Teaching creatively in prison education: an autoethnography of the ground

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Thesis Portfolio Abstract

This thesis portfolio presents an autoethnographic account of a prison educator engaged in a research project that explores creative approaches to arts, prison education, work and training in custodial settings. The position of the researcher is located in-between and across professional practices including ‘arts in prisons’, prison education, work and training environments, which have conflicting agendas that, nevertheless, share the same institutional space. Policymakers and management bodies regulating these professional practices expect education and training to contribute to reducing reoffending. Procedurally, the research process was precariously balanced between, on the one hand, performing to measures of quality based on the requirement to reduce recidivism, and on the other, crude outcome measures driven by a utilitarian marketization of prison education that includes course completion rates calculated on the basis of minimum contact time. This broader context created an uncertain and constantly shifting context for the research, which began with my search for an effective creative practice in a Performing Arts Department (PAD) and ends in a Functional English classroom (FEC).

Conceptually, the research draws on the ‘What Works’ debate (McGuire, 1995; Brayford et al. 2010), which continues to create a disjuncture between policy and implementation resulting from unrealistic assumptions that arts and education programmes in prison might prevent reoffending, with evidence relying solely upon randomisation, reductive causation and numerical calculation. It also draws on desistance theory (Maruna, 2001; McNeil, 2006), which argues that desistance from crime can be understood as an indirect process, rather than an event. From an examination of my efforts to implement and develop creative approaches to education via autoethnographic tools, including ‘fictional performative writing’, I argue two main points. Firstly, the autonomy required by the creative prison educator engaged in an advanced research project repositions the professional in a particular relationship with the bewildering processes of power, protectionism and performance management in the criminal justice system. Secondly, and as demonstrated through ‘fictional performative writing’, I argue that research methods engaging voices from the frontline of educational environments, can reveal seemingly small details relating to the challenges and possibilities of creative education in prisons that, nonetheless, have significant implications for developing productive and innovative approaches to desistance from crime. Moreover, from this ‘grounded’, yet restricted position, I speculate how such approaches might extend both creativity and creatively beyond the validation of this doctorate qualification.
I wrote this thesis about my experiences as a prison teacher trying to use creative subjects such as drama and other ways of teaching creatively in a prison, particularly when using fiction whilst teaching English. The kind of research approach I draw upon here, which relies on individual experience, is often called ‘autoethnography’. Teaching in a prison is different to teaching elsewhere because all the activities in prison are meant to involve preventing prisoners reoffending, an approach referred to as ‘What Works?’ In short, searching for ways that complete the task of reducing reoffending most effectively. Another way of thinking about reducing reoffending most effectively is called ‘desistance’, but this is more concerned with discovering the circumstances in which prisoners decide to lead crime-free lives and these cannot easily be attributed to education, training or therapy. Such circumstances are very complex, and individuals and teams in prison striving towards different goals, with distinct strategies often being driven by a need to protect professional reputations, present an additional challenge. This sometimes gets in the way of creative work that, in contrast, involves an element of risk and uncertainty. Within this thesis, prisons are found to be very difficult places in which to explore creative approaches, perhaps unsurprisingly, given that prisons are part of a system whose objective is to constrain. As a result, I could not do this work as originally planned and so I decided to research my professional practice through fictional writing, based on my experiences as a working teacher across various environments in prison education. I argue that learning from this approach includes a series of perspectives ‘from the ground’ that, whilst seemingly small, reveal the potential of exploring creative ways of educating more effectively in a prison context. In adopting this approach to research, I also found ways in which the circumstances that manifest themselves when teaching creatively might be usefully linked to desistance theory. Lastly, in this thesis portfolio, I consider how such difficulties experienced on the ground, might contribute to the emergence of other creative outlets that aim to explore different ways of opening up the possibilities for prison education, work and training.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Having spent twenty-six years developing a business in textile recycling, I began higher education in 2000, which led to being awarded a ‘BA (Hons) Humanities’ in 2003. In 2004, I began working in prison education. I held teaching roles, became a departmental head, deputy education manager and education manager across a number of prisons. In 2008, I was awarded ‘Master of Education’, studying part-time whilst working full-time. In 2010, I began this part-time doctorate to satisfy a ‘niggle’ about ‘arts in prison’ and its potential for positive change, which provoked a curiosity from my earliest time in prison education. My research experience is limited to a ‘Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Studies in Education’ (research studies), the pilot research documented in this thesis and the thesis itself. At the time of writing, I am still teaching on the ground in a prison.
Preface (Part One)

Part One of this Preface is intended as early point of demarcation for the thesis portfolio design and methods, which were developed in response to changing professional circumstances that interrupted the research process. Consequently, Chapters One to Five and most of the Introduction to the thesis were written in the last two years of research (from almost seven). Alternatively, most of the literature review and the publishable article were written in the first two years. The latter is a requirement of the ‘Professional Doctorate: Applied Theatre’ programme at the University of Manchester. In this case, the ‘publishable article’ section is based upon a small-scale research project that aimed to test out research instruments in preparation for the main piece of research for the PhD by comparing education, training and work practices across different prison settings. This section is intended as both an integral and ‘stand-alone’ contribution and, therefore, some details might appear to be duplicated in the rest of the thesis. Similarly, many sources that comprise the ‘literature review’ section were gathered in the earlier stages of my research, which, in turn, was influenced by Stephen Duguid and Ray Pawson’s mixed methods research to identify causal factors between the arts and humanities and recidivism in Canadian prisons (see Duguid and Pawson, 1982, 1998a, 2000; Duguid and Pawson, 1998; Pawson, 2000; Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Part Two of the Preface (that follows) introduces a change in the philosophical and methodological approach from the initial period of research, and the outcomes of this shift are represented in Part Two of this thesis portfolio more closely. The second part of the Preface presents the first of four pieces employing metaphor to assist autoethnographic meaning-making by drawing upon my wider experiences of textile recycling, entrepreneurism, innovation, risk, contamination and waste. Theoretically, it is based upon Norman Denzin’s ‘interpretive autoethnography’ (Denzin, 2014 pp.46-47; see also Denzin, 2001), which asserts that the autoethnographic researcher can take various positions along a continuum of experience, all of which relate through ‘culture, discourse, history and
ideology' by 'connecting the dots between lives, performance, representation, epiphanies and interpretation' (2014 p. x).
Preface (Part Two)

Let me tell you a short story about entrepreneurship and creativity in textile recycling. There once was a revolution in West Yorkshire, a revolution that came about because the people had learnt how to recycle worn wool textiles into yarns for making new material. This eventually declined and the reader will learn more about this later. Then, in the nineteen-eighties, the ‘green revolution’ gained momentum and during this time recycling became ‘trendy’ for many ‘developed’ economies. In this new arena, I played the role of entrepreneur. I developed techniques to recycle denim, which were blended with fibres recovered from recycled plastic bottles (polyethylene terephthalate or ‘PET’). Just imagine, two of the most marketable products in the world (Levis and Coca-Cola) recycled ‘trendily’ into yarn for fashionable knitwear and woven fabrics. However, many of our initiatives involved risk, for example, when recycling a cellulosic fibre such as used in denim, which increases its volatility and potential for spontaneous combustion. The weight of risk involved in any new creative approach needs to be balanced and I learned that I have a tendency to move towards risk-taking more than safety. One afternoon in 1995 I was unable to extinguish this risk and the factory burned down. I paid the price for both risk and innovation, leading to re-training and a career in prison education. The relationship between this short story and the thesis’ longer story is that whilst I was mostly responsible for the entrepreneurial and creative venture in the textile industry and in the education schemes that followed (and that are explored here), the ultimate control over managing risk resides with the environment in which that risk is being taken. In prison education, the risk was not of burning down a factory, but of damaging the public image and reputation of the prison and their partners in the broader criminal justice system. It was this risk that closed the second entrepreneurial venture in my career – a performing arts academy sited inside a prison education department. By paying close attention to the blend of innovative practice, risk and waste associated here with private enterprise and public institutions in criminal justice settings, I intend this thesis to provide an evidence base of
sorts that will protect the value, broadly conceived, of creativity in prison education, work and training.
Introduction to the thesis portfolio

The overarching proposition of this thesis is that entrepreneurial efforts that aim to explore ‘What Works’ in creative prison education, work and training initiatives from the ground-up are vulnerable to machinations of power, ‘performance and impression management’ (Goffman, 1990, p.203). As shown in this autoethnography, creative initiatives can be curbed to such an extent that such protectionist energies often redirect innovation away from supporting new possibilities on the ground and towards reinforcing a status quo that either complies or supports those machinations.

The cyclical motion of policy cycles is a significant feature of such machinations, one of which occurred on 18 May 2016, whilst I was in the final stages of writing this thesis. A review of prisons by Dame Sally Coates (commissioned by the UK Ministry of Justice) was published, entitled: ‘Unlocking Potential: a review of education in prison’. Although the implementation of Coates' radical review will fall, mostly, outside the scope of this study, depending on how her recommendations are carried out, they could increase the importance of this study as a prison educator’s perspective on creativity and innovation in prison education as it existed before this latest proposal for reform. Moreover, in terms of this thesis, they present a bracketing of policy shifts and time over the research period, similar in technique to the end of a movie being shown at the beginning to frame the (research) story.

Coates (2016) describes the report’s main questions and concerns as follows:

I started this review with some basic questions: how do we measure the success of prison education; what are the current levels of prisoners’ educational attainment; and what happens when education is assessed as not good enough? My first question, though, was more fundamental: who is ultimately responsible for the quality of prison education?

When I have posed this question during the past six months, as part of my work on this review, a small number of senior prison leaders have been confident enough to answer, “we are.” In general, however, too often the response has been ambiguous. When it came to the really crucial matter of “who is responsible”, I’ve been told, “it is complicated”,

or, “it depends.” I found that worrying and this report is designed to tackle my concern (Coates, 2016 p.1).

