

Tales of 2 Prisons:

Discipline and Education for Women in Open and Closed Prisons

Ian Porter

School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the University of Wales, Cardiff

2009



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Acknowledgments

Writing the acknowledgements is surprisingly difficult. It is hard to know where to begin. Although this is the part anyone reading this thesis will encounter first, it is the final thing I have written. As the culmination of a long process it is not easy to collect my thoughts and succinctly sum up the previous years in just a few words.

First of all I would like to express thanks to all the participants who took part in fieldwork.

I owe a huge amount to my supervisors Jane Salisbury and Lesley Noaks. Without them I would not have reached the stage of writing acknowledgements. I appreciate all the help I have received from everyone at the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. Elizabeth Renton and other support staff have proved invaluable. Thanks also to the ESRC for funding this research undertaking.

My mother, Heather, my father, Maurice, my brothers, Tim and Chris, along with my grandmother have been fantastic throughout. I also owe thanks to many friends along the way.

To E for brightening my future.

Abstract

As the prison population continues to rise year on year, the Prison Service has, as a consequence, become one of the most prominent providers of adult education in England and Wales. The female incarcerated demographic alone has doubled over the past decade. Despite this backdrop, prison education remains under-researched compared with mainstream learning settings. This doctoral research is based on in-depth case studies of two women's prisons, (HMP 'Freshfields' and HMP 'Arkham') examining how learning is understood and facilitated within strikingly contrasting open and closed settings. The study (employing strategies of ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews) offers methodological insights in terms of employing successful qualitative strategies in closed off, socially excluded contexts. This thesis argues that the rigid government approach towards core prison curricula provision, framed around a ubiquitous, instrumentalist, basic skills framework, is largely misguided and rigidly simplistic. The case is made that alternative forms of literacy discourse more closely centred on the experience of prisoners, along with creative forms of learning, offer wider and more compelling benefits in terms of esteem and skills. The nature of the transition (educationally and emotionally) from closed to open regimes is explored, demonstrating ways in which the open prisons promote communities of practice more effectively than closed prisons. The underlying tension between employment and domestic skills for women in prison is also interrogated. In addition to arguing for an educational overhaul, the thesis concludes that a structural shift away from closed, barbed wire, institutions along with an overall reduction in numbers of prisoners is needed.

Contents

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Contents	v
Abbreviations	Xiii

I Introduction	1
The Rise and Rise of Prison	1
The Need for a Woman Centred Approach	3
Localism versus Centralism	4
Discipline or Educate?	5
The Two Prisons	7
Research Questions	7
Key Research Themes	8
The Structure of the Thesis	10
II The Purpose of Imprisonment	13
A Statement with Purpose?	13
The Penal Merry-Go-Round	17
Meta-Theories Surrounding Crime and Deviance	19
Prison as or for Punishment?	20
Retribution as a Purpose of Imprisonment	22
The Reductivist Approach	27

Incapacitation	28
Individual Deterrence	28
General Deterrence	29
Rehabilitation and Reform	30
Feminist Perspectives	32
Women as the Original Transgressors	35
III Perspectives on Prison Education	37
Basic Skills for the Soul	37
Reform, Anti-Reform and Discipline	38
Twentieth Century Developments	41
Summary of Recent Changes to Prison Education Provision	43
Recent Changes to Prison Education Management Structure	45
Prison Education: Theoretical Perspectives	46
The Functionalist Perspective: A Theory of Opportunities?	46
Education and the Total Institution	52
Foucauldian Perspective	55
Theories of Empowerment	59
Theories of Emancipation	61
Conclusion	67
IV Methodology	68
Research Aims and Objectives	68
Research Strategy	69
Sampling of Research Sites	69

Access	70
Methods	71
Observation	72
Interview Sampling	73
Data Recording	75
The Qualitative Research Outlook	76
Prison Research: A Matter of Taking Sides?	77
Negotiating Access to Prisons	79
Ethical Considerations	80
The Road to HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields	82
'Welcome to HMP Arkham'	83
<i>'That's not a Prison...'</i>	86
Methodological Toolkit	88
Feminist Perspectives	92
Prison Observation	93
The Marriage of Methods	94
Interviewing: The Semi, Semi Structured Approach	96
Unpredictability	96
Timings	97
Location, Location, Location	99
The Interview Process	99
Ongoing Reflections on Arkham and Freshfields	101
Professional and Unprofessional Wariness	102

Emotional Issues	103
Reflections on the Layered Cake of Access	103
Analytical Procedure	104
HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields: Past and Present	107
The Arkham Population	107
The Freshfields Population	108
Cost Per Inmate	109
Competing Histories: The Narratives of Arkham and Freshfields	110
The Story of a House	112
Freshfields in 1949	113
The Early Days of Education at Freshfields	114
God Fearing Folk	115
Prisons as Engines	116
Writing the Future	116
V Tales of Two Prisons	118
The Prison Learning Journey	119
Addicts and Bad Girls: The Remand Experience	119
An Anti-Educational Space	121
The Arkham Journey: Upheaval and Turmoil; Mourning and Acceptance	122
The Family Dimension	126
Prisonisation/Socialisation/Institutionalisation	127
Freshfields: 'Prison is not just about bars'	133
Freshfields Arrival and Accommodation	134

Fear of Rule Breaking	135
Different Forms of Prison	136
Terminology and Labels	137
Prison Micro Journeys	140
Breakfast Rituals	140
The Educational Micro Journey	141
Prison Libraries	145
From the Treadwheel to the Treadmill	148
Learning Outdoors	153
The Mother and Baby Unit	155
The Family Centre	158
Conclusion	159
VI 'The Best Days of Your Life?'	162
No One Forgets a Good Teacher	162
School Daze	163
School and the Rigid Claustrophobia of Desk Life	169
Family Experiences	172
The Relationship between the School House and Prison House	175
More than a Turnkey? The Frontiers of the Modern Prison Officer	177
Keys as a Determinator	178
Officer Relations in Freshfields	181
Social Relations: Towards a More Feminised Approach?	182
Teaching Relations	183

'...being treated like an adult'	184
'I don't want to be judged'	188
The Paradoxes of Trust	188
Safety Concerns?	190
'A dose of understanding'	191
Patience	193
Praise	195
Conclusion	198

VII The Core of Prison Education 200

The Core Prison Curriculum: A Once in a Lifetime Opportunity?	200
The Centrality of the Written Word to Prison Life	202
Making the Best of a Bad Incarceration	206
Rejecting the Discourse	207
Barriers to Entry	210
A Lack of Educational Opportunity	212
Infantilised Learning	215
Accreditation Overload	218
Sentenced to a Term of Education?	219
Moving Towards an Alternative Literacy Discourse?	221
Storybook Mums: 'Keeping Families Together'	221
'Something for Everyone'	224
Tackling Illiteracy One Toe at a Time	225
Toe by Toe Controversies	227

The Third Way	229
VIII Creative Prison Learning	230
‘Where all your dreams come true...’	232
<i>Dance Boot Camp</i>	238
Reflections on <i>Erpingham Camp</i> and <i>Dance United</i>	242
Inside Art: ‘It takes me beyond the fence...’	243
Artistic Examination	246
The Creative Cell	248
Time to Write and Time to Read	250
Post-Prison Writing	251
The Creative Prison?	251
Creative Accountability	255
IX Prison Vocational Learning	257
The Dimensions of Prison Work	258
A ‘break from education’	259
Doing Porridge	270
Prison Kitchens: Catering for Esteem?	271
Scissor Sisters and Bad Hair Days	281
Linking to the Outside	288
Conclusion	289
X Conclusions	291
The Prison Crunch	291
A Titanic Mistake?	293

Bi-Gendered Discourse	295
Research Theme One: Prison and Education in Context	295
Research Theme Two: Contrasting Prison Structures	297
Research Theme Three: Teaching and Social Relations	299
The Prisons of Childhood	299
Social Relations	300
Teaching Relations	302
Research Theme Four: The Core of Prison Learning	303
Getting Prisons Online	305
Research Theme Six: Prison Vocational Learning	306
Prison Work and Training	307
Research Theme Five: Creative Prison Learning	308
Creative Learning	308
Charities and Prisons	309
To Educate or Punish?	310
References	312
Appendices	336

Abbreviations

CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CLAIT	Computer Literacy and Information Technology
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
ICT	Information Communication Technology
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MBU	Mother and Baby Unit
NAO	National Audit Office
NOMs	National Offender Management Service
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OLASS	Offender Learning and Skills Service
PLSU	Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit
OLSU	Offenders Learning and Skills Unit
PSI	Prison Service Instruction
PWC	Price Waterhouse Cooper
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
TbT	Toe by Toe
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
WBL	Work Based Learning

I

Introduction

‘Society is the walls of our imprisonment’ (Berger, 1963: 109).

This doctoral research is based on in-depth case studies of two women’s prisons, (HMP ‘Freshfields’ and HMP ‘Arkham’) examining how learning is understood and facilitated within strikingly contrasting open and closed settings. The study (employing strategies of ethnographic observation and semi-structured interviews) offers methodological insights in terms of employing successful qualitative strategies in closed off, socially excluded contexts. The key research themes and question framing the scope of this project will be detailed later on in the chapter; an overview of the aims and objectives (along with research design) can be located at the beginning of Chapter IV: Methodology.

The Rise and Rise of Prison

Prisons conjure images of imposing structures, in both a figurative and literal sense, indelibly engrained into the cultural psyche of modern society. Nathaniel Hawthorne observed in his novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, that among the first practical steps on establishing human colonies is ‘to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery and another portion as the site of a prison’ (Hawthorne, 1850: p47). Foucault (1999) detailed the theoretical and social mechanisms underlying the historical changes during western modernity which led to the penal system becoming the ultimate and efficient form of state discipline and normalisation, a means to exert maximum social control and disciplinary power with the minimum expenditure of force. Whether the implications are positive or negative, or both, the evolving dominance of prison as the preferred sanction of the criminal justice system is in little doubt. Prison stands as the gold standard of the criminal justice system (McConville, 2003).

Over recent years, prison numbers in England and Wales have been subject to hyperinflation, a leap from around 60,000 people in 1997 to more than 84,000 in 2009

(Ministry of Justice, 2009a). Juliet Lyon (2009a), Director of the Prison Reform Trust, argues that this has been contributed to by 'the effects of political rhetoric, disjointed legislation and scaremongering in the popular press'. These factors combined have resulted in sentencing inflation and overuse of custody (ibid). Staffing numbers have failed to keep pace with this enormous wave of prisoners. Full time prison officers employed throughout the prison estate stood at 24,272 in 2000 and 26,474 at the start of 2006, an increase of 9%. Over the same period the prison population rose by 24% (ibid).

As a consequence of the rise in prison numbers, the infrastructure has displayed signs of buckling under the strain. Two thirds of prisons are overcrowded, and the IT system introduced to monitor the population has been labelled a 'spectacular failure' and a 'master class' of government mismanagement by the chairman of the Commons Public Accounts Committee (Ford, 2009). In August 2009 due to a systems failure ('data collection issues'), the Ministry of Justice lost count of how many people were incarcerated (Press Association, 2009). Managing a population becomes a near hopeless task when the size of that population is unclear. Other issues have emerged as a consequence of over-crowding. The Prison Inspectorate has uncovered illicit temporary transfers of 'difficult' inmates between prisons, before and during the inspection process, in order to appear more orderly than they actually are (a game of cat and mouse between prisons and inspectors) (Whitehead, 2009).

The costs of prison turmoil and overcrowding are self-evident. Two thirds of those released from prisons go on to re-offend within two years (Shepherd and Whiting, 2006), at an annual cost in excess of £11bn (HM Government, 2005; Prison Reform Trust 2009). Short term sentences in particular have been highlighted as being particularly costly and ineffectual, a waste of public expenditure on a colossal scale:

...in England and Wales the "lock 'em up" culture remains an intractable government policy. After 18 months of an economic downturn and last week's spending review, it seems bizarre that, although other public services are coming under massive scrutiny, the Government is not willing to accept that short-term prison sentences are costing society billions each year. (Hooper 2009)

The Need for a Woman Centred Approach

The female prison population in England and Wales in particular has risen a worrying degree over recent years. Over the last decade the number of women in prison has roughly doubled, compared to an increase of 28% for men over the same period (Ministry of Justice, 2009a). In 2008 there was an average of 4,458 women in prison at any given time.

In 1991 only eight per cent of women convicted for motoring offences at the Crown Court went to prison, by 2001, the proportion rose to forty-two per cent (Fawcett Society, 2006). In a similar vein a woman convicted of theft or the handling of stolen goods is more than twice as likely to go to prison as she was in 1991 (ibid). There is also something of a gendered divide: proportionately more women than men processed by the criminal justice system are remanded in custody, this is despite women committing a higher proportion of acquisitive crime, and having less involvement in serious violence, criminal damage and professional crime (Corston, 2007). More than a third of women in prison have no previous convictions – double the figure for men (Prison Reform Trust, 2006). Since the 1990s there have not been rapidly escalating levels of deviance on the part of women, but rather a change of culture resulting in a less tolerant and more custody focused justice system, which has played a large part in women increasingly being recycled by a punitive court system and sent back to prison. Almost 70% of women in prison are convicted of non-violent offences (ibid). A high proportion of women jailed are vulnerable, one in four has been in local authority care as a child; half have a history of abuse and almost 40% claim to have made suicide attempts (ibid). Over half of women in prison have experienced domestic violence, compared to a quarter of women in the general population, and a third have experienced sexual abuse (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). This is a demographic deserving greater tolerance rather than unsympathetic renditions of absolute custody.

Sentencing structures rarely take into account the harm to the families of those imprisoned. In many respects children are the hidden victims of the criminal justice system. Every year 150,000 children experience the imprisonment of a parent, 7% of primary school children experience a parent going to prison while at school (DfES, 2003). Yet children are

marginalised in the debate and rarely heard (Codd, 2008). In many cases the cycle of offending carries on through the generations, 63% of boys with convicted fathers go on to be convicted themselves (DfES, 2003). The psychological, social and economic cost is huge. The issue is particularly acute for women serving time, 66% of women prisoners have dependent children (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) (when they are jailed a child loses a mother). Estimates suggest that only 9% of children whose mothers are in prison are cared for by their fathers in their mothers' absence (Corston, 2007). This issue is compounded by the fact that women on average serve time further away from family compared to men (there are no women's prisons in Wales for instance).

There are ongoing debates as to the degree to which the structure and character of the prison infrastructure itself aids or hinders rehabilitation for women offenders. Baroness Corston (2007) calls for a radical new 'women centred approach' on the grounds that the needs of women have been overlooked. The argument here is that male and female types of offender and offending are demarcated, that an approach which treats women as women, individually and holistically is needed. The Corston criticism is that the prison system in its current structural guise is homogenised and largely male orientated. This compounds the already challenging problem of engaging with women to aid their successful integration with society on leaving prison. Equal outcomes for both genders require different approaches (Corston, 2007).

Localism versus Centralism

Among the many debates focusing on women in prison, the case for alternatives and abolition has featured prominently, and not just from the direction of fringe figures or critical academics. Baroness Corston (2007), along with Anne Owers (the Head of the Prison Inspectorate), has called for the current model of female imprisonment to be dismantled and replaced with a range of localised treatment and community sanctions.

In terms of size, Owers (2009) is adamant small prisons outperform big ones (her claims have some substance, supported as they are by years of inspectorate findings). The

government, however, is committed to the construction of larger, more centralised, houses of confinement [the local versus centralised approach mirrors wider debates in public services delivery]. Following on from Lord Carter's review *Securing the Future* (2007) [securing the future of who?] Jack Straw, the Justice Secretary, readily accepted the proposals, and in December 2007, plans for a 'modernised prison system' were unveiled. This vision of modernisation involved considerable up scaling: three super-size, multi-storey 'Titan' prisons for men were proposed at an estimated cost of £350m apiece, each with a capacity of around 2,500 (Travis, 2008). Straw and his best man attracted a phalanx of critics. Juliet Lyon, Director of the Prison Reform Trust, argued such monolithic prisons would entail a 'fundamental shift from prisons being used for rehabilitation to being used as penal warehouses, with prison staff reduced to mere turnkeys' (2009a). The titan designs were based on cost effective designs aimed at delivering unit cost savings during construction and in operational terms, optimal sight lines were intended to deliver better staff efficiency and saving. Carter and Straw adopt the same model for economies of scale that formed the basis of Ritzer's (2007) McDonaldisation thesis, or that Tesco uses for battery hens. The question is should the criminal justice system be based on battery production rather than free range principles?

Discipline or Educate?

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the prison estate has witnessed an extreme surge in population over recent years. A consequence of this rise has seen the prison service become one of the foremost providers of adult education in England and Wales. The delivery of learning behind bars brings with it many issues and controversies, stoking conflicting opinions.

Clearly this is a demographic with acute learning needs. The fact that the inmate population has a high incidence of low education attainment is well documented. In 2005 the government green paper, *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment*, outlined the enormous educational challenges faced by a high proportion of inmates, documenting that 49% of offenders serving time in England and Wales were excluded from school (HM

Government, 2005). It is estimated that more than 50% of male prisoners and more than 66% of female prisoners have no qualifications at all (Prisoners Education Trust, 2009). The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) emphasise that women in prison represent one of the most socially marginalised groups, and that education is a top priority if the cycle of reoffending is to be broken.

Doubts, however, persist over the ability of prisons to deliver effective rehabilitation. Jails are forced to make up for failings in other public services yet are overcrowded, and not really set up to be service providers: 'prison is a disciplined but essentially reactive service, struggling to deal with those at the margins of society' (Lyon 2009b). Mike Ewart, the former chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, argues that imprisoning people can do some good but it 'always does harm' (cited in Glackin, 2009). The concern is that any positive benefits are mitigated by the deleterious effects of incarceration. The rehabilitation-harm equation is a delicate and contentious one.

Clearly education and prison can be seen as a contradiction in terms. Yet, there is a wider argument that without learning we are all imprisoned. In sentiments dating back to the first century, Epictetus (2008) expressed the axiom that *only the educated are free*. The inference drawn here means that serving time without an outlet for active mental stimulation renders inmates doubly imprisoned. Linebaugh (1995) believes the effect of mental imprisonment runs parallel with physical imprisonment. Pablo Neruda (1993) emphasised the liberating quality of learning, considering education to be about 'freeing birds'. Freeing birds becomes an apt metaphor where incarceration is concerned.

Away from such purist conception, there is an argument that education is not automatically liberating and can embody enslavement. Foucault (1999) outlined the processes of discipline and normalisation underpinning prison life, the processes by which inmates are manipulated through penal knowledge rather than brute force (and in certain respects become self-policing). In this light prison education could be seen as a means of control and regulation, keeping students obedient and occupied, echoing Luke's (2004) third power dimension linking knowledge with ideological control. Clearly prison education is not a value free discourse: a range of perspectives on its purposes and features are discussed in the chapter III.

The Two Prisons

The focus of this study will be two prisons, HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields (the actual names have been fictionalised). Both are women's prisons replicating key facets of the above debates. While Arkham is a closed establishment, a barbed wire enclosed space, Freshfields, as an open prison, represents an alternative to absolute custody. In terms of population size, it is also smaller (a capacity of 120 compared to Arkham's 350) and more rooted in the local community. In this case, does open equate to expansive, in the sense of stretching learning potential and broad experience, inside and outside of the regime? Conversely does closed prison represent the flip side, a restrictive educational environment, where learners have limited available opportunities? Individual prisons each tell their own stories in terms of the development of penal sanctions (Soothill, 2007). The two research sites will be introduced in more depth in the methodology chapter (IV).

Research Questions

Before detailing the research questions, it is important to acknowledge that prison learning is an under-researched area that has tended to fall between the cracks between educational research and standard penology (the point has been emphasised by Davidson, 1995; Maguire and Honess, 1997; Wilson and Reuss, 2000; Vella, 2005). The output there has been has tended to be gender blind, or with an implicit bias pertaining to men (for example Vella, 2005). Little research has been done specifically geared towards the female experience. Prison education is more than about what goes on in the classroom; it is about wider prison life and beyond. In formulating the research questions I set out to be broad and encompass matters within and without the prisons. It is important to stress the intention is not to offer a deterministic or nomothetic typology of prison learning and learners. To this end I have avoided an overly rigid system of categorisation. The boundaries of knowledge are blurred and the ways in which women in prison engage with education are not easily pigeon holed. This touches on one of the central balancing acts in writing up doctoral work: attempting to categorise research questions and findings while at the same time seeking to steer clear of over-generalisation and simplification, and not overlooking exceptions to the rule. There are

Chapter I - Introduction

dilemmas involved in trying to capture the rich variety of social life while avoiding rigid rubrics and codas.

Key Research Themes

Research Theme One: Prison and Education in Context

[Primarily addressed in Chapters II and III but these overarching themes percolate throughout the chapters].

What are the competing historical discourses and philosophical justifications underpinning imprisonment?

What are the key theoretical perspectives surrounding prison education?

What are the recent drivers affecting prison policy and the provision of education in prison?

Research Theme Two: Contrasting Prison Structures: Open and Closed Regimes

[Chapter V, *Tales of Two Prisons*, presents a ‘thick description’ of Arkham and Freshfields, differentiating the regimes and settings].

What are the differences between Arkham and Freshfields geographically, historically, aesthetically and organisationally? [There is an account of the respective histories later in this chapter].

The prison macro journey: How are women socialised into closed and open regimes? What does the transition entail?

The prison micro journey: How do women navigate the internal prison timetable in Arkham and Freshfields?

What is the range of facilities available in Arkham and Freshfields? What does this reveal about the dichotomy between the open and closed experience?

Research Theme Three: Teaching and Social Relations

[Chapter VI, *The Best Days of Your Life*, addresses teaching and social relations but these themes are also woven throughout the later empirical chapters].

What are the learning histories and educational life stories of women in prison?

What role do prison officers play in day to day incarceration?

In what ways do prison teachers conform to or deviate from teachers in childhood classrooms?

What forms of teaching relationships develop in open and closed prisons?

Research Theme Four: The Core of Prison Learning

[Chapter VII investigates *The Core of Prison Education* and identifies typical curricula activity].

What is the core prison education curriculum?

What do women think of the provision available to them? How do they make sense of it?

What are the learning limitations and successes? Is effective education possible in prisons (open or closed)?

What are the alternatives to core provision?

Research Theme Five: Creative Prison Learning

[Chapter VIII, *Creative Prison Learning*, highlights culturally diverse activities].

What range of creative activities occur in the prison setting?

To what extent do creative activities represent a 'soft option' for women in prison?

In what ways is creative cultural capital produced in prisons?

Who are the providers and facilitators of creative activities?

Research Theme Six: Prison Vocational Learning

[Primarily located in Chapter IX, *prison Vocational Learning*]

What vocational learning opportunities exist?

How does provision of vocational learning differ between open and closed prisons?

Does taking Education and training out of the classroom encourage and facilitate effective communities of practice?

Does prison vocational learning encompass an adequate range of activities and preparation for release?

How are activities in prison remunerated? [This theme is also considered in depth in chapter VI *The Core of Prison Learning*].

In the spirit of qualitative in-depth research of an ethnographic ilk, research questions proved helpful in framing the study, along with a loose set of foreshadowed ideas (a tight and flexible framework). These centred on structural contrasts between open and closed prisons along with 'fitness for purpose' ideas about education inside women's prisons. Throughout the research undertaking, I remained open to emerging themes (Glaser and Strauss, 1968) and progressively focused the scope of enquiry. The qualitative process after all follows a path from theory to text and text back to theory (Flick, 1998).

The Structure of the thesis

The key research themes (detailed earlier in the chapter) are closely mapped onto the subsequent chapters comprising this thesis as a whole.

In the following chapter, the focus shifts beyond HMP Arkham and Freshfields to explore wider debates surrounding the history and purposes of imprisonment: the evolution of penal philosophies of retribution and reform, and the oscillation between the two. Chapter III continues the theme, focusing on the development of prison education up to the present day. Key Theoretical debates surrounding prison learning are also scrutinised [the response in this area has generally been considered sluggish compared with mainstream educational

discourse (Davidson, 1995; Clements, 2004)]. The key question of whether education possesses an empowering quality within the confines of total institutions (or merely serves as an extension of such regimes) is explored.

Chapter IV details the research methodology. It is well documented that the prison world represents a challenging environment as far as qualitative research is concerned (King, 2000; Noaks and Wincup, 2004). The chapter offers methodological insights into effective and flexible strategies in socially marginalised settings where seventh moment hyper methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) have limited applicability. The implications of carrying out research in strikingly different open and closed regimes is scrutinised (with special attention given to contrasting visual grammar).

Chapters V to IX explore the empirical findings generated from the fieldwork process. Chapter V, *Tales of Two Prisons*, focuses on different types of learning journey faced by women in prison: the macro journey (in this case primarily the transition between closed and open establishments); and the micro journey (the lived reality of navigating prisons internally on a daily basis). Chapter VI ('*The Best Days of Your Life?*') contrasts childhood classroom experiences with prison schooling, examining the qualitative variance in teaching relationships in very different learning contexts. The role the modern prison officer plays in social relations dynamic is also scrutinised (more than a turnkey?). Chapter VII, *The Core of Prison Education*, critiques the basic skills agenda that has dominated prison education at the expense of other forms of learning, and that alternative, proactive, forms of literacy discourse more rooted in the experience of women in prison are desirable. Chapter VIII, *Creative Prison Learning*, argues the benefits of creativity learning as a counter point to instrumentalism. The theatrical production of *The Erpingham Camp* (Orton, 1967) at Arkham and the *Dance United* project staged at Freshfields demonstrate the wider benefits of such forms of learning in relation to behaviour, esteem and other learning domains. The intrinsic relationship between prisons and creativity is explored: the prison milieu encourages creative reflection in proportion with deprivation of liberty. Chapter IX moves from creative to vocational forms of learning, the gendered vocational curriculum is examined, especially the tension between employment and domestic skills. The case is

forcibly made that open prisons promote communities of practice in more constructive manner than closed establishments.

The thesis is drawn to a close with chapter X, the conclusions chapter, which addresses issues arising post fieldwork and revisits the key research questions.

II

The Purpose of Imprisonment

This chapter will examine the purpose(s) of imprisonment, the justifications and debates surrounding competing penal functions and philosophies. Without a purpose, or if the purpose fails, prison is reduced to a meagre, not to mention, an expensive system of state sponsored containment. Feminist challenges to traditional readings surrounding the aims of incarceration will be posited as the chapter progresses.

Debates centring on what ‘prison’ represents, together with what it should be doing, have been debated near endlessly. Is the purpose of imprisonment to punish or re-educate? Does prison serve as an effective deterrent or an ineffective one? Does the prison act as protection *for* the public or does it exemplify a system of social control the public should be protected *from*? This chapter will argue that the British prison system has constantly attempted to justify itself yet an over-arching sense of purpose has remained elusive. The purpose (or purposes) of imprisonment has oscillated between a desire to punish and to rehabilitate the offender.

A Statement with Purpose?

The official discourse outlining the objectives of imprisonment is listed succinctly as three bullet points on the Prison Service Statement of Purpose:

- Holding prisoners securely
- Reducing the risk of prisoners re-offending
- Providing safe and well-ordered establishments in which we treat prisoners humanely, decently and lawfully.

(Prison Service 2009)

The stated purpose of imprisonment can therefore be reduced to the areas: *Security, Humanity and Reducing Re-Offending*; three goals which succinctly enshrine the mission statement of the Prison Service. Similar penal justifications were also outlined in the 2003

Criminal Justice Act (2003) which laid down the *purposes* of sentencing for courts for the first time: a mixture of punishment and rehabilitation.

This triumvirate list of aims is loaded with multifarious meanings and justifications, a wide ranging array of potential penal responses, not all of which are compatible or mutually inclusive. While direct there is simultaneously indirection; conciseness married to vagueness. The terminology promises a great deal and very little at the same time; a blank prospectus readily open to interpretation.

The 'security' dimension ostensibly works twofold; firstly through external security, the protection of wider public, secondly through an internal focus on the promotion of a safe and secure internal prison community. In practice 'security' in the penal lexicon has often served as a shorthand synonym for a number of overt (and covert) punitive sanctions and deprivations; a 'dressing down' of the individual. This aspect has been particularly controversial in women's prisons. As mentioned in the previous chapter Corsten (2007) argues that women inmates suffer unnecessarily in being subjected to a penal apparatus designed by men for men. The security function ostensibly may seem to have little to do with education; indeed advocates of secure (tough) regimes are often diametrically opposed to learning programmes. There is a counter argument, however, that the provision of certain types of 'purposive activity' (education and training) reinforces the security paradigm. Mayr (2004), in a similar vein to Foucault (1999), has argued that prison education in actuality facilitates obedience and control. Particular brands of prison education, such as basic skills, can be viewed as a form of curricula surveillance and normalisation. This theme will be explored further in the following chapter on the Perspectives surrounding Prison Education, along with chapter VII which examines the core prison curriculum.

Many of the reasons for keeping prisoners occupied are self evident. From the perspective of the institution, control of the population can be rendered somewhat less problematic (or confrontational) by seeking to introduce positive programmes of engagement, as an alternative to austere measures, such as extended hours under lock and key confinement. Involving inmates in some form of activity is considered to form the basis of what is termed 'dynamic' or interactional security (Dunbar, 1985; Carlen and Worrall, 2004:68). The

premise is that prisoners would be more manageable, and less confrontational, if they had a more positive experience of custody. In short the prevailing idiom seems to be that a busy inmate, while not necessarily a happy one, is less likely to jeopardise the smooth running of the regime or to pose a risk to security. However, Webb (1995) cautions that from the uniformed officer perspective dynamic security might not be so appealing as locking cell doors and keeping prisoners banged up.

As for the inmate, being engaged in an activity tends to be viewed more favourable than the stark alternative of being confined in their cell. Carlen and Worrall (2004) express the opinion that simply having something to do can engender a sense of purpose, and even reduce incidences of self-harming. In pragmatic terms being engaged in an education or work skills programmes provides a limited but important source of income (the controversial aspects of this will be discussed in subsequent chapters). Other than short term financial gain, educational and vocational courses have the added lustre of adding to future employability and longer term prospects.

‘Humanity’ is generally considered to come pre-packaged with a warmer set of connotations compared with security. There is a stereotype of prison officers encompassing short-term security functions, while educators tend to the humanity function; locking doors versus opening minds. However, the reality is not quite so black and white. There is an argument that teachers imbue prisons with a false sense of humanity and hence serve to reinforce the foundations of punitive structures. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault (1999) argued that prison became the dominant, consistent form of state punishment, not out of concerns over equality of justice or humanitarian issues, but rather as an extension of the cultural apparatus of power over the body. The prison machine from this perspective is one of exacting obedience and discipline, any veneer of humanity or morality only serves to further its dominance. Punishment in the guise of humanity can actually seek to reaffirm control over the body. Beyond prison, community sanctions are supposedly deployed on the grounds that they are more humane and less stigmatising towards the offender. Stan Cohen (1979; 1985), along similar lines to Foucault, wrote about the dispersal of discipline, extending the web of surveillance, recourse to electronic, visual and information technologies greatly enhance surveillance capacities of the increasingly robotic state.

Panoptic shopping centres are an often cited example; everything from prisons to consumer activities are subject the gaze of discipline.

When put under closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that ideologies invoked in the name of promoting humanity, have, on occasion proved to be of dubious value and far from *humane* in practice. Hawthorne wrote that prisons represent ‘the black flower of a civilised society’ (Hawthorne, 1962: 48). While the prison moral maze is a contentious topic there is an argument that the official objective of decency improves the day to day lived reality of inmates. In the post-Woolf context prisoner rights have been more on the agenda, more attention has been given to pregnant women in custody for example. The lawful treatment of prisoners has meant in recent years inmates have had legal recourse to the European Court of Human Rights. There is also an ongoing (and controversial debate) over whether prisoners should be allowed to vote. The humane treatment of inmates also provides perhaps the most compelling argument for prison education, in that it suggests regardless of any other potential benefits learning provision should be encouraged because it is the *decent* thing to do.

The security and humanity dimensions deal with day to day prison pragmatics, how establishments should be run, but in themselves are not good enough reasons for recourse to penal sanctions in sentencing. Reducing reoffending (the reductivist approach) is the aspect of the statement of purpose which justifies resorting to prison in the first place. This is a generalised area covering a lot of ground: everything from punitive models of incapacitating criminals to reforming models of education to steer sentenced offenders from future illegal acts. A counter argument is that prison should be based on punishment (retributivist), and any social benefits in terms of crime reduction are secondary considerations. These contrasting philosophical standpoints will be scrutinised in more detail, prior to this, however, recent turns in prison policy (and surrounding debates) will be outlined.

The Penal Merry-Go-Round

The criminal justice system, it has been contended, has mediated between the forces of pragmatism and idealism, fluctuating between a desire to punish and rehabilitate the offender. Scott argues that over recent years prison policy has been mired in a 'penal merry-go-round' (2007:67). This section will provide some backcloth to the current turmoil and instability surrounding the aims of imprisonment.

In the 1960s the crisis of containment led to an escalation in prison security via the Mountbatten (1966) and Radzinowicz (1968) Reports. This was followed by the widely castigated May Committee Report (Home office 1979) which argued that prison treatment and training 'had had its day and should be replaced' (para. 4.27). The May conclusions were roundly criticised by Fitzgerald and Sim as reducing the purpose of imprisonment to a form of 'zoo keeping' (1980:82).

In contrast to the findings of Mountbatten, Radzinowicz and May, the Woolf Report (1991), written in the aftermath of prison disturbances, placed an emphasis on just and humane regimes at the centre of imprisonment. Along these lines, prisons should be committed to justice, alongside parallel functions of security and control (subsequent chapters will debate the extent to which justice, security and control are not necessarily mutually compatible aspirations). Woolf's conclusions implied choice and responsibility and, in some respects, synthesised components of the humanitarian agenda outlined previously by King and Mason (1980). However, what emerged in the aftermath deviated from intent, resulting in a 'confusing list of visions, goals, performance indicators, values and mission statements' (Scott, 2007:67). Divested of their humanitarian facade, it became apparent that supposedly progressive reforms of the mid 1990s ushered in a performance orientated culture steeped in the 'priorities and logic of managerialism' (ibid). During Michael Howard's tenure as Home Secretary in the 1990s concerns over humanity all but took a back seat, ushering in a drive towards prison austerity, effectively signifying the death knell of Woolf and the liberal penological consensus (Scott, 2007).

The Halliday Report, *Making Punishment Work*, outlined a bifurcated approach of reducing offending while offering the public protection, administered through an ‘appropriate punitive envelope’ (2001:2). Halliday called for a risk based model, with the virtual abolition of short sentences; arguing for longer for intensive prison for high risk recidivists, focusing on *what works*. This bifurcated strategy rooted in the persistency principle has led to net widening, ‘extending the penal gaze further on to those from impoverished or minority ethnic communities’ (Scott, 2007:66). Evidence indicated that convicted persistent offenders are seldom the most dangerous in society, but they are often the poorest (Fitzgerald and Sim 1982; Cohen 1985; Justice 2001).

The Carter review (2004) directly led to the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) on the 1st of June 2004. NOMS has taken prison managerialism to brave new heights, acting as an umbrella for public sector and private sector prisons long with probation.

In some respects this is the culmination of over a century’s work. The Prison Act of 1877, which had the immediate effect of centralising the prison network, set in motion the blueprint we have inherited today. The modern prison system (especially in the NOMs context) has morphed into one of our most centralised nexus of institutions. Upsizing does not always bring with it economies of scale, however. The single computer database promised by the NOMs merger has failed to emerge, the goliath project has been singled out for scorn by the National Audit Office (Ford, 2009) as being over budget, over time and under-performing. This has resulted in the Prison Service being unable to collate its own population numbers (2009) because of IT systems failures. On the subject of the failings of the NOMs merger, Graham, the Deputy Education Manager at Arkham, ruefully observed, ‘at least there’s consistency. The government took a model which didn’t work for the NHS and applied it to prisons’. Post-NOMs Carter’s up-scaling and centralisation tendencies have shown few signs of abating, as evidenced by his Titan proposals. Given that the NOMs project has been compounded by computer system errors, it is curious to say the least that the government devolved responsibility to Carter for the Digital Britain (2009) report, outlining the case for brave new world of communications technology infrastructure for Britain (far and wide and beyond the prison network).

The regulative and managerial focus over recent times, designed to create a more efficient prison service, has, in actuality resulted in less than successful mergers and added layers of bureaucracy. Garland (2001) contends the prison system is fundamentally lacking in financial common sense. Critics consider the prison machine to have taken on a life of its own, resulting in an unwieldy system, hard to change the course of, with little sense of overriding direction or identity of purpose. Scott (2007:68) argues that the conclusion to draw from the penal merry-go-round is that prison does not work, 'at least not on the grounds that have been promoted by the Prison Service'. Garland (2001) asserts that over recent decades the penal welfarist agenda has become steadfastly undermined by a culture of control. In the opinion of Mathiesen 'prison security has priority, security comes first today as almost 400 years ago' (2006:36). He also reasons that it is well documented that prison routines and traditions (factors such as transfers, antagonism and paucity of facilities) preclude students from participating in education. This is a serious matter. Education for inmates can be one of the few positive aspects of prison regimes (Mathiesen, 2006).

Having explored some recent direction (and indirection) of policy, the following sections of the chapter will explore the philosophical underpinnings in more detail: the core reductionist versus retribution models. Following on from this, feminist perspectives will be explored, detailing some of the implicit gender biases built into the criminal justice framework.

Meta-Theories Surrounding Crime and Deviance

Duguid (2000) argues that there are two fundamental 'meta-theories', defined here as 'theories-about-theories which generate sub-sets of theories which in turn lead to actions' (2000:52), underpinning crime and deviance. Both philosophical standpoints have, to varying degrees, influenced the theoretical justification for penal responses. The view stemming from Plato works from the assumption that humans are basically good, moral beings who commit evil acts either through their own ignorance or because of the influence of social conditions. The opposing supposition, steeped in Christian doctrine, portrays

humans as fundamentally flawed, stimulated by ego and desire. The contemporary philosopher John Gray (2003) argues that the biblical story of Genesis, explaining how humankind is hardwired with frailty, is more helpful than the 'thin crust of secular optimism'. He contends that such a worldview is preferable to a facile sense of the feel good: people are stuck with imperfections, therefore a pragmatic attitude is the wisest recourse.

Prison as or for Punishment?

The notion of 'justice' is infused with a huge number of potential normative propositions, many of which are mutually exclusive, often in direct conflict with each other. Such contrasting precepts, offer very stark alternatives in terms of when and how penal sanctions should be deployed. There is an ongoing marathon of a debate between the standpoints of idealism and pragmatism. The three main issues in the justification of punishment, in the view of Ashworth and Von Hirsch (1998) can be summarised in three questions: Why punish? Whom to punish? How much to punish?

One view is that the deprivation of liberty serves as ample punishment in itself, beyond the prison sentence there should not be any augmented or 'add on' sanctions employed to make the quotidian round of prison more arduous than necessary. In the 1920s, Alexander Paterson, the Prison Commissioner, declared that people should be sent to prison 'as a punishment not for punishment' (cited in Ruck, 1951: 23). The deprivation of liberty itself is deemed sufficient hardship. This view represents one side, not necessarily the dominant one, of the criminal justice debate. The prison environment should not be cruel for cruelty's sake. Taken a step further, and applied to a modern context, sentiments of this sort can be applied to justify constructive, purposeful regimes where education and training incorporate an integral part of incarceration regimes. The extent to which this has an empirical basis, whether prisons do indeed succeed as meaningful learning environments in their own right (as the findings chapters will explore) is a point of great contention.

With this sentiment in mind, it has been argued, allowing for obvious physical limitations, that prison should as far as realistically possible, match life on the outside. In this vein prison, as the theory goes, should strive to provide a high standard of what are conceived as social commodities, education and healthcare, aiming to offer (once again allowing for obvious caveats) a culture of equivalence with wider society (although it is debateable the extent to which this is an achievable proposition). The concept of ‘equivalence’ is, on its own, considered a problematic one, in that it implies the existence of a gold standard of healthcare and education in mainstream society that ordinary stake holders in the National Health Service or state schooling system might well regard as wishful thinking. Given regional disparities and divergence in policies, should prisons be aiming to match the highest or lowest standards of mainstream education? Furthermore could this be construed as offering a free educational lunch that many in society are denied?

Striving for equivalence in prisons also raises a set of moral quandaries, for if a system of schooling, or indeed healthcare, is implemented wholesale it supposedly serves as an extra layer of ethical legitimacy for the network of jails in England and Wales. From this standpoint teachers and medical practitioners should be conscious of the ramifications, they are either directly, or vicariously, propping up, adding extra legitimacy, to a system of coercion which may indeed run contrary to their closely guarded professional beliefs.

On the more disciplined side of the spectrum, prisoner welfare, in any guise, is warranted little significance. Time inside should be *hard time*, prison itself should be a punishing environment instead of implementing ill conceived liberal leaning policies. Exemplifying this viewpoint, a recent Governor of the state of Massachusetts went on record with a vision for updating the image of incarceration. Adopting a Dantesque turn of phrase, prison, he contends should be ‘... a tour through the circles of hell...’ The only pleasures on offer would be the ‘... joys of busting rocks’ (Worth, 1995:40). Such vivid invocation of hellish imagery puts one in mind of eternal punishment direct from the pages of Dante’s *Inferno* (2006). Justice here invokes the everlasting, heaven and hell, yet also acknowledges that God’s intervention takes too long (Bentz, 2005); direct, firm action on earth is called for.

In brief then, there are two radically opposed schools of thought informing the nature and purpose to which prison should be put. The reforming spirit embodied by the *as a punishment not for punishment* precept on the one hand, and the *busting rocks* mantra on the other. One ideological camp is forward thinking reserving punishment for prevention of future crimes (reductivist), whereas the gaze of the other is retrospective and backwards looking, seeking to punish crimes already committed (retributivist). Reality tends to fall somewhere between the polar opposites of pure ideology, criminal justice systems tend to fashion an uneasy hybrid of contrasting penal justifications (Walker, 1991). David Garland had argued that criminologists must adopt a ‘more pluralistic approach’ (1990:2) to understand approaches to punishment.

Retribution as a Purpose of Imprisonment

Descriptive theory traces the functional and structural role of punishment within society, as well as providing explanations of particular responses to crime. The justification for punishment resides on the state sanctioning of individual wrong doing as a taken for granted norm. Wrongdoers should be punished because they deserve it, irrespective of other considerations. This system of dispensing justice dates back to antiquity (1750BC Babylon) and the code of Hammurabi, among the first codified legal codes (based on the concept of *lex talionis*- ‘the law of retribution’, enshrined in the phrase ‘eye for an eye’. The idea has influenced judicial along with wider culture: Shakespeare’s Shylock was obsessed with the pound of flesh brand of justice; Nick Cave’s song *The Mercy Seat* (1998) is framed around the recurring couplet, ‘An eye for an eye/a tooth for a tooth’. Gorringer (1996) links legal retribution to eleventh century constructs of purgatory and atonement. Retaliation constitutes one potential way to deal with harm, but is not universally accepted.

The concept of retribution, by its very nature, is a backward looking response to crime. Framed in the past-tense it is unequivocally offence directed. Administering to the demands of justice, in terms of directly addressing the harm caused, is considered to be the paramount consideration and justification for a penal sanction. Other potential concerns, such as the rehabilitation, reform, education and welfare of the offender, are disregarded, relegated to secondary, ancillary concerns where affairs of incarceration are concerned. It

has been argued that there is a fundamental moral basis for dispensing retributive punishment to those who transgress society's laws and precepts (Moore, 1997). Justice is conceived as an absolute commodity, existing for its own sake, retribution exists as a natural, logical, extension to it. This is very much in line with the philosophical standpoint of Kant who expressed the belief that if justice succumbs, the existence of men no longer has any value. For Kant, punishment was a categorical imperative, in order to restore the moral equilibrium, 'the last murderer in prison must first be executed' (cited in Walker, 1991:77). Coming from this angle, justice is a universal commodity, considered to be engrained in the very fabric of humanity, an intrinsic quality encoded into our very genetic makeup. Hence to seek retribution is to meet the perennial demands of justice, adding to our sense of vitality and essential *humanness*. This viewpoint also has an historical basis in the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1992). Hobbes contended that in its natural state humankind is feral and self-serving, condemned and embroiled in a war of all against all. As such, it is social institutions that grant us *humanity*. Punishment through institutions of justice, such as prison, becomes essential. If they fail then we are collectively rendered less human (or humane). Nietzsche (1998), on his part, argued that punishment gratifies tendencies in the human condition, that to watch suffering does one good, to inflict it even more so. In a similar vein Polus, the ancient Greek Athenian, perceived that happiness lies in dictatorship, particularly the power to throw enemies in prison (De Botton, 2000).

Durkheim argued that social solidarity is a function of punishment, that 'passion is the soul of punishment'. Punishment arouses moral indignation and a ritualised expression of social values against those who have violated public mores and the social order: 'all healthy consciences' come together and reaffirm shared beliefs through outrage, constructing a 'public wrath' (cited in Giddens, 1972:127). Indeed the social solidarity produced and reproduced through tabloid outrage (see Cohen, 2002) and popular punitivism is in some ways typical of Durkheim's point. There are of course viewpoints radically opposed to Durkheim's contention that punishment in itself is efficacious/benevolent to the public good. Dostoyevsky, through the Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1993), voices distaste where punishment for the sake of punishment is concerned. Harsh, punitive treatment of the offender, the mechanical severing of an 'unhealthy limb' (1993: 69) leads to a social amputation not social solidarity; collective conscience is weakened not

strengthened. The Elder also surmises that hard sanctions in themselves are not deterrent to quelling future crime: as soon as the amputation occurs ‘there at once appears another criminal, and possibly even two’ (1993: 70).

The notion of retribution as the justification and guiding purpose of imprisonment assumes that justice can be formulated as a common currency, with an inherent fixed, natural, exchange rate. It is also conceived that the *harm* inflicted on people as a consequence of criminal acts can be measured objectively, as a constant entity, and allotted an equivalent response in terms of an appropriate penal sanction. This notion of justice dispensed through an equitable medium of exchange, as mentioned, shares some common facets with the equalising notions of *an eye for an eye*... The sentiment is also expressed in the words of Victorian librettist W.S. Gilbert ‘to let the punishment fit the crime’ (1885). The punishment meted out is returned in kind. The prison sentence is considered to be an expedient means of equalising crime and punishment, to achieve balance and reach a state of parity. The moral foundation of retributive styled punishing, with its in built equity and proportionality of punishment, is argued to be attractive by its fairness (Von Hirsch, 1995). On paper it has a neat and tidy quality, like a mathematical equation. This level of simplicity and moral straightforwardness lends retribution some appealing qualities.

This simple foundation, however, is a deeply problematic one. A central criticism of retribution is that it appeals to the archaic, cruder instincts of justice. Critics point out that it entails a male-streamed form of violent sanction, the logic of punishment taken to an illogical and uncaring extreme. Emotional harm cannot be undone through rendering emotional harm; brutality begets brutality [touching on issues of how people will behave post-release]. The notion of attempting to quantify and allocate retribution in such a rudimentary and positivistic manner exposes a deep-rooted procession of flaws. The exchange rate of justice is not fixed one, but is commonly considered to be variable. The harm question is a deeply troubling one. How can transgressions suffered by the individual, or society for that matter, be objectively quantified and measured? Theories of retribution are argued to constitute an expedient means of redressing the unfair advantage resultant from crime (Sher, 1997) cancelling the debt to society arising from such an illicit advantage. However, debt of this nature cannot be simply erased and paid off in the same manner as amassed credit card arrears. As Walker points out, victims ‘cannot be unraped or

unmugged’ (Walker, 1991:74). Raw emotional harm cannot be measured on a rudimentary quasi-quantitative scale; the retributive medium of exchange is a deeply flawed one. Allowing the offender the means of being able to wipe the metaphorical slate clean and work off their guilt has in it some attractive qualities, but is ultimately impossible to legislate for, both literally and figuratively.

How can retribution expiate pain, or indeed prevent harm or trauma from happening at some stage in the future? The backward looking nature of retribution renders this a normatively impossible feat.

Central to the notion of retributive punishment as a justification for incarceration is the belief in a proportionate system of exchange, a system of parity, where time is concerned. Punishment in this fashion can be converted to time taken from the individual (Mathiesen, 2006). The supposition here is that the length of a prison tariff can be measured as equivalent to the nature of the transgression and suffering caused. Punishment is therefore conceived as a convertible currency. In this manner the scales of justice can be balanced. It is supposed that increases in the severity of crime committed can be matched accurately by increments in sentencing along a ratio scale (2,3,4 years...). The very basis of this equivalence is undermined, however, for time served in prison cannot be conceived as a fixed construct; ‘there is’, as Mathiesen argues, ‘no agreement on what prison time means’ (2006:137). Time as a construct presents very different psychological implications from inmate to inmate. Prison time does not have a zero point, it is impossible to say one form of pain is exactly twice as severe as another form of pain. For example a missed visit from family could engender more suffering than time spent confined in isolation.

Retribution as a quantitative dispenser of justice can frequently be considered a problematic concept. How can justice be exacted in a pure, unadulterated state? This impossibility was faced by the money lender, Shylock, in Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*, (2008) for the pound of flesh that justice demanded was impossible to extract without spilling blood. The law of unintended consequences suggests that even the most retributive or punitive sanctions will engender unpredictable outcomes. The most retributive sanction, for example, may impact personally on the offender and lead to genuine critical reflection causing them to desist from future crime. Conversely

rehabilitative strategies in prison may be conceived as forms of coercion or punishment by those inmates intimately acquainted.

Retribution as a stated purpose of imprisonment has a flawed philosophical underpinning. Prison has a considerable symbolic status throughout society, taken for granted as an official sanction. The prison punishment paradigm has encouraged many people to look no further than the prison walls, averting their eyes from the conditions of overcrowding, deprivation, and many abuses carried out on a routine basis throughout the system. Prison has a monolithic presence that stifles the debate for alternatives or reform.

Returning to the earlier precept of *justice* as an intrinsically human concept as outlined by Kantian philosophy, and that by association enforcing punishment is a natural, and necessary, part of humanity. The opposite view is that punishment is not an exercise in self-actualisation and in fact divests basic humanity and better instincts. In this sense punishment is viewed as devaluing the punisher, in that it does not allow positive growth in those who are doing the punishing (Ward and Maruna, 2007) rendering them less, not more, human. Common sense alone tells us that absolute notions of justice in themselves can be unjust when blindly applied. Lovegrove (2001) argues for hybrids of penal theories and models, insisting that penalties should not be based solely on punitive severity, but also upon other precepts such as rehabilitation. Rehabilitative penalties should also be included on the proportionality scale.

Retributivism, as a penal justification, is often argued to be archaic, in that it appeals to somewhat emotive and reactionary feelings of revenge, something of an anachronism in terms of formulating a progressive justice equation. Carrabine (2004) argues that principles based on a more reductivist, or utilitarian, philosophy have become more prominent over recent times. There has been a revival of retributivist ideas in the last few decades, however, in the form of ‘hard time’ sentiments fused with popular punitivism. A ‘just deserts’ philosophy, which contends that severity of sentencing should parallel the seriousness of the crime (and level of individual culpability), was enshrined as a key justification of the 2003 Criminal Justice Act. Proponents of the just deserts approach include Von Hirsch (1995). Jack Straw the Justice Secretary (at the time of writing) has gone on the record as saying that prison activities should be framed around the ‘public

accountability test' ahead of rehabilitative value (Purves, 2009). Political grandstanding to satisfy and appease the court of public opinion is of course problematic. Questions can be raised over how informed the public actually are and how tabloid coverage, might misinform or fuel moral panics (Cohen, 2002). This links in with calls for a new prison austerity and the banning of fun in prisons (a continuation of this discussion can be found in chapter VIII on creative learning).

The Reductivist Approach

On the opposite side of the theoretical spectrum to backward looking retributive penalties are reductivist, or *forward looking* sanctions, where the primary purpose of prison is conceived in terms of positive consequences and future crime reduction. This school of penal philosophy does not necessarily require the length of sentence to be proportional to the seriousness of the crime. The reductivist stance is underpinned by the philosophy of utilitarianism, famously espoused by Jeremy Bentham (Mill and Bentham, 2000), which aims for the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

From the utilitarian standpoint, punishment for the sake of punishment alone is lacking in moral or rational foundation. The frame of reference is starkly different to the retributive counterpart- punishment in this context is considered to have no intrinsic value, hence detached from debates surrounding human nature and Kantian precepts of justice; operating conversely as a means to a crime prevention end. Social worth is not measured by invoking, punishment for the sake of punishment, or justice for the sake of justice. A healthy society should be measured in terms of crime reduction. From this relativistic standpoint punishment should only be morally sanctioned for the good of *social defence* (Matheisen, 2006). The focus is on serving the greater good, the instrumental (or utilitarian) ends of punishment. Reductivist theory works in three ways: deterring potential criminals, reforming criminals and keeping criminals out of public circulation.

Incapacitation

The short-term basis underlining the notion of individual deterrence as a purpose is the basic premise 'that the offender is to be incapacitated by being taken out of social circulation' (Mathiesen, 2006:85). For relatively low level offences the cost of incarceration may outweigh the economic and social benefits resulting from incapacitation, however. There are also problems concerning accuracy, in addition there are questions of false negatives and false positives (Mathiesen, 2006). Possible negative repercussions include labelling theory (Becker, 1997); sentencing decisions based on dangerousness may have a negative impact on the future behaviour of those sentenced and result in the actualisation of a self fulfilling prophecy. Categories of dangerousness with attendant labels may lead to future social exclusion. There is a need to widen the debate over which offenders should be kept out of social circulation, where the prison sentence is warranted or appropriate (particularly with reference to the risk of physical danger to the public).

Individual Deterrence

The longer-term logic underpinning the theory of individual deterrence is that the experience of punishment proves to be so unpleasant that offenders do not want to repeat the infraction for fear of future repercussions. There has, however, been limited demonstrable success when punishment has been framed along these lines. Results have been moderate at best. For instance the 'short, sharp shock' regimes brought in detention centres in England and Wales in the early 1980s by the Conservative government 'proved to have no better post release reconviction scores than centres operating normal regimes' (Dunbar and Langdon, 1998:10). The statistics paint a picture of ever high rates of recidivism. Rather than prison having a deterrent effect the opposite can be true. Some of the women I interviewed confessed to feeling 'safe' in prison compared to the outside.

Where the concept of prison as a deterrent is concerned there are a number of troubling moral objections. The argument in favour of individual deterrence can be used as a justification of the punishing of the innocent, for what matters most is communication of the penalty (Duff, 1996). Another controversial aspect is that the primary concern is with

offences that might be committed in the future, rather than those actually committed (Hudson, 1996). As such individual prevention has little moral justification for forming the basis of penal policy.

General Deterrence

The aim of general deterrence theory is not so much to deter offenders themselves, but to discourage potential offenders. Prison is justified for the 'deterrent, educative or habit forming effect of punishment of others' (Mathiesen, 2006:24). This notion considers the purpose of imprisonment to focus less on the inmates in an individual sense, concerning itself with society at large, preventing others committing criminal acts. Prison is believed to achieve this goal in a number of ways, mainly through deterrence, moral education and habit forming in others. The preventative function is very much engrained in the social psyche, serving as a pervading rationale of the recurring recourse to imprisonment as a sanction. As a deterrent the efficacy is generally not questioned and is 'to a large extent taken for granted in society' (Mathiesen, 2006:55), rudimentary questions remain unasked and unanswered. If prison is, in actuality, effective in deterring people from crime, why does the population swell to new heights on a near weekly basis? The fabric of prison deterrence theory lacks empirical foundation. The premise of the preventative paradigm relies to a large extent on a communication process, which has been argued to be muddled and unclear. Punishment is viewed as a 'message from the state' (Mathiesen, 2006:65), a direct communiqué from the government aimed at habit formation and moral education. Yet this presumption has frequently proved to be problematic in nature. The basic assumption underpinning deterrence, that threat of penal repercussions alone will reduce crime levels, is undermined if such sanctions are unclear to potential offenders, for example drug couriers from the third world who risk long sentences (Hudson, 1993). The efficacy of the punitive message is over-estimated, and there is no way of guaranteeing that the threat of sanctions adequately filters through to the target audience.

Rehabilitation and Reform

Prisons contain disadvantaged people. The role of prisons is to work to lessen the disadvantage. (Tumin, 1993:75).

The other justification of imprisonment on reductivist grounds is based upon the capacity for individual improvement through reform or rehabilitation. This touches upon the central nerve of this thesis, the extent to which education and progressive policies can help inmates to construct new life narratives. Here prison is conceived as having a potentially positive purpose in that it engenders opportunities to help offenders resettle. There are, however, questions as to whether resettle (or resettlement) is the right word. Some inmates have never settled at all in their pre-incarcerated existence. Commitment to education and reform theoretically lends prison a forward thinking and progressive role, without this, critics argue, any goal is rendered devalued and deformed. Prisons must be purposeful and safe communities (argue Ward and Maruna, 2007), for without purpose prisons are reduced to their lowest common denominator: meagre containment. By aiming to promote good educational practice there is the possibility that a positive ethos will emerge (Ward, and Maruna, 2007).

Evidence suggests (a view supported by respondents in my own research) that the majority of people in prison want life inside to be framed along more educational lines. The architect Will Alsop (2006) devised a blueprint for a progressive prison model in consultation with inmates at HMP Gartree (this is discussed further in Chapter VIII which considers prison creativity). The overwhelming majority of inmates listed learning as a priority. The key question is perhaps not if education should prioritised but what type of education.

Keeping prisoners occupied is considered to be 'a good in itself' (Carlen and Worrall, 2004:67) something which does not need to be proven in terms of efficacy. One of the annual Key Performance Indicators used to quantify success of the prison network is the somewhat nebulous concept of 'purposive activity'. However, the notion that keeping inmates occupied (shades of a Victorian work ethic) is a ubiquitous good in itself masks problematic aspects, for example *how* are inmates occupied and exactly *what* opportunities are on offer? This is especially true where gender issues are concerned. The hidden curriculum where women are expected to be clean and obedient often prevails as a key

message (Carlen and Worrall, 2004). What is good for the prison is not necessarily good for the individual. As Nabakov observed 'a prisoner's meekness is a prison's pride' (2001).

Between men and women there are considered to be different levels of prioritisation and a marked dichotomy in terms of opportunities presented. Carlen and Worrall are explicit that, 'keeping women constructively occupied in prison is not viewed with the same (admittedly limited) priority as keeping men occupied' (2004:67). It seems the imperative to train and prepare members for the world of work is considered to be less strong for women than for men (Carlen and Worrall, 2004). By implication there is an explicit assumption that women should be satisfied with a worse level of provision than their male counterparts.

Utilitarian notions of the greatest happiness for the great number, improving prospects on release and reducing future levels of criminality are often used as the compelling justification for learning provision in prisons. There is a counter argument, that prison education should not be forced to justify itself on such rigidly quantitative grounds. Readdressing the humanity argument from much earlier in the chapter, prison education should be provided because it is the *right* thing to do. There is some controversy over instrumentalist measures of success (addressed in more depth in subsequent chapters). This approach often gets it wrong, aiming for non-existent educational panaceas or magic bullets, overriding individual learning needs with functionalist conformity/models. There is much debate over the aims of education (skills versus esteem) and how success should be measured. Furthermore utilitarianism is a philosophical viewpoint insensitive to individual rights, [Jeremy Bentham (2002) dismissed talk of natural rights as *nonsense upon stilts*] and as such has little conception of the value of education, or indeed covert negative values that can masquerade under the guise of progressive learning. The utilitarian view can justify negative gendered streaming if the value judgement is made that this is somehow conducive to the greater social good.

Rehabilitation is considered to be one of the more forward thinking purposes of imprisonment (since it envisages reducing future levels of recidivism) yet it is not without controversial elements. The very terminology is imbued with connotations of inmates being able to assume a productive and competent future role in society. The etymology of the word rehabilitation can be traced back to a fusion of French and Latin, the French 're'

meaning return to normal, while the Latin 'habilis' means competent. Hence, 'rehabilitation' literally translates as a return to competency.

The question is whether this is a form of enlightenment or indoctrination (and how can we be sure?). Rehabilitation is often linked to individualised treatment programmes; there are often shades of medicalised discourse and the notion of restructuring deviant individuals to a 'normal' state (or restructuring women to accepted notions of femininity). Women have commonly been considered not only to have broken the law but their own sense of femininity, a form of double imprisonment for dual deviancy (Heidensohn, 1985). The discourses of education and rehabilitation have often reflected this (Carlen and Worrall, 2004).

The previous chapter discussed the history of Freshfields and the ways in which the original curriculum reflected post Second World War societal attitudes, with women expected to conform to the dual role of wife and mother. Chapter IX will explore work-based training in the contemporary age, how domesticity is still considered to be a dominant vocation for women in prison.

Feminist Perspectives

The main criticism from feminist scholars is that the majority of accounts on the philosophy of punishment tend to be in the guise of being neutral or agendered, but in actuality have an ingrained bias towards the male. In the opinion of Naffine (1997), study of gender continues to be marginalised; the sphere of criminology is dominated by academic men studying criminal men. As such it is argued that mainstream approaches to imprisonment and criminal justice have been male-streamed, overlooking the punishment of women. Meaningful debates on the subject tend to agree that the prison apparatus has been designed for men by men (Corston, 2007) [as Hawthorne (1962: 32) phrased it the work of 'iron men and their opinions'] and as such are not sensitive to the needs of women. This, in turn, invariably impacts on the provision of education for women in prison.

It has been argued that it is only really in the last few decades that the subject of the control of women has been seriously considered. Furthermore, when women are punished it is as

much about upholding gender stereotypes as penalising criminality (Carlen, 1983; Edwards, 1984; Howe, 1994; Howe, 2008). To counter-act this gender bias in the philosophy and practice surrounding punishment there have been calls for a feminist jurisprudence (Carlen, 1990; Daly, 1989; Naffine, 1990). This has two main premises. The first, already touched on, is that legal categories which are supposedly gender neutral are in fact male biased in orientation. Secondly, although more controversial among feminists, is that there is a type of reasoning, characteristic to women, silenced in criminal justice decision making (Hudson, 2003). While feminist scholars continue to stress the need to bring women's experiences into criminological and legal theorising, there is a debate as to whether there is an over-riding female 'voice'.

There is a notion that women have distinctive moral reasoning, more concerned with solutions to specific problems, as opposed to men who are more focused on abstract rules and reasoning. This is very much associated with Carol Gilligan's work, *In a Different Voice* (1982). Gilligan termed the female moral style 'the ethic of care' in contrast to the male 'logic of justice' and argued that both voices should have equal weight in the moral reasoning of justice. In practice 'women's voices were misheard or judged as morally inferior to men's' (Daly, 2002:65).

Certain feminist criminologists have called for legal processes to admit expert witnesses with specific feminist viewpoints to qualify masculine constructions of crime and punishment (O'Donovan, 1993; Valderde, 1996). This concept of female moral reasoning is controversial. Carol Smart (1989) has argued that it advances a view of men and masculinity as beyond culture and history, which serves to distort women's experiences. At the same time, the work would appear to seek to replace one unitary view of the world, the male view, with another unitary, and distorting female view. This 'desire to replace one world view with another', Walklate argues, 'fails to remove feminism from the traps of both essentialism (men and women are naturally and fundamentally different) and determinism (people, men nor women, have a choice)' (Walklate, 2004:167). Smart's (1989) work is sceptical as to whether it is possible, or desirable to aim for a way of thinking through the law which represents all women's (or men's) experiences.

Sidestepping the debate surrounding attempts to capture the female 'voice' (or 'voices') there are clear indicators that women suffer more than men under the current criminal justice framework. In some respects the pains of imprisonment are harsher for women than men: a much higher proportion of incarcerated women compared to men are primary carers of children, yet because of the relatively small number of women's prisons, and due to their dispersed geographical location, women tend to serve their sentences further from their homes than male prisoners (there is no women's prison in Wales for instance). Women make up only around 5% of the prison population yet account for approximately 50% of the incidences of self-harming (Ministry of Justice, 2009c ; Morris, 2009a)

The feminist approach encourages a wider perspective to penology. In addition to addressing areas where women are disadvantaged by the criminal justice and prison system the feminist approach enlarges upon the scope of earlier work and encourages imprisonment to be examined in a wider sense (scrutinising further implications/dimensions). Megan Comfort, for example, builds on the idea of 'prisonisation' which originated from the work *The Prison Community* written by Clemmer (1958) in the 1940s. Prisonisation is about adapting to the norms and values of prison; enculturation and adapting so social conditions. Comfort's, *Doing Time Together* (2007), centres on the experiences of wives and partners of men serving in San Quentin. In the work, she develops the idea of 'secondary prisonisation'; how prison affects wider every day and domestic lives, the collateral impact on families and children who suffer the penal consequences in tandem. Helen Codd (2008) explores a similar theme, examining the broad shadow cast by prisons on lives outside. She notes there is much work offering a critical perspective on prisons in the UK, yet families, partners and children who reap acute effects of imprisonment by proxy tend to be marginalised or overlooked, silenced in the debate. Codd also highlights gaps in the current literature on families, imprisonment and criminal justice. The need for future research into the experiences of male partners of female prisoners is stressed. Other neglected areas are identified, hitherto marginalised groups, 'the lives of gay partners of prisoners of either gender are almost invisible' (Codd, 2008: 20). In addition it is noted that little research has been concerned with who actually visits female prisoners.

Feminist approaches then cast a critical gaze on the conventional debates surrounding purposes of imprisonment, drawing attention to engrained biases. The philosophical justification of incarceration should not overlook the wider implications such the impact on families who suffer secondary pains of imprisonment. Pat Carlen (1990) has called for a different perspective on prison theory; a 'women-wise' penology.

Women as the Original Transgressors

The previous section discussed gendered biases prevailing in the modern criminal justice system. Here I will trace the genealogy of such ideas to representations dating to the foundation of western culture, whereby women are depicted as the original transgressors.

There is a marked anti-woman strain in both the Greek and Christian narratives. In Christian theology and Greek mythology, the decline of man is placed squarely at the feet of woman. In the Genesis story, Eve is blamed for tempting Adam into eating from the tree of knowledge, the original sin, and subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden. After the fall humankind, so the narrative goes, has been exiled and sentenced to hard labour for all time. A kind of infinite prison sentence. From this the negative, laboured connotation of work (as a burden and punishment) has permeated through the ages (Veal, 2004). In the Christian creation story women are singled out as the worst offenders and dealt with accordingly. Certain punishments have been reserved exclusively for women: pain in childbirth and domination by husbands (Genesis 3:16).

Women fare little better in the Greek creation myth. In this version Pandora was the first mortal maiden replete with feminine charm: designed by the gods to be pretty, enchanting and fashionably dressed. She was endowed with sex appeal (from Aphrodite) but also trickery and deceit (from Hermes). Out of curiosity Pandora opened the famed box and unleashed a number of ills such as hard work, disease and old age. Pandora was held responsible for all the woes of the world; the original femme fatale, beautiful but treacherous.

Another facet of the Christian and Greek worldviews is the devalued sense of womanhood. In the Christian story Eve was formed from a discarded part of man, for no better reason than to give companionship to Adam. A prevailing view among the Greeks (notably Aristotle) was that women were inferior or incomplete men, effectively a lower grade of species. While it is easy to dismiss such stories as archaic with little modern relevance, it is important to recognise that myth informs contemporary understandings of the past, a culturally engrained sense of shared values. These attitudes have affected the perception and punishment of women through the ages, not just in terms of prison but also wider community sanctions (*Scarlet Letters* and latter day puritans). Kennedy addresses the theme in her work *Eve Was Framed* (1993), an excoriating critique of out-moded legal attitudes which disadvantage and unfairly stereotype women in the courts (through the prejudices of judges and misconceptions of jurors). The justice system in modern day Britain has been criticised as a 'sexist operation' (Fawcett Society, 2009). Women also tend to not fare well where religion underpins governance of modern states. Writing on the position of women in Iranian society Nafisi writes 'Everyday life does not have fewer horrors than prison' (Nafisi, 2004:13).

Having assessed recent turns in policy, the philosophical underpinnings of imprisonment, along with feminist challenges, the following chapter will consider the development of education in prisons (and debates surrounding provision).

III

Perspectives on Prison Education

This Chapter draws upon a wide variety of discourse from the fields of penology and education, together with other sources, to engage in a discussion on a diverse range of possible theoretical approaches to prison education. Such readings vary considerably. There are contrasting theories with very different implications on how we should perceive learning in prison. From a certain perspective education is viewed as another mechanism in an expansive control network; a pedagogy of social control. Alternatively education and learning can viewed as engendering empowerment and emancipation, a pedagogy of hope.

Basic Skills for the Soul

In its initial guise imprisonment in Britain served as both a criminal and religious sanction for women. The ‘Clink’ was a notorious prison at Southwark in London, from the 12th century until 1780 when razed to the ground in a fire, and is notable in that it was the first prison in which women were regularly confined. The origin of the phrase ‘in the clink’, (doing time in prison) is thought to be from the onomatopoeic ‘clink’ of the sound of striking metal, from metal doors as they slammed, or the rattle of chains the prisoners wore. The prison was owned and run under the auspices of the Bishop of Westminster, located next to his residence at Westminster Palace. Many women of ill repute were incarcerated including workers in Southwark’s notorious brothels. Prison terms were deployed by ecclesiastical authorities in combating lewdness; the Bishop of Westminster administered punishment in tandem with care of souls. Appendix I explores moral panics surrounding urbanisation and women, along with a brief discussion on representations of female prisoners in popular culture through the ages.

Tracing prison education to its origins, the chapel and the classroom occupied the same space. Sellin (1944) contends that the main reason for institutionalised instruction was due to the fact illiteracy was a bar on inmates being properly catechised, literacy and religious

instruction went hand in hand. During the 1600s, in the Amsterdam Correctional House, religious texts were printed exclusively for inmates (edifying epistles of the apostles). However, when conflicts emerged between security, work and schooling, Mathiesen observes that 'schooling lost out' (2006:35). Prisons were intended for the moral rearmament of society, a kind of Christian boot camp for the fallen and the wayfarers of sin. Quotidian routines were underpinned with religious hard labour, a daily timetable of discipline, work and regulated prayer. Prison education in its earliest guise was formulated around the provision of basic skills for the soul. In many respects the past has been transposed to the present: the modern day rations of basic skills, mirroring the bread and water of education. Literacy used to be used for catechism, to make souls competent, nowadays inmates being able to read and write is steeped in an equally functionalist discourse.

This work/religious discipline echoed the zeitgeist of wider society, the close relation between the church and burgeoning forms of capitalism (Applebaum, 1992; Mathiesen, 2006) in line with the foundation of Weber's protestant work ethic (1976). E. P. Thompson in his famous essay *Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism* (1967), wrote about the historical emergence of 'clock time' as effectively a form of collusion between religious and capitalist interests. Industrialists and factory owners required a sober and upright workforce due to ephemeral, short term motives of profitability, while the church was motivated by the eternal nature of the soul's welfare. It was in the interests of both that 'Saint Monday' was combated, the worker's hangover on Monday accrued from an overdose of spirits on Sunday. There was a state of unease over 'lawless and furious people' (Mathiesen, 2006:36).

Reform, Anti-Reform and Discipline

The paradigm of prisons as sites of individual reform in earnest dates to the 19th Century, an age where rehabilitation was taken seriously as a purpose of imprisonment for the first time. It is not a straightforward linear account, however, but one involving discontinuities, contradictions and fragmentation. The narrative is comprised of many strands, 'there are as

many histories of women's imprisonment as there have been women in prison' (Carlen and Worrall, 2004:1).

Exemplifying a different spirit to the precepts of masculine prison hard time, the penal reformer Elizabeth Fry had a considerable influence in the 19th century. As befitting Quaker doctrine, religious instruction once again prominently featured. Fry's mode of reform involved targeting improvement in conditions coupled with resources for the aim of self-improvement. Fry represented the female face at the forefront of prison reform, aiming to redress the iron brunt of the criminal justice system. Carlen and Worrall (2004), however, note that Fry would eventually espouse a technology of reform which encompassed surveillance and discipline (which in itself demonstrates how the forces of prison punishment and rehabilitation have often entwined).

