of a mortification and the issue of overcrowding within the prison system is likely to intensify this particular mortification. Overcrowding and the challenges it presents was noted by a number of sources including IPS (2010), the CPT Reports (Council of Europe, 2007; 2011), and the Irish Penal Reform Trust (2010, 2009). The Irish Prison Chaplains Report (2010) also acknowledged the existence of overcrowding within the prison system and identified the key consequences of it; it noted, for example, that the degrading conditions caused by lack of in cell sanitation are multiplied in cells where more than one person is confined and the report drew attention to the negative impact that overcrowding has on prison life. It cited the increase in tension and violence and states that with increased numbers there is a reduction of opportunities in education and training, leading many prisoners with effectively nothing to do. In Ireland the Whitaker Report (Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985) had recognised the negative impact overcrowding had on education provision and stated that "educational provision has not kept pace with the greatly increased numbers entering prisons nor is it likely to do so unless there is a formal policy decision in this regard" (p. 97).

The CPT (Council of Europe, 2007 and 2011) on its visit to Irish prisons reported a prison culture which was conducive to inter-prisoner intimidation and



violence and identified two important issues contributing to such a culture; namely the lack of purposeful activities for prisoners and the availability of drugs. The Irish Chaplains Report (2010) argued too that the lack of structured activities and boredom within the prison context effectively contributed to and strengthened a drug culture in a prison. Reports from the Irish Chaplains and the CPT highlight the importance of purposeful activities in the safe administration of a total institution and also illustrate the potential role that education, as a purposeful activity, may have in this regard.

The IPS (2010) identified the three issues of overcrowding, segregation, and the availability of drugs as the main operational challenges the prison service face. The availability of drugs in Irish prisons has been in evidence in earlier Irish studies (cf. O'Mahony 1997; Crowley, 1999; Dillon 2001; Long et al, 2004). The policy document *Keeping Drugs Out of Prisons* issued by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in 2006 illustrated how significant the issue of drugs in prisons had become and while the document did propose a range of treatment options for prisoners with a drug dependency, its principal concern was the efforts to stop the supply of drugs in prison. The IPS annual reports (2010, 2009) detail the efforts made to stop drugs, and contraband such as weapons and mobile phones, entering the prison. These efforts include airport style walk through detectors and X-ray scanners being installed in each closed prison and the introduction of a Body Orifice Security Scanner (BOSS) chair to search prisoners entering and leaving the prison. Dogs have also been used since 2009 to detect drugs being carried or transported into the prison and random and planned searches take place on a daily basis in an effort to detect any contraband. Mandatory drugs testing on prisoners was rolled out to all Irish prisons in 2010 and although it has been adopted in other jurisdictions too, it has been criticised for its emphasis on control and punishment rather than treatment and rehabilitation (cf. MacDonald, 1997). All of these practices are likely to impact on prisoners' lives within the total institution of the prison and can be interpreted as examples of what Goffman termed "mortifications". They also testify to the problem of drugs that exist in the prison and the addiction problems that prisoners may present with and/or develop.

The 2010 IPS report revealed that over 2000 prisoners availed of methadone treatment in that year and the report identified the delivery of drug treatment services and continuity of care for prisoners presenting with addiction problems as one that

“continues to be a significant challenge for health care services in prisons” (p. 29). Turnbull and McSweeney (2000) in their analysis of a survey of twenty-six European countries found that an average of 10% of the prison population were reported to be problem drug users although it qualified that none of the countries had a comprehensive system in place to quantify the scale of the problem and consequently this figure was likely to be under-represented. The study noted that both a supply and lack of supply of drugs can impact on prison life with an increase in violence and tension when there is a lack of drugs and the risk of bullying among inmates when drugs do enter. The presence of illegal drugs and violence within the prison system could be seen as an example of the existence of an underlife, another feature of a total institution which Goffman cited, and their existence could also be interpreted as an illustration of the presence of what Goffman called “free places” where inmates took part in forbidden or tabooed activities.

Goffman (1961) argued that a total institution reinforced the low status that inmates had within the institution, and although he makes reference to his view that almost all literature on mental patients is written from a doctor rather than patient perspective he does not pursue a connection between the low status of inmates and their ability to voice their perspective. A review of the literature revealed however that there are limited opportunities for prisoners to make their concerns known to the prison authorities and outside bodies. The Office of Inspector of Prisons (2010) stated that the internal complaints procedure currently in operation in the prison “fell short having regard to prisoners’ rights, in accordance with the State’s obligations to prisoners and best practice” (p. 15). Indeed the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) in their submission to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (2011) recommended that an independent statutory complaints mechanism be established as a matter of priority. There is also no Ombudsman for Prisoners in Ireland who can advocate on behalf of prisoners or act on foot of complaints or concerns raised by prisoners. Neither is there a statutory body to investigate death in prisons. The Inspector of Prisons, the office of which was given a statutory basis by the Prisons Act 2007, can investigate matters however the purpose of any investigation undertaken is to provide a report to the Minister rather than to take particular action on behalf of a prisoner. Therefore although the Inspector of Prison reports provide an alternative and valuable source of information the role itself is limited in terms of acting on prisoners’ specific complaints. In this context, the Irish Advocacy Network (2008) acknowledge the difficulties that prisoners

may face in drawing attention to issues such as ill treatment, abuse, lack of access to or provision of services including educational ones.

Existing legislative structure does include a mechanism for hearing prisoners' perspectives as the Prison (Visiting Committees) Act 1925 created the statutory establishment of visiting committees for each prison. Inspections and hearing complaints from prisoners were among the functions of the committees. Reports were obliged to be written each year and submitted to the Minister for Justice. The visiting committees' reports, despite their remit however, contain very little information on prisoners' specific concerns and this illustrates a gap in accessing prisoner perspectives on prison conditions. The reports have been the subject of much criticism both in terms of their structure and in the reports that are produced. Rogan (2009) notes that the only information available on the operation of the Prison Visiting Committees in practice is contained in the reports of the bodies themselves and little information is contained in the reports on the nature of complaints nor is there a breakdown of complaints in terms of their outcomes. Visiting committees have also been criticised for being too close to the prison authorities and producing reports that are of limited value. O'Donnell (2008) argued that they often revealed an institutional bias and he cites the example of a 2006 Visiting Committee Report from Castlerea Prison which interpreted the fact that few prisoners wished to communicate with it as an indicator as to how well the prison was run, and ignored other alternative explanations as to what this could mean. The process for appointing a prison visiting committee member (the IPS acknowledge that there is no specific criteria, beyond making representations to the Minister) has been the subject of critique and perhaps has also contributed to reports which have been called "brief and bland" (O'Donnell, 2008, p. 123). The lack of criteria involved in the process of selection could also be interpreted as an indicator of the insignificance of the role of committees in terms of their ability to influence policy.

The Irish Advocacy Network (2008) state that "prison visiting committees are widely perceived as ineffectual" (p. 9) and indeed the effectiveness of visiting committees was commented on by both the McBride and Whitaker Reports (Commission of Inquiry into the Irish Penal System, 1980; Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985). Despite the institutional bias O'Donnell (2008) found in his analysis and Rogan's (2009) critique of the quality and depth in general of the reports,

there is evidence, however, in some Prison Visiting Committee reports of a more critical stance being undertaken. The Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee's Report on Mountjoy Prison (2009), for example, was particularly and unusually (within visiting committee reports) critical. It lamented the fact that very little, with the exception of improvements to security, had changed since its previous report and noted that it had consistently been reporting in its annual reports on the lack of action and change within the prison. The report's own acknowledgment that it is repeating points year after year indicates its ineffectiveness. The sense of frustration at political action is not unique to the Mountjoy Visiting Committee but is also present in the 2009 Limerick Visiting Committee report, which although a short report, repeats the word "again" in the context of "we again note/recommend" six times. Thus in essence while the reports are diligently submitted as part of a statutory requirement, action is dependent on political will.

Goffman (1961) had acknowledged that exposure to the physical conditions in a total institution can constitute a mortification and the physical description in official reports of the space prisoners occupy is often bleak. The physical conditions of prison institutions are important to consider also in light of their impact on prison education given that it takes place within the total institution. Many of the prisons within the Irish prison system are nineteenth century buildings with corresponding structural challenges and need for maintenance. Life history interviews for this thesis were conducted in two Dublin prisons, Mountjoy Prison, built in 1850; St. Patrick's Institution, formerly Mountjoy's women's prison, opened in 1858; and Limerick Prison, in the south-west of Ireland was built in 1821 and is the oldest prison in the state. The Irish Human Rights Commission (2011), in addressing human rights concerns in Ireland, acknowledged the physical settings of many prisons and state that: "There are severe problems in Irish prisons. In particular, the physical conditions of prisons are grossly inadequate and fail to comply with Ireland's international obligations" (p. 7).

Independent official monitoring reports on conditions in Mountjoy Prison, (e.g. Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee Reports 2008,2009,2010; Council of Europe CPT Reports, 2007, 2011; Office of Inspector of Prisons,2009) are damning in terms of the structural conditions that prisoners face. The CPT reports (Council of Europe, 2007, 2011) based on their 2006 and 2010 visit to both Mountjoy Prison and St. Patrick's

Institution acknowledge, for example, that while there have been improvements to Mountjoy prison in recent years, they stated that the overall conditions of detention remain poor. The IPS (2008) reported on the completion of a building project in Limerick Prison in 2008 which resulted in new education and library facilities and a home economics training kitchen. However the building project, which also included a new medical centre, did not mean that overall conditions in the prison were improved. The Inspector of Prisons in his inspection of Limerick Prison (2011), for instance, expressed his concern about conditions and also stated that the age of the building and constraints on budget are not an excuse for “denying prisoners their basic human rights” (p. 7). He highlighted a number of deficiencies in the prison, including: overcrowding, “slopping out”, the smell of sewage throughout the landings, broken and leaking equipment (issues which he acknowledges are exacerbated due to the age of the building itself and overcrowding) and unclean cells. As all prisoners will spend the majority of their time in their cells, these conditions, all of which could be categorised, using Goffman’s term, as mortifications, are likely to reinforce their low status as inmates of a total institution.

Rogan (2011) in a history of prison policy in Ireland noted the increased interest in prison conditions that took place in the 1980s, a decade that saw the publication of both the McBride Commission (1980) and the Whitaker Report (1985). The publication of the Whitaker Report, with its wide ranging recommendations, is seen as particularly significant with Lines (2007) calling it “the most detailed and thoughtful analysis of Irish prisons to date” (p. 10). Among other recommendations the Whitaker Report called for the closure of St. Patrick’s Institution citing unsuitable physical conditions and an unsuitable prison regime.<sup>1</sup> The report itself described prison as “of limited protective, deterrent or corrective value” (p. 11), it criticised the lack of statistical information on crime and punishment and its recommendation included a cap on prison places, improving outdated conditions as a priority, and, of particular significance for this thesis, improving education and work training. O’Donnell (2008), some twenty years later, described its recommendations “as persuasive today as when they were first made” (p. 126). Rogan (2011) notes the continued policy of expanding the prison

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<sup>1</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012, Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced the end to the sending of 16 year olds to St. Patrick’s Institution and signed an order to that effect.

system during the 1980s, despite the recommendations of the Whitaker report and indeed changes in government and notes that the two main parties in the country at the time, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, both of them in power at different stages, had little of substance to say on the recommendations issued. Thus, while some evidence of progress was made in the years following the report e.g. improvements in medical services, an independent inspection system, O'Mahony (2007) argues that the limited effect the Whitaker Report had on the philosophy of the penal system is evident in the numbers imprisoned and the lack of development in alternative sanctions.

The theoretical framework chapter had identified the lack of inmates/prisoners' voices in the work of Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) and this same lack of prisoners' views on what prison life is like is present in official reports related to the prison. O'Donnell (2008), who has been critical of the lack of depth and information relating to prison life, highlights the lack of a prisoner perspective in Ireland on incarceration and states that:

We know how many prisoners are held in each institution, but little about their relationships with staff and each other, their anxieties for the future, how they experience the pains of confinement ....Quite simply, we do not know much about how it feels to do time in the Republic of Ireland. (p. 122)

This thesis, in addressing the key research question of how a prisoner learner experiences a school within the total institution of a prison, addresses the gap that O'Donnell has identified. Debates about prison education do raise the issue as to where it is positioned in terms of priority. The Irish Prison Service (IPS) annual reports, for example, reveal support for prison education however the Inspector of Prisons (2010) has also noted the failure of the prison service to always ensure prisoners are in the school on time and the practice too of cancelling or curtailing classes due to staff shortage and staff being deployed elsewhere in the prison.

While the previous sections reviewed literature related to prison education in general and official reports on the institution of the prison in Ireland, an important consideration given that prison education takes place within the institution of the prison,

the final section of this chapter focuses on the provision of prison education in Ireland which is of particular relevance to the fundamental research question posed.

### **Prison Education Services in Ireland**

A Strategy Statement for the Prison Education Service 2003-2007 (2003) summarised the aims of the Prison Education Service as to provide a high quality, broad and flexible programme of education that meets the needs of those in custody through helping them:

- Cope with their sentence
- Achieve personal development
- Prepare for life after release
- Establish the appetite and capacity for lifelong learning

The aims of the Prison Education Service in Ireland were first articulated in a Department of Justice (1994) document, a strategy document which set out the plan for the prison system and acknowledged that overcrowding was the main problem facing the system but also recognised other problems, including shortcomings in education services. The implementation of the recommendations of this report seemed to fall victim to changes in political parties in government and financial concerns (cf. Rogan, 2011, O'Donnell and O'Sullivan, 2003), however the aims of the Prison Education Service illustrate the similarity of the Council of Europe's (COE) view of prison education.

The COE's *Education in Prison* (1990) Report espouses a holistic and rights based view of education. It uses a wide definition of education and understands it to include physical education, sports, library services, social education, cultural activities, and vocational education. Importantly however two themes prevail in the COE Report; firstly that education of prisoners must be as close as possible to the philosophy and practice of the best adult education in the society outside and secondly that education should be seeking ways to link prisons with the outside world to enable both groups to interact with the other. These themes emphasise the connection between education within the institution of the prison and outside of it, and in doing so seeks to minimise

the risk of seeing prisoners as “other” rather than “learners” and the report clearly argues that prison education should mirror education that is available in the community. There is an acceptance in the COE report that prison can and does damage people and therefore should be used as a last resort. The document argues for financial support for education resources in prison based on their belief that prison is abnormal and that education can lessen the abnormality and “limit the damage done to men and women through imprisonment” (p. 10), secondly that most prisoners have had a negative and limited educational experience and this adds to their education disadvantage and thirdly that education has the capacity to help people turn away from crime and play a part in rehabilitation. Warner (2002a) argues that both the COE *Education in Prison* (1990) document, which advocates an adult education position, and the COE European Prison Rules, (2006) which provides a policy framework for the use of imprisonment are both complementary documents, with both identifying the prisoner as citizens and, as such, as part of a wider community. This identification of a prisoners as a person first is, argues Warner, in line with an adult education approach.

The largest part of the prison education service is delivered by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) through the VECs. In 1972 the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) became involved in teaching in prisons in Ireland, an event which the Whitaker Report (1985) acknowledged as important. Ironically, despite what the name “Vocational Educational Committee” may indicate, the education service in the prison does not include vocational training which is administered separately by the prison regime (Kett, 2001). The prison education service also includes librarians from the public service library services, support from the Arts Council and teachers from third level colleges such as the Open University and the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). The IPS (2010) describes the courses and programme on offer under the following six categories:

- Basic Education under which it includes literacy, numeracy, English as a second language and communications;
- Creative Arts, including drama, arts and crafts, creative writing, film production and photography;
- Technology, including woodwork, woodcarving, metalwork, computer-aided design, information technology and horticulture;



- General Subjects, incorporating history, languages, geography, home economics and English literature;
- Life Skills such as personal development, interpersonal skills, anger management, parenting, child care, addiction studies, driver theory and food hygiene; and
- Healthy Living, particularly physical education, sports, fitness and recreational activities, health education, diet and nutrition.

The White Paper on Adult Education (Department of Education and Science, 2000) had identified prisoners as a marginalised group, and the subjects on offer within the institution of the prison, illustrate, in keeping with an adult education approach, the wide curriculum available. The IPS (2010) report that Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate courses are available but states that many prisoners partake in FETAC courses as they offer multiple entry and exit points and a shorter time frame for accreditation. Significantly there are no specific details in the annual reports however as to how many students partake in either the state examinations or FETAC courses. The IPS (2010) describe how education in the prisons is delivered in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills and there are, according to the IPS' Annual Reports (2009, 2010), currently 220 "whole-time equivalent" teachers employed by nine VECs in whose areas the prisons are located. The City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC), for example, the largest VEC in Ireland, provides, as part of its remit, the education service in Dublin's seven prisons: Arbour Hill Prison, Cloverhill Prison, The Dochas Centre (Women's Prison), Mountjoy (Male) Prison, The Training Unit, Wheatfield, and St. Patrick's Institution. This is in conjunction with its mandate to offer educational services in the community which includes running over 20 schools and offering Second Level, Further Education and Adult Education programmes across the city of Dublin catchment area. This model of prison education provision will be contrasted with others in the next section.

Details on education within the prison system are contained in the Irish Prison Services' Annual Report under the section 'Care and Rehabilitation of Prisoners', which also details library use, work and training and spiritual services. Its location in this section illustrates the welfare role education has been assigned within the prison system. The IPS (2009) identified, among its key strategic objectives the development of a

multi-disciplinary Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) system for prisoners. The development of the ISM system by the IPS has been welcomed as a positive development by many stakeholders and education does play a part in it. Prisoners who meet the criteria for ISM are met by an ISM officer and informed of the educational opportunities available in the prison and the prisoner is then interviewed in the education unit where he /she is given information on the range of courses available. The Irish Penal Reform Trust's recent report on reintegration of prisoners in Ireland (Martynowicz & Quigley 2010) acknowledged that ISM was a positive initiative with potential to provide a national framework for reintegration services but found that only a small number of prisoners could avail of it (as prisoners must be serving a sentence no shorter than 12 months) and estimated that it only applied to approximately 30% of all committals to prison. The Chaplain's Report (2010) had similar concerns and although it emphasised how essential an integrated sentence programme was in establishing a rehabilitation regime, it lamented the fact that the programme "stumbles on" with only a small percentage of prisoners having access to it.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of ISM into the prison service does highlight the issue of access and participation in prison education (cf. Downes, 2011; Hawley, 2011). Thus, while the right to education for all has been established by a number of European and International conventions (e.g. The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights) and the right of specifically prisoners to access educational opportunities while in prison (e.g. the European Prison Rules, updated in 2006; the Council of Europe's (COE's) *Education in Prison* 1990 document), one of the questions which remain is how participation is impacted by the institution of the prison and what are the reasons for participation and non-participation in prison education. The following section documents the rate of participation in prison education in Ireland, as reported by the Irish Prison Service.

### **Rates of participation in prison education in Ireland**

The annual reports provide statistics on rates of participation in education for each institution, although no breakdown or profile of prisoners attending education is documented. The figures for 2009 are particularly interesting for two reasons. Firstly,

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that ISM was not yet in existence when fieldwork for this thesis was carried out and although participants described a process in which they were met by the Head Teacher and given details of the educational opportunities available, this was not part of a formal integrated process.

in 2009 the IPS changed their method of compiling figures and introduced a new weekly reporting system which measures attendance at classes each week over the academic year. In announcing this change in their annual report, they acknowledged that in practice this means that the figures in 2009 are not comparable with those for previous years. The IPS report also provided more detail on how previous statistics had been gathered i.e. “prior to 2009 the attendance figures in the annual report were based on a snapshot from the education units for a one-week period in November” (p. 32). Secondly, in the new set of figures, actual attendance at classes each week over the academic year is measured and the figures reveal the numbers of prisoners who attend (counting each prisoner once only, regardless of the intensity or frequency of attendance). While the latest figures therefore make it impossible to make comparisons with other years, they are however likely to be more accurate. The following table (Table 4.2) illustrates the attendance per institution, with the institutions that were used as sites for this research highlighted in bold.

Table 4.2 Rates of participation in education

Institution	Rate of participation (%)	
	2009	2010
Arbour Hill (Dublin)	57.2	55
Castlerea (Roscommon)	38.1	26
Cloverhill (Dublin)	19.4	18
Cork Prison (Cork)	43.2	45
Dóchas (Dublin)	54.5	50
<b>Limerick Prison (Limerick)</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>41</b>
Loughan House (Cavan)	65	69
Midlands (Laois)	48	41
<b>Mountjoy (Dublin)</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>14</b>
Portlaoise (Laois)	54	53
Shelton Abbey (Wicklow)	63.4	62
<b>St Patrick's Institution (Dublin)</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>40</b>
Training Unit (Dublin)	38.1	36
Wheatfield (Dublin)	37.5	25

*Note:* From the Irish Prison Service Annual Report (2009, 2010)

As can be seen from Table 4.2, participation rates vary, with the figures ranging in 2009 and 2010 from the lowest, Mountjoy Prison (18.9%, 14%), to the highest, Loughan House (65%, 69%). The statistics reported by the IPS raise a number of issues and in critically examining these statistics the limits of the figures are revealed. The statistical information provides, for instance, no profile of learners who are engaging with the prison school in terms of, for example, age, nationality, previous educational attainment, and in the case of Limerick Prison, gender. Limerick Prison holds both male and female prisoners but only one statistic is supplied in the IPS report. Also it is not clear whether length of sentence variation may offer an explanation of the between institution variation in education participation.

Additionally, even when making comparisons between institutions some important considerations should be brought to mind. Firstly, although these institutions are all categorized as prisons, they are not categorised as the same type of prisons and this serves as a reminder of Davies' (1989) argument regarding the level of open/closeness of some total institutions and how some institutions may appear more homogenous on paper than they are in practice. While the majority of the prisons are closed institutions (11), two are open prisons (Loughan House and Shelton Abbey) and one semi-open (The Training Unit). St. Patrick's Institution, although a closed prison, is a place of detention for males aged under 21 years. Open centres are described as operations "with minimal internal and perimeter security" while the Training Unit, a semi-open prison is described as "a facility with traditional perimeter security but minimal internal security" (p. 11, Annual Report, 2008). For some inmates, their experience of the total experience of the prison may be more "total" than others. As Table 4.2 reveals, the two highest rates of participation in education are from those who are incarcerated in open prisons, institutions which offer increased autonomy for prisoners.

It should be noted too that Cloverhill Prison is distinct from other prisons as an institution as it is a remand prison, where prisoners have not been found guilty but are awaiting trial. This also may impact on inmates' motivation to engage to prison education.

Secondly, if there is analysis of the figures from only closed institutions which house male prisoners (i.e. excluding Dochas Centre, Loughan House, Shelton Abbey and the Training Unit) there is still a range of rates of participation in evidence e.g. Portlaoise and Limerick have relatively high participation rates as opposed to Mountjoy Prison. Prisoner learners' experiences across three total institutions are explored in this thesis but possible explanations of the range of participation among different prisons include that there could be different practices relating to education at the micro rather than macro level of prison administration, or different profiles of prisoners in terms of for example, educational background or sentence length.

Thirdly the highest rate of participation from a closed institution is located in Arbour Hill Prison however this is an institution with a prisoner profile which is (as the Prison Adult Literacy Survey demonstrated) quantitatively different from other prisons in terms of educational attainment due to the specific profile of prisoners it incarcerates. Fourthly, with the exception of Cork prison and Loughan House (an increase of 1.8% and 4% respectively) all the other institutions have seen a decrease in participation rates in education between 2009 and 2010. No reason is given for this decline in participation and some of these rates of decrease seem quite dramatic; Wheatfield Prison had, for example, a decrease of 12.5% and Castlereagh Prison had a 12.1% decrease in education participation in the space of a year while Mountjoy Prison, already in 2009 at the lowest level of education participation among all the prison institutions in the state, experienced a decrease of 4.9%. All of these prisons have seen an increase in their daily average number in custody with Mountjoy Prison now containing the largest average number of prisoners in the state with an average of 667 (IPS, 2010). This suggests that there may be a negative relationship between rates of participation in education and numbers in the prison. The impact of overcrowding on prisoners accessing education has been highlighted in the earlier part of this chapter.

While the IPS annual reports lack sufficient detail to provide a full analysis they do provide a snapshot of what is happening within the prison in regards to participation and course provision. The IPS Annual Report (2009) for instance identified the issues of overcrowding and segregation as ones that "complicated" the delivery of education within the prison system. The IPS reported the overall average attendance at the prisons school as 38.6% in 2009 and 35% in 2010. The JCFJ (2012) report attributes the decline

in numbers to the fact that educational and teaching resources have not kept pace with the increase in prison numbers and also because “severe confinement now means several hundred prisoners do not have access to education” (p. 64). The Inspector of Prisons Report (2009) reported that Mountjoy Prison has the capacity to provide structured activities for a maximum of 321 prisoners per day yet the insufficiency of this figure is revealed in the context of the average number of 632 prisoners reported in Mountjoy (IPS, 2009). The 2008 Mountjoy Visiting Committee report acknowledges that if many more prisoners were to request more education or recreational activities, the prison would not be able to facilitate them. The Irish Prison Chaplain’s Report (2010) commenting on this lack of activity described Mountjoy prison as a place where “many prisoners ‘do time’ but do nothing else” (p. 3). Similarly, it notes that structured activity in Limerick Prison is available for a maximum number of 195 prisoners which (as a percentage of the average number of prisoners in custody) leaves approximately 35% of prisoners with nothing to do. The Inspector of Prisons in his report on Limerick Prison (2011) stated that it was difficult to calculate the actual number of prisoners who were attending school on a daily basis and, commenting on the small numbers of prisoners attending education in the prisons he had inspected, stated that he was “unable to reconcile this with the published statistics of the number of prisoners who attend education in Limerick prisons and in other prisons” (p. 21).

The Inspector called for an independent education audit to be commissioned by the IPS in order to uncover if the service gave “value for money”, whether the schools were overstaffed or under-utilised for the number of staff employed, whether the outcomes from the education provided is “acceptable” and whether these statistics give an accurate picture (p. 21). The grounds for which the audit is called for provide some indication of the current pressures faced by the prison education service. It is also reminiscent of the pressures felt by education providers in general. Field (2006) for example, has argued that policy interest in lifelong learning has been driven by the economic need of having a more productive and efficient workforce. The Irish government’s White Paper on Adult Education (DES, 2000) does cite this need to provide a skilled workforce in its overall framework on lifelong learning however it is identified as only one of six areas of priority with consciousness raising, citizenship, cohesion, cultural development and community development all cited too as underpinning the framework. Nonetheless, Maunsell et al (2008) have reported unease

among community education groups at what they see as a move towards education for economic reasons only.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

In reviewing literature in relation to education within total institutions, acknowledgement was given to Ireland's historical use of institutions and it was recognised, with the publication of the Ryan Report, that the standard of education delivered within industrial schools in particular, even when delivered by the same providers who were providing education services in the community, was poor. This illustrates the potential of a total institution to impact negatively on education services.

The literature review also revealed the relative lack of literature that is specifically focused on prison education. Furthermore the literature indicated a lack of agreement as to what the purpose of prison education is and this has implications at policy level for what is taught within the total institution of the prison and how success is measured. Literature which focused on the learning environment of the prison and the relationship between prisoner learners and teachers was reviewed and showed the dependent relationship between prison education and the prison itself, underlining the link between prisons and the political, social and economic world outside. Studies in relation to motivation to engage in prison education were also considered and push and pull factors acknowledged.

Obstacles to participation in prison education were also identified in the literature and included dispositional, institutional and situational barriers. Overcrowding in prison in particular was found to have implications for inmates and the conditions in which they must live, and also for prisoner learners and the opportunity they have to avail of education. The literature review supported the view that what occurs in the total institution of the prison itself impacts on the provision of prison education and serves as a reminder that motivation to learn in the prison must be seen in the context in which learning takes place. The literature review also revealed differences in motivation for learner engagement (undermining Foucault's theory of "docile bodies") but also underscored how prison education is vulnerable to conditions within the prison and the wider socio-political and economic environment. Differing models

of education structure in use internationally were identified and the advantages and disadvantages of the import model used in Ireland were stated.

Goffman (1961) had argued that total institutions often fall short of their aims, yet it is within the institution of the prison that inmates live and prisoner learners engage with education. This chapter therefore identified the mission statement of the IPS and included analysis of its annual reports. The incidents of violence reported in the IPS' annual reports make known the difficulties the service has in fulfilling its mission of providing safe, secure and humane custody for prisoners. The second part of the IPS' mission statement had stated its commitment to support and encourage prisoners in their efforts to become valued members of society. The numbers on protection however are likely to impact negatively on the IPS' ability to do this.

The lack of baseline information contained in the annual reports however has been the subject of critique. Nonetheless a picture of life within the institution of the prison does emerge from these annual reports. The IPS (2010) annual report reveals that the vast majority of prisoners in Ireland are Irish, less than 40 years of age and male, with approximately 27% serving sentences of less than three months. However there was no further official profile available for prisoners who chose to engage in education classes.

Analysis of IPS reports alongside reports from statutory bodies and civil society organisations reveal the characteristics of prison life that include overcrowding, violence and threats of violence, and drug use. These factors are all likely to impact on participation in and experience of prison education. As prison education takes place within the institution of the prison, this chapter also documented the poor conditions of some prisons as revealed in the reports. The myriad of reports which are generated on Irish prisons (e.g. Whitaker Report, Prison Visiting Committee Reports, McBride Report) and the repetitive nature of some of them indicates that they have little or no impact.

The chapter ended by providing contextual policy and practice information on prison education in Ireland, and revealed the aims of the prison education service and the curriculum on offer to be in line with the Council of Europe's holistic view of prison



education. Teachers in the institution of the prison are not employees of the prison service but are employed under the same terms as teachers on the outside and the advantages and disadvantages of this structure were identified. Education is a part of the new ISM initiative, yet despite positive reports the Irish Penal Reform Trust's estimation that, due to the exclusion of prisoners on sentences of less than 12 months, only 30% of all prisoners could avail of it, illustrate both the amount of prisoners on short sentences and the impact this may have on education participation.

Rates for education participation provided in the IPS (2010) report showed a decline in prisoners attending education classes. The Inspectors of Prisons observation of poor numbers attending education and scepticism of published figures are relevant for this thesis. His calls for an independent audit of prison education services suggest the beginning of a focus on prison education albeit on the basis of "value for money" concerns and achievable outcomes being met. While the Inspector does not link the poor conditions of the prison to participation in education, it is not unreasonable to suggest that such a link may exist and to argue that what goes on in the prison itself impacts on prison education.

This review of the literature on prison education and analysis of reports on both prisons in Ireland and specifically prison education illustrate the lack of literature on prison education and the lack of information on prisoner learners in Ireland who attend a school within the total institution of the prison. Amidst the statistics and reports that are generated, there is a lack of qualitative research on what it is like to be imprisoned and specifically to participate in education. This thesis addresses this lack of a prisoner perspective on incarceration generally and in particular their experience of prison education by collating life history interviews with 18 prisoner learners in three prison sites. The life history methodology was an important element in gaining this perspective and the following chapter expands on the methodological approach adopted and the challenges it involved.

## **Chapter Five: Methodology**

The objective of this thesis is to examine how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of a prison. In answering this research question fully, prisoner learners' previous educational and life experiences, as well as experiences of the prison school, were accessed through a life history methodological approach. Eighteen life histories were collated from adult male prisoner learners from three prison sites in Ireland: Mountjoy Prison and St. Patrick's Institution, both of which are located in Dublin, and Limerick Prison which is located in the south west of the country.

Prisoner learners were interviewed at least twice in these three prison sites. The literature review had demonstrated that prisoners often come from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds and had highlighted the implications of early school leaving and the importance of considering factors such as family background, the individual's relationship with school, interaction with peers, the school climate and the relationship between students and staff in school. The aim of the first interview therefore was to explore prisoner learners' experience of education prior to incarceration, mindful of the evidence gained from the literature review. In conducting the first interview prisoner learners' educational attainment (again prior to incarceration) was ascertained. The theme of identity had also emerged in the literature review and prisoner learners were also asked in this first interview how they would have described themselves as a student.

A review of the literature had revealed that research into prison education specifically is limited (e.g. Munoz, 2009; Hawley, 2011) and Spark and Harris (2005) emphasised in particular the lack of research involving prisoner learners' perspectives on the subject. The objective of the second interview therefore was to explore prisoner learners' experience of the prison school and obtain their perspectives on prison education, the prison environment, how the prison impacts on their education journey and, in keeping with the theme of identity, how it impacts on themselves.

Reviewing the methodological approaches employed in prison education research to date did reveal however that a variety of research methods have been

employed by other researchers in gathering data on prisoners. These methods included quantitative methods such as surveys (e.g. O'Mahony, 1997, Morgan and Kett, 2003); qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews (e.g. Dillon, 2001; Spark and Harris, 2005); mixed method approaches which used a combination of structured surveys and in-depth interviews (e.g. Costelloe, 2003; Leonard, 2002; Liebling, 2004) and ethnographic studies (e.g. Wilson, 2007). Life history approaches have also been used in research undertaken in prison settings. Richie (2001) for example utilised a life history approach to investigate the challenges incarcerated women face on their return to the community and Roy and Dyson (2005) also used a life history approach with 40 incarcerated men in order to explore how prisoners experienced fatherhood. In view of the range of methods available, this chapter begins with a rationale as to why the life history methodological approach was specifically employed in this thesis.

Four reasons are put forward as to why a life history method was chosen. These reasons relate to the suitability of the life history methodological approach in gathering rich data, its tradition of use with marginalised groups, its ability to facilitate the prioritising of the subjective voice and the appropriateness, given educational policies on life-long learning, that a thesis which examines the educational experience of adult prisoner learners incorporates the learning experiences across the life cycle.

Following the provision of the rationale for the selection of a life history methodology the chapter then explores the role of theory in qualitative research and provides an account of how theory was used in this thesis particularly in relation to its role in the research design, data collection and analysis stage. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) had noted that for many qualitative researchers, qualitative methods are associated with grounded theory. The temptation to use a grounded theory approach was present in this study, not least because of its association with qualitative research but because Antikainen et al's (1996) study (which was especially influential for this thesis in ultimately choosing the life history method) utilised this approach. Grounded theory is concerned however with developing a theory which is based on empirical evidence, and as such, the empirical evidence, rather than the theory, comes first. Chapter Two of this thesis, however, explained how the theoretical perspectives of Goffman mainly and also Foucault were used and this chapter explains how the grounded theory approach

was ultimately rejected in favour of adopting a theoretical framework at the beginning of this doctoral work.

The context for this research was the total institution of the prison and research took place in prison schools in three prison sites. Prisoners are, in research terms, considered a particularly vulnerable population (Shuster, 1997) and, as such, this thesis was subject to a robust process of ethical approval. This chapter acknowledges the importance of the prison context and discusses the implications, including ethical ones, of having the total institution of the prison as a research setting.

This chapter also contains an account of the construction of the interview schedules, the sampling frame used and how access was negotiated. As part of the research design, a pilot study was conducted and was used to refine the interview schedules as well as identify initial themes and an evaluation of the pilot study is provided. An account of how data was collected and the coding framework created is then given and the chapter concludes by acknowledging criticisms of the life history method and identifies the limitations of the research undertaken in this thesis.

### **Prisoner Learners' Perspectives of Prison Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison: Rationale for a Life History Methodological Approach**

While there is general agreement that the popularity of the life history approach has at times fallen in and out of favour amongst researchers over the course of the twentieth century (cf. Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Merrill and West, 2009, for history of the method), the rationale for using this approach in this thesis was multifaceted. Firstly, the method was chosen for its effectiveness in gathering in-depth data. Based on the theoretical framework chosen and the literature review conducted, it was found that in order to address the research question fundamental to this thesis and to fully elicit how prisoner learners experience the total institution of the prison, it was necessary to understand their educational and life experiences both within the context of the prison and prior to their incarceration. It was decided from the outset of the research process, given the complexity of the individual lived experience, that the approach adopted should be a qualitative rather than a quantitative one. The specific use of a life history approach would be able to generate a richness of data that other methods could not

offer. Indeed Plummer (1983) makes the point that researchers using other methods such as surveys or questionnaires, for example, often give an order to the world which it does not have and that a life history method recognises that lives are often messy, often consist of turning points, contradictions, confusions, and moments of indecision. As such, a life history approach is able to appreciate the complexities of human lives. This point is also made by Mason (2004) who argues that a qualitative approach facilitates a sensitive approach to the social context in which data is produced and involves a more holistic understanding of the complexities, details and context of an issue. Merrill and West (2009) also identify the potential of biographical research to both generate new perspectives on social phenomena and to challenge a tendency in social research to simplify complex problems. This has particular resonance with this thesis as prisoners are often presented as a completely homogenous group.

A life history methodology was also chosen as a review of academic literature on the life history method reflects its tradition of use with groups who have been perceived as marginalised. The first significant use of life history, for example, was Thomas and Znaniecki's (1918-1920) landmark study "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America" in which the life record of a Polish immigrant Wladek Wisniewski is presented (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). The use of life history, from this initial landmark study to more recent work which has included work with elderly people (e.g. Wicks and Whiteford, 2006), people with a learning disability (e.g. Hreinsdottir, Stefansdottir, Lewthwaite, Ledger and Shufflebotham, 2006) and people who have been institutionalized (Atkinson, 2004), illustrate how the method has been an appropriate one in working with people who have often been disempowered. Byrne and Smyth's (2010) study in Ireland which used a life-history approach to collect data from twenty-five early school leavers also reinforced the life history approach as a methodological approach appropriate to employ with prisoner learners whose perspectives were being sought in addressing the research question central to this thesis.