The review calls for the prison governor of each establishment to be responsible for education and that they (and senior prison managers) should be given additional training to support a ‘whole-prison approach’ (p.62), which places education at the ‘heart of the prison regime’ (Ibid.). Coates, 2016) recommends that:

We should expect Governors to manage their providers’ performance actively, applying contractual sanctions, pressing for key staff to be replaced, and re-tendering where necessary. Prison leadership (or the operator in the case of a private prison) should be held to account for their success or lack of success in achieving educational outcomes and be recognised and rewarded or face sanctions (ultimately removal) accordingly (p.26).

Whilst Coates (2016) praises many prison educators, she also claims that too many practices are substandard. The report recommends that prison education needs to ‘build capacity’ (p.24) which involves attracting teachers from areas of good and outstanding practice in mainstream settings to prison education and to establish a specialised training programme for new graduate recruits. It suggests that pay could be re-structured to encourage ‘pathways of career progression’ similar to schemes for teachers in schools (p.21).

Coates (2016) draws attention to the importance of every prisoner across England and Wales having a Personal Learning Plan (PLP), driving a continuous and rigorous assessment of learners’ needs, in a personalised approach to learning. For those prisoners demonstrating ‘exceptional progress’ in education or training, early release should be explored for certain categories of prisoner (p.62). Pre undergraduate (Level 3) and undergraduate courses should be funded and encouraged (as they used to be) and external businesses using prisoner labour for contract work inside prisons should consider them for employment on release (p.63). The report does not provide much detail for those not disposed to education and training or their plan for reducing reoffending, but the implication is that punitive sanctions will apply.
For measures of success, on the one hand Coates advocates imitating mainstream measures of attendance and attainment of qualifications with some adjustment for a prison context. Coates claims, 'The key measure for education needs to be progression against the baseline assessment of basic skills made on reception to prison, measured against the expected progress of each individual in their Personal Learning Plan' (p.15). In terms of reducing reoffending, her remarks appear closer to a reductionist strategy than desistance approaches, as she declares:

In his speech on 8 February 2016, the Prime Minister indicated he would like to measure the effectiveness of prisons by the level of reoffending on release, employment outcomes and educational progression. I welcome this challenge. I have been surprised at the current lack of robust data. Developing a suite of outcome measures to enable meaningful comparisons to be made between prisons (particularly between those with similar cohorts of offenders) is vital to drive improved performance (pp.14-15).

Furthermore, Coates suggests that Ofsted should carry out inspections using the same framework as the adult skills sector and that prison education should be increasingly influenced by mainstream education practices. Coates identifies the need for a digital restructure and a flexible curricula design to engage particular learners’ creative practice in and outside the classroom, alongside the delivery of creative arts, sports and ‘Personal and Social Development’ (PSD).

Although the reader may have not yet read about the challenging circumstances I encountered, I cannot resist reflecting on how different my research might have been if the Coates’ review (2016) had happened earlier, as she comments:

The provision of art, drama and music courses is not a core part of current OLASS arrangements. Where they do operate, and where there have been one-off projects or performances with visiting arts companies, they are often the first thing that prisoners, staff and Governors tell me about. The arts are one route towards engaging prisoners when they have had negative experience of traditional classroom subjects, or struggle with self-esteem and communication. They can be the first step towards building confidence for more formal learning (Ibid. p. 29).
And:

There should be no restrictions on the funding for arts, sports and Personal and Social Development courses (PSD) if the Governor believes these are appropriate to meet the needs of prisoners (p.63).

Coates’ recognition of the importance of ‘arts in prisons’ brings me back full circle to the inception of the research process that culminated in this thesis, which echoes my first suggestion for an area of inquiry left unanswered by the study that unfolded. For example, what is the value of ‘arts in prison’ that so many people (including Coates) have recognised? Somewhat ironically, Coates also appears to advocate ‘performance management’ that, in this thesis, I argue (along with protectionism and ‘presentation of self’ and teams) were mostly responsible for ‘arts in prison’ contributions (and other creative initiatives) being thwarted, which otherwise might have informed interests we both appear to share. I suspect such competing factors will most frustrate Coates’ (2016) plans until the next cycle of review and reform. The reader reaching the end of this thesis may find it useful to return to Coates’ recommendations again in order to appreciate their significance and development in the broader context of my experience and research.

This study, then explores the relationship of prison education, work and training with creativity and innovation, amidst recurrent policy cycles and the prevailing ‘What Works’ agenda in one prison incarcerating adult males in the custodial region that encompasses England and Wales. ‘What Works’ is discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, but at this stage the reader unfamiliar with penal contexts might easily speculate that ‘What Works’ is a phrase representing concerns with interventions that reduce reoffending. One important factor in this study is that ‘What Works’ was an early catalyst for the embrace of ‘arts in prisons’ and, ironically, the contextual framework for my original research and practice intentions that were thwarted. However, whilst the ‘What Works’ phrase appears unchallengeable in its quest to reduce reoffending, digging under the surface of frontline practice reveals some of its restrictions, mostly as a consequence of being commandeered as a reductive management tool intended to drive and
measure performance. Therefore, it is, perhaps, surprising that in a postmodern era, in which many proponents have largely rejected grand solutions, that the potential for reductionist causal calculations have continued to dominate policy and discourse within criminal justice across England and Wales. It is this dominance and relative inflexibility that provides the foundation for any criticisms of how the ‘What Works’ approach has been skewed, not the scientific basis of its potential. Indeed, the argument presented mostly by the work of Duguid and Pawson (Duguid, 1982, 1998a, 2000; Duguid and Pawson, 1998; Pawson, 2000; Pawson and Tilley, 1997) explored in the literature review demonstrates the potential for variations, creative extensions and interpretations that could be so promising. Any criticisms in this thesis are not based upon the usefulness of a ‘What Works’ approach then, but a frustration with its dominance and inflexible interpretation in practice. Alternatively, as the Preface (above) aims to tease out, the complexities involved are mostly evident on the ground, a terrain not necessarily suited to accommodate the expectations of instant fixes that policy and modern technology often promises and ‘What Works’ solutions increasingly tend to imply. Alternatively, the findings in this thesis propose that paying attention to the detail of apparently small happenings on the ground, in this case arising from the practice of ‘prison theatre’ and a ‘Functional English classroom’ (FEC), offer great potential for desistance-based creative approaches in this context.

Such complexity, revealed throughout this thesis, influenced a further deviation from convention in the absence of a research question. If a research question assists the reader, then a broad approach would have been adapted such as, ‘What are the challenges and opportunities for creative education, work and training in a prison context?’ The decision to leave out a research question was not to signal a rejection of research questions, nor denounce traditional approaches. Alternatively, the philosophical underpinnings of the research methodology (as explained in Chapter One), subscribes to a notion that universal and timeless solutions in the form of ‘watertight’ (Eisner, 2008, p.8) answers that can generalise across contexts are not always an appropriate response for every research problem. Rather, the approach being adopted is intended to explore dynamic
complexity (that a research question might restrict) through the opening-up of conversations (Ellis and Bochner, 2006 p.435; Eisner, 2008, p.8).

Moreover, in the interests of clarity, whilst I argue that the thesis’ title captures the substance of this research and its core argument (that frontline innovation and penal culture often compete against each other), an early encounter with some key words and phrases that follow (teaching creatively, autoethnography and ground) might assist the reader.

In practical terms, ‘teaching creatively’ in this context also requires the creativity of prisoners engaged with improvisation, devising and performance (see Chapter Three). Similar techniques were adopted from ‘prison theatre’ of using prisoners’ own experience to create ‘new’ stories and interpreting existing stories to make meaning from their lives (as shown in Chapter Four). Furthermore, in the latter, ‘creativity’ was interpreted in terms of exploring alternative learning spaces, beyond the classroom. More conceptually, defining what it means to be creative has been subject to significant debate. William Duggan (2013) maintains that ‘Artistic and creative are not the same thing’ (p.89), although it is often taken for granted that arts subjects are more creative than, say, engineering. Drawing on Duggan’s (2013) comment, this does not mean that someone cannot be creative with their art or that another cannot be artful with their creation. After all, the product of both their work is unlikely to have existed in precisely the same condition before. It is, therefore, a creation (no matter how subtle) as opposed to a reproduction. There is, however, a nuanced position that suggests different ways of working with creativity, some of which accord to the ‘creation’ itself and particular stages of the creation. They bear similarities and crossovers, but are subject to different ‘effects’ or ‘affects’ in specific contexts. For example, the (deliberate) engagement with fiction and imagination in, perhaps, creative writing might also involve a technical framework for devising a plot. Alternatively, for example, bespoke sword-makers in Japan have described a spiritual and artistic element to their highly technical craft. Indeed, both the social entrepreneur’s vision for a new education project and the prison educator’s lesson design might involve any or all these components of creativity.
This relationship between ‘artistic creativity’ and ‘technical creativity’ is more complex than can be fully explored here. However, if a distinction of the ‘artistic’ implies a focus on elements of human experience more closely associated with emotion, these phenomena are mostly incompatible with strictly positivist measurements. In this respect, there is a tension between competing interpretations of creativity within the literature and, therefore, I draw on Professor of Arts Education, Sir Ken Robinson’s (2011) more prosaic definition of ‘how it works in practice’ (p.2) that he organises into three parts. He proposes ‘they are imagination, which is the process of bringing to mind things that are not present to our senses; creativity, which is the process of developing original ideas that have value, and innovation, which is the process of putting new ideas into practice’ (pp.2-3). Broadly speaking, when I use the term ‘creativity’, I am applying the sentiments behind those that Robinson proposes. My experience (and explanation) of creating conducive circumstances for teaching in this context relies on promoting democratic practices more commonly associated with arts-based work than penal culture, of which the Literature Review affirms through the ‘Canadian study’ (see pages 31-35).