Fry, along with her brother, Joseph John Gurney, persuaded Home Secretary, Sir Robert Peel to introduce reforms in the 1823 Gaol Act. The 1823 Act placed on the statute book the first significant commitment to education in British Prisons. The legislation called for provision of reading and writing instruction in all prisons (a diet of basic skills). To this end, all authorities were required to appoint prison school masters. Since 1823, with varying strength and impetus, prison education has played a regular part in prison life, although it has been a patchy history.

The finer intentions of the Gaol Act were compromised as the Victorian age took root. Much of the reforming spirit was eroded in the mid years of the 19th century when repressive regimes developed. Regimes sought to change offenders through austere Victorian values: the protestant ethic of hard labour (Weber, 1976). On the current site of Westminster Cathedral previously stood a correctional facility, Tothill Fields Prison (again, suggestive of a link between prison and religious worlds). At Tothill there was a women's section of the prison, together with facilities for those with young children. Prison work was intended to reflect wider occupations and the world of commerce (Mathiesen 2006) but more often mundane tasks formed the main component of such labour. Activities for women imprisoned at Tothill included knitting, oakum picking and laundry work. To this day (to a large extent) Mathiesen (2006) argues that prison tasks remain repetitious and meaningless. Yet Tothill was considered by some to be progressive in its day. Henry Mayhew visited the

prison in 1861 and in his book, *Criminal Prisons of London*, (1862) praised the staff for ensuring discipline without the need for physical punishment. The main form of discipline at Tothill was the rule of silence, prisoners were not allowed to converse with each other. Correction was engendered via industrious labour (coupled with quiet reflection), hard work for those who were seeking to avoid it (Mathiesen, 2006). Human idleness was considered to be an insult to utilitarian values; a social waste frowned upon as an affront to society. Such Victorian values are exemplified in the works of Samuel Smiles, in many respects the forerunner of the modern self help industry. His personal improvement guide simply entitled *Self-Help* (2002) sold over a quarter of a million copies, elevating him to celebrity status: 'almost overnight, he became a leading pundit and much-consulted guru' (Sinnema, 2002: Vii). Smiles helped to promote the cult of the individual and celebrity (he wrote biographies lauding the achievements of singular characters, heroes of the industrial revolution) which has rocketed into a whole new orbit in the modern age. His work has also attracted its fair share of criticism, the socialist, Robert Tressell, in his novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* dismissed *Self-Help* as a book 'suitable for perusal by persons suffering from almost complete obliteration of the mental faculties' (2004: 572). The downside to the ethic of self-reliance is that it disengages from wider structural concerns, and offers a narrow definition of individual reform. The self must depend on the self, wholesale improvement and reform of prison structures is overlooked. Penitentiary time then becomes abrasive, lacking in charity and compassion.

That is not to say the flame of reform was extinguished through the Victorian era. Local autonomy kept some semblance of a progressive spirit alive. The work of Elizabeth Fry was built on in some localities, which embraced the philosophy that prison should be about more than just punishment. Her influence is felt to this day. She has informed certain facets that still play a part in imprisonment, such as the desire to house and educate men and women offenders separately, chiefly to safeguard a decent sense of womanhood and as protection from the 'lewdness' of men. Elizabeth Fry played her part in reforming the establishment, she is now effectively the face of the establishment (and commerce); since 2002 she has adorned the British £5 note. Charles Darwin, whose careworn visage can be found on the £10 note, presents a contrasting Victorian ethic to that of Fry. His theory of

evolution and natural selection were controversially applied to wider society, in the form of social Darwinism. In this vein the world of human interaction was viewed as an arena of survival of the fittest where the weak fell by the wayside, adding scientific and moral reasoning to Victorian notions of punitivism and anti-charity.

Whilst the rules and regulations which formed part of the 1877 Prison Act (Forsythe, 2001) made some provision for education, this stemmed from the iron logic of prescriptive rules and regulation rather than as a result of imagination or humanitarian zeal (similar in some respects to the modern prison managerial tick box format). Towards the end of the Victorian era, the Gladstone Report of 1895 outlined a relatively enlightened statement of purpose (ibid). The sentiment was articulated that the prison estate should adhere to the principle of making ‘better men and women’.

Twentieth Century Developments

It was not until the inter-war period (between WW1 and WW2) that significant developments to prison education were to be seen. This was the age of the voluntary prison teacher; public finances were unavailable to remunerate a cohort of professional, waged staff. Some of these volunteers emerged from within the Prison Service, notable examples being chaplains, as well as others from outside prison walls. This voluntary activity, maybe because it was voluntary and less officially sanctioned and structured gave rise to a much broader range of activities (for example debates, concerts, craft) than hitherto seen. As chapter VIII on creative learning demonstrates, the voluntary sector is increasingly relied on for variety and innovation in the delivery of 21st century prison education.

Whilst grim rules and prisons persisted, with prisons remaining less than cheery places, a spirit emerged, partly amongst the public at large (Forster, 1998), and partly from individuals such as Alexander Paterson within the Prison Service that prison life should resemble something greater than retributive and unpleasant confinement and work. Paterson, who was Commissioner of Prisons from 1922 until his retirement in 1946, argued ‘you cannot train people for freedom in conditions of captivity’ (cited in Liebling and

Maruna, 2005:22). His aim was to introduce reforms that would provide a humane regime in penal institutions and encourage rehabilitation among inmates.

During his period as Prison Commissioner (1922-1946), Paterson used Wakefield Prison as a testing ground for his reforms, such as establishing a farm within the prison in which inmates could learn agricultural skills. Prisoners were also allowed to earn small sums working, attend training courses and participate in games. In this respect Wakefield prison became something of a forerunner for the modern day prison framework (and in some respects more forward thinking). The intervention of World War 2 gave rise to an element of industrial training (in Maidstone and Wakefield prisons) with a view to discharging prisoners into productive factory work.

The spirit of the post war years, building a new world, was carried forward by the then chairman of the Prison Commission. He subscribed to the 'better men and women' principle articulated 50 years previously in the Gladstone Report, and worked for a significant contribution from a professional education service fully integrated into the penal system. This had an influence on the 1944 Education Act which generated a structure in collaboration with the Department for Education, local authorities, the Central Council for Physical Recreation, as well as calling on the experience of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. The result was, despite a desperate shortage of resources and initial unwillingness on the part of some Local Education Authorities (LEAs), a system enabling LEAs to employ a cohort of educationalists to work in prisons, with costs reclaimed from central government (the Home Office).

This set the pattern for the system. However, this framework was not set up immediately or easily. By 1958, there were still only 29 full time education officers in the UK (Forster, 1998), the rest were part-time on casual contracts. In addition to the practical difficulties arising from the situation, there were, and indeed still are, considerable cultural challenges to surmount. Over the years, the number of education staff has increased, yet the system has had to cope with a variety of problems: accommodation pressures, industrial unrest within the prison service, riot and disorder, not to mention sudden swings in the court of public opinion.

A highly influential turn where prison education is concerned, has been the ‘nothing works’ paradigm, based on a notorious declaration made by Martinson (1974a; 1974b), and subsequently echoed by Sullivan (1990), which branded learning and rehabilitation programmes as ineffectual. Martinson’s research and findings, however, have been frequently maligned from many quarters and likened on occasion to a carnival mirror distorting reality and failing to reveal the complete picture of prison education (Duguid, 1999). Cullen and Gendreau (1989) forcibly argued that the anti rehabilitative message has less to do with objective, evidence based endeavour and more to do with shifts in the political fabric. Despite these sustained attacks the ‘nothing works’ doctrine continues to have a pervasive effect and is frequently used as an empirical justification for starving prison education of funds. Under Michael Howard’s strident tenure as Home Secretary, budgets were cut by 89% (Smith, 2005). Such ongoing frugality and neglect rendered education ‘something of a Cinderella in the prison system’ (Maguire, 1997:1). There has been a reduction of secondary and higher education (Vella, 2005) in prison along with a sharp focus on what Taylor (2006) terms ‘death by basic skills’.

Summary of Recent Changes to Prison Education Provision

1991	Until 1991 prison education was funded by the Home Office and delivered under contract by LEA adult education services and FE colleges. Contracts for prison education services were then put out to tender. Contracts were issued for five years and went to a variety of providers, largely FE colleges. Some colleges had multiple contracts geographically spread across the country. Mostly there was a reasonable proximity to the prison and the education contractor, but some contractors were anything up to 150 miles away from the actual prison. Prison education budgets were placed in the hands of prison governors who could ‘vire’ money to other areas of the prisons.
1991 – 1996	Prison education was subject to decisions by governors often made for non-educational reasons and suffered large cuts in provision with losses of many full-time prison education lecturers.
1996	Prison education contracts were re-tendered. Contracts went to FE colleges, two LEAs and one private provider. Some colleges had developed more of an expertise in prison education than others.

- 2001 Responsibility for prison education was shared between Prison Services and the DfES. A separate unit was established - the Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit (PLSU), subsequently the Offenders Prison Learning and Skills Unit. The PLSU had a network of Area Managers who had a geographic and lead responsibility for an area of work.
- With the establishment of the PLSU, the funding for prison education was transferred from the Home Office and Prison Service to the DfES and ring-fenced for education work.
- 2002/3 The PLSU commissioned Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) to review the funding of prison education. This review found little connection between the vocational training that went on in prisons (in workshops with directly employed instructors) and other aspects of prison life such as offending behaviour and management programmes, sentence management and resettlement. The Review took the broad line that funding should be more closely aligned to individual prisoners' learning needs and the characteristics of their sentence and the actual prison.
- Numerous options were put forward for the future of funding and contracting of prison education. The outcome of the review was that a new re-tendering process would be undertaken and a new specification for such contracts would be drawn for prison education providers. The proposals made it clear that new providers would be encouraged to participate in the tendering process. The project was titled Project Rex. It recommended that prison education should again be re-tendered as a combined contract of prison education and vocational training.
- 2003 Notice to contractors of the re-tendering process was given in April and the date for the new contracts to come into force was April 2004 - later changed to September 2004. Existing providers had their existing contracts extended twice to meet these timescales.
- 2004 In January 2004 Project Rex collapsed and the Offenders Learning and Skills Unit (the OLSU replaced the PLSU) announced that current contracts would be automatically extended for between 1 and 3 years from September 2004.
- 2005-Present Roll out of the new Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) began in 2005 and was completed in July 2006. 21 regional providers are under contract to the LSC (Learning and Skills Council) responsible for the delivery of prison education.

Recent Changes to Prison Education Management Structure

The latest significant structural turn in prison education has led to the establishment of a tripartite approach between the Prison Service, LSC and the individual prison education providers.

There are now effectively dual management figures responsible for the delivery of education and skills in every prison in England and Wales, The Head of Learning and Skills and the Head of Education. The Education Manager is employed by the contract provider (in the case of Arkham and Freshfields local colleges of further education). The role is primarily focused on provision within the education block. Chapter VIII on prison creativity, demonstrates through the Arkham production of *The Erpingham Camp*, how the education department can be sidelined in relation to wider prison learning opportunities.

Since 2003 a Head of Learning and Skills has been installed in every prison (employed initially by the Prison Service and now directly by the LSC). This represents a much newer post than that of the Education Manager, traditionally the most senior position in relation to the delivery of prison learning (Prison Education Managers now report to the Head of Learning and Skills within their establishment). The Head of Learning has a broader working remit compared to Education Managers (whose influence, as mentioned is chiefly confined to the education department) aiming to drive learning and skills potential throughout prisons. In this role they are responsible for all activities throughout the wider regime (kitchens, work activities, horticulture, gym, and so on), and aim to underpin them with accreditation where possible. Although the scope is beyond the education department, Heads of Learning are also responsible for ensuring that core curricula provision within the classroom is to a high standard. The overall brief is to convert prisons from secure environments to secure learning environments. In Chapter IX (on Vocational learning) the concepts of prison work based learning (a contradiction in terms?), along with expansive communities of practice, will be interrogated.

Prison Education: Theoretical Perspectives

The Labour government, elected to power in 1997, inherited a prison education apparatus they considered to be over reliant on ‘education for recreational purposes’ (DfES, 2001). The case has been forcibly argued that under current political regime, ‘evidence based policy has reached its apotheosis’ (Davies et al, 2000:1). This so called inclination towards pragmatism has ‘signalled a conscious retreat from ideology’ (Davies et al, 2000:1) giving rise to what has been labelled an ‘instrumentalist’ agenda in British prisons. The focus of policy has come squarely to rest on the remedial aspects of educational activity (Clements, 2004: 170) at the expense of other learning domains such as the academic and creative.

Overall it is considered that there has been a slow theoretical response where prison education is concerned. Discourse has been sluggish and less prevalent compared with other branches of academia. Davidson claims the field has been ‘out of touch’ with theoretical developments in sociology, history and criminology’ (Davidson, 1995:15). Some might say schooling behind bars has been floundering in a metaphorical game of academic catch-up. Maguire and Honess (1997) argue that there has been a dearth of research conducted into prison education. Practitioners themselves have been keen to create a theoretical justification for their profession, waging a discourse, considered by some, to be *polemical* (Davidson, 1995). Teachers ‘inside’ have regularly presented themselves as champions of prisoner students and their students in turn, as the victims of social disadvantage. In doing so, it has been contended that professionals have tended to focus their energies and zeal on the likeminded, and preached to the converted; justifying their practice rather than engaging in critical or self-reflection (Davidson, 1995).

The Functionalist Perspective: A Theory of Opportunities?

A major perspective pertaining to prison education is rooted in functionalist discourse popular in the 1960s and 1970s, which now constitutes a major theoretical underpinning of contemporary penal policy in England and Wales, the current so called basic skills agenda

(Taylor, 2006). The instrumentalist ethos of the prison core curriculum focuses to a near exclusive level on the high proportion of inmates with a low level of functional literacy (Clements, 2004).

In recent years adult offenders have been identified as a priority group for improving literacy and numeracy (DfES, 2001; OLASS, 2007) with policy geared towards offering prisoners the chance to 'make up lost time on basic skills' (Home Office, 2004:4). The functionalist framework focuses on the high incidence of illiteracy and general low level of educational attainment which distinguishes the prisoner constituency as one of the most excluded in society (Clements, 2004) [the issue of low educational attainment was discussed at some length in the introductory chapter].

This perspective is argued to have a considerable moral underpinning; the fact that many inmates are functionally illiterate badly detracts from their quality of life, worsening an already stressful situation. The ability to read and write is argued to have a hugely positive impact on prison life, in the opinion of Collins, 'literacy adds a much needed aesthetic dimension to prisoner's existence' (Collins, 1995:50).

Advocates of the functionalist perspective point to the far-reaching individual (and by association, social) benefits of literary based prison education. This brand of learning is believed to enable inmates to become more competent and less prone to transgressing society's norms. The prisoner demographic is seen as lacking the functional level of learning enabling them to achieve 'socially accepted goals' (Davidson, 1995:3). The troubling reality is such that 'many prisoners' literacy and numeracy skills are so poor that 'up to 90 percent of jobs may be closed to them' (Home Office, 2000) [This in itself is indicative of a key problem, 'many prisoners' is vague terminology and demonstrates how hard evidence and facts are replaced by estimations or even guess-timations]. According to the functionalist perspective, propensity towards recidivism is explicitly linked to poor educational achievement, in that lowly skilled individuals will seek to gain by illicit means what they cannot obtain through legal channels. This bears some resemblance to criminological strain theory, as conceptualised by Merton, (1938). Strain theory considers society in terms of being saturated with dreams of opportunity, freedom and prosperity whereby if individuals lack the legal means to actualise these dreams they will resort to illegal measures. Education

focusing on functional competency, literacy and numeracy, is posited as the solution to this quandary, representing an *opportunities model* whereby addressing basic learning and cultural needs should correct criminal behaviour, thus opening doors to a previously closed world of legitimate jobs and legal goods (Schwartz and Kock, 1992). The stress is very much on competency infused education as a vessel towards finding a socially and morally responsible outlet for aspirations. The *back to basics* philosophy, is argued to constitute a prudent way forward in terms of 'supporting social re-integration' (Home Office, 2000:3), preparing offenders for the challenges of the modern workplace.

Bold, sweeping claims have been posited by advocates of such an opportunities paradigm, claiming huge benefits in terms of reducing the rate of recidivism. Drawing an explicit link between functional reading-writing capacity and levels of re offending, the commitment to tackle prison illiteracy is claimed to have the potential to 'slash re-offending by 12%' (Hinsliff, 2002). Successful resettlement has long since been undermined by persistently high levels of recidivism. The recent scale of the problem is such that 47% of adults are reconvicted within one year of being released, for those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 60%. For those who have served more than ten previous custodial sentences the rate of reoffending rises to 76% (Ministry of Justice, 2009b). Two thirds of women released from prison in 2004 were reconvicted within two years of release (Home Office, 2005).

The prevalence of re-offending has obvious financial implications. The economic cost of re-offending to the tax payer is considered to be exorbitant, 'the cost of recidivism is an estimated £11 billion a year' (House of Commons, 2005). However, trying to quantify the impact of crime in such a quantitative manner is a somewhat shaky enterprise. The accuracy of such fiscal calculations are frequently scrutinised. Additionally the emotional cost of crime can never be reduced to terms of hard finance, 'victims can be compensated, but not unraped or unmugged' (Walker, 1991:74).

Critics (such as Duguid, 1997) have scrutinised whether using recidivism as a measure of the effectiveness of prison education is politically necessary, or indeed theoretically

appropriate. It is evidently spurious to infer simple causal relationships between interventions and outcomes. A Home Office commissioned study (Stewart, 2005), for instance, evaluated the efficacy of literacy based interventions exclusively on the basis of post-release rates of re-offending. The study revealed that those in one particular research sample who achieved a spelling standard of level one (that expected of an eleven year old), in actuality had a subsequent higher rate of re-offending compared to those at a lower level of literacy. It is evident therefore that forging a functionalist link between rising literacy and falling crime is a form of specious reasoning.

The Home Office's own research has lavished scorn on earlier far reaching policy claims, offering damning criticism of the theoretical framework on which functionalist theory is based, 'improving prisoners' basic skills alone is unlikely to have a major impact on their prospects for successful resettlement' (Stewart, 2005). The ongoing bias towards basic skills has been heavily maligned as being out of touch with the dictates of the modern workplace: 'it is widely accepted that basic skills are not sufficient to enable prisoners to improve their employability in isolation of broader learning soft skills' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005:6). The core curriculum has been criticised for failing to address offenders' individual needs (House of Commons, 2007).

Much of the recent Home Office sponsored research on prison education (Friendship et al 2002; Cann et al 2003; Clarke et al 2004), have frequently operated from methodologically narrow, evidence based, positivist paradigm. Such studies have tended to evaluate the success of interventions delivered in prison in a rigid quantitative manner, focusing on the reconviction exit data of relatively small samples of prisoners in isolation (while overlooking other factors). In fulfilling my research brief it was my intention to adopt a different outlook and employ a range of qualitative methods.

Current learning provision is driven by annual Key Performance Indicators, used to measure the macro performance of the quality of education over the whole prison network in England and Wales. These figures are compiled exclusively on the basis of accreditation in basic and key skills, giving no emphasis at all to other forms of learning which take place in prison, but fall outside the remit of the educational audit. The empirical basis is fundamentally questionable, based on little more than a 'hunch' on the part of the

government (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005:6). These Key Performance Indicators for education are now little more than a footnote within the large Prison Annual Report. In a bizarre regionalistic turn, the basic skills targets set for the whole of England and Wales only take into account Welsh prisons (no women are imprisoned in Wales meaning the statistics are effectively gender blind). Defining ‘success’ in educational terms is a complex area, far more so than this inclination towards narrowly defined targets allows. What is omitted speaks volumes as all female prisoners are expunged from the statistics; an entire gender is whitewashed from the educational chart (as illustrated by Figure 3.1 below). There is a decidedly mixed message filtering through the government educational discourse, basic skills have been considered the educational priority and have assumed the focus of recent years, yet this rhetoric is simultaneously undermined, as the educational attainment of women is not considered important enough to be quantified, or measured, as part of the educational indicators. Measuring educational outcomes and the wider benefits of learning is a hugely problematical area (James et al, 2007; James and Pollard, 2008; Daugherty et al, 2008).

Function name	Annual target	awards	of target
Male category B	0	0	-
Male category C	42	136	324%
Male dispersal	0	0	-
Female closed	0	0	-
Female local	0	0	-
Female open	0	0	-
Male closed YOI	0	0	-
Male juvenile	0	0	-
Male local	300	311	104%
Male open	0	0	-
Male open YOI	0	0	-
Semi open	0	0	-
Cluster	0	0	-
Totals	342	447	131%

Figure 3.1: Entry Level Basic skills awards (Wales only): (Taken from HMPS Annual Reports and Accounts 2007-2008)

The causal foundation of the opportunities model has been widely castigated as propagating a diminutive view of education. 'One reason for dismissing the recidivism-education relationship', Davidson writes, 'is the reductionism implied by positing the relationship' (1995:11). This level of reductionism has at its core a deeply questionable premise, claims Sbarbaro, that 'the etymology of crime lies in the individual rather than in the social structure' (1995:145). Such a normative position bears more than a passing resemblance to neo-liberal perspectives on deviance. Fitting education into such a theoretical framework is considered to be 'sterile and reductionist' (Webster et al, 1999: 1999: 50) a practice delimiting the worth of literacy, stripping it of wider socio-political dimensions. The empirical basis is fundamentally questionable, based on little more than a 'hunch' on the part of the government (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005:6).

Critics of the basic skills paradigm have been vocal and numerous, associating it with disempowering realities (Jones and d'Errico, 1994; Lawrence, 1994; Bayliss, 2003; Vella, 2005; Taylor, 2006). Such a narrow, positivistic, framework is informed by the premise that education should have to prove its efficacy in terms of hard currency. But should education be normatively reduced to having to prove its worth in such a way? It has been argued that education is the hallmark of a civilised society, and should be provided on the basis that it constitutes 'the right thing to do' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005:13).

This functionalist agenda has also been criticised for being one of anti-choice. The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2005) has likewise questioned the current *basic skills* agenda, calling for wider opportunities to be made available, allowing for a greater variety of education and training. Bayliss (2003) has argued the worth of implementing a broader based prison curriculum, while others have forcibly argued that the teaching of prison literacy should move away from a functionalist, basic skills approach and embrace socio-political dimensions (Webster et al 1999).

The focus squarely on competency based learning has led to accusations of an enforced curriculum. The decision to concentrate on a narrowly framed basic skills agenda has been attacked as anti-choice eroding freedom of expression (Davidson, 1995); a remit imposed on inmates from above with little consultation. Inmates are, to a large extent, trapped within

the visions of others (ibid), stereotyped as a largely uneducated and uneducable class. Resources in prison have been diverted from other curriculum areas undermining the implementation of other educational outlooks. The *death by basic skills* approach (Taylor, 2006) has, in effect, eroded other theories of learning.

The title of the government green paper *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment* (HM Government, 2005), does in itself suggest a discourse where education is conceived in an unimaginative way. The implication is that education is a tool of the state as simply a means to an end in reducing crime; conceived as possessing little intrinsic worth. This policy ethos in many respects promotes the anti-thesis of learning. Intrinsic qualities of educational worth are divested; expression itself becomes an oxymoron when the path of learning is imposed from above in such a unilateral manner.

Mathiesen argues that literacy education is not a 'neutral technology' (2006:15); prison literacy has been embedded in a discourse framed as 'quasi-punitive' and 'couched in tough language' (Davidson, 1995:7). This discourse has had global dimensions, the State of Virginia Parole instigated a 'No Read, No Release' parole policy in the 1990s (Jenkins, 1994). Illiteracy in itself has been invoked as a penal justification. There is a growing notion of recycling prisoners until they achieve a pass, a level of accreditation to demonstrate level of *competency*. Such a normative framework confuses lack of reading and writing ability with lack of intelligence, that prisoners must have their thinking done for them. This suggests echoes of Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1968), the philosophical and political model developed in pre-revolutionary France, whereby non-conforming individuals to the norms and values of society are compelled to conform to the dictates of the whole; the *Forced to be Free* principle. The question is can prisoners be *forced to be free*, or as might be more appropriate in this context, be forced to be educated?

Education and the Total Institution

Total Institution refers to a theoretical framework specified by Goffman (1991) relevant to closed off social organisations, for example, prisons and asylums, where all aspects of life for residents take place under one roof and central authority, segregated from mainstream

society. It has been argued that the term and concept survives Goffman as 'sociological shorthand' for domination by forces of 'technicism' (Davidson, 1995:10). Inmates within such institutions can become trapped within a system of power and set of rules difficult to subvert or resist (Goffman, 1991). Total Institutions, in short, hold a great symbolic value as compelling systems of absolute control. Curriculum based learning within such a framework makes for a theoretically interesting proposition, the normative purpose of educational pedagogy in itself becomes severely questionable. The boundary between precepts of humanity and security become occluded in such a learning context.

Goffman (1991:11) conceived the total institution as 'an enclosed, formally administered round of life', where human needs are administered through 'the bureaucratic organisation of whole blocks of people- whether or not this is a necessary or effective means of social organisation' (Goffman, 1991:9). In such an environment individual learning needs are warranted little attention as inmates are processed en-masse. The functionalist framework of education, as outlined in the previous section, is particularly well suited to such an organisational apparatus where individuals are 'treated alike and are required to do the same thing together' (Goffman, 1991:17). Competency based learning, such as basic skills curricula, are codified in such a reductionist manner (routinised, pre-packaged, one-size-fits-all) as to be ideally processed in such a bureaucratic, regimented regime. Literacy is effectively *stripped down* and divested of significance.

In the total institution there is considered to be no possibility for argument, protest, dialogue, 'no opposition to the powers that be' (Davidson, 1995:9). Collins (1995) argues that competency based curricula strictly adheres to such principles, blithely conditioning inmates to accept rules and not challenge them. The functionalist discourse of learning, therefore, with its underlying encouragement of docile obedience, can be construed as finding a natural home, a like minded organisational base within the confines of the total institution. Education itself becomes an appendage of the discourse, another totalising feature.

Sbarbaro contends that prisons 'intensify alienation' because 'everything is dichotomised' (1995:98). One of the primary defining aspects of the total institution is that it operates as an arena of segregation, 'there is a basic split between a large managed group, conveniently

called inmates, and a small supervisory staff' (ibid). Inmates and prison officers are divided into 'keeper' and 'kept', sub-cultures each with their own proscribed set of norms and values (Goffman, 1999). The majority of education programmes operational in prisons are argued by Davidson (1995) to reinforce the respective keeper and kept status, ultimately helping maintain the system of order in the face of over-crowding and other issues threatening the smooth implementation of institutional objectives.

Goffman's total institution thesis, with its many dehumanising implications, has been seized upon by numerous advocates of penal reform. Critics point out the deeply negative and damaging impact institutionalisation has on the individual: that the current recourse to incarceration, and longer sentence tariffs, results in de-personalisation and internalised imprisonment. It follows that current policy leanings, the *basic skills agenda* (House of Commons, 2005; OLASS, 2007) favouring educational programmes with an instrumentalist underpinning, will factor into this culture fostering dependency. Such pedagogical forms are antithetical to any meaningful kind of autonomy, relegating inmates to being perpetually subsumed into the *kept* category. This regulated, innutritious source of educational spoon feeding is argued to foster a regime of learning equated to 'taught helplessness' (Wilson and O'Sullivan, 2004) surreptitiously reinforcing the *kept* status imposed on the incarcerated, subtracting from, not adding to, individual identity. Davidson (1995) also argues that prison education has been frequently invoked to keep inmates isolated from the community, which directly factors into the social segregation enshrined in the manifesto of the total institution. It is with a certain irony that forms of learning which have engendering competency as their stated aim, should further the institutionalised state of the inmate, rendering them, in actuality, less competent for social integration.

The very terminology of *total institution* 'conjures up an image in which there is no place to hide' (Davidson, 1995:9). This represents a seemingly all encompassing theoretical framework where individual autonomy and traits of personality are subsumed. It is the role of the teacher, claims Davidson, to act as the 'intellectual vanguard' (Davidson, 1995:17) standing as a challenge to totalising traditions, encouraging critical reflection on the part of inmates. Education, it is contested, should stand in opposition to the total institution, as an

entity to promote individual identity, challenging arbitrary labels such as the 'kept', and the conformist mechanics of group think.

Prison education can stand accused of resembling the moral wing of the total institution, ultimately an instrument of coercion, a dehumanising tool, all the more powerful for being cloaked in a humane facade. An educational iron fist in a velvet glove.

Foucauldian Perspective

The influence of Michel Foucault (1999) on the sphere of penology has been considerable to put it mildly. Foucault scrutinised disciplinary regimes with recourse to Bentham's panopticon prison model, developing a theoretical framework with considerable implications for learning in prison. The panopticon, a towering structure, with an all seeing eye as its centre piece, was conceived as a perpetual prison surveillance machine, its imposing, monolithic structure seen as fundamental to its disciplinary mechanics, effecting a 'permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1999:195). Such a design ensured the 'inspector', who assumed the all seeing position was able to conduct surveillance from an elevated central location within the radial configuration, and yet remain hidden at all times from the perspective of the inmates. 'Surveillance', states Foucault, 'is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action' (ibid). Inmates can never know when they are under scrutiny, hence instilling mental uncertainty that in itself proves to be a crucial instrument of discipline. 'In short', argues Foucault, 'inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers' (ibid). Inmates ultimately impose upon themselves a system of self-censorship and self-imposed docility.

From the Foucauldian perspective, prison education does not constitute an escape, an oasis of calm, nor physical nor mental relief from the rigours and stresses of quotidian prison life. Conversely education is instrumental to the structure of surveillance, discipline and control operating in prisons. Schooling is fundamentally embroiled in the complex power and normalising mechanics of the prison. 'Correctional education is, in fact integral to the panopticon', claims Collins (1995:56).

Foucault stressed that the aim of the range disciplinary apparatus in such settings as workshops, schools, hospitals and prisons, is to forge 'a docile body that can be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, 1999: 37). Rainbow examined the manner in which such docility is fashioned; 'this is done in several ways: through drills and training of the body, through standardisation of actions over time, and through control of space' (Rainbow, 1984:17). The nature of formal curricula within the prison sphere, it is contended, is ideal by its very nature for the domestication of souls in that regulation of space, constant drills and standardised actions have readily percolated through the official discourse of prison learning and are regularly accounted for. The elements for forging dull obedience (drills, standardisation, control of space), Collins argues with some conviction, 'find an ideal haven' (1995:50) inside the prison classroom where levels of spatial and temporal discipline are at a high. This is considered to especially true given that the vast bulk of the learning materials employed follow strict modularised patterns; bites sized evaluation units, uniformly scaffolded by 'prescriptive guidelines and orderly, sequentialised progression' (Collins, 1995:50). Ideal qualities, in short, for the drilling of bodies into domesticated submission. The very flow of information, which in itself embodies 'the cornerstone of any educational process' (Thomas, 1995:38) is restricted and regulated as education becomes annexed by the panoptic super-structure.

Prison education is argued by its very nature to be subject to the constant scrutiny inherent within the pervading system of surveillance and power relations. The functionalist adult literacy curriculum is argued by Collins (1995) to be easily adapted to this culture of scrutiny, forging a particularly close fit. Both teachers and students, it is contended, are closely monitored, caught within the confines of a rigidly defined, standardised curriculum. Such pedagogy is argued to offer with it the possibility of only a strictly prescribed set of responses, which are channelled and framed as dictated by course materials. Davidson maintains that this framework allows for 'easy surveillance of the individual's behaviour' (1995:7). On the other side of the hypothetical equation, critical discourse and pedagogies come far closer to subverting the panopticon, or at least avoiding its gaze. Such a line in discourse, involving critical and independent thinking, cannot be steered with pre-conceived parameters, nor held under easy panoptic scrutiny. This could constitute part of the reason

why prison authorities tend to be especially reluctant to stimulate students to participate in anything that could be considered genuine critical reflection or self-directed learning.

It is claimed that under the watchful eye of the panopticon teaching rarely rises above being 'essentially accommodative' (Collins, 1995:53), the theoretical underpinning of such schooling is considered to be the upholding of covert institutional goals, discipline and surveillance. The role of teacher is considered to be just as regulated as the student, both, it is argued, are trapped and regulated within the confines of the tightly structured and standardised curriculum (Collins, 1995). A curriculum which, in turn, tacitly upholds the disciplinary strategies of the panopticon.

It is argued that education is not only co-opted as a tool of discipline, but also serves as ideological cover for the machinations of the panopticon (Germanotta, 1995). Education programmes give the impression of keeping inmates meaningfully busy (Collins, 1995; Mathiesen, 2006). They are geared towards fighting idleness, in line with the disciplinary value of instilling a work ethic; occupied inmates are considered to be easier to control and regulate. In this vein it is postulated that education serves a public relations function, serving in effect as an apologist for the unsavoury excesses of the prison system, a convenient moral legitimisation (Mathiesen, 2006) whilst at the same time colluding in an ultimately punitive array of practices. There is, hence, alleged to be a large element of a covert *hidden curriculum* in operation (Knights, 1981). Maclean (1999) argues that prison schooling equates to a form of social control dressed up as a moral enterprise.

Education is considered to serve a fundamental role in stabilising prison regimes. Learning is conceived as a complex, covert disciplinary mechanism, well suited to a technologically advanced surveillance age. In this respect it is far more subtle and persuasive than overtly punitive tools of discipline inflicted in prisons throughout history, for example, the water cellars deployed in the Amsterdam House of Corrections in the sixteenth century, whereby inmates had to pump water at regular intervals in order not to drown (Mathiesen, 2006).

Prison education from a Foucauldian perspective fits neatly into this framework as a form of disciplinary discourse couched in self actualising terminology. Education is therefore conceptualised as a form of ideological manipulation engendering self-censorship and self

imposed docility, echoing in certain respects Stephen Luke's (2004) conceptualisation of power as a three dimensional process. From this perspective inmate choice is considered more of a construct than a reality.

Panoptic techniques also have a wider social application in the context of discipline and control, which extends far beyond the prison gates. Mathiesen argues that the story of prison surveillance has expanded and multiplied, with prison now occupying a very real place 'within an integrated network of control making up a total control system' (2006:7). Although Mathiesen contends the disciplinary apparatus of the penitentiary has grown over recent times, the motif of prison encroaching on society is not a new one. The pervasiveness of prison-like experiences, in the everyday lived realities of ordinary women and men, has long been considered to have stark implications, enshrining the status of prison as a symbol and tool of social control (Codd, 2008).

The fullest implication of the Foucauldian perspective is that the panoptical techniques of normalisation and discipline, most readily recognised as operating within prison confines, are not quarantined and infest wider society. This is very much in line with the *Shades of the prison house* sentiment (Wordsworth, 1902). The implication is that as a prison researcher scrutinising the panoptic mechanisms at work in prison (through education) where they are most readily apparent, will engender a greater awareness of the normative practices covertly at work in wider social settings, drawing similarities between the prison house and the school house.

The panopticon motif has considerable transferable currency. George Gissing's late Victorian novel *New Grub Street* (1985) engaged artistically with the metaphor. The work is set amidst the London literary community which converges around the reading room of the British Library, or *the valley of the shadow of death* as it is euphemistically referred to. The reading room itself is likened by Gissing to a towering panoptic structure as outlined by Bentham, complete with all Seeing Eye; the inhabitants of the library comprise an assortment of docile bodies, addressing the literary tombs and periodicals with a slavish air. The books themselves are described as highly ordered and regimented; the world of learning is itself regulated and controlled by unseen eyes and invisible hands. A prison house

of knowledge ensnaring the mind of the individual; the self reduced to a state of existential quagmire.

Theories of Empowerment

The theoretical perspectives previously outlined have offered something of a negative slant, questioning the very possibility of a meaningful learning experience within the confines of prison. Education itself has been argued to constitute a covert ideological underpinning of totalistic and panoptic regimes, serving a disciplinary function while at the same time offering a facile moral justification. Theories of empowerment, however, offer a contrasting possibility, that education and learning can indeed engender genuinely transformative experiences on the part of the incarcerated within the most coercive regimes. Education behind prison walls is, therefore, not merely reduced to a series of exchanges with control, and the subjugation of human will, as the covert aim behind the politically correct mantra. Collins argues that the conception of prison reality as a total expression of coercion; a uniformly repressive entity, is deeply flawed, a theoretical exercise in exaggeration, 'the panopticon is not monolithic' (1995:57). He suggests that normalising techniques are not all encompassing, and do not dictate the nature of all formal and informal learning practices within prison walls. In prison, Collins argues, self and group initiated learning ultimately prove 'more pervasive than the panopticon' (1995:58). Based on this premise, there are theoretical perspectives on prison education informed by the notion that empowerment and self-actualisation are possible within the current framework of confinement, whereby structural forces cannot entirely subvert the capacity of human agency. This section explores the theoretical possibility of empowerment germinating within the otherwise barren reality of prison life.

The concept of individual empowerment has often been championed by educationalists as, 'the single goal to which prison education must strive' (Werner, 1990:15). The word *empowerment* is imbued with many feel good sentiments but what does the concept actually entail? It is argued by Ingliss to relate to the possibility of change within a prevailing structural framework; the argument goes that it is normatively possible for 'people to

develop capacities to act successfully within the existing system and structures of power' (1997:4). The *structures of power* that Ingliss refers to are seldom embodied in starker terms than the prison. The empowerment precept is an important one, in that it allows for the possibility of personal transformation within the confines of a repressive super-structure without that structure having to be radically overhauled as a pre-condition. Self-change and expression is therefore considered possible with the existing culture of incarceration. Human agency is viewed as not utterly passive when confronted by structures of discipline, or power, as total institution or panoptic theories would imply.

Many commentators on prison education concur that the concept of empowerment in prison education involves putting some distance from the dubious assertion that learning as a value of exchange can be measured in the hard currency of recidivism. Davidson (1995) is passionately opposed to the notion of educational success being conceived of in such a crude, reductivist manner. Inmates should instead forge their own set of learning meanings and priorities.

While prison is an inhospitable environment, it can still be a productive one (Ward and Maruna, 2007). Antonio Gramsci, the noted Italian political theorist imprisoned under Mussolini's fascist regime, produced a significant corpus of work during his lengthy period of incarceration (writing in code in order to bypass constraints of prison censorship). This was despite serving time in conditions deliberately contrived by his captors to be intellectually austere. At Gramsci's trial the prosecutor declared that 'for twenty years we must stop this brain from functioning' (Gramsci, 1971). History informs us that considerable obstacles can be overcome by committed minds. Debray (2007: 24) has likened prison to 'the dissident's second university' (2007:24). In his prison notes Gramsci (1971) penned a section on *organic intellectuals* where he suggested ways in which teachers and students can develop and clarify their intellectual capacity within pre-existing structures of repression. He offered what might be considered an organic pedagogy, one infused with educational hope.

Expressive forms of learning allow the possibility of growth and empowerment, autonomy and self-expression; a way of reclaiming humanity and formulating a sense of self in a coercive structure which, by its very nature, detracts from it (this theme is explored in chapter XIII).

It has been argued that creativity is intrinsically tied to excitement (Ghiselin, 1952), which mirrors the experience and transformation of numerous prison artists. Peter Cameron who became a prison artist of some distinction, described how when seeing his painting printed in the Daily Telegraph after winning a Koestler Award, 'I got the same kind of buzz that I got when I was pulling off those stunts in Mexico' (in Devlin and Turney, 1999:262). John McVicar, a violent criminal turned author, describes vividly the emotional excitement embodied by his life of deviancy, 'crime makes life a struggle for survival, made it dangerous, dramatic, illegal, demanding and always exhilarating. I loved it' (McVicar, 1974:163). He describes a similar thrill on turning writer, 'I have a new stimulus to sustain me. I labour away with a pen, and enjoy it all as much as the power-play of the convict-criminal world' (1974: 203). Similar emotions sublimated through the agency of the pen. Cameron and McVicar express remarkably similar sentiments; the same aura of excitement, of living on the edge, that they experienced when committing violent or dangerous acts in their past manifest themselves to a large degree when they engage in creative or artistic practices.

Creative, expressive forms of education are viewed as a path towards individual empowerment. This concept traces its genealogy to classical ideas of actualisation-humanity as being embedded in knowledge, and knowledge being embedded in humanity. Plato considered knowledge to be the *food of the soul*, a much paraphrased sentiment that education is what sustains us, is necessary for our very being. Germanotta (1995) is adamant that education has its own intrinsic worth, a creative force which swells inside us, that its efficacy should not (and indeed cannot) be adjudicated by being measured against recidivism or other quantitative measures.

Theories of Emancipation

Emancipationist theory contrasts sharply with the potential for educational liberation espoused by the concept of individual empowerment (whereby individual educational growth is considered a possibility within the pre-existing prison structure confines). Conversely Inglis (1997) defines emancipation theory as taking a more radical approach,

challenging the very foundations upon which any given social system is founded upon, through a process of critically analysing and resisting structures of power (Clements, 2004). A sharp distinction is thus drawn between seeking freedom within the existing confines of the prison system (empowerment) and aiming for a wholesale change in the system (emancipation).

Emancipation theory conceives the individual as a vehicle for affecting social change. In this respect then, it serves as a framework for individual freedom that looks far beyond the singular concerns of the individual and towards sweeping changes in the prison structure. On this basis the theory of self-realisation embodied through empowerment is criticised from some quarters in the way it shifts the focus squarely onto the individual, sidestepping any meaningful analysis of the structural forces operating over and above the same individual. Emancipation theorists such as Ingliss (1997) contend that the meaning of education must be embedded within the broader arrangement of social circumstances. Prison education, to a significant degree, must be conceived therefore as ‘determined by the nature of structural forces bearing down’ (Davidson, 1995:7).

Empowerment on its own is considered to be muddled, backward thinking, effectively turning the conditions for liberation on their head. *Emancipation* is a necessary precondition for individual empowerment to occur to any meaningful degree. Empowerment is regarded as a severely limited framework, neglectfully avoiding probing questions concerning genuine liberty, ignoring ‘any analysis of power and the structures that operate to control the individual’ (Clements, 2004:174). Empowerment discourse is therefore considered to instil a false consciousness (Clements, 2004); a misleading body of theoretical propaganda offering, in effect, an erroneous account of the path to personal liberty. From this standpoint strategies of empowerment offer, at best, a limited relief from the pains of imprisonment, ignoring their fundamental material causes.

Germanotta (1995) argues that there are ‘real world lessons’ to be learned in prison, life transformation can be mediated through ‘politicising and educational’ forces (1995:119). In this respect the empowerment ethos, the belief that things can improve for the inmate within existing penal frameworks, can be perceived as a subtle and pervading means of organisational manipulation. The wider world of adult learning abounds with feel good

terminology, such as *self-directed learning* and *androgogy*, stressing the importance of individual autonomy, yet such concepts are imposed from above in a sometimes arbitrary fashion, an organisational discourse of empowerment. This entertains the possibility that empowerment is co-opted, packaged and branded by the world of adult education. 'Concepts of empowerment', argues Clements, ultimately 'emphasise the individual student attaining greater economic, political, social and cultural capital, where education becomes a form of investment' (2004:175). Such a form of learning currency (the *banking system*) was strongly opposed by Freire (1970).

Many have argued (Germanotta, 1995; Davidson, 1995; Collins, 1995) for the wholesale implementation in prison of a critical pedagogy as advocated by educational theorists such as Freire. The Freirian construction of pedagogy is one steeped in social change precluding any notion of authoritarian teaching. Critical pedagogy is founded upon the premise of genuine dialogue, based on the fundamental conviction that structural forces cannot impose programmes from above, learning must be formulated 'dialogically with the people' (Freire, 1970:118).

Freirian educational discourse is argued to be mutually instructive for both teacher and student in prison. The theory allows for a sizeable input into the formation of the curriculum by both parties, a greater choice over texts and content, an ethos conceived as less deterministic and more expressive in its educational demands. Learning takes an entirely different form to that of literacy based education founded upon the functionalist doctrine. Effective pedagogy should instead be rooted in student's own cultural circumstances and history, their personal cultural capital. Freire's is defined as a *Problem posing* pedagogy, in this way the inmate's background is vital in shaping how they learn, effectively determining solutions through their own cultural identity. The *voices* of inmate-students and their own life stories become integral to the learning process, as Collins argues 'literacy in these terms is not so much focusing on the need to read as on attending to the needs of people who cannot read' (1995:60).

This makes for a very different proposition to the *banking system's* tendency to suppress creative power, a suppression which, in turn, is argued to undermine the collective student consciousness. 'The more students work at storing deposits entrusted to them', Freire

states, 'the less they develop critical consciousness' (1970:46). Developing a critical consciousness and rejecting the world of taught helplessness is considered to be vital. Students 'cannot overcome their dependency by 'incorporation' into the very structure responsible for their dependency', the road to humanisation is achieved through 'authentic transformation of the dehumanising structure' (Freire, 1970b:211). In the context of mainstream education, Simon (1992) argues for a curriculum where pupils are made aware of the 'coercive forces' determining how they express themselves, ask questions, imagine their futures.

Pedagogy as outlined by Freire demands critical reflection. In this way, 'education at any level or of whatever formal or informal definition, is not genuine education unless it is a transaction that instils elements of critical reflection' (Germanotta, 1995:106). This translates to critical intervention in the wider world:

Once critical reflection begins, in the context of formal education being pursued in a prison setting, prisoner-students find their own history placed in a new perspective, and then begin to see the possibilities of genuine transformation and eventually transformation of the world. (Germanotta, 1995:111)

Education should be that which encourages individual consciousness; solutions developed through social-action, drawing upon the energy and vitality of prisoners. Inmates' own cultural currency is viewed as essential; an investment which can shape their close environment together with wider society.

Theories of feminism and Marxism share many common characteristics with the world of critical pedagogy. Both lines of discourse are framed in opposition to repressive social structures. Each is critical in their own way of the social banking system, advocating critical reflection and action. Marxists and feminists, stress their own critical pedagogies, their own individual theories of emancipation, adopting the stance that *empowerment* theory (as detailed earlier) is at best a naïve belief, and at worst potentially harmful. Critical pedagogy is often considered to serve as a synonym to struggles of gender and class in that it is fundamentally concerned with stimulating a *critical consciousness* (Shor, 1996) politicising students against a set of educational and curricula circumstances which domesticate them

(Davidson, 1995). Prison education has a special role to play. Davidson (1995) argues that teachers *inside* should serve as an intellectual vanguard, stirring inmate consciousness. Prison is regarded as occupying a unique position in the wider class struggle. It has been contended that prison authorities keep the teachings of Marx under lock and key, that class consciousness is, in effect, imprisoned (Linebaugh, 1995). Inmates are often stereotyped as a *lumpen-proletariat* (Linebaugh, 1995), relegated to be the dustbin of the working class.

Political awareness and social justice are therefore considered vital precepts for inmate students, it is argued that 'the conditions that produce most criminal activity are eliminated not by the domestication of individuals, but by their politicisation' (Davidson, 1995:11). Along similar lines Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) assert that the most effective form of critical pedagogy is that which encourages teachers and others to view education as a political, social and cultural enterprise. A form of engaged practice that 'calls into question forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live their lives' (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991:118).

Prisons, by their very coercive and repressive nature, are argued to constitute a fertile breeding ground for nurturing critical pedagogy and by association collective conscious. 'When large numbers of oppressed groups are incarcerated together', contends Sbarbaro, 'they are positioned to raise their consciousness to challenge the conditions of confinement' (1995:142). This is even the case when learning is overtly suppressed by prison authorities. When Nelson Mandela was incarcerated on Robben Island there was no formal education system, but inmates developed their own critical framework, 'at night, our cell block seemed more like a study hall than a prison' (Mandela, 1994:489). There was a stark political dimension to learning, 'in the struggle Robben Island was known as "the university"... we became our own faculty, with our own professors, our own curriculum and our own courses' (Mandela, 1994:556). The learner-centred precepts of critical pedagogy were very much in evidence; education was deigned to engender wider consciousness. Mandela himself taught a course in political economy and Marxism.

Broadly speaking feminists aim to increase awareness of the oppressive patriarchal structures underpinning society; prison in particular stands out as a bastion of female oppression and subjugation. Women inmates are reasoned to be triply disadvantaged; they

have ‘three strikes against them: they are women, they are in the prison system, and they are uneducated’ (Bell and Glaremin, 1995:46).

This discourse is especially embodied in terms the social reproduction of feminine types through gendered education. Skeggs (1997), drawing on Bourdieu, outlines how femininity is a form of regulation, representing a symbolic form of cultural capital. In their analysis of systems of education Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised that the process of gender attribution to students and academic disciplines are dialectical and universal. ‘The transference of femininity from the student to the school and back again to the student’, writes Skeggs, ‘exemplifies the dialectic of objectification and embodiment, formed via an “electric affinity”’ (2004:22). Thus, shaping the habitus. The normalcy of gendered reproduction works in starkly different fashion for girls and boys. For girls conforming to gender type it only offers a limited form of capital. Conversely for boys it offers masculine power, institutionalised in the school as a form of symbolic capital that (as with the family) represents accumulated privilege in other fields (Bourdieu, 1977; Skeggs 2004). Along these lines the embodied gendered dialectic is firmly structured through hierarchical relations of difference, symbolised by binary oppositions (high/low culture; strong/weak fields; dominant/dominated classes; masculine/feminine; public/private). By which, in an acutely traditional manner, masculinity exists in the public sphere and femininity the private. Simone de Beauvoir (1989) described the pattern of gendered social relations using a Hegelian distinction between subject and other. Man is the subject and the absolute, while woman is reduced to the other.

There is evidence that the prison learning, as with mainstream education, reinforces these binary oppositions. Chapter IX discusses vocational learning in prison kitchens, examining feminine stereotypes, the perception that ideal women should be ‘clean’ and ‘able to please the family’, relegated, in short, to the private sphere. This invokes images of a Stepford prison production line seeking to create a conveyor belt of obedient and tidy women. Skeggs has written extensively on the reproduction of femininity in education. She argues that there is a tension between class and constructs of femininity (1997). Women from deprived backgrounds do not measure up to (or have been excluded from) the feminine.

This is mirrored in prison: many women who end up inside are considered socially excluded (or in more pejorative sense labelled as the underclass or 'sub-feminine').

The debate between the theories of empowerment and emancipation is crucial here. A sharp distinction is drawn between the possibility of seeking mental liberation within the existing structures of the prison system (empowerment) and aiming for a wholesale change in the system (emancipation). Is effective education possible under the current system of power relations/the criminal justice system or can learning inside only serve to reinforce the binary constructions of gender?

Conclusion

Thus, the central overarching question 'what is education for?', which sociologists have grappled with over the decades, can be augmented: 'what is prison education for?' This chapter has outlined different perspectives on learning in the total institution: functionalist, Foucauldian, theories of empowerment and emancipation. In historical terms provision has, in certain respects, come full circle: in its initial guise the focus was on literacy for the instrumentalist care of souls, mirroring remedial aspects of the current, functionalist, basic skills agenda.

The following chapter explores the methodological strategies employed in this research undertaking.

IV

Methodology

This chapter will open with a succinct summary of the research design; the issues outlined will be examined at more length and depth as the chapter (and thesis) progresses.

Research Aims and Objectives

Aim

This doctoral research is based on in-depth case studies of two women's prisons, (HMP 'Freshfields' and HMP 'Arkham') examining how education is understood and facilitated within strikingly contrasting open and closed settings.

Objectives

The research seeks to determine:

The key theoretical perspectives surrounding prison education.

The recent drivers affecting prison policy and the provision of education in prison.

How women are socialised into closed and open regimes.

The learning histories and educational life stories of women in prison.

The contrast in social and teaching relations in open and closed prisons.

The elements that constitute the core prison education curriculum.

The alternatives to core education provision.

Views and expectations of women in prison concerning the education and training available to them.

The limitations and successes of learning schemes in closed and open prisons respectively.

Ways in which creative cultural capital is facilitated and produced in prisons.

The range of vocational learning opportunities that exist for women in prison (and whether they provide adequate preparation for life post-release).

How the provision of vocational learning differs between open and closed prisons.

How training, education and work activities in prison are remunerated and incentivised.

Research Strategy

Why women's prisons? As mentioned in the introduction, the female prison population has risen an alarming degree in recent times, and represents a demographic with acute vulnerabilities and learning issues (many have previously been let down by mainstream education). The issues surrounding imprisonment for men and women are fundamentally different, requiring a different research gaze. As Corston (2007) emphasises equal, positive outcomes for men and women in prison require different approaches. The previous research conducted into prison education (which in itself is not extensive) has tended to be gender neutral, apathetic or intolerant.

Why two prisons? The research focus is a comparative study between open and closed regimes. Following on from the emancipation versus empowerment debate outlined in the previous chapter, issues of structural determination are crucial to this study. The central hypothesis explored throughout this thesis is whether empowerment is possible within the current closed framework, or if a structural shift (emancipation) is required for effective, non-conscriptive, rehabilitation to occur (and whether open prisons represent such a shift).

Sampling of the Research Sites

Why these two prisons? As previously mentioned the focus of the research is a comparative study between open and closed prisons. The women's estate is characterised by a straightforward closed-open dichotomy, in contrast to the alphabetical categorisation (A, B, C and D) of men's prisons.

Delineating research along the lines of closed and open establishments, enables detailed comparison of day to day lived realities of prison life, in two institutions framed along strikingly different structural lines (especially in terms of contrasting regulation and security paradigms).

Sampling criteria was primarily based on Prison Inspectorate reports, Prison Education reports, Independent Monitoring Board Reports, and newspaper/media archives. Based on this information a database was created detailing key criteria including: range of education and training, prison demographics (capacity and population mix), typical length of sentence, and staffing composition.

Although there is no single institutional entity which represents a typical, or average, closed prison, Arkham avoids the extremes of response bias. In terms of education, and overall performance it represents neither the gold standard of the closed prison network, nor the worst. Freshfields, on the other hand, seemed fairly representative of a women's open prison (in terms of size, intake and range of activities).

There were also pragmatic elements to the sampling criteria; in terms of where access was available (there is more detail on this in the following section). As discussed elsewhere prison access is notoriously unpredictable which can restrict the choice of research sites to a severe degree.

A detailed breakdown of Arkham and Freshfields (detailing aspects such as the respective capacities, population intake, and length of sentence and offence type) can be found at the conclusion of this chapter.

Access

Initial contact with prisons was through the medium of a written approach addressed to the Head of learning and Skills at the respective prisons (a sample access letter has been added as Appendix II). This was followed up with communication by phone.

Before Arkham three other closed prisons initially agreed to let me carry out fieldwork, in each case access fell through. In the case of the first institution they revoked the initial permission. This was an extremely frustrating situation especially as I was in the dark as to the rationale behind the decision, the only information I received was a letter (extending to a couple of lines) informing me that the prison 'was no longer able to facilitate my request'. When researching prisons doors can slam shut at a moment's notice, a lesson that is sometimes learned the hard way. As for the second prison, a serious violent incident occurred (which was covered in the national press), effectively curtailing my research before it began. To add a further dramatic element, the third women's prison was re-roled to a young offenders institute shortly before I was due to begin (illustrating the unpredictability that underpins the prison system). When it came to the fourth attempt, Arkham acquiesced and fieldwork matters proceeded relatively smoothly.

In terms of the open site, there were no such complications in terms of accessing Freshfields; senior management figures (the Head of Learning and Interventions, the Education Manager) were keen to facilitate my research. The contrast in ease of access in itself reveals much about the relative difference between open and closed prison cultures (especially in terms of dealing with the outside world).

Methods

Throughout the duration of fieldwork, observations and interviews were employed, enriched by copious quantities of field notes. Such a combination of data collection methods inform each other to a great extent, allowing for some measure of triangulation, the virtues of which are well documented in the prison context, 'if it is possible to get corroboration for an interpretation of one set of data from data collected by other means then one's confidence in the validity of data is increased' (King, 2000:306). Specifically I was able to interview informants about events observed in learning settings, while my observational antenna was attuned to issues raised in interviews.

Observation

Observing and being observed forms an inherent part of prison life. As a methodological tool (to fulfil the research brief) observations were utilised on a number of levels:

- 1) In terms of walking around and making sense of the prisons on a day by day basis (mobile methods), developing a sense of the difference in open/closed cultures in both a broad and specific sense:

- The way in which the two institutions were structured and framed along contrasting messages of regulations, security and rehabilitation.
- The difference in visual grammar between open and closed prison, in terms of facade and interior.
- The starkly different faces of criminal justice iconography: the razor wire paradigm against expansive green spaces.

[Much of this thick description is included in the following chapter which details the internal and external prison micro journeys].

- 2) Participant observation was employed in a variety of different prison learning environments, inside and outside, as a means of witnessing firsthand the interplay of teaching interactions. This included:

- Class bound learning in the education department (literacy, numeracy, ICT).
- Vocational learning (catering, horticulture, hairdressing).
- Creative learning (drama, dance, art work).

[Each of the subsequent findings chapters is heavily based on observations of each of these education settings (Chapter VII: the core prison curriculum; Chapter VIII creative learning; Chapter IX vocational learning). Copious amounts of field notes were complimented by a researcher diary].

The table below illustrates a typical Freshfields weekly observation timetable, split into morning and afternoon sessions. In visiting each of the learning settings, the opportunities for interviews (formal and informal) arose with students and staff (there is more detail on the interview process in the following section). The content of the observation timetable

was comparable in the two prisons (a notable difference being that there was no salon at Arkham to observe). Mobility was a key difference. In common with the Arkham inmates, I relied on internal escorts to access different learning settings, whereas in Freshfields there were no such restrictions. Arkham was also prone to occasional lockdowns and regular disruptions, common features of the closed prison world, but alien to open regimes.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	Education Department: Numeracy	Catering Department	Education Department: Literacy	Prison Salon	Education Department: Business Admin
PM	Education Department: ICT	Shadow Head of Resettlement	Horticulture	Visit the gym	Shadow Head of Learning and Skills

Figure 4.1: A typical Freshfields observation timetable

Interview Sampling

The interviewing style employed was semi-structured, intertwining the disparate elements of flexibility and structure. This gave scope to cover formal, operational knowledge, together with attitudes and beliefs in what can be a restrictive and oppressive interview time frame (in the prison context). More detail on the interviewing approach can be found later on in the chapter.

Interviews were conducted with prisoners, educators/trainers and senior management figures (respective Heads of Learning, Resettlement, and Education). For an exact breakdown on each of the interview respondents at each prison see Appendix VII (Dramatis Personae). These individuals (and their narratives) will be referred to repeatedly throughout the subsequent findings chapters. Further discussion on interview content, sequencing, and the process itself (issues such as unpredictability and locations) can be found as the chapter

progresses (also see Appendix IV: Interview Schedules and Further Discussion of the Prison Interview Process).

Conducting interviews with teaching staff and senior management figures was generally straightforward (at least in logistical terms). These usually took place at a pre-arranged time and venue (normally at the office of the person in question) often during lunch time hours and breaks in education.

In selecting prisoners for interview, I was understandably sensitive to potential issues of sampling bias. I recruited students while observing each of the learning settings at Arkham and Freshfields, encompassing: class bound learning in the education department (literacy, numeracy, ICT); vocational learning (catering, horticulture, hairdressing); creative learning (drama, dance, art work). For obvious reasons I was keen to avoid prison teachers (or other staff) directly hand-picking (or cherry-picking) students.

Other than women actively participating in education and training, I was keen to elicit views from non-participants. I recruited the educational 'rejecters' chiefly from 'Central Services', a building where women earned money (the most profitable rates of remuneration at the prison) by untangling writhing, black knots of aeroplane headphones, and repacking them in individual plastic bags. What were the reasons behind opting for mundane, unaccredited workshop labour instead of a course in learning or training: Instinctive educational resistance? Lack of stimulation? Short-term financial gain? Lack of educational incentivisation or opportunities to participate?

I also had discussions with women over lunch in the Arkham canteen, both with those participating and not participating in education/training. I had similar, unplanned encounters with staff (teaching and uniformed) throughout the prison. Such informal conversations with staff and inmates generated a range of opinions which would not have developed in the formal interview process. This underlines the importance of mobile methods, walking and talking (and observing), to the ethnographic process.

Freshfields made for a different interview context to Arkham. As mentioned above (and in much more detail later in the chapter) all areas of the institution were easily accessible. There was a key difference in terms of sampling residents: although there were some

reluctant participators in education/training (see further discussion in Chapter IV: Vocational Prison Learning) the full on rejecters that can be found in Arkham, and other closed prisons, were absent from Freshfields. Women at the prison are required to sign up for education/training as part of the entrance criteria (a different kind of sampling bias).

There is much more detail and discussion of interviewing strategies and logistics as the chapter progresses.

Data Recording

Fieldwork at Arkham and Freshfields was carried out without the aid of a digital recording device. Taken for granted everyday commodities such as mobile phones, digital cameras and the internet are outlawed in prisons on security grounds (the negative impact of internet prohibition on rehabilitation is discussed at length in forthcoming chapters). The strict rules governing what can be taken into prisons to facilitate the research process are well documented (Noaks and Wincup 2004). It is a fallacy to assume that open prisons are more relaxed about such security matters. Such restrictions, however, underline why it is so vital to carry out hand-on research in prisons in the first place.

It would have been unwise, not to mention unethical, to have subverted these security considerations, there was an element of goodwill extended towards me in that I was not searched going in and out of Arkham and Freshfields. Such actions on my part would have constituted a breach of trust.

There is a common precedent for the lack of a digital recorder in prison research (Noaks and Wincup 2004). In the case of Hudson's (2003) study (interviewing sex offenders) she carried out a number of interviews without a dictation device. This, however, did not negatively impact on the quality of the interview process. 'In general', she reflected, 'this made little difference in recording what was said in the interview' (Hudson, 2003:72). Some criminological researchers advocate the use of the hand written approach, Maguire, for instance, remains 'instinctively resistant' (2000:138) to tape recording participants, on the grounds that it erects a barrier between both parties and erodes trust. This issue is

particularly relevant where women in prison are concerned. An inmate at Arkham told me that she was happier being interviewed sans a recording device as she gets 'nervous around tape recorders'. There is the capacity for voice recorders to stir up memories with negative connotations.

While transcribing interviews by hand (a frequent enough occurrence in criminal justice settings) was not automatically a huge disadvantage, a number of practical issues were nevertheless raised. Take, for instance, complications involved in recording the interview process; the difficulties in accurately representing verbatim speech. One strategy employed was the use of shorthand techniques for writing down conversations, enabling large quantities of data to be collected in a time efficient manner. Throughout the upcoming empirical chapters (which draw extensively on interview data) it should be noted that some of the longer quotes were punctuated by gaps, representing occasional pauses by respondents to enable me to write down their comments accurately, and in full.

Having summarised research strategy, the methodological themes and issues outlined above will be considered in more detail.

The Qualitative Research Outlook

Delamont (1992) argues that to suppose qualitative research somehow constitutes the quick and easy path is founded upon a standpoint of ignorance. Conversely such methods are 'harder, more stressful and more time consuming than other types' (2002: viii). Conducting fieldwork in the prison world confirms these sentiments. The qualitative prospectus is in actuality neither a convenient research short cut nor a methodological *get out of jail free card*. In return for such challenges, however, qualitative endeavour proves to have its own rewards with short term hardships repaid with interest. Such methods probe deeper and pay sustained dividends.

The relative virtues of qualitative research methods are well documented, and have been adopted widely in the prison setting over the years (Genders and Player 1989, 1995; Alder and Longhurst 1994; Bottomley et al. 1994; Vagg 1994; King and McDermott 1995; Sparks et

al. 1996; James et al. 1997). Indeed it is in Britain, King argues (2000), that the strongest tradition of such research is to be found. While there is much methodological precedent to scaffold this study on, there has, however, traditionally been a dearth where the field of prison education is concerned (Maguire and Honess 1997) and even less on education for women in prison.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) outline qualitative research as, 'a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible'. It is this element of being embedded in the field, casting some light on what is essentially a closed off world (King, 2000), that make qualitative methods particularly suited to the prison setting. The point has been emphasised that the qualitative outlook goes some way to bridging the gap between the researcher and researched (Pearson 1993). Establishing close relationships with participants, staff and inmates alike, proves vital in a research environment where barriers separating the outside world are visible and numerous. Such techniques allow for engagement with people's lives through watching, listening and questioning (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

This chapter will concentrate on the qualitative framework utilised in this study to fulfil the research aims, objectives and key research questions. In short it will provide an account of the methods of data collection and analysis utilised to understand and explore the role of education at HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields. Special attention will be given to pertinent issues pertaining to the prison settings, numerous ethical considerations, the not inconsiderable matter of gatekeeper negotiations, together with ongoing access issues.

Prison Research: A Matter of Taking Sides?

Prior to negotiating access and taking tentative steps across the threshold of prison world, it is important to reflect upon questions of one's outlook and partisanship, areas which form an implicit part of any qualitative undertaking. These issues have a special meaning in a prison context (King 2000).

Becker, in an influential paper (1967), addressed the sociologist's dilemma of taking sides in research. 'Some urge them not to take sides', he writes 'to be neutral and do research that is technically correct and value free. Others tell them that their work is shallow and useless if it does not express a deep commitment to a value position' (Becker, 1967:239). Becker's position is not about whether or not we should take sides in research, but indeed *whose side are we on*. It is evident that personal and political sympathies have a considerable impact on research. Critical criminologists deem it necessary to disclose the ideological context underpinning research, generally taking the position that 'since standpoint is inevitable, it had better be overt' (Hudson, 2000:184).

Yet concerns also persist that the personal dimension has a potentially undermining effect on researcher integrity, 'this lingering worry is not explicitly addressed but taunts us, as producers and consumers of research' (Liebling, 2001:472). King (2000) offers an example of such a case, where one of his own doctorate students effectively had 'gone native' forging too close a relationship with prison staff. As a result they were unable to offer a detached analysis.

Liebling (2001), who has conducted extensive research within prison settings, offers a different slant to Becker on the issue of taking sides. She argues that the human element driving research renders it unrealistic to remain wholly detached and not develop sympathy with participants and informants throughout the course of fieldwork. Where Liebling deviates from Becker's argument is in her assertion that the sympathies of the researcher can fall more broadly than on one group. Rather than focusing in a solitary direction, it is possible to balance the opposing sides of the research equation. Indeed prison studies which seek to represent the perspectives of more than a single group to account for social phenomena are not only to be methodologically welcomed, but in fact, Liebling asserts, 'do a more adequate job than those which look only through the eyes of prisoners, prison staff or senior managers' (2001:481). Liebling's stance has not proved uncontroversial in certain social science circles, however, in that she claims she has had her integrity attacked for seeking not just to represent the beliefs of those behind bars, on the downside of power relations, but also those holding the keys.

I considered it vital not to adopt a theoretically blinkered position which might render me myopic where emerging themes were concerned. This stance can be readily justified on the grounds that it is important to be open to theory and concepts arising unexpectedly in the field, which may pay dividends in terms of exploring and explicating the data generated (Bottoms 2000). This proves especially valuable in the field of educational research, with differing perspectives likely to enrich the study. I considered this to be a profitable way forward; to elicit dual views on prison education, from staff and students alike.

In fulfilling the research brief it has been my intention to be highly reflexive at each stage of the process, acknowledging that research impinges on the sphere being explored, and the numerous levels of social interaction inherent in the fieldwork endeavour. There is ultimately, 'no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:15). Research is after all 'a series of interactions, and good research is highly tuned to the inter-relationship of the investigator with the respondents' (Delamont, 1992:8).

It is important to consider how prison social reality is shaped by inmates, staff, teachers and a range of external factors. Through the social constructivist perspective, reality is seen as constructed and reconstructed through human activity and learning is viewed as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped by external forces (Kim 2001). Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities, and prison is no exception to the rule.

Negotiating Access to Prisons

While there has been a 'reasonably steady flow of good quality research' there, nevertheless, remains a 'scratchy relationship' between officials and the research community (King, 2000:285). Prisons, after all, represent closed off worlds shrouded in secrecy to a great extent (King, 2000). Permission to carry out research in such a setting is far from guaranteed and can, point of fact, prove notoriously difficult to obtain (Martin 2000). Common sense dictates that carefully compiling a list of research methods and strategies counts for naught if one stumbles at the first fieldwork hurdle, and proper

channels of access remain un-breached. Prisons are secluded places, each with its own set of rules, formal and informal which can make them seem dark and impenetrable from the outside. As a researcher it is vital to endeavour to lift the iron veil separating prisons from the outside world (in a qualitative sense). Prisons are not perfect environments for facilitating qualitative investigation (and in many respects are uniquely ill suited), yet such challenges underline why it is so important to conduct such research in the first place. Prisons have a certain monolithic, panoptical authority if unchallenged.

Negotiating access is often less than straightforward, and can take a rambling circuitous route. Aside from negotiations themselves, the evolving nature of research design can project proceedings in unexpected directions even before entering prison world. Research plans conceived in the abstract often turn out differently when exposed to the vagaries of everyday realities. One such aspect which altered drastically from my initial blueprint was to reconfigure focus the project exclusively on prison education for women. Pre-existing accounts of prison education tend to adopt a catch all, gender neutral, approach or are imbued with implicit (or even explicit) andocentric bias (Vella, 2005). While prison education overall has been an under-researched area, the provision and treatment of women has in particular been overlooked.

Ethical Considerations

Before exploring avenues of prison access, the seal of approval from the Cardiff University Research Ethics Committee was a pre-requisite. In this respect the gendered focus of the study brought with it certain ethical implications, especially as female prisoners are considered to have more underlying vulnerability issues on the whole compared to men (Prison Reform Trust, 2009).

This research project was conducted in compliance with guidelines provided by the Economic and Social Research Council (2005) stipulating that 'research must be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity and quality' (2005:1). It is vital to deal with ethical research considerations up front before fieldwork begins in earnest, as opposed to an ex post facto afterthought. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) are explicit that other

values cannot be wantonly cast aside in the pursuit of truth. A central dilemma of ethnographic research to be that it amplifies privately voiced comments to the public stage (ibid), this is of particular concern in the comparatively closed off prison world. Bulmer (1982) goes as far as likening covert research to glorified espionage. To negate such murky ethical waters, it was important to ensure that consent would be of a strictly informed basis, with the nature of voluntary participation made explicit. The issue of informed participation is problematised in the prison setting (Scruton et al, 2001; Noaks and Wincup, 2004); this issue will be considered in more depth later in the chapter along with day to day fieldwork ethics.

There are additional ethical considerations which prove pertinent to the deployment of qualitative strategies in prison settings. The dangers of interfering with, or exploiting, the environment have been documented. Fieldwork conducted by Mayr (2004) demonstrated that closely observing inmates engaged in education potentially disrupts the harmony of learning, highlighting that such research could potentially have a counterproductive effects. Therefore perceived benefits of research must outweigh potential for harm. Furthermore Benyon has argued that the researcher should be on guard against being seen as exploiting others in the pursuit of selfish ends, as ‘another bloke getting a degree off our backs!’ (1983:47).

As far as the ESRC are concerned ensuring the safety of informants is perhaps the paramount research consideration (2005). To this end duty of care to the women in prison was vital. Protecting the identities was clearly vital; words and casual disclosures have in them the potential to wreak much harm. The confidentiality of participants was fully respected, in terms of research locations, HMP Arkham and Freshfields are fictitious soubriquets. Any information revealing to identities geographical, institutional or individual was removed, adapted or disguised.

Research design by its very definition takes place in a kind of vacuum. Ad nauseam planning cannot anticipate the vagaries of the field that crop up daily. Although prison research is by its very nature unpredictable there are, however, few (if any) excuses of going in unprepared, as with other research settings ‘there is no advantage in rank ethnographic

ignorance’ (Atkinson, 2006: 191). As the chapter progresses I will discuss the ethical considerations that emerged during time spent in the prison world.