This thesis sought to prioritise the subjective voice of those incarcerated within a total institution and to highlight, as Plummer (1983) asserts, the active human subject. A life history methodological approach facilitated this and in prioritising the voice of those incarcerated and attending the prison school, the potential of the life-history method to empower participants was also a factor in choosing it as a method. The

advocacy potential of a life history approach is clear; life stories allow a participant to reveal an image of his/her self-identity and give meaning to their experience. As Becker (2002) notes, a life history emphasises the value of a person's own story and has, as such, many advantages. It allows people, for instance, to become conscious of their own actions and influences that have helped, or indeed hindered them, and provides an opportunity to tell their story and in doing so give meaning to their own life and experiences. The ability of a life history approach to facilitate reflection and insights makes it a powerful research method (Atkinson, 1998) and thus one deemed appropriate for this research.

By using life history interviews, the prisoner learner is placed at the centre of this thesis and recognition is given to prisoner learners' previous educational and life experiences, experiences which may inform their present perspectives of both prison and specifically prison education. The importance of listening to those who have been on the margins and placing them in the centre was stressed in Downes and Gilligan's (2007) work and echoed in Spring's (2007) contribution which observed a "reluctance to listen to those who are affected by inequality in education" (p. 6).

The employment of a life history methodological approach was appropriate too as in education the term "lifelong" is increasingly in use at policy level (Alheit and Dausien, 2007). The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (Department of Education and Science, 2000) identifies the adoption of lifelong learning as a governing principle of education policy in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed one of the fundamental attributes on which the lifelong learning agenda has come to be based on within an Irish context is that it is lifelong and therefore includes everything from the cradle to the grave (Maunsell et al, 2008). In this context then, it is particularly fitting that the approach used in this thesis takes a lifecycle view.

Since the 1970s the life history method has had a particular renaissance in educational studies (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Antikainen et al, 1996). The work of West, Alheit, Anderson and Merrill (2007) documents, through the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA), the variety of life history and biographical approaches that have been undertaken in Europe in the study of adults and life-long learning. These examples illustrate how the method has been effectively used

in education and Antikainen et al's study, in particular, was especially useful to this thesis in deciding on the life history approach as the methodological approach employed in this research study. Their work deals with the place and meaning of education and learning in people's lives in Finland. Using a life-story approach, forty-four thematic interviews with adults, some of whom were reported as being from marginalised groups, were conducted and their rationale for using a life story as a way of studying, among other things, identity, meaning and concepts of memory, was one that resonated strongly with this thesis. Antikainen et al's recognition that "educational institutions have had a central role both in the individualisation of socialisation ...and in the institutionalisation of the life-course" (p. 9) also supported the use of a life history approach in this thesis given that the research question sought to elicit how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison.

The following section discusses the role of theory in qualitative research and specifically how the theoretical insights of Goffman and Foucault were applied in this thesis.

### **Theory and Qualitative Research: The Role of Theory in the Research Approach Employed**

Mason (2002) identifies one of the major differences between qualitative and quantitative research is the use of theory. Theory can provide a framework for critically understanding phenomena and as Silverman (2006) acknowledges can encourage, instruct and inform research. Arguments have been made that theory must come before empirical research. This deductivist approach (epitomised by Popper (1963; 1976) had a linear attitude to research progress. Others, particularly in the qualitative tradition, have adopted an inductive approach and argued that research must occur before theory can be developed. The grounded theory approach, developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s is an example of this. Using this approach, the theory evolves or develops during the research by means of analysis of the data.

The idea of theory coming last in the research process has been the subject of criticism (e.g. Mason, 2002) as it assumes that research can be undertaken in a theoretical vacuum. Mason contends that it is unlikely that pure forms of inductive or

deductive reasoning are practiced and that most researchers will move back and forwards between data, theory and experience. Miles and Huberman (1994) acknowledge too the debate in qualitative research on just how much pre-existing work should be completed prior to commencing fieldwork particularly in relation to research questions and conceptual frameworks. There is a continuum of research design principles in qualitative research which range from being very structured and rigid to a less structured and pre-determined strategy. Although a theoretical framework was used in the research design of this thesis it was anticipated that other themes would emerge from the data gathered. This non-linear iterative approach and fluid movement between theory, literature review, data collection and analysis is common in qualitative research (cf. Mason, 2002; Lichtman, 2012) and is encapsulated by Berg's (2009) appropriate term "the spiralling research approach" (p. 26). In this more fluid approach with every step made, a re-examination took place as to what had been researched previously; thus in this thesis the theoretical framework was used as a resource in analysing data and Goffman's concept of a total institution and its constituent features and Foucault's perspectives on power and the prison context were revisited once data was collated.

An interpretivist approach was also adopted in this thesis and judged necessary in order to allow for new and unanticipated empirical data to emerge. The interpretivist tradition, as Newby (2010) observed, predisposes researchers to qualitative methods. This meant adopting an approach that was concerned with how the social world is "interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (p. 3, Mason, 2002). Symbolic interactionism is to be found in the interpretivist tradition and has also proved attractive to educational researchers (cf. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007) not just because of its antipathy to positivism but because of its focus on understanding how meaning is created. West et al (2007) argue that the growth of biographical approaches such as a life history was facilitated by the influence of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interaction has been associated with the work of Goffman and while not however a unified perspective, it acknowledges that humans are active agents who do not merely respond passively to events and other people but who interact, interpret and act in relation to events and others. The prison however was the context for this research and prisoner learners engaged in prison education and interacted and acted in relation to events within the total institution of the prison. The importance of the prison context therefore to the thesis is considered in the following section.



## **The Total Institution of the Prison as a Research Context**

Berg (2009) acknowledges the difficulties many researchers face in gaining access to a research setting and undertaking life history interviews with prisoner learners attending school within the confines of a prison proved time consuming and challenging. Ensuring access to the research setting required gaining the support of management and staff of the prison in the first instance and management and staff of the prison school in the second and, in line with David and Sutton's (2011) advice to seek guidance from experts who have knowledge of how particular organisations work, extensive networking on the part of the researcher was undertaken to establish and sustain such support. This networking included attendance throughout the course of the doctoral research process at Irish Prison Education Association (IPEA) meetings, attendance at conferences (e.g. European Prison Education Association (EPEA) conference; Irish Criminology conference, Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE) conference) and public and political events related to both education and prison policy. Through this networking and development of personal contacts, communication was made with two prison educators who had many years of experience of teaching in a prison school, one of whom had relatively recently completed doctoral research within the prison setting. In meeting them and gaining their preliminary agreement with the objectives of this research study, they were able to advise on the most effective means of negotiating access as a researcher to the prison setting. Permission was formally granted by the prison governor and the head teacher in the first research site (Mountjoy Prison). Once this had been achieved in the first research setting, access to the second and third research settings proved easier with the citation of having already conducted the study in one prison seeming to reassure other gatekeepers. Nonetheless a similar process had to be enacted with each prison site i.e. contacting head teachers in each prison school and negotiating with individual prison authorities all of which serves to illustrate Schlosser's (2008) observation that "often, however, gaining ultimate access to the prison requires significant tenacity and persistence" (p. 1509).

Conducting research within a prison setting does also present its own specific challenges for the researcher. The prison climate for example has undergone significant changes in terms of security in recent years (Carrigan, 2005; Lally, 2008; Irish Prison Service, 2009) and this had repercussions for research being undertaken in the

institution. In line with other visitors and staff, I was, as the researcher, subjected to airport style security x-ray machines and sniffer dogs upon entry. Dates of when I was entering the prison also had to be forwarded to security due to the fact that I was bringing a digital voice recorder into the prison. The presence of the digital voice recorder and its similarity in appearance to a mobile phone, the use of which is a criminal offence within the prison, caused difficulties at times, particularly in the initial stages of research. At each prison site, I met prison teachers at the gates and was accompanied by them to the prison school. The times of interviews, all of which took place in the prison school, were negotiated with each individual school and were agreed on the basis of both spaces available to interview prisoner learners and also times that would minimise disruption to prisoner learners, some of whom were preparing for exams. Entry to the prison school was always through the prison itself and at times events in the prison impacted on times of interviews being delayed. Events specific to the prison were also at times referred to in life history interviews. During the course of the pilot study, for example, a riot involving 40 inmates took place in one of the prisons which led to two prison officers and three inmates being hospitalised (Pope, 2009). This event and its implications were subsequently referred to in life history interviews with prisoner learners and it serves to further underline the tense atmosphere and potential for violence that existed in the total institution.

The life history interviews undertaken illustrated the difficulties of conducting research in the confines of the prison which Liebling (1999) described as “an intense, risk-laden, emotionally fraught environment” (p. 163). Schlosser (2008) too refers to the “methodological landmines” (p. 1501) that prison researchers must negotiate and notes that interviewing in a prison setting presents a unique set of obstacles. One such obstacle or “landmine” Schlosser (2008) identifies, and one that resonated strongly with this researcher, was how the prison setting can make the construction of a personal history difficult for inmates to articulate. Goffman (1961) and Schlosser (2008) both highlighted the process of institutionalisation on an individual and the subsequent adoption of goals of the institution by the individual as a result.

Conducting interviews within the prison setting did have an emotional impact on this researcher. The entry procedures were intimidating at first and served to cause anxiety rather than soothe it. The repetition to various prison officers on gate duty of

who I was and what I was doing there was at times irritating (and sometimes intimidating) although the longer the research lasted in each site, the less this occurred. Jewkes (2012) identifies an absence of emotion in prison studies in general, the absence of which she argues could be because of an academic environment in which the emphasis on researchers is to be objective and rational leading her to state “in informal conversations, all prison researchers will relate stories about moments (or prolonged periods) of empathy, embarrassment, fear, nervousness, dilemma, and so on, but they rarely admit to these feelings in their published narratives” (p. 64). Jewkes’ assessment that prison research can be emotive and harrowing at times but also positive and life affirming was born witness to in this thesis. Liebling (1999) has described the demands that prison research makes on the emotional lives of researchers and her suggestion of having a de-briefing session was utilised in this thesis and such sessions were organised with another PhD researcher who was undertaking sensitive research at the same time albeit in an institutional, rather than prison setting.

The research undertaken as part of this thesis had a number of ethical implications and the following section explores the ethical issues of conducting life history interviews with prisoner learners within the total institution of the prison.

### **Ethical Considerations in Researching Prisoner Learners’ Educational and Life Experiences**

Prison research involves particular ethical considerations as in research terms prisoners are considered a vulnerable population. A vulnerable population refers to a population that may not have enough either power, resources, strength, autonomy, or education to protect their own interests. Prisoners, as individuals with diminished autonomy, have in the past been subjected to research which would now be considered unacceptable (cf. Shuster, 1997 for overview of history of research ethics; also Hornblum, 1998). As such, particular concern is given to research involving prisoners. By 2002, the Irish Prison Service (IPS) had set up its own Prisoner Based Research Ethics Committee [PBREC] and its role was:

to promote, encourage, support and disseminate ethically based and appropriate research within the prison service. The committee vets all such applications

from the point of view of scientific merit and protection of the human rights of prisoners including privacy and personal dignity. (Michael McDowell, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2002)

The proposal to carry out research as part of this doctoral work was submitted to two Research Ethic Committees (RECs); St. Patrick College's REC and the Irish Prison Service's Prisoner Based Research Ethics Committee (PBREC) and was approved by both. Due to the sensitive nature of the project and the environment in which the research was conducted, care was specifically focused on obtaining informed consent. The information sheet and the consent form used in this thesis can be seen in the appendices section (Appendix A and B respectively). In line with ethical principles participation was voluntary with participants being informed about what the research involved and how the data would be collected, stored and used. Participants were told that they were not under any obligation to answer any of the questions and they could withdraw from the research at any time. The information sheet was explained verbally and handed to each respondent before the interview commenced. Due to the research being conducted in the institution of the prison there were specific conditions imposed by the PBREC regarding conditions of confidentiality. Thus, in line with the "Exception to Confidentiality" rule set down by the Irish Prison Service's PBREC, it was necessary to insert the following sentence which stated: "I know that these interviews are confidential unless there is reason to believe that either I or someone else may be in danger".

All interviews were transcribed to aid analysis, however all names were replaced by pseudonyms and every effort made to preserve confidentiality. Electronic data and transcripts were stored at a secure location in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

### **Construction of Interview Schedules**

In accordance with a life history approach the interview schedules used were designed to illicit narrative. Antikainen et al's (1996) study was influential in this regard. Their study looked at three key areas of a person's life; the life course, identity and significant learning experiences. The focus of both interviews in this thesis was on education and the first interview concentrated on prisoner learners' previous experience

of education as a child and a young adult. The second interview reviewed data given in the first interview, clarified with prisoner learners that the information was correct and asked more detailed questions on their current learning experiences and their motivation for attending classes. A copy of the interview schedules can be seen in Appendix C.

The design of interview schedules in which the learner would be interviewed at least twice was both a pragmatic and theoretical decision. The research was undertaken in prison schools and limited therefore by prison school times and subject to disruption caused by events in the prison (e.g. visits, riots) making it impractical to plan to conduct an interview beyond 120 minutes with any learner. By meeting prisoner learners twice however, it was possible to verify interpretations and also provide an opportunity in which prisoner learners could voice concerns/reflections about the previous interview.

While the research design incorporated two interview sessions with prisoner learners, it was often necessary to meet learners more than twice as interviews were subject to both the time restrictions of the prison school and events within the prison. When each interview was concluded a detailed contact summary sheet was written which included observations about comments made, interesting findings and any interruptions that had occurred. Appendix D contains a sample of the contact sheet used. The contact sheets facilitated identification of emerging themes, which was necessary in order to facilitate coding of the data. A notebook was also kept of all observations and analytical notes; this was a vital resource to reflect on once the first interview was completed and before the second one commenced. Data was transcribed verbatim and then checked against the audio recording. For quality assurance purposes, the transcripts of 10% of the data was checked by an independent person. Appendix E illustrates, in chart form, the numbers and length of each interview.

### **Evaluation of the Pilot Study**

The interview schedules were successfully piloted with two learners (P1 and P2) in 2009. Interviews from the pilot study were recorded and listened to and the interview schedules were revised as a result. Eleven themes were identified from the pilot study including early school leaving, the importance of the role of the teacher, the influence of peer relations and also the influence of home and community life on views of education

and the impact of parents' relationship with school authorities. P1 for example reported how his parents hated school and that school was "worse than a prison for them". Other key themes from the pilot were barriers to accessing prison education and motivations to enrol and continue education. Institutional barriers to education included limitations on subjects that learners could choose and the physical layout of the prison itself which made accessing the school complicated for some prisoners depending on where they were based. Both learners alluded to dispositional barriers to education as both had negative experiences of school as children and this had a subsequent impact in how they saw themselves as learners. The interview schedules were judged to be successful, both in terms of how the questions were phrased and the data generated as a result and consequently a decision was made to proceed with interviewing prisoner learners. The following section outlines the sample framework employed in the research.

### **Sampling Framework**

Denscombe (2003) notes that social researchers can use two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. While quantitative research is often concerned with how representative its sample is, and how findings can be inferred back to the population, qualitative research rarely makes such claims. Nonetheless, sampling is as important in qualitative research as it is in quantitative. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify 16 qualitative sampling strategies which is in itself an indication of the diversity of research questions and aims of research in qualitative work. A criterion sampling strategy, in which individuals are selected that meet certain criteria, was adopted in this work. The criteria used to identify possible participants were deliberately kept as wide as possible. Participants had to be:

- Incarcerated within a prison
- Attending the prison school
- Male
- Over 18 years of age

The fundamental research question in this thesis sought to examine how prisoner learners experienced prison education within the total institution of the prison and by necessity therefore all prisoner learners had to be both prisoners and attending the

prison school. The interviews were facilitated by “official gatekeepers” such as the Irish Prison Service, the Prison REC and the head teachers of the prison schools. Teachers were also used as gatekeepers in order to facilitate the interview process and time was spent in prison school staff rooms explaining the aims and objectives of the research. Individual teachers invited me to address their classes in the prison school to explain what I was doing and see if anyone would like to participate. Some teachers suggested possible prisoner learners to interview and others advised when exam preparation was taking place and what the best time was to approach possible candidates. Once the research began however some prisoner learners seemed to self-select to teachers and head teachers and I was approached with names of prisoner learners who were keen to take part. A decision was made to take advice from teachers in order not to interfere with the education of prisoner learners by taking up class time at educationally inappropriate times.

While acknowledging that gatekeepers often play a significant role in research and particularly educational research (Cohen et al, 2007) the use of a gatekeeper does have certain disadvantages. These disadvantages include the risk of gatekeepers seeking to suppress, change, or control data and to manipulate access or make access conditional. I was not aware of any attempt to control information collected or to report or feel obliged to report on what was revealed during the interviews. The confidentiality of the process seemed to be respected by all staff that facilitated the research and this is at odds with Liebling’s (1999) experiences of a large government funded prison study in the UK in which she reported on how levels of staff co-operation varied and how a suspicious attitude among staff towards the researchers was noticeable on occasions. While this thesis could not have taken place without the support of the teachers steps were taken however to avoid any suggestion that the role teachers played in facilitating the research was dependent on prisoner learners giving a positive report of the school. Consequently at the outset of each interview I reiterated what my role was and positioned myself as an “outsider” of both the teachers and school and the prison service too. The openness prisoner learners displayed when they spoke about the prison school itself and the critiques they offered suggest that this was believed, although the extent to which it was, is difficult to gauge.

## Sample

Once the sampling framework was agreed eighteen life histories were collated from adult male prisoner learners. The sample of prisoner learners was taken from three sites: Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick's Institution and Limerick Prison. The decision to focus on male prisoners was both a logical and pragmatic one; the Irish prison population is overwhelmingly male, with 87.6% of prisoners in Ireland being male (Irish Prison Service Report, 2010). Secondly there is evidence to suggest that men are underrepresented in adult education programmes in Ireland (cf. Maunsell et al 2008; O'Connor, 2007; Department of Education and Science, 2000; Owens, 2000). The focus on this thesis was on adults and therefore although under-18s are incarcerated in the Irish prison system (in St. Patrick's Institution), they were not approached to participate<sup>3</sup>. The following (Table 5.1) illustrates the profile of prisoner learners in terms of the institution in which the interview took place, their age (at the time of interview), and their educational qualifications. As can be seen from the table, of the 18 prisoner learners interviewed, the youngest prisoner learner was 18 years of age and the oldest learner 54 years. The average age of the sample was 27.4 years and the median age was 21.5 years.

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<sup>3</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012, Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced the end to the sending of 16 year olds to St. Patrick's Institution and signed an order to that effect.



Table 5.1 Age and educational profile of participants

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Attainment (in terms of exams)</b>
Alan	Mountjoy Prison	35	Junior Cert
Ben	Mountjoy Prison	35	No formal qualification
Chris	Mountjoy Prison	23	Leaving Cert Applied
David	Mountjoy Prison	27	No formal qualification
Eric	Mountjoy Prison	20	No formal qualification
Frank	Mountjoy Prison	30	Junior Cert
Gerard	St. Patrick's Institution	19	Junior Cert
Hugh	St. Patrick's Institution	19	No formal qualification
Ian	St. Patrick's Institution	18	Junior Cert
John	St. Patrick's Institution	19	No formal qualification
Kevin	Mountjoy Prison	54	Group Cert
Liam	St. Patrick's Institution	18	Junior Cert
Michael	St. Patrick's Institution	19	Junior Cert
Nick	St. Patrick's Institution	20	No formal qualification
Owen	St. Patrick's Institution	20	No formal qualification
Peter	Limerick Prison	30	Third level degree
Robert	Limerick Prison	38	Inter Cert
Stephen	Limerick Prison	50	No formal qualification

Table 5.1 illustrates the educational attainment (in terms of the formal qualifications) of participants. Eight of the 18 prisoner learners had left school without any formal qualification. The average of these eight prisoner learners is 26.25 years however the median age is 20 years. In this context, it is worth reiterating the stark contrast of the educational profile of these participants, particularly the younger prisoner learners, to recent OECD figures (2011) which indicate that over 90% of young people in Ireland now successfully complete upper second level education. This profile of prisoner learners support findings in previous research (e.g. O'Mahony 1997, 2000, 2002; Morgan and Kett, 2003) and also raises the issue of early-school leaving; the implications of which have been discussed in Chapter Three.

The profile of prisoner learners who took part in this research also reinforces the appropriateness of probing the motivation of prisoner learners to engage in prison education. The educational profile however also revealed that participants had a mixture of educational experiences; eight had achieved a Junior/Group Cert qualification, Chris (23) had a Leaving Certificate while Peter (30) had a university degree and was embarking on a second one. Apart from gender, the group were homogenous in terms of nationality and skin colour; all were Irish and white. This too is at odds with experiences in the wider educational community in Ireland (cf. Devine, 2011 for overview on how immigration has impacted on the education system in Ireland).

### **Thematic Analysis of the Data Using Template Analysis**

Questions in the interview schedule were designed to induce narrative and while there were a number of approaches that could have been utilised in the analysis stage, a thematic analysis of the data, with its emphasis on *what* people said rather than how it was said, was undertaken. Theorising across cases by identifying common themes across research participants is an established tradition within qualitative research (Riessman, 2008) and a thematic analysis allowed fluid movement between primary data, academic literature and policy documents. The identification of themes however did not emerge in a vacuum and as Downes (2011) observes, interpretation of data is “a dialectical interplay that cannot be reduced simply to information processing” (p. 68).

The approach adopted in this thesis is what Newby (2010) described as template analysis i.e. using a template of agreed codes, at least in the initial stages, to interpret data. Therefore although transcripts were read and analysed as eighteen individual cases before coding began, a template was used in order to thematically analyse the data more effectively. This approach differs from other types of qualitative analysis such as grounded theory, where the strategy is to let the codes emerge from the data (bottom up). This template, or framework of agreed concepts, was used to code the life history interviews. The template itself was developed from a combination of three sources; the main and complementary research questions, the theoretical framework employed, and evidence and knowledge gained through the review of empirical and policy related literature. Using a template to analyse themes involved using pre-defined codes to guide analysis and the interview schedules (which had been constructed using the three

sources identified) were used as a starting point for constructing an initial template. Although there is a lack of literature on use of templates in analysing qualitative work in comparison to other approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis (cf. King, 2004 for overview) it has a number of advantages. It is for instance particularly well suited to computer assisted analysis and importantly also has the advantage of forcing the researcher to take a structured and systematic approach to analysing data; an advantage which is particularly useful in light of the fact that as with all symbolic interactionist approaches there is a danger of over-descriptiveness. The initial template was applied in the pilot interviews and then evolved however as the data was analysed and an inductive approach was then used to create additional codes.

### **Coding Framework Employed**

Coding data however is not data analysis but is a part of the analytical process and while coding data is necessary, it can lead to the fragmentation and decontextualising of the narrative; an attempt was made to address this by providing profiles of a number of prisoner learners in the analysis chapters and by providing a context for quotes used to illustrate points being made by prisoner learners. The use of life history profiles was influenced by Antikainen et al's life history work which demonstrated how effectively individual cases could be incorporated into analysis and discussion; in essence Antikainen et al's work maintained the advantages of a life history method but presented it in an accessible way, demonstrating the strength of the methodology and providing a more holistic and contextualising account of a person's lived experience.

Collection of data in qualitative research often results in large volumes of information being gathered (Bryman and Teevan, 2005) and this thesis was no exception; the life history interviews generated over 29 hours of audio and eight hundred pages of transcribed interviews. Data in this project was analysed and the qualitative software package Nvivo (Versions 8 and 9) was used to support the coding process. Preliminary coding used a template based on the topic questions contained in the interview schedules as a guide, and as referred to previously the interview schedules were designed thematically and with the analysis stage in mind.

The coding itself was piloted with initially six interviews coded (the first and second interviews with Alan, Michael and Nick). Following coding of the six interviews 78 free nodes were created (see Appendix F for list of initial codes and Appendix G for map of how these codes evolved). The report on the free nodes and their references made it easier to see duplication in codes and a number of revisions were made. The preliminary coding of these six interviews for example revealed that drugs were mentioned in every interview with 26 specific references. This was despite the fact that there was no direct question on drugs in the interview schedules (and it did not appear in the initial template used). In the subsequent coding of all interviews, drugs became a code and the code itself was divided into references to “Drugs in Prison” and “Drugs Outside Prison”. This code created the foundation for further analysis in both Chapter Six, which focused on prisoner learners’ experiences of prison life, and Chapter Seven which analysed prisoner learners’ previous educational and life experiences.

NVivo was used as a means of retrieving and storing data. David and Sutton (2011) note that while computer assisted qualitative software data analysis can be used to efficiently code and explore large quantities of textual data “such software cannot ‘analyse’ data either in the philosophical sense of drawing logical and meaningful conclusions from data, or in the mathematical/statistical sense of providing clear, simple formulas or numerical patterns that ‘sum up’ the data” (p. 422). Analysis in this thesis therefore was undertaken by working through the data generated and establishing and relating data gathered back to the theoretical framework and literature review.

Although life history was the selected methodological approach employed in this research, its use has been the subject of criticism and specific challenges involving the method have been made and identified. The following section discusses the implications of these for this thesis.

### **Criticisms and Challenges in Adopting a Life History Approach**

Plummer (1983) notes that life history research prioritises the phenomenological role of the lived experience and the ways in which people interpret their own lives and the world around them. There are however many challenges, to both the researcher and participants, in life history interviewing. One criticism of the life history approach is

that it fails to see the whole picture and that in analysing individual perspectives (Fieldhouse, 1996 unfavourably described it as “obscuring the big picture and policy studies with fine, meaningless detail”, p. 117). in effect the broader historical context is neglected. Merrill and West (2009) attribute the work of Michel Foucault as influential to this view. As discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, there is very little sense of the individual in Foucault’s work which is logical given that he viewed subjectivity as constructed within various power-knowledge formations and in ways in which humans are only vaguely aware of, if at all. However, while cognisant of this criticism, this thesis agreed with Plummer’s view that a life history cannot be told without a constant reference to historical change and because of that, it is possible to attain a focus on historical change although the focus is, by necessity, a dual one which moves between the biographical history of the person and the broader social history of their life-span.

The point has already been made in this chapter that people’s lives are often episodic and full of contradictions. Munro (1998), who used a life history method to analyse the lives of female teachers discussed the intricacies of the method in trying to access “a life” or certainly aspects of it. Plummer (1983) has argued that the life history approach is best placed to capture the complexities of a life, Bourdieu (1987), however, has criticised the method and argued that people telling their story are themselves putting an artificial order on their story. While accepting Bourdieu’s criticism, this thesis contends that in using a life history approach, rather than other research methods, the participant has more opportunity and power to structure the order of their story and it is their perspective on their story which is worthy of consideration. Nonetheless, the life-history approach and this double hermeneutic, i.e. the researcher must interpret the participant’s interpretation of their own story, does illustrate the challenge to the researcher particularly at the analysis stage.

In a life history approach participants are asked to give a retrospective account of their experiences and De Vaus (2001) makes the point that people’s recollections will be interpreted or affected according to subsequent events and experiences and that time may have distorted people’s recollections to some degree. However, he maintains that the “retrospective approach is most reliable when we are dealing with memorable events” (p. 128). Antikainen et al (1996) states that memory is a key requirement for

producing a life story however Freeman, Freeman and Freeman (1987) rightly make the point that humans are not passive recording devices, rather they are active organisers of information. They argue that the tendency of an individual to recall elements of a particular event depends on two factors: the degree of development of a person's mental structure and the degree to which the element is typical. In researching the impact of education on the lives of prisoners, the reliability of participant's memory as an accurate record of events is of less importance however to the research than participants' memory of events and their interpretation of events, in other words meaning rather than simply knowledge is sought.

A life history approach also poses many practical concerns, issues that are heightened by the environment of the prison. These issues include ethical matters, the wellbeing of participants, the setting of the interview and the role of the researcher in analysing research. Wicks and Whiteford (2006), who employed a life-history approach to analyse the experience of Australian women who were over 65 years, acknowledge the burdens that may be placed on participants such as being able and willing to spend time being interviewed. They also argue that participants need to be "psychologically robust" as the telling of experiences may evoke both positive and negative memories. This has particular resonance for this research and was one rationale for the use of teachers in the prison school as "gatekeepers" and the reason why prisoner learners were interviewed at least twice with the second interview being used as a means to verify their feelings about the first interview.

This thesis examined, using a life history approach, how prisoner learners experience a school within the total institution of the prison. The research work however did have limitations. The focus of the thesis, for example, was on accessing a prisoner learner perspective and the perspectives of other stakeholders such as teachers and prison officers, were not sought. A review the literature vindicated this approach as it revealed the relative dearth of literature specific to prison education and the need for research to specifically elicit the views of prisoners. Given the position of prisoners as marginalised, and with little opportunity to have their views heard, the decision to focus exclusively on prisoner learners, while acknowledged as a limitation, can be justified. Importantly too, the views of prisoner learners on relationships with teachers and prison officers were sought.

Hawley (2011) reported that key challenges identified by the 2010 European Conference on Prison Education and Training included the growing diversity of the prison population. The prisoner learners who participated in the research were all Irish and this is a limitation. The prisoner learners who took part were not randomised but were interviewed on the basis of criterion sampling. The sample criteria for this thesis included that participants be both prisoners and attending the prison school. Therefore in examining how prisoner learners experienced a school within the total institution of the prison, only those who were attending the prison school, took part. Thus, while prisoners are a marginalised group, this thesis, in not accessing the views of prisoners' who had chosen not to engage in education, did not have the opportunity to access a potentially more marginalised group within the prison.

However, despite these limitations, this thesis did succeed in accessing the education and life experiences of 18 prisoner learners in three prison sites and it is envisaged that this work will add to existing research and act as a counter balance to prison deprivation literature which often characterises prisoners as subordinate and homogenous.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

A life history approach was employed in this thesis to answer the research question of how do prisoner learners experience a school within the total institution of the prison. This chapter began by providing a rationale for the use of a life history approach and four reasons were submitted to support its use. Firstly, adopting a life history approach facilitated the gathering of data that captured the breadth and depth of the lived experiences. Secondly, the life history approach has a tradition of use with marginalised groups and, as Chapter Three discussed, prisoners have been identified as a particularly marginalised group. Thirdly, while this thesis seeks to examine how prisoner learners experience a school within the total institution of the prison, it does so by focusing on prisoner learners' perspectives. A life history approach assisted in prioritising the subjective voice of those incarcerated as prisoner learners were able to reveal their educational and life story and give meaning to their experiences. Finally, the term "life-long" is, in education, increasingly used at policy level (Alheit and Dausien, 2007) and in a thesis which examines adult male prisoner learners' experience of a

school within a prison, it was judged appropriate to adopt a method that incorporated the life cycle.

This chapter also discussed the use of theory in qualitative research and provided an explanation for the use of a theoretical framework. A description and defence of the non-linear research approach was given. The prison context in which research was undertaken had implications for this research and these were identified. The prison itself as well as presenting challenges for the researcher also demanded particular ethical considerations and these were outlined. The pilot study, completed as part of the research process, was reported on with particular emphasis on the themes it identified. The sample and sampling framework employed, as well as how access was negotiated, were outlined. The chapter also revealed the template analysis approach which was used to thematically analyse the data. The chapter concluded by acknowledging critiques of the life history and identifying the challenges involved, and importantly how these challenges were met.

Analysis of the data from the life history interviews resulted in identifying a number of themes and these themes were subsequently organised into three chapters which focused on life within the total institution of the prison, prisoner learners' previous life and educational experiences and finally analysis of their experiences of the prison school. The following chapter, the first of the analysis chapters, begins by analysing the institution of the prison itself and prisoner learners' lives within it. The prison and living within it was a subject in which prisoner learners returned to throughout the life history interviews and the impact of being in prison on their participation in prison education was pivotal. The prisoner learners who participated in the life history interviews were learners but were learners within the prison system and remained confined within the total institution of the prison. This first analysis chapter therefore concentrates on prisoner learner perspectives on life within the total institution of the prison and the prison culture that these learners, by the very fact of being prisoners, found themselves immersed in.



## **Chapter Six: Analysis of Life Within the Total Institution of the Prison from the Perspectives of Prisoner Learners**

*Like, you're in here and around the prison all day you're talking about prison things, not really minding what goes on in the outside, it seems like a different world altogether in here, which it is.*

(Ian, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

In addressing the key research question in this thesis of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, it became evident that the prison itself, “a different world” as Ian describes it, was a subject that participants returned to again and again during the course of the life history interviews. As Munoz (2009) has argued, learning cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place, and it was important therefore in this thesis to begin analysis of the data by first focusing on the context of the prison institution from the perspective of prisoner learners. Life history interviews with those who attended prison schools were conducted in three prisons in the Republic of Ireland; Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick's Institution and Limerick Prison and critical reflections and insights made by prisoner learners in the course of these interviews to both the prison they were currently confined to and, in some cases, to other prisons in which they had been incarcerated in the past, underscored their position as knowledgeable agents, with often extensive experience of prison life. Profiles of two participants with different experiences of a total institution are included in this chapter. Alan, 35, was serving a four year sentence in Mountjoy Prison, while Nick, incarcerated in St. Patrick's Institution, and at 20 years, one of the younger participants in this research, had experienced many years of incarceration, both in St. Patrick's Institution and in detention centres.

The importance of “time” within an institution had been found to be a common element of both Goffman's (1961) analysis of a total institution and Foucault's (1977) writings on the prison and this analysis chapter on life within the total institution of the prison begins by focusing on how prisoners “do time” through outlining the prison routine and analysing what it means from the perspective of the prisoners who choose to attend the prison school. In interpreting the life history interviews using Goffman's theoretical perspective of the total institution in particular, the chapter then progresses

by relating the world of the prison as experienced by prisoner learners to Goffman's account of a total institution. Goffman (1961), in analysing the process of institutionalisation and the effects of a total institution on those incarcerated within it, had identified key features of a total institution; the mortifications that inmates of total institutions face, the formal administration of the total institution and the presence of an institutional underlife. A number of themes were identified from the life history interviews that resonated with the theoretical perspective of Goffman, notably his account of mortifications and how the institution itself operates in terms of the staff inmate divide. Following completion of the data coding process, two examples of such mortifications emerged strongly from the life history interviews: controlled access to family and friends through visits and the loss of a sense of safety that incarceration within the total institution involved.

Drug use within the prison emerged during the life history interviews as a significant theme of prison life and is explored in the final part of this chapter. Goffman's analysis (1961) had been the result of fieldwork carried out over 50 years ago within the medical context of a psychiatric hospital where drugs would have been prescribed and although his analysis of life within a total institution found that there was no market for non-prescribed drugs in the hospital he was based in, the emergence of drugs as a theme in this thesis, in contrast to Goffman's experiences, supports the concept of a total institution as a dynamic rather than static one which can be impacted by developments in wider society. In this thesis therefore the presence of drugs within the total institution and its impact could be seen as a reflection of the emergence of drug use and addiction in society.

Foucault (1977) had stated that the institution of the prison made it possible to quantify the penalty of committing a crime with the variable of time, and this chapter thus begins appropriately with analysis of prisoner learners' perspectives of how time is spent within the total institution of the prison, before progressing to analyse their experience of total institutions with reference to mortifications, including the specific issues raised by prisoner learners in this research, namely the limits placed on access to friends and family and the loss of a sense of safety that imprisonment involves.

## **“Doing Time” Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

The structure of time was an important feature of both Goffman’s analysis (1961) of a total institution and Foucault’s account (1977) of the institution of the prison and was a theme that featured prominently in life history interviews with prisoner learners who reported that prisoners were locked in their cell for 17-18 hours per day. Goffman (1961) observed how a feature of a total institution was a sense among inmates of time being wasted or destroyed and as both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) acknowledge both time and space in prison are strictly regimented. The prison routine, as expected, was tightly controlled and indeed the routine, as reported by prisoner learners, was very similar in all three sites as the following table indicates.