Turning now to autoethnography and the ground, it is important to reiterate that this thesis offers my perspective alone for analysis, based upon experiences in one prison and particular period of time. My perspectives were shaped by the roles I occupied, firstly as an Education Manager during the professional and research planning phase, then as a ground worker teaching in a drama studio and a Functional English classroom (see Chapters Three and Four respectively). Somewhat painfully, I include my own performance in criticisms of decision-making away from (and on) the ground, but especially whilst being an Education Manager, lacking in training, leadership and resistance, whilst employing ‘impression management’ of my own (Goffman, 1990 p.203). Therefore, I felt the heat at management level and how the pressure of ‘being seen to perform’ can influence decision-making for the ground. Consequently, my critique of roles away from the ground in this thesis relates to the systems and socialisation of professional and institutional life, not necessarily the individuals involved. Alternatively, the ‘ground’ represents frontline practice and this thesis
emphasises its importance. A major concern being that voices from the ground are often marginalised, whilst those that rarely encounter the ground hold sway.

Arguably, the most practical research instrument in the thesis is a performance-like, fictionalised scripted form that I call ‘fictional performative writing’. It provides a counter to the imbalance of power, which generates a conceptual value of its own through processes of reflexivity and meaning-making. This approach could be described as being based upon ‘arts-based research methods’ that are commonly employed in autoethnographic research (see for example McNiff, 1998, 2013; Barone and Eisner, 2013). In this case, therefore, the fictional scenarios became an autoethnographic representation of the ground and lived professional experience. Sally Denshire (2013) explains this more eloquently, asserting that autoethnography falls somewhere between literary studies and anthropology, but has drawn particularly upon the field of professional practice whereby the professional and personal, true and imagined are not necessarily accepted as binary concepts (p.1). In this respect, autoethnographic writing goes further than autobiographical, as the silenced author ‘opens a space of resistance’ (auto) with the collective (ethno) through writing (graphy) and comes into play with power (p.3).

The scenarios presented as ‘fictional performative writing’ have a deliberate sequence and rhythm throughout the thesis; they aim to build gradually, but increasingly ask more of the reader’s engagement. Having made the case for the methodology in Chapter One, Chapter Two is as much about power as it is ethics using ‘fictional performative writing’ to present a courtroom scene as a metaphor, representing the meetings leading up to permission for research access being denied in my lived experience. This approach allowed me to tell a story I could not otherwise have told for ethical reasons. In Chapter Three, practice in the Performing Arts Department (PAD) is told as one fictional story, aiming to capture ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) from the grind of the ground. Alternatively, Chapter Four presents a number of scenarios with different characters (in part) to represent the fragmented experience of teaching Functional English with contradictory directives for the use of fiction that
complicated my aim of using fictional techniques learned in the PAD. Fictional performative writing in Chapter Five explores learning from the research with fewer restrictions of realism, inviting the reader to make connections with the ambiguities of constructed realities in prison, as documented throughout the thesis.

Overall, the thesis represents learning from a study conducted through a part-time professional doctorate extending to almost seven years, in which I was engaged with two main teaching roles at the research site (2010-2017). In both roles, I undertook a reflective enquiry into the function and impact of creative education, exploring ways in which a teacher on the ground might work productively to incorporate creativity into learning spaces that enhance prisoner experience and promote reflection through education, work or training. However, providers of prison education mostly advocate prescribed learning aims according to specific learning criteria for the completion of qualifications and issuing of certificates as evidence of success and to generate income. Nevertheless, one intention of the creative process was to avoid limiting the possibilities that might surface from individuals or the group. These included factors arising from the learners’ lives, experiences and associations with circumstances of their incarceration. In this sense, the educational circumstances for reducing reoffending might be created and available should opportunities arise.

My professional role representing the first two years of this study was concerned with developing practice in a newly formed performing arts department (PAD), which aimed to cultivate employability and pro-social skills amongst prisoners. The potential of this work for contributing to reducing reoffending was inherent within policy assumptions of acquiring employability skills to gain or sustain employment as a lifestyle choice in preference to offending. The second professional role, which maps onto the subsequent two years of this study, was as a Functional English teacher that enabled me to explore the use of creative approaches in spite of a narrowly framed syllabus. The presumption of a Functional English syllabus in prison education is that factors such as productive citizenship and gainful employment could become a learner’s aspiration as a consequence of being
able to evidence technical competencies in a relatively short part-time course over four-to-six weeks for each academic level.

The ‘discovery’ of ‘fictional performative writing’ as a research method and reflexive meaning-making instrument is an important finding in this complex institutional setting (and probably relevant for application in others). My turn to this method arose from the challenge of finding a productive response to the extremely difficult circumstances surrounding my attempt to develop a professional research practice in a prison environment during the period of research. For example, at the outset I planned to undertake a conventional study that could explore the life experiences of prisoners through a drama-based/performance course (practising the application of employability or ‘soft’ skills) that might contribute towards constructing alternative identities. This idea drew on a combination of ‘prison theatre’ practices, exploring safe or ‘one step removed’ (Baim et al., 2002) fictionalised accounts of experience and elements of desistance theory. Desistance theory investigates small signals of change, which leading desistance theorist, Shadd Maruna (2001), explores through self-narrative and story (pp. 165-167). More broadly, Fergus McNeill (2006) suggests desistance theory aims to understand rehabilitation ‘from the perspective of the desister, not the ‘expert’ (McNeill, 2006 p.46). In my study, I found that small signals of personal adjustment could be identified, which prison theatre scholars have also reported from similar practical contexts (Thompson, 2008; Balfour, 2009). However, this research proposal could not continue because the department was closed during a curriculum review undertaken as part of the ‘working prisons’ policy cycle (MoJ, 2010; BIS, 2011), in which drama was not considered sufficiently employability-related at the research site. In the second professional role of Functional English teacher, a research proposal was submitted that aimed to continue the PAD’s exploration through the FEC and also non-traditional learning spaces such as industrial workshops. Despite being granted ethical approval by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee, the Instigated Research Application System (IRAS) and an endorsement from prison education management, authorisation to carry out this research proposal was denied by the prison authorities.
Navigating these difficult professional circumstances meant adopting a somewhat pragmatic approach in order to continue the doctorate and complete a different kind of study than envisaged with the first two attempts. A new research design was constructed that included an autoethnographic, arts-based methodology. Specifically, the creation of fictional dialogic scripts allowed me to reflect on the everyday experience of leading creative education initiatives in a way that maintained research ethics standards of anonymity, whilst also navigating institutional constraints. This methodology developed in a way that allowed me to explore the range of learning accumulated from all the experiences above and, as a result, this study offers a set of research findings generated from grounded research in a particular context. It offers a perspective that is very rare in the existing scholarship of both ‘arts in prisons’ and ‘prison education, work and training’, two of the main areas in which the thesis makes a contribution. Therefore, my aim in this thesis is to make meaning from my experience as a prison educator on the ground, exploring creative prison education practice and to do this by adopting the research practices of an autoethnographic researcher.

This study’s reflective (thinking about experience) and reflexive (thinking about the thinking through ‘fictional performative writing’) approach produced two main findings. Firstly, I develop an argument that institutional culture, preoccupied with maintaining the façade of professional performances throughout policymaking and implementation, can profoundly hinder frontline practice of both creative teaching and research. Secondly, I offer a series of more nuanced insights into the everyday challenges of teaching and learning in the prison context that indicate how this might be more effectively achieved. The findings from this (partly) fictional exploration of creative education practice from the frontline suggests there is a tension between innovation from the ground and risk-averse institutional positions, the latter of which hinders potential and disheartens in the former. The remainder of this introduction provides a brief synopsis of the thesis portfolio’s construction and some outline of the content of each chapter.

As described in the Preface, the portfolio is presented in two main parts. The outcomes of two research projects are presented first, as a literature
review and publishable article (in accordance with the remit of the Professional PhD programme at the University of Manchester), followed by the second part consisting of five chapters outlining the methodology and findings of the thesis project that emerged from the literature review and publishable article (in the first part).

The literature review surveys relevant sources from the scholarly literature in the fields of critical studies, philosophy and in criminology from ‘What Works’ (McGuire, 1995) to desistance theory (Maruna, 2001; Maruna and Farrall, 2004). However, it is mostly concerned with examining examples of creative practice in prison education, work and vocational training, the experiences of those involved and the circumstances most conducive for learning and development in these contexts. Whilst there is no claim to providing an exhaustive account, considering the potential embodied by more than four thousand prison educators, it is startling that relatively few published examples of experience from the ground have emerged during a similar timeframe in England and Wales.

The publishable research article is based on a pilot research project. It investigates four prison activity settings in a mid-security prison. They include a semi-skilled production and training workshop, a designated vocational training facility, a contract workshop entailing mundane work and, finally, the PAD. The learning from this study indicates that many prisoners were not attending these activities for reasons of improving employment opportunities or using qualifications for non-prison related further study or employment. Moreover, the research setting that appeared to involve the highest level of intensity in terms of challenging aptitudes for employment and social accord was in the PAD, and whilst preparing for a creative performance.

In part two of the thesis portfolio, Chapter One focuses on the methods employed in this thesis, which also became a vital component in a strategy devised to protect people and organisations from my lived experience. It was designed as a hybrid model, drawing on arts-based and autoethnographic methods and developed in response to the need to re-structure my research proposal. Before this time, I had no plans to use this methodological approach because, firstly, other methods were more appropriate and,
secondly, I had been socialised to believe that discovery and research is always scientific, ‘quantitative, experimental and understood by only an elite few’ (Wall, 2006 p.2). Examples of how others have used arts-based autoethnographic methods are provided both from the literature and samples of reflective, reflexive and fictional pieces written for this study. I argue they enable ways in which to speak to power and investigate the ambiguity of ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ worlds, particularly in a penal context. The jargon of prison and the ‘street’ run throughout this thesis, most especially in what I describe as ‘fictional performative writing’. This jargon is intended to evoke the prison experience, rather than hinder usefulness and clarity for the reader. In order to avoid any unnecessary misunderstanding, a glossary for non-standard English and professional jargon is provided (see Appendix 1, pages 291-293).