The Road to HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields

The decision to conduct research at one closed and one open prison was logical enough, the road to Arkham and Freshfields, however, proved to be somewhat less so. Access was arranged to carry out fieldwork at establishments other than Arkham and Freshfields which both fell through for different reasons, underlining the unpredictable nature of prison research. To add a further dramatic element, one women’s prison was re-roled to a young offenders institute shortly before I was due to begin. This demonstrates that the only certainty in the prison world is uncertainty. Verbal or written guarantees are precarious; the only certainty that prison research will take place is when the fieldwork actually begins. As it turned out when one door to prison fieldwork slams shuts another can open; Arkham and Freshfields both proved amenable to my requests for access. Qualitative researchers are defined not so much by their actions when matters unfold in an orderly fashion, but rather by perseverance when events fail to proceed smoothly and the recourse to plan B (or even plan C).

Initial contact with prisons was through the medium of a written approach (a sample access letter has been added as Appendix II). Whether or not taking scrupulous care over the contents of an access letter offers improved odds of a green light is a debateable point. Noaks and Wincup (2004) reflect that the option of sending a formal written request to the governor or other senior management figure direct is a method which can prove protracted and with no certainty of success. From personal experience, it is a fallacy to assume that all prisons apply rigorous criteria in terms of assessing who they allow through their gates. The reality is that on occasion randomised methods of selection are apparent, bringing an element of luck into play. At Arkham, the Head of Learning and Skills was candid about the sampling method deployed, when approaching a pile of research requests she would pull out a couple ‘and bin the rest’. It is documented that the formal process of access can move along somewhat more smoothly if, as a researcher, one is based at a university department

with a reputation for quality research (King, 2000), especially where there are professional links to prison gatekeepers. This, however, is based upon certain assumptions, one being that letters requesting research are actually read.

Even before the research began in earnest developing researcher identity is crucial. Sparks et al remark that prison researchers are judged from the outset, 'you have to start living the role from day one. Day two is already too late' (1996: 349). This process begins with first contact before even stepping foot in prison. Initial impressions (even before meeting in the flesh) last. An aspect that is particularly tricky in the early days is when to make the inevitable follow up call. Leaving messages does not guarantee a prompt response. As with any relationship when to call back can be problematic. The dilemma is: how much following up is required? Whilst it is vital to generate a response prison gatekeepers are busy, or at least give the impression of business, and it is important to avoid seeming too pushy. A delicate balancing act is called for.

'Welcome to HMP Arkham'

Researching prison education encompasses far more than observing activity in the classroom. Prisons must be understood in terms of local knowledge; each establishment has a unique story, context and cultural history (King, 2000). In this section I will aim to elicit a sense of how differently the two prisons appeared on first appearance (in particular the striking contrast in visual grammar), together with the implications of carrying out fieldwork.

Research took place at Arkham between December 2006 and February 2007. On one occasion an Arkham officer described the institution as 'what you might call a typical prison'. The exterior view of the establishment with its looming, locked gates certainly cemented that impression. The sign 'welcome to HMP Arkham' seemed an imposing warning rather than a cordial greeting. The perimeter fencing at the prison is high, stretching far and wide with numerous patches where the magnolia coating blisters. With the peeling paint, rust on display and lack of gloss it puts one in mind of what is revealed beneath a coat of paint [is rust a metaphor for the state of health of the prison?]. Sitting on top of the fence is an expanse of razor wire, a visual reminder of the overt security paradigm in operation.

Perched up high there are numerous surveillance cameras monitored from within the confines of the security centre. The panoptic vision evokes shades of Foucault who argued that prison become the dominant, consistent form of state punishment, not because of concerns of equality of justice or humanitarian issues, but rather as an extension of the cultural apparatus of power over the body.

Twin signs outside the prison tell a cautionary tale. Firstly, a reminder of the Prison Act of 1952, clarifying that it is an offence to help an inmate escape, to convey liquor or tobacco inside the premises, to convey any letter or article without authority. The second sign presents a stern warning over the use of drugs, and the related penalties (the threat of imprisonment). The exterior of the prison is typified by stark warnings and punitive semiotics. The facade suggests a 'dark and doom-ridden architecture' (Williams, 2001) perhaps in line with what one would typically expect from a secure closed facility. It is hard to disagree with the prison officer's sentiments: based on initial appearances, the rusting high fence, razor wire and panoptic cameras, the prison does indeed seem to represent a typical postcard image of incarceration. At a prison where I previously conducted research, the education manager commented that the world of imprisonment is characterised by 'grey building and grey skies'. Arkham much fits into the grey buildings and grey skies typology. On days with dark clouds overhead Arkham fits into this category, the weather seems to match the mood of the building. Even on the sunny fieldwork days the facade was less than cheerful. The prison itself is situated up a steep incline, the highest point locally, which renders the prison something of landmark, a monolith on the hill. The temperature drops noticeably compared with the surrounding area, and is prone to sudden, strong, gusts of wind.

In Weber's vernacular, at least based on appearances, Arkham resembles an *ideal type* prison. The ideal type comprises a set of common characteristics, stressing elements associated with a given social phenomena, 'into a complex which is conceived of as an internally consistent system' (Morrison, 1995: 270). The ideal type is also symbolic of the pattern of historical life; Arkham stands as a reminder and representation of underlying processes that has seen prison evolve as a product of western rationality and modernisation. Or even the consequences of rationality taken to irrational lengths (a theme

explored at length by Ritzer, 2007). From a methodological and research standpoint, the concept of ideal type represents a normative model, a useful tool for comparative sociology, analysing and contrasting social institutions. In the case of this research undertaking it offers a conceptual framework, facilitating a comparison between Arkham and Freshfields as closed and open prisons respectively.

If the external prison architecture is daunting and cheerless, the reception area offers something of a contrast. The waiting area represents a different, managerialist side, to the prison, a relatively light and warm internal space comprising leather arm chairs and the supposedly organic feel of pot plants. On the wall a mounted plasma television screen welcomes visitors to the prison, with a slide show on loop detailing the management structure of the institution, broadcasting mug shots of all senior staff of the prison. Reminders of the prison security function are also present. There are a number of warning notices fixed to the walls of the waiting area, one details prison contra-band which includes anything from Blu-Tack to firearms, and many substances in between (prisons and primary school classrooms seem to be the two places where blue tack is outlawed). There is a further prominent warning that abetting prisoners to escape is outlawed by the Prison Act of 1952, and likely to result in a prison sentence.

The inner courtyard was the most exposed part of Arkham. Green spaces were noticeably lacking, slightly reminiscent of concreted over schools devoid of playing fields. During fieldwork there were contrasting shades of prison weather: blue sky and cloud, sunshine and shadow. When it was bleak it was really bleak, adding to the atmosphere of incarceration. Even when brighter it was not exactly full of cheer, the glint of sun on razor wire only emphasised the surroundings, a teasing reminder of the outside and lack of freedom. Although this was the only open air part inside prison walls, the area did not seem expansive, on the contrary it almost emphasised the lack of space.

Out in the courtyard the walk to the education department was blocked by locked gates at frequent intervals. Movement between buildings was staggered, staccato style, as my accompanying gatekeeper would unlock and relock each gate. Locked gates and doors become as familiar a sight in prison world as the hefty bunches of keys used to unlock them. Along the way to education was a sport's pitch which apparently was not in much use, on

the other side of which were the wings where women were locked in cell accommodation. One day I was walking outside with the education manager Mara, who told me the prison was ‘relaxed, like a boarding school really’. The surroundings didn’t strike me personally as particularly relaxed, carefree or in tune with a boarding school atmosphere.

The Arkham education department is pre-fabricated, ‘put together like a Lego kit’, one of the tutors remarked. In some respects the building structure mirrors the subject content, the core prison education focus on basic skills (discussed in Chapter VII) resembles a pre-fabricated, one size fits all, curriculum. The somewhat lacklustre external appearance of the block, with fading radioactive green paint, did not necessarily mark the block as necessarily unique or distinct from any given mainstream college. The locked, metallic front door and bars on the window, however, served as a reminder, and a sobering one at that, that this wasn’t a typical educational scene. Outside the building seemed fairly dilapidated. I put the mental question to myself whether the education department was markedly different from the wider regime: a prison within a prison or an educational sanctuary?

‘That’s not a Prison...’

My initial and ongoing impressions of Freshfields contrasted markedly (I visited the open prison between February and March 2008). Whereas Arkham is cast apart from the locality, and clearly labelled as a prison, Freshfields is set within the heart of a village and lacking in overt criminal justice iconography. A passerby would find few obvious signifiers that the former stately home, is, in fact a prison. At ‘Her Majesty’s Pleasure’ signs are relatively concealed, whereas the ones at Arkham are imposing landmarks. On my first visit to Freshfields the taxi driver drove past twice, doing a double take, uttering ‘that’s not a prison’ in some confusion, assuming that her Sat Nav had miscalculated. A prison, however, it most definitely is.

The village, framed around a village pub serving traditional ales, certainly looks the British idyll. Along the main road are red brick houses and cottages, every garden appears to be immaculate (almost as if it is a model village). Intersecting the village is a river (allegedly laden with carp). Approaching the grounds of Freshfields there is a solitary barrier halting

the progress of cars at the end of the long driveway. On the edge of the grounds is a small, seldom occupied, unkempt guardhouse. Visitors are free to walk the length of the drive (which is flanked by lilac trees) direct to the main building unchallenged. Unlike Arkham there is no waiting outside exposed to the elements for an officer to unlock a front gate and allow admittance. Walking up the long drive the lawn extends along both sides and is immaculately maintained, stripes are mowed in neat rectangles. The grass is evenly trimmed, each blade almost appears manicured. The grounds are expansive, Freshfields is set in seven picturesque acres; maintenance is on a grand scale and carried out by inmates. At the front entrance there is a stunning centre piece of flowers arranged around a fountain in circular floral symmetry. Ducks waddle across the grass. Inmates at the prison frequently congregate and light cigarettes under a designated smoking shelter. Plumes of smoke emerge at the sides. The scene bears an uncanny resemblance to a line of women queuing for a bus passing the time by smoking (although these women are not going anywhere). The scene is superficially normal and carefree.

The feeling of normality is almost unsettling. The front door is wide open, with a steady stream people coming in and people going out. As I walk through everything seems normal, yet everything is unexpected. It is initially difficult to reconcile the normality with reality, that this is indeed a prison.

The contrast with Arkham, the monolith on the hill, couldn't be greater. Freshfields looks every inch the ideal country retreat. With its sweeping vistas, on aesthetic terms at least it could be taken from the pages of Evelyn Waugh. Freshfields, however, presents an example of a manor house no longer inhabited by the upper echelons of society, converted instead to an instrument in dispensing criminal justice.

The main entrance of the building takes visitors through an archway to an elegant and large hallway, complete with a high ceiling, winding wood-panelled staircase [this area contained a visual display of 'inspirational women', details of which can be found in Appendix III]. On arrival for the first time I was greeted by a smartly dressed woman, stationed at the reception desk, wearing a hotel styled uniform, smart trousers, pristine white shirt and maroon waist coat, immaculately pressed. Her shoulder length hair was as neatly arranged as her uniform. She signed me in, dealt with identification duties, such as checking my

passport, and phoned the education department, alerting them to my presence. It was only later I found out that this woman at the front desk, who carried out the security checks, was serving time for fraud. This created a strong initial impression, not only was it an indication of a position of responsibility being delegated to one of the incarcerated women, but tellingly revealed that first contact at Freshfields is with inmates not staff. Although I quickly found out on my first day that the term 'inmate', with its associated labelling connotations, was verbal contraband in the prison. Sentenced women are referred to as 'residents' instead, on the grounds that the terminology has more dignity attached.

Projecting residents to the forefront of prison life, removes the dividing line to an extent, there are not the same barriers separating the incarcerated from the outside world as there in a more 'traditional' closed setting, such as Arkham.

You can never tell much about a prisoner from their clothes. Some come looking smarter than the governors, others are really poorly dressed. Since we have gone in for catering for conferences you will see prisoners going about in business suits in this prison.
(Freshfield's Officer)

Visitors are confronted by a prominent sign identifying Freshfield's guiding principles: 'to care for every resident with tolerance and understanding, offering equality of opportunity and taking account of their right to personal dignity and privacy, whilst maintaining necessary security'. This contrasts vividly with Arkham where there are a few messages detailing duty of care or compassion. The focus is on the punitive purpose.

Methodological Toolkit

After conveying my initial impressions of Arkham and Freshfields, setting the tone for subsequent fieldwork, focus will now shift to the methodological toolkit employed during fieldwork. This study makes no grandiose claims to be an exemplar of qualitative endeavour. I have no doubt made mistakes and stumbled into pitfalls which with the benefit of hindsight may have been avoided. However, this is an inherent part of the learning curve defining qualitative research in prison settings, Maguire (2000:123) reflects back on his own

research years, 'it is interesting (if a little painful) to look back on one's own fumbling attempts'. Although there are a plethora of qualitative methods textbooks available (of variable quality) none can really prepare one for the vagaries of the field, especially where prison is concerned.

Throughout the duration of fieldwork interviews and observations were employed, enriched by copious quantities of field notes. Such a combination of methods of data collection inform each other to some extent, allowing for some measure of triangulation, the virtues of which are well documented in the prison context, 'If it is possible to get corroboration for an interpretation of one set of data from data collected by other means then one's confidence in the validity of data is increased' (King, 2000:306). Specifically, I was able to interview informants about what I had observed in the classroom, and conversely my observations were drawn to points raised in an interview context.

A strength of qualitative research is its rich, flexible potential, it is after all 'inherently multi-method in focus' (Flick, 2002: 226). Furthermore the spirit of the qualitative approach encompasses a broad set of interpretative activities, 'privileging no single methodological practice over another' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:6). I engaged in fieldwork with a fresh perspective, eager to implement a compliment of resources arising during the course of the study. The qualitative researcher has after all been likened to a *bricoleur* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) piecing together a variety of tools and techniques as they emerge. The bricoleur metaphor is, I believe, especially well suited to the prison world. Different methods must be brought to play in unpredictable scenarios; the prison bricoleur must think on their feet and adapt. As Atkinson says, bricolage is about forging something new out of available resources (Atkinson, 2006: 89). The process is an individualised one, deviating from idealised textbook conditions reinforcing Delamont's assertion (1992:52) that 'there is no correct tool kit for fieldwork, only what works'. The toolkit analogy is an apposite one in that it places an emphasis on the plurality of approaches, rather than a single one, that are required if there is any hope of capturing representations of everyday lived realities.

Prison methods are not purist methods (then again are methods ever pure?). Prison researchers should abide by Delamont's advice about administering the 'what works' toolkit. Interviews take place in many shapes and forms, often in impromptu fashion.

Likewise they can be curtailed at a moment's notice, in what remains a chaotic environment. A chance event, or the propensity for lock downs, may mean that in a closed prison, such as Arkham, the education department may be closed for half a day or more. A rigid script and mindset is not in the least conducive to qualitative prison methods. Prison world is subject to different norms, regulations to the outside, a contrasting set of formal and informal social codes. As such, from a researcher standpoint, the observational antenna is constantly twitching. Getting a grasp of the prison milieu from the gates to the classroom and beyond is vital. Although capturing and making sense of the difference with the outside world is key, it is important to avoid exotic or simplistic 'othering' of the prisoners, staff or place.

There are elements where prison research can learn from other qualitative endeavours (and vice versa) nevertheless there are certain respects in which the methodological *modus operandi* stands unique. Compared with the modern world, prisons are decidedly luddite-esque, a throwback to a previous technological era. Taken for granted everyday commodities such as mobile phones, digital cameras and the internet are outlawed on security grounds. The strict rules governing what can be taken in to prisons to facilitate the research process are well documented (Noaks and Wincup 2004). The brave new world of seventh moment techniques (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) with an emphasis on post-modern experimentation, visual semiotics and multimedia hyper-textuality is generally not applicable in the prison context. Virtual methods contrast with the corporeality of prisons. Prison research results in an enforced back to basics approach, that of notepads and a dose of intuition. Although this presents limitations, adding to the mystique and seclusion of prisons, it underlines why it is important to access and research such institutions in the first place. In addition, methods deployed should always be fit for purpose. Atkinson (2008) cautions against novel for novelties sake, at the expense of more considered qualitative graft and craft. He observes that collectively modern postgraduate students are not 'highly skilled and sophisticated. In many cases they are the qualitative equivalent of innumerate' (2008:10).

Fieldwork at Arkham and Freshfields was carried out without the aid of devices such as a digital camera or dictation machine. It is a fallacy to assume that open prisons are relaxed

about such security matters. It would have been unwise, not to mention dishonest, to have subverted these security considerations, there was an element of goodwill extended towards me in that I was not searched going in and out of Arkham and Freshfields. Being in the business of smuggling would have been underhand on my part and constituted a breach of trust. This would also have gone against the letter and spirit of the ethical clearance granted by the Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University (such actions would be considered taboo or a form of academic deviance). On a practical level willingly subverting prison law is not a fantastic idea and would have more than likely resulted in a premature exit (or even a prolonged stay!).

The lack of a recording device in prison research is a frequent enough occurrence (Noaks and Wincup 2004). In the case of Hudson's research where she was interviewing sex offenders she carried out some interviews with and some without a dictation device (2003). This, however, did not negatively impact on the quality of the interview process. 'In general', she reflected, 'this made little difference in recording what was said in the interview' (Hudson, 2003:72). Some criminological researchers advocate the use of the hand written approach, Maguire for instance remains 'instinctively resistant' (2000:138) to tape recording participants, on the grounds that it erects a barrier between both parties and erodes trust.

This issue is particularly relevant where women in prison are concerned. An inmate at Arkham told me that she was happier being interviewed sans a recording device as she gets 'nervous around tape recorders'. There is the capacity for voice recorders to stir up memories with negative connotations, reminders of police interviews and official sanctions. From this point of view an advantage of the hand written route is that it helped to erode suspicion in some cases and proved beneficial in generating trust between interviewing parties.

Feminist Perspectives

A man interviewing and observing incarcerated women, in many respects a vulnerable and socially excluded population, clearly generates some sensitive issues. In terms of feminist perspectives on methodology this presents no little controversy. Feminist sociology evolved through research 'on, by and especially *for* women' (Stacey, 1996:88) drawing heavily on women's lived experiences and language. In the 1980s Du Bois (1983) wrote that feminist scholarship and methods would engender a more egalitarian, interactive research process ending exploitation of women as research objects. There is a danger that as a man researching incarcerated women I could compound the problem and reinforce the paradigm of women as objects, adding to pre-existing institutional/structural exploitation. There are many women in prison who have suffered because of men in their lives (Corston, 2007), would I be in a position to empathise, or indeed would it be appropriate that I should even be in a position to convey female opinions?

Better (2006), however, challenges the assumption that the feminist methodological outlook should be considered as an exclusive club 'for women', and that research endeavours conducted by men can benefit from such an approach. She argues that projects seeking to represent the views of not only women, but also those of socially excluded/marginalised groups, sympathise with the feminist perspective. Prison learning has been an under-researched area, for women prison doubly so. This project has sought to focus on a constituency of individuals who hitherto have gone largely unheard and under-represented. Prison education as an under-scoped research area, needs more research into prisoners of both genders by researchers of both genders. I will now move onto a more detailed discussion of the research methods I employed in my time at Arkham and Freshfields.

Prison Observation

Observing and being observed is an inherent part of prison life. Being in a panoptical environment scrutinised by watchful eyes is part and parcel of day to day incarcerated existence.

Observational techniques have been argued to constitute the gold standard of qualitative endeavour (Atkinson et al, 2003), presenting a unique insight into complex social interactions and physical settings (Bryman, 2001). Such a *modus operandi* proves especially suited to the sphere of prison investigation, where being up close and personal is essential in the field (King, 2000). Effective research must be conducted in direct ‘hands on’ fashion, rather than through more vicarious means. In conducting fieldwork at Arkham and Freshfields there were no shortage of occurrences to write up, record and analyse. Such a methodological framework brought with it a welcome element of the unknown to my research, opening up unanticipated avenues of enquiry, ‘because observed events are less predictable there is a certain freshness to this form of data collection’ (Cohen et al, 2000:305).

Multiple spheres of observation emerged throughout the research timeline. One of the most valued avenues, from a personal point of view, proved to be participant observation in a variety of different learning environments, inside and outside, from the classroom to the gardens, the kitchens and theatrical performance. Prison drama was in abundance on and off the stage (Goffman, 1991). Participant observation is perhaps the method that comes closest to capturing the essence of such learning interactions (Salisbury and Delamont 1995) yielding varied forms of compelling data in a way other qualitative methods cannot reach. My observational faculties were drawn to ‘the performance qualities of social life’ (Atkinson et al, 2003:98) the interaction between teaching and learning, focusing on interplay and dynamics between inmates and tutors. Spending time on the inside stimulated my intellectual curiosity, in an intellectual and imaginative sense.

Observation was fully complemented by the furious composition of field notes and researcher diary. The latter was used as a survival mechanism, an outlet to vent personal frustrations and private thoughts. Field notes, in turn, are considered to be the building

blocks of qualitative research, allowing for the accumulation of data and reflections' (Atkinson et al, 2003:60). I was at pains to write up notable events, as well as not so noticeable ones, at a moment of nearest convenience (although this is not always straightforward in prison). Both Arkham and Freshfields proved to be, as all prisons invariably are, an exceptionally rich source of qualitative fieldwork data. as a novice researcher I considered it vital to document as much as possible of quotidian life in a closed off world, and my feelings and experiences in response to those realities, capturing something resembling the 'textual reality of the self' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:60). One's feelings as a researcher themselves stand as an important source of data (Liebling, 1999) and integral to the analytic process.

The Marriage of Methods

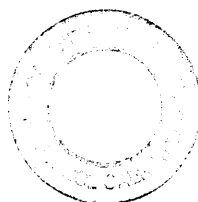
In some respects the methodological relationship between observational resources and interviewing involves a combination of conflict and co-operation (similar to some marriages). The interview is not necessarily the most naturalistic of research mediums, indeed the so called 'interview effect' (Hagan, 1997) may result in distorted findings if there should be excessive methodological dependence. Participant observation combats such an over reliance, adding an extra layer of depth, consistency and validity to the findings (Adler and Adler, 1997). That being said I was conscious not to veer the project too much in the other direction, observing in isolation is far from embodying methodological perfection. There was a danger of my attention wandering or being drawn to certain areas at the expense of others; and also of an implicit bias on my part, 'observers are forced to rely more exclusively on their own perceptions. They are therefore far more susceptible to bias from subjective interpretation of situations' (Adler and Adler, 1997:381). I was acutely aware of the need for self reflexivity (Coffey and Atkinson, 1995). Rather than opting for a partisan position in the observation versus interviews debate, I considered it more constructive to think of them as occupying different spheres of meaning, as informing and complementing each other (Atkinson et al, 2003). Ethnographic observation was extremely important in establishing relationships and rapport which, in turn, enhanced the research process. Periods spent in Arkham and Freshfields prior to interviews were likewise valuable in

helping me establish a sense of bearings, as well as suggesting additional themes worthy of interrogation, facilitating progressive focus.

From personal experience it helped immensely being able to establish prior face to face contact, not having to enter the interview scenario blind as it were. Spending time with respondents in the classroom provided a point of reference (and insights into the day to day learning realities) helping to frame the content of the interview process, sidestepping the potential for awkward beginnings. Engaging with women in Arkham and Freshfields previous to interviews taking place allowed for friendly relations to be established in many cases previous to interviews taking place. Inmates would often offer me tea ('have a brew and put your feet up', etc). From my experience people in prison, deprived of their liberty, are enthusiastic to extend hospitality. The common currency of sharing a cup of tea, illustrates how certain everyday rituals transcend prison walls. The tea flowed inside. In methodological terms I would recommend it over contrived interview icebreakers.

Mobile methods, walking and talking (and observing) proved invaluable. A key example of this is mentioned in Chapter VII (on the core prison curriculum) when Heather, serving time of Arkham, guided me round the education department and expounded her thoughts on learning inside. Such developments facilitate everyday constructions and representations of place and space.

There is often much mention made about establishing *rapport* within the parameters of the interview process. In many instances I consider it to be an unrealistic prospect to expect rapport to develop with a stranger in an artificial interview scenario, in a setting such as prison (or otherwise), without previously established contact. There are also some problematic issues with the choice of the word 'rapport' in that it suggests close knit and warm human relations, a deep personal connection. As such I am not sure how useful the term is in the context of the qualitative studies conducted within penal institutions, in that it is suggestive of something beyond the usual course of researcher-participant relations.



Interviewing: The Semi, Semi Structured Approach

Interviews are of course at the forefront of qualitative methods, representing one of the most commonly utilised research strategies. Employing interviews enabled me to elicit a rich vein of data from my informants, pertaining to their 'experiences, opinions, aspirations, and feelings' (May, 1997:91). Interviews introduce multiple perspectives into the study, in particular the viewpoint of women in prison who constitute an under-represented group.

The semi-structured strategy of interview is a common approach, enabling research questions to be addressed and interrogated in a more focused and clinical fashion than the comparatively in depth approach. This allows interviewers to enter the field with a more focused agenda (Bryman 2001), yet to have the scope to venture off script, allowing fresh concepts to emerge throughout the process, 'an openness to changes of sequence and forms of questions' (Kvale, 1996:124). Relative to some traditional interview types, a greater deal of control is delegated to the interviewee, enabling them to shape 'responses along lines which are peculiarly relevant to them and their context' (Mason, 1996:40). The semi structured strategy can be charged with bordering on an interviewing 'Jack of all trades' in trying to intertwine the disparate elements of flexibility and structure, resulting in the failings of both but few of the benefits. However, it does allow for the qualitative researcher to cover formal, operational knowledge, together with attitudes and beliefs in what can be a restrictive and oppressive interview time frame (especially in the prison context).

Unpredictability

Much is written about interviewing processes, not all of which is entirely helpful to the prison context. If anything I found the semi-structured approach to be maybe a touch too formalised for prison research. If anything I would advocate a semi, semi structured approach. In this research environment there are conflicting pressures. On the one hand there is the pressure of eliciting what Wolcott terms the "things you are really interested in learning" (1994: 105). Unearthing those opinions that cut to the heart of the research questions using a focused script. The process of intersecting boundaries: combining formal

operational knowledge and the personal, shape shifting between the formal and informal. Qualitative interviewing is indeed quite the delicate art necessitating carefully crafted schedules designed to cut to the crux of the research topic, adopting appropriate language and tone. This is especially important given that it proves near impossible to legislate for a set period of uninterrupted time: the constant threat of abrupt interview endings hovers over proceedings like the sword of Damocles. The other side of the research coin is that interviewing in prison can be a delicate process, despite pressures of time and unpredictability it is important to attempt to retain cohesion and an organic flow to the dialogue. Avenues of questioning cannot be introduced artificially, with awkward segue, or at the wrong time. What, when and how you ask is a difficult balancing act. If mal-handled there is potential for matters to collapse like a house of cards.

Timings

Due to the unpredictable nature of the prison environment opportunities frequently presented themselves to carry out impromptu interviews and discussions with a number of inmates and teaching staff at Arkham at Freshfields. In the Arkham setting access to informants was regulated by gatekeepers who literally hold the keys, meaning interviews often occurred unplanned and without prior notice. Flexibility is the key, as mentioned earlier there is a fine line in terms of what to ask and when to ask, how to address the seemingly big questions and how to respond appropriately to comments made by interviewees. As a qualitative researcher it is important to think on your feet, maintaining a natural flow of conversation and not be inhibited by props or a rigid script. This is particularly important in the context of prison research, with the prisoner constituency marking one of the most excluded in society (King 2000). Unforeseen responses proved highly beneficial to the evolving make up of the study. The element of the unknown can be used to one's advantage and enrich proceedings.

Whereas implications for interviewing in the closed world of Arkham, with its regulated lock and key access, are clear enough one would assume matters would run smoother in Freshfields. In some respects this proved to be the case, but likewise it is a fallacy to assume that the freedom of mobility facilitated by open conditions equates to a consistent luxury of predictability. There were occasions spent loitering around classrooms, and other locations,

waiting for residents to turn up for pre-arranged interviews, where people failed to materialise. It is surprising how often people are 'whereabouts unknown' or seem to be misplaced in prisons (one might think they would constitute one of the few places in society where there is a reasonable approximation of where everyone is at any given time). As a researcher it is important to adapt to the fact that people are not always where they should be in prison, whether closed or open. However, that is not to say that time where would be interviewees fail to show is time wasted. Such no shows invariably generate other opportunities; failure to interview one student often presents the opportunity to speak to another. If nothing else prisons are always interesting places to observe. Rather than the times people don't materialise being a loss, they create interesting lines of data and demonstrate why prisons are methodologically intriguing in the first place.

There were other ways in which, as a prison researcher, I had to reconcile myself to a lack of control over proceedings. Such instances included interviews which were prematurely cut short. In one such instance at Arkham, five minutes into a conversation, proceedings were called to an abrupt halt by the unexpected arrival of the legal team of my interviewee. Coincidentally this was the first such visit she had received for a number of months. When I returned to Arkham she had been 'shipped out'; the interview opportunity was lost. Routine elements of prison life such as 'meal times, family or solicitor visits or workshop requirements' (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:78) likewise impact greatly on the interviewing process. To coin the phrase of one of the tutors at Arkham, 'such is life in prison'. With the constant potential for abrupt interview endings there is the nagging temptation to field important questions early lest interview proceedings be prematurely curtailed. As I mentioned earlier though, prison interviewing is a delicate process, urgency must be weighed against other considerations. While time constraints are a real issue, there is the danger of opening with an over aggressive verbal approach.

Location, Location, Location

As with timing, location was unpredictable to an extent. A common facet of criminological and prison research is that the staging of interviews can be chaotic and outside of researcher control (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Many interviews were carried out in the classrooms of Arkham and Freshfields, which was natural enough given that much of my research time was based there. Interviews were often framed around the tasks/activities carried out on a particular day, capturing direct educational and emotional responses (classroom interactions and dynamics). It was interesting witnessing a morning of learning, developing my own impressions, and conversing with students about their own perceptions of learning proceedings.

Interview locations were not ubiquitous and were dotted around Arkham and Freshfields. They took place in a variety of learning settings (in prison kitchens and gardens for instance), in addition there were less formal chats while women lit up cigarettes during breaks or social hours. A number of different rooms within the education department of both Arkham and Freshfields were utilised for interview purposes. A common spot at Arkham was the prison library, although this constituted a public space, or as public as spaces get in prison, it was frequently deserted and rarely open for inmates to avail themselves of. Empty offices were also used, although in such instances the door was kept open for security reasons. Occasionally staff would pop round their head round the door during interviews, ostensibly to make sure everything was okay, this sometimes resulted in banter from the inmates, 'have you come to sticky beak?!'.

The Interview Process

Establishing researcher identity is vital from the outset of any qualitative interaction; this is especially so where the criminal justice settings are concerned (King 2000). Before interviews began in earnest I covered issues pertaining to informed consent and the nature of the research project.

The nature of voluntary participation is in itself problematic in that prisons operate under a regime of enforced compliance (Noaks and Wincup 2004); 'the authority imposed by the prison is not a consensual authority' (Scruton et al, 1991: 61). I was aware that many of my informants, as sentenced offenders, may associate being interviewed with negative connotations; as such I did not want them to feel conscripted into taking part. I stressed the fact that I was entirely independent from the prison service and that participation was of an entirely voluntary nature, that anonymity would be guaranteed, along with the right to refuse to answer any questions, with the right to withdraw at any stage, without prejudice (with reassurance in that eventuality any data would be destroyed).

The best way I found to counter any suggestion of exploitation or hidden motives on my part was through striving to be honest with my informants, making it explicit as to who I was and my purpose for being there. Honesty was not just important from an ethical standpoint but helped to clarify relations between interviewer and interviewee. It would have been unwise to have kept informants in the dark as to my research pretext for 'despite some uninformed portrayals of them, most offenders are anything but naïve and can quickly sense any attempts to dissimulate' (Maguire 2000). In an interview context insincerity is only likely to beget insincerity. Hagan (1997) is of the opinion that inmates are more keen to co-operate if they are informed as to the nature of the study. Indeed I found inmates on the whole to be genuinely interested, expressive, and seemingly more than happy to participate. The vast majority of Arkham and Freshfields women did not act as if they were conscripted or felt pressure to take part, and appeared genuinely pleased to talk, appreciating that their viewpoints were taken seriously. It has been documented that in the mundane prison world talking to an unknown researcher can be an inducement in itself (Martin 2000). As the noted poet (and former probation officer) Simon Armitage reflected on his time collaborating with female prisoners on a creative project, 'rather than be embarrassed or defensive, most of the women were simply flabbergasted that someone had taken the trouble to tell their side of the story' (Armitage and Rhodes, 2005).

Appendix IV Includes a sample interview schedule and a more in depth discussion of the process.

Ongoing Reflections on Arkham and Freshfields

Being at Arkham as a researcher entailed constant containment. My physical mobility was strictly limited in nature and there was a constant need for escorts. Even visits to the toilet, often for the purpose of scribbling field notes, were contingent on a gatekeeper. When I was at the education department I was there for a whole morning or afternoon. Effectively it was a prison within a prison. In observational and interview terms, being locked up did bring with it advantages, mutual confinement proved valuable in terms of spending more time in close quarters with inmates and staff. On a practical level, this gave me valuable insights into restricted mobility in closed prisons. It is important to remember that the vast majority of women serve their time in similar, closed, conditions. Arkham is representative of the imprisonment experience for the many (at least in security terms); the classic closed prison hall marks of locked doors and wing culture.

Freshfields, by way of contrast is less representative of the typical prison experience for women. Navigation around the prison was obviously more straightforward without the routine impediments of locked doors; space was more expansive. I could walk straight from the education department down flights of stairs to the kitchens unescorted.

A catch 22 of educational studies is that situated/embedded fieldwork is vital for a number of reasons, not least because of the potential to add to debates on the direction of good practice, yet there is the real prospect of the researcher harming/hindering the environment they are seeking to help. This issue becomes particularly acute in prison education settings, where visitors are rare and students have limited interactions with the outside world. This is especially the case in a closed prison such as Arkham. Mayr (2004) warns that conducting fieldwork in prison education departments brings with it the risk of negative consequences, researcher presence can equate to intrusiveness and disrupt learning harmony. You cannot reasonably hope to capture reality when you are conspicuously distorting it. In terms of addressing the question of how accurately I witnessed things as they really were, it is impossible for me to say with certainty as I had no previous point of reference with Arkham and Freshfields. Tutors and students at both

prisons informed me, however, that my presence did not have a negative impact on the normal course of events. In respect of interviews, I believe being an outsider to respondent's everyday sphere of interactions had its advantages. This assisted making the strange familiar (Delamont, 1992). It has been documented that in the mundane prison world talking to an unknown researcher can be an inducement in itself (Martin 2000). Overall, staff and inmates seemed genuinely pleased to have their views listened to, and interviews generated many candid comments (see Finch, 2004). I attribute this in part to the fact that interviews were anonymised and also because I was not part of the regular, daily routine.

Professional and Unprofessional Wariness

Some tutors were more reluctant to allow me to observe in the classroom than others. A number of reasons became apparent for this, which I attributed to a combination of professional and unprofessional wariness on the part of the teachers concerned. Instances of professional wariness related to when there were cogent educational reasons to be cautious about my presence. One such example concerned a class of foreign national inmates at Arkham learning English. The cohort was considered to have a delicate dynamic; the women, each conversant in a different language, were low on confidence and hesitant to speak out in group scenarios. As such my presence would have proved problematic, possibly impinging on the gradual process of esteem building (I was, however, able to subsequently interview some of the women from the group). Additionally there were routine educational matters, examinations and suchlike, which occasionally barred me from classrooms. The above rationales for restricting my access to classrooms on specific occasions for specific reasons I attributed to conscientious motives, stemming from concerns surrounding student welfare. Other reasons for teaching staff being reluctant over my presence in the classroom arose, I believe, from less principled motives, an unprofessional wariness. A judgement not founded on concerns over student welfare but motivated by hostility, as if I was going to bring out the research red pen and scribble 'fail' over their teaching performance. Prison can drill into people a suspicious bunker like mentality. One teacher questioned why I would want to research prison education at all.

Researchers are often constructed as spies by suspicious individuals in the various research settings- not least educational ones (see Burgess 1984).

Emotional Issues

Recent research into well being (Bloor et al, 2007) has drawn attention to the emotional labour involved for qualitative researchers involved in sensitive projects or settings. Although my freedom of movement was curtailed around Arkham, this seemed but a trivial hardship in comparison to those faced by the inmates on a daily basis. Some of the heartbreaking biographies I heard from women caused considerable reflection on my part. Problems were not always left at the prison gates; there was a distinct measure of emotional as well as physical toil in the research process. This is perhaps unsurprising given the personal nature of face to face interaction that defines qualitative interaction. One of the things that struck me was how I could leave at the end of the day whereas they could not. This had something of a grounding effect. Maintaining reflexivity and auditing feelings in my 'out of the field' research diary proved helpful (Delamont, 2002). As a researcher it is nevertheless important to avoid the temptation of taking centre stage of the research narrative at the expense of informants.

Reflections on the Layered Cake of Access

Access should be considered an ongoing issue, one that lasts the duration of the fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). It has been remarked that the best a researcher can hope for is 'to move over in the course of time, from being a grudgingly tolerated fool to being a fairly welcome one' (Sparks, 1996:302).

Gaining access to prison should not be underestimated as a methodological issue. In the case of this study it was not simply a case of getting in, doors were opened as swiftly as others were closed, skills of negotiation were required, political dimensions were involved in my numerous dealings with gatekeepers in navigating hierarchies of consent (true of many research settings, see Laine, 2000).

When reflecting on the process of access the metaphor of an onion sprang to mind, in that conducting research in prison bears similarities to unpeeling multiple layers. However, King (2000), as I discovered over subsequent reading, had already claimed this analogy, 'getting to know a prison was like peeling an onion, except that each new layer was different to the last' (2000:299). I came remarkably close then to committing an unwitting act of plagiarism, considered one of the darkest of academic crimes. This serves as a reminder that although the prison setting seemed relatively new and fresh to me, I have been following in the footsteps of others with similar recollections. Carter on his part (1995) likened access to a 'flexible friend' (a slogan culled from a credit card advertising campaign of some years past).

Another image that sprung to mind was the prison cliché of a file concealed in a cake. There are different layers and getting there can evidently prove a messy business.

Analytical Procedure

A multitude of approaches exist when it comes to qualitative data analysis, there is no overarching "single orthodoxy" (Atkinson et al, 1996:52). In common with much qualitative endeavour there is not a generally administered approach, nor is there consensus. One brings a large measure of personal preference and inclination to the proceedings, 'strategies are guidelines and pointers rather than exact specifications' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995:182). As with the wider fieldwork process issues of reflexivity must be addressed by the researcher, in order to recognise the 'social and intellectual unconscious embedded in analytic tools and operations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:36).

Analysis was an integral part of the ongoing research procedure, not an afterthought. Bryman and Burgess (1994) reflect that it is a mistake in qualitative research to view data analysis as a separate enterprise from data collection. The processes are interwoven, each informs the other, and as such began as soon as I walked through the prison gates. I remained flexible to emerging themes, throughout. While in the field I scribbled headache inducing reams of data, suffering from what is colloquially termed *researcher's cramp*, through this process alone potential themes emerged. Field notes were important in drawing up firsthand recollections to make my representations as 'true' to what I

encountered as possible. 'The palest ink', is after all, 'clearer than the best memory' (Hagan, 1997:27). The art of field note composition, and the relationship with memory, has been considered in depth by Sanjek (1990) and Emerson et al (1995). It was vital to write up in detail and then swiftly type up, thereby avoiding sketchy recollections and research writings, punctuated with gaps. In the way that Freud (2006) wrote about 'screen memories', inaccurate representations of the past, it was vital to avoid 'screen field notes', where lack of thoroughness might result in mis-representation and distortion of research data. Writing up transcripts and field notes reflected the 'artful and playful' (Atkinson et al, 1996:10) nature of data handling; I felt a degree of ownership and familiarity with the data and this stance played an important part in ongoing analysis and reflections.

Analysis of empirical data was in two stages: the 'physical hands on' and the 'virtual hands on'. The initial, physical hands on approach involved compiling and explicating the data sets (interview scripts and field notes). To begin with I simply read through, familiarising myself with the text, writing comments and thoughts in the margin as I proceeded. These were my first impressions on encountering the data, rather than fully fledged ideas. I noted aspects that struck me on first reading as attention grabbing, which immediately seemed to me worthy of consideration in terms of subsequent coding. At this tentative point I was not seeking to rush towards premature conclusions, the process of coding and analysing data, after all, is carried over several stages (Lofland and Lofland, 1995), one which requires a considerable time investment, 'it has to be worked at and isn't based on romantic inspiration' (Atkinson quoted in Strauss and Corbin, 2001:117).

When it came to coding the data in earnest, 'creating categories with and from the data' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:26); data was cut and colour coded. Embracing the process as a creative endeavour (Lofland and Lofland 1995) I decided to colour code the field notes to highlight emerging major themes, with results aesthetically on a par with a messy text. On a more pragmatic level colour coding provides a convenient means of categorising a veritable mass of data into readily retrievable sections.

Initially I held back from the CAQDAS computer route, wary of the danger of feeling virtually disembodied and distant from the material. I felt I needed something more hands on and physically interactive first of all. Following on from this was the virtual hands on process,

which involved in putting the full range of my interview and observation data in Nvivo. I did not feel as if it radically altered my analytical trajectory, but it certainly saved time in terms of retrieval and management of data - with efficient functions of code and retrieve. Not only was Nvivo useful in terms of project administration and organisation, it proved of great benefit in explicating patterns and themes, especially as part of the comparative analysis process between the two research sites. Endnote also proved useful for storing notes efficiently on a variety of texts, and also served as a search engine for key terms as my catalogue of indexes was built up over time.

Although I began with indicative research themes and questions to interrogate (see Chapter I) a delicate analytical balancing act was called for. I was keen to remain open to emerging themes; Glaser and Strauss (1968) suggest a preference for theory emerging from data rather than data being shaped to fit pre-determined theories. Conversely Bryman and Burgess (1994) warn that Glaser and Strauss' model can lead to generalisation of concepts, rather than fully fleshed out theories. I treated analysis as a two way process, a path from theory to text and from text back to theory (Flick, 2002).

At no stage of the analysis did I feel as if I had reached finite conclusions, after all 'the process remains, and is intended to be, significantly open-ended in character' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995:181). In the final analysis the process is as much about generating and refining questions as reaching answers. However, the overarching aims and key research questions which 'framed' the study at its outset were borne in mind. The broad thematic areas identified in relation to these are detailed in the following empirical chapters.

HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields: Past and Present

Having discussed the methodology and analytical procedure informing this study, the two prisons, Arkham and Freshfields, will be introduced in detail. This will include an overview of the key characteristics (historical as well as present) detailing important operational data, as well as offering analysis and explanation of the marked difference in respective prison cultures. This section foreshadows issues that will percolate the forthcoming findings chapters.

The Arkham Population

The maximum prison population of Arkham is 358 with a certified normal accommodation of 340 (three quarters are British; a quarter are foreign nationals). The prison draws its population from adult sentenced females (there are no inmates on remand), the regime is home to a small number of life sentenced prisoners as well as a much larger proportion who are on lesser tariffs for a range of offences. Around half of the prison population are serving sentences of between 2 and 8 years (over 80% have been sentenced over a year; around 15% for ten years plus). Short stays (of less than three months) are relatively rare in the prison; the population is relatively less transient in comparison with many closed prisons. Around half are in for drug related crimes as the main offence, with the remainder mainly convicted of a combination of theft, burglary and violence against the person (crimes in the main to fund drug habits). Linda (Arkham's Head of Learning) remarked that 'the effect of drugs in patterns of offending is massive. 95% of women here have been touched by drugs'.

Linda considers the length of sentence to have huge educational ramifications, 'if sentences are too short or too long there's not much we can do for them [the women]'. Short sentences allow insufficient time for a worthwhile course of learning to be undertaken, women on longer sentences have more scope to complete courses, yet the effects of this are cancelled out by the harmful effects of institutionalisation. This theme of prisonisation will now be analysed in more depth.

The Prison Inspectorate has reported that there are no specific issues in terms of the staff gender composition at Arkham (but does not illustrate the point with specific numbers or percentages). Problems have been evident in inmate-officer relations though, as evidenced by facets of the personal officer scheme (for further discussion refer to Chapter VI: Best Days of Your Life?)

The Freshfields Population

Freshfields is styled as a 'comprehensive resettlement regime' with an operational capacity of 131 (less than 5% of who are foreign nationals) making it considerably smaller in terms of population compared to Arkham. As an open prison there is an emphasis on pro-social modelling and personal development, together with fostering links with the community and the maintenance of positive family relationships. Educational skills permeate the whole establishment and sentence planning, although Arlene, the Head of Learning and Interventions, confessed to hating the word 'education' (which will be discussed later). Separate from the main house is a Mother and Baby Unit containing single rooms for up to twelve women and their young children. In addition there is an annex for prisoners in paid employment which has 17 single rooms and 3 doubles.

Although Freshfields places fewer constraints internally than closed prisons there are more external restrictions placed on who is eligible to be drafted in. In comparison with Arkham the prison has reasonably tight entrance criteria, with more restrictions placed on the incoming demographic to qualify for eligibility. The technical term is that a prisoner who comes to Freshfields is 'deemed fit for open conditions'. Women do not qualify automatically, and have to be assessed: they must have a maximum of two years to the expected parole date, and 5 years or less to their non-parole release date, to be considered for entry. No one with 24 hour round the clock healthcare needs is eligible, although women are allowed out for medical appointments. Individuals with a history of self-harming, violence, or those that pose a security risk may not be viable for open conditions. Compared

to closed prisons, for mostly obvious reasons, open prisons have restrictive entrance criteria.

Whereas all women at Freshfields have experienced closed conditions, it is a relatively small number of women in closed prisons who move to open prison before release, indicating something of a supply side issue. Open prisons are reserved for the selected few, so in a sense are quite Calvinistic. In some respects they represent the grammar schools of the prison network.

Although the entrance criteria are restrictive that does not necessarily mean that women at Freshfields are convicted of less serious offences, or the easiest to manage of women prisoners. The vast majority of Freshfield's women are serving over two years, up to life. There are very few instances of the short sentences which are a regular feature of closed prison life. The most common recurring convictions in Freshfields are for fraud, drugs offences and violence against the person.

Cost per Inmate

Cost per inmate at Arkham is to the tune of around £30,000 per annum, compared to around £20,000 at Freshfields. The financial disparity makes something of a statement about the cost weighting of disciplinary *modus operandi*. The post-release offending rate of Freshfields residents stands at 12% (within 2 years), this compares favourably to the national average of over 60% for women [Freshfields is unusual in that re-offending statistics are available, generally speaking statistics for individual regimes are not]. It should be noted that there are dangers in drawing a functionalist link between the cost of prison places and 'success' determined by future reductions in crime; dry data masks prison realities. As the rest of the thesis makes clear, making direct comparisons between prisons based on recidivism data is an invariably problematic business (blind to a number of demographic and cultural issues).

Competing Histories: The Narratives of Arkham and Freshfields

The discussion on Arkham and Freshfields will now shift from the present to the past. This section incorporates details from archive research, in certain instances sources and dates are not revealed in order to respect institutional anonymity.

Researching prison education encompasses a lot more than what goes on in the classroom. Prisons must be understood in terms of local knowledge; each establishment has a unique story, context and cultural history (King, 2006). It is vital to pay attention to what sort of message the location and architectural aesthetic gives out (Soothill, 2007). Arkham is segregated from the nearby community. The prison is situated beyond the margins of semi-detached suburbia, towering over as a conspicuous fortress on a hill, projecting a message of punishment and segregation. Freshfields, by contrast, is integrated with village life and seems expansive to the eye. Arkham and Freshfields offer two very different images of incarceration but they have not always been women's prisons. In order to understand their present day functions (educational and otherwise) it is important to examine the history of both institutions.

Arkham's history as a women's prison is comparatively short. It is only in recent years that the prison has been converted into a prison for females, prior to that it had served as a men only establishment. Inspection reports singled out Arkham for criticism in its early years as a women's prison, finding the establishment to be struggling with 'self-image'. Early years were rocky; Arkham strained under the change to an all female population. Inspectors warned that the inability of the regime to implement a cogent and consistent system of rules had a disruptive effect on inmate and staff alike. Staff and management had difficulty in establishing themselves within the changing climate.

The prison had an infrastructure and staff culture geared towards male problems which caused problems in adapting to the switch over. This is indicative of a wider issue concerning closed prisons for women, and a reflection on the nature of the criminal justice system. 'Women have been marginalised within a system largely designed by men for men',

notes Baroness Corston in her review of the use of custody for women (2007:2). Helena Kennedy QC (in Lewis and Crew, 1997) suggests that in a system essentially framed around men, women can reap the consequences of inadequate provision, unsuitable to their needs. Equal outcomes necessitate different approaches (Corston, 2007). The Prison Service does not have a reputation for being flexible to the needs of inmates when institutions are re-rolled, as the example of Cookham Wood illustrates. The prison was changed from a women's establishment to a young offender's institute in 2008; there have been massive failings in the transition. An inspection report (2009) has found the highest use of physical restraint on juveniles in the country, with few staff familiar working with teenage boys. This demonstrates the specific difficulties in seeking to redefine staff cultures.

The history of Arkham as an institution is a long one, with infrastructure inherited from Victorian times. The site was built in the 1870s, operating as a Lunatic Asylum situated on an expanse of down land. Initially it was to house 1,000 mentally ill people from the surrounding area, but this steadily rose to 2,000 and then 2,500 in the early twentieth century. In later decades the culture of treatment changed from inmates to patients, as a psychiatric hospital. The site closed in this capacity in the 1980s. Following a period of consultation the property was sold to the Home office and converted into a Category C male establishment. Arkham was re-rolled to a women's prison in the early 21st century and is housed in the refurbished buildings of the decommissioned mental hospital.

Arkham's Deputy Head of Education, Graham, was raised in the surrounding area. He remembers growing up nearby when the site was still a mental hospital, and the shadow it cast over the surrounding area. Children were warned by adults 'that's where you'll end up if you misbehave'. There are shades of Foucault here, how the disciplinary function of total institutions permeates mainstream society (in this instance being used to normalise/regulate the young). The romantic poet, Wordsworth, encapsulated the dark image of incarceration trespassing on the lives of children in the lines 'shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing boy' (1902:831). The pervasiveness of prison-like experiences in the everyday lives of women and men has long been considered to have stark implications, enshrining the status prison as a symbol and tool of social control. These

days Arkham still looms up high, still a total institution, and still something of a warning on the horizon. The extended shadow of prison looms large upon wider society.

In each of Arkham's incarnations, as asylum, followed by men's prison then women's prison, there has been a common thread. The site has survived and evolved as a total institution, retaining the characteristic of keeper and kept mentality and disciplined segregation. Throughout Arkham's history, those who corrupt society's mores, the deviants from normalcy, have been corrected in a strict sense. Olivier Razac (2003) writes about the decisiveness of barbed wire in the political management of space, in terms of power, which represents the capacity to enclose space, also as a negative symbol of brutal sovereignty weakening the individual. In certain respects Arkham, throughout its institutional history up to the present day, represents this barbed wire paradigm of containment. The prison gives the impression of being trapped by its own past – a prison for women framed within a hard line masculine space.

The Story of a House

Whereas Arkham was conceived as a total institution, and remains so to this day, Freshfields began life as a home conceived on a lavish scale. Originally the prison was a manor house built as a private residence in 1886. The owner was a knighted Member of Parliament, and influential society man, noted for an active paternalism, with a particular interest in education and the public library movement. It is perhaps fitting then that his private library is now widely used by a diverse group of women offenders.

The Edwardian era brought augmentations to the manor. In 1914 a wing was added to the house as 21st birthday present to the son of the then occupier, and opened with a ball for the gentry and hunt people. A couple of days later the servants and staff were given their own ball. This section contained a ballroom, which today hosts conferences and learning activities, and an oval swimming pool below it, which has been replaced by the prison gymnasium. A far cry from the original function, the wing now plays an active part in

Freshfield's educational infrastructure. This is a 'wing' in a very different sense to that normally associated with the routine of prison life.

War played a part in the fabric of the house. During World War One the house served as a convalescence home for wounded soldiers, after the war the house reverted to a family home. At the onset of the hostilities in 1939 the house and estate was handed over to the government on a 15 year lease. To this day Freshfields serves a governmental function. The last 60 years the house has served a very different purpose to its origins, gone is the social hub of gentrified hunt people. Freshfields now operates as an open prison operating a resettlement regime for women and young women.

Freshfields in 1949

Freshfields is for 'star' prisoners, first offenders, recommended for transfer to an open prison by the governors of the traditional prison to which they were committed by sentence of court. They must be suitable for the special treatment and training in which places like Freshfields specialise: Their term of imprisonment must run for at least another six months before their release so that they can profit from the 'open prison' technique.

This technique does not mean giving the prisoners a paradoxical freedom, as many emotional opponents of the open prison assert. It means placing the emphasis on moral rehabilitation rather than punishment. It is an attempt to restore these girls and women to society as better people than they have been, not as hardened and embittered criminals such as often emerge from the ordinary prison to liberty and a life of continued crime.

(Unknown Journalist)

The terms of the above statement of purpose are worth unpacking. It provides a fascinating insight into intentions and sentiments at the time as to the purpose of open imprisonment (when the concept of open prisons for women was a rarity). One intriguing aspect is how Freshfields at its inception was reserved for 'star' prisoners, the elite that the prison system has to offer. How much has changed? As one would expect the 'special treatment and training' has moved on and evolved since the 1940s, yet although the statement is dated in some ways it is very contemporary. There is still a noticeable 'open prison' technique much

in evidence, a set of core values which separates Freshfields from a typical closed institution. The statement mentions 'paradoxical' freedom which touches the core of the prison to this day. The journalist notes the emphasis on 'moral rehabilitation' as opposed to backward looking retribution, this addresses the philosophical case for imprisonment (the Purposes of imprisonment chapter delves into an analysis of contrasts, the reductivist and retributive perspective on penalty). The message comes through strongly that Freshfields presents itself as offering a half way house to the outside, a penal alternative to the manner of hard time where women emerge institutionalised or 'hardened and embittered'. Aspects of the statement have contemporary relevance: to what extent the brief has been fulfilled?

The Early Days of Education at Freshfields

Initially the 'special treatment and training' offered by Freshfields was steeped in post-war values. In the early days, the plan seemed to be that the prison's regime was to produce housewives and homemakers. There was a somewhat contradictory/incongruous element at work; women governors were part of an early generation of career women yet needlework, painting and decorating were encouraged along with toy making, glove and slipper making and garment assembly. At the beginning of its history as a prison Freshfields was in something of a time warp. In the age of mass-produced clothes and synthetic fibres Freshfield prisoners were encouraged in fine needle work and embroidery, the accomplishments of Victorian ladies rather than skills more appropriate for women who had spent the war years in munitions factories.

The first governor wrote that she found it sad that out of the 28 women employed in the workroom making shirts for male prisoners, not one knew how to sew a shirt (as with today, prisons have to make up for perceived deficits). There was not much of an attempt at equipping women with skills other than crude repetitive ones. In 1948 the prison population was at around the 60 mark; the workforce turned out 3,590 shirts and 1,000 green money bags for the Royal Mint. It is notable that being meaningfully occupied for women prisoners entailed keeping male prisoners appropriately dressed.

It is immediately striking that looking back at prisoners' offences in those days that many of them are no longer classified as criminal acts. In the 1940s many of the women were imprisoned for activities relating to abortion. The sphere of criminality has changed.

God Fearing Folk

When it was made known that Freshfields would be used as an open prison for women, the inhabitants of the village became alarmed. That was the reaction to be expected from a small and peaceful community of law-abiding, God-fearing people. They had little sympathy with those who broke the law of the land by robbing, plundering and sometimes murdering decent citizens. It is understandable that they regarded such people as most undesirable neighbours.

(The First Governor of Freshfields)

As the above quotation from the first governor of Freshfields demonstrates initial relations were fraught between the prison and local community. Some locals were apparently 'haunted day and night' by the imagined prospect of inmates being able to freely wander in and out of the grounds. The result was Nimbyism 1940's style, the attitude of villagers towards staff 'was not hostile, but it was easy to sense a feeling of fear cloaked by a reserved manner'. Things began to change as Freshfields became a staple and took an active participation in parish affairs, 'slowly their fear and resentment lessened and a wholesome and genuine friendship developed'. The prison and the village are now entwined, sharing the same cultural DNA. In the present day people from the neighbourhood can have their hair cut at Freshfields, purchase flowers and farm produce and even have their young children looked after in the nursery.

When I first arrived there was an upstairs/downstairs mentality. Prison officers still called the women "girls". There was nothing seriously wrong with the staff, but not much money had been spent. It felt very neglected. I gave the decorators the freedom to be expressive, allowing officers to choose colours – people were free to use their imagination. I obtained money and spent some of it on pictures to lift the spirits. I was anxious to liven up the place making it a good place in which to work, live and learn.

(Governor in the 1990s)

Prisons as Engines

I like to think I am a governor in the engineering sense- balancing the separate elements, putting a little oil in here, taking a bit of heat away there, so that all the parts function smoothly together.

(Current Governor of Freshfields)

The analogy of a prison governor as an engineer is an interesting one. It is suggestive of the famous saying that ‘a house [or indeed prison house] is a machine for living’; the inter-connecting image of domesticity and engineering. Arkham and Freshfields have developed into two very different kinds of living machines. The parts are the people in prison, prisoners and staff. There is friction and the cogs do not always turning in mutually beneficial motion. It is the people who give buildings character and purpose, just as buildings define the people. A building is more than bricks and mortar, in the same way as the soul is more than the body that contains it.

‘Freshfields feels like a National Trust house’, the current Governor explains, ‘so it does demand a certain approach. My difficulty is not to overdo it. What standards to have? How much to decorate? I aspire to a good guest house, not a five star hotel’. The National Trust heritage vibe of Freshfields contrasts markedly with the barbed wire paradigm represented by Arkham. They are two very different sorts of prison; Freshfields has the character of a house, Arkham that of an institution.

Writing the Future

As with the prisons themselves, the women who are held at Arkham and Freshfields have lives framed by the past tense. Their own personal histories have led to their incarceration, the past offers a perspective on the present. At Freshfields a version of the prison’s history has been researched and written by one of the residents. Accounts like these aid and inform future understandings, contributing to the collective weight of cultural capital. This illustrated a case where a prisoner was not just passively subject to incarceration but was

involved in constructing penal knowledge, helping to make sense of it all. This alone says a lot about the difference between the respective institutions, as well as the difference between closed and open imprisonment. Freshfields has multiple functions and purposes, (operating as a conference suite, salon, garden nursery, etc.) whereas Arkham is focused on tooth and nail incarceration.

V

Tales of Two Prisons

The methods chapter detailed initial contrasting impressions of the two prisons, reflections on first encounters with women in both establishments, the respective environments, moving around on a day to day basis, and so forth. This chapter will address the views of confined women as they make sense of their everyday, incarcerated, reality. It is important to mention that the following empirical chapters will be based primarily on interviews with prison inmates and staff, along with observation data (of learning settings). To clarify the identity of individuals referred to (along with their respective roles in the prisons) please refer to Appendix VII for a full list of interview respondents.

A key area of focus is the divide between Arkham and Freshfields, structurally and temporally, macro journeys between establishments, as well as the internal prison micro journeys. It is fundamental to consider the part philosophy, location, aesthetic and daily rituals play in shaping the character of the lived prison experience. Only by addressing the institutional dynamics in play in each of the two prisons is it possible to gain genuine insights into education and the day to day lessons learned in regimes, inside and outside the classroom (formally and informally). In prison everything becomes a form of education.

Open and closed prisons represent starkly contrasting messages of institutionalised discipline. The difficulties entailed in closed confinement and the tribulations entailed in adapting to open prisons and more freedom will be analysed. Closed prisons regulate discipline over the individual to conform to a set routine and, over time, become dependent on it. Open prisons mark a shift towards self-discipline, taking on the responsibilities of freedom and choice, prompting the question: can freedom and choice be institutionally enforced?

The Prison Learning Journey

Talking to imprisoned women, building up a tapestry of their impressions of how they mediate their time inside, goes at least some of the way in helping to explain why they enrol in formal courses of education, and also in a broader sense the personal lessons that prison has taught them. The movement of women between prisons plays an important role in this regard; the prison population embodies a transient, itinerant community. Prison transitions have huge implications for the individual prisoner learning journey, in formal, non-formal and informal terms. Educational life transitions in 'traditional', mainstream settings have increasingly influenced learning discourse over recent years (see Ecclectone et al, 2008). It is important that prisons are not excluded from the debate.

For women in prison there are numerous difficulties and hardships associated with adapting to closed confinement and the associated curtailing of individual liberties. At Freshfields, there are on the other hand a number of issues associated with adapting to the relative lack of restrictions and curtailments that are afforded in an open prison environment. Open prisons offer a far less segregated institutional experience (in many respects a move away from the prison discourse of hard confinement) where women are deprogrammed, to an extent, and learn to be free, which in its turn presents both challenges and tribulations.

Addicts and Bad Girls: The Remand Experience

It is almost impossible for a man who enjoys freedom with all its prerogatives, to realise what it means to be deprived of that freedom. (Capote, 2000: 143).

I begin with a caveat. Although this chapter is titled a *tales of Two Prisons*, in this section I will take a step back and consider women's impressions of their time held on remand. Remand prisons represent a challenging taster course of living life behind bars, representing a different sort of life experience and education to that found in Arkham and Freshfields.

Sandra, an Arkham inmate who was serving her first sentence, spoke of her remand experience at the beginning of her sentence. Her perception of prison existence was one

‘full of drug addicts and heaven knows what else’. Her own impressions were drawn ‘from the telly and *Bad Girls*’. For many imprisoned women fictional portrayals have informed their perceptions of what incarcerated life is like. Indeed many women I spoke to told me they expected prison to resemble *Bad Girls* (a salacious slice of drama cum soap-opera set in an imagined women’s prison). The remand reality proves to be a sobering one, an unforgiving script as the pains of imprisonment sink in. Sandra was in the minority of female inmates in that she was on her first sentence. She had navigated life unblighted by incarceration until her forties. At that stage of life she considered prison life to be at a permanent arms length (her conviction was for deliberately causing injury), and her first experience was very much a shock to her system. She pointedly said, ‘I don’t know how people can keep coming here. Believe me it’s no holiday camp’. First impressions can certainly be compelling.

The initial madness of being socialised into the remand world was described to me vividly by Sandra. The prison noises were extremely jarring on the nerves ‘key and chains were jangling every five minutes, it really did my head in’. Exacerbating this were the heightened decibels and aural strain, of cell life, ‘TVs and radios blaring in the cells, and headphones on full blast’. Another inmate, Shelley, a literature graduate, said her initial reaction on emerging into the remand world was to question ‘what circle of hell is this?’ (suggestive of Dante’s *Inferno*). A cause for concern is not only the presence of noise, but also the absence. Ruth, a Welsh resident at Freshfields, told me that ‘attention is given to the loud ones... It’s the quiet ones you need to watch out for... sometimes the ones crying out for help are the ones you can’t hear’.

The problems associated with remand imprisonment have been compounded by a marked spike in the population over recent years. Women on remand have constituted one of the fastest growing groups among the prison population there was a 78% increase in the number of women remanded into custody between 1996 and 2006, compared to a 15% increase for men (Ministry of Justice, 2007). Proportionately more women than men are remanded in custody (Corston 2007). As of June 2009, 1 in 5 of the female prison population were held on remand (Ministry of Justice, 2009a).

The statistics associated with women on remand make for disquieting/alarming reading. Nearly two-thirds suffer from depression, figures which are higher than those for sentenced prisoners (Singleton et al (1998). In 2007, 45% of prison suicides were committed by people held on remand (NOMS, 2008). As to the gender composition, outside of prison men are more likely to commit suicide than women but the position is reversed inside (Corston, 2007). Many incarcerated women have pre-existing vulnerabilities which questions the suitability of the harsh remand landscape, part of the penal apparatus designed by men for men (ibid).

An Anti-Educational Space

Remand prison in many respects resembles an anti-educational space. The quality of learning resources has been acknowledged as falling below acceptable standards. Research by Ruthven and Seward (2002) found that only 48% of prison libraries in jails holding remand prisoners stocked the standard legal texts which under Prison Service regulations they must provide. This was an indication that remand prisons were failing to equip prisoners with adequate learning resources as they prepared for trial. Women at Arkham and Freshfields indicated that learning facilities they experienced while on remand were decidedly substandard. Jessica summed the educational situation up as ‘atrocious’. Lisa, on her part, summarily dismissed the range of activities on offer during her time on remand, ‘there weren’t many courses. Fuck all basically’.

Ruth considered her remand occupation of cleaning and making tea one of the better prospects on offer. She reflects that she was ‘one of the lucky ones’. The fact that tea making and cleaning were considered ‘lucky’ occupations speaks volumes. What was the appeal then? ‘It was the best job because of the long hours’, Ruth explained, ‘you didn’t want free time. The cell was dirty and lonely. I would eat dinner in there alone. Working meant my brain switched off’. Laborious long hours were considered preferable to time dwelling.

As mentioned above women on remand are often in an emotionally fragile state. Upon immediate incarceration the thought of qualifications are way down the priority list, the uncertainty of the situation renders life difficult. Jessica explained to me that she had no goals, 'to get through the day was appealing'. Much of her time was spent composing legal letters focusing her energies on a successful trial and swift acquittal, a way out. She told me that this letter writing was 'in hope and diversion'. She didn't make plans for a long prison stay. Jessica, in common with many inmates, framed this remand time in the short term. A temporary state of temporality. It is unsurprising then that remand existence is something of an educational black hole: lack of inmate motivation coupled with lack of opportunities stifle any meaningful formal educational participation. As it was the outcome of Jessica's trial was a guilty verdict. The remand lessons learned were hard ones, she mused, 'I guess what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'.

The Arkham Journey: Upheaval and Turmoil, Mourning and Acceptance

A day in prison on which one does not weep is a day on which one's heart is hard, not a day on which one's heart is happy.

Oscar Wilde (1986) *De Profundis*

If remand existence encapsulates the short term pains of imprisonment, being in a closed prison such as Arkham represents the longer term ones. There is understandably an element of upheaval and emotional turmoil when women are shipped to closed prisons after the verdict has been read out and the sentence begins in earnest. For Sandra on her first prison sentence the move came as a considerable shock, her initial reaction was 'I told them I can't go, this is playing with my head' she explained 'you get settled then they want to up and move you'. She remonstrated, but ultimately had no choice. Women have little say in the matter, in many cases (as with Sandra) prisoners aren't given prior warning ahead of being transported, a factor which Arkham has been criticised for in inspection reports. Moving residence generally entails heightened stress (indeed one of the most stressful life events) this becomes markedly more acute when the move is to prison. Even for those used

to the prison circuit, the upheaval of being shipped constitutes an emotionally jarring business.

Women on their first night normally stay on the induction wing (which is never exclusively staffed by men) this doesn't always go to plan, however. On Sandra's first night she had to stay in the detox unit (despite the fact she had no addiction problems) because of overcrowding pressures elsewhere. This is not uncommon practice. Women on their first night in a new prison are often kept in inappropriate accommodation (although sometimes it is debateable what constitutes appropriate accommodation in the prison context).

The move into prison is challenging enough without extra added layers of complications piled on top. Population pressures often dictate how the prison deck is shuffled, compromising the rehabilitative and reforming aspects of prison life (for what they are worth). When Sandra moved into to her regular spot on A wing she told me inmates shouted greetings from their cells, 'hollering hello from behind the grates'. Her first introduction to her future landing neighbours took place in a segregated manner with locked doors providing a barrier to social interactions.

'When you first come here and look at it all you just want to cry', was the heartfelt opinion of Maria. She was serving time in Arkham for breaches pertaining to a drugs related offence committed some time ago. When Maria was on remand she was caught in the pre-trial bubble of not believing she would stay 'inside full time', that she would be acquitted. Remand was a state of unreality, 'the thing that kept me going was that there would be a way out and it would all end'. When the verdict was read out in court she 'couldn't believe it. I couldn't face up to it'. The sobering reality when Maria was moved to Arkham was that she would be in prison for the duration. 'I just sat on my bunk, it was like mourning for myself'. Adjusting to the beginning of a prison sentence can resemble the initial stages of a grieving process. Annabelle, explained her turmoil on arrival, 'when I got here I just went nuts. I was isolated and lonely... empty. I never thought of suicide in my life until I came here'. The problem was compounded in the initial stage by having to survive days without alcohol, 'it wasn't so bad during the day with my friends distracting me. At nights I was

depressed and lonely. It all hits home when you're slammed in'. Hayley, a Welsh woman serving time at Freshfields, spoke of adapting to cell life, 'telly becomes your best friend'; the light and sound of the cathode ray tube acting as a solitary comfort.

Although the start of the sentence, and facing the reality of a stretch in prison, is a shock to the system and emotionally wrenching, there is also a flip side. Nicole told me that when she was sentenced 'it was a relief to get the bad news'. There can be some consolation in having the veil of uncertainty removed, in knowing the fate in store. Like a serious illness there can be a measure of relief in hearing the bad news and knowing what has to be faced. The greatest fear can be that of the unknown (Defoe, 2001). Maria's feelings of 'being cut up' when she came to Arkham gave way to a stage of reluctant acceptance 'there is no way out... all you can do is count the days off'. The process is draining physically, mentally and financially: 'all you can do is concentrate on getting through the next minute, the next hour, the next day', Maria reflected. Focused baby steps get women through the duration of the sentence.

It is common for women at Freshfields and Arkham to subscribe to the, 'keep your head down', philosophy to doing time (there will be more on this later). In the cells of Arkham and dormitories of Freshfields I saw calendars with the dates ticked off day by day. Motivational messages are often marked on, 'half way there!!!' one read underlined in bold red. Such small things keep inmates pressing on through the prison marathon.

In Arkham, where women are refugees from the outside world, the only escape route is through patience and the passing of time. Heather told me about the birds of prey they kept at her previous prison, 'the girls used to joke about training them to fly in hacksaws'. Women in prison have figuratively had their wings clipped, humour and camaraderie is one way they get through the days 'doing bird'.

The longer term pains of imprisonment are often compounded by the difficulty of maintaining family ties throughout the sentence. This is often a primary concern for women as they are transported. One of Sandra's first considerations at the outset was, 'I didn't want

my mum traipsing all the way down to Arkham'. The Social Exclusion Unit (2002) report that family contact forms an essential part of successful re-integration. Distance plays a key role; women are on average further from family and home than men during their imprisonment (Prison Reform Trust, 2009).

Arkham does not score well in terms of facilitating contact between inmates and their families. New inductees to the prison are not always offered a phone call on arrival. Inmates throughout the prison are subject to a phone monopoly, although tariffs have been reduced following a successful super complaint to Ofcom, they are nevertheless forced to pay rates considerably higher than standard national call charges (Prison Reform Trust, 2009). Such economic exploitation profits at the expense of some of the poorest in society, a high proportion of meagre prison wages is often spent on phone calls to friends and family. Maintaining the family link while in prison is vital, especially for incarcerated women:

The needs of women are different from those of men in prison. Most women still try to manage their families, men simply leave the worry of the family to the outside.
(Freshfields member of staff)

It is important to remember the two way implications of prison communication, how it affects family not just inmates, especially so where distance from home is great. Megan Comfort (2003) analysed the effects of secondary prisonisation, the consequences of incarceration on the inmates' families, in her research on the iconic San Quentin prison in California. The majority of women in prison in England and Wales are mothers, and as such thousands of children who have parents imprisoned are vicariously punished by the criminal justice system each year. Maria explained the difficulties involved in disclosing going to prison to her young daughter, 'I told her mum has to go away because of her naughty medicine'. Codd (2008) notes that this is a hitherto under-researched area, while there is much work offering a critical perspective on prisons in the UK, families, partners and children (the 'little people's voices') who reap acute effects of imprisonment by proxy tend to be marginalised and overlooked. To place this in statistical perspective, in 2006, more children were affected by the imprisonment of a parent than by divorce in the family (Prison

Reform Trust, 2007). During their time at school 7% of children experience their father's imprisonment (DfES, 2003). This in turn is linked to a cycle of deprivation and offending, with 65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

Separation from family and friends can also be perceived as a double edged sword. Comfort's (2007) San Quentin research suggests that some women on the outside benefit from the incarceration of their partners; it can also be true that imprisoned women benefit from being separated from their partners. Many women are in prison because of the men in their lives (Corston, 2009). Jenna used to be in the pub trade before being jailed for conspiracy. She protested her innocence to me, claiming she was ignorant of her husband's actions: 'they said you must know what's what, you're married to him. Yeah, but he was having affairs left and right and I didn't know about that'. Arkham can function as a sabbatical from bad relationships. For some women prison offers something of an escape, Claire told me about an abusive partner 'I feel safer on the inside than on the out'.