Table 6.1 Prison routine

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time</b>
Mornings generally began with cells being unlocked and prisoners collecting their breakfast and returning to their cells to eat and to be locked up again.	8.15
Prisoners were then unlocked around 9.20 and some prisoners went to the prison school/ workshops/ work/ gym or queued for assistance to see the governor/chaplain/dentist/doctor.	Approx. 9.20
Prisoners lined up to collect their dinner; all the prisons visited as part of this research had their main meal in the middle of the day. Each prisoner took food back to their cells and the cells were locked and not re-opened until around 14.00.	Approx. 12.10
Cells unlocked at 14.00 prisoners then queued for the prison school/workshops/gym/work as with the morning session.	14.00
Prisoners collected their evening tea and again returned to their cells which were locked.	16.15
Prisoners unlocked from cells	17.20
Evening Recreation Time	Approx. 17.20-19.00
Prisoners collect a hot drink and a snack and return to their cell to be locked up for the night.	19.15

The routine schedule reported by prisoner learners across the three prison sites demonstrates the strictly controlled order of life which is a feature, according to Goffman (1961), of all total institutions. The table above also highlights the amount of time prisoners spend in their cells and the fact that prisoners also eat in their cells; again emphasising the nature of a total institution and its impact on inmates. It is also evident

from the table that the prison school day is a short one and classes are limited to two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. As Owen notes, the prison routine changes only on Saturday and Sunday when there are no classes or workshops on those days:

Yeah the weekend kind of drags in because you're sitting out in the yard with other people waiting for the drugs, waiting for visits, or just acting the bollox in the yard, drags in, Sunday is, Sunday is really the worst day. (Owen, 20, St. Patrick's Institution)

Owen's observations illustrate how in a tightly regimented environment, the weekend, with its reduction of structured activities, has an impact on how slowly "time" goes. His observations also demonstrate how an environment, in which boredom is a real possibility, can create a situation in which illegal activities such as drug use can be tempting. However, although the prison routine may be controlled there are, as the tabular account of the prison routine illustrates, choices in which prisoners can demonstrate agency; prisoners can for example choose to go to school or workshops or spend their time in the yard. The ability therefore of prisoners to make decisions is in contrast with Foucault's rendering of inmates as "docile bodies" (1977). Chris, Kevin, and Robert stressed the importance of doing something with their time in prison and keeping busy while others, for example Eric and Michael, emphasised the importance of simply having a routine:

You just, you need to get into a routine in this place. If you don't have a routine your head's be all over the place. .... I was getting into a routine, doing me own thing for a while then once you get into your routine you're grand. You're used to doing the same things every week, you know what I mean. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

In order to "do time", as Eric indicates you have to control time within the very real structural constraints that are in operation. Goffman (1961) had recognised that inmates respond to incarceration within a total institution in different ways ranging from a situation withdrawal, a refusal to co-operate, becoming institutionalised in the sense of the institution becoming "home" and what Goffman termed "conversion" in which

inmates appear to incorporate the official view of themselves and begin to act out the role of the perfect inmate. Goffman acknowledged that inmates may use a combination of responses in order to resist the impact of the total institution, however a number of prisoner learners did identify themselves as “model prisoners”. Frank, for example, described how he is considered a model prisoner and is treated as such by prison officers, revealing that he is getting through his sentence by keeping to himself, maintaining a routine and not giving the prison officers, in his words, “extra paperwork”:

I’m left alone and it’s like they know like every time they look in I’d have a book in me hand or I don’t cause any grief or give them any extra paperwork to fill out at the end of the day, so. They just, I’m in two and a half years now, so. And I know most of them; most of the officers that [inaudible]. Most of the officers that really matter anyway would know me face, you know, wouldn’t know me name, you know, would have heard of my name - oh, model prisoner this, model prisoner - like I’ve often been called [inaudible] we’ll give you anything you want, you’re a model prisoner. Like I’ve, I don’t think, I don’t think I fucking licked anyone’s arse in any way in here. Just kind of done me daily routine and minding me own business basically. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

Goffman (1961) in his work had identified inmates in total institutions who were able to not simply adapt to the system but in essence to make it work for them and in Frank’s case it has resulted in him being given the label of “model prisoner”. Frank’s way of “doing time” illustrates his response to the institutional system in operation and his willingness to work within the confines of that system. Goffman argues that entrance into a total institution impacts on an individual’s sense of self and interestingly, as Frank notes, many officers do not know his name but instead refer to him by the label of “model prisoner”. Kevin was also considered a model prisoner and was a “trustee” i.e. a worker in the prison whose status means he is considered trustworthy and can have access (although supervised) to different wings. Keeping busy was of huge importance to Kevin but he had also grasped how the institution worked, a fact which Kevin attributed to his army background. The following incident illustrates his insight into the workings of the system and his knowledge and acceptance

of the “game” that is being played. It also underscores Goffman’s argument that the previous life experiences of inmates affects how well they adapt to institutional life:

So you have to use the system. Maybe play the system, I don’t know. But look, when I was in the kitchen you go out on a visit, you’ve half an hour and on a special you get ten minutes. That’s your visit. But because you’re working and an officer see, when you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing, you’re not rocking the boat, you don’t give them any abuse, they’ll look after you. They’ll give you an extra ten minutes with your wife or your girlfriend, you know. I was in the kitchen, officer came to the door ‘Have you any milk, Kevin’ ‘Hang on, I’ll go down and get you some in the fridge.’ Another fella standing there said ‘There’s milk there.’ I said, ‘Ah, it’s a bit warm.’ ‘Ah, fuck them anyway, just give them, let them fuck off.’ That was, they heard that. Now I’m going down to get them the milk in the fridge because it’s cold – not because I’m trying to do anything good for them. I mean I’d want a cold milk that was, I wouldn’t like milk that’s after being lying, right. So two of us put out on a visit together, half an hour visit. I get an hour; he gets his half an hour. And he comes back in and says to me, ‘cause the same officers, the officers were out there that were looking for the milk. ‘Fucking half an hour. Who the fuck do they think they are?’ I said [name of other prisoner], ‘Look what happened this morning.’ ‘Oh, that doesn’t have anything to do with it.’ I says, ‘it does.’ You have to do, play the system, do it right. Let them see that you have a bit of respect for them and they’ll show you the same respect back. And that’s the way the system works in here. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

The notion of a game being played evokes an earlier Goffman work (1959) in which he drew upon a theatrical metaphor in order to explore identity and how individuals present themselves in terms of values, cultural norms and audience expectations. Thus if, using dramaturgical analysis, life is a drama, we can see how, in the above incident, Kevin has a perceptive understanding of his role, the prison officer’s role and how this “scene” does not exist in isolation but rather has implications for events later on. In contrast, his fellow prisoner has a more narrow understanding of his part and the prison officer’s role. Kevin’s ability to as he says “play the system” makes his time go quicker both in terms of keeping him busy and in getting privileges. His

ability to recognise and work “the system” demonstrates his institutional knowledge of which his fellow prisoner has a limited capacity. It also shows how even in such a regimented environment, individuals still have choices they can make. Robert noted that there were essentially two ways to doing jail:

You can either do jail in your bed or you can do jail by keeping busy and I chose to keep busy and I’ve learnt lots about myself and about what I like doing and what I don’t like doing. (Robert, 38, Limerick Prison)

All the prisoner learners who took part in the research had demonstrated agency by electing to go to the school. However, in Mountjoy and Limerick Prison it was possible for prisoners not to engage in any constructive activity at all (either through choice or through structural constraints e.g. those on protection i.e. prisoners isolated from other prisoners). This fact was commented on by many of the prisoner learners who took part in this research (Alan, Ben, David, Frank, Kevin, Peter, and Robert). Goffman (1961) had identified a sense of time being wasted or destroyed as a dominant theme in inmate culture within a total institution and prisoner learners drew attention to how other prisoners wasted their time in prison in contrast to their own behaviour. Frank, for example, was keen to differentiate himself from other prisoners who he said, treated a four year sentence like “a sleepover”:

I seen the way they went in right, came out with no qualifications, came out just the same as they went in, as if the last four years was just a sleepover for them, d’you know. They come back out to do the same thing.

Alan and Kevin described this inertia in relation to the presence of drugs and drug addicts in the prison and Alan observed:

because a lot of fellas here that haven’t got schooling, haven’t got this that and the other and they come in and go without it, they come in and fuck around with drugs, fuck around with other cejjits and then leave either the same or worse than when they came in. (Alan, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

A profile of Alan, who was serving his first sentence in prison, is contained below.

#### **Profile of Alan**

Alan is a 35 year old married man with one child. He is serving a four-year sentence for a drugs offence. It is his first time in prison and he is the first in his family to be imprisoned. He described how his personality is different in the prison and in his desire to "keep my head down" he would not be the gregarious person he would be on the outside. He first started attending the prison school when he lost his job in the prison for disciplinary reasons. He currently attends art and English classes – although he uses the English class to teach himself how to type on a spare computer, which is in the classroom. He writes cards for another prisoner who cannot read/write; this prisoner does not attend the prison school and Alan suspects that this is due to embarrassment and the need to maintain a "hard man" persona. Alan attends school five days a week, morning and afternoon and is currently writing a book on his life. He acknowledged that prison school was a hard environment to work in and he questioned some prisoner learners' motivation for attending and criticised the messing that took place in the classes. He questioned the lack of rehabilitation in prison and the presence of drugs in the prison and estimated, based on his observations of the prison school, that the prison school could only accommodate 50 prisoners at any one time. He noted that the first time he saw heroin was in the prison and reflected too on the role that drugs had played in his life. He began to smoke hash while in the third year of secondary school and later moved on to ecstasy and then finally cocaine. He noted that "drugs dictated a lot of my life and ruined a lot of it too". He misses his child who was not yet two years when he was first sentenced and although he sees her at least once a week, he finds the visits upsetting too. He hopes his child will go to college in the future.

Alan left a private secondary school at 15 following his inter-cert, in order to attend a year long course in a further education college with the explicit aim of beginning a two-year course in catering college. This was done as his parents refused to let him leave school without having an alternative and he had worked out that the only third-level course, which would accept him without a Leaving Certificate, was the catering course. He worked in a variety of jobs in Ireland and abroad before starting his own successful business which he sold in order to move abroad. He ran another successful business in another country, however he used the profits from this business to support what had become an expensive drug habit. He described being thankful for being arrested and saying to the guard that he had probably saved his life as he felt the way his life and drug habit were escalating he was likely to either die through overdosing or being killed by a criminal over drugs. He plans, once he is released from prison to begin a new business. He also spoke of perhaps being able to go into schools to speak about the dangers of drugs to young people.

Alan's use of the prison school to attend art classes and to write his book illustrate the prison education service's adult education ethos and also the objectives of the service which include helping prisoners cope with their sentences, achieve personal development and establish a capacity for lifelong learning. As can be seen from his profile, Alan's life had been a mixture of success in business but also increasingly chaotic due to his drug habit and Alan's incarceration was initially welcomed by him as it offered him the opportunity to re-structure his life within the very structured



environment of the prison. He maintained his love of being busy in the prison through his engagement with the prison school and his willingness to help others is evident in his writing of greeting cards for a fellow prisoner who cannot read/write. His belief that this fellow prisoner did not attend the school because of a desire not to appear weak to others illustrates the importance given to maintaining a particular image while incarcerated.

It is also noteworthy that this prisoner was able to indicate his need for assistance in writing, not to the prison school but to a fellow prisoner, and this could have implications for how prison education services could be developed. This willingness to help other prisoners illustrates that the prison can be a contradictory place, a place, as Alan indicated in his life history interview, where violent incidents often occurred but also, as he showed too, a place where prisoners did support and help other prisoners. In view of Goffman's (1961) analysis of the impact of the total institution on an inmate's sense of self, Alan's revelation that he had to adjust his personality while in prison is also particularly relevant. Above all however, Alan was trenchant in his criticism of the prison and how it worked in particular in relation to the prevalence of drugs.

Drugs were identified as a theme in the data and are examined later on in this chapter. Nonetheless its impact on the workings in the prison and on other prisoners emerged strongly throughout the interviews with prisoner learners. Goffman (1961) argued that when prisoners entered the total institution, the institution did not substitute their culture for something already formed; thus if prisoners entered an institution with a way of life and understanding of the world which was taken for granted up until the time they were admitted to the institution, the institution itself may not change that view. In this light, Frank's observations on people leaving an institution the same as when they went in, makes sense. Goffman's analysis is also reinforced by Peter's opinion on why other prisoners made so little use of time while in prison; he argued that they were merely carrying on an ingrained pattern of behaviour:

A lot of the lads would be the same on the outside now, like I said I'm in on drugs but even when I was on drugs, but even when I was doing drugs and that on the outside, I was in college as well, or sometimes I was doing, I might have

been repeating a module in college, doing a few hours a week in college, working 40 or 50 hours and then doing the drug dealing and that as well, so, don't know that just the way, I prefer to be busy but some of the lads in here, they would have been out of school since they were 13,14, they would never have worked, they would have been on the dole all the time, and crime would have been the only thing they did with their time and they're not going to change when they arrive in here. (Peter, 30, Limerick Prison)

Kevin made the point that the decision to do something with time (in his example, go to school) was an investment in a future, a future which would not be the same as the life he had lead previously. This resonates with Leondari's (2007) and Husman and Lens' (1999) argument that school and education are both by definition future orientated but also echoes Burnett and Maruna's (2004) study which found that the feeling of having control over the future was an important element in the study of desistance. This has implications for this thesis as it suggests that prisoner learners by choosing to engage with prison education are demonstrating some control and confidence over their future and illustrates the way in which education in prison can function.

In terms of "doing time" St. Patrick's Institution offered a slightly different regime which warrants special attention.

### **"Doing Time" within the total institution of St. Patrick's Institution**

St. Patrick's Institution kept a similar prison routine to Mountjoy and Limerick Prison however it differed to the other prison sites visited as part of this research on a number of issues. Since March 2007 all prisoners in St. Patrick's Institution must leave their cells to do something (other than be in the prison yard) such as go to the library, gym, educational classes and workshops. In Mountjoy and Limerick Prison on the other hand it was possible to spend time simply in the prison yard. Also, in St. Patrick's both remand and sentenced prisoners are housed in the same prison albeit on separate wings and at the time of the life history interviews prisoners under 18 were still being contained in St. Patrick's, again on separate wings.

Davies' (1989) critique of Goffman's concept of a total institution and the argument that some total institutions may be more total than others is supported by data from the life history interviews conducted across three different prison sites. Hugh, for example, makes an interesting distinction between St. Patrick's and the other prison institutions he has knowledge of: "Here is very a lot different to, Mountjoy, Cloverhill, here is the worst prison in Ireland, it's not even a prison, it's an institution, like".

Of the eight prisoner learners from St. Patrick's Institution who took part in this research, four of them (Hugh, John, Liam, Owen), unprompted, reported being eager to go to Mountjoy Prison – a surprising revelation considering how damning the independent official monitoring reports are on conditions in Mountjoy (cf. Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee Annual Reports 2008, 2009, 2010; Report on the Inspection of Mountjoy Prison, Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2009; the Council of Europe CPT Reports, 2011, 2007). In the context of the reported conditions in Mountjoy Prison, the desire by some prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution to go there must serve as an indictment of conditions in St. Patrick's Institution. The common reason to emerge from the data, as to why Mountjoy was preferable to St. Patrick's, was "respect", the lack of it in St. Patrick's and the perception that it was different in Mountjoy, a perception many of the prisoner learners had gained from other prisoners who had experienced both regimes. Liam however although interviewed in St. Patrick's Institution had spent a week in Mountjoy prison and based on his lived experience identified the issue of respect on the part of prison officers towards prisoners as a key difference between the two prisons:

I was in the Joy, I think there's a big difference with the officers over there, I think they respect, I don't know, there's just a difference yeah, think they get away with more over here like, in the Joy there'd be riots. (Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

John also noted the difference in responses of prison officers between the two prisons:

Because all the officers over in Mountjoy, they know what the story is. They're all like older over there, they know where their place is over there, they don't

fuckin' step out of line, they'll be decent to you if you'll be decent to them, if you were decent to the cunts in here they would just take advantage of you. You be fuckin', you be fuckin' rude or mean to them, you know what I mean, they just have it in for you. (John, 19, St Patrick's Institution)

While Kevin demonstrates his ability to “play the game”, John’s observation suggest a different “game” is being played in St. Patrick’s Institution, reinforcing Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of the roles people play in life although in this case the roles and the conventions that order them are not clear. John states that in Mountjoy prison officers “know where their place is”, they understand their role whereas he suggests that that understanding is perceived by prisoner learners as absent in St. Patrick’s Institution. It is apparent however that there is a power relationship between prison officers and prisoners in both institutions. Giddens (1984) argued that in a situation where a prisoner might at first seem powerless and in a subordinate role, the very fact that they are an actor in a relationship gives them degrees of power. He refers to this as a “dialect of control” and Devine (2003) in her analysis of school children also uses Giddens’ “dialect of control” as a way of explaining how schools, while in firm control of timetables and rules, cannot control everything, children will still manage to carve out “spheres of influence”. The life history interviews suggest that Mountjoy Prison in contrast to St. Patrick’s Institution offered more possibilities for inmates to carve out “spheres of influence”. Owen, for example, was also hoping to be moved to Mountjoy Prison, again on the basis of the difference in treatment by the prison officers but also in relation to the absence of control measures in behaviour, as his following comment explains:

it’s so noisy and the screws aren’t really that nice, know what I mean, over there it’s real relaxed, you can do what you want, you can go to school, you can stay on the landing, whatever you want, you can have a laugh, it’s a bit strict here. (Owen, 20, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Interestingly, Liam refers to the greater “freedom” that Mountjoy Prison seems to represent; a point he repeats in the course of his interviews:

That's why most of the young fellas in here want to go to the Joy, yeah, that's the problem with the officers over here [St. Patrick's] like they treat you like a child and they expect you to behave like a man you know what I mean. (Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

Prisoner learners identified life within St. Patrick's Institution as being different to the culture of other prisons. Liam outlines the key difference between St. Patrick's Institution and the other institutions; in being an institution for young offenders it operates with a more regimented structure and was, as one prisoner learner described it, "childish". The enforced wearing of colour coding T-shirts to denote prison status was an indication of this and was (as Hugh observed) reminiscent of school. Indeed this very issue emerged during the recent Ombudsman for Children's Report (2011) which featured consultations with under eighteen year olds in St. Patrick's Institution and led the Ombudsman for children to recommend that "prison management consult as required with young people and their families to see whether it is feasible for young people to wear more of their own clothes" (p. 32).

The difference of course between school and St. Patrick's Institution was that these men were not children, they were legally adults who had been convicted of adult crimes and now found themselves in a system that reinforced their youth and controlled their level of agency. The desire of some prisoner learners in St. Patrick's to go to Mountjoy Prison also illustrated how they positioned thoughts on their future firmly within the realm of the prison which again evokes Ian's words in which he observes how the prison (to a prisoner) becomes the world. This point is returned to in Chapter Eight where motivations to attend the prison school are examined.

For Liam, Mountjoy was simply "much better" in his view, in comparison to St. Patrick's, both in terms of education provision and in terms of how you were treated:

When I get sentenced now in July I want to get the Joy, there's a lot more of me mates and all over there like [ok] just it's a much better, it's not the cleanest jail, there's no toilet or sink in the cell but em, you get more freedom, you know what I mean, ah it's a lot better yeah, there's just more freedom, you know what

I mean, the officers aren't on your back like they are in here. (Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

Thus emerging from the data collected, issues such as respect were prioritised by prisoner learners rather than issues of hygiene and cleanliness and this is a perspective which is found too in Liebling's (2004) study in which she reported that respect was one of the key values and always one of the first values to emerge in discussions about what matters to prisoners in prison. The importance of respect within the total institution of the prison has implications too for prison education and how it is experienced by prisoner learners.

### **“Doing Time”: Workshops and Work Within the Prisons**

Both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) discuss the issue of work within a total institution. While Goffman was more positive about the benefits that inmates may gain from choosing to work, Foucault had argued that through work in the prison, convicts are transformed into “docile” workers. The latest Annual Report from the IPS (2010) estimates that 800 prisoners across all prisons are engaging in work or attending workshops although it acknowledges that the moratorium on public service recruitments and promotions did impact on the services and facilities provided. Attending workshops or working in the prison allowed prisoners the opportunity to gain privileges (e.g. money to buy own food or cigarettes or to be given priority for single cells), all of which could be used to lessen the “mortifications” that the prison system imposed. The workshops are run by prison officers and not all the prisoner learners who took part in this research participated in them. Ben for example chose not to attend. He was conscious that a staff member he did not get on with was involved with one of the workshops, a factor that strongly influenced his decision not to take part despite the incentive of more money:

You can get an extra fifteen quid a week for the workshops but I wouldn't be bothered. 'Cause, eh, there's one of the staff members down there, I don't see eye to eye with like and, em, I just wouldn't go down there. (Ben, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

Eric also was not interested in going to workshops on the basis that the workshops available to him did not provide certificates and qualifications and these were something he was conscious of needing. The Report on Mountjoy from the Office of Inspector of Prisons (2009) detailed the workshops available in the prison and the numbers attending the workshops and acknowledges that only participation in the computer workshop leads to any form of accreditation, a fact that was a particular source of frustration for Frank:

I was over in B wing for a while, em, and they have the carpentry shops over there. And I was asking ‘Can I become a carpenter? Can I learn a trade with you? Can you actually give me the exams?’ This was how I was speaking to them. Yer man that was in charge over there at the time and, em, he was saying ‘No, no, no, you can’t do anything like that’. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

However of the number of prisoner learners who were interviewed as part of this research, it was interesting to note just how many were also choosing to work in the prison or who had worked in the prison in the past; a fact which underlines their motivation to keep busy while incarcerated. Alan for example had worked in the prison grounds making concrete blocks. He lost his job and this was the key motivator for him to attend the prison school. Peter also worked in the kitchen before he lost his job, also for disciplinary reasons. Of the eighteen prisoner learners interviewed, ten had been or still were working in the prison. Kevin, who has always worked in the prison, outlined the benefits that were gained from working, apart from keeping busy:

I get €4 a day, that’s what we get paid, plus little perks here and there and everything, you know. I mean I have a kettle in me cell, I have, make sandwiches, you can do anything, you know. It’s because we work, and it’s always the lads in the kitchen, it’s always the bakery staff. They’re all looked after because they work, because if the system had to pay for kitchen staff to come in from outside and bakery staff to come in from outside, sure we’d be only getting an egg a day for the rest of, it’s as simple as that. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

As can be seen from Kevin's quote, the benefits of work are more than just keeping busy. There is a financial incentive (although a minimal one by the outside world's standards) but there are also the "little perks" such as a kettle and the ability to make sandwiches that minimise the institutional impact on an inmate's prison experience. Peter also outlines a benefit of working within Limerick Prison. He explained the existence of an unofficial hierarchy which meant that if you were a worker in the prison your chances of getting an individual cell increased. This benefit can be seen as being significant; being able to control your personal space within the confines of a cell minimises the institutional impact on an individual. Goffman (1961) noted that while in the outside world pay and status may be motivating factors to do certain jobs, in a total institution the incentive to work is often removed and is certainly affected. As a consequence there will be different motives to work and different attitudes towards it. Goffman observed that "the individual who was work-oriented on the outside tends to become demoralised by the work system of the total institution" (p. 21). Prisoner learners who worked in the prison did not seem to be demoralised by the menial nature of the work they undertook but rather focused on the advantages that working gave them. Work, and the implicit and explicit rewards that it offered, is a part of the privilege system that Goffman (1961) identifies as a key feature in inmate culture.

Access to privileges and being punished both had an impact on how inmates spent their time. Goffman (1961) argues that the privilege system and its rewards for obedient behaviour provide inmates with a way of re-organising the self; an act which is significant in total institutions which strip away inmates' sense of self:

The building of a world around these minor privileges is perhaps the most important feature of inmate culture, and yet it is something that cannot easily be appreciated by an outsider, even one who has previously lived through the experience himself. (p. 52)

Goffman argued that the privilege system exists in tandem with a system of punishment and the prison has a range of punishments which include being put on a disciplinary report (P19), being put in an isolation cell, losing your job or place in a workshop and being transferred. A number of prisoner learners spoke of their experience of being punished. Alan and Ben for example were punished for their part in



a riot: Alan lost his job and as a result of that began engaging with the prison school, Ben was transferred to a prison on the other side of the country and put on the punishment wing which meant 23 hours lock up. It would be two months before he would be transferred back to his original prison:

Sent down to Cork prison. Not to the main jail but to the D block where you're locked up twenty-three hours a day, d'you know. No television, no nothing. Prison clothes and all that carry on. But like I felt like I didn't deserve to be sent there like. (Ben, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

Hugh also reported numerous experiences of being placed in "the pad" which was a padded cell prisoners were placed in, naked except for underwear:

It's not frightening, you just get used to it, because they keep putting me down there all the time so, I just laugh at them, but then again you have to let them know that it's not doing anything, it's not breaking you, because but it is really like, wrecking your head, but you just go on to the governor, they keep me in here, but really like you're saying to yourself, why am I saying this and all but you're letting them know, it's not doing anything, they're not going to break you. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Hugh reveals his need to maintain an image in front of the prison officers; he cannot let them know he is suffering, again demonstrating the prison as a site of contested identities but also underlining Goffman's theory on how individuals "manage" identities. John also reported having experience of being punished; he had been transferred to another prison on account of a violent altercation with a prison officer which he recounted:

and he's trying to rush me into the cell when there's still loads of people up in the landings getting their hot water, [inaudible] he started pushing me and all, said 'here, relax, don't be putting your hands on me, you push me again one more time', he gave me a dig on me mouth so he did, fuckin' 'get into your cell', I was walking back up to the cell and then I just snapped I did, he's after hitting me, you know what I mean?

It would be another three months before John would be back in St. Patrick's Institution. When he was transferred to the new prison, he was placed in the punishment landing and he reported being told what the consequences would be for him if he attacked a staff member in that prison:

The governor said when I arrived that, you hit a member of staff in here, you won't be spending three days in the pad you'll be spending three days in a hospital and all. They were all little women they were, I was just laughing.  
(John, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

John's comments illustrate both his need to maintain his identity in front of a prison officer and also the culture of violence present within the institution. His characterisation of the prison officers in the phrase "little women" which was clearly used as a insult also indicates the macho environment of the prison in which masculinity is depicted in terms of strength and power and signs of weakness are regarded as feminine. This resonates with Goffman's finding that a total institution, particularly where there is an absence of heterosexual opportunity "can induce fear of losing one's masculinity" (1961, p. 31).

While both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) acknowledged the significance of the role of time within the institutional sense, Goffman also identified the mortifications that inmates endure as part of the process of incarceration. In interpreting the life history interviews a number of key themes emerged that corresponded with Goffman's analysis and these are analysed in the following section of this chapter.

### **Mortifications: Impact of a Total Institution on an Individual**

Goffman (1961) identified a number of features of a total institution which impacted on the self including the sense of loss an inmate encounters and the series of mortifications that occur upon entry. Although participants did not use the word "mortification", analysis of the data did reveal a number of events which corresponded to Goffman's view of what constitutes a "mortification". The two most prominent mortifications to emerge from the data, following completion of the coding process,

were the controlled access to friends and family during visits and the loss of a sense of safety.

### **Controlled access to friends and family within a total institution**

Goffman (1961) acknowledged that total institutions are incompatible with maintaining meaningful relations and while visits offered the only way of interacting with loved ones, albeit in a controlled environment, Goffman recognised that inmates could not prevent their visitors from seeing them in their potentially humiliating role as prisoner. The prisons in which the interviews took place (Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick's Institution and Limerick Prison) were closed institutions, where prisoners had limited contact with the outside world. Thus visits were an important part of prison culture. All sentenced prisoners are entitled to a visit of 30 minutes a week and prisoners are allowed one six minute phone call a day to contact their family or close friends. Calls are both recorded and monitored and calls are only allowed to be made to a specified list of approved callers. Analysis of the perspectives of prisoner learners in this study on visits, in itself, provide an insightful lens through which to analyse the impact of incarceration as it represents the interaction of the prison regime with the outside world (and the individuals who inhabit that outside world). David, incarcerated in Mountjoy Prison, spoke for example at length of his girlfriend's difficulties at getting the correct documentation in order to be able to visit him in prison. As his girlfriend had no passport, she was asked to furnish the authorities with a birth certificate but that in itself was problematic:

She has no birth cert because of something in her family. She can't, she's arguing with her family. She can't get her sister to come up. She has to, her sister has to bring up the birth cert up as well to verify who their mother. Stuff like that, yeah. But then because that she, she's fighting with her sister she has to write off to some office in Sligo, me girlfriend has to, to get her birth cert. Right? So that's going to take about a year and a half. So in the meantime she has an M10 Form it's called. And she has a picture of her, a little, tiny picture of her stamped on it with the Gardaí. But it had, it was last year's one. And she went to, to, to, they went to the prison there a couple of weeks ago. He says 'Oh no, we can't let you in. That's last year's one.' Now that's not the case at all.

And she says 'No, no, no'. And she went to the police station. And the police said 'No, we're not giving you another one. That one we gives you, does you five year.' She said 'No, they're telling me it has to be up to date.' 'No, no.' You know what I mean? So like what they're doing when it's busy here they're turning people away for any reason possible, d'you know what I mean.

David's frustration at his girlfriend's difficulties in negotiating with both prison officers and guards illustrates the bureaucratic nature of the prison regime and also illustrates how the problems loved ones face in entering the prison have a very tangible impact on those imprisoned. David, for example, reiterated the difficulties caused by how visits are organised; indeed the first interview with David was interrupted as he was called to a visit from which he returned some minutes later, frustrated and irritated, with the news that the visit was for another prisoner who had the same name. David, who had previously been incarcerated in another prison in the country "in the middle of nowhere" spoke of the hardship his girlfriend, who was reliant on public transport, had to endure in order to visit him:

From a bus, train and then another bus. She was nearly eight hours travelling and she, he said 'No, you're too late'. 'Cause if you haven't got a car, even if you have a car it's a three- hour journey down and back, you know. (David, 27, Mountjoy Prison)

David's concern about the impact his incarceration has had on his girlfriend was echoed by Kevin who felt that his family, and particularly his wife, who made considerable efforts to visit him, bore the brunt of his imprisonment remarking "I'm not doing a sentence. I think me wife is actually doing the sentence out there". Although Goffman's (1961) research detailed in particular the impact a total institution had on an individual it is clear that its impact was also felt by family members and that this was in fact something in which prisoners were also acutely aware of and sensitive to. Visits provided contact with the outside world and their existence therefore seemed to operate, as Goffman alluded to, as both a source of comfort and of sorrow as Alan noted when he talks of seeing his young daughter on a visit:

I love visits but the visits upset you too, you know, like I'll be laughing and joking and playing with her, and kissing and hugging her and she'll be showing me her little drawings and stuff like that and then when she goes, kind, it's a real kind of phew, you know, I don't be in the humour for people, you know, I go back to my cell and gather your things, you know. (Alan, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

For Nick, visits too were an upsetting reminder of both his incarceration and his awareness that his brother might also follow his example:

but just looking, looking though the other side of the screen, seeing your little brother there looking at you, taking the same road, route that you went down, know what I mean, don't want it for him, you know what I mean, want him to do well in life, don't want him to end up like me or anyone else here. (Nick, 20, St. Patrick's Institution)

Alan, Ben and Chris spoke of the importance of seeing their children on visits. Chris's experience of visits though was marked as also being a source of tension as by necessity it involved family members interacting with the prison system and the strict security measures that had been recently introduced. These measures had been introduced to deal with the problem of drugs in the prison, a topic which is explored later on in the chapter. He noted that his daughter, her mother and an aunt had recently been upset by the experience of being searched following the sniffer dog indicating that they were in possession of drugs. As a result visits were screened and there was no possibility of physical contact with family or friends, a point Chris, who protested their innocence and insisted he didn't take drugs, felt impacted on his daughter the most:

She's after getting used to four months of coming up on visits where she can jump over and hug me and then she went back, she thought she did something wrong. So it's hard to explain to her that she did nothing wrong. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Visits have been identified as one means of bringing drugs into the prison (cf. Carrigan, 2005) and many prisons, as a security measure, have attempted to counter this supply route by introducing screened visits i.e. where prisoners are separated from their

visitors by a glass screen through which they can see but not touch their visitors. Mountjoy Prison at the time of collating the life history interviews, did not have screened visits as the norm for all prisoners, whereas St. Patrick's Institution did. Seeing his children on a visit was important for Michael, however as he was serving his sentence in St. Patrick's Institution where screened visits are the norm, he was acutely aware of the conditions of screened visits and adamant that his children would not see him in that setting:

It's not that they're frightened like, you've me, I'd be frightened if I came off the visit, there's 25 young fellas out there, they're all saying 'hay are you listening' [inaudible] and I don't know, [inaudible] frighten them really, looking around, what's the story with the glass do you know what I mean [inaudible] roaring through the glass, it would be heart breaking, I would prefer not to do it. (Michael, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Although Michael does not use the word "mortification" it is clear that seeing his children in the situation described above is a "mortification" as defined by Goffman (1961). As a result of those conditions Michael limited visits from his children to once a month. Michael's comments also highlight the poor acoustics on visits in St. Patrick's institution; an issue which was acknowledged in the Visiting Committee of St. Patrick's Institution Annual Report (2009, 2008, 2007) when the committee reported its unhappiness in the length of time it took to resolve the problem of sound in the visiting area of St. Patrick's Institution. Michael's comments seem to indicate that by the time the life history interviews took place, 2009, the problem was still not adequately resolved. The utter frustration of being able to see but not hear a visitor was clear, as Nick stated: "visitors behind the screens, can't even hear because there's bleedin' 10 or 12 people on the same row as you, screaming as well trying to hear them, stupid, know what I mean?".

The emphasis on security measures meant that physical interaction between loved ones was controlled, restricted and in some cases not tolerated. It seems ironic that the younger offenders endured screened visits while the norm in Mountjoy Prison was for visits that facilitated human touch. The Council of Europe CPT Report (2007) also noted that visiting arrangements in Mountjoy and Limerick were in need of

improvement; when visiting capacity was full, they noted that the visiting rooms offered no privacy to prisoners or visitors and because of poor ventilation and acoustics, were stuffy and noisy. The difficulties with acoustics in St. Patrick's Institution seemed particularly frustrating bearing in mind the therapeutic benefits visits can have. Ian identified the importance of visits and stated that they "keep you sane, keeps the head on". Both Nick and Peter had remarked that in prison you found out who your friends were, a fact that Peter was particularly conscious of when it came to visits, as the following quote illustrates:

There's plenty of lads in here and they get a visit every two or three months because people can't be bothered, em, I know I've talked to other lads now in here about it and it's about the only good thing about going to jail is you find out who your friends really are, people who you think were very good friends of yours will do fucking nothing for you, other people that you thought you know you were friends with but you weren't all that friendly with, you find out that they are totally fucking dependable, can't do enough for you, anything you need, it's there. (Peter, 30, Limerick Prison)

Prison was described by Ian (based in St. Patrick's Institution) as a place where "you're talking about prison things, not really minding what goes on in the outside, it seems like a different world altogether in here" and in the context of such a closed institution, visits have a particular importance. Indeed as Ian also said the only time he thought about the outside world was during a visit and immediately following a visit. Incarceration within a total institution restricts inmate's access with the outside world, and that impact is heightened when friends and family face hardships as a result, among other things, of their loved one being imprisoned. Communication with the outside world in such an environment was important for many of the prisoner learners, being as it was restricted to official visits and officially sanctioned phone calls. The growth of mobile phones use in the prison, although illegal, has been noted by the IPS (2010) and the media but it is not difficult to see why the demand for it exists. The comment by Alan that visits were both a comfort and a sorrow illustrates the dual effect of a visit; allowing you to communicate with loved ones and see for yourself how they are is undoubtedly helpful but it also serves as a reminder the world outside exists and that you are not a part of it.

The second mortification to feature prominently in the life history interviews was the loss of safety that incarceration within the total institution of the prison entailed.

### **Loss of sense of safety within the total institution of the prison**

Imprisonment, as Goffman (1961), observed can lead to a loss of a sense of safety and the threat and reality of violence emerged as a concern among prisoner learners. A number of particularly violent incidents had occurred proximate to the interview phase of this research, including for example in Mountjoy Prison where a prisoner riot, a hostage taking incident and the violent death of one prisoner at the hands of another took place. The Inspectors' Report on the Prison (2009) acknowledges that there were in the past year numerous incidents which have resulted in serious injuries to prisoners and at times staff in the prison. Accounts of violence however are not limited to Mountjoy Prison; John, for example, describes a violent altercation with a prison officer in St. Patrick's which resulted in him being transferred to another prison.

Since I fuckin' came back, all of them like, having a go at me, that's because I got sent up to fuckin' [Name of other prison] for giving an officer, giving an officer a few smacks cause he hit me, like do you know what I mean, they walk around thinking they're fuckin' Rambo, they do, you know what I mean, cause they think they can, I wouldn't mind, it's mostly just all the little 16 year olds they do give smacks to, I mean, all the little kids and all, fuckin' your man smacks me so I hit him back like, I mean, you know what I mean, you can't expect it like, I mean, walk up and then next minute expect them to walk off like. Then he starts going 'oh he swung at me', you know, got me fucked up to D2 up in [Name of other Prison], punishment. (John, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

John's experience draws attention to the idea of the prison as the site of contested identities, for both staff and inmates. His account of events reveals his need to stand up to the prison officer. Again using Goffman's analysis John clearly identifies the prison officer as an actor "Rambo", playing a role. He does not see him as genuine and thus while he accepts, but may not condone, his behaviour in hitting others, he is unwilling to tolerate being assaulted himself. The Prison Chaplain's Report (2010)



stated that within the prison system “the culture of violence has become so pervasive that large numbers of prisoners request to be placed ‘on protection’” (p. 5) while the Council of Europe CPT Report (2007) on its visit to Irish prisons reported a prison culture which was conducive to inter-prisoner intimidation and violence and identified two important issues contributing to such a culture; namely the lack of purposeful activities for prisoners and the availability of drugs. The potential for violence is heightened in the often tense environment of a prison (and enhanced by factors such as overcrowding) and serious injuries were real possibilities as Nick explains: “I mean there’s no fist fight in here miss, it’s bleedin’ knives getting flung at you, you know what I mean, a dump”.

Nick observed for example that in the confines of the prison, fights could begin over petty things, but the consequences could be severe: “when you get locked up fights are just occur, fights can start over anything, fight can start over not giving someone a bleedin’ smoke, bleedin’, in here, just bullies, you have to become a bully to not be bullied”.

Nick described St. Patrick’s Institution as an environment, in which to survive, you had to be seen to be the toughest. He acknowledged that within the prison he is known as bully and a troublemaker, articulating that in order not to be bullied you had to become the bully. This illustrates the role that Nick has adopted in order to cope with imprisonment and also illustrates his awareness of the role which is in contrast to the role of “model prisoner” adopted by Frank and Kevin. Nick’s profile is included not just to provide a more holistic understanding of him and the choices he has made, but also to provide a description, drawing from Nick’s perspective, of life within St. Patrick’s Institution, an institution which is different to the other institutions visited in the course of this research due to the age of the individuals themselves and the particular routine and practices imposed on inmates.