The primary purpose of Chapter Two is to examine notions of power and control and their relationship with prison authorities’ role of regulating research access. The chapter opens with a reflective piece of writing that explores how the concept of professional ethics can hold diverse meanings across contexts and time through metaphor. Placing the closure of the PAD to one side, it is concerned with my difficult experience of being allowed to conduct research in a prison and how the assessment criteria to gain access varied between research ethics committees (REC) and prison authorities. I speculate that the prison REC was subject to a legacy of authoritarian reliance on control through power, which is not limited to the control of prisoners, but all those involved with any activity in prisons. My proposal promoted practices often criticised by public and popular media attitudes to (arts and creative activity) in prisons as ‘soft’, when the political appearance means to look ‘hard’. In turn, I speculate that this phenomenon was instrumental in prison management performances that prioritised protectionism over innovation. At the heart of this chapter is a fictional reconstruction of the circumstances that led to my earlier research application being denied, constructed through the use of ‘fictional performative writing’ as both a meaning-making tool and a means by which marginalised voices can be heard. Afterwards, a reflective critique of the fictional piece explores my lived experience by revisiting the notion of
institutional penal culture, whilst drawing upon Jeremy Bentham (1791) and Michael Foucault (1991).

Chapter Three begins with a textile production metaphor, it explores ideas of waste, recycling, infected goods (Balfour, 2009 p.1) and contamination (Foucault, 1991 p.217) within sometimes ‘bewildering’ circumstances (Thompson, 2008 p.91). Afterwards, the reader is shown inside the PAD through ‘fictional performative writing’, interspersed with critical commentary that, on the surface, is concerned with activity whilst training prisoners for a theatrical performance on the ground. The PAD represents a place in which prison educators aimed to shift attention away from the rest of prison and toward an egalitarian, non-judgmental space to mitigate the effects of ‘impression management’ by the authorities (Goffman, 1990 p.114). Therefore, in complex tensions below the surface much more was being revealed, as argued by others on the ground wrestling with similar concerns of practice in this context (see Balfour, 2009; Thompson, 2008).

Chapter Four continues the exploration of my practice as a prison educator. It is similar to Chapter Three in that the format of ‘fictional performative writing’ and critical commentary is maintained, but rather than exploring the use of performing arts in a prison, it consists of endeavours to apply some learning from the PAD alongside additional creative approaches to the delivery of Functional English. The intended common denominator in this case was fiction, however, from my experience over almost three years, fictional material was banned as a teaching device for Functional English. This was mostly on the grounds that Functional English was intended to support the everyday tasks of which people (and in this case prisoners) were deemed to need by the authorities in order to function as economically and socially productive citizens.

Chapter Five draws this thesis to a conclusion, employing both ‘fictional performative writing’ and critical commentary. Philosophically, it mirrors the absence of a research question by not claiming to provide a nailed down, universal and timeless answer to the problems explored, other than to indicate the usefulness (and often undervalued) potential on the ground that the performances, complexities and competing circumstances of professional life and policy goals tend to neglect. However, in the spirit of
innovation, creativity and tenacity, despite experiences of institutional inertia and protectionist strategies, the closing to this chapter speculates on the source of such circumstances and considers novel ways in which they might, otherwise, be addressed.

As this introduction comes to a close, it may be useful to remind the reader that what happens in prisons is a serious business. Security, good order, discipline and the welfare of all those who enter are, rightly, promoted as elements that deserve consideration as a priority. However, an irony of these circumstances is that they can be an anathema to innovation and creative purposeful activity or research, stifling their potential for contributing to the development of a different prison, and a ‘better’ prison, perhaps a prison that ‘works’. At the time of writing, prisons across England and Wales are being described as dirty, dangerous places that hinder the priority objectives noted above. In order to establish the deteriorating circumstances in which this research is based, it is worth noting that according to the Prison Reform Trust (2016) ‘People in prison, prisoners and staff are less safe than they were five years ago. Serious assaults in prison have more than doubled in the last three years. There were 2197 serious prisoner on prisoner assaults and 625 serious assaults on staff in 2015’ (p.2). Despite many penal reforms and authoritative control, ‘Prison has a poor record on reducing reoffending - 46% of adults are reconvicted within one year of release. For those serving sentences of less than 12 months this increases to 60%. Over two-thirds (68%) of under 18 year olds are reconvicted within a year of release’ (Ibid.). The argument contained within this thesis extends to the idea that despite the deteriorating situation in prisons, those dealing with it day-by-day are rarely afforded a voice of any consequence.
A Literature Review of purposeful activity: creativity in prison education, work and training.

The purpose of this literature review is to marshal scholarly literature from broad, but relevant, disciplinary terrains. It engages with some of the theoretical and philosophical debates and explores a selection of creative innovations in prisons. An important finding indicates that, despite policy calls for creativity and innovation in the UK (for example, MoJ, 2010; BIS, 2011), too many innovations have reported their seemingly unnecessary struggles with multiple obstacles. The examples provided were, too often, closed or irreconcilably coerced out of a dominant penal culture. Moreover, cycles of government reform have failed to perform according to their authoritative pronouncements, as prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded and more dangerous, families devastated and the taxpayer more burdened (Prison Reform Trust, 2017). This interpretation of the literature shows how, despite institutional intransigence, a politically motivated, risk-averse culture dominates and controls, supressing risk, creativity and innovation.

This review is presented in four distinct, but interrelated, sections. The first examines ‘What Works’ and Desistance Theory to explore their contributions to reducing reoffending. As an example of creative ‘What Works’ methodology (that additionally questions ‘for whom, in what circumstances and for how long?’), I examine Duguid and Pawson (1998) and their study of arts and humanities in Canadian prisons. This section ends with a consideration of how the prison context and professional circumstances impact on the efficacy of reducing reoffending approaches, from which I turn to Erving Goffman’s (1990) use of language and practices related to the performing arts as a dramaturgical or theatrical metaphor. The second section surveys prison arts and humanities interventions across England and Wales, making some important connections with factors arising from my own experiences that are presented in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis. Thirdly, I explore some historical foundations for work and vocational training in prisons, selecting a number of innovative ventures for a more detailed examination. The fourth and final section is presented in two
parts. The first offers a brief history of prison education, exploring its status as a ‘Cinderella service’ (see Bayliss, 2003 p.157; Czerniawski, 2016 p.208; Crown, 2005 p.28; Nahmed-Williams, 2011). The second part considers the role of the prison educator/researcher, presenting examples from the very small number of published sources that provide perspectives from practitioners and researchers on the ground.

**What Works and Desistance Theory**

Historically, the ‘What Works’ agenda came about as a response to scepticism about the positive influence of interventions on reducing reoffending during the 1970s and 80s following claims by commentators such as Robert Martinson, published in 1974, that ‘nothing works’ (McGuire, 1995 p.4). Such interventions include prison education, work and vocational training (collectively known as ‘purposeful activity’). There are other elements of purposeful activity in prisons, such as ‘Offending Behaviour Treatment Programmes’ (OBP) overseen by psychologists. This thesis is not directly concerned with these programmes, other than to note their importance to a wider criminological debate and that ‘purposeful activity’ in all its guises represents ‘time out of cell’ as a prison ‘key performance target’ (KPT).

During the 1990s, the notion that ‘nothing works’ became increasingly challenged by researchers reviewing large bodies of statistical research called ‘meta-analysis’, indicating that ‘punitive measures have done little to arrest the increase in crime. It has often been contended instead that in fact they make things worse’ (Ibid.). As findings from these statistical approaches became more convincing, support for the ‘What Works’ debate gathered momentum, paving the way for all manner of creative interventions, not least those offered by arts and humanities disciplines.

It is, perhaps, noteworthy at this point to reiterate that my applications for research ethics approval leading up to the final design for this thesis were based upon the principles underpinning ‘What Works’ approaches. Additionally, the exploration of fictional devices for creating new prisoner identities in both drama and Functional English (see Chapters Three and
Four respectively) represent an interest in desistance theory that developed some twelve months into my research. My research applications, that could not be completed (as the PAD was closed and permission was denied for the FEC), proposed to follow-up prisoners’ lives in order to assess the impact of this work. In particular, I was curious and encouraged by ‘What Works’ modifications according to specific contexts such as those adopted by Duguid and Pawson (Duguid and Pawson, 1982, 1998a, 2000; Duguid and Pawson, 1998; Pawson, 2000; Pawson and Tilley, 1997) featured later in this literature review. However, the interpretation of what constitutes a ‘What Works’ approach by both the prison authorities and education provider was not compatible with my practice or applications. Consequently, the PAD was closed and permission to continue my research interests through Functional English was denied.

Returning to this brief historical outline, some fifteen years on from James McGuire (1995), a seminal publication by Jo Brayford, Francis Cowe and John Deering (2010) ask ‘what else works’, adding desistance theory to the reducing reoffending debate. The editors tend to maintain the importance of evidence-based practice, but argue ‘that more recent understandings of ‘what works’ have been dominated by policy and practice that have originated from ‘top down’ initiatives and policy proposals’ (p.3). The implication, here, appears to echo my own frustration, expressed earlier, that although ‘What Works’ in its initial iteration provided access to developing the scope of ‘arts in prisons’, their practices on the ground have increasingly been co-opted for instrumental purposes, restricting their potential. In their concluding chapter, Brayford et al. (2010) promote creativity in research and practice (p.266) and (in agreement with arguments presented in this thesis) they contend that ‘Practice needs to move beyond the relative safety of the office, group room or hostel’ (Ibid.). Therefore, practitioners on the ground and the people with which they work are vital components for the discovery of alternative or extended approaches to a ‘What Works’ agenda that, in its reductive format, has not yet been concomitant with a reduction in reoffending or the prison population in England and Wales.