The Family Dimension

In times of emotional emergencies the first port of call of women in prison is each other. In some respects the closed prison population equates to one big institutionalised family. In the absence of family outside, the women inside become a form of surrogate. Annabelle explained, 'when you're in prison and got no one your friends become your family, a replacement for what you can't have'. The prison family plays an important role in supporting and motivating in educational terms (especially on bad news days). Students inside provide mutual help and encouragement (Annabelle: 'we're here to help each other. Pick each other up when we're down'), be it in the classroom or on the wing, each of the concentric circles of prison education. Women teach each other literacy (through the 'Toe by Toe' programme which will feature in Chapter VII *The Core of Prison Education*), and help with distance learning, bouncing ideas around, making tea, and through just providing some peace and quiet. Against this, like any family, or other close quarter relationships, there can also be confrontation and disruption. Julia said 'I'm pissed off by drama queens. Some of the

girls cry when they're not the centre of attention. It's just an attention thing'. Elements of tension from classrooms of childhood are replicated in prison.

Prisonisation/Socialisation/Institutionalisation

Change is rare in prison – sameness is the law. The same people with the same crime, the same coloured clothes with the same stripe, the same brown-suited guards with the same orders, the same food on the same day, the same disciplinary slips with the same (guilty) verdicts, the same bed in the same cell night after night after night.

Anonymous Prison Visitor, 1971

Every single thing that happens
is ordained from above
- When you get up, when you go to
bed, when you start work, when you
stop, when you eat, have a bath,
write a letter, see a visitor,
everything. All that matters is you
do what you're told when you're
told. I was put inside for being
irresponsible in the eyes of society –
and put into the most
irresponsible way of life I've ever
led.

Ron G. (26) [cited in Parker, 1973:46].

The internal Arkham prison clock regulates time, space and movement. As mentioned above women are routinised as to when they get up and go to bed, when they eat and when they move around the prison (although rules are amended slightly as women are rewarded with more 'enchanted' status). Václav Havel the first President of the Czech Republic (1993–2003) described the processes of prisonisation thus:

There are plenty of worries here all the time and though they may seem trivial to the normal world, they are not at all trivial in the prison concept. In fact, you are always having to chase after something, hunt for something, keep an eye on something, hold your ground against something. It's constant strain on the nerves, someone is

always twanging on them, exacerbated by the fact that in many important instances you cannot behave authentically and must keep your real thoughts to yourself.

(Havel, cited in Burnside and Faulkner, 2004:2)

Within the intramural existence of the closed prison world, where everything is tightly controlled, things which may seem like trivialities when compared with the outside world are often exacerbated (jarring the nerves). As Havel suggests day to day prisonisation/socialisation presents numerous challenges to individuals in terms of maintaining their sense of authentic self. Time and space take on a unique quality inside (as Havel alludes). Theresa (in Arkham) commented, 'time in here is different, sometimes it drags, sometimes it goes by quicker'. This bears resemblance to Serge's writings on prison temporality: 'there are swift hours and very long seconds. Past time is void. There is no chronology of events to mark it; eternal duration no longer exists' (Serge, 1977: 57). This suggests parallels with Barbara Adam's (1990, 2004) work on the social construction of time. Absolute custody serves as a closed off socially constructed sphere where reality and temporality take on an entirely different conception to the outside. As such education, what it means, how it is viewed, and the motives for undertaking, take on very different aspect in the confines of closed prisons (such as Arkham) compared with wider society.

Prison time is not a unique commodity; it means different things to different people. Francis was keen to keep busy to avoid feeling too reflective, bored or depressed. Activity becomes a means of avoiding too much introspection. In addition to her time in the education department she craves extra-curricula mental stimulation. Other women took the opposite approach and adopt the approach of *slowing down*. Jessica (who was 23) believed she had grown up and matured during her time in prison. When on the outside she was living a very hectic lifestyle, 'drinking constantly, rushing around and never standing still'. Her life tempo changed due to enforced circumstances, 'I've learned to slow down in prison'. She explained that young women inside learn lessons and mature, an education of self realisation of sorts. Jessica adapted to a slower pace of life, whereas she needed constant stimulation on the outside 'I'm not going to be rushing around anymore'.

After arriving at Arkham, Jessica accepted she was in prison for the long term and decided to do something constructive, making the worst of a bad incarceration. Education becomes an essential means of navigating the sentence and keeping busy. Sonia mirrored these sentiments, it is 'very important to keep your mind occupied in prison or you will go insane'. Clearly education can play a vitally important role in terms of the state of mind and passing the time then. Avoiding boredom in prison is essential, as Francis said 'when most of the women here talk about boredom they really mean depression' symptomatic of a broader malaise. As far as she was concerned though boredom is 'a thing in the mind', something which you must counter by being active, or as active as you can be in closed prison, to overcome 'you can use your time in a constructive way or beat yourself up about it'. Women can depend on education in a way they would not on the outside.

According to Frances the hardest aspect of prison life, aside from being away from her family, is coping with loss of freedom. 'On the outside', she says, I 'lived by choices and decisions, I was in authority... in here my only decisions are what to wear, what to eat, what to watch on TV. There's nothing else'. Frances reflected that living by someone else's rules bothered her at first 'but then I felt acceptance. You might call it being institutionalised...' Her solution has been to step back and 'accept it... it makes time go easier'. 'Some girls', she explained, 'can't accept it... the ones always in trouble'. Her attitude is that 'it's no use. You can't fight it. I'm not defeatist, just realistic. This is as good as it gets'.

As for Claire, she was 'a rebel for the first year'. Aspects of prison life irritated her greatly; she is naturally disinclined to authority having been educated at a school run by draconian nuns in South Africa. After a time at Arkham Claire started to 'calm down'. 'The confrontational attitude didn't get me anywhere' she explained.

Lisa, at Arkham, addressed the theme of dependency, 'in here everything's done for you. You take it all for granted, you don't worry about bills, all you have to pay is £1 a week for telly'. She confessed that the prospect of release for her was 'scary... it's back to the reality world'. Lisa continued, 'I'm used to my set routine, I'll find it hard adapting to the outside

world and my kids'. Women in prison are, to a degree, treated like children. When they are released they have the challenge of having to learn the way back to adulthood.

There were many such stories of women in Arkham initially resisting the culture shock of prison rules, but then, over time coming to accept them. 'Everything's there on a plate', Alex told me, 'you're fed three times a day, your washing's done. You don't have to do anything or think for yourself. My cell is safe and pure'. Such comments succinctly illustrate the effects of taught helplessness and prisonisation (in both a physical and mental sense). Women in Arkham don't have to decide when to get up, when to move and where to move. Life inside provides structure that many women lacked on the outside where stories of fractured and chaotic lives were commonplace. 'It's quite nice to have a routine', Georgina said of life in Arkham, 'getting up early and early to bed. The food's not so good though'. That structure, however, comes at a big price, drilling inmates into losing responsibility for their own actions. Hayley, who was serving time in Freshfields, looked back at the 'awful pettiness' of the closed prison circuit, 'you conform and learn to shut up. You lose a bit of personality'. Given time, 'the routine becomes safe to the point you almost want it'. Closed prison exerts complex dimensions of ideological control over the individual where initial resistance against authority can give way to compliance and dependence sustaining prison routines and objectives. Prison madness almost becomes the norm. In Nabakov's *Invitation to a Beheading* rule number two of the prison was 'prisoner's meekness is a prison's pride' (2001: 42). Although taken from a work of fiction, this quote illuminates how certain aspects of prison performance are founded on the humility/servility of inmates.

Arkham shares certain similarities with Goffman's (1991) *Total Institution* model (see Chapter III *Perspectives on Prison Education* for a fuller account). At Arkham, and indeed other closed prisons, inmates are trapped within the 'kept' sub-culture whereby they are 'taught helplessness' (Wilson and O'Sullivan, 1994). Arkham also displays typical total institution visual iconography in abundance: the overt security measures, locks and keys, large gates mounted with razor wire and cameras perched high. Arkham also fits the mental image of the total institution, the internal regulation of individuals (shades too of Foucault). The very terminology of *total institution* 'conjugates up an image in which there is no place to

hide' (Davidson, 1995:9), in both a physical and mental sense. Graham (Arkham's Deputy Education Manager) compared prison life to a care home where he was formerly employed, 'the only difference between the two is the bars on the windows'. Both share the total institution trait of fostering dependency.

Goffman (1991) stressed the ways in which systems of classification are used to label and control individuals. The Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme, an explicit system of rewards and punishments, underpins the fabric of the total institution. Accommodation at Arkham is subject to a hierarchy of categorisation, inmates live in single cells spread over four wings: A,B,C and D. There are three categories of inmate: basic, standard and enhanced. Behaviour deemed constructive and compliant is rewarded with being promoted up a grade, behaviour viewed as disruptive results in relegated rank. The latter works on a 'three strikes and you're downgraded principle'. Two negative comments result in 'red entries' (or 'red writing') on personal records, a third breach leads to a downgrade. The use of red as the colour of discipline suggests parallels with the negative connotations of red ink at school, the educational scarlet letter used to mark individuals as failing or deviant. The downgrade to basic status results in women being placed on a 'behaviour contract' (the choice of words here is very typical of the total institution lexicon). Inmates in this situation lose their in cell television and have reduced association time. Such measures are aimed at making evenings more austere and less pleasant.

While deviancy is punished, compliance is rewarded with accommodation upgrades. As women navigate the duration of their sentence they are moved to better quarters if they conform. Arkham's rules and display model inmate behaviour, illustrating the system of rewards and incentives underpinning the governance of total institutions. C Wing is a general wing, part of which, C4, is known as 'the penthouse' by inmates due to its comparative luxury. Women who achieve 'special enhanced' status qualify for the waiting list for C4 (when I visited there were 80 places available with a waiting list of around two dozen). There are more privileges on offer (including use of a kettle); penthouse women are subject to fewer restrictions and lockup hours. Heather commented on her cell in the *penthouse*, 'I've made it a home with plants and pictures'. Prison accommodation has

moved on she reflected, a marked improvement compared to when she was serving time in closed prisons in the 1980s, 'everything used to be screwed down'.

Heather told me 'good girls go to the penthouse, bad girls don't'. Compared to this women in other wings are kept under comparatively more stringent conditions. In the most recent inspection report Arkham was roundly criticised for keeping many inmates in lock up for an excessive amount of daily hours, especially during their initial time at the prison. A dearth of weekend activity was also highlighted. The overall quality of the living environment was considered to be somewhat chequered.

D Wing offers a further system of privileges closer to release. Aesthetically the block resembles a hastily assembled 3 story pre-fabricated building, and serves as a resettlement unit. It has a somewhat flimsy look compared to the solid brick foundations of the other wings. The wing houses 40 'enhanced prisoners' in single cell occupancy each complete with bathroom en-suite and shower facility. Some of the women residing in this block are on work or study duty within the prison, others, around half, work outside on day release. Women living here are designated further freedoms. Lisa explained 'we don't get locked up in resettlement we have our own key; we have to be in by 11', which sounded somewhat like a teenage curfew. Resettlement prisoners navigate themselves around Arkham with 'green cards', effectively these act as a prison passport which women flash to get past internal border checks (there will be more on the internal micro journey and prison timetable later in the chapter).

It is questionable to what extent the grip of the total institution is loosened on the resettlement wing. Although inmates hold the keys literally, to what extent do they hold them metaphorically? Women have fewer restrictions over their movement and when to get up and go to bed. Does this alter the 'kept' status to any great extent? Ultimately Arkham is still a segregated community with a sliding scale of rewards based on prisoner compliance. The security paradigm echoes loudly throughout each of the wings.

Freshfields: 'Prison is not just about bars'

Attention will now shift to a very different institutional context, the macro prison journey from closed to open conditions, adapting to more freedom. None of the prisoners who arrive at Freshfields have come direct from courts, all have recent lived experience of closed conditions; the under lock and key model of absolute custody. Women's prisons are distinct from men's prison in that there are no alphabetised A, B and C prison categories, just straightforward bi-polar, open and closed demarcation. Are the differences of doing time in open and closed conditions quite so black and white? How open is open? In the previous methods chapter the striking contrast between the visual grammar of the two prisons was examined. Arlene, Freshfields' Head of Learning and Interventions, roundly condemned the treatment of inmates at the hands of the closed prison estate. Mirroring some of the comments made concerning institutionalisation above, she complained that women 'don't make decisions, everything is ordered and structured. They lose their sense of personal responsibility'. The system takes something away as opposed to rehabilitating. Arlene recognises 'people have been used to a confined space find it difficult to settle in [at Freshfields]'. The tribulations of adapting to a such a different structural set up is very evident, Freshfields as a prison without bars in certain respects shares much in common with non-penological total institutions [see, for example, Julius Roth's (1963) ethnography of a tuberculosis hospital].

Freshfields offers a more expansive space and less of the disciplinary *modus operandi* associated with a closed prison such as Arkham, there are 'no bars, locks on the gates, or razor wire' (Arlene). Uniformed prison officers are not as visibly evident. Open establishments, for both men and women, serve as an intermediary stage before release, where inmates can wipe the prison dust from their feet. Adapting to a higher level of freedom can be a problem though. The transition is not made easier in that women are frequently shipped to Freshfields without prior notice. Open prison marks a big change and women should be acquainted with the fact beforehand. Particularly as many residents at Freshfields' have been moved further away from family and support groups. Recent inspection reports have criticised the lack of notice women are often given prior to the

move, and also the inappropriate use of secure vans by which women are transported to the prison. For new arrivals such secure vans are a final reminder of the closed prison world they leave behind.

Freshfields' arrival and Accommodation

The main accommodation at Freshfields is shared, aside from some single rooms for 'lifers'. Many stay in the former servant quarters. Inspection Reports noted that while the overall quality of living accommodation was deemed satisfactory 'some rooms remained cramped', and overall some residential areas were considered to be guilty of being less well maintained and looked after than public areas. The Freshfields dormitories, with posters on the walls together with pictures of family and friends, share more in common with typical shared rooms in university halls of residence than the usual brand of prison accommodation.

Women are 'well supported on arrival' according to inspection reports. Many find it a difficult transition though. The settling in pains of adjustment of the early days at Freshfields were described by Kelly. She explained over a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit, 'when you first come you almost think it's a downgrade, having to be sharing a room'. A number of women complained about sharing a room and associated lack of private space, along with restrictive study space. Kelly confessed, 'I almost wished I was back in the first week'. In the evenings not being told what to do, or locked in the cell early, 'I was so bored, I didn't know what to do with my time'. Kelly had choice restored to her and was initially unsure what to do with it. After being at Freshfields for a time you 'you start to think for yourself and do things for yourself. You start to become human again'. Open prisons teach residents to be more self-reliant, to be able cope more and think for themselves more. To an extent women at Freshfields are deprogrammed and deregulated, unlearning the lessons of closed conditions. In some respects the transition to Freshfields, adapting to more freedom, mirrors the experience of women who are released direct from prison to the outside world.

When I first came here, a year ago, I was amazed. I'd seen the house on the telly before, but when I actually came here, I couldn't believe it – it was so beautiful. I was walking around, looking at every little thing. I love the window with all the star signs in it. But then I began to shut off. You have to do that when you're first here to keep your privacy. Some end up doing it all the time. The only space that's a little private is your room, but you share that. So you end up going inside yourself. And you have to do it because you can't keep thinking about the outside world. You'd go mad if you did. You can't sort anything out from in here. If you've got problems outside, it's best to leave them there. Some women spend all their time worrying about what their bloke's doing: Who's he with? Who's he seeing? You can't deal with all that. It will all be waiting for you when you get out anyway. You have to forget it for the time being and keep your energies for in here. You find a bit of this place and try to make it your own. I'm not saying I don't think about home. I think about it all the time: Part of my mind is always somewhere else, going on ahead.

(Luna, Freshfields resident)

Clearly Freshfields presents women with more space and time to think and feel, which can be emotionally challenging.

Fear of Rule Breaking

Women coming to Freshfields often have some difficulty in adjusting to a relative lack of rules. Arlene (the Head of Learning) was highly critical of the system of regulations underpinning the closed prison network:

...when women come here they're terrified of making mistakes and breaking rules and the repercussions. They're used to a very disciplined approach. On the first night women worry because there's no member of staff telling them what to do...

She vividly described the impact disciplinary regimes have on mind and body. 'Some women when they come here don't want to make eye contact. They've been drilled so they'll say yes to anything. We can't exploit that'. There are shades of Foucault (1999) here, prison enforces a process of normalisation, exerting discipline over body and soul. Arlene's verdict was that there's something fundamentally wrong with the system. 'Women are worried about breaking rules. To make a mistake is human'. It is part of human nature to make mistakes. Making mistakes helps us improve and learn about ourselves. 'The system

generates a blame culture’ Arlene claims. The closed prison world, so it would seem, operates a blame game.

Women at Freshfields must get used to recalibrating to a different kind of rule structure. Not all of them are happy with the change in culture, at least at first. Pam a lifer at Freshfields, told me ‘It’s like walking on eggshells’. She found elements of the regime to be ‘petty and strict’ as far as rules are concerned. ‘You get punished for breaking relatively minor rules’, she complained ‘missed appointments go on your record’. This problem stems from residents having to adapt to self-responsibility, taking control over timekeeping and where to be. What annoys Pam is perceived instances of double standards. Whereas ‘it’s okay for a psychologist to cancel an appointment “due to unforeseen circumstances”...’ the same does not apply when she misses an appointment. ‘I should write a letter telling him to fuck off and that I won’t be able to attend due to “unforeseen circumstances”...’

Different Forms of Prison

Arlene (Head of Learning) doesn’t see the need for excessive prison discipline, as deprivation of liberty is punishment enough. ‘No part of life is your own. That’s a personal prison. Splitting from family. That’s prison’. Separation from family and deprivation of liberty are harsh enough to contend with without added, bolted on punishments. This links with the prison *as* punishment, not *for* punishment, philosophy as outlined in the earlier chapter on purposes of imprisonment. Going to Freshfields can be something of a Catch 22 scenario, the benefits offered in terms of greater freedoms are mitigated against the fact that many of the women are moved further from home than before. Pam told me, ‘I’m lucky to have family support. 85% of lifers lose contact with their family’. There are number of ways Freshfields encourages family contact to combat the distance issues, the prison for example accepts incoming telephone calls for residents. This contrasts markedly to the rest of the prison estate, I mentioned earlier in the chapter how women in Arkham (often with little money) are forced to pay above normal phone rates. Later on in the chapter there will be a discussion on further ways Freshfields stimulates links between residents and families,

through initiatives such as family learning and *Storybook Mums* (a project enabling parents inside to record bedtime time stories for their children).

Pam, who had problems with rules at Freshfields, also spoke of the some of the tribulations involved in adapting to other freedoms open conditions have to offer after long term confinement in closed regimes. Especially outside of the prison. She had just started day release town visits when I met her (part of the staged Freshfields approach building towards the end of a sentence) and had recently had a haircut at an outside salon (as opposed to prison salon), taking pride in her fashionably bobbed hair. Pam was very pleased with the result, but also found the pace of town centre life hectic and awkward to acclimatise to. 'Freedom is knacker', she told me, 'I went to buy a bra but there's too much choice'. The quantity of options on the outside can be overwhelming after being regimented/calibrated to the rigid structure of prison life. Being outside also brings to the fore everyday humorous incidents; Pam spoke of buying handfuls of cosmetics from a market stall, stock piling them for the return to Freshfields. 'A woman asked me "why are you buying so many? Can't you buy them where you're from?" I laughed. I didn't have the heart to tell her I'm a lifer'. In summary, first contact with town life proved to be 'stressful but enjoyable'.

Increased autonomy brings complications. Sartre famously remarked that humankind is condemned to freedom (2007); liberty itself can be a form of incarceration. The Danish existentialist philosopher Kierkegaard (2003) wrote extensively about the angst/tribulations of the individual self and its (often troublesome) journey to attain authentic selfhood. Dorothy Rowe (2003) has written extensively about prisons of the mind. In summary there are different forms of prisons, not all are physical and built of bars or bricks.

Terminology and Labels

At Freshfields, Arlene changed her title from the 'Head of Learning and Skills' to the Head of Learning and 'Interventions'. This was done on the basis that the area of 'skills' was considered to be too narrow and that 'interventions' offer a broader base. Arlene had somewhat vitriolic views on other aspects of learning discourse, 'I hate the word

“education”, if I had my way I would ban it’. The term ‘education’ was considered to be imbued with negative implications, and considered counter-productive, even potentially damaging for the women in the prison system. Many have past experiences of ‘hell in the classroom’. In Arlene’s view ‘some women run a mile when they hear the word “education”’. In an ideal type world she would like to see a moratorium on the word, with *education* expunged from the prison lexicon.

As an institution Freshfields attempts to distance itself from some of the heavy labelling tendencies of absolute custody. The prison brands itself as offering a move towards an anti-prison discourse. Women held there are called ‘residents’ to avoid the stigma of the term ‘inmate’ with the associated *kept* connotations. Karen (the Education Manager) commented on how ‘women become settled in closed regimes. They become used to being inmates’. The manner in which women in prison develop their sense of selfhood through the judgments of others resonates with Cooley’s concept of *looking glass self* (1902). The resident label is aimed at combating the psychology of prisonisation (yet inevitably becomes another version, albeit intended as more positive, of the looking glass self).

A further aim is also to reinforce that because they are resident it is their home (as opposed to prison) and they are expected to contribute to the upkeep in a positive manner, ‘it’s not a hotel’ Arlene explained. Freshfields women are expected to contribute towards their incarceration and the maintenance of the wider institution. The hands on labour of cooking, cleaning and gardening for the most part is done by the residents. What happens when women are resistant to play this role? Such an episode is related in the vocational chapter, when Sandra, a new Freshfields inductee was reluctant to be placed on gardening detail. There is a hierarchy as to the types of activity women are happy to do and those they regard as drudgery (or bordering on it). ‘Everyone has their role to play’ (Arlene the Head of Learning). All women are expected to assume a function (suggestive of Durkheim and organic solidarity). Are women there to help the institution or is the institution there to help them?

Use of the term ‘resident’ has generated a degree of controversy outside of the Freshfields. There had been some media indignation over such labelling, with the *Daily Mail* finding offensive the idea of referring to convicted felons as residents. This was cited by the paper as another pernicious example of creeping political correctness.

Freshfields styles itself as breaking away from labelling women with the deviant, inmate tag with its pre-packaged negative implications and hints of self fulfilling prophecy. Labelling theorists (Becker, 1997; Lemert, 1967) argue it is the application of rules that frame and create *the deviant* as opposed to being a product of individual biology or psychology. An act only becomes deviant when others perceive and label it to be so.

Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “offender”. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied: deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.

(Becker, 1963:9)

Is it possible then to un-label the deviant then? As Arlene argues ‘education’ as well as ‘inmate’ each have the potential for negative labelling, this is especially true when the terms are coupled, ‘inmate education’, which suggests learning for deviants. The extent to which women inside resist or conform to labelling will be considered in subsequent chapters. Is ‘resident’ just another typology of labelling and categorisation reducing the capacity for individual choice?

Inmates or residents? To what extent does the terminology matter? Does a name really make a difference, does language alter function? Does calling a prisoner ‘resident’ make much difference in the scheme of things? Some criticise the negative labelling connotations of ‘inmate’, others argue that people in prison, regardless of institution, open or closed, are prisoners full stop. One should not ignore or pretend that these women are not prisoners, to do so is tantamount to moral manipulation, painting a false picture of the prison reality. Pat Carlen (2002) asserts that prison always remains prison, and as such attempting to re-brand prisoners (who are housed involuntarily) could be viewed as a distortion of facts, masking the true state of power relations.

Prison Micro Journeys

The previous discussion (above) primarily centred on the prison macro journey, women's experiences of the external transitions between prisons. Serving out a sentence, or part of a sentence, at a closed prison (such as Arkham) entails a culture shock which often gives way to institutionalisation or prisonisation. The women that are moved to Freshfields experience a counter shock to the system in terms of seemingly greater liberty and personal responsibility, the question can be posed as to whether this de-institutionalisation is institutionalisation operating under the guise of a different set of imperatives?

Attention will now shift to the 'micro journey', focusing upon internal as opposed to external movement. This will involve a tour of the different learning hot spots located in Arkham and Freshfields, illustrating the difference in educational cultures. Movement and restrictions of movement play a large part in defining the character of learning. A number of themes relating to the core prison curriculum will be addressed, alongside creative and vocational skills, which will be elucidated in more detail in subsequent empirical chapters.

Breakfast Rituals

Breakfast rituals, or lack of them, make for a sharply contrasting start to the prison day in Arkham and Freshfields. Women in Arkham eat their cereal in the isolation of their cell (which they are handed the night before) with only a screen separating the toilet, and wait to be unlocked in the morning. The routine at the start of the day is starkly different in Freshfields. More autonomy is placed on residents, it is their own responsibility to wake themselves up, and they do not wait to be escorted out of their rooms. Unlike Arkham breakfast is served (between half past seven and quarter past eight) canteen style, with a choice of cereals, grapefruit, toast and porridge. Open prisons can at least imbue the old saying 'doing porridge' with some contemporary relevance. Residents sign themselves in at breakfast (at lunch and dinner time residents sign in again; the process of roll checks is firmly embedded into dining routines). This also means that women in Freshfields have a communal breakfast experience, chatting to each other over cereal and toast. Freshfields

breakfast entails some personal responsibility (as mentioned it is left to residents to turn up and sign in) and is social not solitary. The dual personalities of open and closed regimes, how time and space is managed, is reflected through the variance in breakfast routines, which is at the heart of what make the two prisons contrast so vividly. The discussion surrounding prison food rituals is continued in Appendix VI.

The Educational Micro Journey

The morning micro journey to the education department entails some personal responsibility at Freshfields but very little at Arkham. As a closed prison women at Arkham are locked and unlocked at regulated set times. Inmates' wings are segregated from the education department, the journey is interrupted staccato style, locked cells, doors and gates present a physical barrier. Women are unlocked by officers and moved along during the period of 'free flow' (this procedure says a lot about power relations). When inmates arrive at the education department (with its garish radioactive green facade) they are registered as they enter by officers, there is a marked contrast to Freshfield's 'sign yourself in' approach. The set up resembles a customs queue; the process can be somewhat cumbersome. Women have to wait outside regardless of the weather conditions.

At Arkham women suffer the routine ignominy of being escorted through hard rain and kept waiting longer than necessary outside of the education department, often turning up to education dripping. Education staff frequently find themselves having to service emotional as well as educational needs. When it rains and women arrive at the education department wet through and upset it is left to the teaching staff to pick up the pieces. It is not uncommon for Mara, the Education Manager, to provide early morning comfort, a towel and change of clothes. Rolls and rolls of toilet paper are kept in the staffroom, supplies for the teary women. 'We save a fortune in tissues', Mara explains. She jokingly (and affectionately?) refers to 'the girls' as 'drama queens'.

Mara explains that the first half hour of the morning is given over to ‘settling the girls down’, women are allowed to talk amongst themselves and unwind. After the upheaval from moving from their cells to the classroom it takes a while for the transition to an educational or learning mindset to take place. This marks the first social interaction of the day for the women in Arkham, the first opportunity they have had to get together in the mornings, a side effect of breakfasting in isolation.

The segregated, under lock and key, nature of Arkham leads to a number of educational disruptions. The disciplined and rehabilitative sides of prison life do not always sit well together. There are no guarantees students will turn up, the whole of Arkham can be on lock down without prior warning. On other occasions women who are supposed to turn up seemingly go missing (being in a prison does not mean foolproof surveillance; inmates seem to be mysteriously absent quite regularly). This makes for a testing environment in which to plan lessons, learning considerations are not at the forefront in the running of closed prisons and frequently seem more of an afterthought. Assuming students do indeed turn up at the education block, they are locked in for the morning/afternoon session. Not quite chained to their desks but not altogether far off.

Most Freshfields women have a short walk from their dormitories to the education department. There are no barriers in terms of locked doors, no reliance on escorts from uniformed staff to be transported; there is a less overt security presence. Educational practices are not thwarted by lockdowns. Classrooms are situated adjacent to the former servants’ quarters, through long and winding corridors, on the upper floors of the site. The absence of a lift for those with limited mobility has been criticised by Prison Inspectors for restricting access. Although Freshfields is less segregated than Arkham, stair issues persist. While education may possess some transcendental qualities, it cannot necessarily overcome every day, tangible obstacles such as flights of stairs.

The staffroom is the social hub of both education departments; the place to go for canvassing the candid opinions of tutors. The staffrooms at Arkham and Freshfields share similar characteristics: both have contemporary furniture with a ubiquitous IKEA light wood

effect, both have a large collection of cups stained with tea/coffee (with frequent disputes over whose turn it is to wash up) accompanied with packets of chocolate digestives, both rooms strain under the collective weight of paper and everyday educational admin along with row upon row of Lever arch files. At Freshfields the centrepiece is a round coffee table circled by easy chairs, covered with glossy magazines insinuating revelations about famous, infamous and mainly thin women. The world of glamour voyeurism is a far cry from prison realities. Sharp objects are kept out of reach, with knives and scissors stored in locked cabinet with visible glass front.

The walls of education departments are one of the places where the personalities of prisoners come through the strongest. At Arkham and Freshfields examples of educational iconography, created by inmates, adorned the corridors: pictures, poetry, prose, thank you letters and cards ('thanks for believing in me'). On prominent display at Arkham was a sombre portrait of a courtroom scene with a defendant, head bowed and dejected. The piece was titled 'my trial, my funeral'. Personal stories and everyday tragedies are displayed on the walls.

There is a divide between classrooms types and layouts at the two prisons. At Arkham students studying basic skills sat around long, hard edged rectangular tables, with scarred and graffitied surfaces, arranged in a compact, tightly knit formation. Compared to this Freshfields utilised small circular tables spread around the physical space of the room, a set up encouraging small learning groups. Each pod allowed for a maximum of four students. This facilitated small group discussion as well as one to one assistance from the tutor. The 'traditional' teacher-centred classroom and the 'student-centred' classroom are very different both in philosophy and in application.

In terms of IT, Arkham had a collection of dated and chunky monitors; computers ambled along with a sluggish performance. By way of comparison Freshfields had a relatively modern computer suite, equipped with lithe and shiny, modern flat screen PCs fixed in rows on birch effect tables facing the front of the room (reminiscent of IT suites at some universities). At Arkham computers were set around the perimeter of the room in a

panoptical arrangement, whereby inmates would sit with their back to the tutor. Room layout allowed for easy surveillance, a theme which will be explored in the following chapter.

The most conspicuous element of prison IT is what both prisons lack, namely internet access. Without the modern ubiquity of the internet computing becomes anachronistic, reduced to a superficial imitation, in some respects a form of ersatz education. The twenty first century dot com society hangs on the internet for financial and personal purposes, as such, regulated internet access would aid prisoners in terms of professional development as well as in maintaining valuable family contact. Women at Arkham and Freshfields are barred from modern forms of cultural capital such as virtual social networking; they are excluded from the twittering classes. In 2009 Lord Carter unveiled his blueprint for Britain's digital future, women inside, however, are cast aside from the brave new technological world and rendered even more socially marginalised.

Matt, a tutor at Arkham, voiced the opinion that the 'education department is not like prison', a space, at least to some degree, exempt from the routine disciplined imperatives of closed prison. In some respects it represents the least like prison space in Arkham. After women have been registered, and accounted for, the officers leave, which makes it one of the few areas where uniformed staff are conspicuous by their absence (they are on call if any situations arise). However, the view offered by the window grille of the sun glinting on razor wire belies the idea that the education offers an escape from regular closed prison life. The prison milieu is unavoidable. It does not take long for the image of education to be tarnished at Arkham. The space is physically and mentally stifling. In comparison, the views of rolling acres visible through the open windows of Freshfields allow the imagination to wander.

Prison Libraries

The libraries at both Arkham and Freshfields had prominent posters advertising the Richard and Judy book club on the doors (presumably on the basis this would encourage more customers) and stocked the range of books. This suggests that the empire of bibliographic commerce (typically a staple of large, retail book chains, on-line dealers) and marketing has found its way into prisons. In itself this is noteworthy given the widely recognised literacy problems amongst prisoners (Prison Reform Trust, 2009).

Kathleen, the librarian at Freshfields explained to me ‘We’ve moved on from the days of Catherine Cookson’. That being said a range of Mills and Boon romance titles proved to be conspicuous, especially at Arkham. One of the inmates, Sonia, told me that these were her favourite books, ‘I want life to have a happy ending’. This was poignant given her own incarcerated circumstances, her own life having a less than cheerful ring to it. In terms of numbers, true crime books were also among the most conspicuously stocked genres available at the two prisons, with Freshfields offering a display of well thumbed biographies of Harold Shipman, the Yorkshire Ripper and other notorious serial killers. There was something of a genre clash between murder and romance, a curious mixture of grim reality and escapist fantasy. The footballer biographies and Andy McNab style war fiction, which dominate men’s prison libraries, were noticeably absent at Arkham and Freshfields.

In addition the libraries presented a quiet-ish space where inmates can read newspapers, to keep abreast of current affairs or celebrity gossip. A fairly wide range was available at Freshfields, including the *New Nation* self-marketed as ‘Britain’s number one black newspaper’. The *South Wales Echo* was available, demonstrating a means for Welsh women to maintain some cultural contact with their home community in trying circumstances.

The library at Freshfields remains in its original location, situated in a large room off the great hall, lined on two sides with imposing mahogany book shelves. A large ornate mirror is mounted above a fireplace. The space has very much retained the country estate aesthetic. At Arkham the library is located within the confines of the education department and is

somewhere women can seek some refuge and quiet, but the opening hours are not overly helpful, much to the frustration of some inmates. Getting to the education department itself is not always easy, this is compounded by the fact that the library is paradoxically frequently closed during daytime breaks, the time most convenient for women... At Freshfields matters are simplified, residents can simply wander in of their own accord rather than relying on escorts, the library also has the added convenience of longer opening hours. A more extensive service is offered too, women can take out more loans and can use the space for activities in the evenings, such as book clubs, or for distance learning purposes.

For many prisoners the printed word holds few attractions. To this end the libraries at Arkham and Freshfields also offer films to rent on DVD, Hollywood blockbusters dominate in the main (horror and comedies) along with some Bollywood titles. An emphasis is placed on the less daunting services on offer, a round-about way of encouraging women to read more, as Freshfields' librarian illustrates:

New residents come round during induction. I tell them reading might not be for them but there's also DVDs, other activities and work they can do. The hope is that every now and then a resident who doesn't like reading will pick and a book get into it, then pick up another book etc. It's how love affairs can begin

The librarian at Freshfields organises an innovative project called 'Storybook Mums' [this will be addressed in more depth in the core curriculum chapter]. This enables mothers at Freshfields to record a story or poem on CD which is sent to their children, the tagline of the project is 'staying close to your children'. This serves as a form of substitute for being able to read a bed time story in person, an attempt to maintain a family bond, through an alternative form of literacy. Grandmothers, aunts and sisters are also free to participate. This illustrates one of the ways in which Freshfields seeks to facilitate family interaction where barriers (institutional and geographical) render it impossible. In certain respects Freshfields presents a Catch-22, for many of the women transported to the prison it means being further from family than they were during their previous confinement, yet this is mitigated by the fact that Freshfields does more to encourage family interaction compared with closed prisons.

It is not only adults who make use of the Freshfields library, residents staying in the Mother and Baby Unit are encouraged to enrol babies in their own right. Early exposure to books, music and the spoken word brings obvious benefits for babies’ future reading and learning skills. Young children can borrow junior books and story sacks. In addition there is a free ‘Books for Babies’ scheme, through which each baby is offered a free board book to keep on joining the library, followed by a further free toddler book when they reach their first year. Mothers also receive a free Bookstart Book Crawl certificate for their babies once they have borrowed four junior books. It is evident that prison education begins for some at a very young age.

The Freshfields librarian (Kathleen) says that her aim is to run a ‘normal library, as close to the outside as possible’. This raises the question what is a ‘normal’ library? In the same way that the libraries in Arkham and Freshfields are of a vastly different character, mainstream libraries too have a plurality of characters, depending on location and customer base. Rural, suburban and urban libraries, for instance, differ markedly from each other. If the librarian’s comment is taken at face value though, there are ways in which Freshfield’s library resembles the mainstream. Yet there are glaring differences too.

The most notable omission at Arkham and Freshfields is the lack of internet facilities, a staple in any library loosely defined as ‘normal’. Inspection reports have criticised Freshfields for its failure to implement controlled internet access from the library. Reiterating sentiments expressed earlier, because the information super-highway is so embedded into the collective cultural zeitgeist, it raises serious questions over the extent to which prisons can rehabilitate. As a regime seemingly promoting resettlement this becomes especially anachronistic at Freshfields. Not just anachronistic but non-sensical too. Residents released on working placements are free to use internet and mobile phone technology during the day; it is somewhat baffling that they are not able to do the same in the prison.

Over recent years there has been a steady decline in traditional school libraries, with the trend for books to be replaced by computers, and spaces being rebranded as ‘learning

zones'. While in mainstream educational settings technology is threatening the role of the traditional library, because prisons are technologically stunted and internet-free zones, the role of the 'traditional' library is, for the time being, secure.

From the Treadwheel to the Treadmill: Externally to Internally imposed Discipline

The treadwheel served as enforced activity in pre-twentieth century prisons. This was as form of hard labour, wheel turning, initially with some form of productive output in mind. Turning the treadwheel then became an end in itself; there was no utilitarian or productive purpose. Punishment was the whole point, a means of keeping inmates occupied and disciplined. The treadwheel became synonymous with a routine of drudgery, the very essence of classical prison grinding.

Treadwheels are of course relegated to the past, Victorian methods not fit for purpose in the twenty first century. While they have long since disbanded, the piece of prison machinery which comes closest to replicating a modern day counterpart is found in the gym: the treadmill. There are some similarities, both represent constant motion without actually getting anywhere, both encompass physically exhausting activity, pushing one's body to limit. The transition from the treadwheel to the treadmill has seen externally reproduced punishment replaced with internally imposed discipline.

In a broader sense the treadmill can be viewed as a metaphor for prison life: the treadmill of sentencing and transfers; the treadmill of prison courses and the prison timetable; the treadmill of reoffending (the prison revolving door, history repeating itself); then back once more to the treadmill of sentencing and transfers...

A key point to make is that, as with the outside world, spending time in the gym is not to everyone's taste. Kim, a Freshfields resident, described spending time in the prison gym as a 'marmite' activity: 'you love it or hate it'. Women are either passionate or turned off; the converts can be near fanatical. As for Kim herself, she was in the borderline obsessive

category. As a qualified gym orderly (with FOCUS training under her belt) she aimed to maximise her time in the gym during the prison day. I attended her Board session when she asked not to be removed from the gym and placed on alternative education/training, 'please don't take me too many times out of the gym' she pleaded. There is was a consummate zeal about the manner in which Kim went about physical training in the gym. On the outside she was a heavy drug user, there is an element of one addiction replacing another.

The use and meaning of prison gyms is very much related to the social construction and understanding of prison time. As previously mentioned time hangs heavy, especially in closed prisons, gym sessions provide a means for keeping mind and body occupied a means of filling the boredom void. Psycho motive industry can help in keeping internally disciplined, developing mental and physical fortitude.

The notion of gendered bodies also comes into play, the importance of shedding prison carbs or 'prison belly'. At Freshfields gym usage peaks after Christmas, more women exercise to the shed the hangover of excess holiday pounds. Inside prison the body can be a project, just as it is on the outside. This reinforces body discipline, a self imposed body gaze (shades of Foucault). The media obsession with celebrity bodies filters into the prison world.

Prison gyms provide a variety of services, they are not just venues housing machinery and treadmills. A report by the prison inspectorate commended Arkham for offering a range of well maintained equipment and resources, a 'well planned sports programmes' including pilates, dance based routines and working out. Different aspects and gradations of psycho motive performativity in the gym are covered, from structured to less structured body knowledge. Emma the gym instructor runs a six week course split into four modules (Bones, Muscles, Cardio and Components of Fitness). One of the advantages of using the gym as a learning environment is that it does not appear to be a classroom (many women have past negative experiences on that score). Learning in a less formalised setting is a good way to gradually build esteem and skills in tandem, building up a confidence base. Christine remarked, 'I didn't think I could do it but Emma kept telling me I could'. This touches on key

themes which will permeate throughout the thesis, issues such as confidence building and the utilisation of learning environments outside of traditional, demarcated, classroom space.

For an ethnographer of prison tattoos the gym is the place to be. A selection of tattoos of different shapes and sizes were displayed on women of different shapes and sizes at Arkham and Freshfields. Female prison tattoos present a fascinating range of visual iconography. Women's ink has become more prominent in a wider sense socially; the female tattoo is no longer taboo. The gyms at Arkham and Freshfields reflected the contemporary body art fashion trends; the bottom of the spine in particular was a popular location for tattoos. Designs make statements, although female ink is common currency, such designs can suggest an element of rebellion along with other messages.

The social importance of tattoos in prison life has been documented. In men's prisons they have been associated with reinforcing a masculine hierarchy. In Russian prisons' for example, visual research has shown that body ink is used to establish a clandestine rank amongst inmates (Lambert, 2003). The American author Truman Capote wrote about the brotherhood aspect of prison tattoos in his work, *In Cold Blood* (2000). The 'fraternal pin' was a blue dot tattooed under the left eye as an insignia, a visible password, by which former prison inmates could identify each other.

Popular choices of tattoos include butterflies and flowers. The butterfly motif is suggestive of femininity and beauty, without having too many mawkish or sentimental overtones. The emblem has long inspired purveyors of the visual arts, Ancient Egyptians made use of the butterfly in hieroglyphics. The image of the butterfly has significance as far as women in prison are concerned. The butterfly tattoo can serve as a symbol of rebirth and transformation; representing new life after rough times. This hints at the potential for metamorphosis and renewal after the cocoon like state of prison life. Butterflies are also associated with delicate beauty, a fragile femininity. Yet, as with women in prison, they are not always as delicate as people suppose from appearances, and are often survivors.

Some of the women at both Arkham and Freshfields had heart shapes (and variants of) etched onto their skin. This is one of the most enduring tattoo images, the heart is a powerful and universal (and somewhat clichéd) symbol. In the twentieth century the combination of heart tattoos and names proved popular for sailors and men separated from family by war; while in modern day prisons hearts are worn by women separated from their partners. Although the heart is supposed to represent eternal love, reality doesn't always turn out this way. One of the Arkham inmates, Danielle, had the name 'Dave' trapped within a red heart shape. Dave and Danielle have separated, yet the name remained, it was not tattooed over but stayed as an indelible reminder of a failed relationship.

In contrast with the feminine, saccharine or sentimental, the most striking tattoo I saw was of a barbed wire design (amalgamated with a suggestion of Celtic imagery) wrapped around the upper arm of an Arkham inmate. In terms of characteristics, barbed wire suggests toughness and prickliness. In a wider sense it is the loops of razor wire on top of Arkham's walls which help to keep inmates confined to their place. In the section on the respective histories of the two prisons I argued that Arkham belongs to the barbed wire paradigm; whereby barbed wire demonstrates a physical and symbolic capacity to enclose space and weaken inmates. After visiting Arkham one of the things that stuck most in my mind was a picture in Heather's art portfolio. The composition was a sketch of barbed wire coiled around a heart. The discussion of prison art work and creativity is continued in Chapter VIII.

The gym is a separate entity at Arkham, another building where inmates rely on transports. This contrasts to Freshfields where the gym has evolved with the house, it is located in a wing that was added to the building in the early 20th Century (back when Freshfields was still functioning as a private residence). The facilities on offer in the gym would put many mainstream equivalents to shame. Such modern, hi-tech shininess is somewhat incongruous within the country manor aesthetic, located as it is directly underneath the ballroom. A hollowed out dome in the gym used to serve as a swimming pool, but no longer because the rising vapour damaged the antique floorboards above. Where the water used to be are rowing machines, step machines and treadmills. Inmates at Arkham complain of factors

restricting their use of the gym, such as unhelpful hours and escorts. Freshfields sidesteps these issues, residents can just walk in.

Inside the gym things are much better developed. On one occasion I witnessed Julie, a gym orderly (also a resident), carrying out a diagnostic test on a white haired older resident with a dodgy hip. Kelly worked out a suitable exercise regime: taking into account age and physical wear and tear. The gym also presents an interesting model of social relations. One interesting feature at Freshfields is that residents who are FOCUS qualified gym instructors operate as personal trainers for members of staff including prison officers. Disciplining the disciplinarians is something of a role reversal (an inversion of Foucault's concept of bio power?). In the following chapter there is further consideration of social relations, with particular attention paid to how the relationship between prisoners and officers changes with context.

While there are many positive elements *inside* Freshfields, the potential of physical activity and education *outside* is under-tapped. Despite the extensive lawn area there were no outdoor physical education activities in evidence when I visited (a limitation which the prison inspectorate drew attention to). This self-imposed restriction could be considered somewhat myopic on the part of the regime. In mainstream education there are understandably concerns when school children lack access to outdoor recreational areas (partly due school playing fields being sold off), which has raised concerns about childhood social exclusion and health. It seems paradoxical that while Freshfields is a socially excluded community, denied resources (such as internet) taken for granted on the outside, yet at the same time takes for granted one of the excellent resources it does have available, which would be the envy of many mainstream educational institutions. The main outdoor activity I witnessed was smoking. Since the smoking ban residents are no longer allowed to smoke indoors, although the lingering odour serves as a reminder. The lounge area still smells of stale cigarettes, which not even deep cleaning will remove. Outside women huddle under a green, recently erected, smoking shelter whatever the weather.

Learning Outdoors

While outside physical education opportunities proved limited at Freshfields, there were, however, other learning opportunities in evidence outdoors. The micro journey to the horticulture department takes residents beyond the prison boundary, across a main road. Gardening at Freshfields is planned and conducted on a grand scale with three industrial sized greenhouses. There are giant lengths of yellow rolls of hose, each one coiled up like a snake, together with an array of tractors, farm vehicles and other heavy machinery. Women working in the gardens do a wide variety of crop work, bedding plants are produced and sold. The Freshfields women do all the work, at every stage of the process, from inception to the end result, and deal with public interactions in the market garden. In terms of numbers, some 40,000 bedding plants are produced in the summer, and 15,000 in the winter, for the public. An additional 60,000 are grown in the summer, and 40,000 in the winter for use in Freshfields and four other prisons. In addition, salad crops are grown for the kitchen: a variety of peppers, cucumber, tomatoes, courgettes, with plans to widen the variety of vegetables. Residents in Freshfields eat the fruits of their labours on a daily basis as part of their intake of five a day. Although the growing takes place in gardens across the road and off site, some produce makes its way back across to the kitchens (a micro journey of a different sort).

The Office of the Head of Horticulture at Freshfields (Andy) offers a stark contrast to other educational or administrative offices within the prison. It is based outside in a porta-cabin set in the agricultural backdrop of Freshfield's gardens, bedded in the heart of the operation. There is a somewhat incongruous mix of earthy aromas and the technology of a computer. The usual trappings of educational administration are in abundance: folders containing course documents and stacks of paper mounds (a far cry from a paperless office). A number of awards from accreditation bodies adorn the walls. The usual fixtures are mixed with conspicuously outdoor elements, a selection of cuttings and watering cans. Mud and soil litter the floor; plants and lever-arch files co-exist. The setting comprises the typical lifeless-paper office characteristics, together with the organic.

Women studying horticulture at Freshfields are involved with landscape gardening, and overall maintenance of the grounds. Although the base of operations (the greenhouses and soil where the cultivating and crop work take place) is segregated from the rest of the prison, women on gardening duty also tend to the grounds at the heart of the regime, maintaining the extensive, lush green Freshfields lawns with push along mowers, along with the hedges. The environment is also maintained in other ways, women in the gardens are also responsible for waste management, dealing with paper and cardboard. 45% of the prison's waste is recycled. Andy complained to me about the wastefulness of so called 'paperless society', educational bureaucracy creating unnecessary mounds of paper. At the time of my visit Andy was undertaking a qualification in waste management at foundation level so that Freshfields would be able to offer accredited courses in this area in future.

The majority of gardening at Arkham is an indoor operation (comprising mainly of hanging baskets and floristry) constituting a more restrictive affair. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in contrast to the National Trust spirit of Freshfields, there is a noticeable lack of green spaces in an asylum turned prison such as Arkham, imposing gates adorned with razor wire dominate. The atmosphere is sparse and grey, yet here are positives too, ways in which the best is made of a cheerless landscape. Arkham has a miniature award winning prison garden, although it was out of season in the mid-winter of my field work visit. Whatever floral splendour there was had been reduced to ashen pebbles, all depressingly minimalist and gravel. Somehow this suited the atmosphere of a closed prison as much as expansive greenery does an open environment.

The Mother and Baby Unit

You'd be amazed how much property some of them bring. One African girl arrived at the Mother and Baby Unit with nineteen bags. When she, her baby and two of us were in the Entrance Room with her belongings, there wasn't much space. Not everyone is like that. Some come with next to nothing. If a woman hasn't got much then we have a store of clothes to help tide her over until relatives bring things through.

(Freshfield's Officer)

Freshfields is a different sort of prison, in that it contains within its grounds a specialist Mother and Baby Unit and nursery, catering for learning and accommodation needs for children along with their offending mothers. The Prison Inspectorate singled out the combined provision of Mother and Baby Unit and nursery for the accolade of best practice, arguing that the Prison Service should support, learn from and potentially – replicate this unique facility in other prisons.

The Mother and Baby Unit was purpose built for babies up to 18 months old (but there is some flexibility) to stay with their mothers while they serve time at Freshfields. As previously discussed maintaining family ties while in prison entails difficulties, this becomes less problematic when the opportunity arises for women to manage this aspect internally. The facility allows up to ten mothers to maintain full-time care of their children while in custody. New mothers effectively have a period of maternity leave from their regular prison timetable but are required to resume work or educational duties when their baby is eight weeks old, at this time child care provision at the adjoining nursery is utilised.

All this seems somewhat incongruous in a prison, even one without bars. The area inevitably courts a degree of controversy: fostering the initial mother-baby relationship is weighed against potentially deleterious effects on the child of serving out a prison sentence in tandem with their mother. This sparks worrying thoughts about the age of incarceration becoming younger and younger. Many women in Freshfields lost parents to prison when they themselves grew up, critics might say acclimatising their own babies to prison life is probably not the best preparation for future life. The counter argument is that a number of

women end up in prison partly because they themselves were not able to develop a strong bond with their mothers during early years. The Mother and Baby Unit is structured around encouraging family routine and structure, an education in motherhood. By instilling these parenting skills the hope is their children will not grow up to follow in their prison footsteps, breaking the inter-generational cycle of imprisonment. Many of the women had unhappy backgrounds, often having little personal frame of reference of what stable family life should resemble.

The contentious aspects of situating a facility for babies to live with their mothers in prison, is tempered by the fact it is barely in the prison at all. The unit is situated in a separate building at the foot of the lawn, in the shadow of the main house. At a cursory glance a passerby would not think Freshfields to be a prison, and even less that the mother and baby building was in the grounds of a prison. The most unusual thing about the unit is the sense of normality and calmness. The interior is painted to a relaxing light blue, the hue of the sky on a carefree day. The shape is even in harmony. As you enter, there is perfect symmetry; the corridor layout is the same on the right and the left. Certain things cut through the calm and relaxed atmosphere. In the main office suicide kits and sterilisation tablets for baby bottles sit side by side; a sobering reflection on the fragile nature of life.

The unit is staffed by one senior officer and four officers who keep a watchful eye on proceedings, 'with the kiddies around we can't have them [the residents] kicking off'. Often women staying in the unit are surrounded by challenging personal circumstances. Carrie, one of the residents, was deaf, and as such found communication challenging and frustrating. She had a number of underlying issues compounded by man trouble. Involvement from the Child Protection Agency added to an already fraught situation. Kate one of the duty officers explained, 'the problem is not about her being a good mother but the surrounding chaotic issues'.

A glance at the visual iconography confirms that the facility offers a curriculum in being neat, ordered and clean. The laundry room is prominently positioned with a regimented procession of ironing boards, perfectly parallel and spaced apart as if they were on military

parade. My initial thought was whether the unit was geared towards a Fordist conveyor belt of mothers. Prison Service regulations do not sit well in the mix. Mothers were not permitted to cook meals for their babies, ostensibly for health and safety reasons, and food was instead brought over on trolleys. This did not allow women to exercise normal parental responsibility. At weekends, mothers and babies had to go to the main prison kitchen for meals. On a similar theme mothers were not allowed to carry their own babies up and down stairs and were forced to delegate responsibility to staff, again on a (spurious?) health and safety pretext. Such instances serve as yet another example where prison rules erode personal responsibility.

All staff and officers on duty in the Mother and Baby prison wore uniforms, which was at stark odds with the overall ethos of seeking to create a natural environment for babies. This belied the supposedly less disciplined and more sympathetic nature of the facility, a reminder that this was, after all, still a prison. Staff received Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) training, however, none of them were childcare professionals. Although the advice of qualified personnel such as the nursery nurses and social workers was taken into account, they had no formal responsibility for the unit's daily running, which was entirely the responsibility of Prison Service operational staff. The risk associated with this is that prison priorities might take precedence over best childcare and child development practice. Are staff responsible to the prison service or the babies in their care?

The sensible option would be for childcare professionals to be involved in the daily management of the MBU, which would make sense as they are involved with the running of the adjoining nursery. On the other hand, the prison service has not built its reputation for adopting the sensible path. One would not expect prison officers to be running childcare facilities any more than one would expect childcare professionals to be running prisons.

The Family Centre

The nursery cum family centre is located directly next to the MBU. This offers a different sort of educational micro journey to the sort usually found in prison. Not only are babies from the MBU looked after by the nursery, village locals (and sometimes prison staff) use the nursery for their own children. Voluntarily entering prison to receive education must be bordering on unique. Again, this was another example of the expansiveness of the Freshfield's regime and wider links to the community.

The Freshfields Family Centre is a purpose built facility opened in 2004. The nursery is managed by the local council as part of a service agreement with the Home Office and is fully compliant with the Early Years Register. The facility is OFSTED inspected (independently from the prison) and provides day care for a maximum of 22 children between birth and three years. All six members of staff were fully qualified in childcare. There were 12 children on roll during my visit, eight babies from the Mother and Baby Unit and four from the wider community which fostered the mingling of prison and non-prison children.

Parents play an active role in the facility, the 'family centre' centre is not just superficial labelling. Mothers are encouraged to join 'play and stay' sessions in the nursery, which helps them learn about parenting and role modelling [consistent with Early Years Foundation guidelines: DCSF (2008)]. The centre fosters a positive relationship with mothers that is not just confined to the prison sentence. Some women continue to contact nursery staff for advice after they had departed from Freshfields. Fathers are supported too, they are encouraged to make contact and telephone the Family Centre staff to speak about their child.

Within the nursery there is a large open plan playroom, with clearly defined play areas. Low room dividers, and creative use of furniture, separate provision into areas suitable to meet the needs of different ages and capabilities of children attending. Very young babies attend the nursery, it is intended as a space that represents home from home (although home from home for most is within the remit of prison grounds) with colourful, casual and comfortable

seating where babies can be held to be bottle fed (the aim is presumably to help them to feel emotionally secure). The environment is bright and captivating decorated with an array of drapes and sensory materials. Pictures, posters, mobiles, photographs and examples of children's art and creative work are on display. There is a riot of colours. Learning involves play, with everyday items turned into practical, hands on, colourful activities such as bottles filled with water and glitter.

Out of doors there is an enclosed secure play area, a space used daily containing a range of learning opportunities, for example, a sensory garden and fixed play apparatus. Children learn to negotiate as they climb through the apparatus and develop their fine motor skills as they use a variety of mark making tools. There is potential for heuristic play with treasure baskets utilised for children to investigate.

Once a week learning experiences branch out to the Freshfields library, each child has a 'learning journey' of sorts. For offenders the prison learning journey begins as adults after finishing compulsory education, for babies in Freshfields prison learning begins before they have even started schooling.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the macro and micro prison journeys. In some respects Arkham represents a space where women learn to switch off and lose a sense of personal responsibility, prisonisation and the 'inmate' mentality ensues. The worry is that women emerge from closed prisons a combination of having been institutionalised, hardened and embittered. The disciplinary, barbed wire paradigm does not represent the best preparation for release. Freshfields serves as an intermediary step away from absolute custody. The macro transition to open prison entails hardships, the paradoxical and problematic nature of more freedom, having to assert more confidence and autonomy. This is occasionally undermined, however, by unnecessary rules, at odds with the ethos of the open setting, which remove personal responsibility (exemplified by practices in the Mother and Baby

Unit). Although such restrictive regulations seemed the exception rather than the rule, and did not overly distort the rehabilitative message of Freshfields, it underlines the fact that the more progressive prisons must be vigilant about taking backwards steps: giving freedom with one hand and taking it away with the other. Practices must be constantly reviewed (prohibition on the internet in particular is deeply anachronistic). Achieving the right sort of balance in rules poses a wider question: does personal responsibility actually entail responsibility on the part of the individual when the responsibility is institutionally enforced?

Freshfields offers much more of an expansive, multi-layered educational establishment with learning stretching into the community. People from outside the prison can buy farm produce, get their hair cut in the salon, and even drop their children off at the nursery. Freshfields caters for the hair styling, food and childcare needs of not just its internal community but the wider village one. Arkham on the other hand is typified by segregation. The physical and mental effects of locks in prisons cannot be overlooked. The education department is severed from the rest of the regime. If Freshfields is a total institution in the Goffman (1991) sense, then Arkham represents a total, total institution.

The respective difference in population size makes a difference; the intake at Freshfields is around 130 compared to over 300 at Arkham. Shirley, one of the Freshfields tutors with experience of teaching in open and closed prisons, both large and petite told me ‘small prisons like small schools get the best results’. The Chief Inspector of Prisons concurs, that small prisons tend to outperform larger prisons (Owers, 2009). This links in with one of Baroness Corston’s central points, that traditional prison sanctions should make way small scale, nano, rather than titan solutions. Anne Owers the Chief Inspector of prisons has called for local secure centres to replace absolute custody for women, moving away from centralisation and a shift from current obsessions with security, to models more focussed on education and rehabilitation. Freshfields considers itself to represent the future (if a Victorian building can represent the future); the Head of Learning in the prison argues that the regime is more forward thinking than the rest. Arkham, on the other hand, structurally belongs to the old guard, a dated legacy, trapped by its grim vision of the past.

The next chapter will interrogate education inside in more detail, examining why women in prison return to learning (or not as they case may be) drawing comparisons with past teaching and classroom experiences.

VI

'The Best Days of Your Life?'

Transitions from school classrooms to learning behind bars

In the previous chapter, I considered prison micro and macro journeys, how women inside navigate prisons internal, daily institutionalised timetables, along with external transitions, the movement between institutions, acclimatising to contrasting prison cultures. Attention will turn to a different sort of macro journey, the learning journey through childhood and life, women's experiences of the transition from the school classroom to the prison classroom.

Many of the women at Arkham and Freshfields experienced chaotic and fragmented schooling. Accounts encompassed a vast diversity of educational histories; life narratives were non-linear. Women inside possess a vast array of learning needs, and have strong views on their own education, not all of which are mutually inclusive or incompatible.

The sphere of social relations will be examined, questioning whether prison officers have a constructive role to play in education or whether they are uniformed replications of past negative authority figures. In terms of student-teacher relations, is the relationship built on adult values such as equality and trust, or are childhood classroom hierarchies repeated? The answer to these questions are very different in the open and closed prison context.

No one forgets a good teacher

This is a universal message, the assumption that everyone has, as a point of reference a warm teaching relationship they look back on fondly; that in the collective memory bank everyone can draw upon positive recollections of teachers, evoking halcyon, carefree childhood days (at odds with the actual experiences of many in society). The pithy slogan

has, in the past, been used to front big budget, glossy teacher recruitment drives (see Passmore and Lepkowska, 1997) where a succession of celebrities divulged to camera their favourite teachers from school. It is worth mentioning to potential teaching recruits that the inverse is also true, *no one forgets a bad teacher*, as women in prison will readily testify.

Negatively perceived relationships from the point of the pupil are intrinsic to educational failure and can taint lifelong perspectives of learning, ‘teachers turned me right off education’ commented Sophie at Freshfields. Recent research on the Further Education Sector (Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008) has identified numerous learners for whom compulsory schooling proved to be a ‘switch off’. This is frequently the point of reference for prison education, pupils already been ‘turned off’ education scarred by childhood experience and unsympathetic martinets. Sophie added, ‘by the time I’d finished with school I hated, really hated teachers. I truanted a lot’.

Schools Daze

I met Sonia, a woman in her 30s, in Arkham where she was serving time for theft. Her time in school yielded no qualifications: ‘I left at sixteen with no O-Levels. I wasn’t the brightest and wasn’t expected to do much’. In some respects she is typical of the thousands of other women in the British prison system, many of who have life narratives devoid of much by the way of educational expectations or the currency of qualifications and grades. Yet, despite this, she looks back on her time at school fondly, remarking, ‘they’re the best days of your life...’

Sonia had warm memories of the early days of education which, as one might expect, are not the universal message for the women serving time in prison. Many of those interviewed, across the board, drew upon negative connotations of their school experience, and reflected on life in school in a less than rosy light, while others looked back with rose tinted spectacles from their prison cell. A number of contradictions and paradoxes became

apparent. It was not always the case that those who did well at school, in terms of grades and examination performance, enjoyed the experience. Despite accreditation success some looked on time at school as a failure. Conversely, those who fared badly in terms of achieving grades did not universally despise their time at school. There are women like Sonia who left school bereft of qualifications but nonetheless retain fond memories, whilst on the other hand there are others who performed well at school yet loathed it with some zeal. This prompts questions of how we define success in education; whether we should include a broader, and perhaps softer definitions, incorporating factors beyond narrow and rigid notions of performance. Over recent years Plewis and Preston (2001), Feinstein et al (2008), Schuller et al (2004), and others, have examined the wider benefits of learning.

Sonia’s comment on school days as the best of your life represents a generalisable, nostalgic conception of the childhood classroom, presenting a useful yardstick to measure the experiences of women in prison against. The extent to which the statement represents (or mis-represents) early years learning. The expression ‘best days of your life’ in itself presents a range of interpretative possibilities. Is the comment indicative of some kind of idealised construct? The fact that school days are supposed to be your happiest suggests an element of self-yearning or perhaps even delusion, as if saying it out loud makes it true.

For some women in Arkham and Freshfields, the notion that their childhood education could be construed as a high point of their life is patently untrue. Indeed, it could be argued that negative experiences of school did in fact set in motion a chain of events that ultimately landed them in prison, travelling from one repressive regime to another. So, on the one hand, the *best days* statement could be laced with irony. Contrary to this, the statement could be viewed as making a certain amount of sense: even an undistinguished and unhappy time at school may seem comparatively joyful from the vantage point of incarceration. In some respects this represents a bittersweet reminder of the lost days of youth and potential.

Childhood experiences of women at Arkham and Freshfields were decidedly mixed. A number of women I encountered identified school as a time typified by academic failure. This is not in itself overly surprising, the prison population after all represents one of the lowliest educated sectors of society. The figures make for stark reading, a Needs Analysis conducted in Holloway Prison, the largest women’s prison in Europe, revealed that 44% of inmates left school at the age of 16, or before. In addition 35% gained not one single qualification during their time in school.

Behind raw statistics are a wide range of life stories. Deborah, who I met in Freshfields, falls into both categories: ‘I left early and left with nothing’. It is unsurprising that she views her time at school as falling far short of happy, ‘I was made to feel useless at school and this kind of stuck after school’. Life in the classroom did not provide much in the way of preparation outside of the classroom, ‘I felt like I was thick. Learning was a waste of time’. Women like Deborah left school low on qualifications but plenty of baggage, with the perception of being ineffectual ‘thick’ learners, intrinsically unable to make the grade at school. In a similar vein Olivia identified herself as ‘not getting on’ with maths, English and science because of being ‘too stupid’. In wider culture inmates are often labelled as institutionally stupid, an uneducatable underclass. Habermas (1991) wrote about how the public space has been encroached and distorted. He argues the function of the media had altered from facilitating rational debate towards shaping, constructing and limiting discourse to themes pre-approved and validated by the corporate media. In such ways open debates can be hijacked. To illustrate *The Sun* newspaper ran a dismissive story on prison education declaring ‘lads are too thick to think of complex words’ (Macadam, 2006). This is revealing about attitudes from some quarters towards inmate learning potential, or rather lack of. By the same token an article belittling reading ability in a semi-literate red-top tabloid does not have necessarily have a huge amount of credibility.

While Olivia had a lack of success with core subjects at school ‘I couldn’t grasp the basics’ the picture has changed somewhat in prison. She has achieved qualifications in Maths and English to Level 2 whilst serving time in Arkham, the equivalent to GCSE Level. So there is

something of a contrast, at school she felt as if she couldn’t learn effectively, yet her experience in prison dispels this, at least partly, as a myth. So why it is that women like Olivia developed this persona of being ineffectual learners, and carried this negative perception into adulthood?

Olivia identified the quality of some of the teaching she received at school as behind the problem. ‘When I was 12 my maths teacher couldn’t understand if I couldn’t get it’, she explained, ‘he got irritated when I asked, so after a while I didn’t bother’. She described a cycle of impatience on the part of her maths teacher if she failed to grasp concepts after a single explanation. This in turn frustrated Olivia, and led to increasingly disruptive behaviour on her part, ‘I would play up’ resulting in her being labelled as a ‘hot tempered’ and ‘awkward’ student. The Arkham Education Manager (Mara) explained that previous unhappy maths experiences are common, which presents problems in terms of getting women to reengage, ‘getting anyone to do maths is a mission in itself. They hear the word “maths” and they think of their year 9 teacher Mr Curtis, dry numbers, bad breath and BO’. Olivia recounted yawnsome lessons which rambled on and went nowhere, ‘going round in circles in my mind... endless talking... 40 words when none would do’. Learning deteriorating into a kind of prolix shapelessness.

Labelling regularly manifested itself in the low or no expectations placed on some of the women in childhood. ‘I went to a bad school in a bad area in the 80s’, explained Fatima, ‘nothing was expected of us black, working class girls’. Gendered expectations and labelling common in mainstream learning (Stanworth 1983, 1990; Skelton et al, 2007), are also manifested in the provision of prison education, the 1950’s Freshfield’s curriculum (detailed in the final section of the Methodology chapter) was centred around domestic labour, to produce good housewives and mothers. Elements of such gendered expectations are still clearly evident in modern day prison learning and will be explored further in the vocational learning chapter (IX).

A number of women argued that the education they received in terms of the core curriculum had little relevance to them, and did not reflect their circumstances. Jackie (in Freshfields), for example, reminisced ‘I was bored by science. I failed to see the point’. She did not think that lessons had much by way of application to the wider world or how they would help her in adult life. ‘I used to pose questions to the teacher: “Why are we being taught this? What’s the big picture?” he replied “to pass the exam”. In the end he wrote me off as an annoying case’. If Jackie struggled to see the relevance of something she would question not so much what she was being taught, but why she was being taught it in the first place. This annoyed her teachers to some degree. She asked questions in the philosophical vein of Socrates (arriving at truth by routinely querying everyday assumptions) and like Socrates was branded a social deviant (in her words ‘an annoying case’). Alternatively this could be dismissed as questioning for the sake of questioning, to disrupt. The tension of what is taught and how it is taught reflects, to a degree, Bourdieu’s (1986) sentiments on forms of capital. Aside from capital, as represented by materialism and wealth, there is cultural and social capital. Here we see an example of how cultural capital, as represented by core-curricula education, can be seen as excluding and being to the detriment of many girls in childhood. The hidden and narrow curriculum has been explored in detail by Ricks and Pyke (1973), Spender (1978, 1980), Lloyd (1987), Delamont (1990), Salisbury and Delamont (1995), EOC (1996) and Pachler et al (2008).

Lisa was another case in point. She said she did not have ‘a lot of good memories of school... I hated stuff like Maths and English’. This was reflected in her behaviour, ‘I would mess about more when I didn’t understand’. Lisa described herself as ‘one of those kids who kicked off and got kicked out’. She regularly pretended to be ill to avoid school ‘I truanted a lot’. In many respects she is an embodiment of many people who do not fit into to a mainstream educational ethos, marginalised from dominant forms of cultural capital. She left full time education at sixteen, and couldn’t wait to get out [in a similar fashion she can’t wait to get out of prison]. Reflecting back on her life in the classroom she recognises negative attributes existed on both sides of the authority divide, ‘he wasn’t much of a teacher, then again I wasn’t much of a student’.

School time for the women was defined by more than accreditation and subject knowledge alone; in particular the dichotomy of positive and negative relationships with other pupils framed the overall quality of the classroom experience. Barbara hated the academic side of school but loved the socialising, describing herself as ‘up for a giggle’. The fact that women like Barbara enjoyed their time at school despite lack of achievement highlights the fact that the value of schooling cannot be purely measured in terms of exit data and exam results alone. Barbara has kept in touch with some of her school friends by unconventional means ‘Penny used to be in my class but we hadn’t seen each other for ages... we ended up on the same landing at Arkham. I couldn’t believe it!’ Two school girls destined for the same iron bar future.

Other women like Frances recall dark aspects to relationships with their school peers. She went to a girl’s comprehensive in South East London, which she described as a failing school ‘they didn’t have league tables then, but if they did it would propping up the bottom’. Her time was not a happy time because of other girls, ‘I was a very quiet student, they used to bully me... they were shallow and bitchy and made my life a misery’. This was not picked up by the teachers, ‘they assumed because I was quiet I was okay. They used to turn the other cheek’. As such school days for Frances in no way resembled anything like *the best of your life*, there were too many bullying incidents and other distractions; she has judged ‘prison to be a far more conducive environment for learning’.

From school Frances moved on to an FE College, also in South East London. Here she did O-Levels in English, History, Sociology, French, Gender Studies, Government and Politics. It was at college where her ‘thirst for knowledge developed’. The range of subjects suited her more and she was treated as more of an equal by the teachers compared to her school experience (see Salisbury and Jephcote, 2008), ‘I used to ask a lot of questions, and can’t accept straight forward answers’ (again in the Socratic tradition). At college she would ‘research in the library and challenge her teachers’. She ended up having to leave college aged 18, half way through her A-Levels. Financial factors compelled her to get a job. ‘I loved

college life, there was more breathing space’; the transition from school to college entailed a greater sense of personal responsibility and freedom, in some respects mirroring the move from closed to open prison.

School and the Rigid Claustrophobia of Desk Life

The theme of women finding school claustrophobic continually returned in interviews. A large number confessed to feelings of boredom and restlessness. Kelly, who was serving time in Freshfields, found school to represent ‘a dull desk life’ lacking in stimulation and constricting. She was classroom phobic: ‘I longed to escape the school gates’, she explained ‘I left as soon as I could’. She worked for a time in an accountant’s office which she found to be ‘just another kind of desk life’, comparable to the restrictive school experience. She quit her job and became an ‘inter-city coach driver, then I ran an electrical goods shop, but I couldn’t settle’. She describes her former lifestyle as ‘involving too much rushing around. Too hectic’. When I met her Hayley was recovering from a severe gambling addiction, she told me her psychiatrist has described it as the most acute case they had professionally encountered. Feeding her gambling addiction ultimately led to her descent into prison, ‘in the grip of it I would steal from friends and family’. ‘Gambling’s not the same as other addictions’, she explained to me, ‘an alcoholic knows a drink will fuck them up, gamblers think with just one more flutter they’ll win big and sort themselves out. The problem is that voice telling you to carry on and knowing when to stop’. Unlike alcoholics who are under little illusion of the damage their drinking habit causes, gambling addicts view the problem as the solution. The pattern of Hayley’s life has been transformed from high stakes gambling, a rushing around, hectic existence, to an incarcerated way of life. In the previous chapter Hayley related her closed prison impressions, ‘you conform and learn to shut up. You lose a bit of personality’, in some respects she has been forcibly returned full circle to the *desk life* of school and the office she so despised. A system of regulated compliance and attendance. Yet institutionalisation has its attractions, removing some of the danger and chaos of the outside world, ‘the routine becomes safe to the point you almost want it’. The move to Freshfields gave her more freedom, working as a driver, transporting women to

work placements and college. 'When I get out I want a quieter existence. I'll slit my wrists before I go to prison again. I'm serious'.