#### **Profile of Nick**

Aged 20, Nick has been incarcerated on and off since the age of 11. As a frequent juvenile offender he served time in St. Michael’s, St. Lawrence’s, Trinity House and Oberstown Detention Centres. From 11 to 20 years of age, he estimates that the longest he has remained on the outside has been 8 months. He feels that he was “brought up bad”. His father was an alcoholic and was frequently imprisoned while his mother was a drug addict. He recalled numerous family members who had also been imprisoned and he remembered his mother, brothers and himself being “kicked out of the flats” when he was younger due to complaints

about drugs being sold. He attends the prison school in the morning while in the afternoon he works as a cleaner in the computer workshop. He compares the detention centres to a holiday camp when compared with St. Patrick's Institution and complains about the dirt of the prison and the strip searches and the lack of dignity they cause. He is particularly critical of prison officers. He described an incident which took place the previous year when, alone in his cell, and acutely ill (and later operated on with a burst appendix) he attempted to gain the attention of the prison officers. He felt their delay in responding was an indication of their lack of care and he set fire to the mattress in the cell in an attempt to set off the fire alarm and force action. This was successful in that regard, however when he recovered from the operation he was disciplined for damaging property in his cell and subject to three weeks in a punishment cell which involved being kept in his underwear and isolated from other prisoners.

Nick stated he never really learnt to read until he came to the prison school in St. Patrick's Institution. His involvement with the education system, outside of the prison system, was sporadic and marked by numerous suspensions. He reported being a regular non-attender who experienced numerous suspensions while in primary school. His experience of secondary school was limited to less than a month due to being expelled. He told of being diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) as a 10 year old and given Ritalin which he continued to take until he was 13 years of age whereupon he began to use illegal drugs. He told of incidents in which people in authority have been violent toward him, including teachers and the guards.

He is currently serving a six and a half year sentence with three years suspended. He describes being physically stronger since incarceration since he has gained weight and is attending the gym. He knows he will have to "keep me head down" if he wants to avoid his three year sentence being activated but is pessimistic about his ability to do this. At the time of being interviewed he anticipated being released in a couple of weeks. He expressed his tiredness at being incarcerated and his awareness of the difficulties he will face in trying to find a job. He spoke of the unlikelihood of anyone employing him with his history of convictions ranging from assaults, drug dealing and theft. He was conscious too of his physical scars, accumulated through car crashes and being involved in altercations with others, and of people looking at him as if he was a "scumbag".

Nick's profile shows his difficult relationship with authority and his awareness too of the difficulties he faces in being free. His experiences suggest he is at risk of being institutionalised, a fact that he was conscious of too. Although he was tired of being "in these places" he recognised that most of his friends were in St. Patrick's. The physical scars that Nick had revealed the extent of his violent history and marked him out as, in his view, as a stigmatised individual. His observation that people looked at him as if he was a "scumbag" echoed Goffman's (1968) view of the existence of a tendency to view a person with a stigma as "not quite human" (p. 15). The differences between St. Patrick's Institution and other detention centres and prisons were acknowledged by prisoner learners in this research, including Nick. Of the prisoner learners from St. Patrick's Institution who took part in this research (Gerard, Hugh, Ian, John, Liam, Michael, Nick and Owen), only two (Ian and Owen) had never been

incarcerated previously in either a detention centre or a prison, indicating that engagement with the justice system had begun from a young age.

The potential for violence to erupt within the institution of the prison is a possible factor on what prisoners choose to do while in prison and this influence was illustrated by Michael, based in St. Patrick's Institution, who explained how choice of activity could be affected by how safe prisoners thought they would be while engaging in it. He explained how the library was a popular activity choice in St. Patrick's but he attributed its popularity due to the fact that the library, guarded as it was by prison officers, provided prisoners with a sense of safety. Thus the popularity of the library underlines how that sense of safety was absent in other areas of the prison.

People are trying to, but I when people come in here, I don't know it's a thing, this place has a bad reputation, people think they're going into a war zone when they're coming in here, I thought I was going to go on protection the first time I came in here as well, I was shaking at them gates, and I'm not a fella to shake, the first thing you do when you come in here, it just happens, everyone goes to the library and they don't realise for a couple of months what's around them and how much they can do, and that they're not going to be touched, do you know what I mean, so that's why everything's really quiet, if you go up there to the main landings in the morning time, there's twice as many people lining up to get to the library and somewhere safe, do you know what I mean, that's what it is, it's actually somewhere safe, then walk down those corridor, they don't know what's behind them, do you know what I mean, there's actually not that many people trying to get into the school and the workshops, just afraid. (Michael, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

The CPT on its visit to Ireland in 2006 (Council of Europe, 2007) was concerned by the increasing level of inter-prisoner violence which it said was fuelled by the widespread availability of illicit drugs and the existence of a gang culture. It noted that the problem of violence appeared to be particularly rife in three of the prisons visited, Limerick Prison, Mountjoy Prison and St Patrick's Institution, and these three prisons were also sites of research for this thesis. Not surprisingly then, prison as a place of violence and the habitual threat of violence did emerge as an important theme in the

data. For Nick, this was a recurring theme in his life history interviews. The issue of safety, for both prisoners and staff was starkly identified by the Office of Inspector of Prisons (2009). While the 2011 CPT report noted that a number of measures have been taken to address safety concerns (and stated that this was particularly noticeable at St Patrick's Institution where the levels of violence have reduced considerably) it noted that the situation in Mountjoy Prison remains worrying and the prison, "in the view of the CPT's delegation, remains unsafe for prisoners and prison staff alike" (p. 21). Controlled access to visits from friends and family and the loss of a sense of safety were the two most prominent mortifications identifiable following interpretation of the data using Goffman's (1961) theoretical perspective. However Goffman had identified a range of mortifications that occur when confined within the total institution and in interpreting the life history interviews, prisoner learners identified events that could also be classified as mortifications.

### **Other examples of mortifications**

The range of mortifications that Goffman (1961) identified included exposure to the physical conditions of an institution, forced contact with other people and the resulting loss of privacy and restrictions on clothes. The wearing of uniforms can be a feature of an institution and is an illustration of the institution's impact on a sense of identity, a point made by Goffman in which he argues that clothes can be a part of the labelling process that occurs when individuals enter a total institution and their sense of self becomes replaced by an institutional self. Woodward (2002) for example emphasises the role of clothes as cultural markers of identity in a modern society. In St. Patrick's Institution prisoners' uniforms are colour coded to reflect their prison status i.e. prisoners under 18, prisoners on remand, and prisoners on particular wings are distinguishable from each other by the colour of their t-shirts. The issue of colour coding uniforms was a contentious one for a number of prisoner learners in St. Patrick's including Hugh who noted that the practice was not in operation in other prisons in Ireland and reminded him of his school uniform. The practice of providing compulsory clothing to prisoners is limited to St. Patrick's although Lonergan (2010), a former governor of Mountjoy Prison, acknowledged the existence of the practice in prisons generally when he began his career in the late 1960s. The Chaplain's Report (2010) identified the refusal of the authorities to allow prisoners in St. Patrick's to wear their

own clothes, unlike other prisoners, as an act which “undermines their self-esteem and dignity, which is often already fragile, and is unacceptable” (p. 6). The requirement of certain clothes to be worn in the prison indicates that clothes are part of the punishment and serve as a reinforcement of institutional power.

Goffman (1961) had also written about the occurrence of “contaminative exposure” (p. 31) in a total institution caused by personal space being invaded and the searching of inmates, a routine occurrence in a prison environment, would seem to be an example. Searching can involve both a personal search and a search of prisoners’ cells. Nick, who had long history of institutionalisation, despite his young age described the impact of being strip searched: “Takes a bit of dignity away from you, you would be ashamed, you know what I mean, bare, naked, stripped down naked, they make you squat and all, looking at you, it’s degrading”.

Although Nick had prior experience of detention centres, he described the impact on him of being locked up in St. Patrick’s Institution and, in particular, the loss of bodily privacy as a shock. Goffman had specifically identified too the practice of emptying “one’s own slops” as one of the most obvious types of contaminative exposure. The practice of “slopping out” is and has been a source of contention for many prisoners in the past (Carrigan, 2005) and official reports (Council of Europe 2007, Office of Inspector of Prison Reports, 2009) have long criticised the practice. The former governor of Mountjoy Prison, John Lonergan, called “slopping out” “one of the most undignified experiences a human being can be subjected to” (2010, p. 82). For David, conditions in Mountjoy Prison were incompatible with modern day life and concepts of cleanliness.

Turkey prisons are better than here. Bosnia prisons are better than here. Like it’s, there’s, at this day and age there’s not a toilet, know what I mean. And even if you do, how do you wash your hands? You see what I mean? I need to go to the toilet in front of someone and they smell it, if you, you know. It’s not nice.  
(David, 27, Mountjoy Prison)

The lack of in-cell sanitation is a feature of principally the older prisons and Limerick and Mountjoy are all nineteenth century buildings and are among the oldest

prisons (alongside Cork and St. Patrick's Institution) within the Irish prison system. It is difficult to disagree with O'Mahony's (2000) assertion that in spite of the fact that the four older prisons (Mountjoy, Limerick, St. Patrick's Institution and Cork) handle the vast majority of prisoners they have "by far the worst conditions" (p. 13). In-cell sanitation however is present in part of the prisons that do continue the practice of "slopping out" leading to an inequality even among inmates within the same total institution. In Limerick Prison, for example, the newly built C and D wings contain in-cell sanitation but for prisoners in A and B wings "slopping out" is still a daily occurrence, a fact which lead the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (2006) to describe the prison as "a prison of contrasts". This contrast did not go unnoticed by Robert who had spent a period of time on the A wing before being moved to C wing. "They're still slopping out yeah. So over in our wing, C wing, it's just, fuckin', it's a palace in comparison, it's the difference between living on the street and having a little bedsit, that's the comparison".

Goffman (1961) also cited lack of privacy or "interpersonal contamination" as a source of mortification within a total institution. This mortification is undoubtedly heightened within the context of overcrowding which is a frequent occurrence in the Irish Prison system (cf. The Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee, 2009; Office of Inspector of Prisons Report 2008, Prison Chaplains Annual Report, 2010; IPS Annual Report, 2010). While the prison cells may have been originally designed for individuals, increases in prison numbers and consequently prisoners being required to "double up", meant that prisoners in general found themselves having to share cells with others. The lack of privacy is particularly evident with regard to cells with no in-cell sanitation. Who you shared a cell with for the 17-18 hour period of lock up was cited as a concern by prisoner learners and Chris, for example, spoke about having to share a cell with prisoners who were smokers as the ban on smoking in workplaces (introduced in Ireland in March 2004) has exemptions such as prisons, nursing homes and psychiatric institutions, all institutions that Goffman would also identify as examples of total institutions. The exemption of the prison to the smoking ban is testament to the tense or stressful setting of the total institution.

In interpreting the life history interviews using Goffman's theoretical perspective of the total institution prisoner learners did not only make references to the

mortifications that prison life involved, but also referred to the relationship between prisoners and prison officers and the following section analyses this relationship.

### **Prisoner Learners' Perceptions on Relations with Prison Staff Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

Goffman (1961) had identified a divide between staff and inmates as a key feature of a total institution and acknowledged the existence of a “them and us” mentality that emerged as a result and found that both groups may see themselves in terms of narrow and often hostile stereotypes. Frank, based in Mountjoy Prison, for example, outlined the difficulty of having normal interaction with a staff member: “We’re on the landing. You’re having a joke and a laugh with an officer and you get forty-five fucking other people looking over their backs saying ‘What’s he doing having a chat with him?’”.

As Frank’s comment reveals, normal interaction between staff and prisoners in general is difficult within the total institution of the prison. For some prisoner learners, prison was like any other institution, with staff members who were mostly good but contained some who were not. Others though perceived that prison officers judged them on the basis that they were prisoners and saw and treated them as prisoners rather than people:

Some of them are alright, some of them are just no good. And when they look at you they look down on you as if, as if you’re something, they look down on you as if they’re looking over you, you know what I mean. ‘This lad is just a criminal, he’s scum.’ (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

For Hugh prison was a violent place that simply offered no protection to prisoners. He described a situation in which he perceived prisoners were powerless:

The staff in here are going to hit someone hard in the head one day and they’re going to kill him and they’re going to make it out that he was attacking them and they were acting in self-defence when it wasn’t, so there’s people that would be able to do it, that are not prisoners officers, they’re more like social workers or people who care about you, for them to be standing there taking note of it,

what's happening instead of the officers being on their own like they are now and hitting you, leaving you with black eyes, if they leave anything on your face they leave you in the pad for longer until it wears off so you can't show your mother, and even if your ma does see it or your sister comes up to you, they just say you were fighting with another inmate and there's no way you can prove that. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Nick's sense of powerlessness was evident particularly in his contention that within the confines of the prison, hidden from view, no one cared whether he lived or died. Kevin on the other hand was almost alone in his praise for the prison officers. He was a "trustee" i.e. a trusted prisoner who got on well with the officers and he acknowledged that his army background may have helped him cope and adapt to prison life and in particular obeying authority:

And I have great respect for the officers here as well. Don't get me wrong like. They're doing a great job, I'm not going to say they're not. They look after you, they'll do anything that's within their power. There's a fella on the landing, he has a degree in Art from Cork University and when I was in the night time in me cell studying and practising and if I had any, he'd, he'd come over and say 'Kevin, when you're doing this do it this this way,' give me advice.

Kevin's account illustrates how a positive relationship had developed between him and the prison officers, one that was based on respect and negotiation. In many ways Kevin had moved beyond Goffman's observation of "them and us" and related to the prison officers as people who were doing their job and in essence serving their sentence too but as stated earlier he understood the rules of the "game" and his role within it.

And there's other officers here, no matter what they'll help people with advice, they'll, eh, if you're having problems or anything like you can go to them and you can talk to them and they'll steer you in the right direction like. And, but you see an awful lot of people here look at them as the enemy. They don't want a word out of the enemy; we're the prisoners, they're the enemy. Whereas if they changed the whole thing of it and looked at them as well they're officers,



they're doing a job and I just, I suppose if I needed to know anything I could ask them, you know. So if you're perceived as being too close or talking to too many officers they're looking at you saying 'What's that fucker talking to?' you know. So you're in a catch 22. But if they all realised that they're only here to earn a living as well. Now some of them are hard but it's only because of the prison. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

Kevin's comment that some of the officers are "hard" but only because of the prison, reinforces Goffman's view that a total institution has an impact on both inmates and staff. However, the total institution of the prison was in its turn, according to the perceptions of prisoner learners, affected by the presence of drugs within it as the following section explores.

### **Drugs and Their Impact on the Total Institution of the Prison**

In contrast to Goffman's analysis, the life history interviews undertaken as part of this research revealed drugs to be very much a part of institutional life. Goffman (1961) had found that there was no market for drugs among inmates in the total institution in which he carried out his fieldwork over 50 years ago. This may reflect the medical context of the psychiatric hospital which was his research site, in which it was likely that inmates were receiving drugs albeit in a controlled/prescribed way. However it could also demonstrate how the concept of a total institution is not a static one but can reflect emerging issues in wider society. A number of prisoner learners remarked in this research on how drugs dominated life in the prison and indeed the use of drugs was proffered as a reason why some prisoners choose not to do any structured activity, including education:

Like you walk down to one of the yards or onto the landings and say to a fella why don't you go to school and they'll say they're not fuckin' bothered. Ha, ha you know and he'd probably be stoned, or waiting on a visit or looking for drugs, or being promised drugs, you know they do that just constantly, all the time. Wake up, just, who's got it, walk around, has he got something, you got something, I've got something, I have got a visit, have you got a visit, you know all this. (Alan, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

The presence of drugs in the prison meant that prisoners were exposed to drug use. Alan for example, who described himself as a recreational cocaine user outside of the prison, noted how he first saw heroin in Mountjoy Prison. Peter also reported never seeing heroin until his imprisonment in Limerick Prison. Similarly Kevin, as the following quote reveals, had never seen anyone take drugs previous to his incarceration.

Well, I've learned I never, ever – I shouldn't be saying things like this – but I'd never, ever seen people taking drugs, never [inaudible]. It's shocking. It's frightening. Em, I suppose like they're trying their best to stop it. It isn't that they can't, but they won't. Eh, I've seen people, there's guys, people in here [inaudible] drugs, drugs. And I suppose I've learned a lot in that respect, the damage they can do now. It's happening all around outside but you don't see it in such a close range, you don't see it. Maybe people turn a blind eye to it, maybe I was happy in me job and I was making plenty of money and I didn't want. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

Kevin described his experience of prison as “another education” particularly in relation to drug use:

Looking at guys here and it seems to be the same fellas and I'm only here a year, being released and back and released again and back. So it seems to be their life. That's like a career to them. I've seen fellas messing around with drugs that, whether they did before or they did, I don't know, but I've seen this pain in their faces and they don't have nothing to look forward to. Nothing. It's just a blank look off them. And you try to talk to them and sometimes you can't because it's not your place but sometimes when people answer a few questions and you try to tell them a few things about the drugs and all that, they just, they don't want to know. Like, you know, more fellas now they'll ask me 'Will you be able to get me this? Will you be able to get me that? Can you do this for me?' Because I'm a trustee. They play on you, you know that way. But my attitude to that is, 'Look,' – in a nice way I tell them – 'look, sling your hook like, you know'. But it's so sad. And then you get the fellas that are coming in and getting over it. This is like, this is another education to me. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

The disturbing scenario of people being sent to prisons drug free and emerging as drug addicts has been documented previously (e.g. Long et al., 2004) and was also noted by Alan:

There's fellas come in here, young lads, and they leave heroin addicts, you know, that happens a lot. I'd say, 30% of prisoners that happens too, you know. The first time I ever seen heroin was in here, you know, it's fuckin' everywhere like and that's wrong you know. (Alan, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

A number of Irish prison studies have also shown that drugs are available within prisons (Carrigan, 2005; Long et al., 2004; Dillon, 2001; O'Mahony, 1997). O'Mahony in his 1997 Mountjoy Prison study, found that 45 (42%) of the 108 prisoners sampled had used heroin while in prison with 9 prisoners initiating heroin use while in prison. Of long term prisoners (people who had been in prison for at least three months) 56% were using heroin in prison. O'Mahony argued that this group are likely to dominate the ethos of the prison and consequently there is a strong case for housing short-term prisoners in a separate prison. Dillon (2001) in her interviews with 29 prisoners in the Mountjoy Prison complex found that 17 respondents were continuing to use illicit drugs while in prison with four respondents reporting that they had their first experience of heroin while incarcerated. Dillon's exploratory study in Mountjoy Prison also found that respondents perceived Mountjoy to be characterised by a drugs culture (2001, p. 3).

The impact of security measures designed to reduce drug availability affected prisoners' ability to maintain relationships and to engage with the outside world. All letters going in and out of the prison are opened and security concerns over drugs being concealed have been cited as the reason (Lonergan, 2010). Ben, who had noticed the impact of increased security in Mountjoy Prison, described how prisoners now had less freedom than before: "There used to be a lot more freedom I suppose in this jail, you know. You could kind of walk anywhere before, d'you know, a couple of years ago. But now there's all gates locked and all, d'you know".

Ben's comments illustrate the increased security measures and its effect on prisoners and this has consequences for how the impact of a total institution on a

prisoner's sense of self can be affected. This, in turn, may have implications for prisoners electing to engage in prison education and become prisoner learners.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter provides an analysis of life within the total institution of the prison from the perspective of prisoner learners interviewed as part of this research. Both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) had identified time as an important feature of a total institution and this also emerged as a significant theme and the prison routine and how prisoner learners reported choosing to spend their time was presented and analysed in this chapter. One important finding was that prisoner learners had in the majority of cases worked or were working within the prison system, thus indicating that they had made a decision to keep busy while incarcerated. This finding could also indicate that those not attending the prison school may be alienated within an already marginalised population.

The chapter identifies a number of themes emerging from the data that correspond to Goffman's analysis of a total institution. It began by exploring the themes of mortification that prisoners faced. While a number of mortifications were referred to by prisoner learners (e.g. searching, "slopping out" and lack of privacy) the two examples of mortifications to emerge strongly from the life history interviews were visits and the loss of a sense of safety felt by inmates. The divide between staff and inmates, a feature identified by Goffman as characteristic of the formal administration of an institution was analysed in terms of prisoner learners' relationships with prison officers and it was clear that some prisoner learners were able to negotiate the working of the institution and their dealings with staff more successfully than others. In contrast to Goffman's work, drugs emerged as an important theme and impacted on prisoner learners in numerous ways, including being exposed to drug addicts and drug use and the increased security measures introduced by the total institution as a means of countering drug use within the institution itself.

This chapter provided, from the perspective of prisoner learners, an analysis of life within a prison context in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland. Goffman (1961) had identified inmates' previous life experiences as relevant in shaping their experiences of total

institutions and the following chapter, with this in mind, analyses data in respect of prisoner learners' life and educational experiences before their current incarceration. It does so in order to analyse those experiences and provide a context for their choice as adults to engage with education while incarcerated within the total institution of the prison. In the opening quote of this chapter, Ian had described prison as "a different world" and it is also relevant to question how different the world of the prison was to the lives prisoner learners had experienced prior to entering into this prison world.

## **Chapter Seven: Analysis of Educational and Life Experiences of Prisoner Learners Prior to Current Imprisonment**

*School's good when you're small yeah, but then...*

(Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

In addressing the research question of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, it was important to acknowledge that prisoner learners interviewed as part of this research were individuals with beliefs, attitudes and lived experiences, particularly of the education system, and that all of these aspects may have influenced how they interpreted events in their current context of attending a prison school. This is illustrated by the opening quote in this chapter in which Eric recalls how his experience of education has changed throughout his life course. His account of his educational journey, which as a young child began positively before developing into a desire to leave education and which became a positive experience once again while incarcerated within the total institution of the prison, illustrates how the educational journey is not a static one but can be subject to change over the life course. It also reinforces the appropriateness of a life history methodology which allows possible changes over time to be articulated by prisoner learners.

This chapter focuses on contextual information of prisoner learners' lives, outside of the prison context, and their educational life histories, which emerged through the life history interviews. Goffman (1961) had argued that inmates who enter a total institution do so with a "presenting culture" (p. 23), a way of life and understanding of the world. Therefore although prison may be, as Ian described in the previous chapter, "a different world" Goffman found that inmates' experiences of what he termed "other situations of deprivation" (p. 193) and the extent to which they were "street wise" could enable them to understand the workings of the institution and use that knowledge to their advantage and thus minimise its impact. Paton et al (2009), as documented in Chapter Three, had found in their qualitative study of young offenders in the UK, that there was a prevalence among their participants of exposure to adverse and traumatic life experiences which impacted negatively on participants feeling able to

access support. Drawing on data which emerged from the life history interviews, the chapter is divided into three sections and begins with an analysis of prisoner learners' family life experiences.

The second section of this chapter explores the impact of drugs on the educational and life experiences of prisoner learners who participated in the research. Both personal and parental use of drugs, emerged as a theme in the life history interviews and was one which prisoner learners indicated affected their experience of education. The emergence of drug use therefore, as a problem in the community, but one in which schools and prisons have also to deal with is examined in the second section of this chapter.

The third section of this chapter concentrates on the previous educational experiences of prisoner learners who participated in this research. Foucault (1977) had identified both prisons and schools as being part of a carceral network and, in addressing the key research question in this thesis of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, the third section of the chapter analyses prisoner learners' previous experience of education. It begins by providing an overview of their educational experiences before examining the link, as identified by prisoner learners, between the prison and school experience. Two issues in particular emerged strongly in the life history interviews; the school as a site of violence and punishment and the use of expulsions as a means of punishment.

Profiles of two learners, Hugh and Chris are included in this chapter. Hugh, was aged 19 and was interviewed in St. Patrick's Institution. He reported being a heroin addict since the age of 15 and had never attended secondary school. Chris, 23 years, was imprisoned in Mountjoy Prison and he identified himself as unusual among prisoners as he had completed school and had achieved the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). These two prisoner learners, with their different educational and life experiences were chosen to both illustrate the heterogeneity of prisoner learners and to present, in keeping with the use of a life history methodology, a more holistic account of the lives of the prisoner learners.

In presenting the earlier life experiences of prisoner learners and their experiences in particular of education, a perspective and context from which to examine and analyse their educational choices as adults is provided. The data in this chapter reveals the variety of educational experiences of participants and draws attention to their position as knowledgeable agents who are able to discuss, reflect and critique their experiences and the comparisons prisoner learners themselves made between their experiences of prison and previous experience of education are analysed.

### **Earlier Experiences of Life and Family Background**

Goffman (1961) argued that inmates' previous background and life history impacts on how inmates experience a total institution. He recognised for instance that for inmates who have experience of a total institution already, the level of adaptation needed is minimal. Similarly inmates who have gained institutional knowledge through their life experiences are able to benefit from this knowledge in adapting to life within a total institution. In the course of the life history interviews it emerged that Hugh, Liam and Nick, who now found themselves imprisoned as adults, had spent time in Detention Centres as children. Nick, aged 20, had, as revealed in the previous chapter, more experience of institutional life than many of the older prisoner learners interviewed and his life, as revealed in his life history interviews, seemed to illustrate Foucault's (1977) argument that the carceral system is a contradictory one which reinforces delinquency rather solving it. Indeed in the first of his life interviews he introduced the term "institutionalised" and conveyed his anxiety at the fact that his release date was approaching, revealing that "most of my friends are in here". His long history of incarceration (every year since 2000) is particularly significant owing to his young age at the time of interview (20 years). Nick's words illustrate how difficult he finds life outside of the total institution of the prison:

It is, I have to say, it is a big change, you get used to prison life like, you know what I mean, sometimes you're, [inaudible] institutionalised, people saying, don't know, never really last long out there, the longest I've lasted since 2000 is about 8 months, [ok] locked up, locked up all the time. (Nick, 20, St. Patrick's Institution)



Many prisoner learners also reported having close family members who had experienced imprisonment. The intergenerational impact of imprisonment and cycle of disadvantage was illustrated across many of the life history interviews. Hugh, 19, for example, reflected that he was now in the same prison where his mother had served her sentence and the prison experience almost seemed to Hugh to have become normalised as a rite of passage: “me whole family’s been in prison anyway, all me uncles, aunties, the whole lot of them”. Nick also had memories of being brought to Mountjoy to visit his father who was at one stage serving an eight year sentence; like Hugh, he now found himself in the same prison complex in which a parent had been imprisoned. Owen also revealed during the course of the interview that his father had served a long prison sentence.

O’Mahony’s (1997) study provides a useful context for this data. In his study of the 108 prisoners who were sampled in Mountjoy Prison, 16 had a father, and one had a mother, who had been imprisoned. However, as O’Mahony stresses, half of his sample came from families where no other member had ever been imprisoned leading him to conclude that “a family history of criminality is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for involvement in crime” (p. 50). Nonetheless the intergenerational impact of imprisonment is apparent (Lonergan, 2010). Frank revealed in the course of the life history interviews that his father, while not imprisoned in a prison, did serve time in an industrial school, an institution which has many similarities to a prison and which corresponds to Goffman’s definition of a total institution. Frank reported that his father had been sent to St. Joseph’s Industrial school in Artane as a child and “he couldn’t wait to get out when he was sixteen”. St. Joseph’s Industrial school, opened in 1869, was the largest industrial school in Ireland and Britain (Raftery and O’Sullivan, 2001) and received the largest volume of complaints by Investigating Committee of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse [the Ryan Report] than any other industrial school in Ireland. The Commission found that whatever the statutory reason given for committal of boys to Artane, it was clear that poverty was the underlying reason. Raftery and O’Sullivan’s (2001) analysis of the industrial school system in Ireland details the legacy of that system in Ireland and concludes that most survivors ended up in a cycle of poverty all their lives and that a significant percentage of the country’s prison population of the 1970s and 1980s had experience of being incarcerated in industrial schools. The negative experience of education of Frank’s father and Frank’s

subsequent decision to leave school may also indicate the transgenerational impact of Ireland's history of industrial schools. These cycles of imprisonment also underscore Foucault's (1977) argument that it is the institution itself that in fact produces "delinquents" due to the fact that inmates on release are, according to Foucault, often condemned to a cycle of crime and imprisonment with Foucault explicitly citing stigma of imprisonment, homelessness and unemployment as causes of recidivism. Foucault acknowledged the generational impact of imprisonment by accusing the prison of indirectly producing delinquents by not supporting families of inmates which he stated are often left destitute as a result.

Imprisonment in a detention centre, and having a family member imprisoned are events likely to cause anxiety and during the course of the life history interviews, it became clear that many of the prisoner learners had experienced stressful life events in their childhood. The 2009 the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) used a pre-specified list of 13 stressful life events in their interviews with mothers of 9 year old children in order to document traumatic events children (the sample consisted of over 8,500) may have experienced. The stressful life events included experiencing death (of parent or close family member or friend), divorce or separation of a parent, stay in foster or residential care, serious injury to self or family members, parent in prison, conflict between parents, and mental disorder in immediate family. Using the same list of 13 stressful life events, it was possible to chart adult prisoner learners' experience of these events as children.

Table 7.1 Prisoner learners' experiences of stressful life events (as defined by Minister for Health and Children, 2009)

Stressful life event	Learners (initial of pseudonym)																	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	R	
Death of a parent			×															
Death of a close family member									×									
Death of a close friend																		
Divorce or separation of parents				×				×		×		×						
Moving house						×	×	×						×				
Moving country								×			×							
Stay in foster/residential care								×							×			
Serious illness/injury to self										×								
Serious illness/injury of family member					×							×						
Mental disorder in immediate family												×						
Conflict between parents								×										
Parent in prison							×						×	×				

Table 7.1 illustrates prisoner learners' experiences of stressful events. Of particular note in the above table is the number of stressful life events experienced by prisoner learners incarcerated in St. Patrick's Institution (highlighted in grey) and the table illustrates and draws attention to the stressful life events, experienced by Gerard, Hugh, Ian, John, Liam, Nick, and Owen, that emerged from the life history interviews. These prisoner learners were the youngest prisoner learners who participated in this thesis. The number of stressful events experienced is in itself not unexpected; previous research in Ireland (Ombudsman for Children Report, 2011; Kilkelly, 2007; McLoughlin, Maunsell and O'Connell, 1999) has shown that young people who come into contact with the law in the state share certain characteristics which would be considered stressful, such as unsettling family conditions, living outside of home or in care as well as the presence of addiction and mental health problems in their lives.

Due to the fact that the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) charted the experiences of nine year old children (as reported by their mother), there were a number of issues that although a cause of considerable stress for the prisoner learners were not featured in the specified list of 13 events. These issues included experiences of poverty, detention centres, drug use, and parental drug addiction. In drawing inferences from Table 7.1 it should be noted that there are significant differences between the methodology used in the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) and the life history methodological approach used in this thesis. The longitudinal study asked mothers to report if their child had suffered any of the 13 prescribed stresses (as outlined in the table). In the life history interviews prisoner learners were not given any prescribed lists to report on but rather through the life history interviews it was possible to map their descriptions onto the chart above however, the mapping exercise employed is likely to underestimate the stresses experienced by the 18 adult prisoner learners who participated in this research and should not be considered an exhaustive list. Nonetheless, Table 7.1 does give some indication of the stressful life events that prisoner learners, particularly those in St. Patrick's Institution, had experienced.

The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) had identified the separation/divorce of a parent as a stressful life event and four prisoner learners reported that they had experienced this stressful event. Liam indicated that the situation of his parents' separation was compounded by his father's mental illness. He described his father as an alcoholic who had also been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and Liam revealed, in his life history interviews, how his father had previously suffered severe injuries following a suicide attempt which resulted in a number of limbs being amputated. Liam recalled an incident, four years earlier in which his father physically attacked his mother and sister and from which time onwards, contact with him ceased.

Me ma told me at the time that he was sick, you know what I mean and he wasn't right and that was a bit of a shock, you know what I mean, when I seen him the way he was, you know what I mean, no I just haven't seen him since then. (Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

Liam's account of domestic violence, his father's mental illness and the considerable self-violence inflicted by his father on himself seems particularly traumatic. He did not however link these experiences directly with his experience of school and he recalled never liking school from the start:

I don't think I was, wasn't well behaved, was good at doing the work but wasn't well behaved in the class, you know what I mean, gave the teachers a hard, just didn't like it, can't really put me finger on it, you know what I mean, just didn't like authority or anything, had a problem with authority all me life, teachers, just didn't like it, rebelled against everything.

Hugh, as Table 7.1 illustrates, reported experiencing many stressful life events as a child and he spoke about how witnessing physical violence and open drug use had impacted on him:

I seen me father abuse me mother and stuff like that and other things, drugs been took in front of me, serious drugs and, just all things like that, messed with me head. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

As the above comment reveals, Hugh reported being influenced by his family background and earlier family life experiences. Hugh's profile is included below:

#### **Profile of Hugh**

Hugh was 19 at the time of being interviewed. He had served two years and three months in St. Patrick's Institution and had 10 months left to serve. He revealed that his mother had served a sentence in the old Mountjoy women's prison which ironically is the site St. Patrick's Institution is on and where he is now incarcerated. He spoke of his family who had also been in prison. He had been using drugs since before he became a teenager and had been a heroin addict since the age of 15. At the time the interviews were conducted he was on a methadone treatment programme within the prison and was anxious to get onto a treatment programme.

His relationship with school was a fraught one. He told of spending his time in class messing and getting into trouble. He was sent to see a psychiatrist where he was diagnosed as having ADHD. He reported being regularly suspended before being expelled from primary school in 5<sup>th</sup> class. He stated that he had no positive memories of school with the exception of his Communion day where his family had come together and were happy. Once expelled from school, he began to hang around with older people and get into trouble. He was a year out of school before he was accepted onto a second chance programme in which classes were scheduled from 11 o'clock until 4 o'clock each day. He spent 6 months in this programme before having to leave – he described how his family were involved in a violent gang dispute and the area where his second chance programme was located had become unsafe for him. At 13 years he was sent to live with relatives in Northern Ireland where he resumed his schooling.

at primary level. He reported his illegal drug use beginning at this stage and he was expelled from school. He returned to the Republic to live with a relative. By 14 years of age he had been sentenced to a detention centre. He described the centre as a “holiday camp”:

Because it's a holiday camp, like you just want to go back there like all the time, when you get out, you do things just to get back there, they get you everything there like clothes, and things like that your mother and father wouldn't have been able to get.

He described how he learnt to read and write in the prison school and spoke of the books he now enjoyed reading. He reported that while in primary school much of his time was spent being sent out of the class to partake in activities such as cooking. Even in the detention centre, where he achieved two certificates, he told how he could not read or write but rather was dependent on the staff there to complete written requirements. While he had learnt to read and write in the prison school, his relationship with the prison school was not without its disruptions; he was the only prison learner in this study who had been asked to leave the prison school (for a three month period) and he reported recently being banned from the cookery class due to a dispute with the teacher.

Hugh's movement from schools, second chance programmes and homes illustrate the peripatetic life he was leading prior to incarceration. The impact of his family background is particularly illustrated in his account of having to leave a second chance programme as his family were involved in a dispute and it was now unsafe for him to attend classes in that particular area. He revealed in his life history interviews his difficult relationship with people: “I wouldn't mind being banged up for the day, 22 hour lock up, because, I don't like being around people, I don't know what it is, I just feel funny around a lot of people”.

In the life history interviews Hugh revealed his awareness of his parent's difficulty with reading and writing and Ben and Gerard also spoke of their grandparents' literacy difficulties. Hugh, although he made clear during his first life history interview that he was not a Traveller, revealed that his mother was: “No, she didn't go to school, she can't read or write, she's a Traveller like, she never went to school”. A *Survey of Traveller Education Provision* (Department of Education and Science, 2005) revealed that there had been “significant progress” in Travellers' access and participation in education. Despite this, the survey acknowledged that just over 10% of Travellers who now enrol in post primary schools complete their post-primary education, in sharp contrast to the 90% of students from the general population and thus are a particularly marginalised group.

Behan (2006), writing from the perspective of a teacher in a prison school, reported that the regimented organisation of the prison contrasts sharply with many prisoners' previous lifestyles which he characterises as often chaotic and unregulated. Hugh's description of the detention centres as a "holiday camp" in comparison to his childhood is a reflection of the life he had experienced as a child. In the life history interviews, Nick had also used the term "holiday camp" to describe detention centres although in that context he was comparing the centres with St. Patrick's Institution. In his first life history interview Hugh revealed experiences of disputes and expulsion within the education system which also seemed to be continuing within the prison school environment although ironically, the prison system provided stability and an opportunity to recover from his drug addiction.

In the course of the life history interviews, prisoner learners did refer to positive as well as adverse events in their childhood. Robert, for example, spoke about his "fantastic" childhood describing at length the efforts his father in particular would make in encouraging his interest in different sports, no matter if the same sport would be abandoned later and another sport taken up in its place. Although Kevin and Stephen who were the oldest learners in the study (aged 54 and 50 respectively) spoke about a childhood in which poverty was a very real threat, they both described a happy home life although money was not in plentiful supply. Kevin recalled his father helping him with homework and his encouragement for children to have a good education in order to get jobs. Stephen reported that his childhood was also marked by a strong sense of community and of helping others.

back then there was a better. a community, because even if your mother baked cakes, she'd never just bake for her own children but she'd bake because she knew that the woman down the road had a house full of kids as well and her husband was drinking the money or gambling the money so there was no food there so before we'd even eat, you were still sent down, some of that dinner to the woman down the road.