The emergence of desistance theory has offered a different way of thinking about an intervention’s role towards reducing criminal activity and
this is explored mostly in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis. Desistance theory emerged from criminology, gaining momentum at the turn of the twenty-first century. Precise definitions of desistance theory are not universally accepted or fully tested and may yet have to be re-defined should they become vulnerable to being co-opted by prison management systems, as increasingly relates to many cases of ‘What Works’ approaches. However, broadly speaking, instead of prescribing interventions evaluated by a mostly narrow system of measurement (re-conviction rates), desistance theory investigates periods of absence or less serious offending (primary desistance) and what is often considered to be a more deep-seated change of offender identity (secondary desistance). The aim of desistance theory is to understand the holistic and personal processes of desistance such as aging, maturation, family relationships, faith, personal identity, education, training and employment.

Desistance theory maintains that desistance from criminal activity is a ‘process and not an event’ (McNeill, 2006 p.47). There are a growing number of influential desistance theorists, but this thesis draws most heavily upon two key ideas expressed by Shadd Maruna in his (2001) publication. Firstly, that ‘The transformative power of stories, proverbs, slogans and folk sayings may be a neglected area of study’ (p.167). Furthermore, they can be a catalyst for an ‘internalized life story – or personal myth’ and ‘The construction and reconstruction of this narrative, integrating one’s past, present, and anticipated future, is itself the process of identity development in adulthood’ (p.7). The second idea selected can be associated with my interpretation of Goffman (1990), below, in that the full extent of a social actor’s character might not be openly apparent to the audience.

After all, the “myth of the bogeyman” is a narrative. Like a self-narrative, this sort of cultural narrative serves a distinct psychological purpose. This bogeyman myth allows nonbogeymen (the “Us”) to relieve ourselves of the shame we feel for our shared responsibility in creating the “Them” (Maruna, 2001 p.168).

Therefore, although relatively early in its development, desistance theory provides an alternative way of thinking about ‘What Works’. Its
relevance for this thesis is the exploration of small (but potentially vital) details of moments in prison theatre featured in section four of this literature review (see also Balfour, 2009 and Thompson, 2008) alongside those I encountered, which are presented in Chapters Three and Four of this thesis.

**The Canadian Study: a creative approach to ‘What Works’**

Here lies a vital and uncomfortable message for policy-maker and evaluator alike – it is not programs that work, but their capacity to offer resources that allow subjects the choice of making them work (Duguid, 2000 p.146) (Emphasis in original).

The ‘Canadian study’ ran across four different federal prisons in British Columbia, Canada between 1972-1993 (Pawson, 2000 p.70; Duguid, 1982; Duguid & Pawson, 1998). The study was administered through two different universities, producing encouraging findings using methods associated with scientific principles. Although this thesis employs a different methodology, it argues a case for diverse modes of inquiry such as the ‘What Works’ approach adopted in the ‘Canadian study’, both of which (intriguingly) share some common themes and findings. For example, an important argument in the thesis, particularly represented here and in Chapters Two and Four, is that inflexible and protectionist institutional strategies in relation to what constitutes legitimate research and creative practice can restrict policy aspirations.

The Canadian study research includes five categories of prisoners from low risk through to high risk, consisting of over 1000 men; 690 being registered for two semesters or more and these became the initial group for the research. From this number, complete records were obtained on 654, which then became their total group. These were followed-up three years after release and the results report that 75% avoided re-incarceration as compared with 58% predicted (Duguid, 2000 p.140), 'a relative improvement of 30%' (Pawson, 2000 p.74).

Their research relies heavily upon findings from numerical data, which could have been an attempt to speak to authority in a language that criminal justice and policymakers tend to prefer. As Pawson (2000) declares,
governments prefer to ‘make policy at pace’ (p.69). He goes on to state that in the Canadian study, qualitative elements such as prisoners’ life stories and mini histories of classroom events existed but the ‘main data bash took the form of a ‘tracking exercise’’ (p.71). In this sense, the findings might have missed some crucial elements because, whilst the numbers were a vital part of their discovery process, the lack of detail from learning spaces and prisoners/teachers’ voices prevented further analysis of relationships between the numbers and the complexity hidden in detail on the ground. For example, Pawson (2000) described as ‘unearting’ a practitioner’s comment on the programme that the biggest academic improvements came from the least likely candidates. He reports that, at first, they were mediocre ‘and mediocre criminals too’ (p.71). This does not describe the process of change or a detailed account of the practitioners’ further comments, which claim that gradually their grades increased whilst working amongst others that wanted to improve. Nor does it explain a practitioner’s deduction from the ground that, ‘It’s not so much a case of ‘rehabilitation’ as ‘habilitation’ (Ibid.). At this point I wanted to know more, especially how they might relate to the ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) in ‘a theatre of little changes’ (Balfour, 2009 p.7) from arts and humanities in England, in the section that follows and described further throughout the thesis. I wanted to know if there were some common experiences between the people teaching on the ground in different situations. Both the numerical data and glimpses of detail from the ground in the Canadian study were fascinating, but aspects of the latter could have been overlooked despite the researchers’ aim of not abandoning the ‘What Works’ question, but asking it more sensibly (p.67).

The first-half of this research was based at the University of Victoria (1973-1984) named ‘The Liberal Arts Degree Program’ in which English literature and history were considered disciplines most likely to couple cognitive growth with the development of moral reasoning. Similar to arguments I tease out in Chapter Four, Duguid (1982) contends that ‘Characters in novels, historical situations, psychological theories, and philosophical arguments all act in combination to produce the desired effect’ (p.60). Furthermore, the success of the programme was not attributed to skills training, ‘but the changing of perceptions of reality’ (pp. 54-55); in part
due to the inclusion of morality as a key theme and the learning environment created. Pawson (2000), a key member of the research team, argued that underpinning all these factors is a principle that ‘All programmes work through the volition of their subjects and somewhere in this capacity to provide continual support for positive choices lies the secret of lifelong learning prisoner education (Pawson, 2000 p.82).

The second-half of the Canadian project began with the Simon Fraser University (1984-1993), re-named the ‘Simon Fraser Prison Education Programme’. The curricula offer extended to social science subjects along with a small number of natural science choices. Pawson (2000) argued that their study was ‘by a considerable margin the biggest higher education programme ever attempted in a prison context’ (p.70). This part of the Canadian experiment was based on arts and humanities subjects such as English literature, history, philosophy and drama, which aimed at not reforming the prisoner but rather at challenging the framework within which he makes decisions. The authors of the report concluded ‘it is not time in the classroom that rehabilitates but the educational experience that different amounts of time can provide’ (Duguid and Pawson, 1998 p.480). Therefore, ‘Inmates were thus free to volunteer for the course (or not), to co-operate closely (or not), to stay with the programme (or not), to seek to extend the programme (or not), to learn lessons (or not), to retain lessons (or not) and to apply lessons (or not)’ (Pawson, 2000 p.82). The indication here is that prisons might not ‘work’, but certain types of activity with particular prisoners might at certain times, given the ‘right’ conditions. Therefore:

For the university program, constructing an alternative community within the prison meant experimenting with democratic decision making within the program, offering classes that focussed on controversial subjects, creating a fine arts and theatre program with opportunities for performance and role-taking, and importing into the prison as many personalities as possible from the university community. Accomplishing this required from the prison a degree of autonomy that in many respects was unprecedented in its liberality and cooperativeness (Duguid, 2000 p.128).

The relatively large amount of space allocated in this review to the Canadian study is due to its importance as one of the most comprehensive
prison education studies involving relevant curricula areas through an innovative and longitudinal ‘What Works’ approach. Of particular relevance are a number of comparable findings and a philosophical argument that embraces diverse and creative ways of inquiry. The chosen methodology for the Canadian study was developed and described by Pawson and Tilley (1997) as ‘realistic evaluation’, which is a theory-driven approach intended to evaluate ‘why a program works for whom and in what circumstances’, rather than a traditionally polarised position of, does it/does it not, work (p. xvi). Hughes (2005) describes their methodological approach as the development of a ‘longitudinal, critical realistic framework, incorporating long-term follow-up and tracking of representative samples of participants, combining qualitative and quantitative research methodology and enabling researchers to test theoretical propositions’ (Hughes, 2005 p.14). Arguably, then, the most significant barrier to continuing ‘What Works’ research according to Duguid (1998a), is a need for prison authorities’ openness for ‘real’ change because ‘Given the virtually antithetical relationship of the authoritarian prison to a liberal arts education, the creation of an alternative community was seen by some to be crucial if the experience of the academic courses were to have a substantial impact’ (Duguid,1998a p.4). Pawson (2000) concluded that:

It is time for the prison service to think again about programmes that are de-coupled from the hubris-ridden notions of ‘experts’ who insist that they know what is best for others. It is time for another look, through new lenses, at all of those standard, old-fashioned education and training programmes (Pawson, 2000 p.82) (Emphasis in original).

The Canadian study may have been one of the longest running and most impressive examples of arts and humanities in prisons, but the use of arts with prisoners whilst public services are being cut is often politically problematic and ammunition for mass retribution in the hands of the popular media. Consequently, despite its accomplishments, the programme and its associated research were closed down on the basis of budget cuts (Pawson, 2000 p.74).
According to the findings from the ‘Canadian study’, ‘education cannot compensate for the mechanics of the penal system’ (Pawson, 2000 p.81). In other words (and as accords with my lived experience), for many prisoners and professional practitioners alike, prison is too often an antithesis to technical problem-solving and creative work associated with arts and humanities (Duguid, 1998a). Here, I turn to Erving Goffman (1990) in order to unravel this paradox of a penal context whereby dominant forces tend to power, through a confluence of the micro (through internal protectionist strategies) and the macro (by perpetual policy reform cycles) that can both contradict and appease each other’s aims.