Hayley sees something in society that compounds problems and creates inmates. She cites examples in the mundane routine of schooling, and also the way gambling is presented in the world. Behind the shiny, respectable facade, of modern casinos, she says there is real suffering at play, with profits being reaped out of misery. 'If casinos sign up twenty new punters on a promotion night, offering gambling vouchers and free drinks, a few of them will develop a problem with addiction', she adamantly believes.

As with Hayley, Claire described her school experience as claustrophobic and conformist. The educational context was different, she was born in South Africa and was schooled at a Convent in Cape Town ('I didn't particularly care for the nuns'). By her own admission Claire was a 'trouble maker'. She identified her deviance as a form of rebellion and self-expression against a colourless and austere educational machine. To cause a commotion she would 'ring the mass bell at inappropriate times'. Sanctions were framed in a religious tense, 'I was always sent to chapel to repent for some sin or another'. From an early age Claire considers herself to have been a rebel, 'when I was told to sit down a voice inside told me to stand up'. She was expelled from the convent aged 11. At 14 her family moved to England and she was educated at a private dancing school where she experienced a very different educational ethos compared to the convent ideology. At 17 she went to college doing A-Levels in Biology, English and Psychology, always obtaining As and Bs. In this respect she represents one of the many people who hated school but prospered in a more self-orientated, less pedagogically rigid, environment compared to school. Claire rebelled against the establishment when she was younger, [education as resistance, Giroux (2001)], hating having her liberty compromised. It is something of a sad irony that women such as Claire who rail against authority end up subjugated by it, for the penal system represents perhaps the most compelling form of control that exists (Cavadino and Dignan, 2007).

Other women had stories to recount about oppressive educational upbringings abroad. Nassrin was raised in post-revolution Iran experiencing a classroom regime of gender apartheid. ‘My school had steel gates and brick walls’ she explained, ‘it was gloomy inside, like a prison not a school’. Raised walls kept women segregated and camouflaged from the outside world, generating a prison like learning environment. ‘The priority was to be a wife and mother first. We were expected to be quiet and humble... Loose veils were a sign of loose morals’. Masculine and religious authority collided in an education system seemingly designed to imprison and coerce women. The theme of female repression in 1980’s Iran was explored by Marjane Satrapi (2008) in her award-winning, auto-biographical work *Persepolis*. On a similar theme, in the novel *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafasi (2004) draws on her experience as an academic at an Iranian university and vividly describes the educational and societal oppression received by women during the 1980s, remarking ‘everyday life does not have fewer horrors than prison’ (2004: 13).

The idea of every day prisons for women has international currency. Located in Kabul, Afghanistan’s first purpose built all women prison has been constructed with UN money. Behind its walls most of the prisoners have been jailed for flouting Islamic laws, reminiscent of the Taliban era. The majority are young, mainly teenagers, escaping violent arranged marriages. Their fathers have cut deals to sell them, a matrimonial human trade where men barter over the price of women. Prison for the mothers also means prison for the children. The women stay in jail until they agree to return to their abusive husbands. This presents a zero sum choice, a domestic prison or prison with bars; the question of which abusive environment is marginally less unbearable. Britain has been providing military and financial support to the Afghan government under the auspices of the war on terror, while domestic terrors against women are culturally sanctioned in the country on a daily basis.

For many women the spheres of school and home can in some respects be seen to resemble prisons of childhood. This analogy is explored through art in Mona Hatoum’s work *Incommunicado* (1993) stored at the Tate Modern in Liverpool. The bare metal bars of a cot resemble those of a prison cell, with the springs substituted for taut cheese wires. A symbol

of comfort and refuge is transformed into a claustrophobic space resembling incarceration and torture.



Figure 6.1 *Incommunicado* by Mona Hatoum (1993)

Family Experiences

Women in prison had very different experiences of the familial sphere during their formative years. Madeline's mother identified learning as *the* overarching imperative when she grew up, 'it was impressed on me from an early age that education was the most

important thing in life’. ‘Unfortunately’, she explained, ‘like most teenage children I took very little notice of good advice... I rebelled and became pregnant and married at eighteen’. Three years and two children later she was divorced, ‘Another lesson from my mum was “never rely on a man”. A further piece of imparted motherly wisdom was ““You’re never too old to learn... which I think is very true’. *You’re never too old to learn* proved to be prescient advice in Madeline’s case, she returned to education in her 30s taking courses in literacy and numeracy at Freshfields.

In contrast with the conception of education as ‘the most important thing in life’, in many cases it was placed much lower down the priority list. Some women had low or no expectations placed on them from within the family unit. Denise followed in the footsteps of her mother by getting pregnant while still going to school, not that she attended on a regular basis, ‘my mum was never that bothered about going to school or doing homework’. Sex education on offer at school was ‘helpful... but I didn’t get to hear much of it. I was hardly there’. She joked that ‘having a kid was easier than French’.

Other inter-generational lessons have been handed down. ‘My dad taught me to steal when I was 14’, Nancy at Arkham explained, ‘I’m now 27 and want something better with my life’. Her teenage education was in crime rather than the standard classroom model, a deviant set of skills for life. This account echoes the opening lines of Philip Larkin’s poem *This Be The Verse* (1974): ‘They fuck you up, your mum and dad/They may not mean to, but they do’. Nancy hopes that the qualifications she avoided earlier in her life can now offer a positive break from the past. Nancy is one of the statistics who left school without qualifications and a poverty of aspiration, straight into a life of crime and ultimately prison. There is a tragedy behind the statistics; broken homes and fractured lives. This taps into contemporary debates about ‘broken Britain’, perpetuating cycles of social exclusion, and underclass.

Nancy’s experience raises some probing questions: What chance do women like her have in life? Is it really surprising they end up in prison? The poet Simon Armitage participated in a project to give women in prison a voice through music, he wrote of the experience ‘there

was no escaping the fact that the majority of women were victims... my head tells me it doesn't excuse the crime; my heart says it probably does (Armitage, 2005).

Back in the nineteenth century the Russian writer Dostoyevsky wrote, ‘the degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons’ (cited in Pollock, 2006: 309). If nothing else prisons function as a reflection of wider society, holding up a mirror to the failings of mainstream education to provide an adequate start in life. They are social dustbins, where difficult cases are filed away, increasingly the social agency of first not last resort. Prisons are being forced to make up for a lot of deficits (Owers, 2009).

Returning to Sonia who expressed the view of school days being *the best of your life*, if she had her time over she would have taken things more seriously. ‘In the last two years I lapsed’, she reflected, ‘I should have studied harder and had a laugh a bit less...’ Sonia looks back with retrospective regret on her younger days with some poignancy, ‘I wish I could talk back to myself at 13 and do things different’. In some respects then, it is not so much a case of her school time being the most positive time of her life (misplaced nostalgia) but rather wanting to press the rewind button and do the time over again so she doesn't end up in prison. Prison life is often framed in the past tense, looking back from the cell and wanting to alter the course of events. Sonia's predilection for romance stories, specifically Mills and Boon was mentioned in the previous chapter (‘I want life to have a happy ending’). In some respects her desire to return to school and talk to her younger self could be seen as a way to rewrite her own life fiction, deleting prison from her life narrative in the process.

The Relationship between the School House and Prison House

There are only two places in the world where time takes precedence over the job to be done. School and prison.

(William Glasser, 1975: 125)

As the above accounts reveal, previous experiences of childhood and schooling for women at Arkham and Freshfields were diverse. A common denominator lay in the tales of chaotic, fractured lives. Many women in prison have never settled ever (Owers, 2009). The school timetable often served as the only stable routine underpinning childhood (the school almost acting in the role of surrogate parent). That is not to say this imposed structure was a necessarily a welcomed one, with tales of claustrophobia and oppression, rebellion and truancy commonplace (the prisons of domestic life and childhood). Thus, while many women rebelled against institutionalised teaching as children, for some it provided a measure of security, discipline and control lacking elsewhere in their lives.

Incarcerated women often draw parallels between the school house and the prison house. Georgina, who was mentioned in last chapter, described Freshfields life as being ‘just like school’. ‘I didn’t like school at the time’, she explained, ‘but I’m probably better equipped to deal with it the second time over’. In a sense then it was about gearing up for a repeat performance, drawing on her past life narrative; a form of experiential learning. What similarities are there? ‘It’s quite nice to have a routine’, she said, ‘getting up early and early to bed. The food not so good though’. The structure of prison life is conceived here as similar to school, down to the unpalatable food. If school was the time when women had structure/routine when they were children, incarceration provides it when they are adults.

Prison regimes, (the emphasis being on closed institutions) with their tightly regulated spatial temporality; provide a degree of order and safety (as mentioned in the previous chapter). The fact that women almost come to depend on their own incarceration and institutionalisation becomes clear, as Hayley said ‘you almost end up wanting it’. Prison provides temporary release from instability and chaos (the prisons outside) while doing little

to address deep rooted issues. This is stretched to the point where some women cannot emotionally cope without it. Sam explained, ‘I had nightmares that I was outside and couldn’t find my way back in’. A pairs of prisoners at Arkham climbed on top of a roof to stage a disruption aimed at curtailing their imminent release, because they simply could not cope with the prospect of the outside world (the tyranny of freedom). Closed prisons like Arkham provide institutionalised reassurance, a steel security blanket. Because a lot of the women do not have a great track record at being free on the outside, having the scope of decision making removed (and hence the potential for making mistakes) can be appealing. It is understandable why women come to rely on the supervision of lock and key existence. If anything this makes it all the more tragic.

Staff also raised comparisons between prison and school life. An Arkham tutor described the regime as being ‘just like a girl’s boarding school’. This comparison was debateable. Conversely Freshfields resembles the boarding/private school image more closely. Residents at Freshfields sleep in shared dormitories, not cells; they share a communal canteen breakfast rather than eating in isolation; they have responsibility for their own punctuality, strolling over to the classroom rather than waiting to be unlocked and escorted. There are no high walls coated with razor wire.

It is not just the experience of being in prison that draws parallels with school but also that of leaving. Shauna’s leaving book was made up of messages written by fellow prisoners ahead of her release, marking a rite of passage in similar vein to the last day of school. Entries included shared reminiscences of happy times, ‘we’ve had a few laughs and proper good conversations... you’re a sound lass but mad as fuck... I’m going to miss you’. Whereas school leaving messages tend to focus on hopes of future success, prison messages often centre around hoping they will defy the odds of prison revolving door syndrome: ‘try not to end up back in this shit hole, you should be making people smile like you do in here... Behave. Or at least don’t get caught’.

The theme will now shift to social relations within the prison world. Firstly, considering the role of prison officers, the extent to which they play a productive or a reductive part in imprisonment. Following on from this will be an examination of teaching relations inside, the ways in which the prison school room conforms to or deviates from classrooms of childhood.

More than a turnkey? The Frontiers of the Modern Prison Officer

Contestable though the point is, it could be argued that the most vital role in the delivery of prison education in closed conditions is played by the disciplinary staff. They serve as an essential pre-condition, for if officers do not escort women to the education department then lessons, in any form, cannot take place. In 2007 Prison Officers in England and Wales went on an unauthorised wild cat strike (Sturcke, 2007), the result was national lockdown for a day. All education courses and prison activities ground to a standstill. Those due for release could not leave simply because no one was willing to unlock them. That is why prison officers have the most important educational role; they have the power to stop it from happening altogether. Are they just glorified transporters, or do they serve a more constructive function? Are prison officers more than just a turnkey? Are officers able to shake off the confrontational, ‘us and them’, dynamic and play a constructive function in terms of education?

Traditionally the role of uniformed prison staff has often been associated with limited horizons, a short-termist function linked to security, somewhat antithetical to the ideals of prisoner learning and rehabilitation (for more of an in depth account of the rehabilitative versus disciplinary paradigms see the *Purposes of Imprisonment* chapter). Arnold et al (2007: 471) have argued that it is important to avoid prematurely jumping to ‘sociologically impoverished’ and misleading conclusions. The culture and discourse surrounding prison officers, it is contended, has evolved away from dated conceptions as the ‘monolithic, power hungry enforcers of authority’ (ibid). Erwin James (2003), writing on his own prison

experience, found warders to be variable during his time inside. Some would be supportive and encourage the pursuit of education and self-improvement, while others would be undermining and hold grudges.

Keys as a Determinator

Very different models of staff culture emerge at Arkham and Freshfields, with keys acting as a determinant of status. Mark, a staff member at Freshfields reflected on his long experience of working in numerous penal institutions; male and female, open and closed, ‘I have known prisons where officers have a key chain which is at least twice as long as it needs to be’. Keys become a potent (phallic?) emblem of power, ‘common sense tells you that for all practical purposes it needs to be the length of your arm but I have seen them twice as long’. According to Mark this was all part and parcel of the pervading masculine culture, ‘I have also known officers who slashed the root of their cap peak and re-sewed it so that it almost touched the tip of their nose’. The aim, he claimed, was to project a menacing image, ‘they looked threatening. It was all part of the macho thing’. Heather, a serial offender, revealed that staff culture at Arkham had progressed a great deal from comparable closed prisons she had experienced in the 1980s ‘you spoke when you were spoken to. You had to stand legs apart and call out your number’. Prisoners were identified by a number assigned to them, rendering them little more than walking statistics in the eyes of officers, stripping away humanity to the point it can be plausibly denied. In relative terms imprisonment in Arkham, ‘is like holiday camp’. Inmate-officer relations have progressed from recent, dark, history but by how much? ‘You can try to eradicate it’, says Mark, ‘but you’ll never totally eradicate the need for some to portray a powerful image. It’s a fact of prison life’.

One of the ways the culture and discourse has evolved is through the personal officer scheme, whereby uniformed staff are expected to make a constructive contribution towards imprisonment. At Arkham and Freshfields the programme has been implemented with

diverging success, reflecting the wider ethos of both establishments and the ways in which officers help or hinder education and purposeful activity. Relationships with personal officers and prisoners are supposed to be based on mutual respect, high expectations and support. Arkham has failed in this brief according to damning inspectorate reports, the scheme has been ‘poorly developed and did not meet the needs of the women prisoners’. Most women I encountered at Arkham were unaware of who their personal officer actually was, ‘personal officer what’s that?’, and, ‘that’s the first I’ve heard of it’ were typical responses.

Personal officers are expected to play an active part in rehabilitation, reading and helping with the Offender Assessment System (OASys), for example. Yet even those who did know their personal officer said it meant precious little in practice, ‘if you’ve got a problem they fob you off’, complained Angela. According to inspection reports there has been little evidence of active prison officer work, with staff receiving no special training. Staff have blamed shortages, population pressures and cross-deployment as hindrances to doing the job effectively.

The list of flaws identified by the prison inspectorate was long. Tellingly, some women only found out who their personal officer was when notices were put up just prior to a formal inspection visit. None of the wing files recorded that personal officers had even introduced themselves to the women for which they were responsible. As for the entries, they were limited to rudimentary observations about behaviour and contained no engagement with the pastoral role intended by the scheme. This reveals a lot as far as closed prison culture is concerned, the obsession with compliance to rules and protocol. Entries were not even always completed by the responsible personal officer, and were often cut and pasted, indicating a distinct lack of a personal touch. Typical entries included: ‘polite and compliant’. Compliant! Where is the equality, which the scheme purports to encourage, in such a statement? This demonstrates the over-arching instrumental imperative of maintaining discipline within total institutions.

In revealing fashion, nothing in the scheme even recognised that the Arkham prisoners were, in fact, women, or might have specific issues or needs distinct from men. This gender blind dimension is far removed from Corston’s contention that equal outcomes require different approaches (2007). The lack of sensitivity towards gender issues at Arkham was exemplified by occasional behaviour I witnessed, on one occasion two officers were chatting among themselves and jokingly referred to a prisoner as a ‘MILF’ (an acronym for ‘mother I’d like to fuck’). Although such comments were relatively rare they nevertheless displayed a casual misogyny. Irwin and Owen (2005: 109) have reported that it is not uncommon for male staff to refer to women prisoners in demeaning fashion, as ‘bitches’ and ‘whores’, hence conveying ‘the patriarchal subtext of women’s imprisonment’.

The personal officer scheme is intended to be an example of innovative practice, yet the failings reveal the extent to which many staff are uncomfortable in stepping outside of their disciplinary comfort zone. Officers have evidently struggled with the concept of rehabilitation, attending to prisoner needs. Women at Arkham overwhelmingly reject the notion that uniformed staff serve a helpful/constructive function, or are anything other than apathetic at best. ‘They do nothing to help us’, Mary explained, she described one officer as a ‘walking scowl... we call him Smiler’.

Arlene (Head of learning at Freshfields) was critical of the clash of cultures in closed prison regimes: ‘there’s rubbing points between the discipline and non-discipline side of prisons’. The non-discipline side is about rehabilitation and the potential for individual growth, in this respect ‘the discipline side doesn’t sit well’. Arlene complained that closed prison is too much about exerting power over the individual, ‘...keeping them their place. What’s the need for this discipline? People in prison have needs, and we need to engage with them’. She shook her head ‘I don’t understand why they have to lose identity’. Why do prison officers do this then? ‘Because they can. We’re light years from equality’. Arlene added tellingly, ‘I’m retiring later in the year. The thing about retiring is you can speak your mind’.

Linda, her Head of Learning counterpart at Arkham, was also scathing of the attitude of officers in the prison. Some ‘offer resentment rather than support’ in terms of education for the women, ‘one was complaining my son doesn’t get this...’ Linda described the Prisoner Officer’s Association as ‘conservative dinosaurs’ resistant to change for the sake of resisting change. She cited examples such as opposing the use of internet in prisons and the associated detriment to the range and quality of education inside. By the same token, Linda saw signs of hope for the future, ‘there are a few enlightened souls so maybe things will improve. It depends whether the voices are heard or are loud enough’.

Officer Relations in Freshfields

In terms of staff relations, the scene could scarcely be more different at Freshfields. With residents taking charge of the reception desk visitors have some initial difficulty in knowing who are the staff and who are the prisoners [difficulties in delineating the keepers and the kept]. Residents represent the upfront image of Freshfields, how the establishment chooses to present itself to the world, rather than keeping women concealed or locked away behind the scenes.

The personal officer scheme has fared considerably better at Freshfields. Personal officers without fail introduce themselves to new residents within 48 hours, the crucial settling in period during which women adjust to the open prison culture shock. The staff concerned meet with their designated residents to discuss progress (targets, sentence plans, etc) and compile monthly reports. This compares favourably with Arkham where personal officers rarely introduce themselves to their assigned women, and where reports are centred on behavioural and disciplinary matters. Residents I spoke to were generally more positive about relations with staff compared to other prisons, Tara told me that officers ‘stop to have a chat and ask about my girls’.

While at Arkham uniformed staff have been criticised for failing to take into account any female and family needs, at Freshfields they help to bring up children in the mother and baby unit (this was discussed in the previous chapter *Tales of Two Prisons*). This highlights the extreme disparities that exist between staff cultures in open and closed regimes. Toni, an Arkham inmate who was staying in the resettlement unit, revealed that her relationship with a prison officer changed when she was on day release. She described a recent town visit, ‘he’s quite different when we go out, not as bad as I thought... we went to Starbucks and Kentucky Fried Chicken. Little things you take for granted’. On the outside, when keys were removed from the equation, the relationship worked better, ‘we chatted, it was all quite normal’. Toni said ‘It made me realise it’s not just the people that are fucked up it’s the system’. In the closed prison world, officers and inmates are trapped/locked within the confrontational them and us, keeper and kept, dynamic of the total institution. Many of the failings of staff at Arkham are not entirely down to their failings as people, but rather down to the system they work in. Institutionalised work roles represent yet another form of imprisonment.

Social Relations: Towards a More Feminised Approach?

Can the prison working culture be changed from within? Could a female-centred approach engender more constructive and less confrontational outcomes? Liebling and Maruna (2005) have written about how introducing more female staff into men’s prisons brings with it positive aspects in terms of balancing out the gender composition, aiming to transform regimes into more normal habitats reflecting life on the outside (although there is little ‘normal’ about prison). Could altering the gender dynamics of social and power relations produce outcomes of a constructive and less abrasive type? To draw parallels with the outside world, Harriet Harman (at the time of writing the Minister for Women and Equality) has argued, along with others, that the harsher consequences of the credit crunch and economic downturn could have been averted if more women were in positions of financial responsibility (see Morris, 2009b). The logic here is that a female influence would challenge the group think and macho risk taking associated with male dominated leadership culture.

Wider gender prejudices and attitudes have an impact. In 2007 *The Sun* ran a pictorial piece on a female governor entitled ‘Beauty of Belmarsh Opens Up’ (Kay, 2007) focusing more on her visual attributes and ‘glamorous’ appearance than her attitudes to imprisonment. This illustrates that women are not always taken seriously as governors, running a prison is considered antithetical to the *feminine*.

Teaching Relations

This section will examine inter-personal interactions between tutors and students, the fundamental importance of teaching relationships in the prison context. Does this dynamic mark a positive shift away from prison disciplinary functions, a more positive chapter in social relations, an escape or extension from wider regimes? The difference between the closed and open institutional set up is once again key.

It is important to consider how women frame their experiences and expectations of teachers in prison. A wide range of desirable traits were identified by the learners and tutors inside. Matt, who teaches at Arkham, argued that prison teachers must possess 3 major traits: ‘to be concerned, dedicated and mad’. Recurring themes raised by prisoner-students centred on the desirability of a more ‘adult’ learning relationship founded upon mutuality, trust and fairness. There were similarities here with research in mainstream post-compulsory settings. Salisbury and Jephcote (2008), for example, identified the crucial qualities of teachers as empathy, patience and approachability. In prison there are consistent elements, yet problematical areas are simultaneously raised too, such as the difficulties of basing learning relationships on a foundation of mutual responsibility in an environment which, by definition, erodes responsibility (especially in the closed prison context).

Many of the desirable characteristics raised by students were framed in the past tense, everything that relationships with many school teachers lacked. Can the qualities underlying

effective teaching relationships be summed up so succinctly and addressed in a reductionist manner? Further scrutiny reveals a number of complexities, conflicts and contradictions. Perceptions of students and teachers on the nature of their relationship differed at both Arkham and Freshfields.

‘... being treated like an adult’

In terms of educational priorities, as far as Arkham’s Eleanor was concerned, ‘being treated like an adult is the most important thing’. This element was considered by many women to be the cornerstone of strong student-teacher relationships in prison. The importance of the theme of an adult to adult understanding recurred in numerous interviews, and sometimes in strikingly similar language. Anne stressed that if her prison tutors were not ‘on the same level I wouldn’t bother staying in the classroom’. Tamsin, adopting a similar linguistic turn, stressed that ‘teachers must be on my level’. Anne was 23, serving time at Arkham ‘plugging away’ at basic skills. Tamsin by contrast was twenty years her senior, with a past educational portfolio including degrees, living in the open conditions of Freshfields hundreds of miles away. Despite the contrast in personalities, educational attainment and institutional confines, teachers being *on the level* had some common currency across the prison estate.

Women may want to be treated like adults in the classroom but the set up of closed regimes presents challenges. Returning to the point of the prison micro journey, women in the Arkham institutional set up do not have any control or responsibility in taking themselves to the education department, and must rely on escorts. The relationship between tutors and students at Arkham is contingent on a not always reliable third party, in the form of officers. For Matt, a basic skills tutor, this has proved to be understandably frustrating, ‘you never know who will turn up... the prison can be on lock down at any time’ (women can fail to turn up for numerous reasons, such as legal visits, lockdown, court appearances, being shipped out, etc). He reflected ‘the only certainty is uncertainty’. Being unsure who will turn up

renders lesson planning challenging, even nigh on impossible at times. The Arkham scheme of things is hardly conducive to maintaining an up to date scheme of work. The nature of the segregated environment makes establishing any sort of face to face teacher-student relationship difficult, let alone an adult one. These constraints do not exist at Freshfields. Ian, who taught basic skills there, told me ‘my biggest complaint about teaching here is when staff don’t always care that you’re teaching and walk in to give women messages that could have waited’. This illustrates the point that prisons of all hues are not always sensitive to educational needs (for some regimes learning is located somewhere towards the bottom of the priority pile). Yet it also serves to show that the nature of interruptions to learning is less severe at Freshfields compared with Arkham, where tutors frequently wonder if the women will turn up at all. Teaching at Freshfields does not present so many obstacles, if relationships with students are on more of an adult basis it is largely because the physical and social environment allows this.

Despite the constraints, the Arkham education department promotes positive relations with women, to an extent. Hannah considered the education department to be, ‘different, more relaxed than the rest of the prison’. Frances praised the relaxed atmosphere in the classroom; ‘there is no sense of authority. The teachers are dedicated, so the pupils are more motivated’. Women are treated with respect which in turn instils confidence. She was able to retain a measure of identity, ‘in here I feel a bit more normal, the rest of prison takes something away from you. You lose a sense of who you are...’ In some respects she was constructing the education department as an oasis in the wider prison wasteland. Inside Arkham, ‘the teachers treat us like adults but the rest they boss you around. It’s like being back at school’. This is broadly in line with statistical findings on the subject, prison education staff are often highly regarded by prisoner learners with almost 70% saying they were well supported. In contrast, support for learning from prison officers was reported by less than 20% of respondents (Prison Education Trust, 2009). This is, in turn, mirrored by my own findings: while prison tutors are perceived by inmates to play a positive role in learning, signifying, to some extent, a break with past, negative classroom experiences, prison officers

often stir memories of hated teachers from childhood, suggesting parallels between keeper and kept relationships in both prison and schools.

Graham, the Arkham Deputy Education Manager placed an emphasis on, ‘aiming to treat others as you want to be treated’. The element of mutuality in teaching relationships was considered important by women at the two prisons, or at least according to Elena at Freshfields, ‘not being treated as if you’re five’. In this respect there was some irony that Elena, as with a number of other students commended Nick, a former primary school head master, for his ‘respectful manner. He doesn’t talk down to us’. Nick, however, related a different perspective, revealing that he employed strikingly similar teaching strategies to those he had formerly used on small children back at school, ‘these come in handy teaching numeracy’. Elena spoke of not wanting to be being treated like a five year old, yet in some respects that was exactly the treatment she was receiving from Nick. Women in prison cannot always escape their classrooms of childhood. However, on some occasions the perception of mutuality can be more important than mutuality itself, as W I Thomas famously wrote ‘if men [and women] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (1928: 572).

Women at Arkham and Freshfields universally reviled being overtly patronised. ‘I hate, hate, hate being talked down to’, emphasised Stacy at Freshfields, ‘I had enough of that shit at school’. Not only is the being talked down to tone considered to be ‘insulting’ and ‘unprofessional’, for many women in prison it brings back memories of past negative teaching relationships, how they were treated at school, and why they were turned off education in the first place. Being talked down to results in the breakdown of the teaching relationship for many I spoke to. An illustration of this was an art teacher at Arkham unpopular with a number of women. Heather described her as ‘grey and lifeless’. Jenna found the art teacher frustrating to deal with, and interfering, and quit after a few sessions, ‘she kept on telling me “this colour needs to be here” it’s my piece of work, you can suggest but don’t tell me what to do’. The dictatorial style was resented, ‘I don’t respond well to orders. I’m not a child, some don’t take that on board’. During observational fieldwork I

caught first hand glimpses of art lessons with regulated brush strokes, where painting became akin to a form of dictation, stymieing the creative process. This defeated the purpose of the artistic enterprise in the view of Jenna, ‘if you can’t do self-expression I don’t see the point’. Ultimately what constitutes aesthetic appeal is deeply subjective, ‘not everyone sees everything through the same glasses’. This correlated to the kind of painting by numbers education Jenna rejected at school. The sterile, dictatorial, pedagogy in some ways represented an extension of Arkham’s disciplinary dynamic rather than providing temporary relief from it.

The emphasis placed on equality (and being on the same level as tutors) is not universal for women in prison, however. Take for example the perspective of some foreign national inmates where the teacher-student relationship has an altogether different set of connotations. According to Mara the Head of Education at Arkham, ‘some worship teachers as if they were “half god”. There’s an African woman who curtseys in my presence’. The genuflecting attitude reveals something about the relative cultural esteem teachers are held in. There are some telling differences here; some inmates value a reciprocal relationship with teachers, while others value the elevated teacher status and hierarchy. It is somewhat difficult to see how the opposing views can be reconciled. Sandi from South Africa believes emphasis in relationships with teachers should be founded on hierarchy not equality, ‘in this country there’s no respect for teachers’. She perceived that many Arkham prisoners lacked inner respect in addition to respect for others, ‘women in here are a mess. They look terrible... there’s no self-respect... if you want to feel good on the inside you’ve got to look good on the outside’. As Sandi saw it, women in Arkham, ‘take their education for granted. They’re in and out, then back in. Everything on the house’. Sandi’s comments illustrate some of the issues surrounding institutionalised culture and the way closed prisons promote taught helplessness. She believes the women would be in for a shock if they experienced incarceration in her country: ‘South Africa, that’s what you call a prison. They don’t believe in education... all you do is hard labour’. This echoes the primary prison commandment issued in Kafka’s *In the Penal Settlement*: ‘honour thy superiors’ (2005: 157).

‘I don’t want to be judged’

For women, in both Arkham and Freshfields, being non-judgmental was considered an essential ingredient in an effective teacher. ‘I’m here to learn. What I’ve done shouldn’t matter. I don’t want to be judged...’ Sarah (at Freshfields) pointed out. Many of the women I encountered have felt unfairly judged and castigated at various points in their lives, a number were unhappy with their treatment at the hand of the criminal justice system. The education department represented somewhere they could ‘get away from being judged’, as Heather put it, ‘I’ve enough friends and family to judge me. I need to do education for a breather’.

This is not to say that the implications of crimes and misdemeanours are left outside of the classroom door, however. Matt, who taught basic skills at Arkham, told me that some of women in his classes bring up the nature of their convictions to see what reaction they elicit from him. He explained the classroom etiquette, ‘prisoners can tell but mustn’t be asked’, his attitude was ‘at the end of the day it doesn’t matter to me what they’ve done’. One case in point was where an inmate wrote an account of her offences and asked Matt to proof read it. He is convinced that he was not given the handed the narrative in order to check the spelling and grammar alone, ‘it was eye opening and violent stuff written in a lurid style. It communicated the full story why she was in prison. She wanted to see if she would be judged’.

The Paradoxes of Trust

Do prison tutors trust the prisoners? ‘I trust the girls but I wouldn’t turn my back on them,’ was the message from Cheryl an IT tutor at Arkham. This answer raises a clash of contradictions: trust mitigated by suspicion. The antonyms cancel each other out, resulting in a zero sum equation. I trust you... but (in stark contradiction) only if I see what you’re doing. Hallmarks of a paranoid trust. This links in closely with existential tensions associated

with trust raised by the Prague born Novelist Kafka, ‘it is comparatively easy to trust anyone if you are supervising him’. (2005: 128). Kafka’s insights into the psychology of paranoia, control and surveillance suggests parallels with the work of Foucault (1999) and Cohen (1985).

At Arkham the computers, with their dated obese and scratched monitors, were arranged around the perimeter of the room in a panoptical arrangement, whereby students would sit with their backs to the tutor (the tutors did not have to worry about showing their backs to the inmates). Room layout allowed for easy surveillance, it was straightforward to see whether students were playing card games or doing CLAITs (Computer Literacy and Information Technology). A blind eye was often turned to games of Solitaire or Patience; the most important thing seemed to be that inmates were sat down and occupied. Surveillance was not always used to enforce work, often it was to keep an eye on behaviour of inmates. The classroom layout coupled with trust issues (...‘I wouldn’t turn my back on them’) were indicative of a closed prison mindset: paranoia and control. The education department was entwined with the Arkham security nexus (as if wrapped together with barbed wire). Such suspicion is increasingly encroaching on the outside world, as evidenced by the increasing incorporation of surveillance strategies in mainstream education. The Thomas Deacon Academy (self-branded as ‘the school of the future’) opened in 2007 (Ashana, 2007) styled as the shiny modern antidote to the conveyor belt of factory school. Behind the cutting edge facade of arched ceiling, retractable panels and mirrors (designed by Norman Foster’s firm of architects) lies an array of suitably modern range of surveillance techniques. A hi-tech computer system monitors attendance, sending out automated text messages to students who do not swipe in. Classrooms are transparent with glass fronted doors framed within a larger open plan spaces. Vantage points outside the classrooms, and from walkways above, provide simultaneous viewing opportunities for dozens of lesson. The panopticon has been educationally super-sized. Although it is the prison classroom that should be learning effective educational strategies from everyday classrooms, it is increasingly the everyday classrooms that are integrating prison-like surveillance.

Competing twin messages emerged from teaching staff at Arkham. On the one hand elements of solidarity with the women were expressed, treating them with the same level of equality as any other student and not pre-judging their character on the basis of past misdemeanours. Pulling in the other direction was solidarity with the disciplinary arm of the prison, the fact that inmates (with special emphasis on the *inmate*) must be kept under scrutiny. Life in a closed prison invariably generates suspicion.

Safety Concerns?

Related to the above: do teaching staff, especially in the confines of closed prison, have concerns over their own safety? The teaching block is notable as one of the only places at Arkham where there is an absence of disciplinary staff during the core day. They are ‘on call’ if a situation should arise, but such incidents are very rare. In her tenure of 18 months (at the time of my visit) the Education Manager only had recourse to call on prison officers twice. One of these occasions did not directly correlate to misbehaviour within the classroom. Two women managed to access the roof of the block to stage a disruption in protest at their imminent release, the reason being they simply could not cope with the prospect of the outside world (the tyranny of freedom).

As to any fears of being assaulted, Mara Arkham’s Head of Education explained ‘my daughter was worried, but I told her I’m safer teaching in prison’. She related an episode when was teaching in a college on the outside:

...there was a young man listening to a walkman which was blaring loud music. I asked him to turn it off and he just upped and walked out. I went out to speak to him, he told me he had to go because voices in his head were telling him to kill me. Afterwards I found out he was a schizophrenic. The music was loud to dampen aggressive thoughts...

Focussing too much on perceived danger on the inside creates something of a false impression that such dangers do not exist on the outside, ‘quite honestly I feel safer in here than out there’, Mara remarked.

‘A dose of understanding’

Luna, a Freshfields resident, considered ‘a dose of understanding’ to be a desirable teaching trait. Her sentiments were echoed by students and tutors at both institutions. Many women in prison bring a number of challenging issues, or ‘baggage’, as one tutor phrased it, into the classroom making effective learning exchanges more challenging for all parties. Cheryl (an IT tutor at Arkham) described the atmosphere as ‘intense at times’, more so compared to mainstream settings. ‘The problems women bring to the classroom table are more severe, calling for a more understanding approach than your average comprehensive or college’ she said. Prison teachers must employ ‘empathy and winning strategies’, she explained.

In the hairdressing salon at Freshfields, scissors are stored in a locked cabinet, a potential kernel of concern. They are counted out at the start of each session and counted back in again at the conclusion. Debbie does not consider it to be a big issue in general though, ‘the women wouldn’t be here if they couldn’t be trusted with a pair of scissors’ she says. There are issues of vulnerability to be considered though, a high proportion of women in prison have a history of self-harming (Prison Reform Trust, 2009), which prison tutors must be aware of in exercising due duty of care. External and stressful life changing circumstances can impinge on the routines of residents in Freshfields. A common cause of emotional devastation for women in prison relates to children. The majority of incarcerated women are primary carers and are far more likely to be a greater distance from close family than imprisoned men (ibid). Women frequently have to cope with losing custody of their children while inside. Debbie (a hairdressing tutor at Freshfields) told me about a ‘girl who has just lost her kids’, her two girls were being adopted while she was inside. Working in prison means that Debbie must deal with such personal tragedies on a regular basis, ‘I can’t legally

give advice, anyway I’m in no way qualified to deal with some of these problems’. In this case Debbie explained ‘I deliberately put her where I could keep an eye on her’. She removed the woman from cutting duty (‘if she hurt herself I wouldn’t have been able to forgive myself’), instructing her instead to pile hair on a wig, working on styles. Debbie also ‘turned a blind eye’ and let her ‘chill out’ listening to her iPod, which is, officially speaking, against the regulations during the prison day. Tolerance and understanding of this kind was evidenced in Further Education Colleges researched by Salisbury and Jephcote (2008). Teachers in prison complained to me about being hamstrung by rules, hampering their ability to display judgment and to teach. The iPod episode, however, demonstrates how some teachers in prison prioritise a dose of understanding.

Such common sense rule bending is not uncommon on the part of tutors in prison. Inmates have become casualties of the 2007 legislation banning smoking in enclosed spaces, resulting in day time opportunities to light up a cigarette being much restricted in Arkham. ‘Sparking up’ in the education department is now officially outlawed, whereas previously the women were permitted to smoke in the corridor during break times. Given the locked door situation prisoners cannot nip outside for a smoke, whereas the situation at Freshfields is a good deal more straightforward as residents can simply stroll outside to have a smoke under the purpose built shelter. That is not to say cigarette consumption had ceased within the confines of the Arkham education department, however. Students frequently disregard the rules by smoking during break time in the toilets, a practice overlooked by staff (One side breaks the rules and the other pretends not to notice- a two way smoking conspiracy).

This is a reminder of the ubiquity of certain educational experiences (the crafty fag behind the bike shed at school, a re-living of educational deviancy). The stresses and strains of closed prison existence (‘the emotional knocks’) should be taken into consideration. In the last chapter Havel’s definition of prison was mentioned (cited in Burnside and Faulkner, 2004), as a milieu which constantly exacerbates the nerves. On this point Matt (an Arkham tutor) remarked ‘it’s best not to deal with nicotine starved women at three in the afternoon’. This gentle subversion of the rules is one of the ways tutors extend some

humanity to women in prison, recognising that the stresses of life locked away inside, (alongside those stresses that impinge from outside), call for a relaxed, elastic, and not rigid, attitude to regulations. The turning a blind eye school of pragmatism is sometimes best for all concerned. There is no need for red entries and prisoner disciplinary records remain can remain unblemished.

The iPod and smoking episodes demonstrate that ‘principled infidelity’ (Hoyle and Wallace, 2008) and discretion (agency) were sometimes favoured by teaching staff at both Arkham and Freshfields over arbitrary regime rules (in some respects a sense of humanity or decency won out over set in stone prison rules sets). As Day et al (2007) stress, teacher empathy matters. What is an essential characteristic in mainstream settings takes on even greater qualitative value given the uniqueness of the prison classroom.

Patience

Following on from understanding, patience is considered an essential virtue for tutors in prison to possess. Sonia (at Arkham) was complimentary in this respect, ‘some of them [the educational staff] bend over backwards’, displaying, ‘care and patience’. This was evident in a number of teaching interactions I witnessed, for example Becky, nearing the end of her sentence at Freshfields, who was trying to work out a mathematical problem involving volumes. Apart from a single missed out calculation she understood the process to reach solution. The tutor Alistair patiently let her work it out, step by step until she worked out the missing piece of the puzzle. At no stage did he reveal the answer or cut her short. He patiently listened to her talk through the problem, as she pieced it together step by step, gradually arriving at the answer. As Becky explained to me this sort of approach was alien in her formative education, ‘if you didn’t know the answer right away you were thick... maths teachers were the worst. They couldn’t understand how you couldn’t understand’. Becky was not unique; many women in prison have experienced short-tempered impatience from childhood teachers, with maths teachers often being singled out as the chief culprits.

Patience is also turned on its head, some women set out to probe its limits. Nick prided himself on having limitless patience, an immunity built up over years in primary school classrooms. Some students he says try to pierce his armour, seeking to attack perceived weak spots, ‘some want to get a reaction’. Janice, for example ‘tried every trick in the book’ before conceding, ‘you haven’t got a key... I can’t wind you up’.

The women I interviewed on the whole expected the classroom to be a calm environment; Becky told me she ‘didn’t want to be shouted at by the teacher’. Again, raised voices reflected negative experiences from her schooldays. The Head of Horticulture at Freshfields told me that he avoided raising his voice to get the message across, otherwise he’d have to ‘face the waterworks [tears]’. ‘It can be like walking on eggshells’, he remarked. As mentioned in the previous chapter Mara, the Head of Education at Arkham, kept an ample supply of toilet paper in her office for ‘teary emergencies... Kleenex would cost a fortune’. Mara would also give women a hug when they were upset (on other occasions too, birthdays for example). On the other side of the emotional equation Sandi (serving time at Arkham) had little time for such sentimental outpouring, on the subject of teachers she opined ‘they’re not here to hold your hand’.

The previous chapter addressed the theme of the institutional family, as Annabelle explained, ‘when you’re in prison and got no one your friends become your family, a replacement for what you can’t have’. It is also noteworthy how tutors in prison draw on the concept of family, sometimes casting themselves as parent figures. Nick explained the importance he placed on staying composed, ‘many of these women have lacked calm, positive male role models in their lives’. In some respects he thinks of himself as a patient and paternal figure. As for Mara (Arkham’s Education Manager), she remarked, ‘I must have “mum” in lights on my door’. The emotional labour of her job includes dispensing birthday hugs and toilet paper for tissues. Providing a towel and dry set of clothes for women after they have been left standing out in the rain by officers is another duty of care she undertakes. There is an interesting contrast between dual roles here, the slightly hands off

and patient father figure, and the very hands on mother providing a shoulder to cry on. The ying and yang of parenting. In some respects teachers construct themselves as the ideal parents many of the women never had when they were growing up. This identifies the potential for more research into the heightened emotional labour associated with teaching in prisons. With respect to mainstream educational settings, Price (2001) has observed that teachers are increasingly expected to assume the role of the parent, both for physical and emotional well-being. This in turn reflects wider patterns of emotional labour and dedication as explored by Hochschild (1983), Shuler and Sypher (2000), Rafaeli and Worline (2001) and Mann (2004).

There are noticeable contradictions at the heart of the teacher-student dynamic in prison. As mentioned earlier there is the notion that women learners are adults, wanting to be treated as such, as equals, not to be talked down to. Yet concurrent with this they are perceived as girls, fragile and childlike, requiring emotional support to match. Wider Arkham life infantilises women, divesting responsibility; a regime propagating taught helplessness (almost an irresponsible parent).

Praise

Women at Arkham and Freshfields identified the ability to provide encouragement as an essential trait on the part of teachers, ‘they make you feel good about yourself’ as Lisa (at Arkham) put it. This is especially important in the prison context; educational esteem is clearly at a nadir for many women inside. In numerous cases, as with Lisa, praise from teachers was in low supply during school days, ‘I was made to feel I couldn’t do anything right... I now feel like a better person’. A depressing aspect of my fieldwork was the amount of women I encountered previously low on learning confidence, who, paradoxically had to be incarcerated for educational esteem to be bucked up (the doors of confidence opened during incarceration).

Many inmates told me they only signed up for, and completed courses, because they were gently pushed and encouraged to do so. I met women who earned their first educational qualifications in prison who proudly showed off certificates in IT, literacy and numeracy. Sylvia (at Freshfields) explained the value of her first ever qualification, gained in literacy in a closed prison, ‘I was made to feel I can do it, that I’m not useless’. At the other end of the accredited spectrum were women working through distance learning qualifications. Jean told me ‘I never thought I’d do Open University’, she had recently finished a diploma in Health and Social Care. She thought it was the preserve of ‘the brainy’ and was proud of herself for doing it ‘I never thought I’d be a graduate’. When she was younger she says learning wasn’t something expected from black, working class girls. Being able to do distance learning inside was clearly considered a boon, particularly given the overall lack of free agency in prison, ‘in here we have no choices’. She completed the course with a combination of cajoling and encouragement from teachers, ‘I wouldn’t have done it unless I was pushed. The teachers had confidence in me’. Clearly there are more than just certificates or accreditation at stake. Again this demonstrates the wider benefits of learning (Plewis and Preston, 2001; Feinstein et al, 2008; Schuller et al, 2004). Much is revealed here about the social construction of knowledge, women such as Jean perceive that they have joined a learning culture they were previously denied membership [suggestions of Bourdieu (1986) and cultural/educational capital].

Encouragement, or lack of encouragement, has a big influence where artistic endeavours are concerned. Claire was encouraged to branch out in a creative direction early on in her incarceration, ‘when I first came to prison I could only draw stick men’. Under the guidance of her art teacher she discovered a talent and an aptitude for painting she didn’t realise she had, and subsequently has won Koestler prizes (prison art awards) for her landscape compositions. However, due to the precarious nature of the system, she was transferred to Arkham where the art level catered for is almost remedial and the teaching style conservative and patronising. A clear regression in teaching standard thwarted Claire’s progress. Claire’s prison ‘artistic journey’ will be examined at greater length in the creative learning chapter.

At Freshfields there was a special type of ‘horticultural’ encouragement displayed, whereby the nurturing potential of gardening was harnessed. One way this was facilitated was through the prison nursery, providing residents the opportunity to interact with the wider public through selling garden produce. This illustrated wider benefits of work based learning [a theme developed in Evans et al (2002), Fuller and Unwin (2004) and Huddleston and Unwin (2007)] and ultimately demonstrated ways in which open prisons develop the potential for confidence and skills (in tandem) far more effectively than closed regimes. There will be more on the esteem building effects of horticulture in chapter IX (focusing on vocational education and learning).

Tutors had differing views concerning the merits (and proportions) of praise. At Freshfields Nick was unequivocal on the subject of teaching assurance, the virtues of praising basic skills work, ‘I always write a comment there and then’. He provided instantaneous, formative feedback, ‘the comment is as important as the mark’. Nick clearly believed the value added of assessing learning *for* learning (in a formative sense) not of learning (scoring work in a summative way) (see Black and Wiliam, 1998; Black, 2003). For Nick the imperative was to ‘praise the performance, not criticise the person’. This is seen was viewed an effective strategy to steer students forward and bolster self-esteem, to hit the grade of confidence. Can over praise result in overly needy students? Critics caution that the dangers of too much praise, or learning overly styled along therapeutic lines, results in a devalued educational currency (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009).

Dawn, who taught IT at Arkham added a cautionary note warning that ‘women can be greedy for praise’, suggesting that encouragement should be rationed. She also pointed out that certificates serve a purpose in bolstering self-esteem but often mean ‘bugger all in the real world’. Indicative of the trap of the accreditation society and mixed blessings of praise, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) have, on their part have been critical in their writings about what they consider to be the pernicious and insidious rise of therapeutic education.

Mara, the Arkham Education Manager, emphasised the doubled edged aspect of praise, that it should be in some kind of proportion to talent. While she commended the quality of art work ‘if they’ve painted something that’s clearly rubbish you can’t let that think they’re Van Gogh...’ Praise should be tempered by realism. This episode will be returned to in Chapter VIII on creative forms of learning.

It is important to consider how the social construction of knowledge differs inside and outside of prison. From Jean’s perspective her Open University diploma represents joining the accredited and graduate classes, a step up in the educational world she never thought she would make. Learners may climb the educational rungs inside but are they headed for a fall when they reach the outside world? Some prison staff believe there is a potential dark side to dispensing praise, that over inflated expectations must be managed and goals must be realistic to avoid propagating false dreams. Arkham’s Head of Resettlement says that regardless of their capabilities, job applications by prisoners are routinely ‘binned by employers’, destined for the trash can. The criminal persona often supersedes the value of educational certificates, such is the prison of societal perceptions and expectations. Many women are realistic on this point, Annabelle did not rate her future interview prospects highly, ‘when they ask about my experience, what am I supposed to say? That I worked on the prison servery?’

Conclusion

Women at Arkham and Freshfields revealed numerous fractured biographies and bad educational experiences. Accounts were non-ubiquitous, however, experiences of childhood were diverse, varied and eclectic in nature. Often there were negative and damaging stories to relate; some women suffered the burden of dual childhood imprisonment, both at school and at home. Recollections of negative labelling and being turned off education at an early age were common elements. It is all too evident that ‘bad’ teachers are remembered with some vehemence, which in turn, colours perceptions when returning to education. Yet the

negative side did not tell the whole story, often women looked back fondly at school despite poor performance. In some cases there were social compensations, or perceived benefits in terms of security and stability. Each past narrative, for bad for good, was unique in its own way; the common thread being that all were headed for a future behind bars.

There are clear parallels between the school and prison experience, representing for some women rare instances of order, routine and security. In prison this timetable leads down the path of total institutionalisation and taught helplessness. In terms of the fabric of social relations in closed prisons, officers represent some form of equivalence with reviled childhood teachers, framed by the ‘us and them’ dynamic of a legitimacy challenged authority. The failure of Arkham’s personal officer scheme demonstrates the extent to which staff become institutionalised in their disciplinary ways. Freshfields by contrast illustrates far more positive staff relations, illustrating what happens when bars are removed from the equation. The tenor of social relations is framed by context, the stark dividing lines between open and closed prison mentalities.

Expectations of teaching relationships were often framed in the past tense; women invariably defined them against (often negative) experiences at school, measuring against earlier yard sticks. There is something of a palindromic pattern: many women are trapped by their own past narratives, it is often difficult to overcome the life stories that led them towards prison. Open and closed prisons present different social and learning archetypes. At Arkham it is clear why praise is rated so highly, many were denied it in the past as well as in the incarcerated present. Teacher relations were positive, although some contradictions were evident too. Trust issues were apparent, education does not escape panoptic framework and in some ways reinforces it. Arkham demonstrates some of the limitations of empowerment theory: a structural overhaul in the vein of Freshfields is needed.

The next chapter will mark a shift from social and teaching relations to focus on the core prison curriculum.

VII

The Core of Prison Education

The core prison curriculum, centring on basic skills provision, has been criticised from many quarters. This chapter supports many existing critiques that the focus on basic skills is reductionist, inflexible, taking little account of gender and, in isolation, is ineffectual in preparing women for resettlement. Yet there is also another dimension- for some women the benefits of what they perceive as educational *success* and benefits to esteem seem to exceed the value of the paper accreditation. Towards the end of the chapter it is argued that a more innovative literacy discourse, framed in individual experience, is needed.

The Core Prison Curriculum: A Once in a Lifetime Opportunity?

On my first day visiting the Arkham education department Heather, one of the students, made me tea followed by a grand tour, complete with her own colourful commentary on the courses on offer: ‘there’s literacy, numeracy and IT. Literacy is for fraud, numeracy is for cooking the books and IT is for computer hacking’. This, tongue in cheek, interpretation presented the core subjects in a very different light to the official discourse. The straight-faced, law abiding, rhetoric of providing women with the skills necessary to aid their successful re-integration into society was turned on its head, with education courses instead offering the means for inmates to become better criminals rather than diverting them from a life of deviancy. Although these comments were intended as light-hearted, they do, nevertheless, vicariously question the efficacy of the prison core curriculum- does the basic skills pathway promote a law abiding future, a deviation from deviancy? Is provision in this area adequate or even empowering? Is it the right form of education to be investing in inside prison (or outside for that matter)?

Francis, who had already served a year in Arkham, described the education on offer as ‘a once in a lifetime opportunity’. The first irony in this statement addresses the fact that being locked up should be perceived as opening doors and gifting opportunities; that deprivation of liberty should present some valuable and valid life chances, a chance to catch up on educational skills. The second irony is that raw statistics suggest time in custody for women is unlikely to be a ‘once in a lifetime’ event. Reconviction rates over recent years have hovered over the sixty per cent plus region, more suggestive of a revolving door process than one off experience. This was the case for Janice at Freshfields, ‘I’m 29. I’ve spent most of my adult years in prison. It’s depressing really’. For many like Janice the sum of years spent incarcerated inside exceed those spent at liberty outside. The treadmill of sentencing becomes a lifestyle routine, prison a *déjà vu* reality. Hence *Once in a lifetime* is something of a bittersweet sentiment- do women inside along with staff believe that the range and variety of education on offer make it less likely they will return and render prison more of a *once in a lifetime* event, a roadmap for a better future?

As the previous chapter discussed, women in prison often experienced fragmented and chaotic upbringings, lacking in educational foundation. The core prison education curriculum at Arkham and Freshfields prioritised literacy, numeracy and ICT (as consistent with the OLASS delivery framework with its links to *Skills for Life*). This is in line with the national trend, basic skills represents the majority of education on offer in prisons, on the basis that this constitutes the main area in which inmates are educationally lacking. Recent government discourse has focused on aiming to develop prison as an environment offering the time and opportunity for prisoners to catch up on basic skills. The fact that inmate populations have a high incidence of low educational attainment is well documented. Educational attainment of women in prison is markedly lower than that of the general female population. It is estimated that 47% have no educational qualifications at all, and 37% have GCSEs as their highest level of achievement (Prison Reform Trust, 2009). Whilst 2% of the general population have been excluded from school, 33% of sentenced women prisoners were excluded from school (Prison Reform Trust, 2009) Two out of every five women prisoners left school prematurely (ibid) The high incidence of illiteracy and general

low level of educational attainment distinguishes the female prisoner constituency as one of the most excluded in society (Clements, 2004). The scale of the problem is severe. In recent years adult offenders have been targeted as a priority group for improving literacy and numeracy, homing in on skills for life inside (DfES, 2001; OLASS, 2007). Policy in short, has been geared towards offering adult offenders the chance to 'make up lost time on basic skills' (Home Office, 2004:4).

There is some prudence attached to the basic skills focus in that it offers a way of attending to learning needs from the feet up. According to the opportunities model, should offenders be instilled with a functional level of learning they will have more socially accepted goals opened before them and hence, in theory, should be able to achieve them through legitimate as opposed to illegitimate means. The opportunities model is linked to empowerment theory (outlined in chapter III: *Perspectives on Prison Education*) which argues that life changing/enabling education is possible within prison confines/the prison structural set up. Along these lines education is seen as genuinely improving individual prospects on release, with the potential to break the prison cycle. Dichotomous to this, the emancipatory perspective asserts that meaningful education is a non sequitur in incarcerated circumstances (the core curriculum is antithetical to precepts of empowerment, a sterile and reductionist educational discourse, reinforcing prisoners 'kept' status). Prisoners must be freed before their minds can be, and not the other way around.

The Centrality of the Written Word to Prison Life

In many respects the attack on prison illiteracy is well intentioned. If the written word is considered to have great social significance on the outside, its value arguably becomes even greater in the context of life inside. 'Every time we want something', explained Hayley at Arkham, 'we have to put an order in, or a request... everything has to be done on paper'. Carlo Gebler, a novelist and writer in residence at HMP Maghaberry, commented that 'in prison nothing happens unless you write it down. A prisoner can't put in a tuck shop order

for shampoo or tobacco unless they write it down' (cited in Stanford, 2009). Those who are illiterate inside, and there are many, are placed at a disadvantage, over two-thirds experience difficulty in filling prison forms (Prison Reform Trust, 2009). Conversely those with the ability to read and write can be in high demand. 'I can read and write quite well', Hayley said (point of fact she sat A-Levels at college) 'if people ask I help them write letters home and stuff like that. In return they're quite grateful'. This reading and writing system of skill exchange demonstrates that literacy can be an advantage in the prison hierarchy (and inversely the disadvantage in being illiterate).

Inside prison methods of communication with the outside world are heavily regulated: access to telephones is controlled, restricted and expensive (although Freshfields allows incoming calls); prisoners are barred from accessing the internet. In a technologically backward community, the antiquated written word becomes all important. In terms of communications, prison is an anachronistic pen and paper as opposed to virtual space, increasingly at odds with the broadband knowledge economy. Where deprived of liberties, stimulus and other means of expression, writing takes on great significance, taking on both an instrumental and creative role in prison life (a theme explored in the following chapter on prison creativity).

Along these lines the emphasis on basic skills can be seen as having a considerable moral underpinning; the fact that many inmates are functionally illiterate badly detracts from their quality of incarcerated life, worsening an already stressful and repressive manner of existence. The ability to read and write is argued to have a hugely positive impact on prison life, in the opinion of Collins 'literacy adds a much needed aesthetic dimension to prisoner's existence' (Collins, 1995:50). Numerous women I encountered in Freshfields and Arkham left school without accumulating any qualifications but have subsequently built up a portfolio of Entry Level, (along with Levels 1 and 2) qualifications while serving time in prison.

The gains for Penny, who had worked through literacy levels 1 and 2 while at Arkham, were palpable, 'it's given me a lot of confidence in myself. Not just for in here but for when I get out too'. This bodes well not only for the future but also in terms of navigating the prison sentence. Such newfound ability to read and write develops new skills and beliefs, 'it's helping to get rid of the feeling that I always screw up', Penny added. Paula (at Freshfields) on her part got her first educational qualification while in prison, in her 50s, 'can you believe it, the first certificate I got was in here...' belatedly joining the accreditation society, albeit in a limited fashion. Jessica, serving time at Arkham, was also impressed on this score, 'it's great that older women have the opportunity to get their first ever certificate'. She added 'some people in here couldn't take care of themselves on the outside because of drugs, to have the opportunity to gain a qualification is just wonderful'. There is an element of relativism here, whereas a certificate in literacy may not be considered to have much of an educational currency by many, for women who have led a chaotic and hazardous life, the ability to gain a certificate can represent something of a major, personal success.

For Sonia there was clearly an element of pride involved in her educational achievements. Reflecting on her prison accreditation portfolio (Literacy and Numeracy Levels 1 and 2; CLAIT and CLAIT plus) she reflected 'I'm proud of what I've done'. Looking back at what she had achieved Sonia felt good about herself, earning certificates helped to elevate her self-image. In a broader sense she considered education to play an essential role in 'making myself a better person' For Sonia esteem and self worth had been vital aspects of her learning, perhaps worth more than the educational value of the accreditation she has gained. This is an aspect lost in the debate, that there are benefits to education that cannot be measured by simple to quantify units. While the basic skills orientation may be criticised by some for not involving any great skill to accomplish (with limited educational value), there are cases where it inspires women to develop and partake in other forms of education.

This self-esteem aspect has become a much debated educational theme in recent times. Kathryn Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) caution about The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic

Education, placing education focusing on esteem and education in a pejorative context. Ecclestone argues that there needs to be a focus on hard skills, that recent years have ushered in too much of a learning focus on emotional fragility coupled with the insidious creep of therapeutic techniques. This becomes a complicated area of contention in the prison context, and perhaps ultimately remains something of a cyclical process- for some women skills lead to esteem, in other cases esteem must be addressed prior to skills.

One of the difficult aspects of measuring education, or what works, is the element of hard to quantify aspects or the law of unpredictable consequences. To illustrate the point mathematical forms of learning were viewed as dry and uninspiring by many women in prison, yet some viewed the same curricula activity as fun and stimulating. Sonia found maths to be challenging as she was 'stuck in old measurements', Lisa on her part found maths 'boring... I find it hard getting the hang of numbers'. Conflicting with these opinions, however, Stacy found numeracy to encapsulate the polar opposite, 'I get a kick out of working with numbers', she explained, 'most people find it boring but I find it creative and stimulating'. Numbers added some colour to Stacy's prison life, which brings to mind Galileo's contention that without mathematics one is wandering around in a dark labyrinth (see White, 2007). The creative possibilities of numbers have been explored by Scarlet Thomas in her work *Popco* (2004). The social construction of learning is in the eye of the beholder. Many found numeracy a dull enterprise, yet some found it to have colour. This raises some questions about stereotyping and essentialist gender dichotomies, generic assumptions that it is men that deal with rationality and numerical abstraction while women opt for emotive stimulus. It only takes one exception to disprove a rule. The link between creativity and numbers is addressed in the next chapter, exploring how the *Dance United* project at Freshfields helps women with concentration when applying themselves to mathematics.

Making the Best of a Bad Incarceration

For many women, undertaking education or training in prison entails trying to be constructive and making the best of a bad incarceration. Lizzie, serving time at Arkham, summed up the situation as 'you can use your time in a constructive way or beat yourself up about it'. In closed prisons, where circles are ever decreasing, opportunities can open up behind closed doors. Confinement means women cannot get too far from education. 'I was a cleaner in the education block', explained Maureen, 'I'd never turned on a computer before. I was quite scared of them to tell you the truth. Mara (the Education Manager) asked if I wanted a go... I'm now doing my CLAITs'. Locked in the education department, cleaning, Maureen literally could not escape the learning courses going on [can locked doors open minds?]. The captive audience explains why many people return to education in the first place. And not just for lower scale qualifications. Lizzie would not have resumed her education if it was not for incarceration. Previously the closest contact she had with the reaches of higher education was in a domestic waged capacity, 'my only job after school was as a cleaner. I used to do student rooms in halls of residence'. At Arkham she was undertaking a course in sociology with the Open University; provision supplied from beyond the prison walls.

The benefits linked to prison education are not limited to the individual. Virginia (at Freshfields) explained, 'I'll now be able to help my kids with their homework. I'll be able to relate to them more... I won't be embarrassed if they ask me questions'. Improving her own literacy and numeracy had a side effect of giving her more interest and empathy in the learning of her two young children. Basic skills learning has been utilised in a positive way by many of the women in Arkham and Freshfields by sharing and passing on the benefits. Some women have also been able to invest their newfound skills in helping their children and grandchildren with school work as they get to grips with reading and writing. 'I want to give my children the help I didn't get', explained Virginia. This is a form of being able to offer the support that she herself did not receive growing up, a desire to see her own past mistakes avoided. Helping her children is similar in some respects to helping her past self.

Many women hope that education inside will help them to construct a better future. In the last chapter I mentioned Nancy who was initiated into stealing by her dad when she was 14. Her hope was that education would facilitate a positive break from the past. Inside the artificial (yet all too real) confines of Arkham, inmates construct and reconstruct their imagined futures. Alex talked about the struggles of reassembling the pieces of her life, 'it's like a jigsaw, trying to put it all together again. I'm only around the edges'. Along these lines Anne Owers, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, has said one of the key challenges of imprisonment lies in 'helping people to build a new narrative of their life' (2009). A stable vision of the future. The scenario for many prisoners resembles an inversion of *A Christmas Carol*, (Dickens, 2003) where the memories of the past pointed to happier times while the future vision was grim, in prison women are often chained to a grim past but attempt to construct a happier future image. Rousseau (1968) famously utilised the metaphor of humanity casting off its collective chains; can inmates cast off their personal chains? Do women in Arkham have realistic ideas about their future, especially as many of them have been through the revolving door before? Can this incarnation of post-prison life be any different?

Rejecting the Discourse

It is worth scrutinising the foundations of the Opportunities Model in more detail. Advocates of the functionalist, basic skills centred perspective point to the far-reaching individual, and by association, social benefits of literary based prison education (OLASS, 2007). This brand of learning is envisaged as an opportunity enabling inmates to become more competent and less prone to transgressing society's norms. This mirrors the logic of strain theory (Merton, 1938), which conceives of society as saturated with dreams of opportunity, freedom and prosperity whereby if individuals lack the legal means to actualise these dreams they will resort to illegal measures. According to this framework, educational advancement within prison could be conceived as legal means to fulfil such aspirations as

opposed to criminal alternatives. A fuller account of strain theory can be found in Chapter III (details perspectives on prison education).

Can a skills focused educational approach imbue inmates with the capabilities and desire to live by legitimate means, as a viable alternative to repeated trends of recidivism and criminality? Not all women in prison see education as paving the way to success on the outside. Cola, who was 21 and serving time in Arkham, did not buy into the rhetoric. To date the only legitimate paid employment Cola had been engaged in was working at her mother's hairdressing salon. She worked sweeping up hair and making tea, which lasted all of one day, and was remunerated £50 for her efforts. The short employment tenure was down to Cola's perception of long hours and hard work for a meagre reward; 'I can earn that £50 in five minutes selling drugs'. As such, this represented a considerably smaller investment in terms of time and effort, with the returns far in excess of those offered by starting in the hairdressing trade. In the event she chose a life of crime over cutting. Cola's criminality was tempered with realism; the illegitimate options in front of her offered a better rate of exchange than the legitimate ones. She was staunchly committed to continue drug dealing on release, the future risk of incarceration in Arkham, or sister institutions, was not considered by her enough of a deterrent to steer her into an alternative way of life. 'I'm happy to spend fifty one weeks a year locked up if I can spend the other one living like a princess' was her assessment. In many respects Cola represents a classic case of strain theory, her dreams of the high life have been facilitated by crime, she did not even entertain the notion that the education on offer presented her with an opportunity out of her previous rhythm of life. 'Cocaine to me is like a drink or a smoke to you' she explained. The foundation of the opportunities model, that bolstering inmates skills will be sufficient to steer them from lives of criminality seems decidedly wishful thinking in this example. The skills for life policy framework does not always harmonise with the skills prisoners themselves opt for in their own lives.

So, we have one narrative emerging from the government about the reformatory potential of the skills centred approach to education, but we have a very different story emerging

from Cola, who pragmatically views a life of crime as more in tune with fulfilling her needs and aspirations than her qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Much of the wider evidence appears to support Cola's version of events, that a narrow focus on basic skills does little to aid successful resettlement (Home Office, 2005; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005).

Although the core curriculum is envisaged as an opportunities imbuing framework, there is a problem when prisoners refuse to buy in to the message. Annabelle (in Arkham) was forthright 'I'm not going to lie. When I get out of here I'll meet up with my friends and probably have a dabble'. 'Many of these women don't perceive they need education', explained Mara (the Head of Education at Arkham), 'although most haven't had easy lives they've managed without being able to read. They've been able to deal with bills and disguise the fact they can't read. It's amazing really'. Graham the Deputy Manager touched on the difficulties of providing what women want, 'we shouldn't assume that education is for everyone'. He explained further, 'by that I think it's so far from the experiences and expectations of most of the women here. It's a different language. We need to present ourselves in a way they can relate to'.

The previous chapter (*The Best Days of Your Life*) discussed how many women were excluded from classroom cultural capital as children. It is not surprising then that such negative experiences should inform the decision not to return to education in prison. 'I hated school, why would I go back? The teachers hated me and I hated them', explained Sue at Arkham. This bears some resemblance to the concept of 'rejecting the rejecters' (McCarkle and Corn 1954) defined as:

...a way of life which enables the inmate to avoid the devastating psychological effects of internalising and converting social rejection into self-rejection. In effect it permits the inmate to reject his rejecters rather than himself.

(McCarkle and Corn, 1954:88).

For women like Sue formative learning experiences did not present an opportunity, only failure and rejection. She was rejected by the education system and by society (imprisonment being the most extreme form of social rejection) in turn she has actively rejected the prison education system.

There are problems in engaging with the target audience, those identified as the priority group for the core curriculum of basic skills. Angela, while recognising the need to improve on her level of literacy and numeracy, found the approach at Arkham dry and tedious, ‘too boring, too much reading’. She left school at an early age and found resuming education after a long hiatus (in her thirties while in prison) to be less than stimulating. Numeracy in particular was a contentious subject area, often regarded as a bane rather than a boon. In the previous chapter it was discussed how many women were scarred by classroom mathematics experiences. The later chapter (IX) on vocational learning examines an episode of timetable tension at Freshfields with Michelle frustrated about having to share her time between the salon and the classroom, ‘you don’t understand, maths gets me angry’. A dose of learning is sometimes viewed as a nasty medicine, antithetical to notions of education as empowering. Is it genuinely in the best interests of the students concerned? Is it perhaps a form of being cruel to be kind? Does it enhance future prospects and possibilities?

Barriers to Entry

There are barriers to entry as far as undertaking prison learning is concerned. Although the core curriculum may be presented as offering prisoners opportunities when they are released on the outside, on the inside opportunities to participate are unequal (which problematises the issue). At the macro level the prison system presents daily impediments which frustrate educational potential. Particularly in closed regimes, learning is hampered through security systems and overcrowding (Prison Education Trust, 2009). The situation is compounded by the high incidence of inmate migration between prisons; the Prison Inspectorate has condemned current removal procedures for reducing inmates to pawns on

a chessboard (see Travis, 2009). What is referred to as the 'magic roundabout' of prisoner transfers (the 'ghosting' of inmates) has likewise been widely criticised (Doward, 2009). The educational ramifications of the high level of human traffic between prisons is severe. 41% of inmates who fail to complete a course do so because of being transferred to another establishment (Prison Education Trust, 2009). In a significant number of instances the paperwork for qualifications is lost in transit; over a quarter of inmates suffer as their learning records do not follow them to their new prison (ibid).

In terms of financial opportunities there was a sliding pay scale to all activities in Arkham, with education rooted to the bottom of the pile. The workshop offered the most generous rates. In a building known as Central Services, selected inmates earned money by untangling writhing, black knots of aeroplane headphones, and repacking them in individual plastic bags. While the women involved in the routine labour were behind bars and not going anywhere, the headphones were destined for all corners of the globe. With bonus payments inmates were able to earn in excess of £30 a week. Although such bonuses might not seem extravagant they are financially very attractive inside, in some ways the prison world's equivalent to banker's bonuses. While the wider economy declines, a thriving sub-minimum wage culture develops in prison. The 'booming' inside production line contrasted with the dilapidated scene not far from Arkham's fences, where an industrial wasteland with windowless, run down factories and shells of buildings reveal the scars of the past.

It is noteworthy that the Prison Service has been blocking freedom of information requests into the terms of employment contracts with outside companies for many years (Cookson and Chamberlain, 2009). These contracts amount to a hidden exploitation and may well reinforce the view that work is not as exciting as crime, and certainly not as well paid. Prison employment is often bleakly mundane, a throwback to the spirit of sewing mailbags or the treadmill. Examples include stuffing envelopes, with bonuses attached should inmates fulfil quotas (ibid). In some respects this symbolises a skewed mirror or a parody of performance related pay culture.

Work in the Arkham kitchen paid women anything from £18 to £24, but still more than education, the remunerative nadir, offering only £11 a week. Bonuses here were more meagre than the ones offered in the workshop, with £2 offered when women gained certificates. Mara the Arkham Education Manager was not happy, 'education pays the worst but in my world it should be the most'. The message communicated is that a lower value is placed on learning than other activities in the regime, education is dis-incentivised at Arkham, devalued both monetarily and symbolically. 'The thing you should know', said Katie, 'is that some of the women here are poor, they have no money and are always borrowing cigarettes'. Prison wages may not seem lucrative, but can make a huge difference in the context of life inside. Some women choose the mind numbing routine over education because of money. This could be regarded as supporting total institutional objectives, keeping inmates occupied through repetition of small tasks and closing off the mind. Although the prison core curriculum is styled as an opportunities engendering model, such intentions are undercut by lack of incentivisation, and financial disadvantage.

Sidestepping such issues, HMP Freshfields pays a flat rate of 30p an hour for all activities and education, to avoid financially incentivising or dis-incentivising any aspects of the regime. This avoids residents opting for short-term cash gain over improving long-term prospects. There is a gender disparity though; rates of remuneration are relatively low compared with male resettlement prisons according to the Prisons Inspectorate.

A Lack of Educational Opportunity

Rather than the core prison curriculum offering empowerment and possibilities, a phalanx of critics (Bayliss, 2003; Taylor, 2006; Vella, 2005), along with prisoner students and teachers, argue the opposite is true, that the functionalist agenda is artificially restrictive, and that a broader educational mandate is essential.

Women in Arkham and Freshfields offered a wide range of verdicts on the nature of the basic skills laden curriculum. Not all awarded the provision top marks. Claire, for example was overtly critical of the range of education on offer at Arkham, which she perceived to be inclined towards a somewhat narrow learning focus. 'I would give the education here 2 out of 10', although she acknowledged, a degree of subjectivity was involved, 'this is only my point of view though'. Claire claimed, 'the education is fine if you are illiterate, but frustrating if you want something beyond the basic level'. From her perspective prison does not mark a *once in a lifetime* opportunity, as far as learning goes, but on the contrary, a frustrating lack of opportunity. Evidently there is a delicate balancing act, and the perception that the educational needs of the minority are not being addressed along with the majority. Claire added, 'if you've got a degree the choice is between stagnating in the workshop, stagnating in the education department or stagnating in your cell'. The equivalent of a zero sum choice then.