And

it was the same with clothing, clothing was never thrown away like it is today, right and there was no shame on, your neighbour coming up with a bag of clothes and saying oh this doesn't fit my Mikey, would it fit one of your boys? Right and you were never ashamed to go out knowing that everyone on the estate knew that the child across the road had them clothes the week before, right, children wouldn't do that today but then they wouldn't have to do it today. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

This sense of connection with others was identified by Stephen as a positive experience. The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) included moving house as a stressful life event and this seemingly innocuous event did emerge in the course of the life history interviews to be a source of stress, not because of the physical act of moving but because it involved leaving behind a network of friends. Frank and Liam, for example, spoke of the impact moving house had on them and Frank, who moved twice in his early teenage years, noted:

Like you picture being fourteen, going to school, settled with your own group of friends running around and doing whatever. You move to a different area and, eh, suddenly, like I don't think people realise how big a change it is to actually, like you're not just leaving a house, you're leaving a way of life behind. Like I'm looking back on it now thinking 'Jaysus! What if we didn't move? Would I be here? Would I have met these people?' And I don't think I would have if I had stayed where I was. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

The importance of the peer group is evident and it is clear from Frank's account that moving house involved leaving behind a valued network of friends and beginning again, an upheaval which he considered to have had a major impact on his life course and had implications for his decision to leave school.

By analysing the life history interviews it was possible to appreciate both the diversity in prisoner learners' family life and the similarity of certain events such as the experience of being let down by authority figures. In analysing prisoner learners' previous life and educational history, the impact of drugs, both personal and parental



use of drugs, emerged as a theme which prisoner learners indicated affected their experience of education and the following section explores this theme in more detail.

### **Impact of Drugs on Life and Educational Experiences**

In the life history interviews, many prisoner learners spoke about the influence of alcohol and drugs on their lives. John, for instance, reported engaging in serious alcohol use at the age of 15:

I knew there was something wrong with me, I was lashing out, walking down the road, hot wiring cars and all, stupid things, stupid things, fuckin' every shop I'd go into robbin' drink and all, bottles of wine, bottles of budweiser, you know, anything in cans, anything at all. (John, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

John revealed how he had, when younger, reacted to his parent's separation by "just coming and going off the rails, getting into trouble and all". He reported during the life history interviews how he "knew there was something wrong with me" and he revealed his previous attempt to die by suicide at home. John had also been expelled from his second chance programme Youthreach for drug use and he revealed in the life history interviews how, before being expelled, he had tried in vain to sign himself into a psychiatric hospital.

Nick, Ian, and Michael spoke of engaging in drug use as children and young adults. Nick revealed how, as a young teenager, he stopped taking medication for ADHD and instead began to experiment with illegal drugs: "About 13. Stopped taking them, then smoking, getting into hash and all bleedin' whatever, Es and coke and all."

Ian and Michael attributed drug use to impeding their experience of education. Ian reported in the life history interviews how he had starting drinking and using drugs following completion of his Junior Certificate and as a result lost interest in school and began to mess and cause trouble. Michael, who had learnt his girlfriend was pregnant, and who described himself as terrified as a result, recounted the circumstances leading up to his expulsion and the assault on the teacher which occurred the day he finished his last exam in the Junior Certificate. Michael reported reacting to the news of his girlfriend's pregnancy by drinking and taking drugs and events in school erupted

wherein a verbal row with a teacher escalated and he responded by hitting the teacher. “I was 16. That’s why I left that year, couldn’t, I don’t know, didn’t know how to tell my parents so I didn’t know what to do. I went ape around the place drinking taking drugs, you know”.

Drugs use was also connected to Liam’s experience of school and his subsequent experience of Youthreach. He had begun to use and deal in drugs while in school and reported that events soon began to spiral beyond his control:

Yeah, that’s it, yeah, well it’s not really expensive for when you’re in them circles you know what I mean? ‘Cause you know the right people, and you get the right price, you know what I mean? And you’re doing things, like, I was working for people doing things, and all you know like selling drugs for people, or whatever, robbin’ cars for them or something and em but get paid for it with a load of gear or something, you know what I mean? They’d say ‘sell that’ I’d make a few quid smoking it, you know what I mean, that’s when most of me troubles started yeah. I had a few, like I was in trouble with the police but started getting into big trouble, you know what I mean, owing debts and all, the gaffe getting shot at, you know what I mean, it was getting out of hand, you know.  
(Liam, 18, St. Patrick’s Institution)

For Alan and Peter, school and college were sites for engaging in drug use. Alan reported that:

But em it’s funny the first time I ever seen, seen drugs was in school, was in [Name of School]. And em I was 15 I think when I seen drugs you know, and I’m 35 now so I’m talking now 20 years ago and it wasn’t like it is today. Kids today probably know everything about everything you know but I was 15 and this guy brought in a bit of hash you know and he showed it to me. And I couldn’t believe that this thing that looked like a little piece of chocolate was drugs you know, it was amazing to me like that this was illegal, that this was drugs you know. I was actually doing my junior cert at the time and we went down to Stephen’s Green to try the stuff out you know and we smoked, I can’t remember he must have rolled it up because I haven’t got a clue what to do, but

we smoked this stuff anyway and went back to the school for the whole afternoon. God I was spinning around, [laughter] getting sick, in absolute bits, going green like you know. But that was my first introduction to drugs like, you know, even in a school like that there were drugs there you know. (Alan, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

Peter, recounted how his years in university were spent drinking heavily and engaging in drug use, however Eric and Liam pointed out the presence of drugs in the community, rather than the school itself which was the issue. Eric, for example stated “It wasn’t that there was drugs in the school, there was drugs out in the streets” while Liam, in a similar vein, stated “no, wouldn’t have come into drugs in school, no that was around the people I was just around”. For Hugh drug use and alcohol use began at a young age and also escalated once he had been expelled from school and could not access another one for a considerable amount of time:

Yeah, I was bored and all, seeing me family, and all me cousins and all doing things, I was only 12, I saw what they were doing and I was going to do it with my friends, drugs and all, drink. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

The life history interviews with Hugh revealed how *not* being in school, and the boredom that resulted, was a factor in engaging in drug use. The above quote also illustrates the influence of family and friends in Hugh’s life.

Parental rather than personal drug use also emerged as a theme during the life history interviews. Gerard was one of four participants (Ben, Gerard, Hugh and Owen) who were brought up by grandparents, and in the cases of Gerard, Hugh and Owen; this was attributed to their mother’s drug addiction. Gerard reported on being brought up in an environment where, until the age of eight, drug taking was clearly visible.

Don’t know, probably cause when I was brought up by me mam like, didn’t have the best of lives you know, when I was only young like me mam was a drug addict you know [ok], me mam and me dad, so the background I had from living with me ma up to the age of 8 was just looking at people doing drugs, looking at me ma doing drugs, you know, I didn’t have the best of lives when I

was growing up as a kid, until I moved in with me nanny, you know, had a better life with me nanny, lived in a house, when I was living with me mam, was living in flats full of drugs, full of drug addicts, you know. (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

He noted that "I had them to mind for too many years I'd say" but immediately made clear how his mother had now recovered:

But she regrets it now, she always talks about it, tells me how sorry she is, and how she's trying to make up for it and I believe her because she's looking a lot better now, like she's putting on weight, she's looking a lot better now. She's going to see counsellors and she's doing everything for herself now. (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

The love Gerard feels for his mother is clear. Owen, who like Gerard also found himself being brought up by a grandparent due to his mother's drug addiction; was also keen to show that his mother had made the best decision in the circumstances: "She left me at me nanny's door, I was told she was after getting strung out on heroin, she knew it was the best option for us, I can't hold that against her, do you know what I mean?"

The commentaries of Gerard and Owen seem to reveal willingness on their parts to absolve their mothers of blame or certainly to provide a context for their mother's behaviour. Gerard spoke at length about an incident that occurred when he was young when his mother did not return to the B & B they were staying in. Gerard reported his efforts to keep up the pretence to the B & B owner that his mother was in the room and detailed how he minded his brother, who was a baby at the time, and how he managed to get his younger sister (aged 6) dressed and brought to school. For food, he stole cereal from a nearby shopping centre.

Gerard's efforts to keep up appearances and to maintain the pretence of his mother's presence illustrates Goffman's (1959) ideas on social interaction in which he used the imagery of the theatre. It is clear for example that Gerard is performing a role in order not to draw attention to the reality he finds himself in. The performance is undoubtedly for the benefit of the B & B owner, but also too for himself and his siblings

and his mother; there is implicit knowledge in his actions that to alert others to the reality of what has happened would be to discredit her. The imagery of the theatre that Goffman evokes also provides imagery from which to bridge the gap between structure and agency – in this account, Gerard can be seen to act within the very real constraints of his environment. It was three days before the B & B owner became suspicious and social workers were called in and the children were later put in the care of their grandparents. This event was described by Gerard in a matter of fact way:

I was probably about nine, eight or nine, and em me mam was gone out, obviously to get drugs or something and three people came to the house, well the bed and breakfast we were staying in, and they were social workers, and it was me, me little brother and me little sister there, me big sister was already living with me nanny. And eh they came out and said they were social workers, we're going to take you into care, have you anyone's phone number to ring and tell them? (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

The matter-of-fact qualities of Gerard's descriptions of this incident are telling in themselves. On asking whether he found this incident frightening he responds by saying:

Yeah, well it was, but at the time, my little sister didn't know what to do, she would have only been 6, 6 and me little brother was still in a cot like you know, so he wouldn't have known what to do, so I was the oldest and I just had to do something, you know. (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

It is clear from his response that he feels he did what he did because he simply had to, there was no one else. Yet his ability to take on a role of significant responsibility for his siblings at such a young age is remarkable. Other prisoner learners also revealed how witnessing drug use and misuse featured in their childhoods. Nick's childhood memories, for example, were in the main negative and featured parental drug and alcohol abuse:

No, I don't, brought up with a alcoholic as a father and a bleedin' drug addict as a mother, you know what I mean, wouldn't call that bleedin' good growing up,

brought up around my surroundings, bleedin' drugs everyday think of life like, anyway you look you would have seen someone taking drugs. (Nick, 20, St. Patrick's Institution)

As Nick's comments reveal, drug use had become a part of both his home life and was a part of the area in which he grew up. With his father imprisoned and his mother in the midst of a drug addiction, home was a difficult environment: "At lunch breaks usually run over, me ma or someone would throw us money and get out and get, sit down by a chipper or something, or eat sweets or what have you, whatever, back into school then".

As with Gerard, home was a site of contested identities in which responsibilities, more associated with adults, were given to him. Nick's recollections reveal not just a context of material poverty but a poverty of nurture. Some prisoner learners however seemed anxious that their imprisonment should not be interpreted as meaning their parents had done something wrong, as Eric in Mountjoy Prison stated: "Me family raised me well, you can't say they didn't".

Eric's observation that "you can't say they didn't" was a reminder of the power and responsibilities of the researcher in analysing data gained through research. Eric's comment and his concern that his family would be blamed for his imprisonment illustrate his awareness that despite the many complex reasons for crime and imprisonment, family background in particular is often highlighted.

This section has revealed the perceptions prisoner learners had regarding drug use and its impact on their lives. The following section explores data that emerged from the life history interviews in relation to prisoner learners' previous educational experiences.

### **Overview of Prisoner Learners' Previous Educational Experiences**

The research question posited in this thesis relates to how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison. In addressing this research question in full, prisoner learners' perspectives on their previous educational experience were specifically sought. It was clear from many of the prisoner learners

(particularly Alan, Ben, Chris, Eric, Gerard, Kevin, Liam, Michael, Robert) that their parents/grandparents were keen for them to stay on at school or at least have somewhere to go if they left. The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (2009) revealed that parents in general had high educational aspirations for their children with 78% of parents expecting their children to achieve at least degree level whereas less than 1% of parents expected their children to achieve only a Junior Certificate.

Table 7.2 illustrates the ages of the 18 prisoner learners, all of whom were attending a school within the institution of the prison, and also details, the age they left full time education, their educational attainment in terms of formal qualifications, and, in brief, the reason stated as to why they left school.

Table 7.2 Overview of prisoner learners' school history

Name	Age left full-time education	Educational attainment at school	Why learner left school
Alan	15	Junior Cert	Went to do a course in an FE College in order to get into college
Ben	14	No qualifications	Repeated Suspension – decides not to go back due to circumstances of 3 <sup>rd</sup> suspension
Chris	17	Leaving Cert Applied	Completed Secondary Education
David	14	No qualifications	Got a job
Eric	14	No qualifications	Disinterested in school, wanted to leave
Frank	16	Junior Cert	Left to get a job
Gerard	17	Junior Cert	Expelled
Hugh	12	No qualifications	Expelled
Ian	15	Junior Cert	Expelled
John	14	No qualifications	Expelled
Kevin	16	Group Cert	Got a job
Liam	15	Junior Cert	Wanted to leave and go to Youthreach where most of his friends were
Michael	16	Junior Cert	Expelled
Nick	13	No qualifications	Expelled
Owen	13	No qualifications	No second school would accept him
Peter		Third Level Degree	Completed third level education
Robert	17	Inter Cert	Got a job
Stephen	14	No qualifications	Left to find work

Note: All participants are identified by pseudonyms.

The literature review in Chapter Three had highlighted the link between educational attainment and imprisonment and the particular educational needs of prisoners (cf. O'Mahony, 2002; Morgan and Kett, 2003), nevertheless, Table 7.2 highlights the diversity of prisoner learners' previous educational experiences. Eight of the prisoner learners (Ben, David, Eric, Hugh, John, Nick, Owen and Stephen), for example, would be classified as early school leavers according to Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, which defines early school leaving as non-participation in school before reaching the age of 16 or before completion of three years post-primary education, whichever is later. Two of the prisoner learners, Hugh and Owen had no experience of secondary school while Nick's attendance was limited to a number of weeks. Chapter Three had revealed how over 90% of young people now complete upper second level education in Ireland (OECD, 2011) and the importance of completing second level education had been recognised by, amongst others, O'Connor (2007) who argued that the completion of second level education has become "the main gateway" to continuing engagement with learning and is "widely recognised as a central objective of education policy that has direct implications for participation in further and higher education and for broader policies relating to economic competitiveness and social inclusion" (p. 3).

However, the reasons some prisoner learners left school were often complex and multi-faceted. For a number of prisoner learners (Alan, Ben, David, Erik, Frank, Kevin, Liam, Robert and Stephen) leaving school was described as a decision they themselves made, although the decision was influenced by a number of factors including a desire to earn money and/or get a job (Eric, Frank, Kevin, Robert, Stephen) and to leave a school environment which was often perceived in negative terms (Alan, Ben, David, Liam, Stephen). Alan for example had made a decision to leave school but, under clear instructions from his parents that he couldn't leave without somewhere else to attend, he had worked out that by doing a year's course in a Further Education College he would be able to gain entry into college. However, Alan's experience of school did influence this decision, he revealed in the life history interview that although he was never in serious trouble, school was becoming a less comfortable place for him.

Two of the prisoner learners (Chris and Peter) had completed second level education and both were pursuing a third level degree while in prison. Peter was unusual among all the prisoner learners interviewed not just because he had completed



second level education but because his experience of education was markedly different from the others who took part in the research. He revealed in the life history interviews how he had completed his Junior Cert, had repeated his Leaving Certificate in order to get the points to go to college, and had (admittedly taking more time than originally envisaged) gone on and successfully completed his university degree. While in the prison he was embarking on his second undergraduate degree. At a surface level, it would seem that he was an educational success story however he was critical of a range of educational issues including the secondary school curriculum, teachers' ability at times to control a class, the points' race and the fact that the Irish language is a compulsory subject. He was particularly critical of how the secondary system was geared towards the Leaving Certificate exam and he spoke at length of the negative impact the exam had on learning and subject choice. Peter felt strongly that the exam encouraged rote learning and forced students to strategically choose subjects in order to gain maximum points. Peter's criticisms have also been echoed by other sources (cf. Smyth, 1999) including the Hyland Report (2011) which acknowledged the considerable impact of the Leaving Certificate exam on teaching and learning, with the exam itself becoming a determining factor in what is studied, and the influence of the points system on subject choice.

Chris had also completed second level education and he had opted to do the Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) rather than the traditional Leaving Certificate. The LCA was introduced in 1995 and it is a two year programme available to students who want to follow a programme with a strong vocational emphasis and was not designed, as Hyland (2011) acknowledges, as a path of direct progression to higher education. A study of student experiences of the LCA (Banks, Byrne, McCoy and Smyth, 2010) highlighted the distinctive profile of LCA students and found that they tend to come from working class families whose siblings also have low levels of education. The study also noted that the LCA specifically targets young people at risk of dropping out of school and this was a category that Chris identified with. The LCA has a relatively low take up with approximately 7% of the Leaving Cert cohort undertaking it and Banks et al (2010) note that the distinctive teaching and learning methodologies employed in the programme (including group work, credit accumulation, smaller class sizes and work experience) did help re-engage young people with the education process and foster more positive attitudes towards school. Both Peter and Chris recognised that

their educational attainment in school made them unusual within the confines of the prison. A life history profile of Chris is contained below:

### **Profile of Chris**

Chris is a twenty-three year old Dublin man who is serving a twelve year sentence. He is the father of two children. He described how he was going to leave school after his Junior Certificate along with his friends however he continued on because of his mother, who later died, had asked him to finish school. He described himself as being very close to his mother and unable to talk to his father. He chose to do the Leaving Cert Applied because he thought it would be easier than the Leaving Certificate. He recognised that his continuation of education made him unusual among his peer group at home and also within the prison too. He was adamant however that he wouldn't send his child to the school he attended, the same school also that Chris' own father had gone too.

He described school as a place where it was common to see fights outside, a place where you had to stand up for yourself:

You go to school on your own like and had to make my way down the school like, make your own way down like. You don't have anyone holding your hand that will drop you at the front gate like. It's time to grow up like.

Chris had been involved in orchestrating a student strike in his school, a strike which took place following a national teachers' strike. Police had been called to the school and Chris had received a broken nose in the disturbance. Chris recalled how his injury was covered by the media but there were no repercussions for anyone involved. He regretted doing the Leaving Cert Applied, which he described as "a joke", and felt he should have done the Leaving Certificate. The school he attended was streamed according to ability and he found himself in the middle stream. He had been told by the school that the Leaving Certificate Applied was for students placed in the lower classes, however he talked to another person from the area who was also in the same position as him and both decided to choose the Leaving Cert Applied as it was "the easier one".

Chris had lived abroad for a period of time before returning home to face his sentence. He is trying to forget about the past and concentrate on the future. He was adamant that he had made his own choices in life. He wonders though how different his life may have been if his mother had not died. He wondered in particular if his mother was still alive would his personal relationships be different, he has two children with two different women and only gets to see one child because of his differences with the mother of the other child. While he sees one of his children once every two-three weeks he does not like her coming to the prison.

While in prison he received training, over a period of 6 weeks, from the Samaritans to become a Listener in the prison. He described how he would be on call on certain nights and prison officers would knock on his cell door if another prisoner needed to talk. Chris discussed the importance of confidentiality in the difficult circumstances of the prison. He noted that as he was sharing a cell, his cell mate would know he had been called out but that he could not reveal anything about conversation or who he had talked with. He also noted that he could not reveal information to officers, some of whom he felt were genuinely concerned, instead he requested that they talk to the individual in question. He noted the Listener Support system in the prison in which Listeners met each week. Chris also works in the laundry in the prison.

He had attended a school in another prison and felt that all prison schools were not the same. He described the previous prison school he had been in for example as being like back in primary school in the sense that you were treated in a childlike way. He is much more positive about the

current prison school he attends although he has concerns about subject choice and the difficulties at times of getting to the school. Chris is currently doing a degree with the Open University (OU) in the prison school. He tries to follow the OU advice of studying two hours a day. He is focused on doing something that would enable him to achieve a certificate while doing his sentence and he attends the school in order to receive advice on essays and get feedback from the teachers on work he has done for the OU.

Although Chris was critical of the LCA programme, it was successful in the sense that he did complete upper second level education. Chris' life history profile also reveals how through his prison work in the laundry, his studying for a degree and his volunteerism with the Samaritans, he has kept active within the institution. Significantly his report of a more negative prison school experience in another prison institution reinforces the argument that not all prison schools within such total institutions, are experienced in the same way. Thus although prisons may share similar characteristics as total institutions, there is potential in each institution to bestow their own features albeit perhaps less tangible ones, for example developing a particular ethos or atmosphere. The following section explores comparisons which emerged from the life history interviews on prison and the school environment.

### **Prisoner Learners' Comparisons Between the Total Institution of the Prison and Their Earlier Educational Experiences in School**

The link between schools and prison is not an abstract one (Foucault, 1977; Devine, 2003; Dwyer 1995; Hodge and Tripp, 1986) and the connection between the two was acknowledged in Chapter Three. A review of the literature on early school leaving, also in Chapter Three, had identified the importance of the school climate, while Chapter Five had addressed prisoner learners' perspectives on prison culture and life within the total institution of the prison. A number of prisoner learners, in the course of the life history interviews, drew comparisons between their present experience of prison and their previous experience of education. The emphasis on what can be worn was an issue to emerge in life history interviews conducted in St. Patrick's Institution, an institution for young adults under 21 years. Michael linked St. Patrick's Institution's insistence on colour coding prisoners according to their status to his former secondary school principal's insistence on the correct school uniform being worn. Michael reported how his principal dealt with students who did not conform to the dress code by sending them home, often at 9.30am in the morning:

Go around, 'tuck in your shirt', go home, you've no t-shirt on you, where's your pants, there's no, half nine tomorrow, there was just 'go home' and you couldn't go home cause your parents, you'd be killed, so where would you go? You'd go to the back of the school, smoking and drink, he wouldn't care less then, you know what I mean? (Michael, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

As the statement from Michael reveals, in an apparent effort to enforce discipline and maintain control by enforcing a dress code, the school becomes not a site of learning but facilitates opportunities for engagement in illegal and anti-social behaviour. This emphasis on clothes and the correct uniform are, in Goffman's analysis, ways institutions have of impacting on individual's sense of self. In Michael's example, the strict enforcement of correct clothing and being sent home early in the school day seems designed to exclude the student from any meaningful learning experience.

Eric, who although interviewed in Mountjoy Prison, had recently come from St. Patrick's and he also drew attention to the link between how children were treated in school to how prisoners, but specifically those incarcerated in St. Patrick's Institution, were treated the same way.

They're on a different wing into what we're on. It's just what way the schools treat you like, you know what I mean? They treat like us you're a proper kid 'cause it's only an institution for young lads, you know what I mean? If you're not, like there's lads over there that are twenty, nineteen, twenty and they have their heads screwed on like, you know what I mean? (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

Michael also drew links between the practice of "streaming" (the practice of organising school classes according to academic ability) as adopted by some schools and the prison practice of placing certain prisoners in particular wings, it was clear that the prisoner learner saw both practices as being done with the principal aim of control. Michael, in recalling his experience of school, reported being put into a small class after successfully completing first year where it was clear to him and others that this class was the bottom of the school hierarchy in terms of academic ability. When being

interviewed on his experience in school Michael reflected that such streaming practices, in his opinion, did not work:

‘cause we were treated like, we were treated like fools, so we acted like fools, do you know what I mean, [inaudible] I understand that, but putting us altogether, putting us on our own, do you know what I mean, sure it only made us worse, I was the smartest in my class, I could do what I wanted to do, I could read and write, I was brainy that way, I just didn’t, I don’t know why. (Michael, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

The impact of labelling is evident and is being enforced by the practice of streaming. Smyth, McCoy and Darmody (2004) note that “streaming” is now disproportionately prevalent in disadvantaged schools and may indeed contribute to more working class students being allocated into lower stream classes and consequently experiencing the school climate as negative. Byrne and Smyth’s (2010) study on early school leaving reported that in schools that used streaming, students could identify the type of class that they had been assigned to and that many students in their study had experience of highly disruptive classroom environments. The findings of these two studies on early school leaving echo the experiences of Michael who reported that he was the only one of this small class of eight students to get his Junior Certificate. Kevin, who although over 30 years older than Michael, also reflected on the practice of streaming and its influence on his earlier educational experience:

But then you’d look down at the D and the Prep class and sometimes you’d feel sorry for them. They were just in a class and flicking paper around and throwing pens at each other and, you know. That wasn’t happening in my class. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

The following section further examines analysis of prisoner learners’ experience of school in relation to features identified in Goffman’s (1961) account of a total institution.

## **Previous Experiences of School: Features of a Total Institution**

In analysing prisoner learners' previous experiences of school using Goffman's (1961) concept of a total institution, two distinct areas emerged and are explored: the loss of a sense of safety in schools and the use of punishment, specifically expulsion, in schools.

### **Loss of sense of safety**

Goffman (1961) had identified loss of a sense of safety as a feature of a total institution. Many learners however, when discussing their earlier experiences of schooling, reported a culture of violence and intimidation. Stephen, at age 50 and the second oldest of the prisoner learners interviewed, would have left school at an age when a majority of people did not go on to secondary school and he recounted his experience of education as an extremely negative one:

The violence that was used in the school. And even as a child, to actually see a grown man with a four-foot bamboo cane with sellotape wrapped tightly right around going up the whole way and to see any young child having to hold his hand out.....the froth coming from a grown man's mouth as he's inflicting pain to anyone. I seen a lot of it. You know like, so I've never had a good memory of school. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

For Stephen, school was a place of violence and dread and he spoke of witnessing acts of violence being committed against his family members and others in his class by teachers and of the resulting fear he had of being beaten. The threat of violence Stephen faced impinged on any positive memories he had of school. As well as the violence and threat of violence inflicted by teachers, Stephen was aware that school was also a site of inequality, he spoke of knowing from a young age of the class distinction that was present in the class room with children being positioned and given attention by the teacher according to the economic status of their family:

Well, I noticed from a very young age that you had an area in my town where there was Travellers that would come to school. The Travellers was at the very back, right? And then lower working class people was in the next line to them.

And that's what I . . . well I always remember that of school that. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

Stephen's experience of education, in particular his leaving school on completion of primary education, may be seen as illustrative of an era in which in the absence of free second level education, many students left following primary school. O'Connor (2007) explains that the introduction of free second level education, which occurred in 1967, and noticeably later than many of Ireland's European counterparts, had a considerable impact on completion rates. The interview with Stephen also took place in the aftermath of the publication of the report from The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse [The Ryan Report, 2009] and this report was evoked by the prisoner learner himself during the course of the life history interview when Stephen, noting that the report was revealing abuses in "reform schools" suggested that there should be a similar disclosure about what was happening in mainstream schools. The Report concluded that the fact that there was little variation in the use of physical beatings from region to region, decade to decade, or from Congregation to Congregation was an indication that there was cultural understanding within the system that beating boys was acceptable and appropriate. Those who were extreme in their punishments, be they priests or lay staff, were according to the report, tolerated by management and their behaviour rarely challenged. Among the conclusions that the Commission made in its report were the acknowledgements that:

Physical and emotional abuse and neglect were features of the institutions. . . . Schools were run in a severe, regimented manner that imposed unreasonable and oppressive discipline on children and even on staff. (Volume 4, Chapter 6, Conclusion 6.01)

And

Complaints by parents and others made to the Department were not properly investigated. (Volume 4, Chapter 6, Conclusion 6.13)

These conclusions echo some prisoner learner accounts of their experiences of the total institution of the prison. Stephen's description of his school, while not an

industrial school, could be perceived as similar to those in an industrial school, in terms of his account of the violence and oppression he reported experiencing. His experiences highlighted his lack of power and also his awareness of his parents' powerlessness. He explained how he felt it was not an option to complain to parents about what was happening in the school as the child would be blamed on doing something wrong:

A parent could not go in and because the priest would actually say that you were lying and who would be believed? And if your parents pushed it any further, on the Sunday morning, your parents was named right, from the pulpit, that they were bringing the devil's word on top of the school and the church. So, you're blackmailed, the parents were actually blackmailed to say 'well you must be doing something wrong'. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

Stephen reported leaving school with limited education, describing how "I couldn't read or write when I left school. I couldn't even read the clock". He revealed in the life history interview how he felt, on the basis of his daughters' experiences of education, that the school experience was different today where "Children have more rights. Teachers are more understanding". However, reported incidents of violence did emerge among younger prisoner learners during the life history interviews. Some prisoner learners for example noted the aggressive behaviour of some teachers and their description indicated the presence of a pervasive culture of control that was liable at times to erupt in violence. Ben described how he had "seen a lot of fellas getting really whacked, d'you know in primary school like" while Nick was also critical of the headmaster whom he accused of being violent towards him. Robert, who on the one hand was the most enthusiastic about his secondary school and the teachers there, was critical of the primary school he attended:

But yeah, it was just, it was just one of those things, there were teachers who actually would get off on it, they'd actually enjoy it, they'd enjoy roaring and shouting at you, they'd enjoy belittling you, that was the thing I learnt in secondary school where the quality mark was there but in primary school if they thought you were dumb you stayed dumb, if they thought you were clever you were nurtured, which I did find an awful lot in primary school. (Robert, 38, Limerick Prison)



Robert's recollections of school seem to echo Goffman's observations of a "them and us" relationship among staff and inmates within a total institution. The importance of labelling is encapsulated in the phrase "if they thought you were dumb you stayed dumb" and the impact such a label may have on your sense of self, particularly if it is supported by an institution. Robert's account is a reminder too of Goffman's observation on how the total institution reinforces the low status of the inmate.

Goffman (1961) had identified the divide in a total institution between the small group of supervisory staff and the larger group of inmates as a feature of total institutions, noting that both groups may tend to see themselves in terms of narrow and hostile stereotypes. While schools in and of themselves are not total institutions under Goffman's definition, nonetheless it was noteworthy that Nick framed the relationship between teachers and students in a similar way. Nick who left school at 13, having experienced only a couple of weeks in secondary school was critical of the teachers who he felt did not care. He reports that he was unable to read and write, yet he felt teachers were indifferent and he characterised teachers in his first life history interview as a "bunch of alcoholics" and in his second stated that "most of them are just after the money". Chris' description of a class's treatment of a teacher, also echoes a "them and us" scenario and paints a picture of a teacher ceding control to her pupils and effectively being reduced to a passive observer in the class room. "She was told like, 'Sit down there you and be quiet' like. She had a broken leg for a few months and she was just left in the corner like. We did what we wanted like".

Goffman (1961) had observed the impact a total institution had on an inmate's sense of self and identity was an area in which he also explored in his earlier text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) in which he noted the "front" that people presented in their interaction with others. Chris alluded to this and was aware of the personas teachers adopted in the classroom:

Most of them were alright like. Some of them were a bit too, too good for their own good like. They got took advantage of and there was others that like hard as nails. They just couldn't even have a laugh in the class, couldn't smile like.  
(Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

John too spoke of deliberately provoking a teacher who had a speech impediment while Peter talked about how his class had realised that by “tormenting” a teacher she would keep them back from the next class for 10 minutes – a measure that only meant that the “tormenting” was a regular feature as the following class was one where the subject teacher had control and would make the entire class work solidly for the duration of the forty minutes. It seems that once a culture of control had been established and accepted within a school then it simply became a battle between pupils and teachers to see who would gain control.

This “battle” of dominance and control was also manifest in bullying and acts of cruelty within the school setting and were described by Ben who stated: “I seen a lot of bullying going on. There was a lot of blind eyes turned to it”. Gerard, Liam, and Michael described similar acts of bullying but revealed that they were in fact the bullies. These accounts resonated with Nick’s reflection on St. Patrick’s Institution (as revealed in the previous chapter) that “you have to become a bully to not be bullied”. Liam and Michael recalled getting into trouble in primary school because of their behaviour towards other students, a fact they both regretted now:

‘Cause I was bullying another student, kept hitting another student, taking his lunch off him, throwing it on the ground, making him eat it, real bastard, now I look at it, I’m sick of all that, know what I mean. (Liam, 18, St. Patrick’s Institution)

They were just stupid things, you know like bullying young fellas, nothing to be proud of now, like it was funny back then but it’s not now, ashamed of it now more than anything else, some of it. (Michael, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Gerard also reported engaging in bullying behaviour in primary school and it was clear from Gerard’s recollections that it was an intervention of a number of teachers in primary school that caused him to examine his own behaviour at a time when he was about to enter secondary school. Nonetheless, he reports that in hindsight some of his behaviour in secondary school could have been regarded as bullying:

I might have been a bit of a bully yeah, being stupid like, over stupid things, people kicking me, you know, like running with the ball and someone kicks me by accident, because of that you know, adrenalin pumping, I'd play football all day, knowing I could just snap.

In 1993, the Department of Education and Science (DES) drew up Guidelines to deal with bullying behaviour in both primary and post-primary schools (DES, 1993). The guidelines conclude "It is evident that bullying is a matter of increasing concern in our schools. It poses very real difficulties, therefore, for school behaviour and discipline". Minton (2010) in a survey of bullying in Irish schools reported that bully/victim problems seem to be persistent with 35.3% of primary students and 36.4% of post-primary students reporting having been bullied over the previous three month period. The results of the survey lead Minton (2010) to conclude that aggressive behaviour appeared to be widespread in Irish schools. Smaller scale community-based studies in the Dublin area have also provided evidence from children of the existence of bullying in school and the need for effective strategies for dealing with it (Downes and Maunsell, 2007; Downes et al, 2006). The National Longitudinal Study of Children (Minister for Health and Children, 2009) also found that 13% of nine year olds (15% of boys and 11% of girls) reported that they had picked on a child or an adult in the year preceding the survey. Thus, based on information from the children themselves, there was some overlap between those who were bullied and those who were bullying with 10% of the sample reporting being both.

The climate of bullying, violence and potential violence which emerged among some prisoner learners' experience of school suggest a connection too with the climate of violence and bullying that has been reported in the prisons (and documented in Chapters Three and Four). Goffman (1961) had argued that for some inmates, based on their previous life experiences, the level of adaptation needed on entry to a total institution is minimal and this point seems to have particular relevance in this context. So too does his observation that inmates entered total institutions with an understanding of how the world was and interestingly Olweus and Limber (2010) who reviewed large scale studies on bullying in Norway found that previous research revealed that former male school bullies are clearly overrepresented in crime registers as young adults.

Within the school system, the highest punishment that could be used was expulsion and when prisoner learners reflected on why they left school, expulsion was cited as a reason by six of them and the following section explores their experience of expulsion in more detail.

### **Use of punishment in schools: Expulsion**

Goffman (1961) in his account of a total institution had noted the existence of a privilege system and described methods of punishment ironically as part of the same system, with both privilege and punishment both being used to gain control. Six prisoner learners recounted their experiences of being punished in school through being expelled. The final incident before expulsion was in a number of cases the result of violence. Michael, for example, revealed how police were called by the school in order to deal with his behaviour which involved a physical assault on a teacher. Hugh, who was the youngest to leave school (at age 12) reported being expelled because he had hit his teacher and broke a number of windows. He described why he did it. “I don’t know, I was just throwing chalk at him, and he was putting something on the board, he grabbed me by the neck and I didn’t like it, think it was too rough, I flipped”.

Although Hugh is punished for his violence, in his account of the event he is reacting to violence and the “contaminative exposure” that Goffman (1961) also referred to in his analysis of a total institution. Hugh also reported how his mother had a tense relationship with the school and he feels that the situation was inflamed by his mother’s reaction to his neck injury. He now found himself expelled from 5<sup>th</sup> class in primary school aged 12 and in the “catch 22” situation of not attending school (which at his young age is against the law) but being unable to find a school to take him.

Owen never attended secondary school as he revealed that no school would accept him; a fact he attributed to his diagnosis of ADHD. Owen reported a history of expulsions from primary schools and as such a particularly disjointed educational experience. He revealed, in the life history interviews, how he had attended “five or six” primary schools and described the sudden end to his formal education: “Well I got thrown out of a few of them and then I got put into one that basically you can’t get thrown out of so the minute I made my confirmation, that was it, goodbye”.

McCoy, Banks and Shevlin (2012) acknowledge that there has been dramatic transformation of the special education system in Ireland in the last two decades and as a result of these changes there are now a greater number of students with special educational needs (SEN) attending mainstream schools. McCoy and Banks (2012) found that because of this shift towards more mainstream provision in Ireland only a small proportion of students (.5%) attend, as Owen did, special schools. Three other prisoner learners, apart from Owen, referred to ADHD in their life history interviews (Hugh, Liam and Nick). Hugh, Nick and Owen all left school early and all reported being diagnosed with ADHD and receiving medication while Liam, who did complete the junior cycle, revealed that while he was never diagnosed, teachers “just kept saying I had ADHD”. McCoy and Banks (2012) found that children with SEN that, even taking account of their social and cultural background, are considerably more likely not to enjoy their time spent in school. McCoy, Banks and Shevlin (2012) found that children attending highly disadvantaged school contexts were more likely to be identified with behavioural problems and less likely to be identified with learning disabilities than children with similar characteristics attending other schools. The authors argued that this could point to a culture of care/containment rather than academic progress and questioned whether teachers in these contexts are more likely to identify emotional behaviour difficulties (EBD) in response to the disciplinary challenges presented in these schools. They questioned too the implications of this labelling for children in terms of their educational progress and also peer relations and highlight the much greater levels of disengagement among children with SEN. In line with international research, the study also found that boys are over-represented among children as having Special Educational Needs (SEN). Both Hugh and Owen, 19 and 20 respectively at the time of the interviews, and both diagnosed and receiving medication for ADHD, had no experience of second level education, with both reporting that no secondary school would accept them.