Goffman’s (1990) focus is on the ‘presentation of self’ and a notion of ‘everyday social life as something like a staged drama or theatrical production in which social actors, on the basis of their appearance and manner, attempt to form favourable impressions of themselves before audiences’ (Treviño, 2003 p.18). According to Goffman (1990), these performances occur in all walks of life, but can have more dramatic implications when acted out by individuals and/or teams with power over others (pp.83-108) and as an ‘art of impression management’ (pp. 203-230).

In the introduction to a publication of edited chapters on Goffman’s legacy, Anthony Javier Treviño, (2003) develops Goffman’s idea of ‘normal deviancy’, asserting that:

The rules of the interaction of social order are those that, above all others, demand that behaviours directed towards the presentation of self, or to the reaccreditation of a lost face, are precisely and exclusively about information control (Ibid. p. xvi).

Therefore, Goffman (1990) suggests that political and professional considerations often trump any social benefit and ‘It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that the illusions and impressions are openly constructed’ (Goffman, 1990 p.114). For example, public finances were being squeezed during both the time of the ‘Canadian study’ (below) and my own experience during this research, which heightened the political sensitivity around what activities prisoners should access, according to
Similarly, according to Pawson (2000) the decision to close the Canadian initiative was considered to be political and protectionist rather than economic or educational (p.74). Therefore, if the theory of ‘impression management’ that Goffman proposed and the ‘Canadian study’ identified as a barrier to meeting ‘What Works’ objectives are accepted, then no matter ‘What Works’ (or goes misconstrued), articulations of the efficacy of interventions might remain compromised. In the section that follows, the reader is encouraged to continue this consideration of connections and contradictions between creative purposeful activity, policy aims to reduce reoffending and the circumstances in which these take place.

Arts and Humanities in Prisons

One factor rarely afforded consideration in the scholarly literature is that ‘arts in prisons’ interventions have been provided by a combination of both insider and outsider influences. Almost all the published scholarly literature relates to interventions planned and delivered by ‘outsiders’ as visiting artist/practitioners, often employed by organisations that are charity-based (see Arts Alliance: Evidence Library, 2016). The practice of permanently employed ‘insider’ prison educators’ engagement with ‘arts in prisons’ (which is of course a key focus of this thesis) is almost completely undocumented in England and Wales.

This section is in four main parts. The first briefly gauges the scope and location of literature related to ‘arts in prisons’. The second revisits the idea of contamination or infection presented by the textile recycling metaphors (especially in Chapter Three) and more practically through the idea that arts and humanities in prison have become vulnerable to the instrumental marketization of education (and possibly rehabilitation). The third part explores a crucial theme of small details from prison theatre practice on the ground, pertinent to my own lived experience. Such phenomena were identified and described by Balfour (2009) and Thompson (2008), which strongly resonate with my experiences as presented in Chapter Three. This focus on the ground meant that the potential for a greater breadth of prison theatre sources was restricted. Lastly, this section provides an example of
research into arts and humanities’ practice in prison that seeks to continue exploring creative approaches and the political manoeuvrings involved in doing so.

Hughes’ (2005) findings on ‘arts in prisons’ were primarily from the UK, but a small number of exceptional examples were included from the English-speaking world (most notably the ‘Canadian study’) and others from Brazil. In total, 76 different ‘arts in prison’ examples were documented, most of which Hughes (2005) considered to present their findings using inadequate forms of evaluation. Hughes (2005) compared the quality of the ‘arts in prisons’ field against a particular set of principles, asserting that ‘the majority of studies are relatively weak when assessed against strict ‘scientific’ standards’ (p.24) and as a consequence only 42 were considered ‘studies of some quality, using the criteria outlined above’ (p.25). The weaknesses identified were ‘small samples, reliance on self-report measures, lack of control or comparison groups, assumptions made about the link between outcome and intervention, lack of use of other literature/research to examine themes/findings and short-term views’ (Ibid.). A key criticism was that most studies ‘only focussed on identifying effects, without consideration of their strength or transferability to other contexts beyond the arts intervention’ (Ibid.). Hughes (2005) contends most studies were ‘lacking information about how data were analysed and interpreted’ (p.72), but adds that ‘absence of evidence does not mean there is an absence of effect’ (p.25).

However, the published literature has grown considerably since Hughes (2005), despite practice being subject to different funding arrangements and impact expectations from creative practice to therapeutic, and more (see, for example, Balfour, 2004; Hughes, 2006; Thompson, 1998; McAvinchey, 2011; Liebmann, 1994 and McLewin, 2011). Increasingly in recent times, arts organisations involved with projects in prisons have collaborated with academic researchers to evaluate findings with the intention of meeting the terms of evidence-based outcomes for policy and funding requirements (McLewin, 2011). These have mostly tailored creative work to focus on policy initiatives and/or forecasted outcomes in areas such as English and/or mathematics development (‘basic skills’) (see for example, Hurry et al.,
2014; TiPP, 2004); cognitive behaviour therapy (Baim et al., 2002) and a rehearsal of transferable skills and aptitudes for life and work (Balfour, 2004 pp.1-18; Thompson, 2008 pp.77-108; Caulfield and McGuire-Snieckus, 2014).

The most up-to-date collection of ‘arts in prisons’ published material (not including OLASS activity) is subsidised and managed by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and available on the website of Arts Alliance. Arts Alliance are managed by ‘Clinks’, who have also worked with New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to support voluntary sector organizations to improve their capacity for identifying, producing and using good quality evidence and evaluation (Clinks, 2017). Therefore, significant development has taken place in recording and evaluating ‘arts in prisons’ between arts organisations and those responsible for research quality since Hughes (2005). However, it appears their legitimisation is largely conditional upon compliance within a narrow set of methods and approaches in service of instrumental objectives, considering that significant influence remains in the hands of the prison authorities.

Notwithstanding the adaptability of practitioners and organisations responding to ‘arts in prison’ funding requirements, Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennet (2010) argue that ‘impact studies, focussing as they do on economic and social indicators, do not actually engage with the real purpose of the arts. They are intrinsically valuable before they are instrumentally so’ (p.7) and:

Instead of questioning whether or not the arts actually do have the economic and social impacts claimed for them, researchers have directed their efforts to coming up with evidence that they do…This has led to charges that the field is characterised not so much by independent, critical researchers, but more ‘hired hands’ (Ibid.).

The question of professional integrity is explored by Balfour (2009), describing tensions whereby positive, personal or social change is subject to ‘contamination’ (p.6) in a market for the ‘commissioning of transformation’ through instrumental, utilitarian means/ends approaches. According to Balfour (2009), this struggle ‘infects the ways in which applied theatre
defines and talks about itself’ (p.1). He argues that in doing so, it brings about an ‘ideological ambiguity’ (Ibid.) whereby prison theatre has been ‘deliberately re-phrasing ideology in more pragmatic and marketable terms’ (p.2), asserting its capacity for rehabilitative transformation on criminal justice’s terms. In this respect, Kershaw (1992, p.251 cited in Balfour, 2009 p.2) suggests such discourse can play into instrumental hands by limiting the role of ‘arts in prisons’ practice and research, surrendering power to be ‘at the beck and call of the dominant order’ (Ibid.). Balfour (2009) offers an alternative as a more realistic view of practice that is nevertheless underused and insufficiently explored in this context. He argues:

However, in resisting the bait of social change, rehabilitation, behavioural objectives and outcomes, perhaps (and it’s a small perhaps), applied theatre practice might more readily encounter the accidental, and acknowledge that what applied does is not always linear, rational and conclusive in its outcomes, but is more often messy, incomplete and tentative (Ibid. p.8).

Helen Nicholson (2005) broadly concurs; suggesting the significance of applied theatre is not necessarily in its capacity for instant ‘results’. Uneasy with making grand claims for the unrealistic pace of ‘transition’, she introduces the idea of ‘transportation’, the vehicle/s of which may be ‘little changes’ (Balfour, 2009 p.7) in ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) that can be closely aligned with the philosophical underpinnings often associated with desistance theory. Nicholson asserts:

Should transformation occur, it is a gradual and cumulative process, the result of learning and negotiation with others, a progressive act of self-creation. In the process of transportation, the outcomes are clearly focussed but not fixed, and change may take place gradually, a collaborative and sustained process between participants and often in partnership with other supportive agencies. It is about travelling into another world, often fictional, which offers both new ways of seeing and different ways of looking at the familiar (Nicholson, 2005 pp.12-13).

Nicholson’s sense of ‘travelling into another world’ is one way in which ‘arts in prisons’ practice might defy adverse spaces such as prisons to create a temporary space for arts or theatre practice. Hughes (2005) reports
that such themes recur across all art forms to improve ‘perceptual/thinking ability and emotional insight’ and in ‘creating a context (physical, social, emotional) to facilitate personal change’ (p.70). Thus, the notion of a ‘liminal or transitional space is a key concept which applies across a number of specific art forms’ (Ibid.) as implied by the ‘Canadian study’. Thus:

The arts offer a non-judgmental and un-authoritarian model of engagement, as well as a non-traditional, non-institutional social and emotional environment. Engagement in the arts assumes and requires respect and responsibility, cooperation and collaboration - factors which are vital in stimulating lasting change (Ibid.).

It is probably an unrealistic prospect to consider that such ideologically divergent perspectives (‘prison theatre’ and prison itself) will collaborate democratically and whilst the balance of power remains with the prison authorities, ‘arts in prison’ research is at risk of being restrained, undermining its potential to demonstrate effectiveness on the ground. In such circumstances, the likely consequence of any stalemate is a reduction in arts and humanities’ practice and a further marginalisation of diverse arguments.