Claudia at Arkham wanted 'something with a bit more creativity and variety', her sentiments were echoed by other women in prison. The core curriculum takes a very different approach, however. Rooted in functionalist discourse, the basic skills instrumentalist ethos focuses to a near exclusive level on the high proportion of inmates with a low level of functional literacy (Clements, 2004). Focusing on the many, not the few. Graham, the Deputy Education Manager at Arkham, argued that 'the government's Skills for Life strategy is misplaced, more needs to be done earlier in schools'. He was critical of the way 'it takes prisoner's learning down a narrow path'. The OLASS Learning and Skills framework (2007) prioritises functional skills at the expense of wider learning needs. Taylor (2006) has labelled the overbearing remedial approach that has dominated prison education discourse over the past decade as 'death by basic skills'. A more in depth basic skills critique was detailed in chapter III which examined key theoretical perspectives surrounding prison education. Here follows a brief summary of some of the main criticisms.

The rigidity of focus up to levels one and two does little to aid resettlement in isolation, the benefits as an educational panacea have been over-stated; soft skills are lacking (Home

Office, 2005; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005). The basic skills approach offers a reductionist conception of what constitutes success, allied to a rigid KPI structure (statistics aren't even collected for women), propagating a simplistic causal relationship between literacy and crime. Such a narrow, positivistic, framework is informed by the premise that education should have to prove its efficacy in terms of hard currency. But should education be normatively reduced to having to prove its worth in such a way? Education is the hallmark of a civilised society, and should be provided on the basis that it constitutes 'the right thing to do' (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2005:13).

Mara (the Arkham Education Manager) reaffirmed these sentiments, 'in isolation basic skills does little'. She was frustrated by the basic skills centred approach, although she acknowledged 'it has a key role to play within the broad educational spectrum'. She believed alternatives have been precluded and that the policy framework has been blind to 'wider, more rigorous definitions of learning'. This inevitably impacts on the service she and her staff could provide prisoners with funding flowing in the direction of basic skills, to the mutual annoyance of many of the prisoners and staff. Another troubling dimension involves elements of 'dodgy practice' by some providers of prison education, whereby it has been lucrative to enlist students in basic skills according to the rubric of financial inducements offered by educational contracts (to help meet Prison Service Key Performance Indicators). Mara claimed that 'it had been known for education managers in some prisons to sign up inmates with A-Levels and degrees in literacy and numeracy classes' under a formula which affords financial inducements for doing so.

Provision has often been out of step with educational needs. Francis for example described herself as 'very IT literate, I've been in jobs when I've trained people in this area'. In a previous prison she was undertaking a course in CLAITs which she found to be non-taxing, well below her level of computer expertise, 'it's wasn't challenging but it got me out of my cell'. Women who want to engage with challenging, mentally stimulating education are often left disappointed. Distance learning and Open University can provide alternatives to

the limited internal provision for those who want to engage in learning beyond the equivalent of GCSE Level. The Prisoners' Education Trust fund up to 90% of fees for distance learning courses. If women want education outside the remit of the core curriculum, they have to turn away from prison providers to the Third Sector. Although the lack of internet inside prisons proves a sore point, the Open University categorises provision according to a traffic light system: red means the course cannot be completed offline. Prisons are in some ways uniquely placed for the development of virtual campuses, yet there is institutional reluctance on the part of the Prison Service power brokers to facilitate such developments.

Non-profit organisations are behind much prison education innovation facilitating alternative forms of provision; conversely the Prison Service drags its heels by closing off the on line world. This is something of a perverse situation, prison time hangs heavy, there is a lack of mental stimulation and fewer distractions compared with the outside. In some respects incarceration should be the ideal climate for distance learning. Statistics reveal that in 2004 less than 1% of prisoners in England and Wales were engaged in Open University learning (OLASS, 2007).

Infantilised Learning

Claire criticised the lack of challenge involved in her education, 'I started doing an NVQ but stopped because it was too basic. It wouldn't challenge my 8 year old daughter'. This underlines the common perception that learning in prison delivers education for children but not for adults. Keira complained about the courses on offer at Arkham, 'it's too basic as if we're kids. We're taught not to think in here'. The curriculum is viewed then as patronising, deviating from precepts of autonomy and individual competence, another way prisons teach helplessness and take away capacity for independent thought. By way of contrast the Foundation Phase introduced into Welsh schools in 2008 (covering early years and Key Stage 1) put in place an emphasis on learners to the age of 7 being self-reliant and

initiating learning transactions. While primary school children are encouraged to act like adults, some women in prison complain they are treated like primary school children.

The basic skills paradigm is considered to be infantilised, 'sterile and reductionist' (Webster et al, 1999: 50), a framework devaluing literacy, divesting critical potential. Learning effectively leached of essential nutrients. Educational austerity, basic prison rations. The bread and water of learning. Vella (2005) argues that basic skills is discredited and should not be considered proper education at all. In this way the prison curriculum can be viewed as a parody, or ersatz form of provision. The focus on the remedial is associated with disempowering realities (Jones and d'Errico, 1994; Lawrence, 1994). The irony behind the so called core curriculum-opportunities model is that it engenders a fundamental lack of opportunity, embodying a deprivation of choice and agency, anti-thetical to the very notion of education as an empowering and enabling commodity. An educational discourse, in short, peddling monochrome dreams.

The accreditation game is defined and shaped by others. The implication is that prisoners are incapable of knowing what is best for them, that because they have made bad decisions they should no longer be allowed to make decisions at all. As if women can be rehabilitated and re-forged, broken down and rebuilt as functional members of society. The problem with the dominance of basic skills is the way it serves to accentuate perceptions of feminine vulnerability and helplessness. It can give the impression that women are passive consumers of their own imprisonment. This is a distortion of reality. 'Many of the women in prison have an inner toughness', explained Karen the Head of Education at Freshfields, 'women who have been on the game, for example, are survivors. They bring these coping strategies to the fore in prison'. The adaptability and survival strategies linked to previous lives of criminality and deviance are seen as key traits in surviving prison. Many have had to deal with tough knocks and setbacks, picking up other skills growing up than those taught in the classroom. Lessons the wider world has taught them. A large number of were exposed to the darker shades of life at an early age. It is wrong then to patronise them through education.

Britney, who was undergoing literacy and numeracy classes in Arkham, told me ‘We do it because we’re thick’. The way Britney conceived of herself as *thick* highlighted some worrying facets regarding self-image for students in prison. Goffman (1991), espousing a dramaturgical approach, wrote about the presentation of the self and how, as social actors, we produce and reproduce our social realities. In reinforcing her own negative stereotype, it could be that Britney was writing her own self-fulfilling prophecy. There is a danger that the discourse surrounding basic forms of learning does little to discourage the formulation of the *illiterate* and *uneducated* inmate (the *Dummies’ Guide* approach to teaching, insinuates that students are unintelligent as a starting point). As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 2006 *The Sun* newspaper published a vitriolic piece on prison education labelling ‘lags’ as ‘too thick to think of complex words’ (Macadam, 2006). Prisoners are often trapped within the visions/interpretations of others, the typology of inmates as institutionally thick. This makes prison populations easier to stigmatise, mock and despise as an un-educated, deviant, other (a point where humanity can be plausibly denied).

Based on some of the opinions of some women in prison it follows that there is a compelling argument that basic skills curricula are rigidly defined and antithetical to empowerment. Not so much an opportunity, but lack of opportunity. There are shades of Bourdieu (1986), as prisoners are further marginalised, maligned and excluded from social capital. The obsession with basic skills reinforces and reproduces the stigma of inmates as an illiterate, unintelligent class. The ‘us and them’ dichotomy does not just refer to the internal prison sphere of social relations, it also informs wider debates: the ‘us and them’ educational schism between inmates and wider society. Graham, the Deputy Education Manager at Arkham, reflected on this point:

I realise there’s nothing particularly unique about the women in here. Speaking to them... the worrying thing is it’s often understandable. I’m not sure what I would have done had I been in their position. I think to myself “there but for the grace of god”.

Accreditation Overload

The esteem and good feelings attached to certificates was discussed earlier in the chapter, on the flipside to this there has been an element of accreditation overload for some women. During her time in prison, up to and including Arkham, Tracey had accumulated 12 certificates, 'at first they gave me a huge feeling of satisfaction'. She commented that 'a lot of fuss is made by the staff over the certificates', especially for people who have never completed an educational course. There is an element of pageantry involved, photographs are taken, there is a ceremony of sorts. This is positive, she thinks, in that 'it encourages people who can't read and write. It gives them the chance to learn'. The environment was considered supportive, 'they show that they care'. A financial value was placed on attaining qualifications at Arkham; a bonus of £2 was paid per certificate. Tracey admitted that after a while to becoming somewhat jaded by the whole process, 'my first certificates meant a big deal to me, now I realise they're not hard to get'. The level of significance attached to qualifications falls in proportion to the perception of lack of challenge entailed. Tracey stopped displaying them with pride, instead keeping them neatly filed away in a folder out of view (in some ways mirroring the opportunities trap in wider society).

Undertaking prison education can result in being submerged with paper accreditation, the quantitative easing of qualifications. Freire (1970) was highly critical of such a normative premise guiding education, which he termed the *banking* system. Education of this sort is likened to a form of investment capital, divested of intrinsic value. The metaphor is well suited to prison education where dominant forms of curricula betray the hallmarks of a depositing process. Prisoner-students appear as receptacles, to be filled accordingly by the curricula structure, contrary to the principles of human inquiry. The *banking* form of education, based around cash point micro learning transactions, is therefore considered conducive to keeping inmates steadily occupied and as such keeping the total institution in working order (this theme will be developed shortly).

The value attached to such paper currency outside of prison and in the world at large becomes a problematic area. There are barriers to employment other than lacking pre-requisite skills. The prison of perceptions means that qualifications alone are unlikely to lead to jobs. As discussed in the previous chapter The Head of Resettlement at Arkham was clear that applications from ex-prisoners are, more often than not, destined for the human resources bin. Jonathan Aitken, who went from the senior ranks of the Conservative Party to being convicted of perjury, has argued that ex-offenders should have the opportunity to spend their convictions fairly (as in many other countries) to allow for fresh starts (Hinsliff, 2009).

Sentenced to a Term of Education?

In some respects the basic skills discourse can be interpreted as an extension of the total institution rather than a relief from it. Wilson (2009) has argued such education represents a form of ‘frog marching’, tied to ‘centrally driven key performance targets’. A one size fits all punitive mantra, an example of the centralising tendencies of the Prison Service.

While undergoing basic skills serves as a means of individual mental discipline, a way of keeping the mind occupied, such form of curricula activity can also be viewed as being consistent with the disciplinary arm of prison. The functionalist adult literacy curriculum is argued by Collins (1995) to be easily adapted to this culture of surveillance, forging a particularly close fit. Both teachers and students, it is contended, are closely monitored, caught within the confines of a rigidly defined, standardised curriculum. Such a format is seen as conforming to a strictly prescribed set of responses, which are channelled and framed as dictated by course materials. Davidson maintains that this framework allows for ‘easy surveillance of the individual’s behaviour’ (1995:7). A bite sized quasi-punitive pedagogy.

As mentioned in the third chapter (scrutinising perspectives surrounding prison learning), there is some controversy over the extent to which attending education should be enforced as part of an agenda of personal reform (Jenkins, 1994). Sandi, serving time in Arkham, warmed to the idea of compulsory participation, 'education should be enforced', she argued 'especially computing, it's the way of future'. Courses in education, especially with an ICT element, were seen by Sandi as a means of retaining mental sharpness. This raises the Rousseau's (1968) quandary of whether people can be forced to be free (or educated?). Sandi emphasised why she considers it so important that prisoners enrol in education: 'women stagnate in here... they turn to cabbages in their cells'.

The aspect of women stagnating in prison points to some very real dangers of minds ossifying on the inside, brain cells withering in the cell. Evenings and nights can be long and lonely. Hayley (mentioned in Chapter V *Tales of Two Prisons*) reminisced about her closed prison loneliness... 'the telly becomes your best friend'. A poignant image of how women in prison cope without stimulation and human company. There are, however, other sides to life in the cell according to the testimony of women. Minds can be broadened as well as atrophied.

It is a fallacy to assume that prison learning begins and ends in the classroom. Women draw on their own faculties and resources in their cells. Francis, discussing her evening routine, revealed 'I never miss *Question Time*. I'm very political'. Although convicted prisoners are dis-enfranchised from voting, it is wrong to assume their interest in political affairs is automatically dimmed (given their circumstances they have every reason to be uniquely interested). Although it is easy to be dismissive about the state of tele-visual culture it does, nonetheless, provide a link to cultural discourse on the outside. Francis also spoke of her reading habits, 'my idea of a good evening used to be in the company of a bottle of wine, now it's a good book' (she had a shelf full of Terry Pratchett titles). Francis was also engaged in writing projects, including a biographical work based on her life story, as well as experiences in prison, written in the third person. She was also studying the bible from an in depth historical perspective. She had ambitions to learn Greek and Hebrew, 'I'd really like

to do a degree in theology'. As such she was poles apart from discourse stigmatising inmates as an illiterate and uneducatable underclass. The prison cell can be interpreted as an informal learning space (although inevitably there are blurred boundaries between formal, informal and non-formal), in that it concerns learning arising from the ritual of everyday (incidental) activity, and is less structured than the prison classroom, and is less bound by accreditation. Rogers (2004) argues that a new paradigm for learning exists where the lines between formal and informal are blurred.

Moving Towards an Alternative Literacy Discourse?

Previously in this chapter I have discussed interpretations of core basic skills provision in prison, and how learning develops a different meaning in the prison context. In the latter sections of the chapter I will explore the potential for a move towards a more personal literacy discourse in prison, away from the basic skills model and more rooted in individual experience.

Freshfields is a participator in the innovative *Storybook Mums* scheme where can residents record and send bedtime stories to their children, a process which helps to maintain family ties, and is also a practical, embedded way of enhancing basic and social skills. At Arkham the Toe by Toe (TbT) programme offers a one to one structure of delivering literacy, with inmates at the forefront as both teachers and students.

Storybook Mums: 'Keeping Families Together'

The Storybook Mums project enables women at Freshfields to record bedtime stories for children. The aim is for mothers to be able to maintain a normal parental activity under difficult circumstances of separation. In many respects children are the hidden victims of the criminal justice system. Every year 160,000 children experience the imprisonment of a parent (Department for Children, Schools and Families/Ministry of Justice, 2007). 7% of

primary school children experience a parent going to prison while at school. Yet children are marginalised in the debate, the little people's voices are rarely heard (Codd, 2008).

Storybook Mums offers a technological solution to maintaining family ties (keeping contact means that prisoners are six times less likely to reoffend on release). Many children are unable see their parents in prison because of distance to travel (women on average are imprisoned further away than men). The scheme styles itself as, 'keeping families together', the degree to which this is achieved is up for debate. A disembodied voice is a poor substitute for tactile parenting, but given the circumstances is probably about as good as it gets. Angie recorded stories for her son, 'so he knows I'm thinking about him every day'. She felt that reading to her son from a distance helped him in dealing with anxiety and loss, 'he said if he closed his eyes it's as if I'm there'.

The project encourages a family centred literacy, 'I never had bed time stories when I was young', explained Angie, 'I'll do it when I get out... it's a reminder of what I'm missing'. A survey by alltopbooks.com (2008) revealed that one in three parents never read a bed time story to their children, with many claiming they lack the time (a poverty of family hours). Time, however, is a commodity prisoners have in abundance. Elements of the Storybook Mums initiative might be considered as bordering on a distance learning course in parenting.

Stories are recorded onto a portable voice recorder. This encourages the development of reading and oral skills in an embedded way. Poor readers and non-readers are not excluded from the project. Linda had difficulty in reading some parts of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (stumbling blocks included the third bowl of porridge) 'the lines were spoken to me and I spoke them back'. There is also potential for a creative writing dimension, 'we can also write our own stories', explained Angie, 'my son loved that I included him in a story'. For mothers like Angie and Linda investing in relationships with their children (a family literacy) as opposed to the paper currency of accreditation is in some ways suggestive of the Freirian

construction of pedagogy (1970) where learning is framed in terms of the student's circumstances and life history, their own personal cultural capital.

Recordings are sent off and edited by inmates at Dartmoor prison (where the project originated) using digital audio software on computers; music and sound effects can be added and mistakes deleted. In this way benefits are passed on as prisoners learn to be part of a dynamic product team, who can gain an OCN (Open College Network) qualification in sound and audio production through their paid work. Finished stories are then burned to CD ready to be forwarded on to children. For Angie the process took some getting used to, 'I felt silly at first speaking into the recorder. I'm uncomfortable around them...I didn't think it sounded good, I made mistakes, it sounded a bit dull...' Although she added, '...but my son loves them so I try to make them better'. Overall it is an impressive sounding package, listening to the fable of the *Gingerbread Man* whooshing noises were added to emphasise movement and sprinting, cows mooed and horses neighed. The effect was very much reminiscent of a radio production.

The programme was conceived by Sharon Berry in 2004, while she was teaching literacy in prison. It is telling that it was designed and developed not from the top down, but by a practitioner from the ground up. Based in Dartmoor Prison the scheme has been disseminated across 70 establishments. There is potential to go further, Storybook Mums is easily transferable between institutions. Participation is not exclusive to parents; grandparents, aunts and uncles and siblings can record stories too. Benefits are widespread, emphasising the need to move away from narrow definitions of educational success.

In 2007 Storybook Mums won the charity of the year award and in 2008 went on to win the accolade of Small Charity, Big Achiever at the Third Sector Excellence Awards. Pockets of innovation are sprouting from the charitable sector as opposed to from within the Prison Service.

‘Something for Everyone’

The Freshfields library advertises itself under the slogan ‘Something for everyone’. Although this was an example of marketing exaggeration (and unfulfilled promises), the library acted as the Freshfields’ base for Storybook Mums, and in some respects represented an expansive learning environment (Fuller and Unwin, 2004), or at least more so compared to a prison library of the Arkham mould. Whereas the Freshfields library bridged contact with families on the outside, the restricted opening hours at Arkham (closed during many break times, evenings and weekends) meant users could only access their library in a limited capacity (many wasted hours of words locked away, sitting dormant on shelves among broken spines).

Despite such promising work at Freshfields the Prison Service finds other ways to stifle innovative ways of promoting offender literacy. *Cell Texts* (2009) is an on line space, a prison library without walls. The texts, all written by authors during incarceration (including Irina Ratushinskaya, Wole Soyinka and Oscar Wilde) are catalogued according to length of prison sentence, as opposed the numerical staidness of the Dewey categorisation system. Yet these works of prisoners through the ages cannot be accessed by the prisoners of today (due to the internet ban). Hence, the incarcerated are barred from a type of writing they could empathise with, a literature composed within conditions of captivity [disenfranchised from their own cultural capital?]. In stark contrast, the main depictions of inmates in the Arkham and Freshfields libraries were authored by outsiders to prison life, representations of prisoners as serial killers, sensationalist biographies of the Yorkshire Ripper, Dr Shipman and the like. Libraries stand as a symbol of ‘discourse about discourse’ (Bayard, 2008:48) a commentary on how knowledge is arranged and constructed. It is interesting to observe that the cultural reflection of criminals in the libraries of women’s prisons is as male mass murderers.

Yet the sensationalist material finds an audience in captivity. Some women I spoke to were avid consumers of glossily packaged true crime. Alex at Arkham revealed ‘I always watch

Crimebusters', (stating the irony of convicted criminals enthralled by television dedicated to clamping down on crime is too obvious). Her other viewing habits? 'I also watch programmes about people banged up abroad, 70 to a cell and no rights'. Alex was drawn to the exotic side of criminal life (celebrity criminals, extreme incarceration) poles apart from her own offending history as a benefit fraudster.

Tackling Illiteracy One Toe at a Time

An alternative model for tackling prison illiteracy is presented in the form of the *Toe by Toe* (TbT) initiative. This is based on a simple premise: two thirds of prisoners lack literacy skills, who better to teach them than the other third? The TbT reading manual was developed by Keda Cowling, inspired by her experience of teaching children with dyslexia. The TbT programme started in 2000 in Wandsworth, within a year 80 prisoners had learned to read using the scheme. It now features in more than 90% of prisons. TbT is facilitated in prisons by the Shannon Trust (a registered charity) who supply the manuals.

The premise of TbT is a buddy system, fluent readers take those with low levels of literacy through the manual one step at a time. Women in Arkham involved in the project (as teachers and students) were highly enthused, noticeably more so compared with basic skills. Jessica was tutoring 5 women on the programme (including one from Wales and one from Somalia) she was adamant that 'benefits were on both sides', to the extent that she and her pupils continued the education out of hours, giving up much of their free time to pursuing the course (although of course 'free time' is not free at all but designed and shaped by penal authorities). From Jessica's point of view it was 'good to feel purpose, to be needed and useful', while the women she taught were rapidly developing their literacy.

Sally explained how she had benefited from TbT. On the outside her illiteracy meant the doors of employment were closed to her, 'I couldn't do a job. I couldn't read the health and safety'. Earlier in the chapter the moral dimension to literacy was discussed, the ability to

read means that women are able to represent themselves in a more positive way. 'I used to play the clown, I acted like I didn't care', she reflected, 'I now feel more confident on the inside'. A year previously Sally was functionally illiterate, when I met her she was helping women who could not read follow her own successful trail through TbT.

There are similar documented success stories. Eric Allison (2008) former prisoner turned journalist, has been one of TbT's strongest supporters (to the point he is now a trustee of the Shannon Trust). He illustrates the strengths of the schemes drawing on the TbT experiences of two inmates at Verne Men's Prison in Dorset. The first was a heroin addict and prolific re-offender, the only word he could read was 'chips' ('I lived on the streets a lot and I like chips so I wanted to make sure that, when I asked for them, the place sold them'). After completing the course he progressed to teaching illiterate inmates and had plans to enrol in college post-release. The second could neither read nor write when he came to prison but after TbT became a journalist on a prison magazine (interviewing a visiting Bishop). His mother was 'thrilled to bits' seeing his name in print. Likewise, he went on to teach literacy to other prisoners.

Advocates argue that the TbT programme helps prisoners take control of their lives: baby steps for a better tomorrow. The Prisons and Probations Ombudsman has gone as far as declaring it, '...the single best thing introduced into prisons in the last ten years' (HM Prison Service, 2008).

One of the interesting aspects of the scheme is the way it develops a sense of prison altruism. Jessica explained 'where I came from [America] I used to work in the fashion industry. I never really did much to help others. Now I want to continue'. Can this community spirit be fostered outside of prison? In 2007 160 copies of TbT manuals were distributed around deprived estates in Brighton, supported by an estate matriarch whose son learned to read by TbT in prison. Eighteen months later 80 people had learned to read and were using their new found skills to help others, developing a form of community literacy (illustrating the shared benefits).

Toe by Toe Controversies

There is some controversy, however, over the TbT approach of synthetic phonics, connecting sounds of spoken English with groups of letters. This is considered to be the literacy of children not adults. This brings to mind some of the issues basic skills was criticised for earlier, such as infantilising and dis-empowering learners. However, while the basic skills agenda in prisons has become the overbearing centralised discourse, TbT should be seen in the context of a wider menu, away from the idea of dominant panacea.

There are a number of ways TbT avoids some of the pitfalls of the basic skills approach to combating illiteracy. 'It's better than going to education', explained Sally, 'there you've got 12 people in a room but with one to one you get more time'. Alan Wells the former Head of the Basic Skills Agency (a phonics sceptic) believes the problem for adults who cannot read is not so much the teaching strategy that was formerly employed, but rather being left to stagnate at the back of the class overlooked by teachers (Kingston, 2009). Whatever the controversies with phonics, TbT at least offers interactive one to one support. It is unlikely that a qualified teacher (with pay to match) will be assigned to each illiterate prisoner as the overall prison population continues to escalate.

The prisoner on prisoner teaching dynamic removes classrooms and teacher hierarchies from the learning equation. Although critics will complain that the inmate driven approach removes teachers from the equation, teachers have often been the problem. Many prisoners are reluctant to return to the classroom because of the negative imprint burned from childhood. TbT provides a way back into education for offenders with anti-teacher or anti-authority attitudes, many then take their learning further. The programme breaks down the barrier of teacher-inmate, expert-deviant. Students of the programmes, like Sally, then go onto to teach it, resulting in a cyclical learning process. There is less stigma which aids recruitment, 'women who can't read and ask me direct. It's easier to ask help from one of your own', explained Jessica. It is also taught on the wing, essentially the prisoner's back yard. This represents a model of non-forming learning, with structured, initiated learning

transactions occurring outside the auspices of the classroom. Regardless of the merits, or otherwise, of the scheme it serves as a reminder that it is important to get out of the conservative mindset that teachers in classrooms offer the only educational solution (when in actuality this has often been the problem).

TbT does present an incredibly structured learning schedule, bite sized chunks and tackled in a regimented and linear sequence. Yet inmates have more input compared to other curriculum models, they decide on their timetable, location and frequency. Jessica explained 'it's less intimidating'. Simplicity is the key, 'it's a feeling of "I can do this"', explained Sally. Learners know sounds already and quickly recognise shapes of letters that represent them, they appeared to be enthused rather than patronised. 'Everyone succeeds in the end'.

The jury is still out on the utilisation of phonics for adults. While it has become increasingly prominent as literacy tool for children, there has been limited research on its efficacy for older learners. The assumption has been that it is too infantilised, yet advocates argue that phonics can be an effective tool for adults, and a change in attitudes is needed (Kingston, 2009). Research commissioned by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) compared three approaches to adult literacy, phonics came out on top (Brooks et al, 2007; Burton, 2007). Aiming to resolve the debate, the ESRC has commissioned research aiming to have a similar impact to the Rose review of primary education (2006), which recommended synthetic phonics as the chief modus in teaching young people to read. 'A "team" of academics! They won't come cheap!' reposted Eric Allison (2009). His alternative? 'I instead offer the ESRC a solution to save it money and time. If it wants proof of how phonic learning can be effective with adults, it needs only enter any prison'. Regardless of the findings, prisons should be looked at to inform wider approaches to literacy. After all, this is where the biggest concentration of adults lacking the functional ability to read and write is to be found.

The Third Way

This chapter has discussed the basic skills core curriculum approach, the merits and otherwise. In many respects the official discourse is centralised and stifling, failing to relate to the experience of prisoners. Increasingly many of the innovations have been brought in from outside, a hidden dependency on the third sector. Initiatives such as *Storybook Mums* and *Toe by Toe* offer alternatives to staid models of literacy. At the other end of the educational scale, higher education only exists in prisons (and even then in a strictly limited form) due to intervention from the *Prisoner's Education Trust*. The government drags its heels and displays conservative tendencies, the lack of internet access compounds learning across the educational spectrum. The result is an Oliver Twist, cap in hand, 'please sir' approach to address reoffending. Charity is being called on to attend to prisoners' learning needs, from the remedial to academic and, as the next chapter reveals, creative ones too.

VIII

Creative Prison Learning

In the previous chapter the core prison curriculum was critiqued at length. Aspects of my findings mirror the general critique frequently levelled at functionalist styled education in the prison context; the often rigid and overbearing 'death by basic skills' approach (Taylor, 2006) reducing learning to a value of exchange measured in hard currency. This chapter marks a shift from the core prison curriculum and will focus on creative learning, an area which is under-funded compared to basic skills but still very much in evidence at Arkham and Freshfields. The key area scrutinised in this chapter will be the extent to which (and in what ways) creativity manifests itself inside prisons. Is the concept itself a misnomer?

Arguments in favour of more expressive forms of learning have a strong theoretical basis. Davidson (1995) has argued that inmates should be encouraged to forge their own set of learning priorities with creativity at the forefront. Habermas (1991) was keen to emphasise that the *systems world*, with its underlying technical rationality should be resisted in favour of life enriching alternatives. This, in the context of prison education, could be taken to mean the rejection of functionalist laden curricula in favour of more expressive learning outlets. In many instances inmates have indeed been able to mediate their identity within the cracks of the systems world.

Empowerment theory particularly embraces creative and expressive forms of learning (Wilson and Reuss, 2000; De Maeyer, 2001). A broader, expressive, vision measuring intangible outcomes, such as increased self worth and positive attitudes, is considered to be preferable (Bayliss, 2003; Webb and Williams, 1993). This focus on expression opens up a discourse of individual choice, as opposed to the quasi-punitive and repressive overtones of the functionalist paradigm. This recognises the fact that learning needs cannot be administered to in a ubiquitous way, what works for one prisoner will not necessarily work for another (Wilson, 2000). The empowerment outlook regards education as a means to

allow inmates to ‘retain choice and control in what they do while in prison’ (Reuss, 1999:125). The penal environment, whether closed or open, by definition, restricts choice to a severe degree, hence the element of freedom and vitality embodied through self-expression is viewed as especially important. So, which examples of creativity learning and self-expression will be focused on here? First of all I will consider education as a creative performance and group activity. Under scrutiny will be the staging of *Erpingham Camp* at HMP Arkham and *Dance United* at HMP Freshfields.

The play *Erpingham Camp* by Joe Orton (1990) is set in a Butlin’s style holiday camp which the author intended to represent the power dynamic of a women’s prison. The work serves as a metaphor on incarceration, a fictional counterpart to the real world dramas of prison life. The spectacle was particularly interesting to witness with actual serving prisoners portraying fictional metaphorical counterparts, roles within roles (providing a rich context of inter-textuality).

Dance United is a project run by a dance academy participated in by some residents of Freshfields, aiming to promote dance innovation in tandem with social inclusion. In contrast to the play in Arkham dance rehearsals took place outside of the prison at a dance academy in a nearby town. As a specialist dance studio residents not only worked and collaborated within themselves as a cohort, but also with students and instructors of dance. This involved mixing with non-offender members of the dance group, some as young as 14 years old, performing in a variety of venues- on stage, in schools and in Freshfields itself.

The focus of the chapter will then move away from the spheres of dance and theatricals to explore prison art and creative writing. Further discussion will explore the link between creativity and prison. In Arkham, life in the cell sparks creative reflection for many of the women. In some cases creativity flourishes *because* of incarceration, not despite it.

‘Where all your dreams come true...’ Theatrics in the closed prison world

Putting on a theatrical production marks a break from the quotidian routine of prison life in a closed prison, adapting a secure environment to a theatrical one, the drama extends beyond the stage. The makeshift theatre was set up in the visitor’s room, one of the more colourful areas in the prison. A range of artwork stretched across the walls including faded prints of Van Gogh sunflowers together with a selection of drawings and paintings produced by prisoners- some realistic portraits and abstract art. There were also some paintings by children and grandchildren of the women in Arkham, one was a sheet of paper covered in red, green and blue handprints, bold at first then becoming progressively faded. Compared with many areas of the prison, the room had a light and spacious feel, sunlight beamed in through a number of windows, while the majority of the prison seemed if it was designed to keep the sun out. With the staging of the play the room was demarcated- one area comprised of the makeshift stage, scenery and seating arrangements, the rest of the room featured an assortment of storybooks and toys scattered around, there was also a section for baby changing. This is the space in Arkham where there are the most physical reminders that many of the women serving time are also mothers and grandmothers, where interaction between the inside and outside world is most evident.

Rehearsals developed in a lively fashion. Performances on the stage were animated and much mirth was evident from the makeshift wings. In the background a compact disc player broadcast a steady accompaniment of Mo Town and soul music, in some respects it all took on a party atmosphere, certainly a departure in mood from the regular prison routine. The stage backdrop evoked warm images of bright sand and palm trees, crowned with an azure blue sky, contrasting with the drab prison architecture. There was an intense sun painted in yellow and gold, rounded off with the words ‘where all your dreams come true’. A somewhat ironic slogan given the prison context.

The theatre group which staged the play specialise in bringing small scale productions to prisons aimed to be for the benefit of inmates, staff and the wider prison community. The

group were represented in Arkham by the director/producer, a middle-aged man with bald head and bushy beard, a polished young male actor who is played the central role of camp commandant, and a hard working young woman (with an art college education) contributing the set design, the sun and sand backdrop. The aim of the theatre group is to lead a volunteering group of inmates in creating a piece of theatre. The bedrock of the work, so said the director, involves getting people to work as members of a team and to acquire the drama and theatre skills necessary for effective communication. The objective is for these skills to be applied to the material, developed through rehearsal up to the final performance. In this case the group were staging an adaptation of Joe Orton, but they have also written and produced original work in conjunction with inmates at other prisons with prisoner's voices integrated into play. The group is funded by the charitable sector and arts awarding bodies.

As rehearsals ensued enjoyment on the part of the women performing became more and more apparent, and a vibrant atmosphere developed. Bridgette told me that aside from making a refreshing change from the discipline of her regular prison day, participating in the play also helped her develop her artistic potential, 'it brings something out of me'. White (1998) argues that prison performance engenders a means of amplifying silent voices. Bridgette grabbed the opportunity for self-expression with both hands and she participated in the proceedings with exuberance. This attitude was mirrored by the rest of the acting cohort who were jocular, raw and unpretentious, offering a striking contrast with Julian, the young actor brought in with the group who arrived with the polished stamp of drama school. His voice reached a high pitched crescendo at certain times. Performances of Joe Orton are often hammed up to a high pitch of campiness, and he certainly did not stint in this respect, in his role as commandant of the fictional holiday camp. The women on stage enjoyed themselves and frequently laughed between lines. There was a clash of styles between theatrical luvvie-ness and the raw exuberance of the nine Arkham women.

The choice of *Erpingham Camp* was itself very apt as the play draws a number of parallels with the prison world. The play is a farce in which a respectable group of English campers

are innocently pleasuring themselves at a 1960's holiday camp before catastrophe strikes and they find themselves fighting against the camp's demonic, rigid, moral and patronising manager, 'Erpingham'. Although the setting is ostensibly a holiday camp, the play serves as a metaphor for prison life and inmate revolt, subject matter very close to home for the inmate performers. The play comments on the narrowness of the holiday-makers' chalet beds, which can be taken to mean prison beds, as well as the rigidity and dreariness of British life, where everyone knows their place. Although the drama was written in the 1960s clearly the play has compelling modern day relevance. The thinly veiled parallels between the holiday camp setting and the prison world were all too apparent to the women performing when I spoke to them, finding an empathising audience.

The backdrop quote *where all your dreams come true* is clearly laced with irony as the subject matter of the play unfolds, this becomes doubly so in the prison context. The holiday camp in the play is a false utopia, a superficial fantasy masking the reality of authority, behind the veneer it is, in actuality, a prison like ironclad dystopia. Staging the play in penal surroundings brings the textual parallels between holiday camp and prison to life. Accusations are often made by tabloid commentators that prisons are like holiday camps, but rarely that holiday camps are like prisons. It goes without saying that for the women performing, their dreams had not come true; none of them aspired to be in a place like Arkham. The play promoted plenty of opportunity for self examination.

In a central scene the women in the play rebel against the commandant of the holiday camp. The inmates relished playing this scene, staging an uprising with mock violence: one of the performers motioned a forceful knee to the groin of the young actor portraying Erpingham. This marked a very visible portrayal of authority being challenged and attacked. Another woman threw a slow motion punch, at this point the director jumped onto the stage and shouted directions, demanding that the punch be more *stylised*. This was a memorable scene, even though it was just acting the symbolic value was palpable with real-life inmates rebelling against a fictional authority. The experience was cathartic for those involved. Bridgette indicated that acting in the play represented a means of metaphorically

turning the table, not only at abusers on a personal level, but also ‘sticking two fingers at the system, even if it’s just pretend’. This draws parallels with some of the critical sensibilities of emancipation theory, challenging the very foundations upon which any given social system is founded upon (Inglis 1997), through a process of critically analysing and resisting structures of power (Clements, 2004). Elements of the emancipation ethos were in evidence throughout the production, the women performing reflected on structures of power, not just in the sense of prisons, but also in terms of their own personal and family relationships. There were aspects of meta-drama in play. The themes of theatre resonate in prison. Hughes (1998) argues that drama serves a dual purpose for women in prison, as a vehicle for both resistance and expression. Peaker and Vincent (1990: 110) write that ‘arts are subversive in that they invite prisoners to question life and to think for themselves’.

One of the inmates performing, Tera, talked about how she can relate to the material, that being a woman in prison gives her a greater insight into the part. She added that she enjoyed the pretend fighting, landing imaginary hay makers, ‘it’s not every day you’re encouraged to be violent in here...’ Participating in the play brought with it a staged depiction of mock violence. Goffman (1969) stressed that we all have roles to play in the everyday human drama constructing and reproducing reality. Theatrical imagery and the sphere of social action become interchangeable. Inmates have a socially constructed role as the incarcerated on a daily basis, as do prison staff as the jailers, the keepers of the keys. The women performing *The Erpingham Camp* performed roles within roles - within the everyday and very real prison world they acted a role in the play which in turn reflected on the nature of their incarceration. Like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (2006) there is a play within a play. The stage-managed overthrowing of authority had a wider resonance for the way the women viewed their roles in everyday prison life, bringing a looking glass to their parts as inmates (abounding inter-textuality). Women inmates are argued to be triply disadvantaged; they have ‘three strikes against them: they are women, they are in the prison system, and they are uneducated’ (Bell and Glaremin, 1995:46).

There were elements of everyday dramas. The choice of play was not without controversy in Arkham. Some of the education staff thought the subject matter was ‘too close to home’,

too closely centred on issues pertaining to incarceration. There were conflicting aspects to this. Some staff voiced concerns that the women did not need reminding of their incarceration, that a dose of escapism would have been preferable. On one level there was concern for the wellbeing of the inmates, but there were also worries over women engaging in subject matter questioning the legitimacy, moral and otherwise, of prison authority. It is considered something of a risk performing material which casts a question mark over everyday incarceration and by extension the jobs carried out by staff. Goffman (1991) stressed the social interactionism at play in prisons, the fundamental dichotomy between the roles of keeper and kept. In this case stage fiction compels prisoners to challenge/scrutinise their everyday role on the prison stage, which forcibly demonstrates the analytical and emotional power of drama. Along similar lines Peaker (1998) has explored the dynamics of drama and the institution.

The unease of some of the educational staff about the choice of subject matter raised questions of whether the play should be performed at all. One teacher, who objected to *The Erpingham Camp* on the grounds that it clearly reflected on prison life, suggested the musical *Chicago* would have proved a more suitable choice. His suggested alternative was striking given that *Chicago* is set almost exclusively within a jail populated by murderesses (how does this *not* reflect on prison life?). On the whole though, *Chicago* as a popular West End musical may be considered to be safer ground than *Erpingham Camp*, and is certainly not unique in terms of popular musicals set in women's prisons. Although subject matter of women in prison may seem something of a niche subject, the cult Australian television soap opera *Prisoner Cell Block H* and the British drama *Bad Girls* have both been given the West End musical treatment in recent years.

Tension extended beyond the choice of play. One inmate dropped out because she considered the play 'amateurish' in comparison to a production of *Chicago* she had (coincidentally) performed in another prison. The amateur dramatics were considered to be just that bit too amateurish. The director showed signs of exasperation at times. When I spoke to him about the development of rehearsals he had a resigned air about him, 'what

can you expect in a place like this?’ He was pleased the women were enjoying themselves and communicating well, but, seemed intolerant at times of the surroundings and level of talent on offer. In some respects he seemed to confuse Arkham with the National Theatre.

As a production supposedly bringing the prison together there was something of a lack of collaboration. The art department were irate at not being called on to help with the scenery, questioning why inmates themselves did not design and paint the backdrop. The stated brief of fostering teamwork and community spirit were in somewhat short supply and opportunities were missed to get more of the women involved. Contrasting with the mantra of the play, ‘where all your dreams come true’, a sense of harmony did not prevail around the prison. Not everyone thought it was a team effort and some cracks showed. Relations between the play director and the Linda, the Head of Learning and Skills, were strained after the former unwittingly sparked a security alert after absent mindedly taking a set of prison keys home with him rather than handing them in at the end of the day as prison protocol dictates. Following the incident the key carrying privilege was revoked and Linda subsequently bestowed a number of derogatory soubriquets on him including ‘numbnuts’.

As to the final performance, there were heavy restrictions on which women in the prison could attend. Security issues and bureaucracy associated with everyday prison life were very much in force for the occasion. Part of the logic in staging the play was to sweep away everyday prison issues and concerns, but in many respects the event only served to underline many of the totalistic elements of prison life. In some ways it could be viewed as ironic that the staging of a play about conflict and aggravation should be marred by a lack of cohesion and togetherness in Arkham (hence accentuating many of the themes in *Erpingham*).

Dance Boot Camp

This section will move from the theatrical world of drama and examine another aspect of creative performance in the form of a dance project participated in by the women of Freshfields. A relationship developed between HMP Freshfields and a dance academy over the twelve months prior to my fieldwork. In this time three separate cohorts of Freshfields residents attended the academy for the *Dance United* programme, five days a week for the duration of the twelve week programme. The participants were from different backgrounds as well as embodying a wide range of physical fitness levels.

Each day consisted of an hour's commute each way in heavy traffic, on top of a hectic day in the studios. The Freshfields residents were integrated fully with the rest of the group and acted as role models for younger members, some as young as fourteen years old. They also helped with domestic chores and were considered to be supportive in their general attitude and participation by the staff running the project.

Participants were required to demonstrate commitment to the project from the outset and displayed great enthusiasm and determination through times of physical and mental exhaustion. The cohorts pulled together to perform on stage in front of large audiences on several occasions. The first performance took place after only three weeks of rehearsals, putting on a display on a professional stage, an impressive achievement in a relatively short space of time. They have performed in front of audiences of over a hundred at theatres located in several large urban centres, as well as in the ballroom in Freshfields itself. The ballroom of the former stately home has undergone much social transformation over the years, the scene of lavish social occasions in the past, is now reserved for performances by groups of convicted women. At the end of twelve weeks the participating women did their graduation performances.

The Freshfields participants believed the positive benefits of the scheme to be numerous. They gained tremendous personal satisfaction from their experience, and benefitted from a

palpable boost to their self-confidence and self-esteem. The experience of performance provided Thea with a real sense of excitement, 'it gave me an amazing adrenaline, better than any drugs and you don't get the downer afterwards!' Thea summed up some of the benefits of the course, 'I thought I would just learn to dance but I have got so much more out of it: Trust; Team-building; self-discipline; confidence and commitment'.

The women who participated in the project gained an insight into what it is like to be professional and disciplined. It was felt by many to aid concentration, memory and sequencing faculties, which, in some cases have been impaired by past substance abuse. Polly emphasised this point, 'I now know how to focus – it is an amazing feeling to be able to concentrate without fidgeting and feel so professional on stage'. The improvements in concentration levels have been perceived to enhance other aspects of learning, 'I think I am better at Maths now', says Polly, 'because when you have to remember one sequence after another it improves your concentration and memory'. The dance project links into the core learning domains (identified by Bloom, 1969; Marzano and Kendall, 2007) in an innovative fashion.

A healthier lifestyle has been promoted by the dance project. Since being involved Thea has cut down on her intake of cigarettes and tries to eat a more healthy and varied diet. She says that she is motivated because of enjoying the exercise and in general '... feel much fitter now'. Mirroring these sentiments Cindy enthuses, 'since leaving Dance United I go to the gym more, I have given up smoking and stuck at it and I eat much more healthily'. Benefits are not reserved exclusively for the individual, families of the women in Freshfields have also gained from this new found commitment to exercise and healthier outlook, 'I even took my daughter swimming for the first time last week' Thea told me.

The Dance United project places a focus on physical presence, improved posture and poise. Staff at Freshfields noted striking improvements in the posture and confidence of residents in a short space of time. Karen, the Head of Education, has noted the transformation whereby shy and self conscious residents became 'really bubbly and self-assured'. She

strongly believes that women entering Freshfields from closed prison are institutionalised and downcast from their experience, Dance United is regarded as a positive project addressing what are often very low levels of self-esteem. 'Before Dance United I used to act at being confident but now I really am and things feel more balanced', says Cindy, 'it's made me want to believe in myself again and feel determined to make a success of my life'.

Engendering a sense of team work and trust are other key facets of the programme. Residents participating develop the skills to work as a team; to be patient and tolerant of the frustrations of others, to learn the art of compromising, and learn that impulsiveness can have a negative impact on the rest of the group. There is a sense of camaraderie that comes from being a part of the performance according to Sinead, 'you feel real close to everyone after a big performance and it was so sad to leave'. Sinead also told me that they learnt to develop 'complete trust' in each other, 'especially when we were doing lifts'. This fostering of closeness and trust was viewed as especially important by the women, Polly explained 'it's like being part of a family and it feels really safe because everybody cares about you'. The element of a safe environment is especially important, given that many of the women have lacked this reassuring aspect in their past. Chapter V (*Tales of two Prisons*) considered the theme of how the 'inside' family can become a form of surrogate during separation from family outside.

Women also learned new skills and gained technical expertise through participating on the project. Thea explains that, 'now I can listen to music more carefully and I have learnt how to choreograph. I never thought I would be able to do that'. Up skilling has also taken place with regards to the mechanics of photography and filming expertise, this has inspired Sinead, 'I want to get a digital camera now when I get out so I can record events properly.' Horizons have been broadened for a number of the women, Cindy says, 'it is amazing to think that I understand about live theatre performance now'. Before participating in the project she had never even visited a theatre, through the scheme she was given the opportunity to perform in an auditorium and found it to be 'an amazing experience'. This can be regarded as a broadening of Cindy's cultural capital (Bourdieu 1990).

The Dance United project proved to be physically demanding for the women participating, effectively developing psychomotor skills. Cindy's initial reaction was one of, 'oh, my god. I'm never going to get through this because it is so physically demanding. It is a right challenge! It is just like dance boot camp'. However, being an integral part of a team was enough to spur her on, 'sometimes you are so exhausted you just want to take time out but if you did you would be letting all the others down and you can't do that'. The staff were considered very supportive but, Cindy said, 'expected you all muck in and do chores', it was a very busy and stimulating environment, 'so there was no need to mess about'.

The Freshfields women were able to contribute as positive role models in the programme, which contrasts to the often stigmatising nature of the criminal justice system. Throughout the project the women were teamed with children as young as fourteen, they felt as if they could positively pass on their life experience, 'the younger people look up to us and we can warn them off drugs and coming to prison' says Thea. Performing with and in front of children was not without emotional hardships though. Thea explained, 'it was a bit of a struggle visiting schools and seeing other people's children when I can't be with mine, but I got over it and it made me more determined to be a good mother'.

After completing the course the dancers were given a certificate in Practical Performance Skills (Level One) and an arts award. Additionally, they were presented with a personal testimonial, addressing their individual qualities and achievements (as recognised by staff at the Academy). This form of personalised feedback evidently meant a great deal to the women who completed the course.

Feedback from the dance academy was glowing. They found staff and residents at Freshfields to be 'first rate from the start'. Communication lines were felt to be a strong point. The academy had understandable concerns about the long commutes for the women, but in the event this turned out not to cause any problems in their opinion. The experience was summed up as 'excellent attendance, excellent commitment and excellent

performances’. The partnership with Freshfields was considered to be mutually beneficial, it was noted that the women from Freshfields had a very positive effect on the peers in their group and that it was ‘an absolute pleasure to work with them’. The retention rate has, thus far, been 100%.

Transferable skills gained are seen as a boon in terms of personal benefits but also in terms of future employment. Participants have more reason to believe in themselves combined with an increased drive and determination to achieve their goals. Previous residents who completed the course have been actively involved in aspects of dance or youth work, and are either in employment/training, or are expecting to embark on this path.

Reflections on *Erpingham Camp* and *Dance United*

There is some notable contrast between the two projects *The Erpingham Camp* and *Dance United*. Both developed links with outside organisations, a meeting of minds between the creative and prison worlds. *Erpingham Camp* was produced and directed by an outside theatre group who brought their talents and skills to the inside, a production with an anti-prison message staged within prison walls. *Dance United*, by way of comparison, involved residents of Freshfields developing technical skills in contemporary dance, rehearsing and performing in a range of mainstream venues beyond the prison walls. In many ways *Erpingham Camp* failed to transcend the quotidian routine of prison life and on-going rehearsals emphasised tensions within. *Dance United* on the other hand took women outside of the prison environment to work with professional instructors and a wide range of dancers outside of the criminal justice system. A final point worth noting is that whereas *Dance United* is an ongoing and renewed project with new cohorts being enrolled from Freshfields on a regular basis, the *Erpingham* production was strictly a ‘one off’, with little chance being offered for future Arkham inmates to participate in such performance based forms of education. *Erpingham* could have been engaged with a range of women; an opportunity lost. *Dance United* on the other hand has clearly become a welcome feature at Freshfields.

Inside Art: 'It takes me beyond the fence...'

This section will shift away from education as theatrical performance and examine the relationship between prison and art. There are many documented instances of inmates discovering hitherto unknown forms of expression through creative means, demonstrating the transformative currency of education. Cohen and Taylor, in their 'phenomenological picture' of life in Durham's E-wing, speculate that art for prisoners can be connected to 'quests for legitimate deviant identities such as "intellectual outsider", "bohemian", or "exile"' (Cohen and Taylor, 1972: 140).

Claire (who was mentioned in Chapter VI *The Best Days of Your Life*) was encouraged to participate in education at another closed prison (before she was transferred to Arkham); if she was not paid she says she would not have participated. Prior to being in prison she could only draw stickmen, while serving time she enrolled in art because it was in the warm and a 'skive'. This default choice transpired to be a significant act. She discovered an aptitude for painting to the extent that she won Koestler Awards for her landscapes, including one of Table Mountain in her native South Africa. Painting, she explains, 'takes me beyond the fence- opens up another horizon'. There is frustration too. Her tutor at the closed prison prior to Arkham recommended she should do a degree in fine art, yet all they have to offer in Arkham is remedial level art which frustrates Claire. Claire describes going to prison as a real culture shock. She reflects, 'I was a rebel for the first year, then I realised this didn't get me anywhere and started to calm down'. Her attitude, through time, became more constructive, looking on boredom as 'a thing in the mind'. Claire says that she uses art to free herself mentally, and that she has never contemplated the nature of freedom so much as when it has been deprived from her in the confines of the prison estate. In this respect, we may consider that art, and the whole question of freedom, take on a different meaning inside closed prison. This evokes Sartre's sentiments (1947) when he argued that the French were never as free as when under the authority of Nazi occupation, as the occupation, by its very nature made women and men question what it meant to be free.

Claire's experience closely mirrors other documented cases. In her work *Inside Art* Brown (2002) offers an example of 'elderly man serving a life sentence for murder' (2002:7) who developed a predilection for art while serving his time. Through the artistic process of painting he vividly describes being transported to his own personal paradise; a state of 'heavenly bliss' (Brown, 2002:7). Invoking a liberating metaphor the prison artist went on to say 'my mind and spirit's where the pictures are' (Brown, 2002:7). In many respects painting his own reality, transcending prison walls. On a similar theme Liz Jensen's (2001) novel *The Paper Eater* begins thus: 'If there's one thing to be said about life in captivity, it's that you get to travel.' This sentence juxtaposes two images that do not normally go together: prisoners and mobility.

The transcendental *beyond the fence* quality vividly described by Claire has been explored in film. The cinematic world has always had a fascination with life in prison (Images of Incarceration); the motif of personal freedom has frequently been deployed, depicting inmates as being able to rise above prison surroundings, the high walls and razor wire. In the film the *Shawshank Redemption* (1995), arguably the most well known prison film of recent times, there is a notable scene when the tough, quotidian round of prison life literally grinds to a standstill when a duet from Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro* is played over the public announcement system. The film's narrator called Red vividly described the experience:

I tell you, those voices soared higher and farther than anybody in a grey place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away.

This cinematic example might seem somewhat facile next to reality, fictional manipulations are one thing, the reality of prison conditions quite another, but it serves at the same as a compelling allegory of the liberating potential of music and art. The fictional on screen inmates are depicted as transcending prison walls in similar way described by real life prison artists. There has been a long tradition of music in prison as a vehicle for expression, survival and reform [discussed in Appendix V].

Another vivid aspect of Claire's testimonial is how she only really engaged with art by accident, signing up for lessons only because the education department was 'warm' and she considered art lessons to be an easy course of action, 'a skive'. The accidental growth of the prison artist is not altogether uncommon, Jimmy Boyle, once considered to be one of the most dangerous violent offenders in all of Scotland, documents in his auto-biography *A Sense of Freedom* (Boyle, 1977) that a chance encounter with clay while serving time at the Barlinnie Special Unit led to his personal transformation.

When he arrived at the unit he was, in his own words, 'to put it mildly, animalised after seven year of solitary confinement' (Boyle, 1977:50). Boyle depicts himself as a wholly destructive force, 'it was a time when I was bursting with rage and energy and incapable of doing anything positive' (ibid).

One day I picked up seven pounds of clay that was lying around... It was the first real positive thing I'd done in my life and it was like a creative damn bursting inside me. In that one moment I had crossed over a threshold.
(ibid)

Thanks to this happenstance meeting between inmate and clay, Boyle is now a highly successful artist working primarily through the medium of bronze, involved in many community arts projects.

It has been argued that creativity is intrinsically tied to excitement (Ghiselin, 1952). The French Impressionist artist Degas drew a similar analogy, 'a painter paints with the same feeling as that with which a criminal commits a crime' (cited in May, 1976:27). Jung, one of the founders of analytical psychology argued that creativity stems from primordial experience. Creative expression can therefore be viewed as a process of sublimation, offering a positive outlet for the thrill or buzz associated with criminal acts.

Exclusion from artistic and cultural capital is something keenly felt by large numbers of women in the prison system. Female prisoners are considered to be among the most excluded demographic in society (The Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). Claire for example, thought that the world of art was an elite one with its doors firmly closed to her until she

discovered her talent in prison. Likewise a number of the women participating in the *Dance United project* had similar opinions, that the world of dance was monopolised by a cultural elite. These feelings of social exclusion are keenly felt by men in prison as well. Prior to his time at Barlinnie, Boyle considered the artistic world as something he was barred from, beyond the remit of his own cultural loci. Art was the preserve of the few, 'something for the toffs, not people from my working-class background, or so I thought' (Boyle, 1977:50).

Claire confided that 'apart from being a piss artist I'm a good artist'. She elaborated on the theme, and said that the feelings of frustration that led her down the road of alcohol abuse she now vents in a productive way through paint and brush, 'one addiction replaces another'. Creativity has been likened to a process of personal change (Carrell and Laing, 1982), engendering transformation (Edwards, 1979). Parker (1973) explored what prisoners do to prevent their minds from atrophying and their feelings from dying. Creativity acts as a curative force allowing for individual rebirth (Rogers, 1961), which is especially pertinent to Claire, in the way she describes her own kind of personal rebirth.

Artistic Examination

Women examine the nature of prison life and personal identity through their art: revealing truths about themselves along with truths about the system which incarcerates them. At Arkham a piece entitled 'Trilogy of Life', was comprised of three sculptured heads each one represented an aspect of the life cycle: a woman as a baby, a teenager and in advanced, wrinkled years. As with *Twenty Women Singing* [see Appendix V] the theme of feminine aging was explored. The art work was also intended as a critique of prison life, 'healthcare is crap', explained Theresa, 'the sculpture's inspired by the fact you die waiting'. 'If one person gets ill, everyone does', she went on to explain, 'the food doesn't help either, it does nothing for the immune system'. Such sentiments disparage recent Inspectorate findings on Arkham which commended 'improvements in the quality of healthcare provision'. Heather, however, was blunt on the subject, 'it's shite. Pop a pharmaceutical's the solution. And here was me thinking they were trying to get us off drugs'.

Through prison art women explore life inside (as indicated by the ‘Trilogy of Life’ sculpture), and also examine the possibilities of life outside prison walls, beyond the fence (Claire’s Table Mountain landscapes); internal and external expression. This is in a similar vein to Socrates contention that ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’ (Plato, 2005). Humanist psychologists (Maslow, 1987; Rogers, 1961) assert that to be truly human is to be creative, it is therefore considered a process in self-actualisation, not the preserve of a few. Expressive and creative energy are considered to embody a large range of qualities such as emotional health (May, 1976) and inter-personal communication (Bronowski, 1978).

On prominent display in the corridor of the Arkham education department was a portrayal of a courtroom scene rendered with sombre, nightmarish colours. At the centre was the defendant, head cast down, feature dejected. The piece was entitled ‘my trial, my funeral’. The picture resembled artistic impressions of criminal trials, the still frames produced by courtroom artists which feature on the televised news. Except, this time, the convicted party had, them self, composed the piece, which made it more affecting (more of a personal investment).

Mara, The Arkham Education manager, talked about how she strongly believed in the potential of self-actualisation through art, ‘some of these women really put themselves on the line... it can be quite a religious experience for them’. She added a caveat, however, ‘if they’ve painted something that’s clearly rubbish you can’t let that think they’re Van Gogh’. This suggests negative aspects to praise, in that it can engender a false sense of ability out of proportion with reality (this theme was explored at some length in Chapter VI *The Best Days of Your Life*). Mara’s solution? ‘If it’s bad I’d never say it’s bad to them. I’d pick on the best feature and say something like “I like what you’ve done with the colour” keep going’. In the final analysis, ‘the thing that matters is what it means to them, and how they express themselves, not if it’s naff or nor’.

The creative impulse was frustrated for some women by the attitude of the art tutor at Arkham, who curbed the potential for artistic expression (mentioned Chapter VI *The Best Days of Your Life*). To recap some of Jenna’s annoyances: ‘she kept on telling me “this colour

needs to be here... I'm not a child... if you can't do self-expression I don't see the point'. The rigid painting my numbers pedagogy was frowned upon. Theresa, who had a degree in textiles followed by a career in graphic design prior to Arkham, said that she, 'rubbed up the wrong way' with the art tutor, there was a 'clash of personalities'. What was the cause? 'She wants you to do what she wants. I'm getting kicked out because I've got a degree and know more about art than she does'. There were clearly conflicts over technical expertise and perceptions of artistic knowledge. The episode also highlighted the lack of options, the limitations for expressing creative potential, for those that do have degrees in prison.

The Creative Cell

Dreaming the Life

Sky high ideas and ideals
In another time there could have been wheels
I'm the catalogue girl
Dreaming the Life
Find me in a magazine
Make up sorted and feminine
Bubbly in hand
Just a role of the dice

Dreaming the Life was written by Mandy while in Arkham. The fantasies of the high life and unfulfilled dreams were highly poignant given the context. Prison represents something of the polar opposite to the 'glam' and 'bubbly' lifestyle. Reflections in the cell of an imagined life that could have been but never was. Mandy said that writing poetry, 'gives me hope in a dark place and helps the walls come to life... It helps to funny it up'. Finding humour in the sadness helped Mandy through her existence in Arkham, demonstrating the unique power of poetics within the constricted prison space.

Mandy is part of long tradition, prison writing in a distinctive and admired genre, dating back to the early third century when Saint Perpetua sat in her cell in Carthage and wrote her 'Passion' while she awaited martyrdom. Subsequent giants of the form have included Fyodor

Dostoyevsky, Oscar Wilde, Malcolm X and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In the 1980s Irina Ratushinskaya was imprisoned for anti-Soviet agitation, formally ‘the dissemination of slanderous documentation in poetic form’. While in prison she wrote poems on soap until they were memorised when she would wash them away. Her memoir is entitled *Grey is the Colour of Hope* (1989) (paralleling Mandy’s comment about finding ‘hope in a dark place’).

Jenna talked about what poetry composition meant to her, ‘it’s a way to deal with my own thoughts and feelings. Personal stuff and abuse’. The medium seems to have a particular appeal in prison. Andrew Motion, the retired Poet Laureate, wrote in the foreword to a collection of prison poetry ‘of all literary forms, [it] is the one best equipped to convey strong feelings’ (2009:4). Jenna believes that ‘beautiful words are better than violence’. Webb (1995) has examined the therapeutic potential of prison writing, in line with this sentiments, Jenna revealed that she began writing as a way of coping with depression, ‘I thought it might help to get the words out on the page’.

Talking about her writing process Jenna remarked, ‘the words are made up but they’re all true’; aiming towards self-actualisation through fiction. In terms of the hierarchy of needs for human fulfilment, creativity sits at the top of the tree (Maslow, 1987). Expressive forms of education are viewed therefore as path towards individual empowerment. This concept traces its genealogy to classical ideas of actualisation- humanity as being embedded in knowledge and knowledge being embedded in humanity. Mandy commented that committing the pen to poetry is, ‘the thing that makes me feel alive’. She noted the positive impact on her self-image, ‘I’ve become more confident. I was too introverted when I wasn’t writing’. Previously she used to ‘rip up the pages’, thinking that ‘they weren’t any good’.

Time to Write and Time to Read

Prisoners have time - probably as never before in their lives - to think and reflect on who they are, where they are and why they have ended up there. Locked up in their cell with their thoughts, they often find themselves in a kind of emotional freefall. And part of that is searching for a way to express their feelings. All it takes is a nudge in the right direction... and they start writing.

(Billington cited in Stanford, 2009)

What is it about prison that inspires people to write? 'You've got to do something with your time' was Mandy's answer. This mirrors comments earlier in earlier chapter about the oppressiveness and loneliness of prison time. 'You can't help but think about life on the outside', explained Mandy, again echoing Sartre's point about how conditions of captivity invariably lead us to contemplate what it is to be free.

While temporal factors inside prison can be conducive to cell block writing, time can be a scarce commodity in the world at large. Eric Allison, a member of the inmate turned professional author club, says he sometimes misses prison, as inside he had more time at his disposal to write (Open Book, 2008). The hectic pace of life outside and infinite distractions (quite the opposite of prison life) can be a barrier to creative or educational disciplines; the paradox of liberty is that too much or too little presents difficulties ('man is condemned to be free', Sartre).

It is not just time to write that people in prison possess, but also time to read. Sonia, the Mills and Boon reader, said 'I didn't bother reading so much before'. Prison life hinges on the filling of enforced hours. In Arkham her reading became so prolific that the prison librarian had to order in more Mills and Boon as Sonia exhausted the supply. The musician Pete Doherty cited reading poetry, especially the works of Emily Dickinson, as helping him survive a spell in prison in 2006. Reading is an activity that can sustain people in hard times (echoes of David Copperfield and 'reading for life'). Doherty left prison with a renewed appreciation of poetry in more than a symbolic sense, he smuggled a number of the

volumes out with him on release, 'I've got a shelf full of books with HMP Pentonville stamped on them' (Barton and Petridis, 2006).

Post-Prison Writing

Casper Walsh (2009) has written on how prison memoirs can help offenders turn a page, as a prisoner turned successful memoirist himself he has more insight in the area than most. He is dismayed at planned government powers (at the time of writing) to seize money ex-offenders make from writing about their crimes. While the image of hardened criminals profiteering from their misdeeds may arouse a chorus of disapproval, it is worth pointing out that those who are convicted 'already "pay" for their crimes through sentencing' (Walsh 2009). Walsh's own auto-biography is revealing account of a troubled past, a young boy struggling to not to follow in his father's footsteps. The work is unsparing, avoiding self-pity or sentimentality, crime is not glorified but quite the opposite (Walsh shoots down the myths of drugs and 'heroin-chic' as glamorous). The account is laced with optimism as he attempts to construct a better tomorrow. It is a shame that the government is keen on preventing ex-offenders making a living from the agency of the pen, which is preferable to many of the alternatives. It seems churlish or vindictive to deny people a better, brighter future because of past misdemeanours, in the words of Oscar Wilde: 'every saint has a past and every sinner has a future' (2007: 77).

The Creative Prison?

In addition to creative projects mentioned earlier (Dance United, theatre, Twenty Women Singing) there are many others in operation throughout the prison network.

Electric Radio Brixton ('making waves behind bars') is a radio station broadcasting (in the prison of the same name), funded by grant giving foundations and described as 'a bit like Radio Five, only much more interesting' (Williams 2009). The station has won two Gold awards at the prestigious 2009 Sony Awards (Radio One, by comparison, went away empty

handed). The Judges credited ERB as an example of what can be achieved when radio is put to best use 'an intimate connection to deliver powerful, meaningful content that targets an audience who have a genuine need to be fulfilled'. Unlike the other nominations ERB has a captive audience of around 800, all kept behind a 30 foot barbed wire fence. Broadcasts cannot be picked up on the outside; content is made for by inmates for inmates (hence prisoners become producers not just consumers of media culture). Unlike the other stations vying for Sony awards, ERB gets callers such as Carlos on G Wing, 'why are the portions of food so small? Is it because you don't want to feed us a lot of food – so we don't get bigger than the officers'. Content covers religion, poetry and music, along with discussion of prison issues, including a monthly Governor's Question Time. One of the shows which receives the biggest response is Poetic Justice, an anthology of poems and short stories from prisoners (Williams 2009). Students who complete the radio course achieve a level 2 qualification (equivalent to GCSE), the length has been cut from 12 to 6 weeks because of the high rate of inmate transfers to other prisons.

Fine Cell Work is a charity which trains and pays prisoners to do professional embroidery and quilting. In 2008, 403 fine cell workers were employed in 26 prisons, with 50 volunteer instructors doing the teaching. The resulting work is of high quality and has been featured in numerous popular publications including *Marie Claire* (May 2008) and *Home and Gardens* (December 2008). It is surely an example of creative vocational innovation when elaborate cushions are embroidered for Dover Castle from the confines of a prison cell. Through the website (www.finecellwork.co.uk) customers can sponsor inmates, paying for individual commissions and write letters of correspondence if they choose to. Although internet is banned within prisons, it can still be harnessed from the outside to create work for and encourage communication with prisoners. Testimonials listed by Fine Cell Work are impressive:

The first thank-you I got... It was that I was in here and outside there's someone with a smile on their face because of my work. That gave me a sense of purpose.

Andy, HMP Wandsworth

Other prisoners have reported the positive benefits they have gained from the project, including discipline, skills, therapy and finance. Most of the fine cell workers are men (80%) few of who embraced needlework before prison. In Freshfields' early days as a prison the domestic programme centred on women sewing prison shirts for men. It is probably a measure of progress that men in prison are now doing technically challenging needlecraft.

The common denominator linking all the projects mentioned in this chapter (dance, theatre, music, radio, needlecraft) is reliance on the charitable sector, and, in many cases, non-paid volunteers. Is it possible for things to go further, a structural shift to prisons as a more creative space? A more progressive architecture? 'The creative prison' (Alsop, 2006), was a project headed by architect Will Alsop (who was behind the prize winning design for Peckham Library in South London) commissioned by the art and rehabilitation group Rideout to design and ideal prison. The result was HMP Patterson (a 'super-enhanced' category C – for those who had earned trust and privileges), designed by Alsop in collaboration with inmates at HMP Gartree in Leicestershire. In 2006 I visited the exhibition when in Nottingham. The jail blueprint was orientated around small units of 12 prisoners, each block with its own kitchen, common room and communal garden. Each block was a mini tower structure surrounded by green space, reminiscent in certain respects of Le Corbusier's (Samuel, 2007) vision for a radiant city, consisting of dominant, regimented high rise buildings isolated in a park-like landscape. 'A prison is a small town', argues Alsop, 'The ideal prison gives its inhabitants a sense of self respect' (2006).

An interesting aspect of the exhibition was in the form of contributions made by inmates at Gartree. One included an abstract picture of a tree of knowledge planted in water, depicting outward, rippling effects. The striking thing about contributions from prisoners was a unified, collective call, envisaging prisons as a creative educational space. Suggested timetables were centred on learning potential, 'overall think college campus more than prison'. Slogans gave an idea of how inmate would frame their own prison: 'imagination takes flight'... 'education breaking bonds'... 'knowledge is freedom'... 'rehabilitation not retribution'. The comments book, however, suggested the visiting public were not

necessarily converts to the message of rehabilitation over retribution. One such entry read, 'prison is meant to be punishment. There are too many do gooders in our society and anarchy is all but upon us'.

The Creative Prison project stimulates debate about the role of architecture in the modern prison. Comments and pictures from participating inmates suggested a humanist blueprint/vision with education at the forefront. The final design, in my opinion lacked some warmth and was framed within an institutionalised space, marrying functionalism and fauna. Cameras, tags and heat-sensing equipment would work in tandem with security barriers (a vision of the future paved by techno-corrections). In some ways I felt that Freshfields, dating back to Victorian times, possesses a more progressive set up.

There are other noteworthy aspects to debates about the conception of prison space. Cell Texts (mentioned in the previous chapter) promotes a prison library without walls, an online virtual space. Away from debates about the ideal prison, how do inmates imagine their ideal home within prison? In 2003 the activist/artist Jackie Sumell asked Herman a very simple question: 'What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6" X9" box for over 30 years dream of?' 'The House that Herman built' (Colin, 2007) is a dream house imagined from behind bars. The ongoing conversation has produced sketches, plans, architectural blueprints and models, a replica of Wallace's prison cell and an animated video of his imagined house. From the outset, Sumell has been raising awareness and is now fundraising to actually build the house in Wallace's hometown of New Orleans. Speaking on his incarceration Wallace has commented, 'once you build something in your mind, you're free' (ibid). In Liverpool teams of inmates have been building their future in a practical sense. Groups of prisoners have trained to become painter-decorators by renovating dilapidated council houses- when they are released they can move in.

Creative Accountability

In 1997 the government inherited a framework it considered to be over-reliant on learning for leisure models. The solution was to focus on structured learning, moving away from education framed in the personal, as a means to self expression. The OLASS prospectus (2007) prioritises skills for life, with some vocational training mixed in, but has little time for creative learning. Coyle, for one, has argued that the pendulum has swung too far away from soft skills in the direction of hard, inflexible, basic skills (cited in House of Commons, 2005).

This chapter has examined creative possibilities in delivering prison education away from one size fits all curricula paradigms. There has been a discussion on the merits of theatre, dance, writing, art, needlecraft, and media production. Rather than being an educational timeout (or soft skills being a soft option) it is clear that such forms of learning improve discipline, concentration, team-work, technical skills, empathy [the list goes on... each of the strands of Bloom's taxonomy (1969) are present and correct]. So, is the government embracing the approach?

Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 50/2008 suggests not. This was issued early in 2009 (post-fieldwork) by Jack Straw Head of the Ministry of Justice (a government department with a slight Orwellian ring to it). PSI 50/2008 formally lays down that all activities in prisons must be judged on how they 'might be perceived by the public'. All inmate activities, even those not funded by the tax payer, must 'meet the public accountability test'. In other words all the programmes mentioned above (Dance United, prison theatre, Electric Radio Brixton, Fine Cell Work, etc) could be prohibited if they are deemed non-compliant with PSI 50/2008 and contrary to the public interest.

It is not unusual for individual head of prisons to take a tough line on activities. The Governor of Armley Prison Leeds, for instance, closed down a planned staging of a musical drama co-production between staff and prisoners, declaring 'it's a prison not a holiday

camp’ (cited in Gardner, 2009). What is especially troubling in the case of 50/2008 is the fact it constitutes a knee jerk, blanket diktat imposed by the state. Sir David Ramsbotham, the former Chief Inspector of Prisons and patron of a number of prison arts projects, described the PSI as lunacy (cited in Dugan, 2009). Responding to tabloid ire Straw has even taken steps to curb prison parties for inmates (Wilson, 2008).

The other issue is how do we even measure what constitutes accountability to the public? There is much potential for a superficial or false consensus, with the views of the loudest or angriest voices being taken most into account (such issues plagued Rousseau’s conception of the general will). In truth, the public accountability test in the modern age probably means the tabloid outrage test. What lengths would a Justice Secretary be willing to go to appease the media in the guise of the public? PSI 50/2008 was conceived in reactionary fashion to ban a well established comedy course at Whitemoor prison after some indignant tabloid coverage. The programme was considered to be worthwhile (and in the public interest) until some negative press coverage came along. Far be it that education should be perceived as entertaining or fun.

With all the discussion about the public accountability test, it is worth remembering that volunteers in projects such as Fine Cell Work are also card carrying members of the public who give up their time and expertise for free. Hectoring from the state (about what constitutes a constructive pursuit) is an insult to the dedicated people, with innovative ideas and ideals, who have covered the gaps where the government have failed in provision.