Nick and John, who left school at 13 and 14 respectively, also reported being expelled. Nick’s experience of secondary school was a brief one and within weeks he was expelled for stealing a teacher’s car, an act which involved the police intervening and Nick being arrested and charged with a number of motoring offences. Ian (who did complete his Junior Certificate) and John also initially reported having been expelled but through their descriptions of the events it is not clear if their expulsions would have

been formally recorded. In both cases (which took place in separate schools) both learners were “asked to leave” with the school making it clear that it would be in the learner’s interest to take this option instead of being expelled. Data from the National Educational Welfare Board Annual Report (2008) stated that “reported expulsions are uncommon” (p. 19) with 134 expulsions being recorded in 2005/6 (16 of which occurred in primary school, and 118 in secondary schools). John described the altercation he had with his teacher and the subsequent discussion with the school principal:

I was sitting right beside the door and the door was open, there was two little muppets outside messing, you know making noise, so I kicked the doors closed, the teacher ‘what are you doing closing the door’ and all, in me face shouting at me. All spit coming at me. He dragged me up out of the table, [inaudible] hip smacked off, a big lump of spit slapped off me face, fuckin’ I put a big filthy spit on his face and he grabs me, fucks me out, ‘get out, go down to the principal’s office’. I’m not going to no principal’s office, I’m going home, see you later. Then me ma’s talking to the principal and all, the principal says he’s always getting into trouble, we don’t, I’m not telling him to leave, I’m asking him, we’re asking to leave. I said, fuck this, I’m not staying where I’m not wanted. See you later, tried to get in another school or two, but no joy, no one would take me. (John, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

John’s account also echoes Goffman’s description of “contaminative exposure” and his action could be interpreted as a response to this. In John’s description of events, it appears that his “expulsion” would not have been recorded as one although in effect, that is what it was. Thus, while official reports record relatively low levels of expulsion, there is no data on students who are “asked to leave” nor can those who are “asked to leave” rather than expelled avail of any appeals procedure. Gerard spoke of the incident which resulted in his expulsion and described being in a situation where he felt he could not back down in front of others and how his subsequent attempts to go back to school were rebuffed:

A girl just started slagging me, and I lost the head, I just went mad, I just, I was told to sit down, I just got up and walked down the hall and the principal said if

you walk out don't come back, I just kept walking. But then I rang up and tried to get back in to the school, but they said no, so I went to Fas then. (Gerard, 17, St. Patrick's Institution)

As can be seen from Gerard's comments, his need to maintain his position in front of his peer group and his principal meant that he "kept walking", and his willingness to engage with the school is illustrated by his subsequent phone call. This rejection and expulsion, and the experiences too of Ian and John who are "asked to leave" raises questions as to whether these students are expelled or "pushed" out.

### **Positive Views of Educational Experiences**

By asking about the type of school prisoner learners attended and their experiences within it, a picture of the school culture began to emerge. The most positive description of a secondary school was given by Robert who spoke at length about the school he had attended and the opportunities it had provided him. It was while he was at school that he expressed an interest in setting up a canoe club and this interest was supported and encouraged by the school. Mention of schooling did evoke some positive memories and a large number of these memories related to sports and activities organised through the school itself (Ben, David, Eric, and Robert).

We used to go on trips and stuff, you know what I mean and it's class trips and stuff like that, you know what I mean. That was, I, I enjoyed that, you know what I mean. We used to do, have, play games of football in the yard and stuff like that. It was good growing up as a kid, you know. It was a good school. I thought it was a good school, yeah. (David, 27 Mountjoy Prison)

Putnam (2000) argues that extracurricular "out of school" activities organised both within and independently of schools have been shown to increase civic involvement in later life, involvement which he sees as crucially important as the crux of Putnam's argument is that social networks have a value both for individuals and for communities. Participation in extracurricular activity is also associated with a reduction of early school leaving especially for high risk young people (Downes et al 2006, Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). In contrast to prisoner learners who had experience of

streaming, Robert reported classes of children with mixed ability and of children being encouraged to help and to be helped.

and even in my class there were kids clever in maths and some better in English like I was excellent in art, woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing, where there maybe another three were as good, you know, so it was, and then it was a good thing to help each other out then as well. You know so if somebody was joining another class and they weren't as good, the teachers would encourage another student who might be better, or was picking it up easier, to help them out, you know which was good.

And

I would have done that and it would have been done for me as well. So that's why it helps because you're not giving all the time, you're also receiving some help as well, which is fantastic. (Robert , 38, Limerick Prison)

The type of peer mentoring that Robert experienced was not reported by any of the other prisoner learners, a point that Peter noted. "The closest you would have got to peer mentoring would have been one of the older kids kicking the crap out of you".

For other prisoner learners, school was an opportunity to meet people and to make friends and for some learners (notably Frank and Peter) school and college respectively were the context for creating friendships that would continue once formal education had ended and would be a source of comfort while serving a prison sentence. Peter who is serving his sentence in Limerick prison acknowledged the importance of visits from friends and was grateful for the often long distances his friends made to keep contact with him.

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse the previous educational and life experiences of prisoner learners prior to imprisonment and the chapter was divided into three main sections. It began by examining prisoner learners' experiences of family background. It became apparent through the life history interviews in this thesis that



many prisoner learners had experienced stressful life events in their childhood. These stressful life events included separation of parents, being moved from parental care and witnessing drug use and violence.

Younger prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution reported having experienced a number of particularly stressful life events. These stressful events included experiences of incarceration in detention centres, a parent in prison, and stays in foster care. The profile of Hugh illustrated the difficult childhood he had experienced. While some prisoner learners reported positive experiences of their childhood, it was clear that many prisoner learners had experiences that were liable to impact on their educational journey.

The second section of this chapter focused on the influence of drugs, both personal use of drugs and parental use of drugs. Drug use had emerged as a significant theme in the life history interviews and the potential of school to be a site for drug use and expulsion from school to be an instigating factor for drug use emerged through analysis of the life history interviews.

The third and main section of this chapter focuses on prisoner learners' previous experience of education. An overview of prisoner learners' educational attainment was presented based on analysis of the 18 life history interviews. Two prisoner learners had completed the senior cycle while eight had left school early and the remaining eight had left school having completed the junior cycle. Of the 16 who left school without completing second level education, six reported being expelled. Six out of 16 prisoner learners who had not completed second level education, would never engage with education again until they found themselves incarcerated within the total institution of the prison.

The data in this chapter reveals the variety of educational experiences of prisoner learners and draws attention to their position as knowledgeable agents who are able to discuss, reflect and critique their experiences. Foucault's (1977) identification of both prisons and schools as being part of a carceral network encouraged analysis of comparisons prisoner learners themselves made between their experiences of prison and school. In analysing prisoner learners' reported experiences in school, a number of

features were identified that corresponded to two features Goffman had identified as characteristic of a total institution: the loss of a sense of safety and punishment, specifically expulsion. Both are explored in this chapter. The accounts of violence that had been experienced in the school system created a parallel with the accounts of tension and violence that have been reported in the prison system. A culture of control and dominance was frequently evoked when describing school experiences, although Robert's account of his positive experience in secondary school, in particular illustrates that this was not always the case. Analysis of the life history interviews revealed that expulsion is used for a number of sanctions varying from criminal behaviour to situations in which the student refused to "back down".

It is clear that those entering both educational and prison systems, come having experienced family and community life. The emergence of drugs, a problem in the community, emerges as an issue in which schools and prisons have to deal with. All the participants in this research however were prisoner learners, prisoners who chose to engage in education while in prison, in many cases, despite their previous educational experiences. In the course of the life history interviews prisoner learners presented vivid memories of their time in school and the teachers who taught them. This chapter therefore offers insights that may be useful for those involved in teaching, both within the education system and indeed the prison education system more specifically. The final analysis chapter in this thesis, Chapter Eight, focuses on analysing prisoner learners' experiences of attending the prison school and their motivation to engage in education while incarcerated within the total institution of the prison.

## **Chapter Eight: Prisoner Learners' Experience of Prison Education Within the Total Institution of a Prison**

*The school doesn't come to you; you have to come to the school.*

(Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

The objective of this thesis is to ascertain how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison. In order to fully address the research question posited, this chapter examines, through analysis of the life history interviews, how prisoner learners come to access prison education, their perspectives on the prison school and the challenges involved in studying within the total institution of the prison. The chapter also examines prisoner learners' motivation to attend the prison school, barriers to engaging in prison education and prisoner learners' suggestions for reform, in terms of access and participation.

The previous chapter revealed how many prisoner learners, prior to incarceration, had negative experiences of education including experiences of suspension and expulsion. Yet these prisoner learners had chosen to engage with education within the confines of the total institution of the prison. As the above quote by Liam illustrates, the onus was on prisoners themselves to make contact with the prison school and access prison education and this chapter begins by describing and analysing the process of enrolling in the prison school as revealed through the life history interviews. Prisoner learners' views of the prison school itself and how that experience compares to their previous experience of education outside the institution of the prison are then explored. Goffman's (1961) identification of a divide among staff and inmates as a feature of a total institution provided the foundation for investigating the relationship between teachers and prisoner learners further and analysis of the teacher-prisoner learner relationship is included in this section. In exploring prisoner learners' perspectives of the prison school, the range of subjects currently being undertaken by the prisoner learners is also presented.

While Chapter Four had reviewed the literature in relation to motivation to engage in prison education, the life history interviews, collated from 18 prisoner learners in three prison sites, explored why prisoners chose to attend the prison school and become prisoner learners. The range of motivations and “push”/“pull” features, which emerged from the life history interviews, are presented in this chapter and analysed. A review of the literature had also revealed the significance of prisoner learners’ perspective on their own future as a factor in motivation to engage in education (Leondari, 2007; Husman and Lens, 1999) and with this in mind, prisoner learners’ study goals are also explored. Barriers to attending the prison school, as identified by prisoner learners, are identified and analysed and the chapter concludes by offering suggestions, which emerged from the life history interviews, as to how improvements to prison education could be made.

Included in this chapter are two profiles of prisoner learners, Eric, 20, who was serving his sentence in Mountjoy Prison and Stephen, who at 50 years old was the second oldest prisoner learner interviewed and who was incarcerated in Limerick Prison. These two prisoner learners are chosen to illustrate their different life and, in particular, educational experiences.

### **Process of Enrolling and Accessing the Prison School**

In addressing the research question of how prisoner learners experience prison education, the process of how prisoner learners enrolled and consequently accessed the prison school were explored in the life history interviews. A relatively straightforward process of enrolment was reported across all three prison research sites. Prisoner learners reported that once you had decided to attend the prison school, and had entered the prison school an initial interview took place with a member of the teaching staff. The interview, as described, seemed to be informal in nature, and consisted of questions relating to prisoner learners’ previous educational background. That interview also included an overview of courses which were available and in some cases guidance on what courses the prisoner learner could enrol in. Frank for example described his experience:

When I came here first I went into the Governor, ‘Right, I want to go and get me Leaving Cert, how do I do it?’ ... brought me up for my interview, ‘Right, what subjects do you want to do?’ That was it, you know. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

As can be seen from Frank’s account, having made the decision from the outset that once in prison he would do his Leaving Certificate, he was directed to the prison school and his interview effectively consisted of being asked what subjects he would like to do. As such, from analysis of the life history interviews, the prison school interview process did not seem to operate as a mechanism to exclude candidates or to “cherry pick” the best candidates, but rather as an information session on what was available. Hugh describes his experience in which the teacher interviewing him offered encouragement to do a FETAC course:

It was alright, I came over and he was asking me things, like did I have any courses, or did I want any course or anything. I said the Junior might be too hard for me, I didn’t think I’d get through I wouldn’t have the patience for it and he said there’s an easier thing, FETAC and I knew about that because I already had got certificates from Lawrences for that, two of them. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Eric, although in a different prison, reported a similar experience:

[Name of teacher] talked me through it, you know what I mean. It’s hard to get back into school, you know what I mean. But you have to get over it. Once you’re back in there you’re alright. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

Stephen elaborated on the interview process in the prison he was incarcerated and how it was used to encourage peer support in learning:

Yeah, you have to go for an interview and that and they’ll do anything now from beginners literacy and that, eh maths, English, eh, you can, they, they interview you and then they explain about all the different classes and what would you like, they ask you about your schooling and that, eh and where would you like,

what did you want help with, if you wanted to learn reading and writing, if you were embarrassed about it, did you want one-to-one tuition and they'll do up in a simple form, that a person doesn't have to let anyone know what's happening with him, what he's getting from the school and that, and they slowly then actually group a number of people that have the exact same problem but they'll get them involved in helping each other right which [inaudible] it's actually working. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

In contrast to the relatively straight forward enrolment process in the prison school however, the process of physically accessing the prison school itself was reported as being more complicated. Chris explained that a prison officer at the gate possesses a list of names for those attending the prison school, and at the allotted time, it is up to each prisoner to alert the officer to the fact that they are going to the school and then the prison officer consults the list and decides whether the prisoner can be brought up to the prison school:

Some days it would take half an hour, some days it would take ten minutes. It all depends who's on. Sometimes they hold us to wait at the gate, it depends on the officer. So we could be waiting for ages. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Chris described the frustration inherent in such a process, dependent as it was on "luck and who's on the landing and who'll let you out the gate" would sometimes cause:

Ah, they annoy you sometimes when you're in a rush to get somewhere and you only have so much time like. So you just get annoyed with them. You can't blame them like, so you can't. You can't blame them, you can't say anything to them. They'll just laugh at you. There's no point fighting with them or arguing with them. You don't get anywhere. So you just, you have to live with them. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Eric too described the powerlessness of the experience:

‘Cause they just don’t let you up. Some of them are just, some of the screws in here are just assholes, you know what I mean. Some of them are alright, some of them are just no good. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

Frank noted the frustration caused by knowing that while prisoner learners are waiting to gain access to the prison school, the teachers are upstairs waiting for them to arrive:

When you have a man downstairs telling you that they’re not up there and you have a person that’s teaching us and ‘We’re here since half nine every morning’, And finally get up and say ‘How, how long are you in here? What time do you get in here?’ ‘Half nine’. ‘Alright. They told me you weren’t in until ten o’clock.’ (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

Frank’s comment illustrates the intricate relationship between the prison school and the prison – the school is dependent on the prison regime to run effectively and the teachers are, it seems, as powerless as the prisoners to make sure classes begin on time. The prison school’s reliance on the institution of the prison was also illustrated by Liam. He reported how the process of getting to the school, which he felt went smoothly on most occasions, was impacted on what was happening in the prison and told how an event, such as a fight in the prison, could significantly delay when prisoner learners could go to the prison school.

The importance of a prisoner learner’s name being on the prison officers’ list of prisoner learners going to the prison school emerged during the life history interviews and accessing the prison school was compromised when a prisoner learner’s name did not appear on “the list” as Owen discovered:

But sometimes like there yesterday, yesterday, yeah my name wasn’t down for the afternoon. They weren’t, they were saying no, no, no, we’re not getting you over, the officer who would bring you over, he said, no I’m not bringing you over [inaudible] so basically fuck off. So we started talking to the ACO [Assistant Chief Officer]. The ACO came down for every day, the ACO brought the lot of us over. (Owen, 20, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Interestingly as Owen observed, the more senior the prison officer the more likely he was to bring prisoner learners over, perhaps indicating the value s/he saw in providing education in prison in general and its relationship too with the effective running of a prison. Hugh had similar experiences to Owen:

Yeah, sometimes the teachers aren't in and like it's all a big list now in the prison, you have to be on a list to get into the library, gym and workshops, if you're not on that list, you have to go back to your cell. And the odd officer who doesn't like you, he'll tell you 'you've no class' and you've to go back to your cell. An ACO, that you had a disagreement with you and he'll say the ACO has the list. They'll send you back to your cell and they'll keep doing it until you explode. They just want to give you a few thumps then and get you on a P19 [disciplinary report], lose family visits, lose phone calls, shop, everything. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Hugh's frustration at not being on the list is evident, as too is his interpretation that it is done as a measure of control and with a desire to provoke inmates so that they will be disciplined further. While the reason a prisoner learner's name might not be on "the list" could be multiple, what is certain is that it produced a degree of uncertainty among some prisoner learners as to whether, on any given day, access to the prison school might be prevented. As John states "I wasn't let over yesterday, that was Tuesday, don't know if I'll be let over again today". However many prisoner learners spoke of this uncertainty with an air of resignation. Chris, for example, interviewed in Mountjoy Prison, told how "it's just the way it is" similarly Peter in Limerick Prison reported "it's just the way the place works". Michael, in St. Patrick's Institution, revealed how he responded on being told by prison officers to go back to his cell as his name was not on the list for school, "went to sleep, what else can you do? You know what I mean?"

A number of prisoner learners however reported having little difficulty in getting to the prison school (Ben, Kevin, Peter and Robert) however this was because it seemed they were known and trusted by the prison officers. Peter, for example, described the process in the prison he was imprisoned in:



The way it generally works is we know what days we're coming over here so we go down hang around where he's going to be collecting and he'll check off the list but a lot of the time there'll be a couple of names missing off the list, depending, some of the officers vary about it, they know the lads who are coming over all the time anyway so if you're not on the list they'll bring you anyway, others, if you're not on the list, too bad, you're not coming over today. (Peter, 30, Limerick Prison)

His observations show that in accessing the prison school, there was a dependence on the prison officer in charge and as Peter stated "some of the officers vary about it". While Peter had little difficulty getting access to the prison school, he was aware of problems with the process:

Some of it's just accidents, people get left off or a teacher's off one day, so a bunch of lads waiting to get to school to be told 'no your class isn't on today' or there's an officer missing for the day, doesn't happen so much with the main school, but eh usually if there's an officer missing anywhere in the jail, right the officer from the library will be the first one that will be transferred over so the library will be closed on the day, it's the first thing, the first place they're going to cut corners, they're not going to leave themselves short on the landing where an officer where they're trying to keep control of 50 or 60 people [yeah] on the off chance somebody wants to come over and get out a couple of books.

Peter's account of how the prison officer assigned to the library may be re-assigned to the prison if there is a staff shortage, with the library closed as a result, highlights the security priorities of the prison institution and its impact on educational services.

The high level of bureaucracy involved in the prison regime is apparent but lead to some almost farcical situations, Robert for example told of how prisoner learners would be called to go to the prison school and then those who were going to the workshop (run by officers in the Irish Prison Service) would be called later; however if the wood workshop was cancelled, those prisoner learners could not, except at the

discretion of prison officers, be allowed to go to the prison school, as the people down on “the list” for the prison school had already been collected.

So I’m stuck then, you know, there’s quite a few of us who are stuck, and we try to come over to the school, now a lot of the time, fair play to most of the officers they will bring us over but it’s the fact that they don’t have to, you know, so. (Robert, 38, Limerick Prison)

Although difficulties in accessing the prison school were reported by prisoner learners across all three prison sites, Mountjoy Prison, St. Patrick’s Institution and Limerick Prison, this may not be experienced in all prisons, or at least not to the same degree. Frank, for example, spoke of how punctual the process of going to a prison school in another prison setting, which was not a site in this research, was, in comparison to his experience of attending prison school in Mountjoy Prison:

Like it’s very strict down there [name of other prison]. Like if you’re not, like they’ll call you between a quarter to ten and five to ten and if you miss the call in the morning you won’t, now they are punctual, you will get to where you’re going on time, right, em, rather than up here. I mean you’ll get up here for say ten o’clock some mornings, make it up at a quarter past ten, but then some mornings you can get up at a quarter to. (Frank, Mountjoy Prison)

The Inspector of Prisons stated on his inspection of Mountjoy that he had observed “on numerous occasions” (p. 15) prisoners not reaching their scheduled classes on time and in some cases over an hour late (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2009). Recommendation 14 states in his report states that “prisoners must attend school and workshops on time” (p. 41) and he states that this is a matter for local management which requires a change in existing practices.

The physical process of accessing prison education, the need for prison learners to identify themselves in front of prisoners and prison officers and the dependence on prison officers to permit access to the prison school could be interpreted as an institutional barrier to prison education. The prisoner learners who participated in the life history interviews were all attending the prison school and as such had successfully

accessed prison education services. Additional barriers to accessing prison education are explored in the concluding section of this chapter, and the following section explores prisoner learners' perception of prison education within the total institution of the prison.

### **A School Within a Total Institution: Prisoner Learners' Perspectives**

Liebling (2004) had found that most prisoners spoke of "escape" or "special places" when they talked about wellbeing within the prison system and a similar response was in evidence in this thesis in relation to prisoner learners' description of the prison school. Attendance at prison schools in Ireland is voluntary and as prisoner learners elected to attend, it was not surprising therefore to find that many prisoner learners who participated in the life history interviews described the school in positive terms. The precise words and phrases used to describe the prison school were, however, notable. For Alan, the school was "a kind of sanctuary" and this notion of the prison school being an escape or break from prison life was evoked by a number of prisoner learners including Ben and Frank: "The school I suppose it is like, it's a great escape, especially in prison" (Ben). "But the school, like it's a break. When you come up here like it's a break from the landings" (Frank).

Goffman (1961) had argued that the bureaucratic managing of a large group of people is a key feature of a total institution and that consequently surveillance was an important and integral element to it. Foucault (1977) too had described prison as "omni-disciplinary" (p. 236). Frank's comment that in the prison school "you're away from the watchful eye" suggested that, for him at least, school was a space free from the institutional gaze that permeated the prison. Robert's description suggests this too and he described the prison school in terms of being "free".

Oh absolutely, you're out of jail, you're not in prison, when you come over here you're free for a couple of hours, you're doing what you want to do, you're doing what you like doing, there's no one banging your door saying you have to go to the yard, or you have to go to your cell or anything like that. (Robert, 38, Limerick Prison)

The characterisation of the prison school as a break/escape from the prison is significant in itself seeing as those within the prison school are still physically within the prison and each prison school has prison officers assigned to it. However it was clear from the life history interviews that prisoner learners identified the prison school as operating in a space which is different from the rest of the prison. As discussed in Chapter Two, Goffman (1961) had identified areas of a total institution which were not subject to the same level of surveillance as found elsewhere. He used the term “free places” to describe them and these “free places” had “less than usual staff authority” (p. 204) with Goffman observing that staff either did not know of these places or knew of these places but stayed away or at least relinquished their authority once they entered them. In Goffman’s study however free places were often used as the scene for forbidden or tabooed activities e.g. the patch of wood behind the hospital was used occasionally as a place to drink or an area in the grounds was used as a location for poker games. Nonetheless his description does resonate with prisoner learners’ description of the prison school with the important qualification that prison schools were sanctioned by the total institution of the prison. Goffman (1961) noted, for example, in his description of “free places” that “all of these places seemed pervaded by a feeling of relaxation and self-determination, in marked contrast to the sense of uneasiness prevailing on some wards. Here one could be one’s own man” (p. 206).

This point was echoed by Frank’s description of the prison school as a place where you were “just seeing normal faces, you know, being treated like you’re, up here you’re, it doesn’t feel like you’re, you know, secluded or you’re in any way in prison” Similarly Eric told how in the prison school:

Like you’re your own person like, you know what I mean. They can’t go mad to you if you miss, if you miss a couple of classes, you know what I mean. They can’t go mad at you. You just do it and that’s it. If you don’t want to do it you just leave it. And that’s alright. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

A profile of Eric, based on data from the life history interviews, is contained below:

### Profile of Eric

Eric is 20 years old and is serving a three year sentence. At the time of interview he had spent nine months in prison and had served the initial part of his sentence in St. Patrick's Institution. He expressed his preference for Mountjoy Prison where he now was rather than St. Patrick's where "they treat you like you're only a little kid". His father is deaf and "a bit of an alcoholic". He describes him as not knowing what was going on when he was a child. He is close to his mother who visits him regularly. He went to primary school and completed one year in secondary school. He left half way through his second year in primary school but acknowledged that he was missing for most of the second year. He described being disinterested in school, characterised himself as a "messenger", resented having to wear a uniform and was unable, having missed so much of the second year, to "get into it". His mother was keen for Eric to go to school, he was aware however that his father also dropped out of school early and doubts he could have intervened in Eric's decision to leave even if he wanted to as, in Eric's eyes, that would have made him a hypocrite. Although he acknowledges some friends did stay on at school he described leaving school at 14 as not something out of the ordinary "sure that's what most kids do like, you know what I mean? Most kids don't even stay to do their leaving". Eric has older siblings (who were taken into foster care) and a younger sister.

"That's just the way it is" was a phrase Eric repeated throughout the life history interviews.

Eric began using drugs at 15 or 16 years of age. His mother was concerned about his dropping out of school and he went to Youthreach at his mother's insistence. He was one year at Youthreach however he was fired from there in his second year. He became heavily involved in drugs and felt it was good he was now in prison as he was off drugs and was eating properly. He had gained weight and attended the gym every day.

Eric attends the prison school every day and is currently doing Junior Certificate Maths, English and Business studies. He has completed a six week cookery course in the prison. He enjoys the school but identifies difficulties in accessing the school on certain days due to the prison officers on duty. He had wanted to be a carpenter when he was young and would have liked to do the woodwork workshop in the prison but as it offered no opportunity for him to gain certificates he felt it was of little use to him.

He has a girlfriend and a three year old child and his plan is to get a job when he is out of prison in order to support his girlfriend and child.

Eric had left school without any formal qualifications and the above profile provides contextual information on him and his background. His belief, for example, that most people left school early, is at odds with OECD (2011) figures which indicate that over 90% of young people now complete upper second level education. Eric's perspective on the numbers completing school makes clear that many of the people he knew were among those who did not complete. Drugs, as his life history interviews make clear, impacted on his educational experiences of Youthreach, a second chance education programme. Prison provided an opportunity for Eric to become drug free and more healthy in terms of diet and exercise. His desire to engage in education while in prison, was revealed in the life history interviews, to be rooted in his desire to achieve

qualifications, thus he perceived the carpentry workshops which offered no opportunity to do this, as of limited use to him. His identification of a need for qualifications to help him secure employment on release indicate how future orientated Eric is.

Goffman (1961) had identified a number of features of a total institution including the sense of loss and the series of mortifications that occur upon entry. While the prison school could not alleviate the mortifications that prisoner learners endured through incarceration, it did seem to mitigate the impact that the mortifications may cause particularly with regard to how prisoner learners were treated within the prison school. Chris alluded to this in his description of the prison school: “at the end of the day when you come up here they don’t treat you like you’re a prisoner. They just treat you like you’re normal” (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison).

Chris summed up succinctly the difference in how prisoner learners were treated in the prison school in the words “at the end of the day we’re, we’re adults here”. While the prison operates by demanding obedience and telling prisoners what to do, the prison school offers a space which is different – a space where prisoners are allowed to be adults and learners and are treated accordingly, as Frank articulates:

When it comes to the school I can relax, I can chill out. I can, I can get on with me work, I can ask questions, I can be treated as a human being, other than an animal, you know. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

This is reminiscent of Goffman’s (1961) use of the term “free space”. Wilson (2007) too had referred to space and had used the concept of “the third space” to describe the space the prison school occupies in which “a prisoner can be transformed into a student, where prison officers are replaced by teachers, and where it is possible to see and use colour, eat the food that you have made yourself and enjoy a more conducive environment” (p. 200). Analysis of the life history interview with prisoner learners in this research study suggested that the prison school seemed to provide a unique space within the total institution of the prison, as the following figures illustrates:

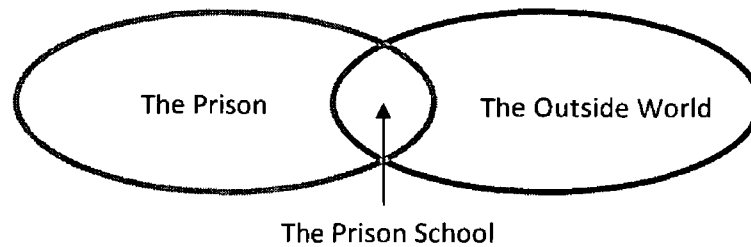


Figure 8.1 The prison school as a unique space

Figure 8.1 illustrates the position of the prison school as a distinctive space, one that cannot exist without the institution of the prison and the presence of the outside world. It is not an independent entity in its own right however, but has a dependent relationship with the prison and the outside world (in terms of policies and societal chances) and is influenced by both. Therefore while the prison school may facilitate the development of a life freer of, as Goffman terms, an “institutional gaze”, it is still part of the total institution and while prisoners become learners within the prison school, they will return to being prisoners. Similarly while inmates are enclosed in, what Foucault (1977) terms “complete and austere institutions”, they are never completely enclosed. Prisoner learners’ interaction with non-prison staff within the school, and their exposure to the media and experience of visits in the prison itself, means that the outside world encroaches and impacts on individuals who are incarcerated. Negative coverage in one newspaper during the time period of the life history interviews was critical of the existence of small class sizes within the prison school as compared to students in the school system where much larger class sizes were the norm. Ben and Kevin were both conscious of this criticism and referred to the newspaper coverage with Kevin acknowledging what he saw as “two ways of looking at it”.

Now, there’s two ways of looking at it I think. They’re right to an extent. In one way they are right because if my kid was going to school outside and there was forty or thirty-five in a class and he was finding it hard to cope and he couldn’t really get the same attention. And then I’m looking at him and saying there’s a

criminal in Mountjoy and there's only nine to a class. There's only nine to some classes because you have the likes of fellas down that won't come up. And then there's a specialised teaching job as well in here because not just the ordinary teacher from outside, couldn't come in here and sit down and teach a class. You'd have to be a special type of person. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

Those who attend the prison school also bring their previous experiences of education with them. Prisoner learners' experience of education in the prison school can be contrasted therefore with their experience of education as children and young adults in the community. At times these experiences contrasted sharply. Hugh observed, for example, that he "Never really had a good education you know, until I came in here". His observation that he had to be incarcerated and attend the prison school in order to have a "good education" is an indictment of the education he experienced outside the institution of the prison. Hugh was 19 at the time of his interview and his reports of previous educational experiences offer criticism of the contemporary system of mainstream education. Stephen, who was at age 50 the second oldest participant, reported having had a brutal and brutalising experience of education. He reported in his life history interviews how when he was growing up, education was equated with fear. The contrast between his love of the prison school and his experience of school on the outside as a child is stark:

I enjoy coming up here, I never enjoyed coming up to school when I was a child, d'you know, sad to say like, even 12 or 13, the fear that you going in those gates of school, d'you know, you'd be nearly wetting yourself, right, your stomach was sick and you knew within that day you were going to be beat up, right, that was an awful thing for any child to go through and the violence, I'm not just talking about caning you but the kicks and the punches and they were grown men that was doing this to us and everyone else. (Stephen, 50, Limerick Prison)

For both Hugh and Stephen, it is clear that the prison school has made a positive contribution to their sense of wellbeing. A profile of Stephen is contained below:

#### **Profile of Stephen**

Stephen was 50 years of age at the time of the interviews and was serving a nine year sentence. He had been in prison for 7 months. He was from a family of 14 and school was not a positive



experience for him. He noted the inequalities in the classroom and spoke of the violence and threats of violence inflicted by teachers on the children and the fear that caused.

He left school, along with the majority of children in his class at 14 and went to work. He was unable to read or write. By 15 he was working on building sites in Britain. He described his working life as for the most part a succession of low paid jobs which he feels he was condemned to because of the inadequacies of the education he received. He described school as a frightening, violent place of lost opportunities and one in which both children and parents had no rights. Leaving school, he said, was "my happiest experience".

Stephen subsequently taught himself to read and write. His experience of education not only resulted in limited job opportunities but he also felt that it was responsible for the tremendous anger he felt for years. In the life history interviews, he reported seeing an article in a newspaper on a theatre group who were working with individuals consumed by anger. He recognised himself and contacted the group. For six months he worked with this group on an anger management course and through role plays learnt how to deal with people and to accept other people's points of view. The course made him realise that he was carrying a great deal of emotional baggage from his childhood; baggage that was contributing to his heavy drinking, drug use and sense of not belonging. Divorced and separated from his second wife, he attributed his destructive lifestyle and inability to maintain relationships to his experience of education and held the state ultimately responsible for allowing one group of people, the Catholic Church, to control education for so long. He felt that if his educational experiences had been different, his life and consequently the decision he made to get involved in criminal activity would have been different. Nonetheless, he had no regrets about getting involved in crime; seeing it as a rational choice. He acknowledged that many of his achievements in material terms have come from the proceeds of crime, of which he includes his daughters' education. He speaks proudly of his two children one of whom is in second level education and the other in third level education and noted the emphasis he placed on school when they were young.

He has travelled extensively and had felt his lack of knowledge with computers keenly when abroad when he noticed people using internet cafes. Once in prison, he was eager to take computer classes. Stephen is currently attending the prison school every day Monday to Friday and is taking classes in art, arts and crafts, computers and t'ai chi. He also works in the prison and takes pride in his job. His aim is to devote himself more to art and to undertake the art exams available. He also plans on learning a foreign language with the ultimate aim of teaching it. He does not plan to continue education outside of the prison both for monetary reasons and because he believes that while availing of education within the prison is not perceived as a weakness, outside in the community it is.

Stephen's life history interviews charted his educational journey from a school, which was a frightening and violent place to him as a child, to his positive experience of education within the total institution of the prison. The impact of the negative experiences of education in his childhood was evident; he perceived the violence he experienced and witnessed while in school as having a significant impact on his adult life and life choices. His emphasis on education for his own children was notable as was his pride in their educational experiences. In the previous chapter, reference was made to Stephen's belief that education was different today and that children now had more

rights and teachers more understanding. The following section explores the comparison prisoner learners made between the education they had experienced as children and young adults and their experiences, as adults, of prison education.

### **Comparisons Between Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison and Previous Experiences Outside of the Prison Setting**

Prisoner learners revealed in the course of the life history interviews how the prison school compared to their previous experiences of education. They identified three key differences between their experience of the prison school and their experiences of education and school in general and these differences related in the main to the atmosphere of the prison educational environment and the differences in the teachers and methods of engagement. Many prisoner learners reflected on how the atmosphere in the prison school, ironically, was more relaxed than the school they attended as children/young adults. Gerard noted that “in here you have a talk, like, have a laugh in the class, on the outside it’s more serious” and this point was also echoed by Liam:

Would be a bit different, yeah the school in [School Name] or wherever, the teachers were more, just more like kind of regimented, know what I mean, stricter, but over here it’s just, they take you where you’re at, know what I mean, I always found in school just you had to be up to the bar you know what I mean, but in here they just, take you from where you’re at and then just work on you.  
(Liam, 18, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Owen observed that he did more work now in class than he would have done in a class outside of the prison precisely because of the more relaxed atmosphere:

It’s totally different to an ordinary school, they give you more time, more easy going, you know what I mean, let you mess in class, like when I was in school I didn’t do half the work that they were doing. (Owen, 20, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Differences in teachers and methods of engagement were also cited as a key difference between a prison school and a school outside the institution of the prison. Gerard, for example, told of how he saw that teachers in the prison school in St.

Patrick's Institution listened to the prisoner learners and had an appreciation for them as individuals and their circumstances. "They understand where you're coming from as well you know, they just listen to you as well, not like teachers on the outside. Teachers on the outside don't listen to what you have to say".

John also observed that teachers in the prison school "try and get the best bit of work out of you over here, try to encourage you". John used the word "freedom" not in relation this time to the place the prison school occupied in prisoner learners' perceptions of it, but in relation to how the curriculum was being taught in the prison school:

And then like that in school, know what I mean, say you're doing a bit of history or something and they were reading out something the day before, something interesting say like the 1916 rising or something, and eh then they brought you onto something else the next day, like in here you'd be able to say to him 'ah listen that was interesting I want to learn more about that', like you know what I mean, what I was doing the other day. In school, 'no, we're doing this' you know what I mean. You're just, you're given more freedom in here, it's more like, the teachers outside are teaching you, but these are trying to teach you to learn yourself or something, you know if you want to do it. (John, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

In John's view teachers in the prison school were able and did encourage autonomous independent learning. Gerard was keen to stress that "streaming", a practice in his secondary schools (and others as noted in Chapter Seven), was not done in the prison school:

Yeah, well it's not like, you pick over the thickest fellow on the Monday because he's not as bright as these lads, it's all mixed in one do you know what I mean, like say, like in the secondary school, if you're doing the entrance exam for the secondary school and they grade you and at that grade, they look at and see, kind of see how smart you are and what class and like to be in third year say, class 1 would be the top class 2 and 3 would be kind of lower. Third year say, kind of higher level, Number 2 would be ordinary and number three

foundation, do you know what I mean, so it's not like that in here, it's all in together, it's all in together. (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Chris revealed how his view of teachers has totally changed since he has engaged with the prison school:

Me view on teachers has changed since I've been in the prison like, from seeing teachers up in this school. Me view's changed. I've totally different towards teachers. Up here they're nothing but helpful. Like they do whatever they can for you, they try and help you out doing whatever. Like in a school they're not going to be doing that sort of thing so like me view has changed on teachers like. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Frank also reflected on how he had changed as a person, a fact encapsulated in his attitude now to exams and studying. When education was something that he had to do, he never studied, whereas as an adult, having made the choice to attend class and work towards an exam, he now understood and experienced the stress that it involved. In the context of now being an active agent, with the capacity for self-directed learning, Frank now experiences stress, related to upcoming exams, for example, in a different way.

The differences between prisoner learners' experience of prison education and their experience of education as children and young adults may be related to the prison school's use of an adult education model. Warner (2002a), for example, has argued that adult education is perhaps most distinguished by its teaching methodology and identifies, among its features, the valuing of a learner's life experience and the participation by the learner in shaping their learning. The following table illustrates the classes that prisoner learners reported taking during the life history interviews and indicates the range of subjects on offer.