Indeed, accomplished practitioner/researchers have recognised ‘effects’ that the Canadian study did not publish, such as Clough’s (2002) report of ‘real happenings’ (p.8) through exploring narrative fiction or a sense of ‘moments’ occurring in prison theatre (Thompson, 2008 p.91). Traces of this phenomenon appear later in Hughes’ (2005) review, drawing on James Thompson’s (2008) development of ‘marking theory’, both as a means of identifying ‘effects’ performed as ‘bits of behaviour’ in ‘little dramatic performances’ (Thompson, 2008 cited in Hughes, 2005, p.66) when describing experiences of participation in prison theatre. Moreover, drawing on his experiences in the prison theatre organisation ‘Theatre in Prisons and Probation (TiPP), Michael Balfour (2009) suggests that moments he describes as ‘small miracles and changes’ (p.8) might occur more readily through playful situations. These, he contends, might allow creative work to explore its aesthetic worth, rather than ‘unrealistic claims’ (Ibid.) of personal transformation based upon predetermined, ‘coercive, objectives-driven work’
Balfour (2009) develops this idea further, suggesting ‘A theatre of ‘little changes’ might provide a way ‘to re-orientate what is possible about the work’ (p.7). Similarly, (in TiPP) Thompson’s (2008) exploration of constructed narratives ‘related to real situations’ (p.93) identifies ‘the point of transition – a moment often experienced as bewilderment’ in the ‘glitches, changes and less-than-satisfactory moments’ (p.91). If such moments occur, then Thompson (2008) might have a point when he suggests ‘we are all ‘marked people’ who exhibit patterns created by ‘little dramatic performances’ (p.52), sometimes in ‘blurred, transitional space’ (Thompson, 1998 p.17). Such phenomena are experienced in the moment. Sometimes they feel beyond description or a perfect representation, but the ‘fictional performative writing’ throughout this thesis invites the reader to share a reality of the ground in a reconstructed experience of these moments for themselves.

Such moments rarely come to fruition unless the ground is prepared. For example, Balfour’s (2000) comment reflects my experience that ‘The contribution of the facilitator was not, in Frierian terms, a moral or ‘cultural invader’ who went to groups to impose and instruct’ (p.11), but to ‘harness the fundamental human ability to create and respond to stories’, which can reach ‘profound levels’ (Baim et al., 2002 p. xiii). Such profound ‘happenings’ (Clough, 2002 p.8) have been described as ‘bits of behaviour’ that can ‘gently or faintly, mark’ (Thompson, 2008 p.53). They are seemingly small gains which cannot be seen in managers’ offices, nor do they feature in the dramatic claims of policymakers’ solutions; rather they can emerge from practice ‘on the ground’ (Thompson, 2008 p.147) in ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) from a ‘theatre of little changes’ (Balfour, 2009 p.7).

The last part of this section provides an example of an ‘arts in prison’ initiative navigating this difficult terrain. The ‘Re-imagining Futures’ (Bilby et al. 2013) practice-based research took place between May and August 2013. The academics involved drew on a ‘realistic evaluation’ methodology (partly modelled on the ‘Canadian study’) to explore the potential of ‘arts in prison’ activity through a desistance lens. However, whilst Charlotte Bilby et al. (2013) begin to redress the criticisms of research design as described by Hughes (2005), they nevertheless accommodate the Prison Service’s
interest for out-sourcing services and the use of ‘arts in prisons’ to meet Ministry of Justice (MoJ) needs. The authors of the research report state:

In the context of the current ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2013) agenda, the proposed opening up of the market for rehabilitation providers means there should be a clear place for arts organisations within criminal justice agencies. However, there is a need to evidence the impact that the arts have on offenders’ motivation, intentions and journey to desisting from crime and realising their potential as crime-free citizens. NOMS states in the most recent documentation that it will concentrate on commissioning services which have a proven track record of reducing reoffending (p.10).

In the Re-imagining Futures study, three established researchers from Northumbria University and Bath Spa University explored five arts projects in four criminal justice settings. They include visual arts in a high security adult male prison; music and deejaying skills with young offenders in the community; a music-making project in a resettlement (open) prison and creative writing with bookbinding in a closed prison for females. The report claims: ‘this piece of research demonstrates a clear link between taking part in arts-based activities and the movement towards secondary desistance. It identifies the importance of arts practice for the participants and claims to show what types of outcomes successful projects should be producing’ (Bilby et al., 2013 p.6).

Their recommendation to government and service commissioners implies a criticism of reticence to innovation in that they should be ‘open to new and emerging organisations who provide innovative provision, have identified desistance-related aims, objectives and outcomes, and have robust evaluation plans in place’ (Bilby et al., 2013 p.55). In this statement, there is a clear sense that despite a collaborative approach, the important efforts of those on the ground are at risk of being subjugated by an authoritative resolve to control not only what happens in prison, but also what and how such ‘reality’ is presented to the outside world through research.
Prison work and vocational training: Purposeful activity or punishment?

The simple truth is that punishment hardens; it is forgotten by the prison people that they have clay, not gold, to work upon; and so, whilst passing their material through the fire, they are making bricks, not crowns of righteousness (Grubb, 1903 p.18).

In prison education, work and training, there are particular interventions or curricula areas that are afforded priority and others that are disadvantaged. Such practices can appear bound to a punitive past with a propensity to constrain creativity and innovation, a central concern of this thesis. For example, English and mathematics classes are mandatory for adult prisoners that are unable to produce a certificate as ‘proof’ or demonstrate ability above a certain level (usually above ‘entry level 3’, often compared with the cusp of high school entry). This policy is not applied universally across all the prison estate and fluctuates over time, but it was the policy for most prisons during the period of my research. Prisoners were mandated to attend English and mathematics for their own good, regardless of whether they feel it is a form of punishment and how this affects their relationship with education. As Michael Foucault (1991) argues, such utilitarian approaches (re)construct, in disguised form, the pre-modern modes of punishment in a contemporary era:

From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. If it is still necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and with a much ‘higher’ aim. As a result of this new restraint, a whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists; by their very presence near the prisoner, they sing the praises that the law needs: they reassure it that the body and pain are not the ultimate objects of its punitive action (p.11).

These are uncomfortable ideas, raising questions of how services in prison might contain elements of discipline through a neo-punishment, veiled by the language of support. These ideas challenge deep-rooted assumptions about the positive impact of disciplining body and mind through work,
vocational training and education. Likewise, assumptions that a work ethic is possible by force or habit even under quasi-punitive circumstances, or that it brings about character transformation and withdrawal from criminal activity, cannot be generalised effectively as we discover in the publishable article that follows this literature review. The points being expressed, here, are not intended to challenge the principles of purposeful activity and the importance of ‘productive’ lives, but rather question what factors underpin their practices. Some activities appear ‘untouchable’ in the prison curriculum such as English and maths yet they can dominate and restrict choice, be used as a means to demonstrate meeting targets or be deployed in ways that have a negative impact, bringing into play the importance of creativity and innovation for curricula design and delivery. Possibly, as the ‘Canadian study’ suggested, context trumps learning and transformation, which is compromised whatever interventions are provided.

A comprehensive, historical examination of how and why prisoners were occupied is not necessary, here, but in order to establish some relevant historical context, from World War II and up until the end of the century, the cycle of committee after committee, reform after reform have prevailed. After the crisis of ‘nothing works’ in the 1970s (Martinson, 1974) riots leading to the Woolf Report in the early 1990s were underpinned by a rising prison population. Simon (1999) summarises this cyclical motion leading up to Woolf (1991), promoted at various times as both ‘reality’ and a ‘solution’:

Looking at prison history from the late eighteenth century up to the beginning of the 1990s, we see that work has been regarded in different ways at different times. Its purposes have been variously seen as: redemption from sin; an aid to discipline; teaching the virtues of labour; maintaining prisons; running them as profitable factories, or at least reducing their costs; alleviating the rigours of incarceration; building public works; imparting good work habits; imparting trade skills; ‘treatment and training’ and just keeping prisoners occupied. And every now and then one has a sense of déjà vu (p.12).

The Woolf Report (1991) was meant to be a turning point, recommending that work should be constructive and purposeful, reflecting working life outside prison as much as possible, which should be focussed
on employment opportunities on release. The report went further to recommend that education should provide basic education, vocational skills and training that have parity with work. Instead, the Home Office insisted that work would remain a priority activity for prisoners on economic grounds (Simon, 1999 p.15). Nevertheless, the report instigated change as prison instructors were increasingly tasked with gaining training qualifications and the offer of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) for prisoners became more prevalent. A year later, Prison Service HQ developed a policy statement for governors, which questioned:

Is work experience realistic compared with that likely to be found outside, in terms of: acceptance of responsibility; hours of attendance; production processes/technology; interaction with others (supervisors, work-mates); incentives for good work/penalties for poor performance; chances of the inmate getting that kind of job outside; the pace of work? (p.16).

Staff recognised similarities between some kinds of prison work and outside employment such as its content, equipment and organisation at the workplace (such as production lines), but ‘the differences were far greater’ (Ibid.). They included lower pay (at that time typically around £7 per week) and no holidays, pensions or trade union rights. There was an over-representation of low-skilled, labour-intensive, menial and dull work; lack of career structure; prisoners living and working together; slower pace; restrictions with freedom and security; less discipline and a lack of prisoner motivation (p.121). The notion that a false world of prison work was being created inside the artificial reality of a prison was a charade, of which many were unavoidably complicit, yet aware. For example, Simon’s (1999) interviews that asked: ‘is prison work like outside work?’ (p.120) revealed perceptions of both staff and prisoners that their everyday simulation had become a normalised reality.