IX

Prison Vocational Learning

In this chapter there is a shift in focus, from the artistic realm of the imagination and creative performance to everyday prison activities which may be considered more practical and vocational in their focus. Recent policy discourse including *The Offender's Learning Journey* (OLASS, 2007) has placed a renewed focus on vocational training (in tandem with basic skills) attuned to the needs of the modern workplace. This chapter explores the main work-based training provided at Arkham and Freshfields comprising, horticulture, catering and hairdressing. Such forms of learning in prison help to extend 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Fuller, 2007), beyond the auspices of the classroom setting ('a break from education'). Boundaries between formal and non-formal learning are blurred, with more of a focus placed on a learner centred, personalised approach. In some respects such an ethos helps women who have previously struggled professionally, domestically and emotionally. While there is innovative practice in place at Freshfields, which in many ways represents an expansive learning environment (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) encouraging wider social interactions, Arkham reflects the limitations and frustrations of the closed prison world, resembling a more restricted learning environment.

The expansive-restrictive framework is often used for characterising learning environments (Fuller and Unwin 2004). Expansive features are those which cross boundaries in different learning/training contexts, facilitating effective training environments. This includes the opportunity for participants to engage with multiple communities of practice; gain broad experience across the institution; pursue knowledge-based as well as competence-based qualifications; learn off-the-job as well as on-the-job. Restrictive features represent the flip side of these attributes. Under the restrictive approach, learners struggle to make progress in terms of achieving formal qualifications and have limited opportunities available for progression and development.

The broader discourse, underlying vocational training in prisons, is for women to conform to gendered expectations; training not so much for future employment (as professionals) but to fulfil the emotional labour of the domestic sphere (Carlen and Worrall, 2004). Incarcerated women both conform to and resist the role. There are limited gender horizons compared to creative forms of education (examined in the previous chapter) which encourage women to think about their identity in a broader sense.

The Dimensions of Prison Work

The work of prison inmates is important on a number of levels. On a functional level attending to everyday practicalities (in the kitchens, gardens, etc) is necessary in keeping prison communities in what may be considered a reasonable working order. Without their labour contribution the conditions of their own imprisonment would not be possible.

Vocational skills training constitutes a further aspect of prison work, considered a key element in bolstering prisoners' future employability and professional prospects (OLASS, 2007). There is naturally occurring evidence in prison gardens and kitchens, for instance, enabling women to gain qualifications in a practical setting. Many respond more positively to this form of practical activity than the classroom bound approach. In Arkham there are limitations, however, as women learn real life skills in a markedly artificial and segregated context. In Freshfields, by way of contrast, there are layers of commercial activity and multiple connections with the outside world. Hairdressing, salon and garden services are offered to the public, giving residents the opportunity for real life, and relatively uncontrived, everyday interactions.

The tacit side to such provision is geared towards addressing deficits in domestic skills, where women learn everyday competencies they previously lacked. Ideal women should be 'clean' and 'to be able to please the family', according to Arkham's Head of Catering, in short, chiefly occupied within the private sphere. This invokes images of a Stepford prison

production line seeking to create a conveyor belt of obedient and tidy women; rehabilitating women to accepted notions of femininity (the etymology of ‘rehabilitation’ literally means a return to competency). Carlen and Worrall (2004) argue that women in prison are considered not only to have broken the law but also violated gender norms, their own sense of womanhood, so called double deviance (Heidensohn, 1985), and that the discourses surrounding inside education and rehabilitation reflect this. Prisoners are not free from the burden of societal expectations (Hochschild and Machung, 2003).

A ‘break from education’

The Hanging Basket Seeds of Hope

Vibrant life exploding into colour;
Lavender bordering on white; nearly summer.
Scarlet red; cornflower blues
Primrose yellow – all kinds of hues.
The smell of life; the smell of peace.
The smell of hope; that comes with release.
Warmth of colour, coolness of touch
Such amazing beauty is almost too much.
Though the soil in the basket gets into my nails
The hope of the future will always prevail

(Sol, Wayne, Mark, Jahbi, Sed – HMP Grendon)

There is a close relationship between flowers and convicts

Jean Genet the French polyglot (and sometime prisoner) drew an analogy between the constitution of prisoners and the flowers of the earth, ‘*there is a close relationship between flowers and convicts*’ [Genet’s italics] (1954:5). Genet wrote in the *Thief’s Journal* (1954), a fictionalised account inspired by events of his youth (when he spent time as a thief and a prostitute), that the fragility and delicacy of flowers are of the same brutal insensitivity as convicts (1954). This comparison is apt for many women in prison, behind exterior of brash

confidence through which they have lived their lives, there are telling stories of deep rooted vulnerability. Stacy, who was serving time in Freshfields for supplying heroin, told me that she has never been confident person, but has always tried to come across as such. She said, 'for me it's always been all a front. Seeming confident and being confident are two different things'. This dated back to her school days, where she explained she did not get on well with teachers, it was a 'front thing'. Behind the confident exterior was a vulnerable core.

At Freshfields women working in the gardens grow a variety of vegetables from seed. Some are used in the prison kitchen, some are sold to other prisons and others are sold to the public. Amanda, one of the residents, described to me her sense of initial disbelief on growing a tomato from seed. 'that ain't a tomato I said to Andy'. She suspected that Andy, the Head of Horticulture was having a joke at her expense, 'I thought he was pulling my leg'. The only previous contact Amanda had had with tomatoes, not to mention other fruits and vegetables, was when they were full grown in the supermarket. She had no concept of the process involved, at Freshfields she had gained knowledge 'in growing things, seeing how things grow'. Working in prison gardens encompasses botanical and self-knowledge, along with the possibility of individual regeneration.

Moffett (2007) has explored how the use of horticulture as an activity for those on the margins of society has a long and successful tradition dating to Victorian times. Prison, as an environment on the social fringes, would seem well suited then. Rice and Remy (1998) have investigated the impact of horticultural therapy on psychosocial functioning among urban jail inmates in terms of cultivating healthy self development. *Social and therapeutic horticulture*, as it is often termed by practitioners, is regarded as a viable alternative to mainstream education. Sempik and Aldridge (2005) have done much research in this area, reporting benefits including the development of horticultural skills; social and work skills; literacy and numeracy skills; together with an increased sense of well being and the opportunity for social interaction and the development of independence. Moffett (2007) in particular stresses the increased self-esteem and confidence resulting from horticultural learning. Such an approach also has detractors. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) outline a

counter therapy argument, bemoaning the way the curriculum of the self has increasingly encroached upon educational discourse. Is there a danger that framing the discourse around vulnerability risks an element of the self fulfilling prophecy, women reproducing themselves as damaged goods?

Amanda told me there is a form of therapy in being outside and getting her hands dirty [a sort of Zen quality]. She has learned that tending to flowers and vegetables requires patience and care, that too much or too little watering can be damaging. She takes responsibility for 'looking after fragile and delicate little things'. Dave, the head of horticulture at Arkham, believes that 'many of the women here are damaged', he sees a healing, nurturing aspect in gardening work, viewing this as a well suited activity for women offenders. He would like this nurturing aspect to be extended in the form of a course specialising in the care of small animals. There is probably some irony in caged women looking after caged animals. Andy who heads the gardens at Freshfields, who has a blunt and warm down to earth manner about him, echoes these sentiments. He believes spending time in the gardens is positive for the vulnerable women in prison. In helping other things grow he argues that women help themselves to grow. The therapeutic aspects of being outside and hands on are perceived as beneficial, 'sometimes when they're wound up it calms them down. Sometimes they need a break from education'. There is seen to be a marked distinction between formal education (that is to say education indoors) and prison gardens. As Dave at Arkham explained: 'it doesn't smell like a classroom'. Lessons are learned but in a different setting. The informal elements introduced into the formal educational and prison structure in some respects supports Alan Rogers' (2004) view that a 'new paradigm' for learning exists, in which programmes are part formal, part informal going in both directions along a continuum. He argues 'both forms of education are important elements in the total learning experience'.

It is interesting how horticulture is differentiated from traditional class bound learning, as, 'a break from education'. Etling (1993) criticises the prejudiced hierarchy of learning that stereotypes 'education' as something that belongs in the classroom, reducing anything outside this interior remit as 'somehow inferior, usually dubious, and certainly

uncontrolled’. In reality, outdoors Non-formal education, has the advantage of being more learner centred than most formal education (Ettling, 1993). Colley and Hodkinson (2003) on their part have argued that while the locus of this debate is often centred on the inherent superiority of one or the other, in actuality distinguishing or privileging spheres of knowledge is problematic (as mentioned elsewhere, the boundaries between formal and non-formal learning are often blurred).

Andy believes that women in prison are more vulnerable than incarcerated men and he is mindful of this in his day to day approach. He is sensitive to ‘bawling’ as he calls it, ‘you can’t shout at them or the water works start’. Andy says he has to be kind even when he is firm, the women can be stubborn and temperamental, ‘sometimes a bit of badgering is called for’. Sometimes women do not want to be delegated garden duty, which will be explored later in the chapter. Andy told me there is an element of teasing from his colleagues who work in the gardens at other prisons, ‘they always joke I don’t know how you deal with the women all the time’. There is evidently some banter involved, ‘one bloke told me he has a hard enough job with just his wife’. Andy is happy enough with the situation though, and would rather work with female than male prisoners. He thinks dealing with the local young offenders ‘would be a nightmare... I don’t know how they can do it in the gardens over there, with all the showing off’. Overall, Andy is philosophical, taking the rough along with the smooth (‘some days I ask what the hell am I doing here?!’) There are, however, plenty of occasions where he and the women feed off each other: ‘Like any job on the outside there’s good days and bad days’.

Gardening, therefore, is seen as an important way to build up and develop the confidence of women. One of the ways Freshfields facilitates this is through a nursery open to the public where residents are called on to deal with day to day interactions. The women are expected to deal with the general public in fielding horticultural enquiries. The typical skills at play in working in a nursery or garden centre are developed. Such dimensions of work based learning have been explored in Evans et al (2002), Fuller and Unwin (2004) and Huddleston and Unwin (2007). Women working the Freshfields gardens evidently benefit from such customer relations interactivity. There are a number of dimensions in play, residents not

only have the opportunity of enhancing their skills and expertise in terms of gardening, but the importance of conversations with the public at large should not be underestimated.

This represents an avenue of prison praise and encouragement, learning to be free, that is possible in work based learning at Freshfields but not in a closed institution such as Arkham. A prison sentence by its very nature strips away people's liberty and, to a large degree, individuality. Dawn told me of the culture shock starting her sentence, 'Because I wasn't talking to people I lost the ability to talk. Previously I was very chatty'. Part of the prisonisation process is that people become less competent in the mundane routine, elements of everyday existence that make them who they are; the simple conversations that people take for granted. Dawn spoke to me of the benefits of dealing with the public on the prison gardens, the varied conversations she has experienced with people on the outside, 'we get quite a lot of the older generation coming in, some in wheelchairs'. Talking to customers in such a manner is important, and a positive experience of engaging in ordinary conversation, breaking away from the routine prison vocabulary. Dawn talked about the ordinariness of these interactions, breaking down barriers between prisoners and the public, us and them distinctions which tend towards the 'othering' of people in prison. Clearly, these conversations with the public are an important part of getting re-acclimatised to life outside of prison.

Anything which portrays criminals in a more positive light should be welcomed. Inmates are often trapped within the confines of externally imposed constructs (Davidson, 1995); media representations of offenders tend to be unflattering caricatures (Mathiesen, 2006). Stephen Fry, a descendant of the penal reformer Elizabeth Fry, contends that inhabitants of prison are unfairly categorised as 'criminal classes', a maligned 'species from another planet'. (in Devlin and Turney, 1999: 251). His viewpoint carries with it personal insight, in that he himself served three months in Pucklechurch prison for credit card fraud when he was 17. Allowing prisoners the opportunity to dispel negative stereotypes through face to face contact with the public clearly has its merits.

The Freshfields garden nursery also presents an opportunity for residents to develop horticultural expertise and knowledge through customer relations. Fielding a wide range of gardening questions has bolstered Dawn's confidence. She revealed there are occasionally 'awkward customers with difficult to answer questions'. The set up is supportive and reassuring though, 'if I can't answer a question I shout "help" to Andy, he'll say "what's up". I watch him and learn'. This bears some resemblance to Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice model which details the social processes involved in learning. The garden nursery demonstrates situated learning, embracing legitimate peripheral participation; the Freshfields horticultural workers watch and learn through Andy.

Interactions with the public are aided by the fact that the horticulture operation is ostensibly based away from the rest of the prison grounds. It is situated across a public road, set apart from the rest of the regime. The entrance is marked by for sale signs advertising the wares to the public. Such is the demarcation from the rest of the regime that on my first horticultural visit my escort, a teacher in Freshfields, did not know the way to the prison gardens and had to ask directions from a passing resident.

In some respects, the condition of flora could be considered part of the healthy prison test. Mara the Arkham education manager discovered numerous plants in an unhealthy state when she began working in the education department. When she first arrived there were remnants of a fern, which had withered and died, in her office. She told me that she considered the state of plants and flowers to be analogous with the wellbeing of the prison. On an aesthetic level no one wants to be surrounded by dying plants. This also reveals a deeper level of neglect, Mara believes, which can permeate and contaminate other areas. This mirrored the view of one tutor who confided that, prior to the arrival of Mara, leadership was uncaring and overly target driven. A working environment with dying flowers is equated to a lack of professionalism and attention to detail; a nurturing mentality is viewed as all important. 'If we don't care for our pot plants', Mara said, 'it looks like we don't care for the women in our care'.

If gardening at Freshfields is expansive and on a large scale, the closed confines of Arkham foster much more of a restrictive horticultural atmosphere. The main bulk of gardening on offer at Arkham comprises hanging baskets and floristry. Women who undertake the courses produce the high quality hanging baskets which are on display at a local town centre (sourced by the council). Floristry entails developing a variety of intricate skills, concepts of bouquets, arrangements, tying and so forth, together with the practical matters of pricing and profit margins. Dave, who heads the department, commends the fact that the hanging baskets are on view outside, that 'it's good for the women to give something back'. Although opinion was divided among the women I spoke to on this matter. If the repaying society back element is to be fully realised then the women should be better able to see the benefits of their floral labours. As it is they are distanced from the final product. If this is intended to somehow encompass giving something back, or shades even of restorative justice (paying back society vicariously through improving the floral environment) the message is somewhat muddled. Walking around the town centre it is not clear that the hanging baskets are the handiwork of Arkham inmates. The incarcerated women themselves have severely restricted access to witness the finished effect (although there is limited potential for town visits towards the end of the sentence). Phil, catering manager at Arkham, complained to about the local 'blue rinse brigade' who adopt an uncaring attitude to women in prison (summed up as 'blinker'), and have little idea of the work that goes on inside. Compare this with the open experience in Freshfields, where gardening interactions take place between residents and the outside public on a frequent basis. Floristry, on the other hand, whilst incorporating transferrable skills (mathematics and a general sense of business acumen) again suffers from the fact that all the work is done in an isolated context. Tying and pricing take place in a somewhat artificial and arbitrary fashion, in which women lack the opportunity to develop customer skills as they would in an open prison. One of the main, perhaps inevitable, shortcomings of vocational activities in closed prisons is that inmates learn real life skills in what can only be described as an unreal, dysfunctional climate.

In general terms, at both Freshfields and Arkham, horticulture avoids some of the pitfalls, and in a way provides something fresh, compared with other forms of prison learning. The

so called, 'break from education', as mentioned earlier, offers a physical and mental hiatus from everyday prison stresses. Because learning occurs in a context that 'doesn't smell like a classroom', some of the overtly off putting facets of formal education are side stepped. There are therapeutic and confidence building aspects (the 'hands on and muddy' elements) which are difficult to replicate in a classroom. Often it is the classroom that is perceived as the problem in the first place ('sometimes when I'm wound up getting outside calms me down'). These esteem building aspects are complimented by the fact women produce something concrete (in an organic sense) during their time in the gardens. As Dawn, a resident at Freshfields, told me, 'with a tray of 500 plants I've done something physical. Unlike maths where it's all on the page'. There is clearly a physical and practical application together with therapeutic benefits. Moffett (2007) along with Sempik and Aldridge (2002) report similar benefits to horticultural learning and skills, the amalgamation of different spheres of knowledge (personal and practical).

Some women have a real aptitude for gardening tasks and are naturally green fingered. There is a lot of untapped potential, Andy remarked, some have a natural flair to 'pick it up quick'. There are women who look beyond their current confinement and 'say they want to do it for a living'. Others are enthusiastic, 'but it can take longer to get there', individuals who do not have quite the same level of natural aptitude or 'gardening nouse'. Generally speaking, Andy observed that there are those who are willing and able, and those on the other hand who are willing but not quite so able: in general both groups are keen to have gardening feature on their timetable. Some want to work full time on the gardens, while some want a split in their timetable, a measure of variation. Other women want 'a breather', Andy says 'to get away from education'. So, if there are willing participants in the gardens, with varying levels of skill, what about other groups who are more reluctant to pursue a horticultural option?

There are women who can be 'a bit of a struggle', Andy admits, who do not want to be outside in the gardens. There can be something of a seasonal reluctance, popularity can depend on time of the year, the weather sometimes determines the level of gardening

enthusiasm. Andy observes that there is always a spike in popularity during summer months when women, en masse, want to escape the inner confines and would rather be out 'working on their tan and sunning themselves'. Although he wryly notes there is a curb on the enthusiasm on overcast or rainy days. Weather is something of a leveller; it rains or shines over prison just the same as the world outside.

The intake into the prison gardens at Freshfields is not conducted in an arbitrary or temperamental fashion though; the horticultural timetable is not determined by the vagaries of individual mood or the weather. Unlike other prisons, residents attend their Board sessions which determine their weekly timetable (elsewhere, I was told, the trend is for this to take place behind closed doors). The timetable for residents is designed to be 'based on individual needs' of residents, according to Arlene the Head of Learning, 'a bespoke package'. Karen (the Education Manager) explained to me, 'they have some say, we try not to oppose them. We want them to do something they're enthused about'. There are clearly times when staff at Freshfields and residents at the prison have contrasting notions of what individual need entails though: 'sometimes a lot of recommending is required' Karen observed. In attending the Board, witnessing the boundaries of negotiation that take place between residents and staff, I witnessed occasional timetable frictions, and disagreement over what constitutes 'individual need'. When Muriel appeared before the board tension arose regarding placing her in the gardens for part of the week, 'how will it help me being out in the gardens?' she complained. Muriel looked down on gardening work; she was vocal in asserting her opinion that there is little educational value to be found in horticultural skills.

Arlene [Head of Learning and Interventions] - We want you to do something that contributes to the life of the prison.

Muriel - Why?

Arlene - This isn't a hotel.

Muriel - 'haven't you got people who do that work?'

Arlene - Yes, people like you.

(Freshfields, March 2008)

The response from the Head of Learning and Interventions was to place an emphasis on the learning value present in horticultural work, that many useful skills are embedded. She also argued, somewhat pointedly, 'this isn't a hotel', the implication being that the prison grounds, large in stature, necessitate considerable hands on maintenance. Muriel responded, 'haven't you got people who do that work?' which met with a reply of 'yes, people like you'. The compromise, not entirely to the satisfaction of Muriel was a mixed timetable with half the week spent in horticulture. At times there was a palpable sense of tension between individual needs and the needs of the prison (in terms of general upkeep). Brian the Head Prison Officer at Freshfields was quite explicit, 'all must work towards the upkeep of the prison'. The expectation placed on residents is to contribute to a working environment with dual purpose, which operates as a prison and as a conference suite. As mentioned earlier, there is a notion of how prison gardening can entail growth and nurturing, yet this is not always reciprocated. Not everyone is keen on nurturing the prison environment. There are elements of conscription at play. Women, like Muriel, regard certain types of vocational work (like gardening) as menial or beneath them. Such activities are considered to be lower down in the hierarchy of prison opportunities, an indicator of lesser status. Muriel's case illustrates a reluctance, or resistance, to play a perceived lesser role [de Beauvoir (1989) wrote that women are cast in binary opposition to men as the inferior other]. Skeggs (1997) argues that women possess a limited form of capital and are expected to conform to expectations. Although prison gardening can be seen as a break from the stresses of 'normal' prison routine, points of stress can emerge when placing residents on horticultural duty.

There have been other instances when horticulture has reflected every day, prison frustrations rather than transcending them. Residents at Freshfields undergoing NVQ Level 1 in Horticulture (split into 12 units- mowing, hedging, etc.) have, in the past, been required to surmount wordy obstacles of a complicated garden literacy. Students were required to learn

both the common names and Latin names for plants. Previously women undertaking the NVQ needed to recall these Latin names correctly and accurately. Andy was blunt on this point 'this was a challenge for us and no mistake'. Women in prison have enough literacy based problems without being called on to decipher difficult to grasp languages. Such was the absurdity of the situation that at Andy's prompting an assessor raised the issue at exam board meeting and asked 20 top examiners how to spell a Latin flower name containing a total of 18 letters. Apparently only 5 were capable of accurately spelling a Latin word considered essential for the NVQ level 1.

The more pleasurable aspects of gardening in prison, the sense of fulfilment, along with escapism, or 'organic relief', it can bring, were, to a degree, undermined by the questionable insistence on force feeding Latin terms (arguably not compulsory in understanding nature's language). The natural aspects of horticulture were compounded by counter-intuitive elements, a language barrier which proved considerable for many women concerned. This highlights some of the problems when mainstream curricula qualifications are not adapted to the needs of minority groups with unique learning considerations, such as women in prison. The positive coda to this particular story was the proactive intervention of staff at Freshfields. By bringing the matter to the attention of the examination board a change in curriculum was engineered, demonstrating that improvements in practice can stem from within, at a localised level.

In terms of how time in the gardens benefits women on release, Amanda, who was mentioned earlier in the chapter, revealed that horticulture had given her a real sense of fulfilment which, she anticipated, would help her on the outside. Engaging in gardening activities, has, she believes, enabled her to cultivate self-knowledge, 'I've learned more about myself, yeah definitely'. When she is released from prison her plan is to spend time growing and planting with her children, yielding a potentially positive impact on family relations (further extending communities of practice). In particular, she intends to grow her own vegetables, which contrasts markedly from her time prior to Freshfields when she was unaware where tomatoes came from, other than supermarket shelves.

Other prisoners are more apathetic to the merits of outdoor, garden labour, preferring to count off their remaining days under shelter. Olivia, an inmate serving time in Arkham, told me 'I hope it rains everyday day I'm in here'. She joked that the best thing about being in prison is not being rained on, which was why she would rather spend time locked up inside than being at the mercy of the elements while gardening. One activity which is very much associated with the indoors is catering/food production, which will now be discussed at length.

Doing Porridge

[Please note a wider discussion of the part food plays in everyday prison rituals can be found in Appendix VI]

Catering is a ubiquitous activity in all prisons regardless of typology: men and women's; open and closed. There are multiple purposes behind the activity in prison kitchens. Firstly, the prison masses must be fed, common sense dictates, although certain sections of the media (invoking the spirit of popular punitivism) can be somewhat begrudging on this point. Secondly, women have the opportunity to 'pick up and brush up on' domestic life skills which, in turn, are argued to bolster self-esteem. This element compensates for what some view as a natural deficit, Phil, the Head of Catering at Arkham, explained that 'the society we're in today expects the female species to be clean and cook'. Finally, catering presents the opportunity for prisoners to obtain qualifications, 'the icing on the cake', as Phil puts it (he regards accredited skills as being of secondary importance compared to life skills), where the naturally occurring evidence of prison food production can lead to NVQs.

'Prisons have moved a long way from the days of bread and water' Linda (the Head of Learning and Skills at Arkham) explained. By this she meant by this that modern prisons are intended to entail a good deal more than just a sparse, sterile system of incarceration; that the goal is promote the capacity for individual improvement and potential rather than

offering mere wall to wall containment. The Head of Learning and Skills brief is to stretch learning potential throughout the milieu of the wider regime (recent changes to the prison education management structure were detailed in Chapter III: Perspectives on Prison Education).

Catering and the kitchens, in theory, have the capacity to meet some of these aspirations; prison food preparation means not just fuel but is also a means to an end for qualifications as well as developing domestic and life skills. Phil, who heads the catering department hopes that in a small way he can ‘brighten the future’ for the women in Arkham, so that life on release will be a positive one with less chance of re-offending and ‘wasting their lives in institutions like this’. The aim in many respects is to aid imprisoned women in constructing a new life narrative.

Prison Kitchens: Catering for Esteem?

Food clearly plays an important part in the diet of prison life, across both sides of the servery divide, for those who cook as well as those who consume. There are many layers to the experience of working in prison kitchens, where the learning of domestic skills and NVQ qualifications go hand in hand. All kitchen workers at Arkham are inducted into the catering department and are trained in general cleaning, equipment cleaning, Health and Safety, and Food Safety. ‘Big Phil’, as the women call him, oversees the department. He is a larger than life figure, with a military background (and formerly a keen rugby player), with a habit of reclining in his chair, boots resting on the office table, while puffing on a large cigar (a healthy disregard for health and safety).

At Arkham NVQ training at Catering Level 1 is available; for those who display desire and aptitude (and have long enough left to serve) Level 2 is also offered. Working in the kitchens and doing an NVQ earns Lisa £20 a week, higher than she would get by spending her time in the education department. The pay for education courses, she told me, ‘puts people off’. The advantage in training in catering is that the weekly wage takes into account the kitchen

labour, that is providing meals for the prison population, with an additional financial incentive for undertaking the formal educational qualification aspect, the catering NVQ. One of the problematic areas of Arkham, common too many prisons, is that learning is financially dis-incentivised compared to alternative activities in the prison timetable. Issues surrounding the remuneration terms of prison labour was explored in more detail in chapter VII (*The Core of Prison Education*).

There are a number of interesting dimensions to prison catering qualifications. The department manifesto outlines the key objective: ‘we offer the training not as a means to employment but as a life skill’. To learn the ability to produce nutritious food hygienically and cheaply is regarded over and above any envisaged future employment benefits. ‘The majority of our population have few skills in the area of meal production’, the manifesto also states, ‘most provide take away meals for their families, at some cost’. In her report Baroness Corston stressed the same point: ‘how to cook a healthy meal, are missing from the experiences of many of the women in modern society who come in contact with the criminal justice system’ (2007:7).

Phil expressed his opinion that the qualification is just the ‘icing on the cake’, a bonus, ‘the main point is as a life skill, not to rely on McDonald’s and the like. To be able to please the family’. Such comments arouse a certain amount of controversy, especially coming from a man. Critics contend that expectations placed on women, to be domesticated and pleasing, represent a dark side of western family/food culture. In their work *Female Fetish*, Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen analyse the relationship between food and conceptions of femininity in western societies. They argue that traditionally, ‘our culture constructed masculinity as he who fucks, femininity as she who cooks’ (Gamman and Makinen 1995:159).

This element of learning to ‘please the family’ was evident in some of my interviews with women. Lei, originally from China but since settled in England, explained ‘cooking is an important ritual in my culture’. Being in Arkham has presented an opportunity for her to

learn how to cook European dishes which she plans to impress her husband with on her release 'being able to cook English dinner to please him is important to me'. Learning in prison means different things to different people, in this case becoming educated in aspects of European culture. Jankauskait (2003) writes about how attitudes towards food and gender in Eastern cultures are markedly different. Rather than associating cooking with repression, it becomes instead 'a very eloquent part of feminine self-expression'. It is important to note these elements of cultural relativity.

The terms of the debate should not, however, be framed exclusively around women's cookery obligations to family, or the assumption that women in prison are culinary illiterates. This precludes the possibility of any element of fun to be had. Gemma, who I met in the basic skills classroom at Freshfields (not the kitchen), told me that she enjoys cooking on the outside, 'cooking can be sexy and cool. I love Nigella [Lawson, the television chef]. It's moved on from the old days'. Brunsdon (2006) has analysed the contrasting faces of feminism in the kitchen. Delia Smith (who Gemma may well be referring to as the 'old days' of cooking) has become synonymous with dependability to the extent that her first name appears as a noun in the Oxford English Dictionary. 'Doing a Delia', for example, is a testament to the reliability of recipes, a tried and tested formula. Delia's clear and precise instructions identify her as 'an enabler and facilitator' (Brunsdon, 2006:47). Crucially, in the context of this debate, 'Delia confirms that whatever else she is, the woman in the kitchen is a wife' (2006:48). Contrary to this, Brunsdon asserts, Nigella Lawson is less wifely, 'distinguished by her sensual enjoyment of her own cooking and her semi-ironic, sometimes wittily flirtatious mode of address' (2006:51). The result is something a bit more post-feminist, 'Nigella is younger, she has more cultural capital... and she uses more irony' (ibid).

Lisa fits Phil's profile of a woman who, prior to being locked away in prison, lacked the ability to produce a healthy meal and relied heavily on takeaways for herself and her family, but who has successfully picked up cookery skills during her time inside. As she explained, 'my cooking was basic before here. No stews and no fish. I was down the chippy a lot of evenings'. Lisa had been a mainstay of the Arkham kitchen for fifteen months when I visited, the longest serving inmate in the department and something of a kitchen matriarch. Initially

she was not over-enthusiastic being in the kitchen but 'decided to give it a try'. At first she was not confident of being up to the task, 'I felt like I couldn't do it. There was so much to take in, so much to remember. When I cooked some dishes I couldn't remember how'. Over time things improved, 'like any job', she explained, 'once you get into a routine it's easier'. By the time I encountered Lisa things had improved a great deal from the early days, and she was progressing well in her catering NVQ, capable of overseeing three separate dishes for lunch in the prison. Every day she would make an entry in her NVQ 'big booklet', paying particular attention to questions of safety and hygiene. Lisa's case demonstrates how newcomers become members of a community of practice, learning through cultural osmosis (Lave and Wenger, 1991), initially by participating in simple and low-risk tasks that are nonetheless productive.

Although the aim, as Phil emphasises, is for women to be able to take better care of themselves (and their family where applicable) in a personal dietary sense, producing prison food is a far from intimate affair. Cakes, for example, are baked in huge trays on an industrial scale (Lisa's favourite is jam sponge with coconut sprinkles). On special occasions there are more personalised touches in evidence. Individual cakes are baked for women's birthdays; the prison family becomes a sort of surrogate family [as mentioned in earlier chapters]. Lisa explained that she is 'more passionate about cooking' after her prison experience and she looks forward to getting out and showing off good food to her friends and family, cooking for her two girls, aged four and eight. She plans to prepare her own fish, rather than buy it battered from the 'chippy', along with stews and dumplings. Pasta is another of Lisa's favourites, 'you can do so much with it'; an important staple which presents much more potential for variety and choice than she was previously aware. Lisa's recently found love of cooking was both highly evident and infectious.

There are some limitations to this nutritional mission. If education is the answer to promote a healthier consumption of meals, then surely it is not just the few who produce the meals in prison where efforts should be concentrated, but also the far greater number who consume them. To return to the earlier point about some instances of unhealthy prison

eating, perhaps courses in nutrition should be wider spread than just those working in the kitchens. Many of the lunchtime customers revert to type, deciding on the pizza and chip options they opted for on the outside. Arkham uses the word 'customer' (for the prisoners eating the meals) to foster a semblance of a consumer rights discourse, but is the customer always right? And if not what lengths should the authority of prison go towards correcting unhealthy eating habits? This form of education could be viewed as problematic, as a form of prison nanny state-ism. Even if the individual is successfully reconstituted inside is it reasonable to suppose they will choose healthier options on the outside when they are released into wider society? There is a lack of work on practical issues such as developing awareness on how to put together a healthy, balanced basket in the supermarket, and how to eat well on stressed and straitened finances (an obvious barrier is that finances and resources in prison are stretched as it is). Prisons in many respects are in a position where a plethora of deficits are thrust upon them, the failings of wider society. Clearly a closed prison such as Arkham is a less than ideal environment to effect such a personal transformation; teaching women in isolation how to live more healthy everyday lives in the wider world has paradoxical overtones.

Numerous women I encountered did not think too highly of a domesticated routine before they were in prison, and showed few signs of being converted while in prison. Carly, for instance, who was serving her first custodial sentence when I met her at Freshfields, places a high priority on work life and has little time or interest in the kitchen role. At school she gained four A-Levels (ICT, geography, English and Maths) and afterwards committed two drink driving offences. Before her time in prison she worked long hours as a tele-sales manager for major mobile phone network. Her employment tenure was cut short after being sentenced to a year for conspiracy to defraud; she sent mobile phones to friends which were subsequently sold on EBay. At Carly's board she was delegated kitchen duty for two and a half days (and two and a half days in the gardens) which she was less than happy about. The head prison officer tried to reassure her that 'it's a small kitchen', not like the ones in some other women's prisons 'where vats are bubbling over'. Carly debated the point, without seeming negative or rude (the Head of Learning and Interventions noted she

was 'smiley and positive'), that she did not have and did not want kitchen experience, but in the end adopted an air of resignation 'there's no use arguing, but it's not ideal'. Some women who reach the end of the sentence feel the need to be pragmatic and comply rather than jeopardise their position near release. Carly told me she was disappointed by the outcome, 'I wanted more out of it, not just to be a slave in the kitchen'. There was a sense of evident resentment at having to conform to gender stereotype, occupying a position behind the stove. Rather than genuine consensus there was an element of strategic compliance. Carlen (2004) has written about how activities in women's prisons tend to reproduce gendered expectations. The original Freshfields curriculum offered limited domestic horizons (see the latter section of the methodology chapter for an historical overview). To what extent have matters progressed?

As mentioned in the earlier section on prison gardens, choice can be a touchy subject, as the needs of the prisoner and those of the institution are not always in obvious harmony. There are genuinely complicated issues at work which are less than straightforward to resolve. On the one hand women may resent a job they regard as lower down the prison hierarchy, a form of domestic slavery or drudgery. Prisons are, however, working institutions and women (some of them more, and some of them less willingly) are required to commit to the upkeep of the environment. The irony is that it is through undertaking such work that their own confinement becomes possible, so the resentment in some cases is understandable. The flipside is that women are expected to work towards release, not just their confinement. The Head of Interventions at Freshfields is keen to stress the regime 'is not a hotel'. Although it is open, with far more associated freedoms than closed institutions, the staff do not want it to be perceived as an easy option. The routine of life is, in fact, harder in some respects compared to higher security prisons. More is expected of women, trust and liberties are expected to be earned.

The issue of women in prison and domestic labour is understandably fraught with tension. Attempts by prisons to reinforce gender roles will invariably stir up an amount of controversy (prisons as a non-consensual authority underlining subservient roles). Some of Phil's comments about ideal women being 'clean' and 'to be able to please the family',

almost invoke images of a Stepford prison production line, a conveyor belt of obedient and tidy women. This sort of subtext to prison learning, that of domesticated women pleasing men, has shades of a hidden (although not very well hidden) curriculum. The finger could be pointed at wider society and not prisons, or conversely, prisons could be blamed for reflecting wider society. The aims of rehabilitation in this area are somewhat troubling. The expectation of women to please men sidesteps issues of what are, for many, dysfunctional relationships. Anne Owers the Chief Inspector of prisons notes that for many women in prison the men in their lives have been part of the reason why they end up in prison in the first place (Thomson and Sylvester 2006), raising the question where exactly do the rehabilitated or enlightened men fit into this framework?

Phil, the Arkham catering manager, is explicit (as is the kitchens manifesto) that the benefits of cooking qualifications in prison are primarily about bolstering domestic expertise, and that imagined future employment in the catering industry is a secondary and marginal consideration. The more important aspect of the NVQ is that it represents 'joining the club'. A club some thought they would never become a member of. Gaining a certificate is argued by Phil to embody a sense of personal achievement and a boost to self esteem; previously the doors of the accreditation society were locked to many women in Arkham. It is a question, Phil contends, of gently building self-confidence.

It is well documented that large numbers of women in prison have negative associations from childhood school experiences, classrooms can appear daunting places (see Chapter V, *The Best Days of Your Life*). The advantage of learning situated in the catering department (away from the confines of the education block) is that 'they learn without realising they're learning', Phil believes, 'it's about getting them into a classroom without them realising' (again, there are links to communities of practice). The benefit of catering qualifications (in prisons and elsewhere) for women who lack educational esteem is that barriers are broken down as the classroom becomes embedded in the everyday working kitchen environment. Naturally occurring evidence is generated from the meals prepared and served in Arkham. Phil explains 'it's about them being comfortable' (which can be difficult given the

background of some of the women). This element of seeking to make learners comfortable and coax them into a classroom (which does not seem like a classroom) is evident when talking to the kitchen workers. Lisa tells me the situation compares favourably to her school days, 'big Phil takes it slow', she tells me, 'which means I know I can do it'. This draws certain parallels with mainstream society, many learners benefit from courses in work based scenarios in realistic environments. What makes prison different is that in many respects it represents an unreal and unrealistic environment; women like Lisa ended up in kitchens because of being part of a captive audience. She would not have embarked on the NVQ journey if she remained at large in what may be termed 'real life'.

A prison kitchen, in some respects, may be an environment more suitable for women lacking confidence than a mainstream one. Phil says the aim is to create a quiet and calm, 'congenial atmosphere'. Kitchen histrionics, shouting and 'F words' are noticeably absent (a lack of Gordon Ramsey-esque aggression and swearing). Phil has worked in men's prisons in Northern Ireland so he has firsthand knowledge of masculine confrontation and aggression. With men in prison kitchens he argues 'there's always testosterone flying about'. The situation may almost be bordering on 'testeria', a term used by Monbiot (2009) to explain testosterone-fuelled male rampages. There is pent up machismo and aggression in men's prisons, inmates do not 'always take orders easily and are often looking for an excuse for confrontation' [some resistance to being clean and orderly]. A prison officer at Freshfields described their perception of differences in gender attributes:

Women prisoners like a place to be tidy and fresh. They don't abuse the space in the way men would. The panelling in the main lobby wouldn't last ten minutes in the average men's prison, it would be covered with graffiti.

Such essentialist definitions of females as a quiet and clean species were addressed in the *Twenty Women Singing* production (discussed in Appendix V). The performance, staged by the women of the Welsh National Opera chorus (taken to two women's prisons), was themed around dazzling laundered whites and domestic labour, intended as an ironic post-feminist comment.

One of Phil's mantras is that 'courtesy and breathing are two of the things that cost nothing'. He believes it helps the women to have calm and courteous male authority figures around them, rather than ones who display anger and impatience. This, Phil argues, ultimately aids women in the art of learning food production (he is a sort of meal role model as well as a male role model).

The aim then is for an oasis of calm, but is this possible in a prison kitchen? Busy kitchens, with the pressure of constant deadlines, inevitably exude stress. There are both positives and negatives in having cohorts of women working together in close proximity. An atmosphere of camaraderie and team-work develops, but also elements of friction too. Lisa enjoys being around, and cooking with, other people (she confided this is the furthest point from self-reflection in the cell), 'I like working with other people, I wouldn't like a job on my own in an office'. A vital aspect of any well run kitchen is to engender a spirit of co-operation and teamwork; there is a food production line where people are dependent on each other. When it works well at Arkham the women spark off each other. Kitchen workers have set tasks to complete: Lisa does not enjoy preparation side of life in the kitchens, the chopping, peeling and so on. She considers her speciality to be adding spices and experimentation (the more creative sides of cooking). There is a fun dimension to collaborative cooking ('having a laugh!') but a very professional aspect too. It is essential for the kitchen workers to work effectively together to reach the common goals, when women 'get on top' of their allocated task (making sandwiches, peeling and boiling vegetables, etc.) 'most help each other out'. Lisa considers assisting others to be vitally important part of life in the kitchens 'yesterday I was helping [less experienced] girls with the hot plate, putting veg in, little things'. ('Most I get on with, you have to work together'). There is some antagonism generated in that some kitchen workers do not toe the line and share the same ethos of collective responsibility, 'when they've done they don't think they need to help out', Lisa complained 'this does get the girls angry!' ('There are some girls I don't get on with'). Phil 'tells us you have to work as a team but some are just a hindrance and don't want to help out'. The kitchen at Arkham, therefore, is not entirely a measured oasis of calm. Freshfields catering is, in comparison, on a much smaller scale, the prison has an

operational capacity of 128 (a number of women work in the wider community and as such are not on site for meals during the day).

Lisa is positive about staff relations in the kitchens, 'you can talk to them, especially big Phil and little Steve' ['little Steve' is one of the chefs at Arkham]. The prison officers, by comparison, she complains 'don't have much time for you, and fob you off' [the dimensions of social relations are explored in Chapter V *The Best Days of Your Lives*]. Many women regard relations with prison officers to be antagonistic, whereas with catering staff there is a sense of working towards a common goal which, in turn fosters greater mutual relations. Lisa explained that Phil, 'has helped me a lot and never gives up on me, he says "you can do it Lisa". He pushed me on when I tried to get out'. The treatment she receives is 'all polite, they don't treat you like a prisoner', in some respects the type of positive reinforcement she lacked on the outside when she battled against her drug addiction. The element of praise has an ameliorating effect, 'they give you compliments and make you feel good about yourself', which clearly makes a big difference in prison. When I asked Phil about the compliments he told me, 'women are greedy for praise' (it is important to 'give them praise for their first buffet', for example or whenever they reach a culinary landmark). Feedback also reaches Lisa through a comments book where inmates can deliver their opinions in writing, 'messages in the book make me feel good'.

There is job gratification for Phil too, a feeling of 'satisfaction' (esteem works both ways). So, what is behind this satisfaction? 'In trying to benefit others', he says, 'it's just a pipe dream but I'd like to be able to give people a better chance in the future, see some changed faces'. 'You get the odd success in front of you', he explains, 'prisoners say please and thank you'.

Having considered horticulture and catering, the discussion will shift to the prison salon as a site of situated learning.

Scissor Sisters and Bad Hair Days

Michaela expresses the importance of hairdressing salons, 'For 2 hours makes you feel you're not in prison'. £3 for a cut and blow dry can afford a rare taste of normality. Such salons are especially important in closed conditions, a rare treat in an atmosphere where levity and fun are in relatively short supply. It is a shame then that Arkham closed down the hairdressing unit. Michaela, one of the women at Arkham, told me it was a shame as she 'always liked hairdressing' it was one of her favourite activities in the prison. She explained some of the problems that led to the closure. Was the salon popular I asked? 'it was and it wasn't '. Some of the girls apparently got less than exemplary haircuts, 'not what they wanted. Not the Vidal Sassoon treatment' (the cutting was done by other prisoners trained in the task). This reveals a lot about tensions in closed regimes [in chapter V, *Tales of Two Prisons*, the extent to which the total institution strains the nerves was discussed (Burnside and Faulkner, 2004)]. A perceived bad haircut can be upsetting enough in the outside world, but such aggravations and disagreements can become intensified and cause great upset in the claustrophobic prison world (such aspects can become magnified in a close knit, incarcerated social microcosm).

The closing down of the unit may be considered a pragmatic move, the path of least resistance, which cuts down on hair related arguments and as such allows the regime to run in a more smooth and obedient fashion. Yet, there is clearly much that is lost with losing the hair and beauty service. On an obvious level it is another liberty to add to the list that are taken away from the individual whilst inside. As Michaela mentioned, it could make the women feel for a brief period as if they were not in prison, (or at least the experience was softened by the blow dry and conditioner treatment), such things (which are taken for granted and seem even trivial on the outside) help to keep intact some sort of relationship with normality (if only in a small way).

The physical and mental health of women deteriorates noticeably in closed prisons (Liebling and Maruna, 2005). Arlene (Head of Learning and Interventions) is shocked by the state of

women on arrival at Freshfields, their appearance and posture (the prison pallor), the way they walk and talk. It angers her that women in prison are taught to be dependent, they 'learn to lose all sense of personal responsibility... grown women are treated like girls'. In this context, the denial of access to hairdressing facilities seems remarkably culpable, in that such a unit encourages women to take more pride in personal appearance and is important for prison morale. Arkham is, in this case, guilty of a lack of responsibility in denying women the potential for personal responsibility. The question persists, how can a spirit of professionalism be cultivated if women lack the opportunity to smarten themselves with a haircut? This undermines education and training, not just for the women who would otherwise be able to train as hairdressers inside (which is a popular form of occupation for women post release), but also has a negative knock on effect throughout the rest of the regime. If it is difficult for women to look professional it follows that it is difficult to act professionally. This serves as a further illustration of how closed prisons are designed for men by men (Corston, 2007), not fit for purpose where women are concerned. A prison like Arkham which was built in the male tradition (and previously housed male inmates) reflects a barbed wire paradigm. Razac wrote that barbed wire has 'the capacity to enclose space, tends to weaken; it becomes a negative symbol of brutal sovereignty' (Razac, 2003). Such closed institutions are, in their very architectural DNA, invariably masculinised spaces; the closure of a prison salon denies women a rare chance to keep in touch with their femininity in a milieu overtly framed around the male. Sharma and Black (2001) have written about the dimensions to life in salons, ways in which services rendered represent a form of emotional labour catering to inner and outer conceptions of beauty. The loss of the salon Arkham did not just represent a loss in terms of helping women *look* better, but also in terms of making women *feel* better.

The full working salon at Freshfields, by way of contrast, illustrated some of the potential of prison hair dressing. Offering a haircutting service is important in an open prison in that it encourages women to take more personal responsibility over their appearance. Because open prisons are intended to operate as an intermediary stage for women prior to release, so it would make little sense in denying women such a service that is common in everyday

existence. Many of the women in the prison are on training or placements outside, so looking professional is a must. For the salon workers hairdressing offers the possibility of training and self-improvement; as with prison gardens there are therapeutic benefits too. The Freshfields salon also maintains an important link with the outside world, as women from the neighbouring village make use of the facilities and enjoy a chat. Sharma and Black (2001) explore world of mainstream salons as social and learning hubs. The aptly named Kristen Barber (2008) has analysed the wider gendered discourse surrounding the salon as a feminised social space. By contrast barber's shops are for men, with activity centred on the no frills utility of cutting, resisting the feminisation of identity.

Ostensibly the unit at Freshfields resembles any regular mainstream hairdressing establishment. Salon chairs are positioned in front of mirrors; clumps of snipped hair on the floor. The sound of chatting is accompanied by the background noise of near constant hairdryers (and the distinctive aroma of hairdryers too). A list of jobs is written on a mirror with pen that can be wiped away. Villagers come in (demonstrating community links) every week for a cut and 'a natter'. 'They love having a chat with the girls', Debbie who runs the salon told me. There is a clearly visible pay structure fixed to a wall, a basic cut and dry costs £2.50, other treatments and services are offered, a range affordable colours and waxes. A manicure costs a couple of pounds. Freshfields residents do not handle cash; money comes out of their prison account. 'Many of the women are low on money', Debbie informed me, 'they can pay in the future if need be'. This element of discretionary flexibility is noteworthy. The informality over terms of payment contrasts with the formalised rubric of the pay structure.

The fact that the unit closely resembles a fully fledged working salon reflects the fact that Debbie, who runs the department, owns her own salon outside of the prison and is an experienced hand where hairdressing is concerned. What prompts someone to move from successful career in mainstream hairdressing? 'I've done the salon, been there. I wanted a new challenge', Debbie explained. She also gets much more job satisfaction from working in a prison rather than mainstream salon, 'the job feels more worthwhile, it's really helping

folk'. She still owns the salon outside but only ventures there from time to time to check that everything is running smoothly.

The Freshfields salon offers qualifications to underpin practical skills and offers genuine opportunities for women to continue in the profession, both on placement towards the end of their sentence, and subsequent to the final release date. The range of hairdressing accreditation offered is at NVQ Levels one, two and three. Levels two and three usually require a couple of years to complete on the outside, Debbie told me, whereas, 'the record here is completing Level three in six months'. She attributes this to the benefit of one to one help and the fact that women are often committed and the course gives them a sense of purpose. Unlike other avenues of prison training and education where resultant employment is fairly speculative, women who do learn hairdressing at Freshfields have a good chance of getting a placement in a salon outside. The Prince's Trust has even given grants to Freshfields' residents to encourage them to open up their own salon. The fact that it is possible to gain some qualifications quicker than on the outside suggests a prison focus, where deprivation of liberty concentrates focus on goals and narrows the sights. Education can embody an absolute commitment for women in prison, a rare positive on which to cling on to in helping to navigate the sentence. Whether the deprivation of freedom constitutes a fair trade is debateable.

Women who train in hairdressing at Freshfields are given gradual step by step training to build up their self-confidence. There are many stages before women are given access to customer's hair with a pair of scissors. By the time they are deemed ready for practical haircutting opportunities they have practiced and developed individual competence to a high degree, which makes disenchantment over the cut and styled end product, as there was at Arkham, less likely. Initially all the trainees begin with the formal mechanics of shampooing and conditioning. When women graduate to cutting they begin by practicing on a long wig (on an artificial head model) progressively cutting the hair shorter, starting on long hairstyles, then shorter ones (when they are exhausted the wigs are thrown away and

the process starts again). There is much step by step social learning (Lave and Wenger, 2001) in evidence.

There are plenty of embedded and transferable skills involved in training to be a hairdresser. As with catering and horticulture there are the familiar elements of, 'it's a classroom but they don't know it', which again comes in useful for women who would gladly cut all ties with formal education. Debbie explains the women 'learn without realising, they really use their noggin'. In common with the horticultural and catering settings, the salon is differentiated from class bound learning (the so called 'break from education'). The core elements are transmitted in a more learner centred, practical, framework (Etling, 1993). As Colley and Hodgkinson (2002) stress, the boundaries between formal and non-formal are blurred. Arkham, with its lack of salon, clearly misses out on a rich vein of learning potential.

Plenty of mathematics is brought into the equation. Aspiring hairdressers are required to learn how to mix colours, a practical way of incorporating ratios, in order to be able to apply tints and peroxides. If the wrong proportions of peroxides are used, it is unlikely to result in satisfied customers. To succeed trainees are expected to be focused, or must quickly learn focus. To this end it helps there is a practical goal to hairdressing rather than being on an abstract level. There are writing skills involved; portfolios are immaculately presented. Wider researching skills are also compulsory, with women required to do book research, for example on the differences in white and afro Caribbean hair. 'It's more than just a blue rinse', Debbie explained, 'trainees have to be focused and accurate, it's easy to go pear shaped!'

As with other forms of education and training at Freshfields, the allocation of hairdressing, and the wider framing of the individual weekly timetable, is discussed at the weekly Board sessions. There is a notable deviation from the delegation of gardening or kitchen detail where, as discussed earlier, some residents are somewhat resistant (some women frown upon the gardens and kitchens as low down in the overall hierarchy of delegated duties; the dimension of not wanting to be forced to 'slave' away). Where hairdressing training is

concerned there is a noticeable difference in attitude, with some women aggravated at not being allowed to spend *enough* time in the salon each week. A number of residents want hairdressing exclusivity, resulting in instances of inverse Board tension.

Such an instance occurred when Leanne appeared before the Board. As with all residents new to Freshfields she attended the weekly Board session. Unlike the majority of other residents, however, it was not her first time at the institution [Arlene- ‘you liked it so much you came back’], she had previously served time at the open prison, during which she achieved levels one and two in hairdressing. While at Freshfields the Prince’s Trust funded her driving lessons so that she would be able to run her own business, a mobile salon, post-release. The lessons were cut short when she absconded, but nevertheless she succeeded in setting up a mobile hairdressing service later on. She laid off hairdressing and downed her scissors when she became pregnant. Leanne was 26 on her return to Freshfields, and, as such, over the qualifying age for future financial support from the Prince’s Trust.

The important aspect to the Board sessions, Karen (the Head of Education at Freshfields) revealed, is the imperative to examine the needs of the individual holistically, to generate ‘a proper joined up plan’. It cannot just be piecemeal a bit of hairdressing here and a bit of catering there; it must meet individual need and is aimed at helping women upon release from the establishment. At Leanne’s Board session agreement over key targets, and how to achieve them, generated some friction. Leanne wanted to focus on working towards her level three in hairdressing, but Arlene, the Head of Learning and Interventions, was insistent that Leanne should also improve her level of literacy and numeracy one day a week. To complicate matters further because the prison kitchens were short staffed Arlene also wanted her to spend two days in the kitchens, which Leanne was less than enthused about: ‘that’s not helping me learn anything in the kitchens’. This raises issues about the art of compromise, legitimacy, and the kitchens not being viewed as a proper learning environment by some residents. With catering taking up two days in her timetable, and literacy and numeracy another space, this left Leanne with two days a week for Level three hairdressing, ‘how can I do that on only one day a week?’ Brian the Head Prison Officer

drew a line under the situation, 'well that's what you've got. It may change'. There are follow up Boards to review progress and address any potential amendments to timetables.

Arlene tried to appease Leanne by telling her, 'this is a compromise. The best of both worlds'. The aim, she said, was to monitor her progress in hairdressing, for Leanne to do brush up sessions, then 'do Level 3 when tutor says you're ready'. The numeracy issue became a very thorny subject, there was some more complaining from Leanne about how she detested maths, and considered it a general irrelevance as far as hairdressing, or her own personal progress, was concerned. Arlene took some umbrage at this point, asserting that mathematical competency is integral to hairdressing life, 'ratios are vital in salons... whether it's 30% bleach, 60% colour, etc'. There was not a happy compromise as Arlene had hoped, frustration was written on Leanne's face, 'you don't understand maths gets me angry'. She was still not satisfied and complained again, at which point Arlene put an end to the discussion 'don't let *no* or *but* leave your mouth'. In the end Leanne was resigned to not getting exactly what she wanted:

Leanne - can I go now?

[Leanne left, not all together happy with her lot].

Arlene - She's a stubborn one.

Brian - I was on the verge of putting her full time in the kitchen. [Note the kitchen is framed in terms of punishment].

Leanne's attitude displayed reluctance with an element of strategic compliance. There were similar examples of tension over women's roles in prison kitchens and gardens discussed earlier in the chapter.

Linking to the outside

The openness of the Freshfields hairdressing salon is such that it helps to promote many important links with the wider world. Women in the village can come once a week to have their hair cut and styled. Marilyn, one of the village regulars, told me the service is 'wonderful'. The customer satisfaction is down to more than just the quality of the hairdressing on offer. Initially she was slightly apprehensive, 'I wasn't sure what to expect... I wasn't sure we would have much to talk about'. Initial expectations of awkwardness were unfounded, however, and she finds the women in the salon easy to talk to. Marilyn says she finds it easier to relate to the women than she thought, 'we have chats about everyday things' including beauty tips, fashion and celebrity gossip; 'we both read *Heat*' [a fount of popular culture]. They also talk about families and motherhood, their shared experiences as women. Barriers and misconceptions are broken down, or at least partially eroded, on both sides, Marilyn told me it's 'important to give these women a fair chance'. There often seems to be a prevailing discourse of 'them and us' surrounding prisoners and the outside world; the 'othering' of people serving time in prison. Open prisons can play a positive role in this respect, if the public spend more time in prisons it chips away at popular misconceptions (that prisons are holiday camps; that prisoners are 'the other', a degenerate species).

There are other ways that the salon stimulates important links, not just with the rest of the regime, but also the sphere of existence outside. Three or four times a year Freshfields holds family days where children can spend the whole day with their mothers in the establishment. Themes are often seasonal, Halloween and spring for example. The salon participates and plays an active part in these family days, children can get their hair cut or face painted, for example.

Other links to the outside are cultivated. Some women in Freshfields progress to placements in salons outside of the prison, prior to full release. This is especially useful for women training in more specialist areas, one of the women I encountered was working part of the week in a salon specialising in Afro-Caribbean hair. Others go outside prison to attend beauty courses (waxing, etc).

The hairdressing profession is not to the liking of everyone in prison. In Arkham there was the example of 21 year old Cola (mentioned in the *Best Days of Your Life Chapter*), who chose a life of crime over cutting. The only legitimate paid employment Cola has been engaged in prior to prison involved working in her mother's hairdressing salon. She worked sweeping up hair and making tea, which lasted all of one day, and was remunerated £50 for her efforts. The short employment tenure was down to Cola's perception of long hours and hard work for a meagre reward; she says she could earn the £50 in five minutes selling drugs, a considerably smaller investment in terms of time and effort than starting out in the hair dressing trade. On release she is committed to the high life ('cocaine to me is like a smoke or a drink to you') over the legal alternatives.

There are conflicting aspects to life in the salon then, Leanne is very keen to spend as much time there as she can, while Cola is much more dismissive, viewing it as a source of drudgery. Black and Ursula (2001) examine the of competing discourses surrounding the beauty salon in wider culture, as the site of both compliance with, and escape from, a feminine ideal.

Conclusion

On one level vocational learning reveals a palpable dichotomy between open and closed prisons. Arkham is steeped in the barbed wire paradigm of enclosed space, where real life skills are learned in an artificial setting. The closure of the salon denied the women not only an important service but also a social and training opportunity, demonstrating that vocational training cannot escape the frustrations and restrictions of closed regimes. Freshfields, by contrast, presents a more expansive community of practice, inside and outside, linking training with the outside world.

A further notable aspect lies in the somewhat false premise of vocational learning for women in prison. Official discourse is ostensibly aimed at addressing professionalism, hard skills and career prospects (OLASS, 2007), yet delivery often focuses on the reproduction of

femininity through domestic and emotional labour. This reinforces the gendered dialectic in education (Skeggs, 1997) by which masculinity exists in the public sphere and femininity the private. While Freshfields is innovative in some respects, and offers practice others should follow, in others ways it is steeped in the values of its original post-second world war curriculum, aimed at producing better wives and mothers. Alongside their physical confinement women suffer the additional imprisonment of societal expectations.

X

Conclusions

In this final chapter I draw together key findings from fieldwork conducted at HMP Arkham and HMP Freshfields. To conclude, I argue the need for three overhauls: an overhaul of sentencing, an overhaul of prison structures and an overhaul of educational and training provision within prisons. To begin, I will outline some of the wider developments effecting imprisonment for women subsequent to my fieldwork time at Arkham and Freshfields and consider the implications in relation to the findings of this doctoral research project. Following on from this, the overall conclusions and implications in relation to the key research questions will be discussed.

The Prison Crunch

Since my time at Freshfields (Spring 2008) the burgeoning signs of cuts have been apparent. At the time of writing the prison has recently been subject to the process of amalgamation which Baroness Stern warns is tantamount to enlargement by stealth (ePolitix, 2009). The prison has lost its sole governor, who now has dual control of two prisons, the second some 30 miles away. The practice of amalgamated management is considered to be an exercise in cutting staff costs rather than improving quality of service (Stern 2009). This proves controversial in the case of Freshfields because it has been singled out by Anne Owers (2009), the Chief Inspector of Prisons, as being the best her team has ever inspected. The prison Freshfields is effectively being ‘twinned’ with has been beset by a wide range of problems over recent years (criticised for a macho staffing culture where women are often treated in a derogatory way) and there have been calls for a direct, hands on troubleshooting style of management. The task is huge Owers (ibid) warns, ‘the wisdom of making its already difficult task more challenging by adding responsibility for this distant satellite must be open to question’. The fear is that this will detract from the performance

of Freshfields. When the Prison Service cuts costs, corners are also cut, and it is best practice which suffers a process of regression to the mean (Owers, 2009).

Wilson (2009) draws attention to recent 'efficiency savings' that have compromised the rehabilitative intentions of the prison nexus. The Prison Service is dominated by controlling, conservative tendencies, with recent times illustrating a recession into a less innovative mechanic.

There has been a fresh turn in the debate over the extent to which prison education and training are prioritised. Budget reductions in effect across the prison estate have reduced the core education week by half a day. The effect of this, explains Erwin James (2009), is that:

Most prisons now lock their prisoners in their cells from Friday lunchtime until Monday morning, opening them up only to collect food and to take an hour's walk around the exercise yard each day.

(James, 2009)

A chief cause of concern in closed prisons is the excessive amount of time inmates are locked in cells. As James (ibid) also points out, this is deleterious to prisoner wellbeing and can only have a negative impact on re-offending post release. With all the debate about future cuts in education spending the government has launched a pre-emptive strike on prisons, although with considerably less fanfare, or hostile reaction, invariably associated with emotive debates surrounding provision in mainstream schools. Prisons are soft targets for hard cuts. The credit crunch has become the prison crunch. While the credit crunch was triggered, in part, by toxic speculation on the part of wealthy bankers, the acute effects have been keenly felt by generally not so wealthy inmates. As McDermott remarked in an article in *The Times* 'it makes me nostalgic for the days when the Prison Service could afford a revolving door' (2009).

The cuts to education hours coupled with Prison Service Instruction 50/2008, which formally lays down that all activities in prisons must be judged on how they 'might be perceived by

the public', suggests a worrying precedent where prison education and activities are concerned.

A Titanic Mistake?

Another key development has been in the abandonment of the Titan prison project, originally announced by the Justice Secretary Jack Straw in late 2007.

Lord Carter's understanding of prison modernisation (detailed in the report *Securing the Future*) involved considerable up scaling. Jack Straw was enthused, and three super-size, multi-storey, 'Titan' prisons were proposed at an estimated cost of £350 million apiece. A 2008 consultation paper on prison expansion revealed that each jail would stand four or five storeys high holding around 2,500 people. The architectural focus of the project was framed around the construction of priapic monoliths, with warehousing criminals seen as a solution to the storage problem created by an ever-expanding prison population.

There was a phalanx of objections on all sides. Yet at the putative stage negatives fell on deaf ears. The Term 'Titan' itself borders on anti-reform, suggestive of an all powerful hubristic discourse riding roughshod over penal alternatives. Critics (James, 2008; Lyon, 2009b; Wilson, 2009) have argued that ramping up prison capacities would aggravate rather than alleviate existing problems. Shirley, one of the Freshfields tutors with experience of teaching in open and closed prisons, both large and petite, told me 'small prisons like small schools get the best results'. Mirroring these comments, Owers (2008) the Chief Inspector of prisons, is adamant that larger prisons tend to perform worse.

In April 2009, however, the Titan proposals were abruptly dropped. This may seem like a victory for common sense, few were in favour of the proposed scheme in the first place, critics were numerous and vocal. Jack Straw (2009) explained that his move away from Titans was mainly due to 'listening to all sides', hitherto he had displayed a politician's knack of being deaf to criticism. The result, however, has been far from a Damascene conversion. Five scaled down Titans have been announced as an alternative, holding 1,500 prisoners each, which will put each of the establishments at the very top end of current prison

capacities (similar to HMP Wandsworth the largest UK men's prison). Juliet Lyon, a Director of the Prison Reform Trust, condemned the latest proposed solution as tantamount to 'mindless prison building' (2009b) and predicts this will generate future problems as each of the new establishments will be 'larger than our biggest and most troublesome prisons' (Lyon 2009). Baroness Stern (2009) has raised further concerns in the House of Lords, claiming that the government has responded to the overt criticism of the Titan scheme by choosing instead to enlarge prisons by stealth, 'the introduction of Titan prisons by the back door', with the amalgamation of prisons under one management structure, even if they are geographically distant. The message from the state is that bigger is better (despite considerable evidence pointing to the contrary). The commitment to ever larger prisons inevitably struggles to keep pace with the rising prison population.

In contrast to the upscale approach for men, criticised by Lyon (2009), the discourse for women appears to be branching out in another direction. In 2007 Corston wrote that for a fraction of the billions needed to pay for 8,000 additional prison places for men, there was 'an opportunity for government to do something innovative for women'. It seems her advice has been heeded. As of August 2009 the government has committed itself to reducing the women's prison population by between 350 and 400 (around 10%) by 2011 (Hill 2009). To help achieve this £15.6 million (an economic fraction compared to bank bailouts or Titan economics) is being invested in community solutions, such as developing women's centres and bail support services. While Frances Crook of the Howard League of Penal Reform has welcomed the policy move, she considers the numbers to be conservative, arguing that it is effectively possible to 'reduce the women prison population to zero' (cited in Hill 2009). Crook argues that 'the tiny number of women who have committed violent crimes and are a danger to society could be placed in small residential units', while the overwhelming number incarcerated for non-violent crimes, 'could pay their debt to society while on community sentences, during which they would also be helped to beat the issues that led to their offending behaviour in the first place' (ibid). Currently almost 70% of women in prison are convicted of non-violent offences (Cabinet Office, 2009).

Bi-Gendered Discourse

There are two projected futures of the prison service then, one proposed by a Lord and the other by a Baroness. Carter's solution lies in coping with the aggressive expansion of the men's prison population through monolithic multi-story prison building, which has found more detractors than acolytes. Corston on the other hand has argued that we should review who we send to prison, and that traditional imprisonment should make way for small scale community solutions: a nano ethos trumping centralisation. The government seem to be heeding Carter's advice for titans, or at least micro titans for men, while at the same time making tentative steps in Corston's direction towards penal alternatives with respect to women.

The key research themes framing the parameters of this study will now be interrogated in some depth.

Research Theme One: Prison and Education in Context

In order to position the empirical findings within a wider context, this research study has explored the evolving purposes and philosophies underpinning imprisonment, together with discourse and theoretical perspectives surrounding prison education. These debates have been analysed extensively in chapters II and III.

Prison without a purpose is reduced to sparse containment (and prohibitively expensive containment at that). Chapter III outlined the conflicting philosophical standpoints justifying the basis of imprisonment, prisons as sites for reform or retribution, whether the purpose is to discipline or educate (or educate through discipline).

The Retribution perspective (still highly influential in relation to public and policy attitudes) is contended here to be retrospective, inconsistent and anachronistic, both in philosophy and practice. Where prisons exist the aim must be towards reform, yet the discourse informing prison education remains problematic (as will be discussed below). In actuality though, there has never been a clear message as to what the direct, over-arching purpose of

prison really is, the boundaries between rehabilitation and punishment are often blurred, with a somewhat muddled message as a result. Yet despite (or perhaps even because of) lacking a consistent and meaningful aim, prison, perhaps more than ever, remains the criminal justice gold standard in Britain (McConville, 2003). As Foucault observed:

So successful has the prison been that after a century and a half of “failures”, the prison still exists, producing the same results, and there is the greatest reluctance to dispense with it’

(1984: 232).

Prison is undoubtedly successful in that it continues to aggressively expand in democratic western cultures (with particular reference to the United States and Britain) despite being consistently associated with failure (whether by economic, moral or recidivist standards). In some respects the monolithic dominance represents a form of anti-logic immune to its own shortcomings. The present and future is written on past failure.

In terms of the historical progress of prison education, in some respects provision is rooted in a dated pedagogy. In its initial guise the chapel and the classroom were one and the same place. The focus was on reading and writing in order for illiterate criminals to observe and receive religious instruction, a form of basic skills for the soul. In a number of ways the modern day, instrumentalist curriculum has not really progressed. Rather than possessing an empowering quality, such forms of education have generally stereotyped inmates (often in a pejorative sense). The concentration on the remedial has marked out and stigmatised offenders over the years, influencing the construction of prisoners as an uneducated and uneducatable underclass.

Research Theme Two: Contrasting Prison Structures: Open and Closed Regimes

Overhauling Sentencing and Prison Structures

Government moves to reduce the women prison population are welcomed, although such intervention is overdue and can scarcely be termed proactive. This is not an overnight, unforeseeable, phenomenon. Over the previous decade the number of female prisoners has increased by 60% (Bromley Factfile, 2009). When prison capacity is strained, problems inevitably abound due to population pressures. Women I spoke to complained of inappropriate first night accommodation at the beginning of their prison stay (discussed in Chapter V *Tales of 2 Prisons*). It will be interesting to observe how successful the government is in its new found intention of turning women away from prison. The 10% projected reduction is, however, on the conservative side considering that 70% are convicted of non-violent offences.

Debates over statistical semantics should not cloud wider issues. Charles Clarke (during his tenure as Home Secretary) commented at the launch of the Fawcett Society's *Justice and Equality* report (in March 2006) that, 'You only have to look at the re-offending rate to realise that prison doesn't work'. When a recent Home Secretary emphatically states that prisons do not work, policy makers should pay attention, especially bearing in mind that recent holders of the post have keenly espoused the 'prison works' message (especially since Michael Howard's tenure in the 1990s). It is a prohibitively expensive system, one which has proven to be ineffectual. The overall average resource cost per prisoner in England and Wales in 2007-08 was £39,000 (Prison Reform Trust, 2009) yet people emerge far more likely to reoffend than not. The costs of sentencing whether emotional, social or economic, are excessive and often out of proportion with the initial offence.

There needs to be a drastic review of the appropriateness of the criminal justice system with respect to women. In the 19th century Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1999) wrote that laws and constitutions are masculine in origin, in the 21st century Baroness Corston has argued that

the prison system is designed by men for men. In some respects then, little has changed. Pat Carlen (1989) has called for a change towards a woman wise penology. In Corston's (2007:7) opinion 'there has to be a better way, especially when the crimes generally involve only short sentences'. She adds that people locked away are deserving of more understanding, 'we seem to have little sympathy, understanding or interest in those who have been their victims, many of whom end up in prison' (ibid). The criminal justice system is being called upon to make up for wider deficits, a signifier of provision failure elsewhere. Prisons have effectively become modern day social dustbins where difficult to manage cases are filed away out of sight (Owers, 2009). Increasingly, prisons are being relied upon as the social agency of the first resort when they should be the last. More robust early interventions are needed along with alternatives to prison time. Prisons are at the frontline in dealing with acute adult education, mental care and addiction needs despite being one of the most ill suited and ill equipped settings to address such issues.

It is little wonder that reoffending statistics make for dismaying reading. Closed prisons represent a barbed wire space designed to herd and weaken individuals, the total institution in its most brutal form. I have reported at length on the damaging consequences of prisonisation. Many women were victims of abuse before prison, in certain respects this is replaced by an institutional abuse when they are in prison. Closed prisons are not fit for purpose, representing in many ways an anti-educational space. Any personal success stories emerging from Arkham were particularly impressive, given that the structural set up worked against this.

Freshfields fares better, primarily because it seems less like a prison. The harsh semiotics of incarceration are visibly reduced, women are encouraged to take more personal responsibility and more interaction with the outside world is facilitated. On a day by day basis, residents in Freshfields become more acclimatised to freedom, reducing the culture shock of release, whereas in Arkham inmates become more imprisoned as the days pass. Education and rehabilitation need to be the primary considerations in moving prisoners. As it is only a small minority of women serve time in open conditions, the majority are convicted of non-violent offences yet end up in closed prisons. The process often seems to

be determined by happenstance rather than by design. Mandy wrote in her poem life is 'just a roll of the dice' (Chapter VIII *Creative Learning*), and in many respects it is a roll of the dice whether women end up at a prison like Arkham or a prison like Freshfields, a casino approach to criminal justice. Staff and inmates are locked into a system where the odds are stacked against them.

Research Theme Three: Teaching and Social Relations

The Prisons of Childhood

Many have been starved of love, excluded from school, haven't achieved very much, then when they get into trouble they are taken from the few people who are dear to them.

(Corston, 2007: 17)

In the quest for best educational practice in prisons, the shining beacons of success, there is a risk in sidestepping the key question, the failings that lead people to prison in the first place. Whenever women walk past the threshold of the prison classroom, it is an indictment of the wider education system, a social failure. As Victor Hugo phrased it, 'he who opens a school door, closes a prison' (cited in Caputa, 2008:33). Prison classrooms hold up a mirror to systematic failings elsewhere.

Previous educational attainment for women in prison is frequently low, with high rates of school exclusion. Past negative experiences colour perceptions, and this often explains a marked reluctance to return to learning inside. At the same time, it is important to avoid stereotyping women in prison as a uniform lowly educated class with a ubiquitous back story. Many of the women at Arkham and Freshfields experienced chaotic and fragmented schooling, for a variety of reasons. Accounts encompassed a vast diversity of educational back stories, narratives were non-linear. It is clear that more effective learning interventions are needed from a young age, but this does not follow a simple tick box formula.

Classroom memories presented contrasting and sometimes paradoxical images. Some women who under-achieved in a conventional sense, nevertheless looked back fondly. There were also bittersweet recollections of the lost days of youth and potential. For a number school provided order and stability absent from the rest of their childhood. Reflecting back on what constitutes success or failure is a complex matter, clearly more than the sum of individual qualifications.