Table 8.1 Prisoner learners' classes in prison school

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Classes attended in the prison school</b>
Alan	Art, English (Alan is facilitated in this class in typing a book he is writing)
Ben	Music, geography, cookery
Chris	Studying a social science degree and attends the prison school for assistance
David	Maths (Junior Certificate)
Eric	Maths, English, business studies (all Junior Certificate)
Frank	Currently doing a web design course, and Junior Certificate maths, English and business studies. Has completed computer classes.
Gerard	Junior Cert maths and English, also attending art and cookery classes
Hugh	Maths and art
Ian	English (Junior Certificate), soft toys class
John	Soft toys class
Kevin	Art (FETAC)
Liam	English and Civil, Political and Social Education (CPSE) (Junior Certificate), Communications (FETAC), Personal Awareness (FETAC), arts and crafts
Michael	Soft toys class, art
Nick	Art (Junior Certificate), Communications (FETAC), Preparation for Work (FETAC) Has completed maths, CPSE (all Junior Certificate)
Owen	English (Junior Certificate)
Peter	Studying for a history degree and attends the prison school for assistance
Robert	Art (FETAC), t'ai chi
Stephen	Computers, arts and crafts, art (FETAC), t'ai chi

Prisoner learners reported experiencing particular challenges in choosing to study within the prison setting. These challenges included:

- Lack of physical and technological resources
- The closure of the prison school during holiday periods
- Lack of privileges gained by engaging in education
- Limited subject choice
- Other prisoner learners causing distractions in class

Prisoner learners' access to computers and the internet, emerged as a theme in the review of literature in Chapter Four and security concerns within the prison sites

visited as part of this doctoral research resulted in computer use being limiting to the hours the school was open (9.30-12 noon and 2pm-4pm) and no internet access permitted at all. This was identified as a challenge in the life history interviews by Peter, who was pursuing an undergraduate degree and required to type up essays (interestingly Chris who was also studying in another prison for a degree with the OU, albeit in another subject, was permitted to handwrite essays). Thus, while the prison school facilitated Peter using the computers to type up his essay he was aware that the opening hours of the prison school meant that he had to plan both assignments and the typing of them significantly in advance of any deadline: “you know yourself from the outside, you’d get an essay typed up in a day no problem but if your day is an hour and a half long, you’re talking about a week to get it typed up” Peter had already completed a degree outside the institution of the prison and he was, as a consequence, aware that to do well on his course he needed to do extra reading and research. He reported relying on his family and friends to drop in extra books and a friend of his, currently studying for a PhD, had looked up key words and journal articles using university library databases and had posted relevant articles to Peter. His comment that “the school here has been good about getting me extra books and that when they can but again there’s a limit there you know they have a budget each year and they’re not going to spend every penny of it on me”, illustrates his awareness of the constraints the prison education service operated under. Peter described the security measures introduced by the prison service in relation to computers and internet use as “a bit over the top” and was aware that other counties had different policies, stating that: “I can see why they are strict about computer access and internet access, but it’s been brought in, in a load of other countries”.

Other resource issues were less problematic from security points of view but had an impact nonetheless. Ben reported for example that the lack of furniture in his cell, apart from a bed, made completing assignments difficult. Also as a consequence of teachers in the prison system being employed by the VEC on the same terms and conditions as teachers on the outside, teachers working within the institution of the prison have the same entitlements to summer, Easter and Christmas holidays. The summer break in particular is a long one and all prison schools are closed during the month of August with substitute teachers being introduced in July. However the long holidays offered a challenge to many prisoner learners and emerged during the life history interviews with some prisoner learners as a cause of concern. Eric, for example,

recognised the disruption it caused to the routine and the difficulty of getting back into the routine of prison school:

If you're doing something and you're stuck into it and then you stop doing it, say it's taken basically two or three months, it's just, what's going on here like, you know what I mean? And it's hard for you to go back like and get natural self back into doing something that you want to do but you can't do it because you're, you're just used to be hanging around doing nothing. You know what I mean. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

David reported that "I'd rather they didn't have a break at all". Chris also identified lack of subject choice as an issue and complained that the choice was limited. He recounted a *Catch-22* scenario in which, eager to study a particular subject for Leaving Cert which was not currently on offer, he was asked to collect names to see if there was an interest. He managed to collect twenty names but was then told that was no guarantee that people would not drop out.

They said 'Get me a list of people that want to do it'. But they were saying 'What if they all dropped out and you were the only one left doing it?' So it was the same thing like. They didn't want to put resources or something to do the Leaving Cert. So I just, they start then with the different, 'Start Your Own Business' class so I just wasn't assed about that. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Ironically, he was being encouraged to go to a "Start Your Own Business" class, a difficult undertaking, particularly in the midst of an economic downturn. The motivations for attending classes within the prison school were varied; and not always to do with learning. A number of prisoner learners for example raised a concern about students being allowed to disrupt the class. This may though be evidence of prisoners using education as, what Goffman termed, a "removal activity". In other words they were not there to seriously engage in education but rather to "kill time".

Alan and David identified having motivation to attend prison school as a key difference between their experience of education in the prison and their previous

experience of education as children and young adults. The following section explores the factors that impacts on prisoner learners' motivation to engage in education.

### **Motivations to Engage in Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

Education within the total institution of the prison is voluntary and there were alternatives to attending school. Prisoners could, for example, opt to stay in their cell (although this is not allowed in St. Patrick's Institution), work in the prison, attend a workshop, or go to the gym or yard or library. Analysis of the data generated from the life history interviews revealed the multiple reasons as to why prisoners engaged with education while incarcerated. These factors included the fact that the prison school provided relief from the prison system, provided a safe environment within the prison and relieved the monotony of prison life caused by a regime which sees most prisoners being locked up for up to 18 hours per day. Goffman (1961) had found that "free places" seemed to be employed on occasion for no other purpose but to escape wards and having something to do or think about that was unrelated to the prison was a key motivating factor for a number of prisoner learners. The repetitive nature of prison life and the resulting ennui could be seen as an important "push" factor in attending the prison school. Goffman had identified among the dominant features of an inmate culture, the premium placed on what he called "removal activities", activities in the prison, often unserious in nature, which allowed the inmate the opportunity to "kill time" and are so engrossing that they allow the inmate to forget their status as a prisoner. This motivation for attending class was articulated by some prisoner learners. For John, going to class simply gave him "something to do" and this point was also made by Alan who articulated the difference between going to school in the prison and going to school on the outside: "You wouldn't go to school on the outside just for something to do, do you understand? Whereas you'd go to school here for something to do".

Liebling (2004) had found that involvement in work or education made prison life easier to cope with and many prisoner learners did see prison school as an "escape" from the prison regime. Ben, for example, saw prison school as a place where drugs did not dominate. Similarly, David felt that the school "keeps you away from the yard" where the potential for trouble was increased. The undercurrent of violence present



within the prison system, which has already been documented in previous chapters, meant that, in contrast, the prison school offered prisoner learners a safe environment from which they could escape the confines of their cell, allowing as Frank revealed, people to attend the prison school without being “worried about looking over their shoulder”. Frank felt that attending the prison school also allowed him to keep a low profile in the prison and again decrease the likelihood of trouble. “Like I walk around in the shadows in here, you know. And the school helps you do that”.

Liam spoke of how attending the prison school makes time go quicker while David and Frank felt that not only does attending school make the time go quicker when you are there, but the benefits extend to when you are locked back in your cell. David explained that:

Like you just get stuck into your work. And then it's not only that. When I'm down in the cell then, you know between, when, when they lock you up, if you do a bit of Maths or something the time is gone. Before you know it it's half seven. (David, 27, Mountjoy Prison)

While Frank reflected that through studying the cell is transformed into a bedroom:

When you're studying, when I'm studying and it's just, like it's not as if I'm in prison. It's just the door is locked, you know what I mean, as if it's just a bedroom really that you're sat at home studying. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

The most common reason for attending the prison school that emerged during the life history interviews was the need to make use of time in the prison. Attending the prison school was seen as both making time go quicker and also making time more productive in facilitating learners gaining qualifications while in the prison, a point made by Alan, Ben, Chris, David, Eric, Frank, Gerard, John, Michael, and Nick. Thus while Gerard attended prison school because “no point in just messing around all the time, just doin' something, keep my head down, time passes quicker you know what I mean, if you're doin' something” he wasn't interested in just doing anything for the sake of it, rather he was interested in doing something that would gain him a

qualification. The literature review had highlighted the importance of considering learners' own view of their future and pointed out that Leondari (2007) and Husman and Lens (1999) agreed that school and education are both by definition future orientated and the same future-orientated perspective was cited for some prisoner learners. Gerard's comments echo, for example, this concern with his future after prison and this point is also articulated by Frank: "You can come here waste your time or you can either make good use of your time. Like because like if you don't make good use of your time you're only going to end up back inside".

Motivation to engage in education included the fact that prison school offered the opportunity to gain qualifications in order to improve learners' chances in the job market, in itself illustrating a concern for the future. For some prisoner learners, children and family provided the motivation for attending school, a reason which also reflects a concern for the future. Kevin, for example, was studying art and stated that he was attending prison school for his own personal satisfaction; nonetheless he had taken up maths too so as to be able to help his teenage son on his release. Frank identified his main motivation for attending prison school as his young daughter, however during the course of the interviews he also noted the importance in his life of his partner and his family, it was their support too that encouraged him to attend the prison school and gain a qualification:

If I wasn't, if I wasn't using the time productively, I don't think they'd be able to manage as well as they are with me in here, you know. Like, we were very close family, you know. Like there was an awful lot of things that went bad for us, an awful lot of things that went good for us like. We were through thick and thin as a family, you know. And, eh, it's mad that like. If they think, if they think I'm doing well in here well they think everything is alright with me. Well it is, basically, everything is grand. (Frank, 30, Mountjoy Prison)

Michael was keen to go to classes which offered him the opportunity to make things that could be used as gifts to his family and presents to his two young children. He explained with pride what he had made in the soft toys class and what he would use them for:

I have two teddy bears in there now that I made, three to go, it's nice to be doing you see, [inaudible] when I get a family visit, I don't like walking out empty handed to the kids, do you know what I mean, out to the kids, so whatever I want to make I hang onto, they look great, they're better than what you get in the shop. (Michael, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

Goffman (1961) had observed that maintaining relationships is incompatible with a total institution and Michael's engagement with the prison school illustrated his efforts to minimise this feature. Family and children emerged from the data as motivating factors, a finding which was also echoed in Smiling Hall and Killackey's (2008) study which stressed the important role family members in particular played in motivating prisoners to engage in education while in prison.

The prison school also provided an opportunity to interact with other prisoner learners in a safe environment and, in the case of Mountjoy Prison, it also provided space where prisoner learners from other landings could mix. As the import model of prison education organisation (i.e. when teachers are employed by the same educational authorities as the outside) is used in Ireland, attending school also allowed inmates to interact with teachers who were non-prison staff. Goffman (1961) had found that meeting outsiders was a desirable event for many inmates and he recognised that they were used by some patients in his study as a means of forgetting about the inmate culture they found themselves in. Goffman (1961) had recognised the staff-inmate divide as a feature of a total institution and found that this divide has consequences in terms of how the two groups address each other (both physically and verbally) and in how they treat each other. Teachers however in the prison school, although working in the prison at the invitation of the Irish Prison Service, are not employed by the IPS and in the life history interviews this distinction was made and understood by the prisoners themselves. Frank, for example, drew a distinction between the roles of the prison officers and the teachers and observed that it was possible to share a joke or laugh with the teachers whereas to do this with the prison officers would be frowned upon, again reinforcing the notion of the prison school as a separate space:

It's like most of the teachers up here, you know, you joke and you laugh with them. It's a break from the norm. We're on the landing. You're having a joke

and a laugh with an officer and you get forty-five fucking other people looking over their backs saying ‘What’s he doing having a chat with him?’ It’s only up here that you can relax and have a joke and a laugh, d’you know like that. Em, as I’ve said this is a more relaxed environment like. It’s just, it’s like, I can’t put, I can’t think of the word for it. Right you have a fucking war zone there outside and when you step in here and it’s just like, the eye of the storm. You have the tornado going on all around you and you get into the jail like you don’t know what’ll fucking happen from one end of the day to the end of the next. (Frank, 30, Mounjoy Prison)

Chris’ comments about being treated “like you’re normal” in the school and Frank’s observations about being treated as a human being, reinforce too the notion that the interaction and relationship between teachers and prisoner learners was notably different than between prison officers and prisoner learners. This was succinctly described by Nick who observed “all the teachers are nice here. Shame about the officers”. Chris characterised the relationship between prisoner learners and teachers as one of respect:

At the end of the day when you come up here they don’t treat you like you’re a prisoner. They just treat you like you’re normal. But then we are normal people but there’s none of this like ‘I’m better than you and’. I get treated with respect when I come up here so. You’re not treated like a child; you get treated like an adult. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

The absence of a hostile divide between teachers and prisoner learners is in line with Goffman’s finding that this divide did not exist among professions hired in by total institutions to provide what he referred to as “humane technical services”. Indeed Goffman argued that those hired to perform these services may see themselves as “captives” (p. 87) within the system. This view of teachers as almost akin to inmates was reinforced by Nick’s sense of protectiveness of a teacher whom he credited with teaching him how to read and he reported getting annoyed when he witnessed a prison officer giving this particular teacher “a bit of abuse”.

For many prison learners, the prison school was not their first choice of activity and many of them had first engaged with work and workshops before coming to the prison school. Alan and Peter for example had both lost their jobs in the prison as a result of disciplinary issues and only then had begun to go to the prison school. Hugh explained how it was on his third stay in St. Patrick's Institution that he began to think about going to prison school:

Because I was, when I first came here I was 16, I never went to school, I sat in the yard all day long, I got out and I was out a couple of months, two months, and came back on remand, and started getting workshops in, and things like that so I started going to workshops and doing nice things like sanding worktops and then I was thinking that I wanted to go to school, and I didn't do school and I got out again and then back in and I still didn't sustain that, doing a long sentence so I'd been really thinking like so, it's not worth it like, what you do in the outside, then you have to regret it all in here, seeing all the young fellas, going home with certificates, friends of mine from the outside, from in here and all, so I just got the ACO and asked him about the school. (Hugh, 19, St. Patrick's Institution)

As can be seen from the above quote, Hugh was strongly influenced by seeing his friends gaining certificates and doing well. He elaborated that some of his friends "were worse than me growing up" and had been in prison on more serious charges and were now doing apprenticeships in trades. His friends' experience of gaining qualifications in prison could be seen as a "push" factor. Goffman was cognisant of the existence of an "underlife" and found that bonds among inmates were part of the underlife of the total institution even when the emotional support that may exist among sets of inmates may not be something established in the official design of the organisation.

There were also very pragmatic reasons why prisoner learners people engaged in education while in the total institution of the prison. Ian for example was anxious to show the court in his upcoming case that he was using his time productively. Nick spoke of the reward of a fast food meal which was given to every student in St. Patrick's Institution who sat an exam in a Junior or Leaving Cert subject (this seemed to

be a feature of St. Patrick's Institution only and its role in motivating prisoner learners in St. Patrick's may be significant, indeed prison food was a topic of conversation across all the prison sites). Kevin was also keen to begin a degree course in the prison, although he was aware of the benefits for personal development but he also saw pragmatic financial reasons for studying in the prison where it was free, as opposed to paying for classes in the community:

You can do every subject that you want and you might have nine in a class. And a teacher that is qualified to teach in any school teaching you. Go outside and try and do that. Not a hope. I mean it's going to cost me, if I want to do me degree outside, a couple of grand. And I mean if I can get it started in here, I can get it in here for nothing and do it for nothing. So why not take advantage of, I mean you can do your Junior Cert here. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

This financial reason could be seen as a "push" factor and indeed did emerge in Costelloe's (2003) study where, one participant revealed how his motivation was strongly influenced by that fact that his degree would be paid by the prison service rather than him personally. Thus the person's engagement with education could be interpreted as a way a prisoner had of not just reacting but retaliating against the system that was incarcerating them. This is reminiscent of Giddens' (1984) phrase "dialectic of control" which he uses to describe the influence that even those who are in a subordinate position can exert.

Nonetheless the mention of financial reasons as a "push" factor is a complex one as unlike other structured activities in the prison such as work or workshops, there is no immediate financial incentive to attend the prison school. While all prisoners receive a daily gratuity, those attending workshops or doing work in the prison receive increased payments than those engaged in education or training. This is in breach of the Council of Europe European Prison Rules which Chris had acknowledged in the life history interviews:

You're supposed, you're supposed, you're entitled to the same as anyone. In the prison rule you're entitled to, you're entitled to the same privileges as anyone working in, in the yoke here. You're entitled to the same, you're entitled to, so

you should be getting paid when you come to the school ‘cause it’s in the prison rules, but you don’t. It’s your own choice to come. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Even though Chris knew the lack of parity of gratuity with workers was in breach of European Prison Rules he was powerless to do anything about it. Warner (2012) has questioned how the IPS can state that they encourage prisoners to engage in education and treatment, when in fact more money is given to those involved in work in the prison. Warner’s contention is not that prisoners need a financial incentive to engage in education, but that by making it more immediately beneficial for prisoners, many of whom may have little money, to engage in cleaning or maintenance duties in the prison may divert inmates who are interested in engaging with other services and argues that “the philosophy of rehabilitation and reintegration has been replaced by the philosophy of the workhouse”.

The following table outlines the numerous “push” and “pull” factors in why prisoners engaged with education in the prison.

Table 8.2 Push/pull motivating factors in engaging in prison education

Push	Pull
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prison environment</li> <li>• Peers engaging in prison education</li> <li>• Appearance before court</li> <li>• Financial incentive to study in prison rather than outside the institution of the prison</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To do something productive with time</li> <li>• To improve prospects on the job market</li> <li>• Engagement with others and non-prison staff</li> <li>• Children and Family</li> <li>• Relaxed atmosphere of the prison school</li> <li>• Material benefits e.g. food</li> </ul>

Despite the existence of these push/pull factors, the Inspector of Prisons in his report (2011) on Limerick Prison has commented on the small numbers attending the prison school and Alan too in his second life history interview drew attention to the small physical space allocated to the prison school: “the jail is lucky enough that a lot of people aren’t interested in the school because if everyone was interested what would they do?”. A number of barriers to accessing prison education emerged in the course of

the life history interviews with prisoner learners, and these barriers are explored more fully in the following section.

### **Barriers to Accessing Prison Education and Suggestions for Improvement in Terms of Access and Participation**

This chapter began with Liam's statement that in his view "the school doesn't come to you, you have to come to the school" which illustrated how the onus is on prisoners themselves to make contact with the prison school. Liam reported in the life history interview how making this contact with the school was not without its challenges:

Find [name of deputy head teacher] and get an interview, that's if he's available, [name of teacher]'s always run off his feet, you know what I mean? You always see [name of teacher] bouncing around, up and down like a yo-yo, maybe if they could sort out a kind of a that they had someone there all the time, you know what I mean? (Liam, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

Prisoner learners therefore not only must be motivated to attend class they are often required to demonstrate how motivated they are as accessing the prison school was revealed to often require other skills such as persistence and patience. The process of enrolling in prison education and of accessing classes, addressed also at the beginning of this chapter, could be seen as another institutional barrier to participation. Other barriers to engaging in prison education while incarcerated within the total institution of the prison were also explored in the life history interviews. In exploring the motivation prisoner learners had to engage with education in prison, prisoner learners were asked about the reasons they thought other prisoners did not. The reasons that emerged from the life history interviews were varied and wide-ranging and summarised by David who revealed:

You see a lot, you see it depends what sentences people are doing like. You see some of them can't come up 'cause they're fighting. Some of them are into the gym, go to the gym instead. And some of them just don't want to come up, you know. They're into drugs and stuff. That's what they're into. If you're messing



around with drugs you've no time for school really, you know. So that's probably why, you know. (David, 27, Mountjoy Prison)

As David explains, there are numerous reasons why prisoners may choose not to engage with prison education. They may work in the prison during school hours or have opted to attend alternative activities such as the workshop or the gym. They may also not be permitted to attend by the prison institution because they are, as David states, "fighting". Chapter Four revealed how some prisoners are segregated or "on protection" and as such have access to education and services curtailed or stopped. In Limerick Prison, for example, prisoners in the D wing had limited access to the prison school while those on protection did not get to go to the prison school at all as Robert explained:

They can't come over here at all, right. And some of them might be on protection because of the type of offence, others might be on protect because they have enemies within the prison, so, now I know stuff will be brought over to them and they will get help from the teachers here but it is not the same. (Robert, 38, Limerick Prison)

Robert's example illustrates an institutional barrier to accessing prison education. The threat of violence within the total institution of the prison could also be categorised as an institutional barrier. Michael felt, for example, that while the prison school seemed to provide the opportunity to mix with others in a safe environment, the idea of interaction with others may in fact be a cause of fear. He explained how anxious he was before he was imprisoned and how he spent some time in the library in St. Patrick's Institution (under the control and surveillance of a number of prison officers) before he began to realise what was available for him to do in the school. His observations are a reflection on the potential violence of the prison and the difficulty that creates. Owens' (2000), in a qualitative study of men's participation in community education in Ireland, identified four categories of barriers to education: informational, situational, institutional and dispositional. A dispositional barrier referred to individual's perceptions, feelings, thoughts and attitudes and it was this barrier that participants in the study gave greater emphasis to, leading Owens to conclude that the greatest barriers to marginalised men's participation in education were located within

the self and are linked to the question of male identity. In a later publication, Owens (2007) argued that the impact of social and economic changes on notions of gender have affected the ability of some men, particularly marginalised men, to construct and reconstruct their identity. The literature on the impact of an institution on identity has been discussed in Chapters Two and Three, however during the life history interviews, Alan and Kevin reflected on how attending a prison school might be perceived within the prison. Alan, for instance, cited the need among some other prisoners to maintain a “hard man” image: “A lot of fellas here have that hard man persona, you know, giving it this, that and the other, yet can’t read, they probably think it’s a weakness”. Stephen, too, was conscious that not attending may be linked to concern about how you appear to others: “I think a lot of people don’t come up is, is because they feel worthless. They’re embarrassed about looking to be a fool, embarrassed about mistakes”.

Use of drugs and drug addiction was cited by Alan, Ben, Frank, Kevin, and Robert as the main barrier to accessing prison education. Ben described the prevalence of drugs, also discussed in Chapter Six, in the prison and explained that “there’s a lot of people in this place like, they just think about drugs 24/7”. The effect of drugs and addiction on individuals may impact motivation to engage in any structured activity and therefore this could also be categorised as a dispositional barrier. Chris and Nick both attributed “laziness” to the cause of people’s non-attendance at school. This too could be categorised as a dispositional barrier to education, however Chris elaborated on what he meant by “laziness” when he spoke about encouraging his friend, who had spent two years in the prison without engaging in any meaningful activity, to attend the prison school:

Yeah, you get stuck in a rut in bed. You’re in bed at four o’clock every day and getting up then and up all night and missing out on his dinners and teas, living off junk. So I got him out of that. (Chris, 23, Mountjoy Prison)

Chris’ description illustrates how easy it is in the prison to become “stuck in a rut” and echoes Goffman’s identification of the capability of the total institution to reinforce the low status of an inmate. It also reinforces Hockey’s (2012) argument that the institution of the prison itself could inculcate docility and as a result impact on motivation to engage in any structured activity.

As referred to in the previous chapter, Goffman (1961) had argued that inmates who enter a total institution do so with a “presenting culture” (p. 23), and Gerard and Peter commented on how that just by being in prison did not necessarily alter your behaviour or your views. Peter felt that if people had not been busy, except for engaging with crime, on the outside, they didn’t always feel the need to change their behaviour just because they had been imprisoned.

Don’t know, some people just couldn’t be bothered with school, couldn’t be bothered in here, couldn’t be bothered on the outside, some people just don’t really don’t like school then there’s others that just rather than do school, then there’s others that are just mad at doing school, show that they are doing something here for when they get out, do you know what I mean. (Gerard, 19, St. Patrick’s Institution)

Among the framework of barriers that Owens (2000) identified was a situational one. This was concerned with the individual’s life-situation, and related to the level of resources such as time and/or money that could influence participation in education. While prisoners had, in theory, time to avail of education while in prison and prison education was free, Eikeland et al (2009) in a quantitative study which examined the educational background and needs of prisoners in five Nordic countries drew attention to the link between motivation to engage in prison education and the length of sentence to be served. The length of prison sentence could be interpreted as a situational barrier and was also identified by some prisoner learners in the life history interviews as a factor in non-engagement. Eric, David and Ian, for example, emphasised that those on short sentences would have no interest in going to the prison school.

Some people just don’t come up because they don’t, they don’t think they need it, you know what I mean. Some people are alright doing small sentences, they’re getting out of here very soon like, you know what I mean? The way they look at it is they don’t want to come to school, you know what I mean. They’ll be getting out in a few months time, there’s no point. (Eric, 20, Mountjoy Prison)

And

Loads of people are only be doing short sentences, they're going to be out shortly so it wouldn't benefit them coming over, like they wouldn't have time to do an exam, the vast majority only doing a few months and small sentences and or remand and that, so the people that are doing big sentences do come over like. (Ian, 18, St. Patrick's Institution)

Table 8.3 reveals the length of sentences that participants were serving:

Table 8.3 Prison learner and length of sentence

Learner	Length of sentence
Alan	4 years
Ben	7.5 years
Chris	12 years
David	4 years
Eric	3 years
Frank	10 years
Gerard	3 years
Hugh	3 year and 1 month
Ian	9 months but awaiting further sentence and anticipates being in prison for a few years.
John	2.5 years
Kevin	3 years
Liam	Just finished a three month sentence and is awaiting a trial and further sentencing
Michael	18 month
Nick	6.5 years with 3 years suspended
Owen	Has been in St. Patrick's for 8/9 months and is awaiting trial on other charges. Anticipates being moved to Mountjoy Prison as a result.
Peter	3 year
Robert	7 years
Stephen	9 years

As can be seen from Table 8.3, no one, apart from prisoner learners awaiting further sentencing, is serving a sentence of less than 18 months. This suggests that length of sentence may be a factor in decisions made to engage in prison education. The

Annual Report from the IPS (2010) notes that people committed under a sentence of less than 3 months increased by 27.9% on the 2009 figure, i.e., from 5,750 to 7,356.

Owens (2000) also identified the category of an informational gap as a barrier to participation in education and this referred to the range, quality and reliability of information on education as well as how that information was disseminated. It emerged from the life history interviews that very few prisoner learners had begun attending the prison school on entry to the institution. Ian and Gerard, both in St. Patrick's Institution were an exception among the prisoner learners interviewed; however it should be noted that St. Patrick's Institution had a number months previously introduced a regime change in which all prisoners were forced to do some activity during the day. Nick, also based in St. Patrick's Institution, had up until then spent his day in the yard, he described how he was at first annoyed ("snapping over it") over the new change but on reflection thinks "it's lucky, it gets us out of the yard every day, getting into nothing just bother". Other prisoner learners heard about education through other prisoners. Kevin, for example, who had begun working in the prison from the beginning of his sentence described how he first heard of the prison school:

When I was coming out the gate one day I seen this guy with paint and I just asked him 'Where'd you get that? And who done that?' And he was telling me that someone in the Art done it. And I didn't even, 'The Art?' and that's how I got to know about the school And I came up enquired about it, went into [Name of teaching staff], that was it. That's how I found it. (Kevin, 54, Mountjoy Prison)

Stephen also reporting hearing about the prison school from other inmates. Eikeland et al (2009) had also suggested that prisoners may not have received enough information from the prison authorities about prison educational options and a number of prisoner learners also suggested improvements to the prison school to address this information gap. Ben, for example, stated:

Like you never see, d'you know. You never see nothing like. Once or twice a year you might see a piece of paper stuck up on the landing promoting something. That's probably promoting something for them like, a meeting or

something, d'you know. Other than that like, you probably could do with a bit of promotion, yeah. 'Cause now as well you have a lot more, eh, foreign nationals coming in as well. (Ben, 35, Mountjoy Prison)

Kevin also felt that the school could make use of the model already adapted by the Samaritans in the prison by having a listener suite, a confidential space where a prisoner could discuss his education needs. On being asked if they would suggest any improvements to the prison school Stephen stated that he would not change anything about the prison school itself and Nick and Gerard reported that they liked the prison school the way it was: "Nothing, I like the school here, the way it is" (Nick, St. Patrick's Institution).

## **Chapter Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter sought to describe, analyse and evaluate the prison school through the words of learners who attend. Through analysis of the life history interviews, the chapter began by exploring how prisoner learners access prison education. The physical process of how prisoner learners get to the prison school was found to be dependent on prison officers and impacted at times by whether prisoner learners' names were recorded on the official list of prisoners attending the school. Once in the school, accessing classes was reported to be a straightforward process with the interview required described as being informal in nature and seemed more akin to an information session rather than a process designed to exclude. Prisoner learners' perspectives on the prison school were explored in the life history interviews and prisoner learners reported the school in positive terms with prison learners describing the prison school as a space different from the rest of the prison institution. While the prison school does seem to operate in this altered space, it is a space which is not an independent entity but rather a space which depends on and is impacted by both the prison regime and the outside world. The difficulties learners faced in getting to class or of classes starting on time, for example, due to staffing/security issues are evidence of that.

Prisoner learners compared, in the course of the life history interviews, their experiences of prison education with previous educational experiences outside the prison institution. Key differences between education outside the institution of the

prison and education within the prison were identified. These differences related to the atmosphere of the learning environment, the role of the teacher and methods of engagement that were used. These differences are characteristics of the adult education model in use within the Irish prison education service. The variety of classes which prisoner learners reported attending is indicative of the broad curricula on offer.

Challenges to studying within a prison setting were identified and these challenges included lack of resources, both physical and technological, the closure of the prison school during holiday periods, the limited subject choice within institutions at times and the lack of privileges gained by engaging in education. Learners also elaborated on their motivations for going to the prison school and the “push” and “pull” factors impacting on motivation were identified.

The chapter concluded by exploring barriers to attending the prison school and prisoner learners’ suggestions for reform, in terms of access and participation. Examples of institutional barriers to participation were identified. They included the process of physically getting to the prison school and having to negotiate access at times with prison officers and the restriction or limitations placed on segregated prisoners and those on protection. Dispositional barriers such as the need to maintain a “hard man” image also emerged in the course of the life history interviews and the use of drugs by individuals was perceived by prisoner learners interviewed to impact strongly on prisoners’ motivation to engage in any structured activity including education. Importantly, length of sentence, also emerged as an important factor in engaging in education with longer sentences perceived as being a motivating factor. An informational gap in accessing prison education was also identified and prisoner learners offered suggestions as to how this could be addressed including greater promotion within the institution of the prison and the use of a listener suite, a model of support which is successfully used by the Samaritans already in the prison. This chapter, concentrated as it is on the prison school, is the final analysis chapter of this thesis and the following chapter discusses the implications of the analysis raised in this and the two previous analysis chapters for reform. Based on the data collected therefore through life history interviews with adult male prisoner learners across three prison sites, the concluding chapter of this thesis extricates significant areas of discussion and makes

recommendations on how, from the perspective of prisoner learners, prison education can be improved.



## **Chapter Nine: Discussion and Conclusions**

This final chapter extricates and discusses issues which emerged during the course of this doctoral work and, in offering conclusions to this research, makes recommendations and suggestions for reform and highlights potential areas of further research. The fundamental research question posed in this thesis was how do prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison and in order to answer that question fully, two related sub-questions were also posed, namely: what were prisoner learners' previous educational and life experiences and how does the institution of the prison operate and impact on prison education in terms of access and participation? This thesis addresses these questions by focusing on the educational experiences of prisoner learners through the theoretical lens of Goffman (1961) and his concept of a total institution, complemented by Foucault and his analysis of the prison (1977). By examining Goffman's concept of a total institution within a 21<sup>st</sup> century Irish prison context, the role prison education plays both within the total institution of the prison and within individual lives is analysed. However, while both Goffman and Foucault had made use of literary, historical and academic sources, and in Goffman's case ethnographic fieldwork also, the words of those confined within a total institution are missing from their analysis and this thesis adds to their contribution by providing, through life history interviews conducted across three prison sites, a prisoner learner perspective. This has particular relevance in a context in which there is a lack of literature on what it means to be imprisoned in Ireland (cf. O'Donnell, 2008; Behan, 2006), a lack of literature on prison education (Hawley, 2011; Munoz, 2009) and, within the institution of the prison in Ireland, in a context in which the lack of a prisoner perspective is reflected by the inadequacy of the complaints procedure in Irish prisons (cf. Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2011b; 2012). In discussing the findings that emerged from the eighteen life history interviews, it is possible to group the discussion into three thematic areas: the total institution of the prison, previous educational and life experiences and finally, prison education.

### **The Total Institution of the Prison**

Through analysing Goffman's (1961) ethnographic work on a total institution, features that Goffman identified were categorised under three distinct headings:

mortifications, the formal administration of a total institution and the development of an institutional underlife. Data from the life history interviews illustrated how Goffman's features of a total institution were present in the three Irish prisons visited as part of this research. In discussing the implications of this finding in relation what it says about the total institution of the prison, the feature of mortifications is of particular relevance and in terms of mortifications, two examples emerged strongly from the data: controlled access to friends and family during visits and the loss of a sense of safety felt by prisoners. Other issues such as loss of privacy, being subjected to searches and, in the case of Mountjoy and Limerick Prisons, "slopping out" also emerged from the data. The mortifications that prisoner learners reported enduring reinforce comments consistently made by observers of the prisons and contained in reports including CPT reports (Council of Europe, 2011; 2007) and Office of Inspector of Prisons reports (2009; 2010; 2011a; 2012) and others (e.g. IPRT, 2011; Irish Prison Chaplains, 2010). The consistent criticisms by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to the Irish government, particularly in relation to prison overcrowding, violence and the physical conditions of prisons, combined with data from the life history interviews, illustrates the importance of these concerns and this thesis recommends that political action is required to address these.

Visits provided prisoners with the only way of interacting with loved ones, albeit in a controlled environment, however the identification of visits as a source of mortifications was in keeping with Goffman's (1961) analysis in which he found that total institutions were incompatible with maintaining meaningful relations. Data from the life history interviews revealed however that visits were an important part of prison culture and prisoner learners were cognisant of their importance and sensitive to how their visitors were impacted by the process. Goffman (1961) had recognised the vulnerable position that inmates had in this regard and noted that inmates could not prevent their visitors from seeing them in the potentially humiliating role of inmate. One prisoner learner, for example, reported preventing his children visiting him due to the conditions of the visiting rooms and the difficulty caused by poor acoustics in communicating with visitors, while other prisoner learners reported concern at how the process affected their loved ones. The issue of prison visiting rooms had also been raised by CPT reports (Council of Europe, 2011; 2007) and Visiting Committee Reports (cf. St. Patrick's Institution Visiting Committee Reports 2008; 2009). While the visiting

process may in its essence be a mortifying one action is required to ensure that prisoner learners' access to visitors, and the conditions in which visits take place, do not further impact on a prisoner or their visitors through the presence of degrading practices and conditions.

Goffman did observe that there can be differences in how a total institution operates even *within* one type of institution and Davies (1989) in his critique of the concept of a total institution acknowledged that some total institutions can in fact be more total than others. While the perspectives of prisoner learners across all three prison sites were, in many ways, similar in terms of their accounts of prison life conditions in St. Patrick's Institution warrant particular consideration. It is particularly noteworthy that of the eight prisoner learners from St. Patrick's Institution who took part in this research, four of them unprompted, reported on being eager to go to Mountjoy Prison, an adult prison in which many prisoners are forced to "slop out" and a prison which has been the subject of critical reports on the physical conditions contained within (cf. Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee Annual Reports 2008, 2009, 2010; Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2009; the Council of Europe CPT Reports, 2011, 2007). In the context of the reported conditions in Mountjoy Prison, the desire by some prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution to go there must serve as an indictment of conditions in St. Patrick's Institution. The common reason to emerge from the data, as to why Mountjoy was preferable to St. Patrick's, was "respect", the lack of it in St. Patrick's and the perception that it was different in Mountjoy, a perception many of the prisoner learners had gained from other prisoners who had experienced both regimes. The prioritising of issues of respect in the prison among prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution is an important consideration especially given that relations between prisoner learners and prison officers in St. Patrick's Institution, as revealed in the life history interviews, were reported as being particularly negative.

Reports of violence and threats of violence inflicted by some prison officers and the use of punishment cells featured in the life history interviews. Difficulty in getting a response from prison officers for assistance (by pressing a call bell in the cell) was reported by one prisoner learner who recounted an incident where he set fire to the cell in order to attract the attention of officers and receive medical assistance. When he returned from hospital he was disciplined and spent three weeks in a punishment cell,

naked apart from underwear. This incident resonates with a recent report from the Inspector of Prisons (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2012) who found that prisoners' calls for assistance are ignored for considerable periods in a minority of cases and that this leads to further disruption as prisoners use other methods to attract attention. The distribution of power within the prison system, which Foucault (1977) had analysed, is reflected in these examples where prisoners use what limited power they have to attract the attention of prison personnel, and are then punished by the prison system for doing so. Foucault, in his analysis, also emphasised how control of the body was a particularly modern form of exercising power and, within the prison system, this can be seen in relation to how space is organised, for example, sharing cells, 'slopping out', and the use of punishment cells. Requiring prisoners to wear certain clothes could also be seen as the institution exercising its power.

Explicit in the exercise of power is the notion of otherness. The idea of the offender as outsider or "other" has been made by Goffman (1961) and others, including Christie (2000) and Becker (1963). Foucault's (1977) work however is useful in creating awareness of the significance of institutionalised practices in constructing prisoners as "other". Prisoner learners from St. Patrick's Institution noted that they were obliged to wear clothes that were colour coded in order to denote their prison status. The issue of colour coding uniforms was a contentious one for a number of prisoner learners in St. Patrick's including one prisoner learner who noted that the practice was not in operation in other prisons in Ireland and reminded him of his school uniform. This issue also emerged during the recent Ombudsman for Children's Report (2011) which featured consultations with under eighteen year olds in St. Patrick's Institution and led the Ombudsman for Children to recommend that prison management consult with prisoners and their families to see whether it was feasible for young people to wear more of their own clothes. The Chaplain's Report (2010) identified the refusal of the authorities to allow prisoners in St. Patrick's to wear their own clothes as an act which "undermines their self-esteem and dignity, which is often already fragile, and is unacceptable" (p. 6). A recent report by the Inspector of Prisons on St. Patrick's Institution (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2012) acknowledged that the colour coding of prisoners benefits those working within the institution of the prison but has the effect of "ghettoizing" (p. 23) prisoners further. There is a counter argument, acknowledged by the Inspector, that if prisoners were allowed to wear their own clothes, extra pressure

would be put on families to provide clothing. However, the compulsory wearing of prison issue clothes, which the Inspector (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2012) reported as “inadequate” (p. 23) due to being dirty, ill-fitting and containing holes and tears, combined with the negative relations between prisoners and prison officers and the threats of violence present, reinforce the low status of inmates in St. Patrick’s Institution. This thesis endorses the findings of the Inspector of Prisons in its recent report on St. Patrick’s Institution (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2012) and recommends therefore that the Irish Prison Service develop a more constructive setting for young adults to be incarcerated within.

In contrast to Goffman’s (1961) work, drugs emerged as a significant theme in the life history interviews undertaken in this research. The literature review documented a number of studies suggesting that prisoners have more mental health problems in comparison to the general population. Evidence also emerged in the literature of the widespread availability of drugs in prison and the addiction issues faced by prisoners. The literature review had revealed how some prisoners are entering the prison with a drug addiction, while other prisoners are initiating drug use while incarcerated. Drugs were revealed in the life history interviews to impact prisoner learners in numerous ways, including being exposed to drug addicts and drug use while within the prison and being subjected to the increased security measures introduced by the total institution as a means of countering drug use. Drug use was also put forward as a potential reason by many prisoner learners as to why other prisoners were not motivated to engage in prison education. From the life history interviews, it was clear that prison represented for prisoner learners an informal learning environment with regard to surviving the institution of the prison itself and the availability of drugs and exposure to drug use. In view of the impact that drug use and addiction has on the prison and, in particular, prison education, this thesis recommends that the IPS should consider increasing the number of drug free wings in Irish prisons and the drug treatment facilities available therein.

Goffman’s (1961) identification of a divide among staff and inmates as a feature of a total institution provided the foundation for investigating the relationship between teachers and prisoner learners. The structure of prison education in Ireland (outlined in Chapter Four) means that teachers are not employees of the prison service and are, by

nature of their position, both insiders and outsiders. Goffman (1961) had found that total institutions often hire outside professionals to perform “humane technical services” (p. 87) and the staff/inmate divide he observed within total institutions was not present with this group. The life history interviews in this thesis suggested also that this divide among teaching staff and prisoner learners was not present. However the existence of the prison school within the total institution of the prison exposes prison teachers to the conditions of the prison and places them in a unique position. Freire (1996) has pointed out that all education and educators are political and in this respect there is an imperative on prison teachers and educators in general to contribute to national and international debate and discourse about penal policies, prison regimes and living conditions that prisoner learners face. This thesis therefore recommends that prison teachers and educators contribute to the debate about prison policy in general and prison education in particular.

The literature review also drew attention to the various international documents developed in relation to prisons including the European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2006) which stipulated that there should not be a financial disincentive to engage in education. Warner (2012) observed however that more money is given to prisoners who carry out prison work (e.g. cleaning and maintenance work) than those engaging in education. His contention is not that prisoners need a financial incentive to engage in education, but that by making it more immediately beneficial for prisoners to engage in cleaning or maintenance duties in the prison, the practice may divert inmates who are interested in engaging with other services. Engagement with prison education is thus likely to be impacted negatively by the provision of additional benefits to prisoners who opt to work in the prison and this view is supported by data from the life history interviews in which two prisoner learners reported only engaging with the prison school as a result of disciplinary action which prevented them from continuing their work in the prison. As such, this thesis recommends that in awarding payment to prisoners, the Irish Prison Service should comply with the European Prison Rules.

By adopting a life history methodological approach, the prisoner learner is placed at the centre of this thesis and recognition as such is given to prisoner learners’ previous educational and life experiences, experiences which may inform their present perspectives of both prison and specifically prison education.

## **Previous Educational and Life Experiences**

Goffman (1961) had argued that inmates who enter a total institution do so with a way of life and understanding of the world. He also argued that inmates' previous life experiences, particularly their experiences of deprivation, could impact on how they experienced life within a total institution. Foucault (1977) had also identified both prisons and schools as being part of a carceral network and, in addressing the key research question in this thesis of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, and mindful of Goffman's and Foucault's insights, data on prisoner learners' previous educational history was gathered as part of the life history interview process.

### **Typology of Prisoner Learners' Previous Educational Experience**

Analysis of the eighteen life history interviews with prisoner learners, all of whom were attending classes within the prison school, highlights the diversity of their educational experiences. In terms of educational attainment, using a life history approach, it was possible to develop a typology and to identify three 'types' of prisoner learners' educational profile:

- Prisoner learners who had left school early with no qualifications (8)
- Prisoner learners who had left with Junior Certificate or equivalent qualification (8) and
- Prisoner learners who had completed upper second level education (2)

The literature reviewed had indicated that prisoners come from backgrounds that are, in general, educationally disadvantaged and the data generated from the life history interviews, although the sample used was not a representative one, does support that finding. The data also revealed a prisoner learner profile with an average age of 27.4 years and a median age of 21.5 years. The typology created therefore is important when compared to recent OECD (2011) data which indicates that over 90% of young people in Ireland now successfully complete upper second level education. Of the eight prisoner learners who left school early, five of them (Eric, Hugh, John, Nick and Owen) were 19 and 20 at the time of the interviews indicating that despite educational

developments in retention in recent decades, not all children were benefitting. This is starkly illustrated by the fact that Hugh and Owen had no experience at all of secondary education while Nick had only attended secondary school for a number of weeks before being expelled. Indeed six out of the sixteen prisoner learners who left school before completing second level education had been expelled. A culture of control and dominance was frequently evoked when describing school experiences, although Robert's account of his positive experience in secondary school, in particular, illustrates that this was not always the case. Nonetheless the accounts of violence that had been experienced in the school system created a parallel with the accounts of tension and violence that have been reported in the prison system. Analysis of the life history interviews revealed that expulsion was used for a number of sanctions varying from criminal behaviour to situations in which the student refused to "back down". The experience of two prisoner learners who reported being "asked to leave" by their secondary school also raises questions as to whether some students are effectively pushed out of education.

In analysing life history transcripts, some prisoner learners' reports of their previous educational experiences in school were reminiscent of two particular features of a total institution: the loss of a sense of safety and the use of punishment, specifically expulsion. While some prisoner learners reported witnessing bullying in school, others reported that they were in fact the bullies. This may be interpreted as an indication that school was a site of challenging behaviour on their parts. The numbers also of prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution who reported being diagnosed with ADHD and the experience of Liam, who although not diagnosed reported being frequently told by teachers that he had it, supports the view that students have complex needs and schools must address these needs beyond merely excluding challenging students from education. Of the prisoner learners from St. Patrick's Institution who took part in this research, six of the eight prisoner learners had prior involvement with the criminal justice system. This trajectory from negative educational experiences, involvement in criminal activity and incarceration (a trajectory that Foucault had identified), indicates that early intervention is needed to break this path.

It became apparent through the life history interviews underpinning this thesis that many prisoner learners reported having experienced stressful events in their



childhood. These stressful life events included inter alia the separation of parents, being removed from parental care and witnessing alcohol and drug misuse and violence in the home. The intergenerational impact of imprisonment and cycle of disadvantage was illustrated across many of the life history interviews. The younger prisoner learners in St. Patrick's Institution, interviewed as part of this research, reported having experienced a number of particularly stressful life events. This finding is in keeping with the literature available on young offenders. Hugh, Nick and Owen, who were all serving a sentence in St. Patrick's Institution and who were particularly educationally disadvantaged, reported in the life history interviews to have had a parent imprisoned.

Many of the prisoner learners revealed, in the course of the life history interviews, their negative experiences of education including experiences of early school leaving and expulsions. Despite these experiences, the prisoner learners interviewed were engaging with education while in prison and were able to critically reflect and analyse the differences between their educational experiences. Prisoner learners cited differences between the teachers, the teaching methodologies in use and the atmosphere in the learning environment of the prison school as the main differences between their previous educational experiences of school and their current engagement with prison education. This shows the potential of the educational approach used in the prison school and consideration as to whether components of this approach could be applied to a setting outside the prison environment should be given.

A decision was made in this thesis to interview adult male prisoner learners and men are, in general, underrepresented in adult education programmes in Ireland (cf. Maunsel et al, 2008; O'Connor, 2007; Department of Education and Science, 2000; Owens, 2000). However prisoner learners' positive views of engagement with prison education within the macho environment of the prison suggest possible ways in which adult education outside the institution of the prison could be promoted to male adult learners in particular and could be used to develop initiatives in encouraging a continuation of engagement in education post-release.

## **Prison Education**

In addressing the research question of how prisoner learners experience prison education within the total institution of the prison, the life history interviews undertaken as part of this doctoral work found that prisoner learners were, in the main, very positive about the prison school and this study found that the prison school, according to prisoner learners, provided a space or “sanctuary” within the prison system where prisoner learners could figuratively “escape” from the total institution of the prison. Goffman’s (1961) description of “free places”, as part of an underlife of a total institution, resonates with prisoner learners’ description of the prison school. The idea of prison schools being an “escape” from the prison also echoes Wilson’s (1984) use of the concept of the third space and draws attention to prisoners’ sense of agency in maintaining a sense of self amidst the threat of institutionalisation.

As a result of data generated from the life history interviews “push” and “pull” factors in why prisoners engaged with education in the prison were identified. The push factors included the prison environment itself, the presence of peers already engaging in education, appearance before the court (and a need therefore to show they were using time productively) and a financial incentive to study in prison rather than outside the institution (which incurs expense). Pull factors included the desire to improve prospects on the job market, to engage with others and non-prison staff, to do something to show/help children and family, the relaxed atmosphere of the prison school, personal desire to use their time productively and to gain material benefits e.g. food.

Within the prison school, prisoner learners who had reported earlier adverse educational experiences and/or poor educational attainment also reported successfully completing modules and undertaking state exams within the context of the prison school. For two of the prisoner learners, both 20 years of age at the time of the interviews, the prison school was where they learnt to read and write. This contrasts with literature on industrial and reformatory schools in Ireland in the past in which the Committee to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report) found that many inmates emerged from these schools without being able to read and write and many were, as a consequence, condemned to a life of poverty and low paying jobs (cf. Smyth and McCoy, 2009 on the connection between education and life chances). This difference

between education within the total institutions of the past and the prison school in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland is important.

The literature review had revealed how prison education is sometimes measured within a narrow recidivist framework. However, other measurements could be considered such as the role prison education plays in helping prisoners cope with the mortifications of imprisonment and the increases in self-esteem that may result in successful engagement with education within the context of the total institution of the prison. Kevin made the point that the decision to do something with time (in his example, go to school) was an investment in a future. This resonates with Leondari's (2007) and Husman and Lens' (1999) argument that school and education are both by definition future orientated and Burnett and Maruna's (2004) work found that the feeling of having control over the future was an important element in the study of desistance. This suggests that education can serve an important function in prison in generating hope and confidence particularly when it exists within a total institution that has a culture of mortifications and suggests that education should be encouraged and supported at all levels of the criminal justice system and prison education placed at the core of the penal experience.

The employment of teachers by local authority education committees may give the impression that the prison school is wholly independent of the institution of the prison but life history interviews with prisoner learners revealed the major role the institution and individual prison staff played in determining access to the prison school. Using Foucault's (1977) theoretical perspectives on power, it was clear that the distribution of power within the prison system is reflected in the process of gaining access to prison education. Once physically in the prison school, access to classes was revealed to be a relatively smooth and learner-friendly process, however getting to that stage involved prisoner learners at times demonstrating not just the motivation to go to the prison school but also perseverance, patience and negotiating skills in order to overcome possible delays and administrative curtailment by prison personnel. Analysis of prisoner learners' perspectives also showed how some prison officers were a support to prisoner learners while others were not. The issue of prisoners not getting to class on time has been raised by the Inspector of Prisons ( cf. Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2012) and indeed as the life history interviews were conducted for this thesis within

prison schools, it was noticeable that the time prisoners arrived varied significantly with the school day shortened as a result. The life history interviews conducted with prisoner learners who had successfully accessed prison education nonetheless identified what they and other prisoners faced. As a result of the data generated, the current process of prison officers acting as gatekeepers on entry to the prison school should be re-considered and training of prison staff to address the role prison personnel have in promoting and supporting prison education should be considered.

The prison school, as well as offering literacy skills to prisoner learners was shown, through analysis of the life history interviews, to offer a variety of classes, enabling prisoner learners such as Alan, Kevin and Robert, for example, to pursue their specific interests in art and offered the opportunity for other prisoner learners to pursue qualifications (such as FETAC) as well as other state examinations including Junior and Leaving Certificates. Yet formal accreditation of qualifications was not available for all educational activities undertaken by prisoner learners. The Report on Mountjoy Prison from the Office of Inspector of Prisons (2009) for instance acknowledges that only participation in the computer workshop leads to any form of accreditation. There is an interesting parallel with industrial schools in Ireland which, although established as schools of industrial training, failed to accredit work done within them for apprenticeship purposes (Raftery and O'Sullivan, 2001). This thesis recommends that prisoner learners undertaking courses and workshops should be offered the opportunity to achieve accredited qualifications that have significance to the world outside the total institution of the prison.

The current model of education in Ireland, in which teachers are not employees of the prison service, has many advantages in terms of how prison education is provided, with teaching and learning within the prison school in effect distanced from the total institution of the prison. However its major disadvantage is that, in employing teachers on the same terms and conditions as outside the institution of the prison, the prison school remains closed during mainstream school holiday times and weekends when, as revealed in the life history interviews, the impact of incarceration may be felt more acutely. This emerged as a concern and indicates that a more flexible approach to education delivery during holiday periods should be considered.

Of the eighteen prisoner learners, as the typology of previous educational experiences revealed, only Chris and Peter had completed upper second level education prior to their incarceration. The prison school supported them by facilitating their engagement in third level study which they were pursuing via distance learning. Peter, who already had an undergraduate degree, was particularly critical of the lack of computer and internet access in the prison system. The issue of ICT, presented in the review of the literature in Chapter Four, only emerged as a specific challenge in the life history interviews with Peter. One possible rationale for why this may be was that, through his previous educational achievements, Peter was aware of just how much he, as a learner in the context of the total institution of the prison, was disadvantaged in terms of his ability to research essays by only having access to computers during prison school hours and by not having internet access at all. Prisoner learners, if not able to keep pace with digital technologies, are at risk of being increasingly marginalised educationally by the lack of access to computers and the internet. As such, the Irish Prison Service should consider international models in use in order to establish best practice in this regard.

The importance of time within the total institution was identified by both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) and sentence length, and its resulting focus on time, emerged both in the literature and in the life histories as a factor for engagement in prison education, with longer sentences being associated with attending the prison school. While this thesis is not recommending longer sentences for prisoners, the increases in short sentences in Ireland have been noted by the Irish Prison Service and this increase is likely to have implications for participation in prison education. Yet the education system does consist of an academic year punctuated by terms with a semester being typically fifteen weeks. There is potential therefore for the IPS to view time in the prison more creatively in terms of what could be accomplished within a short period. Although the new Integrated Sentence Management (ISM), in which education plays a role, was not in existence at the time of collating the life history interviews for this research, introducing new entrants of the prison system to the prison school is a welcome step. However, as prisoners serving a sentence of twelve months or less are not eligible for ISM, this in effect limits eligibility to approximately 30% of all entrants to prison (Martynowicz and Quigley, 2010). Consideration should be given to widening

the criteria for inclusion in ISM in order to provide new entrants with information on the prison school and the educational options available.

In accessing directly prisoner learners' perspectives on prison education it was envisaged that the findings that emerge from this thesis would have policy implications for education both within and beyond a prison context. Many prisoner learners did not engage with prison education from the beginning but rather began attending the prison school following a period of time in the prison. Alan's account of helping another prisoner who could not read or write and his belief that this fellow prisoner did not attend the school because of a desire not to appear weak to others illustrates both the importance given to maintaining a particular image while incarcerated but also importantly indicates that this prisoner was able to indicate his need for assistance not to the prison school but to Alan, a fellow prisoner. This has implications for how prison education services could be developed in terms of greater promotion of the service and, in particular, the use of prisoner peers to engage in outreach. This is particularly important in view of the numbers accessing prison education, the small numbers of which is a cause of concern for the current Inspector of Prisons (Office of Inspector of Prisons, 2011a; 2012).

The life history interviews with prisoner learners who were accessing prison education however did reveal valuable insights and analysis of the data through the theoretical lens of Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1977) allowed conclusions to be drawn in relation to the theoretical framework used. Goffman, for example, had identified a culture of mortifications within a total institution and it was evident from the data that this culture of mortifications existed within Irish prisons. Furthermore, both Goffman and Foucault had identified a strong sense among inmates of time being wasted or destroyed and use of time and the need *not* to waste it did emerge as a theme and featured strongly as a factor why prisoner learners engaged with prison education. Thus attending the prison school could be seen as a way of re-organising a sense of self and importantly of mitigating the effects of the total institution of the prison. The difficulties faced by prisoner learners in gaining access to the prison school however could be seen as a mortifying process in itself and applying Foucault's analysis to the process of physically accessing the prison school also revealed the power structure in

place in prisons, with prisoners and indeed prison teachers appearing, at times, powerless.

Through Goffman's identification of an underlife as a feature of a total institution, he did show, to a much greater extent than Foucault, the resourcefulness of individuals in adapting to a total institution. While illegal activity such as using mobile phones or smuggling drugs into the prison could be seen as an illustration of the existence of an underlife, analysis of the data revealed that it is also possible to interpret the prison school as an example of the underlife of the total institution of the prison and to thus reframe it in a positive way. In Goffman's work for example "free places" were often used as the scene for forbidden or tabooed activities but this description of "free places" resonates strongly with prisoner learners' description of the prison school, with the important qualification that prison schools are sanctioned by the total institution of the prison. Goffman's (1961) identification of the development of an institutional underlife as a feature of a total institution is similar to Wilson's (2004) use of the concept of the third space and both draw attention to prisoners' sense of agency in maintaining a sense of self in the face of institutionalisation.

This thesis, as a result of the knowledge gained and data generated from the theoretical framework, literature review and, in particular, the eighteen life history interviews with prisoner learners in Mountjoy Prison, Limerick Prison and St. Patrick's Institution, makes eighteen recommendations. Seventeen of the recommendations can be grouped in a cluster of three themes, themes which, although incorporating the doctoral work as a whole, resonate with the structure of the analysis chapters specifically. The first theme refers to recommendations made in relation to the total institution of the prison.

### **Recommendations Concerning the Total Institution of the Prison**

**Recommendation 1:** Government action is required in order for Ireland to address consistent criticisms made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) regarding the physical conditions in many Irish prisons, particularly the lack of in cell sanitation in parts of

Limerick and Mountjoy Prison, and the culture of violence that exists within some prison institutions.

**Recommendation 2:** In order to assist prisoners maintaining relationships with loved ones, prison visiting rooms need to be environments in which prisoners and visitors have the space and conditions in which to hear and talk to visitors. The Irish Prison Service as a priority need to address consistent criticisms made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) in this regard.

**Recommendation 3:** Regime practices in St. Patrick's Institution to be urgently reviewed by the Irish Prison Service with particular consideration given to developing a more constructive setting for young adults to be incarcerated within.

**Recommendation 4:** Priority consideration to be given to increasing the number of drug free wings in Irish Prisons and the drug treatment facilities available therein.

**Recommendation 5:** Urgent debate on national penal policy regarding imprisonment is required particularly with regard to increases in the prison population, the conditions prisoners face and the numbers in prison with addiction and mental health problems. Prison educators and educators in general must contribute to this debate.

**Recommendation 6** The European Prison Rules (Council of Europe 2006) to be adhered to with regard to payment of prisoners; engaging in prison work should not be financially more rewarding than engaging in prison education.

### **Recommendations to Educational Practice in General**

Prisoner learners were asked, in the course of the life history interviews, about their experience of education prior to their incarceration. The data that emerged from the life history interviews lead to specific recommendations being made in relation to educational practice in general.

**Recommendation 7:** There is a need to address the implementation of school-based interventions in terms of mental health and support initiatives in order to break a



pathway from negative or interrupted educational experiences to incarceration within the prison system.

**Recommendation 8:** The educational approach adopted in prison education in Ireland has the potential, as demonstrated by prisoner learners' accounts, to successfully re-engage learners who had negative educational experiences and/or poor educational attainment, with mainstream education in their earlier lives. As such, components of the approach used could be adopted to support learners in other contexts.

**Recommendation 9:** Recommendations made by prisoner learners regarding access to education to be applied, where applicable, to educational settings outside of the total institution of the prison and initiatives to encourage prisoner learners to continue engagement in education post-release should be developed.

### **Recommendations in Relation to Education Within the Total Institution of the Prison**

The fundamental research question posed in this thesis was how do prisoner learners experience prison education and it is appropriate therefore that the bulk of the recommendations made, as a result of the life history interviews and doctoral work, refer to education within the total institution of the prison.

**Recommendation 10:** Mindful of the cited benefits of attending a prison school, prison education should be encouraged and supported at all levels of the criminal justice system and prison education placed at the core of the penal experience rather than as a prop.

**Recommendation 11:** The current process of prison officers acting as gatekeepers on entry to the prison school should be re-considered with a view to having a member of the teaching staff, in conjunction with prison personnel, involved in the process and able to advocate on behalf of prisoner learners in order to ensure that prisoner learners have unobstructed access to prison education.

**Recommendation 12:** Professional development of prison staff to consider the wider effect of the total institution as a learning environment and to address the role prison personnel have in promoting and supporting prison education.

**Recommendation 13:** Prisoner learners undertaking courses and workshops to be offered the opportunity to achieve accredited qualifications that have significance to the world outside the total institution of the prison.

**Recommendation 14:** In acknowledging that learning cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place, local education authorities (Vocational Education Committees) to review the model currently used in which prison school classes cease during holiday periods and at weekends. A more flexible approach is needed in order to meet the educational rights of the prison population.

**Recommendation 15:** Prisoner learners, if not able to keep pace with digital technologies, are at risk of being increasingly marginalised educationally by the lack of access to computers and internet. The Irish Prison Service should consider international models in use in order to establish best practice in this regard.

**Recommendation 16:** Consideration to be given, in view of the increasing number of prisoners serving sentences of less than one year, to widening the criteria for inclusion in ISM in order to provide new entrants with information on the prison school and educational options available.

**Recommendation 17:** Recommendations made by prisoner learners regarding improving access to education e.g. greater promotion of the service, to be explored further. In particular the use of prisoner peers to engage in outreach and encourage access to and participation in education within the total institution of prison to be considered.

## **Future Work**

The final recommendation refers to future work that could be undertaken in the under researched area of prison education.

**Recommendation 18:** Further research is needed to address the dearth of research on prison education, in particular, marginalised groups of prisoners within the total institution of the prison to be considered as priority for further work.

The sample criterion for the life history interviews collated as part of this thesis specified that participants be over 18 years of age, male, imprisoned within the institution of the prison in the Republic of Ireland and attending the prison school within that institution. As such this thesis concentrated on the experience of adult male prisoner learners and this decision was justified on the basis of the numbers of male prisoners imprisoned within the institution of the prison in Ireland and the under-representation of males in adult education outside the institution of the prison. This rationale is still valid and this thesis will add to the information available on prison education. However, it does suggest areas of further study.

Theoretically, the work of Bourdieu and in particular his concept of habitus could be used to analyse power within the prison system. Future empirical work could address the perspectives of prisoners who choose not to engage in education within the institution of the prison. Women prisoners also, a minority within the prison system, may have particular educational experiences and needs and while some of the findings of this thesis may have relevance to this cohort, future research could address their particular experiences. A limitation of this thesis was that the prisoner learners interviewed were Irish and white. This was not deliberate but rather emerged as a result of the selection process in which prison education personnel were also engaged. Greater diversity among prison populations generally has been recognised in the literature (Hawley, 2011), and while numbers of nationalities other than Irish and members of ethnic minority groups are comparatively low, in relation to the prisoner population in general, their experiences, while potentially more difficult to access, would be an important addition to the literature on prison education. There are also a number of children (under 18 years of age) who are imprisoned within the institution of the prison and, cognisant of the additional ethical requirements this would invoke, accessing their experiences could provide valuable information from a particularly marginalised group. The review of reports, both from the Irish Prison Service and civil society organisations, contained in Chapter Four of this thesis revealed the presence of prisoners who are segregated from the main prison population or “on protection” and as such have access to prison education limited or curtailed. The increasing number of these prisoners suggests too that their experiences of imprisonment and prison education should be considered as worthy of further investigation.

Finally, Goffman (1961) acknowledged the limitations of his own work, noting that at no time was he committed, even nominally, to the total institution, and this is also true of this researcher. As Robert stated: “You have to be here, you can’t, everyone will have a different attitude to the jail but you have to see it to believe it”. Despite that limitation, through accessing prisoner learners’ experiences of prison education, using a life history methodological approach, insights into prison life, prison education and previous educational and life experiences have been provided and analysis of the life history interviews have resulted in findings that have implications for penal and educational policy and practice. In addressing the research question of how prisoner learners experience prison education, it is hoped that in this thesis a representation of the individual and their lived experience emerges from within the confines of the total institution of the prison.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A - Information Sheet**

Dear student,

My name is Jane Carrigan and I am studying for a PhD in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra about prisoners' experience of education. As part of my studies I want to talk to students throughout the country who are attending classes in Irish prisons. I would like to hear about your experience of education before you came to prison and what you think about schools in prison. I am also interested in hearing about why you decided to study, what you think about your class and if you have any plans to study in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study the following will happen:

1. I will arrange with you a suitable time to meet and to interview you. I will interview you more than once.
2. All interviews will be recorded. The interview will last about an hour each time.
3. I will ask questions about your experience of education, how you feel about learning in a prison and your views on education and plans for the future.

Then I will listen to the recording and type up what was said. Codes will be used instead of actual names. Your name will not appear anywhere in the study. I will make every effort to be sure that the information I present won't identify you to other people. The recordings will be kept safe in a locked office and will be destroyed 1 year after the project is completed.

It is important for you to know that prison staff and your teachers in the prison will not have access to the information you have given. The only exception to this is if you reveal information that suggests that you or someone else is in danger – this is line with Irish Prison Service rules.

You don't have to take part in this study. You can refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason. Whatever you decide will not affect the education you are receiving at the moment. Nor will it affect your future educational plans.

At a later date if you have any concerns about the study or what you said during our interview, you can contact me by phone at 01-8842200 or by email at Jane.Carrigan@spd.dcu.ie. You can also contact the Dean of Research in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.  
Thank you for reading this leaflet.

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**Researcher's signature**  
**St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra**



## **Appendix B - Consent Form**

Jane Carrigan has explained to me what the study is about. I have read the information sheet and understand it. I had a chance to ask questions about the study and know that I can contact Jane later on if I have any concerns or further questions about the research. I know that taking part is voluntary and I can decide not to take part at any stage and if I do any recorded information will be destroyed.

I know that these interviews are confidential unless there is reason to believe that either I or someone else may be in danger.<sup>4</sup> I also know that the information will be stored securely and that one year after the project is completed all data will be destroyed.

By signing this form I understand that I consent to take part in the study and I give my permission to take part and have my interviews recorded.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>4</sup> In line with Exception to Confidentiality set down by the Research Ethics Committee of the IPS.

## **Appendix C - Interview Schedules**

### **Initial Interview**

I'd like to find out about your experience of education while in prison and to find out too what school and learning has meant in your life, can you tell me a few background questions about yourself? I'll listen first and try not to interrupt.

#### **Theme: Identity**

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How would you describe yourself?

#### **Theme: Educational Experiences in the past**

When you were a child, what was your experience of school?

Where did you go to school? How did you feel about school? What type of school was it?

What do you remember most about school? Was there a difference between primary and secondary school?

What did you like most about school? What did you like least?

What did you get out of school? What was useful to you?

Did you have any difficulties in school? Did you get any supports?

#### **Theme: Identity**

In school, looking back how would you describe yourself as a student? Who do you think has most influenced your view of education?

#### **Theme: Relationships with peers**

How did students get on with each other in school? How did you get on with people in your school?

How did you get on with people your own age? Did you have experience of peer mentoring?

What organisations or activities were you involved with in school/college? Outside of school/college where you a member of any organisations?

#### **Theme: Relationships with teachers**

How would you describe your teachers in primary school? In secondary school? What was your relationship with them? How did they influence you?

#### **Theme: Educational Attainment**

How far did you continue with your education?

#### **Theme: Educational Attainment and Relationship with Peers and Family**

When did you leave school? Why did you leave? What did you do next? What did family and friends think about you leaving? Were you happy once you made that decision.

#### **Theme: Educational Experiences in the Past**

If you could go back and make changes in the school system what would you do? What would have helped you?

#### **Theme: Home & Community Life and Parental Views on Education**

What was growing up in your neighbourhood like? Was your family different to other families in your neighbourhood?

What were your parents' feelings about school? What were their educational experiences?

What have you learnt from your parents?

How much a factor do you think your family background has been on your schooling?

Theme: Relationship between school and crime

Do you think school could have stopped you getting involved in crime?

## **Second Interview**

### **Theme: Experience of Prison School**

What are you studying at the moment? Probe: What is it like? When did you start? When do you hope to finish? Relationship with teachers. What makes a good teacher? Can you describe how you enrol in a class here? Did you get any help/assistance in choosing this class? What changes would you make to the prison school?

Why did you decide to go to education classes here?

What are your goals? Is it job related/ non-job related? What motivated you to begin classes?

What motivates you to continue?

How much time is needed to study?

How much time would you spend in class? On homework? How many times a week do you attend class?

Did you ever go back to education outside of the prison? Why/why not?

### **Theme: Identity**

What are you like as an adult student? How would you describe yourself now?

### **Theme: Prison Environment**

What would you be doing if you weren't going to class here? How does your experience of school outside the prison compare to your experience in the prison? Probe: in what ways are they different/the same?

### **Theme: Future Educational Plans**

Are you going to continue your education in the future? What are your plans? Are there any challenges to continuing education? Have any of your friends or family returned to education? Probes: Why/Why not? Probe plans. Probe obstacles if mentioned. Probe needs and supports- family, friends etc. In relation to their education, what do you hope your children to achieve?

### **Theme: Identity**

What is your view of the role of education in your life?

## **Appendix D - Contact Summary Sheet**

- Interviewee:
- Location:
- Date and time of interview:
- Length of interview:
- Special circumstances:
- Observations about location/site:
- What were the main findings/key issues?:
- Anything interesting, different, unexpected?:
- Note information missing (if any):
- Which questions, if any, were problematic and why? (Note the changes you made to the questions):
- Issues to be followed up:

## Appendix E - Number and Length of Interviews

The following table outlines the duration of each interview and the interviewers that were checked independently.

Participant	Length of Interviews (mins.)				Total
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	
Alan	58	78			136
Ben	62	69			131
Chris	59	68			127
David	26	25	4	47	102
Eric	16	27	48		91
Frank	57	80			137
Gerard	35	26			61
Hugh	36	46			82
Ian	24	29			53
John	4	52	32	12	100
Kevin	59	27	43		129
Liam	41	15	33		89
Michael	31	40			71
Nick	36	45			81
Owen	33	32			65
Peter	57	30	38		125
Robert	50	26			76
Stephen	16	71			87
Total Interview Time				1743	
Total in Hours				29.05	
Quality Control					
10% of Data				174.3	
Frank b				80	
Ben a				62	
Stephen a				16	
David b				25	
Total no. of minutes independently checked				183	

## Appendix F - List of Initial Codes Created

self-description	family and neighbourhood
experience of school	parents' feelings about school
feelings about school	parents' educational experiences
school location and type	impact on family background on schooling
memories of school	influences on education
difference between primary and secondary school	school and impact on crime
liked most about school	subjects in prison
liked least about school	description of prison school
what did you get out of school	time first began to attend prison school
what was useful about school	description of prison teachers
description as a student when younger	what makes a good teacher
student relationships	why attend
relationships with peers	study goals in prison
description of teachers in primary school	description of enrolling in prison class
description of teachers in secondary school	choosing subjects in prison
difference in teachers in primary and secondary	time needed to study
relationships with teachers	time spent in class
difficulties in school	homework in prison
supports in school	motivation to continue with prison classes
activities in school	suggested changes to prison school
activities outside school	self-description as an adult student
educational attainment	alternatives to not attending prison class
why did you leave school	comparing school inside and outside
what followed after leaving school	plans to continue education
family and friends reaction	challenges to continuing education
your reaction to leaving school	family or friends returning to education
suggested changes to school system	educational expectations of children
what in school could have helped you	role of education
description of neighbourhood	

## Appendix G - List of Codes

Tree code		References
Drugs		
	Drug use outside the prison	23
	Drugs in the prison	21
Examples of agency		
	Examples of absence of agency	9
	Examples of agency	19
	What followed after leaving school	14
Family and community		
	Activities outside school	8
	Childhood	21
	Description of neighbourhood	13
	Family descriptions and relationships prior to imprisonment	20
	Family or friends returning to education	9
	Family relationships at present	13
	Impact on family background on schooling	9
	Parents and prison	2
	Parents' educational experiences	17
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## **Appendix I - Recommendations**

### **Recommendations concerning the total institution of the prison:**

**Recommendation 1:** Government action is required in order for Ireland to address consistent criticisms made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) regarding the physical conditions in many Irish prisons, particularly the lack of in cell sanitation in parts of Limerick and Mountjoy Prison, and the culture of violence that exists within some prison institutions.

**Recommendation 2:** In order to assist prisoners maintaining relationships with loved ones, prison visiting rooms need to be environments in which prisoners and visitors have the space and conditions in which to hear and talk to visitors. The Irish Prison Service as a priority need to address consistent criticisms made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) in this regard.

**Recommendation 3:** Regime practices in St. Patrick's Institution to be urgently reviewed by the Irish Prison Service with particular consideration given to developing a more constructive setting for young adults to be incarcerated within.

**Recommendation 4:** Priority consideration to be given to increasing the number of drug free wings in Irish Prisons and the drug treatment facilities available therein.

**Recommendation 5:** Urgent debate on national penal policy regarding imprisonment is required particularly with regard to increases in the prison population, the conditions prisoners face and the numbers in prison with addiction and mental health problems. Prison educators and educators in general must contribute to this debate.

**Recommendation 6** The European Prison Rules (Council of Europe 2006) to be adhered to with regard to payment of prisoners; engaging in prison work should not be financially more rewarding than engaging in prison education.

### **Recommendations to educational practice in general:**

Prisoner learners were asked, in the course of the life history interviews, about their experience of education prior to their incarceration. The data that emerged from the life history interviews lead to specific recommendations being made in relation to educational practice in general.

**Recommendation 7:** There is a need to address the implementation of school-based interventions in terms of mental health and support initiatives in order to break a pathway from negative or interrupted educational experiences to incarceration within the prison system.

**Recommendation 8:** The educational approach adopted in prison education in Ireland has the potential, as demonstrated by prisoner learners' accounts, to successfully re-engage learners who had negative educational experiences and/or poor educational attainment, with mainstream education in their earlier lives. As such, components of the approach used could be adopted to support learners in other contexts.

**Recommendation 9:** Recommendations made by prisoner learners regarding access to education to be applied, where applicable, to educational settings outside of the total institution of the prison and initiatives to encourage prisoner learners to continue engagement in education post-release should be developed.

### **Recommendations in relation to education within the total institution of the prison:**

The fundamental research question posed in this thesis was how do prisoner learners experience prison education and it is appropriate therefore that the bulk of the recommendations made, as a result of the life history interviews and doctoral work, refer to education within the total institution of the prison.

**Recommendation 10:** Mindful of the cited benefits of attending a prison school, prison education should be encouraged and supported at all levels of the criminal justice system and prison education placed at the core of the penal experience rather than as a prop.

**Recommendation 11:** The current process of prison officers acting as gatekeepers on entry to the prison school should be re-considered with a view to having a member of the teaching staff, in conjunction with prison personnel, involved in the process and able to advocate on behalf of prisoner learners in order to ensure that prisoner learners have unobstructed access to prison education.

**Recommendation 12:** Professional development of prison staff to consider the wider effect of the total institution as a learning environment and to address the role prison personnel have in promoting and supporting prison education.

**Recommendation 13:** Prisoner learners undertaking courses and workshops to be offered the opportunity to achieve accredited qualifications that have significance to the world outside the total institution of the prison.

**Recommendation 14:** In acknowledging that learning cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place, local education authorities (Vocational Education Committees) to review the model currently used in which prison school classes cease during holiday periods and at weekends. A more flexible approach is needed in order to meet the educational rights of the prison population.

**Recommendation 15:** Prisoner learners, if not able to keep pace with digital technologies, are at risk of being increasingly marginalised educationally by the lack of access to computers and internet. The Irish Prison Service should consider international models in use in order to establish best practice in this regard.

**Recommendation 16:** Consideration to be given, in view of the increasing number of prisoners serving sentences of less than one year, to widening the criteria for inclusion in ISM in order to provide new entrants with information on the prison school and educational options available.

**Recommendation 17:** Recommendations made by prisoner learners regarding improving access to education e.g. greater promotion of the service, to be explored further. In particular the use of prisoner peers to engage in outreach and encourage access to and participation in education within the total institution of prison to be considered.

**Recommendation 18:** Further research is needed to address the dearth of research on prison education, in particular, marginalised groups of prisoners within the total institution of the prison to be considered as priority for further work.