A large number of negative lessons were learned in childhood classrooms. There were many instances of women scarred by being labelled 'thick', by teachers who placed low or no expectations on them, which in turn became a self-fulfilling prophecy of under-achievement and damaged esteem. The classroom for some women was a claustrophobic symbol of negative authority, a form of past incarceration. It is little wonder that vast numbers enter prison gates haunted by school (a repository of bad memories) and are deeply reluctant to return to education. There are striking parallels between school and prison.

Social Relations

The most revealing aspect of social relations, between prisoners and uniformed staff, was evidenced in the Personal Officer scheme in operation at Arkham and Freshfields. Intentions were forward thinking, to change the dynamic between prisoners and officers towards mutual relations and respect, away from the keeper and kept, lock and key, mentality. At Arkham, however, it is fair to say implementation was a resounding failure. Many women were completely unaware of the scheme and who their delegated officer was. In general there were complaints that prison officers had little time for them. These first hand findings were supported by the prison inspectorate, who found entries by officers to be perfunctory and impersonal, obsessed with rules and regulations and often cut and pasted. It is worth bearing in mind that the personal officer scheme is supposed to represent best practice and a fresh start in terms of inmate and staff relations. Instead it highlights some of the worst practices in women's prisons, that uniformed staff are gender insensitive and awkward in

stepping out of their disciplinary comfort zone; in many ways remaining stubbornly obstructive rather than supportive. In some respects prison officers symbolised a throwback to the negative side of childhood schoolhouse authority.

Prison officers represent the masculine, confrontation side of closed prison life, underlining that such institutions are not fit for purpose for women (reiterating the point that such spaces have been designed by men for men).

The contrast was marked at Freshfields. Women I spoke to were generally far more positive about officer relations compared to the picture emerging from Arkham. Staff would chat with residents over cups of tea and overall seemed to play a far more constructive role in terms of rehabilitation. Prison officers even help women with childcare duties in the Mother and Baby unit (although in this context wearing uniforms seems unnecessary).

Enhanced prisoners at Arkham (who qualified for day release) reported that relations with officers were more relaxed, normal and far more positive compared with life on the inside. This suggests that the closed prison total institution mind set breeds conflict, and that the rehabilitative potential of officers will invariably be compromised in such a structural context. Prisoner-staff relations are locked into a perpetual 'us and them dynamic' [playing out roles as every day, social actors - Goffman (1991)].

The debate about prison officers playing a constructive role in prisons such as Arkham contributes to the myth that closed prisons can function as effective rehabilitative spaces. If prison officers are to make a positive and rehabilitative contribution then the space must be positive and rehabilitative too.

To reiterate earlier points, far too many men and women convicted of non-violent offences are sent to barbed wire institutions when there could be alternatives, either in terms of community based sentences or the potential for local solutions.

Teaching Relations

Overall, women at Arkham and Freshfields were positive on the subject of relations with teachers, viewing them in a more positive light than other forms of staff relationships (which in itself can be seen as a justification for prisoners to spend more time in the classroom in the company of tutors).

Women in both prisons commented on the lack of hard-line authority imposed in classroom, a beneficial shift from the childhood schoolroom dynamic in many respects. There was evidence of some contradiction, however. One tutor was praised by students for treating them as if they were adults, yet his side of the account revealed that he employed the same teaching techniques he had deployed in his former capacity as a primary school teacher. Although women expressed a desire to escape the classrooms of their childhood, in certain ways aspects were being replicated inside prison classrooms. The closed prison set up at Arkham instilled conformity and divested individual personal responsibility, which heavily compromised educational objectives of encouraging confident, adult learners.

It should also be highlighted that not all students wanted the adult treatment, or to be the teacher's friend, and instead desired a hierarchical framework based on respect and unequal status.

The teaching staff in both prisons displayed an understanding and flexible attitude to rules, demonstrating an element of informal discretion within a highly formalised formal set up. The role of tutor in prisons entails a considerable amount of emotional labour, requiring patience, praise, and dealing with teary episodes. Tutors at both prisons identified themselves as role models, and, in some respects as surrogate parents. Prison teaching involves a delicate balancing act between emotional labour and professionalism, while praise is viewed as essential in terms of boosting esteem and confidence, there were concerns by tutors over potential dark sides: women being addicted to praise, or the dangers associated with praising work out of proportion with ability.

Trust was identified as an important aspect underpinning relations between tutors and students. At Arkham, however, the panoptical classroom layout, coupled with an attitude of ‘I trust the girls but I wouldn’t turn my back on them’, suggested trust tainted by an element of paranoia.

The prison context means that tutors are often viewed in a positive light compared with the surroundings (especially in closed prisons), whereas childhood teachers were often constructed as jailers.

Research Theme Four: The Core of Prison Learning

The direction of government policy has moved away from soft skills in the direction of hard functionalism. This represents centralisation at its most stubborn and eccentric, the hunt for non-existent magic bullets. At the time of writing the current Labour government has been in power for over a decade, if the functionalist approach was going to work it would have demonstrated more positive outcomes by now. Every year huge numbers are trained in literacy in prison; every year huge numbers return to prison functionally illiterate.

The vast array of education needs of prisoners call for a broad educational menu, not a simplistic ‘one size fits all’ myopia. The Danish writer Kirkegaard (1999) argued that a systematic, objective model of philosophy and ethics was not feasible. In a similar vein an overriding, authoritative definition of what prison education represents (in the context of incarcerated time and space) is likewise elusive.

That is not to say basic skills education entails zero benefit. For the women concerned qualifications can be worth more than the actual value of the paper currency, representing a belated membership of the accreditation society. Such learning can instil new belief, and is often preferable compared with some of the alternative ways of spending prison time.

The opportunities model surrounding the provision of basic skills is inherently flawed. Focus on literacy and numeracy alone is unlikely to steer women from a life of crime, as discussions in earlier chapters illustrate. The prospect of basic skills generally does not inspire women to return to the classroom in a hurry (especially as there are often negative past connotations involved). There was a certain level of equality in perspectives: both teaching staff and women seemed mutually unenthused and doubted the efficacy of basic skills learning.

What price education? Women's pay reveals how much education is valued by regimes. At Arkham it was far more lucrative for women to spend the day unfurling coils of headphones for airlines, an activity that represents mundane activity at its most mundane, which does not even pretend to have any learning merit. Freshfields, by contrast, offered an undifferentiated 30p an hour flat rate for all activities within the prison. While this did not necessarily represent a huge financial incentive, on the other hand it did not dis-incentivise or discriminate against learning. Promoting education in prisons goes far beyond classroom boundaries, it has to be a consistent message across regimes. Imposing remuneration structures which reward mindless production line labour as the most profitable activity, reinforces and conveys an admission that a low price is placed on rehabilitation.

Women at Arkham complained of wanting more educational variety. Freshfields negates this to an extent in that there is an opportunity to participate in educational opportunities beyond the prison gates. The core prison curriculum represents a 'death by basic skills approach', an infantilised and sterile discourse (reaffirming the stereotype of the terminally 'thick' inmate). The accreditation overload meant that women's perceptions of what a certificate represents became jaded and diminished across the educational journey, echoing Freire's (1970) critique of forms of educational depositing pedagogy. Many women have experienced qualification fatigue; there is a dilemma between opportunity and ease.

There were, however, possibilities suggestive of a more innovative literacy discourse developing away from core provision. At Freshfields *Storybook Mums* addressed literacy

skills in a much more personable way and also helped to promote family literacy and communication (a kind of family distance learning). The Toe by Toe (TbT) scheme at Arkham encouraged women to play a more active part in their education, those who have been through the programme have gone on to teach it. It has helped to promote learning out of the classroom, integrating it into cell life. The benefit of the inmate on inmate approach is that it is framed around shared biographies, encouraging motivation while reducing much of the stigma attached to illiteracy.

Away from rigid, imposed from above, frameworks are approaches to literacy grounded more on inmate's interactions and experiences. Much of this innovation is being driven by the third sector, from outside, in stark contrast to the internal, conservative and centralised, Prison Service mindset. The recommendation is not to look for an alternative one size fits all prescription, to replace one magic bullet with another, but to provide a menu of alternatives framed around, rather than squeezing, individual potential.

Getting Prisons Online

It is essential that prisons join the internet society if education inside is to come anywhere close to realising its potential, otherwise it is reduced to a form of ersatz learning. While the sphere of opportunities takes on ever more momentum on the outside, the prison world, which already lags behind, moves at a snail's pace. Lack of internet is another signifier that rehabilitation is not what prisons are designed for, adopting a low position on the priority list.

Prohibition of on line access means educational choice is severely restricted. This especially affects prisoners with needs above the basic level. There is little suitable provision in prison yet there is a world wide web of opportunity that lies tantalisingly out of reach. Distance learning opportunities are heavily reduced; the Open University only offers a very limited catalogue of courses offline.

Lack of internet limits access to formal and informal learning potential as well as broader social capital. *Cell texts* is an innovative online library cataloguing writing by prisoners, yet prisoners are, ironically, the only social group unable to access it. They are effectively excluded from their own cultural capital. In terms of news media, prison populations only have access to the dead tree press, news written the day before and framed in the past tense. Women in prison are isolated from the increasing importance of online social networking, vibrant ways by which they could keep in contact with family and the wider world. How do we expect prisons to facilitate successful reintroduction to society when virtual shackles are imposed in addition to the physical ones?

Lord Carter has presented twin visions of the future, one inside the prison network and one outside. His report *Securing our Future* (2007) outlined a titan future inside. His report *Digital Britain* (2009) outlined the blueprint for a broadband revolution outside. It is interesting that one vision focuses on warehousing people in ever increasing numbers, effectively reducing opportunities, while the other seeks to expand opportunities through harnessing internet potential. There is clearly no place for prisoners in the brave new world of broadband.

Research Theme Six: Prison Vocational Learning

Prison Work and Training

Many women in prison have the perception that the world of work offers low paid and mundane opportunities. So what does Arkham offer? Women earn money by untangling writhing, black knots of aeroplane headphones, and repacking them in individual plastic bags. Such activity is unlikely to win over hearts and minds and convert women to the merits of legitimate employment. Such mentally stultifying work is a cruel parody of the modern workplace, a modern day prison equivalent of past treadwheels, keeping inmates tediously occupied.

Vocational learning reveals much about the gulf in learning potential between open and closed prisons. Arkham represents a segregated enclosed space, an artificial setting in which to learn real life skills. The recent closure of the prison salon denied the women a training facility as well as a social resource. Freshfields demonstrates how open prisons operate as a more expansive learning environment, promoting communities of practice, facilitating conversations with the outside world (with salon and horticultural services offered to the wider public)

In some respects, vocational training for women in prison is based on a false premise. Official discourse is ostensibly aimed at addressing professionalism, hard skills and career prospects (OLASS, 2007). Yet the tacit side of such provision is geared towards limited horizons, addressing deficits in domestic skills. This evokes images of a Stepford prison production line, rehabilitating women to accepted conceptions of femininity. Carlen (2004) argues that women in prison are considered not only to have broken the law but also their own intrinsic sense of womanhood. In different ways the discourses of education and rehabilitation in operation at Arkham and Freshfields reflect this gendered discourse.

Research Theme Five: Creative Prison Learning

Creative Learning

The merits of creative learning were much in evidence at Arkham and Freshfields, presenting a compelling case for the implementation of a broader based, expressive curriculum in prisons (advocated by Collins, 2004).

The closed prison theatrics in Arkham, in the form of *The Erpingham Camp*, offered women an opportunity to be expressive, the subject matter of the play also encouraged them to critically examine their own role as prisoners. However, the production was a one off, and opportunities were missed to get more of the prison involved (the art department, etc). In many respects the staging of the production reflected the limitations and frustrations of the closed prison world.

Dance United at Freshfields took women out of prison and gave them the opportunity to train together at a Dance Academy. The project proved beneficial in a range of areas, including: esteem, trust, team-building, self-discipline, confidence, commitment, concentration and promoting healthier lifestyles. The wide range of transferrable skills accrued contradicts the government's rather dismissive attitude towards arts activities in prison.

Other commendable aspects of creative learning included artwork and creative writing. Such work reflected on prison conditions as well as imagining life beyond the fence. It was clear, in a number of cases, that when people are deprived of liberty they start to examine what it is to be free as never before.

Prisons generate considerable creative capital, some truly remarkable work. There is an empowering message here, the human capacity for creating something positive in adverse circumstances. This alone is never enough to justify the imposition of imprisonment, however.

Charities and Prisons

Much of the innovative learning provision I witnessed (at Arkham and Freshfields) was facilitated by the charitable sector (*Toe by Toe*, *Storybook Mums*, *Dance United*, *Erpingham Camp*). This demonstrates that in many cases innovation happens despite, not because of, the prison service. The third sector is increasingly being relied upon to harvest skills and fill gaps in provision. Worryingly, such provision has become jeopardised by Prison Service Instruction 50/2008 (discussed in the previous chapter) which dictates that all inmate activities, even those not funded by the tax payer, must meet the public accountability test.

There is another side to the debate: rather than papering over gaps from the outside, should charities be involved in running prisons from the inside? In June of this year Turning Point and Catch 22, two respected and established charities, won a bid to build and manage new prisons in London and Merseyside, in a consortium with private service provider Serco (Brooks 2009). In September 2008, the crime prevention charity Nacro announced a similar bid in coalition with the private security firm Group 4 Securicor and a construction company. The charity's chief executive, Paul Cavadino, argued the logic in being a part of the prison management team, as representing 'the best way of ensuring they are being run properly is to be involved in planning this from the start' (Stevenson, 2008). Aitken (2009), who has worked closely with the Conservatives on prison reform, advocates such an approach, that charities will bring energy and expertise to HMP management teams. The argument is that charities will deliver the soft power of rehabilitation, while the hard power of security and physical restraint will continued to be done by officers trained in the area. A tidy division of labour then between the yin and yang sides of prison life.

Brooks (2009), however, does not think the reality is quite so clear-cut. She argues that charities will be party to hard power, 'the use of physical restraint, the treatment of suicide risks, the imposition of virtual solitary confinement – as well as the cuddly stuff like art therapy'. There is a worry that when charities occupy an equal place on the management

ladder their priorities will then adapt. In bidding to run a prison with private companies Nacro conveniently dropped their opposition to prison expansion and privatisation of the criminal justice system. Can the charity Catch 22 maintain its commitment to seeing fewer young people jailed while playing the role of jailer (a catch 22 in itself)?

There is a danger that organisations such as Nacro and Catch 22 end up giving private security firms a superficial sheen of credibility. When charity and punishment mix, dilemmas invariably abound. Charitable groups bring fresh ideas about tackling society's problems, which, in part, comes with the outsider perspective; if they become part of the inner circle there is a danger of being subsumed by the system. Innovation could give way to routine management concerns and mundane indicators of performance. Charities should focus on what they do best, bringing some colour to the otherwise drab palette of prison education and training, in particular through addressing the soft skills maligned by the government. Punishment and the running of prisons should be left in the hands of the state.

To Educate or Punish?

It is essential for sentencing structures, prison structures and educational structures within prisons to be overhauled. The reality of high reoffending rates is not such an unfathomable mystery given the current set up.

Prisons need to offer a wider array of learning opportunities: education should allow more scope for personal expression and be framed more around inmate experience. The current framework gives little scope for women to think or feel for themselves. As a consequence of the rapid numerical expansion of the inmate population, the prison service has been handed the obligation of being one of the foremost service providers of adult education in England and Wales, and is currently failing in the duty. The whole closed apparatus is centred on containment, neglectful of the fact the vast majority of the captive audience will emerge once more into society.

The potential gains of prison education have to be weighed against deleterious effects of incarceration, the sense of individuality prison strips from people. In closed prison rehabilitative goals are heavily compromised. The emancipation argument is right, a structural overhaul is a pre-requisite for education to occur on a meaningful level. It is a non-sequitur to learn to be free in conditions where mind and body are enslaved. The most dangerous thing about closed prisons are that the conditions normalise and regulate women into a routine to the point they find it safe and dependable. Such institutions represent a one size fits all discourse with a core curriculum to match. This form of enclosed, segregated, barbed wire space weakens the individual and proves unsuitable for a heterogeneous population with a wide variety of acute needs. Any merits as a rehabilitative environment are compounded; existing problems are likely to be exacerbated. It is essential to move away from the dated warehousing mindset.

Should more women be placed in open prisons? It is a question of whether the aim is to educate or punish. Open environments encourage and support rehabilitation, far better than closed alternatives, for the simple reason they are set up to be less like prison. The potential for individual growth is not reduced to an afterthought, self-reliance and self-respect form part of the wider community. Women in open prisons unlearn what they have learned in the closed milieu and take on more personal responsibility. More is offered, interactions and conversations with the outside world are facilitated.

Along with alternatives to closed prisons, we need to invest in alternatives to prison full stop. Sentencing women to prison is often reduced to an expensive system of retribution which does little to address the problems which led them there in the first place. The debate should not be about rehabilitation within prison, but about rehabilitation away from prison.

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Appendix I

Lewdness and Women in Popular Culture

Hogarth's *Gin Lane* an insightful social document offering satirical insights into 18th century social attitudes. The illustration of gin soaked women touched concerned over moral decline and the general state of the nation; the dark side of urbanisation, fears over cities as immoral places. *Gin Lane* depicts graphic scenes of infanticide, starvation, madness, decay and suicide.



XXIX. GIN LANE. 1751. Engraving. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 14 in.

William Hogarth (1697-1764), *Gin Lane*. 1750

At the forefront of Hogarth's print is a half-naked, gin addled woman driven to prostitution (suggested by the syphilitic sores on her legs). A baby slips unheeded from her arms, plunging into a gin cellar to death. The mother is seemingly only concerned over a pinch of snuff. The illustration is not as much of a caricatured exaggeration as it may appear. In 1734

Judith Dufour reclaimed her two-year-old child from a workhouse where it had been given a new set of clothes; subsequently she strangled the infant (disposing of the body in a ditch) in order to sell the clothes (for 1s. 4d.) in order to purchase gin (George, 1985: 41). In a similar case, a toddler burnt to death because of the neglect of Mary Estwick who was incapacitated in a gin-induced stupor (Warner, 2002: 69). Such cases provided a focus for anti-gin campaigners and the image of the neglectful mother became increasingly central to anti-gin propaganda. Sir John Gonson, whom Hogarth featured in his earlier *A Harlot's Progress*, turned his attention from prostitution to gin and began prosecuting gin-related crimes with severity (Dillon, 2004: 42).

By 1727 Defoe was one of those in favour of anti-gin legislation (having previously supported the distilling industry). He was notable for being among the earliest practitioners of the novel (along with Fielding and Richardson); in *Moll Flanders* he created the medium's first bad girl. On the one hand the novel is interesting in that it offers a salacious and racy episodic narrative of female debauchery, the anti-heroine herself describes her life as 'a horrid Complication of Wickedness, Whoredom, Adultery, Incest, Lying, Theft, and in a Word, everything but Murther and Treason'. If *Gin Lane* represented the squalid side of feminine immorality, the character of Moll Flanders embodied a kind of sexiness. Another noteworthy aspect is that is the first novel which deals with the treatment of women by the criminal justice system. Moll ends up punished for her crimes, incarcerated in Newgate prison (like the book's author twenty years previously: life imitated art). The model of incarceration presented is one of despair; Newgate is depicted as an 'emblem of Hell itself, and a kind of Entrance into it'. Yet the prison is the site of Moll's reform and repentance through religious instruction (although there are question marks over how sincere the religious conversion is). The first depiction of female criminality in the novel is subject to much ambiguity/ambivalence: Were readers attracted by just punishment and a morally edifying coda, or conversely for the liberated depiction of female hood and licentious exploits that comprise the vast majority of the text?

Through the ages this sexualised cultural depiction of female criminality has continued. 1970's exploitation films, including New World's 'Women's Penitentiary' trilogy: *The Big Doll's House* (1971), *The Big Bird Cage* (1972), and *Women in Cages* (1972) substituted the everyday realities of prison life for women with titillation and shock value (Mason, 2004). Mason argues that such films diminished the message of serious reforming prison films, as they became viewed merely as more refined versions of their crass counterparts, obscuring real life prison abuses. More recent on screen representations of women in prison include the popular prison drama/soap opera *Bad Girls* which aired from 1999-2006, which presented life inside as tense and sexually charged. The series ran under the tagline 'bribery, corruption, rape... and that's just the screws'. The show later transferred to London's West End but in the form of a high kicking 'grit and glitter' musical (the ball and chain depicted as a glittering disco ball) which gave more of a kitsch and camp take on prison existence. Such fictional portrayals of incarcerated life are relevant in the wider world as they become a form of cultural yardstick. Women I spoke to in prison held *Bad Girls* as a point of reference in terms of how they anticipated prison life to be prior to their incarceration.

Appendix II

Sample Access Letter

Head of Learning and Skills
HM Prison XXXXX

I am a PhD researcher based at Cardiff University, conducting research into prison education and vocational training, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). I plan to undertake a study in the near future and am writing to ask for your consent to spend some time at HMP XXXXX.

XXXXX, as an open prison with a wide range of educational and training activities, would be of great benefit to my research. The prison has been noted for its emphasis on purposive activity and resettlement. It would prove extremely valuable for me to be able to gain firsthand experience.

Should you consent, my time would primarily involve interviewing staff and inmates participating in education classes and work based training. I am keen to stress that my presence would cause a minimal level of disruption, as a qualified teacher myself I can empathise completely with the time constraints and pressures you and your staff are under.

It is my intention that this study will prove of some benefit from your perspective. My research findings will be made fully available. I am focusing on developments in the delivery of prison education and training, patterns of inmate participation, together with staff and inmate perspectives on prison education.

The welfare of your colleagues and inmates would be my primary concern. Participation in the study for all concerned would be of a voluntary nature with confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed. In any writing up pseudonyms would be used for people/places/HMP XXXXX. My research plan has been already been rigorously scrutinised and fully endorsed by the ethics committee at Cardiff University.

The education and training of women prisoners is an important yet under-researched area. As someone with a background in adult education it is an issue I feel passionately about. It is my hope to make contribution to enhanced understanding and awareness of this topic.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I will contact you in approximately one week by telephone to discuss the matter further.

I look forward to speaking with you in the near future

Ian Porter

Post-graduate Researcher
Cardiff University School of Social Sciences

Appendix III

The Display of 'Inspirational women' at Freshfields

Campaigners: The Burmese female pro-democracy activist and winner of the Nobel prize Aung San Suu Kyi. She is a notable prisoner of conscience rebelling against autocratic authority through means of non-violence and civil disobedience. Aung San Suu Kyi has spent over a decade under house arrest, she has imprisonment in common with the women of Freshfields.

Prominent historical examples of women dedicated to the care of others, such as Florence Nightingale and Mary Jane Seacole. Florence Nightingale (the 'Lady of the Lamp') gained fame in her capacity as a nurse during the Crimean War, insisting on adequate lighting, improvements to diet, hygiene and regular activity; placing an emphasis on physical and mental health. Mary Jane Seacole was a Jamaican born British nurse who volunteered to tend to soldiers wounded in the Crimean War after hearing of poor medical provision. She was refused, largely down to prejudice. Despite rejection this she borrowed money and made the 4,000 mile journey by herself. She distinguished herself by treating battlefield wounded, often nursing wounded soldiers from both sides while under fire. As a woman of mixed race Mary Seacole overcame the double prejudice of influential sections of Victorian society.

Politician women: Margaret Thatcher Britain's first female Prime minister, Condoleezza Rice the United States Secretary of State from 2005-2009, and the women who succeeded her (after failing in her bid to become the first female President of the United States) Hillary Rodman Clinton.

Athletes: Kelly Holmes who won a brace of gold medals in the Summer Olympics in Athens, the sailor Ellen MacArthur who broke the world record for the fastest solo circumnavigation in the globe spending 71 days in self imposed solitary confinement, and the successful Para-Olympian Tanny Grey-Thompson.

Royalty: The Queen Mother and Helen Mirren who gained widespread acting plaudits and an Oscar for her portrayal of the Queen.

Authors: J K Rowling who began writing as a single mother on welfare, and is now one of the richest women in Britain.

Entertainers: The Spice Girls who propagated the message of 'girl power' and the singer Kylie Minogue who has battled breast cancer.

Appendix IV

Interview Schedule and Further Discussion of the Prison Interview Process

Interview Schedule (Students)

Name.....

Section One: The Journey to Prison Education

1-a) What education/training are you participating in?

1-b) How did you come to do this course (title)? (Probe- did you choose to sign up? Were you allocated?)

1-c) What choice was there/what were your options? (What else did the prison have to offer you?)
Pay comparison?

1-d) How did you find out about the course? [why did you sign up?]

1-e) What were the things that influenced your decision? [Was it your idea to do the course? Was it your first choice? What attracted you? Incentives for education? Disincentives?]

1-f) What were you looking for in a course? [Pay? Qualifications? Prospects? Social reasons? To be occupied/relieve boredom?]

1-g) What were the first few weeks of the course like for you? [How did it compare to previous experiences of education? Have there been surprises or challenges? How do you think you have adapted to study in a prison environment? **Difficulties from being in prison?**]

1-h) Have you done any prison education/training prior to this? (If yes repeat questions: *How did you come to do this? What choice was there? etc* **How did it compare to HMP? Difference between regimes?**)

Section Two: Biographical Data/Learning History

2-a) How long have you been at HMP?

Where did you live prior to HMP?.....

Where did you live originally?.....

(probe-previous institutions? first sentence?)

2-b) How far away is HMP away from where you lived on the outside? [Probe-Any difficulties and issues? Probe. Problems with keeping in touch with friends and family? Contact from outside- Visits and letters?]

Family ties- family life (children etc). Close?

What happens on family visits?

2-c) Which secondary schools/colleges did you attend

2-d) Which other institutions have you attended since school? [probe-dates?]

2-e) Did you take any exams/qualifications? [probe- what in? dates?]

2-f) At what age did you leave full-time education?

2-g) What jobs have you done since leaving school/employment history? [probe- details]

Section Three: 'Think Back' Questions [time at school/other educational settings]

3-a) Tell me a bit about yourself at school. [when you think of school what do you think of first of all? what memories do you have of yourself at school?]

3-b) What sort of pupil were you? [do you think friends and classmates from days at school would describe you in the same way?]

3-c) How did most teachers think of you? [can you remember what sort of things they said on your school reports? comments they made to you in lessons?]

3-d) Overall, do you think you got the most out of school? [why/why not? If you had your time again would you do things differently? Did you enjoy school? why/why not?]

If relevant elicit more recent accounts of time spent in education, training schemes, New Deal programmes, work based learning, etc...

Section Four: Experiencing Education 'Inside'. 'Typical' Week

4-a) What is your timetable for the week? [How many hours? where?]

4-b) What sort of things do you do? [How is learning structured? Do you like the structure? Would you like more input? How do you find the Workload? How much homework (if any) do you get? Where do you do it? on the wing?]

4-c) Do you enjoy what you're doing? [Why/why not?]

What does education mean for you?

4-d) What you most/least enjoy about the courses you take? [Why/why not? What sort of activities are most effective for you as a learner? What type of sessions do you most enjoy/ least enjoy?]

4-e) Can you describe some of the approaches to teaching and learning that you believe help you learn?

4-f) Where do your courses (education and training take place) what facilities do you make use of?
[eg library? opinion?]

4-g) What is the atmosphere like in the classroom? [How do you get on with classmates? Constructive? Helpful or hindrance? What do you like about being in the classroom?]

4-h) Would you say you get on well with teachers/course tutors? [Staff helpful? Respect? Any difference compared with other staff in the prison?]

4-i) Could you describe to me a 'typical day'? [What time do you get up? Have breakfast? What time does 'education' start? How long does it take to get to learning block from cell? Any difficulties in being transported... etc **What makes your day run smoothly/any impediments?**]

4-j) What sort of things do you do on the wing (in the evenings)? [How do you spend free time? Any education?]

4-k) What are the hardest things about spending time in prison?

Section Five: Focus on Last Lesson

5-a) What did you do in your last lesson/training? [What activity did it involve? What facilities?]

5-b) Did you enjoy it? [Why?]

5-c) What went well? [could it have gone better?]

Section Six: Imagined Futures. Goals and Aspirations

6-a) Immediate Goals? [Educational? employment? social? other?]

6-b) What about longer term? [where do you want to be in xx years time?]

6-c) What do you want/expect to get out of education? [on a personal level]

Section Seven: Personal Evaluation

7-a) What is your opinion of the education/range of activities at HMP? (Comparison with other prisons?)

7-b) What would you like to see more of?

7-c) If you could change your course/design your own-what would it involve?

7-d) How seriously do you think education is valued/prioritised by the regime? [well organised? Pay? Facilities, conditions...]

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you for your time in talking to me.

Interview Schedules and Beginnings

As with the majority of research environments preparing a form of interview schedule is common practice. On the whole though, my interview aide memoires served as back up or a form of reassurance if my wits failed me. I found the sign of a successful interview was through not having to resort to the script of the interview schedule at all. That is not to say that thinking about and planning interviews is anything less than essential. As I mentioned earlier prison interviewing is a proverbial balancing act between organic, flowing conversation and artificial timing/temporal pressures. Being able to navigate these tensions does not happen through happenstance. I found that it was because of preparation and planning that I was able to confidently venture off script in interviews, often not referring to my notes at all. Deviating from the original interview guide and not being too dependent on the set interview text is a recognised aspect of qualitative interviewing (Seidman, 1998; Legard et al, 2003).

In the beginning of the conversation it is essential that both interviewer and interviewee(s) are put at ease (Maguire, 2000). This is obviously sound common sense, and key interviewing tenet regardless of location, but is an essential aspect within prison confines. It would be understandable for the women I spoke to not be entirely at ease as I was an outsider to the prison world asking a variety of questions, likewise there was reason for me to not be comfortable being that prison is outside the scope of my usual existence. As mentioned earlier matters were helped greatly by the fact that I had spent time with the majority of respondents prior to interviews. That being said the interviewing process inevitably marks something of a shift in the researcher/respondent relationship. There is the worrying potential for awkward beginnings due to the contextual shift (although keeping interviews 'in house' as it were the education department and other learning locations certainly worked). In the event as far as prison research goes talking is really the easy bit (although saying the right thing can be another matter).

Establishing tone from the outset was obviously vital, I aimed to steer clear of anything resembling formal lines of interrogation, especially as the previous interviewing experience for many incarcerated women was as an official sanction under caution in the custody suite of a police cell. Burgess famously likened interviews to a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984:153), in this context the purpose being to elicit incriminating information. I considered it important to portray the interviewing process in a more positive light, not one evoking the negative side of power relations. The 'introducing questions', as Kvale (1996) described must be approached with care and

should avoid being too obvious or indelicate. In this respect I sought to avoid opening gambits and staid, generic lines of questioning. My aim was to delegate to the interviewee allowing them the opportunity to speak. Because the women I encountered were non-ubiquitous, neither was the tone of interviews. The tempo differed according to who was interviewed. Some informants were like proverbial 'bulls in a china shop'; where the situation resembled verbal gymnastics from the word go. Others were initially more reticent. It was key to pick up on comments and act responsively. I wanted to avoid a 'by the numbers' interview approach, and convey that respondent's views genuinely mattered.

In terms of composition my planned interview schedules were designed to cover several avenues of knowledge/information, with thematic overlap, mapped to the research questions and main lines of enquiry. The areas were not covered in the interviews in a linear fashion, or set order (I tried to steer clear of what may be interpreted as leading, or obtuse, questions). Although dialogue in each interview adapted and branched off, the unpredictable avenues often produced the fertile lines of data (off script but not off message).

The main interview sections (not necessarily followed in linear order) were as follows:

'Prisoners can tell but mustn't be asked': Addressing Biographies

Biographical issues for inmates focused primarily on learning histories but also touched on family issues and criminality. This area required a delicate balance. Legard et al (2003) remark that biographical information should be elicited in the early stages as it is unlikely to develop of its own volition over the course of the interview. This is problematic in the context of prisoners. I tended not to open with probing biographic questions touching on past offences and criminality. Such information emerged when informants were comfortable to disclose. On some occasions disclosure was upfront, when I met Heather she joked straight away that she was in for 'smuggling 3 kilos of coke'. Disclosure itself on the part of people in prison can in itself be a form of ice breaker, sometimes as a way to gauge how they will be judged. Pushing the women I interviewed into disclosure would have been ethically dubious and an abuse of duty of care. My experience was that responses were more revealing when less pressure was applied. There is a prison etiquette: 'prisoners can tell but mustn't be asked'.

Covering biographical areas in interview encompasses 'think back' questions (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Think back questions are helpful in dealing with the past of informants, 'specific and grounded in their experience' (Krueger, 2000:58). Furthermore, it is significant that the questions are framed in the past tense. This shift in the time line has a grounding effect, increasing the reliability of responses, because it 'asks about specific experiences as opposed to current intentions or future possibilities' (Krueger, 2000:58). This moves the emphasis from what might be, or ought to be, to what has been, and proved useful in establishing past educational narratives.

The thinking back aspects covered a wide range of life history. Areas which came up included educational memories, recollections women had of school, the sort of pupil they were. The fabric of relations with teachers, other students, parents. Experience of home life (what lessons were learned there). The leaving age in terms of full time education (a number of women I interviewed left school early due to motherhood). The level and range of educational qualifications gained (many incarcerated women get their first certificate in prison). The nature of post-compulsory education learning and training and the types of employment engaged in (legal and criminal). Interviews often touched on the road map to prison.

Education Inside: The Learning Journey

This section of the interview schedule involved more thinking back, the learning journey to education in prison. The story of how and why inmates became involved in prison education forms an integral aspect of the research equation. I was intrigued by what attracted women to incarcerated learning. How induction processes differed between Arkham and Freshfields. What were the options and choice of courses: how much dialogue took place, was learning consent informed? What were the things that influenced decision making; which course attributes were considered desirable?

On the flipside of the educational coin I interviewed non-participators and rejecters; what factored in their decision *not* to opt for formal qualifications? What forms of non-formal and informal learning were they engaged in?

As to staff, what was their journey to teaching in prison? What was the attraction? Is it a job or a vocation?

The Nature and Organisation of Educational Courses

Interviews covered the nature and range of courses and qualifications being undertaken by women in prison. What was the weekly timetable; what constitutes a 'typical day'? I was keen to get a sense of not just educational activities during the daytime in the classroom, but also on the wings (and in the case of Freshfield's dormitories) on the evenings and weekends; the concentric circles of learning and types of educational knowledge being transmitted (formal, informal, non-formal).

In terms of organisational factors I gained interview insights from teachers and managers into the formal/informal composition of education, how courses were put together and run, and also the view from students from the educational shop floor. I also elicited wider information about the regimes: how day to day lived realities and how prison objectives (and timetables) compare and collide with learning ones.

Evaluations

Interviews provided an opportunity for participants to air candid opinions and an overall evaluation concerning the state of play of prison education, as one informant phrased it their 'two ha'penny worth'. This is important as women inmates (as mentioned previously) are an under-represented constituency. Inmates expressed opinions concerning the range and quality of educational provision/activities at Arkham and Freshfields. This addressed a focal point of the research inquiry: the quality and scope of the prison core curriculum. Conversations touched on the quality and style of teaching and facilities, the approaches that facilitate effective learning. The rewarding and challenging aspects to education inside were covered; the enjoyable and less enjoyable aspects of learning activities/interactions. As part of educational evaluation I asked interviewees what they would like to see more of in terms of learning opportunities, if they could amend the curriculum what would they change/ if they could design their own course what would it involve?

Interviews with teaching staff likewise focused on personal evaluation: what they thought of teaching the curriculum in its current state, the range of activities and qualifications, what aspects they would change; their views on what constitutes good teaching practice. Tutors expressed opinions on the realities and frustrations of teaching inside, how prison and teaching objectives are not always in harmony, in Arkham for example the difficulties of lesson planning and preparation where there is a constant prospect of lockdowns and lesson cancellation at no notice. I was

especially interested in how 'success' is measured from the prison tutor perspective, in formal, informal and non-formal ways. Teachers were very forthcoming about what they regard as the enjoyable and rewarding aspects together with the less enjoyable and not so rewarding.

The evaluative process involved a strong comparative element. Women I interviewed compared Arkham and Freshfields to other prisons where they had served time, how the institutions compared in terms of purposive activity and the nature of regimes overall. Likewise the tutors with previous prison teaching experience contrasted the realities of teaching in different institutions, examples of where the system is failing, as well as good practice with the potential to be transferred throughout the prison estate. Speaking to staff and women serving time gave a strong sense of the differing implications of learning and rehabilitation in closed and open settings. Institutional comparisons were not restricted to previous prison experience. Teaching staff compared their experience of teaching in prisons with teaching in schools, inmates, on their part, discussed how teachers in prison compare with their childhood teachers in mainstream education. Issues raised included comparisons between prison classrooms and school classrooms, and the teacher-student relationship contrasts with mainstream schooling. Can mutual trust develop between inmate and tutor within prison confines? Gender comparisons also emerged during interviews, as tutors compared their experiences of teaching in men's prison with women's.

It was also important that as part of the reflexive qualitative research process I evaluated how interviews played out on an ongoing basis. Interviewing is a craft and gets honed through a process of experiential learning. As Maguire reflects (2000) mistakes are made as fieldwork unfolds; it is a learning process and I certainly learnt lessons in prison. As the number of interviews grew new lines of inquiry emerged from informants, content which I factored in turn into subsequent interviews. Silverman (1993) terms this as the process of 'progressive focusing'.

Imagined Futures: Goals and Aspirations

Forward thinking interview questions complimented the think back ones. These provided an insight into how inmates envisage and mentally construct their lives post-release, 'on the out'. The element of imagined futures provided a neat counter-point to think back questions, avoiding an over-reliance being mired in the past tense. Resettlement is a pressing issue where women in prison are concerned, with rates of recidivism of late being at a high level. There are debates surrounding the appropriateness of the word 'resettlement', many women in prison have never settled ever (Owers

2009). I was keen to find out what women wanted and expected from education; whether they perceived benefits, or otherwise, in relation to resettlement potential. It was important to get a sense of whether interviewees were positive about their future lives and a sense of worries and the envisaged challenges. What are the immediate goals for women in prison and where do they imagine themselves to be in the longer term? Does prison life offer adequate or inadequate preparation for release? What are the overall lessons learnt from time in prison?

Teaching staff were open on the score of what they perceived to be the failings of the prison system and the lessons that need to be learnt. They offered a range of opinions as to the quality of preparation prison provides for life outside, and the capacity for education to change lives. Some tutors were keenly aware of the harsh law of averages and display a worldly wise attitude. One commented how it is 'depressing to see the same faces again. Such is life'.

Appendix V

Prison Music

Music has a long tradition in prison as a means of empowerment preserving a sense of individual identity. This was exemplified by the unique musical tradition which grew out of the American southern prison system during the early decades of the twentieth century. Behind the barbed-wire barracks a vein of African-American creativity flourished in the state pens, because it was essential to the spiritual as well as physical survival of the black prisoners (Lomax, 1993). The songs that grew out of the harsh emaciating conditions, spoke tragically of penitentiary conditions. Music was means of survival, the rhythm of song matched that of chain gang drudgery. Out of this vital creative outlet emerged a new musical genre, an original repertoire of songs voicing feelings and fantasies of inmates (ibid). Some recordings of inmate work songs have survived, they represent an important social document preserving inmate identity, keeping alive lost voices.

Songs about prison have a unique, iconic quality. In 1955 Johnny Cash released *Folsom Prison Blues*, a song about a fictional outlaw incarcerated for murder ('I shot a man in Reno to watch him die'). In 1968 he performed a now legendary concert at the same prison he had earlier made famous, a set list which featured *Greystone Chapel* written by an inmate serving time at the prison for armed robbery. The following year Cash went on to perform at San Quentin Prison in California; his emotionally charged performance struck a particular chord with inmates:

San Quentin, I hate every inch of you.
You've cut me and have scarred me thru an' thru.

The subject matter was close to the bone, a scathingly honest portrayal of the prison the audience called home. A polemic from within prison walls. Lyrics about learning to survive the harsh knocks of incarceration and emerging the other side: 'I'll walk out a wiser weaker man'. Weaker but free. Cash said of his prison concerts, 'they were the most enthusiastic audience I have ever played to.' Despite never serving hard time (he landed in jail 7 times, each time for misdemeanours, for one night only) Cash had a special artistic affinity with the prisoner constituency. After his death in 2003 he left a legacy of having performed arguably the most famous prison concerts of all time, lauded critically as well as commercially.

Prison songs have even inspired education programmes. The 1978 Clash B Side, *jail Guitar Doors* inspired the musician and social campaigner Billy Bragg to set up an independent initiative in 2007 of the same name, which provides guitars to prison inmates to aid musical development and rehabilitation in tandem. Donated guitars are sprayed with agit-prop slogans such as 'Stay Free', 'Clash City Rockers', and 'This Machine Kills Time' - in homage to protest song pioneer Woody Guthrie, whose guitar declared 'This Machine Kills Fascists'. Bragg says: 'One thing playing guitars can do is take you out of the place you are in - and that's crucial in prison.' Can prison music programmes ultimately reduce levels of recidivism? The charity Changing Tunes, which uses music to aid rehabilitation in 9 prisons, claims that the reconviction rate of those who take part is between 10% and 15%, compared to a national rate above 60%. Whether such dazzling statistics hold up under scrutiny or not, further investigation is essential. The court of public opinion is not convinced; however. Topping (2007) cites a couple of examples to illustrate the point. When the band My Luminarie held a concert to raise instruments for prisoners in Reading the local paper's letters page was filled with vitriol. In the second case a social worker in Northamptonshire was told he should 'condemn a little more and understand a little less' after he bought a guitar for a disruptive young man charged with murder. There is a perverse kind of logic at here, which loathes levels of criminality in society, yet is loathing even more when practical steps are taken to address the problem. Just desserts writ large in neon lights.

Personally, I am convinced of the benefits in guitars for prisoners, and not because of hard statistics. The scene was the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts in 2008, the Leftfield tent. A former inmate one of the beneficiaries of Jail Guitar Doors, was performing, 'sitting in my cell, my guitar, that's all I had, a release for me'. He had only been out for four days, and was only allowed to play by permission of his parole officer, 'music ain't just notes, scores and stuff it's a way of living man, life and that and being able to embrace that'. I stood among a crowd transfixed. People cried and cheered at the performance (vocals and guitar), the atmosphere was electric. Some things can't be measured by statistics. While Johnny Cash was a musician making a connection with a prison audience, here was an offender fresh out of jail making a connection with a music audience. Jail Guitar Doors has only been in operation for 2 years; hopefully it will not be long before it reaches women's prisons.

20 Women Singing: A Chorus of Approval

In autumn season of 2007 the education department (MAX) of Welsh National Opera (WNO), the renowned national opera company for Wales, took a singing project into two closed women's prisons. It is essential to gain an insight into prison arts projects from the perspective of the providers (as well as service users), as to the benefits, or otherwise of performing such programmes in prisons. To that end I interviewed key players at WNO MAX, and reviewed rehearsal footage, of *20 Women Singing*.

Twenty Women Singing was a cabaret of songs for women, about women by women and sung by the 20 women of the Welsh National Opera chorus (by the time of performance numbers fell to 17). Songs were chosen to illuminate the story of the women who sing for a living and live through singing. The text was created in collaboration with the cast, who brought their memories, histories and personalities to the project. Musical genres embraced opera, music theatre and folk song.

In addition to the two prison performances, the show was taken to nine venues across England and Wales reaching a variety of female audiences including women in prisons, young mothers, secondary school pupils and elderly women. The MAX department strives to make opera accessible for everyone (across ages, communities and capabilities) offering artistic expression in different contexts, beyond the stage, widening cultural capital. 'We're always looking to challenge perceptions of what opera is and to take it into spaces where it would never normally be found' explained Rhian the Director of WNO MAX. Projects can be anything from a bringing a dose of opera singing to the alcohol aisle of Tesco in Merthyr Tydfil, to engaging teenagers who have been excluded from conventional education (with similar learning biographies to many of the women in Arkham and Freshfields) through performance.

Prison certainly fits within the remit culturally/socially excluded target audience. While not necessarily unheard of, prison is not generally the first space that springs to mind in terms of live participation in operatic experiences (opera setting is a different matter, Beethoven's sole opera, *Fidelio*, exclusively takes place within a Spanish state prison).

The prisons presented an unpredictable staging environment, and in their own way provided some operatic twists. Laura, the MAX administrator, told me that the paper programmes could not be stapled and needed to be bound with string, yet knives could be taken into the prisons. Becky, who was involved with the technical side of project reflected on similar security inconsistencies, 'I had to leave my phone and digital camera in a locker and I wasn't allowed to take them in yet I was allowed

to take my bag and my knitting needles'. Richard, also in technical, revealed that everything had to happen to the minute, the set up was not conducive to providing entertainment. Staging took place in the prison church, he explained, 'we were locked in there in the morning and we set up, and we weren't allowed out until we were escorted back by security in the afternoon'. It is something of a unique proposition for producers of opera to be held captive on their own production.

The show itself was about the 20 (or rather 17) women in the WNO chorus. In a change to the usual run of events the chorus members were put to the forefront, everyone had a chance to perform a solo, 'so that everyone got their moment, so that everyone got a connection' explained Rhian. Between each song there were text sessions of talking, telling a personal story, to lead from one piece to the next, 'a kind of a sense of the journey of the group' (Rhian). It was clear that the women of the chorus had made a large emotional investment in the undertaking, in the programme notes they told their own stories of what music meant to them personally:

Anne (Mezzo) grew up in a Welsh mining village with music all around her. She feels lucky to have made a living from singing since 1973.

Laura (Soprano) has sung professionally for four years. She loves it because she has learnt that music preserves its meaning even when all else seems to fail.

Rhian talked about trepidation on the part of performers, 'there was so much fear from our women on our side'. Why so? 'It was the first time we'd performed it, and they didn't know what was going to come up in prison'. Richard elaborated the point, 'it was quite personal, there was a lot of risk for them that they might be rejected'. The chorus members had emotionally put themselves on the line; the note of caution was understandable.

As it turned out first performance fears were unfounded. 'It was the most incredible performance, I don't think I've been in a performance like it since', was Rhian's assessment. 'It was just like alchemy'. Rhian continued:

Our women got this amazing reaction within the first five minutes... there was a whole section to the beginning of it when we did a kind of improvisatory sing along where people just sing songs, "what's your favourite song and we'll sing that". Somebody asked for Amazing Grace and the whole room joined in, at which point our women kind of went "wow! We never expected that!" and from then on the performance was absolutely electric. Charged. People were singing and standing up and clapping and crying and then afterwards all of our women flooded into the audience and started to talk to them. It was just an unbelievable, unbelievable show.

What was behind the chemistry and connection? The theme of the project was about chorus, more specifically a piece devised to give the WNO chorus of women a voice and character, 'they were speaking to another chorus of women who were in a different position' explained Rhian. Performance resembled a musical dialogue of empathy, 'talking about universal things about women's lives, talking about children, talking about men, talking about being a grandmother, how it feels to age'. Universal themes common to both groups, 'it's just that one of them happens to be in prison for transgressing the law and the other happens to work for an opera company and sing for a living'.

The songs expressed different stages of femininity, from Gilbert and Sullivan's carefree three little maids from school, 'Fill'd to the brim with girlish glee', to the treatment of old age in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, 'But time treads up on the tired feet of women'. The casting department was apparently reluctant to give a solo to one of the 'senior' members of the chorus, 'because her voice, is, you know, old' (Rhian). 'But by god she was incredible', added Rhian, 'you're aiming for one thing and things come out and you think wow!' The performance was of *In My Little Bottom Drawer* (Will E Haines and Jimmy Harper) about a spinster waiting to get married, 'her age made it quite humorous, she was so sincere'. In many ways this was breaking down preconceptions concerning the nature of opera singing 'it's about having character and you can be vulnerable and sing vulnerably' (Rhian).

One of the pieces was a lullaby in Welsh, from Richard's perspective 'it was one of the pieces that touched people the most even if you didn't understand the language'. In this case the message and sentiment transcended language, 'a lullaby is a lullaby is a lullaby and you know the context of the piece is being sung to a baby' (Rhian).

The staging and dramatisation of the songs centred on mundane, everyday activities. The main feature of the set was an arrangement of criss-crossing washing lines with gauze sheets hanging over. A recurring theme was three stages of domestic production: washing sheets, hanging them to dry, and folding them. Then back to the start. An endless cycle. The emphasis was on white, costumes and sheets were a pristine white. Similar to the fabric whiteness associated with the coda of washing powder commercials. WNO productions have a distinctive consistent look and character, neatly encapsulated by Atkinson in his ethnography of the company as 'intellectually austere' (Atkinson, 2006:17). In *20 Women Singing* Visual sparseness was employed to striking effect.

Richard described the aesthetic as aiming towards a 'post-feminist comment... commenting about how women have been treated through the ages and how they view themselves now'. The focus was on the women's voice through everyday activities and emotions, which was 'foolproof', in Richard's opinion. 'The connection was there instantly because everyone has to do these things on some level'. It was the opera of the universal and personal, not the esoteric or exotic.

From the production perspective the first prison performance was an unqualified success. 'The most responsive and the most appreciative of all the groups we visited' was the verdict of Richard 'they were the most thankful audience for it happening and really got something out of it'. 'The emotional transaction was heightened', he added. According to Rhian after some pre-performance hesitations the women of the chorus can't wait to perform back in prison.

The first prison performance of *Twenty Women Singing* exceeded expectations then. What of the second. Due to the prison being on lockdown in the afternoon only the handful of inmates who participated in a morning workshop attended the performance. The perennial frustration of closed prisons. Music possesses a transcendental quality but there are limits.

Appendix VI

Prison Food Rituals

Provision of food has changed considerably throughout the years in prison. In 1837 a typical day in a penitentiary began with one quart of oatmeal porridge, followed by a dinner of 'one quart of stew of heads and bones'. Providing symmetry to the day, supper was identical to breakfast in supplying inmates with another quart of oatmeal. Hence, the common currency of criminals being sentenced to a term of 'doing porridge'. Historically rations were contingent on prison labour, those who were employed, working on the treadmill for instance, were entitled to extra portions. Performance was rewarded in a fairly utilitarian manner, more food for those who worked and enforced abstinence prescribed for the indolent and incapable of labour. The cuisine on offer for prisoners has changed a great deal in the intervening years up until the twenty first century, dietary standards in the modern age have evolved and inmates no longer have to condemn themselves to arduous labour to secure increased victuals. Quantity of food is not contingent on labour.

Another break with the past has been the recent demise of porridge on the prison menu. Erwin James (the pen name of James Monahan), former life-sentenced prisoner turned prison correspondent, has written how porridge was one of the highlights in his prison day, 'how we loved to queue on cold winter mornings in anticipation of a large steaming ladle of the stuff. And on warm summer mornings too, of course' (2006). Prison porridge offered a substantial and warm breakfast, a healthy mix of carbohydrate and fibre that kept cholesterol levels of inmates in decent order. Porridge played an important part in prison life and folklore, 'superstitious cons would always insist on eating a full bowl on their last morning. "If you don't you'll be back for it," went the old saying' (ibid). He observes wryly, 'I can't see "doing cornflakes" catching on' (ibid). The replacement has taken the form of a small bag of cereal together with a third of a pint of milk issued to prisoners the night before to be consumed the following morning.

This means that prisoners have to be strong willed not to look on tomorrow's breakfast as today's supper during nightly bang up. At Arkham, Tracey told me the breakfast pack can be 'comfort food' to help provide solace through a lonely night. Breakfast can then be seen as a treat if only a small one, a measure of relief from the pain of confinement at night. It is not surprising that prisoners such as Tracey succumb. Clearly this is not desirable from a nutritional point of view. Although the archaic quart of porridge was probably not sourced from high grain oats, at least it ensured a warm intake of morning calories (actually on the morning). The question needs to be asked: what is the logic behind

ending the practice of ladling morning porridge? The official answer is that 'society' no longer eats a hot breakfast. This paints an intriguing picture of dominant social trends, at the very minimum the Prison Service should cite compelling evidence, or demographic study, to suggest that 'society' does not, in point of fact, partake of a hot breakfast. Assuming there is evidence to support the generalisation is it a sensible idea to base prison food servings on dominant social norms as opposed to, for example, nutritional wisdom? ('society' is becoming increasingly obese, we are told, it does not follow that there is any sense replicating this increasing talked about social norm). If the change is justified by keeping apace with social norms and commonly accepted practices how can the Prison Service countenance serving today's morning breakfast yesterday evening? Behind the specious reasoning the demise of prison porridge has been an exercise in rampant cost cutting. The different aspects, or compartments, of prison life do not exist in isolation (Owers 2009); a conventional nutritious breakfast is not an unreasonable right and certainly a pre-requisite if effective learning or working in prison is to take place during the day.

Breakfast rituals, or lack of them, make for a sharply contrasting prison day in Arkham and Freshfields. Whereas women in Arkham eat their cereal in the isolation of their cell (if it has survived through the night that is) and wait to be unlocked in the morning, the routine at the start of the day is very different in Freshfields. More autonomy is placed on residents, it is their own responsibility to wake themselves up, they do not wait to be escorted out of their rooms. Unlike Arkham breakfast is served (between half past seven and quarter past eight) canteen style, with a choice of cereals, grapefruit, toast and porridge. Open prisons at least can instil the old saying 'doing porridge' with some contemporary relevance. Residents sign themselves in at breakfast, which they are required to do four times, a day. This also means that women in Freshfields have a communal breakfast experience, chatting to each other over cereal and toast. This contrasts with Arkham where the first half hour of education classes in the morning is time where women are allowed to talk amongst themselves and unwind, because this is the first opportunity they have had to get together in the mornings, a side effect of breakfasting in isolation. Freshfields breakfast entails some personal responsibility (as mentioned it is left to residents to turn up and sign in) and is social not solitary. The dual personalities of open and closed regimes, how time and space is managed, is reflected through the variance in breakfast rituals, which is at the heart of what make the two prisons contrast so vividly.

Prison Dinners

Arkham supplies two hot meals a day, at lunch and at dinner in the evening. Inmates who labour in the catering department are referred to as 'kitchen workers'; the diners as 'customers', (replicating mainstream catering lexicon outside of prison). The kitchen workers are expected to produce food to a level of quality and meeting dietary requirements, customer care is taken quite seriously, there is a suggestion box where messages of praise and complaint can be deposited with anonymity. The kitchen workers and staff collaborated to produce a mission statement, which they strive towards daily:

Our purpose is to provide a nutritious and varied diet, under hygienic conditions. Every member of the food service team shares a common goal. In ensuring that our customers are happy with their meals. If at any time the catering team fails to deliver this service we will do all in our power to rectify the situation.

Typically the customer base is in the region of 200 daily (roughly in line with the prison roll), with an additional 10 non-uniformed staff members of prison staff joining inmates for lunch Monday to Friday. Prison staff dine in the same dining room and partake of the same dishes as the rest of the customers, staff and inmates alike eat off paper plates and use plastic knives and forks. At Christmas staff serve inmates. Governors regularly join tables and women and chat over lunch, which breaks down barriers somewhat.

This compares favourably with a men's prison where I have previously spent some time. Prison staff spent lunch in their own canteen, which revealed a lot about the hierarchy of the prison. Managers, teachers and uniform officers were all densely clustered in their own turf, a shrine to segregation. This level of compartmentalisation was also evident in the attitude some had to their jobs, one of the prison teachers wandered over to a table of prison officers to chat with one member of staff to ask her if she was considering doing any teaching (there were plans at the time to engage officers with degrees in an educational capacity) 'not fucking likely', was the curt response. A lot can be learned about prisons, the dimensions to 'us and them relations' (between staff and inmates and staff and staff) which permeate throughout prisons, by observing lunchtime routines.

Appendices

A flavour of a typical Arkham menu is as follows:

Lunch

Fried fillet of fish
Beef cutlet
Vegetable cutlet

Chipped potatoes
Mushy peas
Bread and butter.

Dinner

Pasta Carbonara
Roast with Yorkshire Pudding
Paella.

New boiled parsley potatoes
Spring cabbage
Batten carrots.

Rounded off with a dessert option of Manchester Tart.

At Freshfields Lunch is served at twelve, residents have to register in as they do for breakfast. As opposed to the Arkham lunchtime system of uniform queue of women lining up at the same servery for food to be ladled , scrapped or shovelled onto plates, Freshfields operates as something more typical of a college canteen set up, there is a separate salad bar for instance. Freshfields lunchtime fare includes such options of poached fish, pasties and tortillas. Instead of the plates of chips which are tucked into at Arkham, the equivalent at Freshfields is a slightly more exotic rendering of potatoes Lyonnaise style (sliced pan fried potatoes and thinly sliced onions, sautéed in butter with parsley). Tea time is at five at Freshfields, residents are required to sign in again (the process of roll checks is firmly embedded into dining routines) options tend to include more substantial options than at lunch time spaghetti bolognaise, cottage pie and variants on the same theme. Desserts include the like of spotted dick, treacle sponge and toffee lumpy bumpy.

There is much humour surrounding some of the gastronomic choices on offer on prison menus, particularly the naming of certain dishes. Lisa, who works in the Arkham kitchens, for example joked about the inclusion of Manchester tart on the prison menu 'you don't get any Manchester tarts round here'. At Freshfields, on the other hand, there was some derision when the catering manager

handed out a sheet of paper listing the lunch menu of the day; one of the main courses was 'supreme chicken' resulting in some mirth and enquiries of 'well, what's so supreme about it then?'

Much thought goes into lunchtime and dinner menus in prison, Phil, Arkham Head of Catering works with a nutritionist at the local Primary Care Trust to consult on a four week, 28 day cycle. There is some provision made for vegetarian and diabetic options, and 'where possible' servings of healthy options. Foods which comply with strict religious observance such as for the Jewish and Muslim faiths are also catered for. Menus are produced which adhere to religious festivals, such as the Muslim fast of Ramadan and Jewish Passover. Themed evenings take place once a month, such themes have included Halloween, Caribbean, Jamaican and an outdoor barbeque. A choice of three meals is available to customers at lunch, which tend to be lighter varieties, with four dishes to choose from for the evening meal, the 'main meal' of the day complete with choice of sweet.

In terms of presenting nutritional variety, not all fish at Arkham is battered or fried. Behind the scenes in the kitchen I have witnessed salmon in parsley sauce being prepared. When turkey makes an appearance on the menu it is in the form of a roast or a stir fry, not reconstituted fare such as the much maligned turkey twizzlers. Although the inclusion of healthy choices among the not so unhealthy, it has to be noted that choice and whether that choice is enthusiastically opted for are not necessarily in complete harmony. The merits of healthier options were frequently overlooked in favour of oleaginous chip based options. Accompanying the chips would often be a square portion of pizza carved from a giant tray, coated by a congealed layer of cheese. On days where pizzas contained meat, vegetarians would either pick off the pieces of ham or opt for just chips. Either way, chips were clearly the staple food stuff that many of the lunch time prison customers opted for. To draw a link with wider education, this mirrors the Jamie Oliver school dinners dimension where healthy choice options have been presented to schoolchildren, but there are no guarantees of popularity.

If there was to be a fully fledged 'Jamie's Prison Dinners' type initiative, with closed prisons vetoing unhealthy options there would at least be more potential for compliance than in schools on the outside. In theory prisons have a captive audience, so leaving the grounds for a takeaway option, as pupils in school have been reported to do, would be a less likely proposition for inmates. Likewise surreptitious chip parcels which have been passed through school railings would be unlikely to find a way over barbed wire gates to their intended target. In closed confines a form of dietary punitivism could theoretically be instituted, to make sure a healthy option is the only option, and stop inmates from ordering crisps, anything chocolate coated and unhealthy confection. Realistic enforcement

though would be another matter though, as banning of unhealthy snacks would surely result in an illicit trade and create another prison black market (on top of drugs, mobile phones, etc). Even if such a spirit of dietary totalitarianism were theoretically enforceable, such a move would add another layer of austerity and deprivation of liberty to an already sparse and harsh existence.

So what do women have to say about the prison diet? Due to this carbohydrate overload and piling on the calories, Eleanor in Arkham told me about how many of the women battle 'prison belly' when they're inside. She puts this down to 'sitting down and eating lots of carbs'. The carbohydrate intake is compounded by what can be a sedentary lifestyle in prison. (Prison life calls for a unique form of exercise, the 'cell workout'. Charles Bronson, labelled as 'Britain's most dangerous inmate', by sections of the media who like to carry out such exercises in labelling, has written a book on how to keep fit in solitary confinement). While it may be frowned on from a nutritional point of view, it is clear unhealthy dishes are popular in prison. Women inside often choose 'comfort calories' Eleanor told me, which is a by word for chips. Such food, at least in the short terms, can help women inside to some meagre level of comfort. In some way this helps a kind of link to be maintained with life outside, the portions of chips and take away food. As Phil the Head of Catering at Arkham told me that 'food is about morale throughout the prison' and has an important knock on effect. It is hard to disagree with this statement.

Producing a high quality and variety of prison dishes is something of a challenge, when I visited Arkham the daily food allowance was £1.56 per prisoner per day. The amount spent on inmate's food is a controversial area with some critics arguing this amounts to indulgence, favouring a new penal austerity. Among the stories representing such media outrage was a piece appearing the *Daily Mail* headlined 'Hospitals spend less on their patients' food than prisons on their inmates' (Martin, 2009). The piece highlighted the fact that patients treated by the National Health Service were ill fed and malnourished when contrasted with comparatively impressive portions served to those individuals kept at Her Majesty's pleasure.

The premise of the piece, however, resided on a dubious statistical foundation. With a cursory scrutiny the evidence cited in the article actually contradicted the thrust of the narrative, given that the average daily spending on hospital food per head was listed as £6.97 across England, and at a higher level of £9.87 across Wales. Compared to this the price placed the Prison Service budget for ration in England and Wales as much lower, at £2.12 per head daily. The only factual basis the story presented to support the claim that 'hospitals spend less on their patients' food than prisons' was through figures demonstrating that a tiny minority of hospitals spend less than the £2.12 afforded by

the Prison Service (although some of the actual amounts were disputed by the NHS Trusts concerned). Therefore there is a clear element of skewed, misleading analysis at play to generate an eye-catching headline. Of course many readers will not have ventured past the headline. The picture is largely misleading, behind the moral indignation is a non story aiming a broadside towards imagined levels of prison profligacy. The more accurate story (based on the figures presented) would be more mundane along the lines of *the majority of hospitals spend a good deal more on their patients' food than prisons on their inmates*. This is no altogether uncommon, where prison stories feature in the sensationalist press, invariably inaccuracy tends to be not too far behind. The backlash that invariably surrounds any form of spending aimed at improving the lives of people in prison is deeply problematic. The danger is that any effective mechanism aimed towards rehabilitation and with the potential to cut down on future levels of reoffending (hence of long-term financial benefit to the public and the exchequer) can be negatively coloured as prison profligacy. Prison positives can be spun into negatives.

Nick, who teaches literacy at Freshfields, has strong feelings on the subject of the media constructed discourse of outrage ('the fuss kicked up by the *Daily Mail*'), and the potentially damaging knock-on effects it has for people serving time in prison, 'they are not sentenced to be starved to death. They have their liberty taken, not their food'. The wider problem, Nick believes, is that such negative press acts as a barrier to prison improvement, 'as far as politicians are concerned it's not a vote winner'. There is clearly a tension between doing what is right or effective compared to doing what is popular. Nick argues that greater priority must be given to prison conditions and not just 'lip service', although he is keenly aware of the challenges. Previously he has worked as a primary school head teacher and is keenly aware that where spending money on improving the lives and education of young children is popular there is considerable resistance where prisons and prisoners are concerned. Women in prison are not immune to what is written about them in the press, in fact it is one of the few gauges of popular opinion available to those inside, and certainly plays a part in why some women are apprehensive about life after release (and why indeed some women view being in prison as 'safe').

Appendix VII

Dramatis Personae

Inmates

HMP Arkham Inmates

Alex - 'You're fed three times a day, your washing's done. You don't have to do anything or think for yourself' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons]. The struggles of reassembling the pieces of her life, 'it's like a jigsaw, trying to put it all together again. I'm only around the edges'. [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education]. 'I always watch *Crimebusters*' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Angela - Found the approach at Arkham dry and tedious, 'too boring, too much reading' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Annabelle - 'When you're in prison and got no one your friends become your family, a replacement for what you can't have' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Barbara - 'Up for a giggle'. [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?]

Bridgette - On acting (in *The Erpingham Camp*) 'it brings something out of me' [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Britney - Who was undergoing literacy and numeracy classes in Arkham, told me 'We do it because we're thick' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Claire - Rebelled inside prison for the first year [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons]. Was educated by nuns in South Africa [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Cola - 'I'm happy to spend fifty one weeks a year locked up if I can spend the other one living like a princess' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Eleanor - 'Being treated like an adult is the most important thing' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?]. Many women battle 'prison belly', when are inside, 'sitting down and eating lots of carbs' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Fatima - 'Nothing was expected of us black, working class girls' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Frances- 'This is as good as it gets' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons]. 'Prison is the more conducive environment for learning' [compared with her school] [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Georgina - On life in Arkham 'getting up early and early to bed. The food not so good though'. [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Appendices

Hannah - Considered the education department to be, 'different, more relaxed than the rest of the prison' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Heather- Reminiscing about birds of prey at previous prisons [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Jean - 'I never thought I'd do Open University' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Jenna - Used to run a pub, 'my husband was having affairs left, right and centre' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Jessica – Distinctive lipstick. From America, in here early twenties. Worked in the fashion industry [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Julia - 'I'm pissed off by drama queens. Some of the girls cry when they're not the centre of attention. It's just an attention thing' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Katie - 'The thing you should know is that some of the women here are poor, they have no money and are always borrowing cigarettes' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Keira - complained about the course on offer at Arkham, 'it's too basic as if we're kids. We're taught not to think in here' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Lei - Originally from China but since settled in England, 'cooking is an important ritual in my culture' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Lisa - 'I truanted a lot' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?]. Talked about how remand prison offered few activities. Worked in the Arkham kitchens [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Mandy - Wrote *Dreaming the Life* [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Maria- She was serving time in Arkham for breaches pertaining to a drugs related offence committed some time ago [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Mary - On prison officers 'they do nothing to help us' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Maureen - Confinement means women can't get too far from education. 'I was a cleaner in the education block' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Michaela - At Arkham, told me it was a shame the prison salon closed, 'I always liked hairdressing'... 'For 2 hours makes you feel you're not in prison' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Nancy - 'My dad taught me to steal when I was 14... I'm now 27 and want something better with my life' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Nassrin - Drew comparisons with her childhood in Iran [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Olivia - Identified herself as 'thick' at school but progressed well in Arkham education [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?]. Had a lack of success with core subjects at school, 'I couldn't grasp the basics'. 'I hope it rains everyday day I'm in here' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Appendices

Penny - Worked through literacy levels 1 then 2 while at Arkham [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Sally - 'I couldn't do a job. I couldn't read the health and safety'. Benefitted from Toe by Toe (TbT) [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Sam - 'I had nightmares that I was outside and couldn't find my way back in' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Sandi - From South Africa believes the basis of relationships with teachers should be hierarchy not equality, 'in this country there's no respect for teachers' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Sandra - First timer at Arkham. Talked about her experience of time on remand. In prison for causing deliberate personal injury [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Shauna – Discussed her leaving book [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Shelley - A literature graduate [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Sonia - Proloific Mills and Boon reader, 'I want life to have a happy ending' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Sue - 'I hated school, why would I go back? The teachers hated me and I hated them' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Tera - One of the Erpingham women. Being a woman in prison gives her a greater insight into the part [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Theresa - 'Healthcare is crap'... 'the sculpture's inspired by the fact you die waiting' [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning]. 'I'm getting kicked out [of art lessons] because I've got a degree and know more about art than she does'... 'Time in here is different, sometimes it drags, sometimes it goes by quicker' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Toni – 'He's quite different when we go out, not as bad as I thought'. (Same person as Lisa) [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Tracey - Had accumulated 12 certificates, 'at first they gave me a huge feeling of satisfaction' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education]. The breakfast pack can be 'comfort food' to help provide solace through a lonely night [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

HMP Freshfields Residents

Amanda - Described her sense of initial disbelief on growing a tomato from seed, 'that ain't a tomato I said to Andy' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Angie – Participated in the *Storybook Mums* project... 'so he knows I'm thinking about him every day' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Becky - Nearing the end of her sentence at Freshfields [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Carly - Was serving her first custodial sentence when I met her at Freshfields. Placed a high priority on work life, with little time or interest in the kitchen [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Cindy - 'Since leaving Dance United I go to the gym more, I have given up smoking and stuck at it and I eat much more healthily' [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Dawn - 'Because I wasn't talking to people I lost the ability to talk' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Deborah - 'I left [school] early and left with nothing' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Denise - 'Having a kid was easier than French' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Elena - '... not being treated as if you're five' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Gemma - Enjoys cooking on the outside, 'cooking is cool. I love Nigella [Lawson, the television chef]. It's moved on from the old days' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Hayley - Talked about the claustrophobia of desk life [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Jackie - 'I was bored by science. I failed to see the point' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Janice - 'I'm 29. I've spent most of my adult years in prison. It's depressing really' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Julie- A gym orderly [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Kelly - First impressions of Freshfields, 'you almost think it's a downgrade' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Kim – Obsessed with the gym [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Leanne – 'That's not helping me learn anything in the kitchens' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Linda - Recorded *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Luna - Considered 'a dose of understanding' to be a desirable teaching trait [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?]. 'When I first came here, a year ago, I was amazed. I'd seen the house on the telly

Appendices

before, but when I actually came here, I couldn't believe it – it was so beautiful' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Madeline - 'it was impressed on me from an early age that education was the most important thing in life' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Michelle - Frustrated about having to share her time between the salon and the classroom, 'you don't understand maths gets me angry' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Muriel - 'how will it help me being out in the gardens?' [Chapter IX: Prison Vocational Learning].

Pam - 'It's like walking on eggshells' [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Paula - Got her first educational qualification while in prison, in her 50s, 'can you believe it, the first certificate I got was in here...' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Polly – On Dance United, 'I now know how to focus – it is an amazing feeling to be able to concentrate without fidgeting and feel so professional on stage' [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Ruth - a Welsh resident at Freshfields [Chapter V: Tales of Two Prisons].

Sarah - 'I'm here to learn. What I've done shouldn't matter. I don't want to be judged...' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Sinead - 'You feel real close to everyone after a big performance and it was so sad to leave'. (Dance United) [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Sophie - 'Teachers turned me right off education' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Stacy - 'I hate, hate, hate being talked down to' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Sylvia - explained the value of her first ever literacy qualification, gained in a closed prison, 'I was made to feel I can do it. I'm not useless' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Tamsin - Stressed that 'teachers must be on my level' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Tara - 'they [prison officers] stop to have a chat and ask about my girls' [Chapter VI: The Best Days of Your Life?].

Thea - Dance United gave her a real sense of excitement, 'it gave me an amazing adrenaline, better than any drugs and you don't get the downer afterwards!' [Chapter VIII: Creative Prison Learning].

Virginia - 'I'll now be able to help my kids with their homework. I'll be able to relate to them more... I won't be embarrassed if they ask me questions' [Chapter VII: The Core of Prison Education].

Staff

HMP Arkham Staff

Linda - Head of Learning and Skills Arkham

Mara - Education Manager Arkham

Graham - Deputy Education Manager

Cheryl- IT tutor at Arkham.

Dave - The Head of Horticulture, 'many of the women here are damaged'.

Matt - Basic skills tutor. Day to day teaching in a closed prison is frustrating, 'you never know who will turn up... the prison can be on lock down at any time'.

Emma- gym instructor.

HMP Freshfields Staff

Karen - Education Manager Freshfields

Arlene - Head of Learning and Interventions Freshfields

Brian- Head Prison Officer

Andy- Head of Horticulture

Debbie - Hairdressing Tutor.

Jeremy - IT Tutor

Kathleen - Librarian

Kate - Duty Officer of the Mother and Baby Unit

Nick- Basic Skills Tutor.

Shirley - Tutor with experience of teaching in open and closed prisons... 'small prisons like small schools get the best results'.