Succeeding administrations have been unable to significantly change attitudes to prison work, stem the rising prison population or re-shape institutional penal culture. For example, New Labour’s target-driven approach intended to drive up performance within criminal justice, which involved huge financial investments, yet between 1996 and 2010 the prison
population in England and Wales grew by 29,746 or 54%’ (Prison Reform Trust, December 2011 p.4). The impact of their target-driven culture was to encourage protectionist business practices, of which more genuine success on the ground was unable to compete.

The coalition government of 2010 coincided with the beginning of the research reported in this thesis. The coalition began with yet another reform amid the many cycles and circles of solutions over centuries but the revolution promised in the Green Paper, ‘Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders’ (MoJ, 2010), led many education providers to remove or reduce arts and humanities from their curriculum, regardless of their contribution. Presumably, the most important factor for education providers was adhering to national policy, above the needs of prisoners and the potential of people or initiatives at the margins and on the ground. The Green Paper promised longer working regimes, hard work and industry for prisoners as a central part of its ‘rehabilitation revolution’. Underlying this policy, and much associated discourse at the time, was an implied threat aimed at public prisons that market forces will decide who runs prisons through a ‘payment by results’ system (MoJ, 2012). However, when the ‘rehabilitation revolution’ failed to materialise, such phrases were phased out of government discourse, making way for others such as ‘Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation’ (BIS, 2011) and ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2013), which focussed on a major restructure of probation services.

These cycles of policy reform broadly situate the examples of prison work in this literature review amid the political circumstances leading up to, and including, the research period (2010-2017). They represent a series of political manoeuvrings and performances operating at a different level to the ground and far removed from the seemingly ‘smaller’, but crucial, performances concerned with what work, works best in which circumstances. As this review shifts to examine some of the more creative initiatives in which work becomes a formalised process of vocational training, the examples provided show the direction of potential, as creative solutions bubble up from the ground.
Vocational training differs from prison work in that skills are demonstrated, taught, assessed practised and formerly accredited. Some workshops have no formal training, others can be a mixture of work and training and fewer are dedicated training facilities with no other output. One significant change across England and Wales in 2006 was the roll-out of external providers contracted to deliver education and training in prisons through the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). Some vocational training provided by prisons remained in place after this time, if external providers were unable to implement their own version. Therefore, different vocational training qualifications were provided both through OLASS and the prison, operating to distinct quality standards and management.

Arguably, a more inspired response to creating conducive circumstances for prisoners’ progress might be designed as a social enterprise approach. One such initiative entitled ‘Future Prisons’ (O’Brien and Robson, 2016) was described by Alison Liebling (professor of Criminology) as ‘a fine example’ of a new model of community prison and ‘through the gate’ provision based on the concepts of learning and social enterprise’ (O’Brien, 2011 p.3). However, this alternative has not been commissioned despite being available for more than five years. This is not an isolated case as there are other examples of creative initiatives being closed down that this thesis is unable to accommodate. For example, Brewster (1983; 2014) and The NewGate Programmes, Santa Cruz Women’s Prison Program and The Barlinnie Special Unit, as documented in Duguid (2000, pp. 97-122). However, one particular example worthy of more detailed examination is presented in three reports published by the Howard League (2008; 2010 & 2011). They describe a ‘graphic design’ social enterprise in 2005, which developed into a commercial initiative inside HMP Coldingley by the name of ‘Barbed’ before being closed down in 2010. The precise reasons for Barbed’s closure were not provided, but the institutional barriers were described as follows:

That Barbed was unable to overcome the institutional barriers to its commercial viability does not, in any sense, amount to its failure. Barbed was an inspired approach to prison work and its impact was enormous. Barbed demonstrated the possibility of exciting and life enhancing work
inside prison walls and, as the testimony of those who worked within its studio suggests, its value was transformational (Howard League, 2010 p.6).

Barbed claimed to be the first such prison enterprise in the UK and possibly the first of its kind in the world. The initiative was part of the Howard League’s campaign for ‘real work’ in prisons, which they claim was ‘a bold and path-breaking response to the widely acknowledged failure of prison work’ (p.2). Barbed was not designed with Prison Service objectives in mind, although its philosophy was situated within the ethos of policy at the time of its launch. For example, in December 2005 the Government published its Green Paper, Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment. It included a strong focus on jobs and a belief that ‘sustained employment is a key to leading a crime-free life’ (Crown, 2005 p.13). This ethos was broadly in line with Barbed’s approach, but they were trying to break ground in many other ways such as lobbying for wages equivalent to industry levels, prisoners paying tax with a contribution set aside for charitable causes and repayment to victims. Not unlike so many other innovative examples (too numerous to include here) they reported that ultimately institutional ‘obstacles, impediment and inertia’ (p.24) were the main causes for their closure.

**Prison education: specialist or slipper-less**

The sub-title, above, refers to a number of references in the literature linking a ‘Cinderella’ concept with prison education (Bayliss, 2003 p.157; Czerniawski, 2016 p.208; Crown, 2005 p.28; Nahmed-Williams, 2011). However, Lindy Nahmed-Williams (2011) goes a step further to interrogate the meaning behind this expression, pointing out that in comparison to the status and funding afforded schools and universities, numerous sources have described Further Education (post-compulsory adult learning) as a ‘Cinderella service’ (p.28) making prison education the Cinderella of the Cinderella service. Moreover, according to Czerniawski (2016):
Prison education is facilitated by a ‘Cinderella’ profession isolated from the professional recognition, accreditation and remuneration of the wider teaching profession. The characteristic ambiguity in England about what constitutes ‘education’ or ‘training’ is one that is exacerbated by economic and political sensitivity to penal populism. Such ambiguity provides a space into which the restructuring of prison education risks being determined by discourses associated with punishment and retribution, rather than rehabilitation (pp. 208-209).

In the remainder of this chapter, the Cinderella factor is a re-occurring theme containing deeper meaning about how public and political attitudes to services and conditions for prisoners and prison educators might not be entirely divorced from the utilitarian ethos and punitive modes of discipline discussed earlier. The prison educator is both at the centre of such a legacy and key-holder to knowledge, skills and qualifications. Alternatively, prison educators hold keys that have symbolic meaning, such as the locking-up of prisoners during the day, yet being ‘free’ themselves at the end of it. Prison educators tread a fine line of acceptance, sometimes closer to a jailor from a prisoner’s perspective, but not necessarily a prison officer’s. Whilst, on one hand, they can be a vital source of intelligence to security departments, prison educators are often perceived as a ‘weak link’, on the other hand. Moreover, whilst friendly to prisoners they cannot be their friend, yet as an education specialist they are often decried as not a ‘proper teacher’, implied by many that comment, snub or criticize, but do not practice on the ground in prisons.

There is a general consensus amongst organisations supporting prison education that it should enhance prisoners’ lives, leading to a reduction in criminal and anti-social behaviour (EPEA, 2015). Charities such as the Prison Reform Trust campaign for improvements, working alongside organisations such the Prisoners’ Education Trust (PET). In 2012, PET established the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA), which aims to deliver the ‘learner voice’ from conversations and focus groups inside to senior officials outside in Criminal Justice and with regulatory bodies such as the ‘Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills’ (Ofsted). In 2013, the PLA published ‘Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes’ (PLA, 2013) in which they argued that ‘a more joined-up, outcome-focused
and value-driven approach should lead to improvements, and shape how the Offender Learning and Skills contracts evolve to fit the new criminal justice landscape’ (p.2). In June 2016, the PLA collaborated with Clinks and New Philanthropy Capital (NPA), setting out a ‘theory for change’ (PLA, 2016) in response to the questions, ‘what is prison education for?’ and ‘what might it be?’ The ‘theory for change’ promotes ‘wide ranging benefits of prison education, including, but going beyond, employability’, the importance of desistance theory, the prison culture, well-being, human capital, social capital, knowledge, skills and employability (p.1). However, the theme of being ‘outcome-focused’ is prominent, presumably in the interests of ‘evidencing progress’ in a format and language that speaks to power. Yet, terms relating to a target-driven culture have infiltrated education from the language of business and the market. More troublingly, they have a propensity to skew the integrity of its own objectives, as argued earlier in this literature review. Moreover, commenting on cultural and political differences between prisons in Europe, Gary Czerniawski (2016) argues that in England and Wales:

A neo-liberal logic that alleges that competitive tendering and performance outcomes are the best drivers to improve prison education has culminated in a race-to-the-bottom in the standards of educational provision for prisoners (pp.207-208).

In many respects, the Carter Review (Carter, 2003) was a catalyst for change in prison education. The Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit (PLSU) became the Offenders Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and the onset of new funding arrangements through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) began as management and quality arrangements shifted from local authorities to independent education providers in a three-way partnership with prisons. The Carter Review made recommendations such as tougher sentencing, ‘What Works’ approaches to reducing reoffending and the establishment of a National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Their purpose was to replace the prison and probation services in a bid to manage reducing reoffending objectives with greater control (Carter, 2003 pp.42-43). In 2004, the Offenders’ Learning and Skills Unit (OLSU) was given the
responsibility of planning the introduction of OLASS, which began as regional pilots in 2005. New Labour’s intentions for OLASS were presented through a number of Green Papers. ‘A Five Year Strategy for Protecting the Public and Reducing Re-offending’ (Home Office, 2005) pledged funding to increase the necessary skills to support employment, followed by ‘Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment’ (Crown, 2005), that promised to improve the quality and quantity of education for prisoners. Expectations were raised as one of the largest increases in funding for offender learning went from £57 million in 2001-02 to £151 million in 2005-06 (p.6).

OLASS rolled-out across England and Wales from August 2006, the same year that Sandy Leitch (2006) published a review of UK skills more generally. Leitch claimed that unless the nation improved its economically valuable skills according to ‘market needs’ (p.4) the long-term prosperity of the UK would be undermined (p.1). Increasingly, OLASS design and discourse became associated with Leitch’s (2006) economic argument for increasing productivity as a means of prisoner transformation. After the first year of OLASS, the LSC decided to canvas responses from professional stakeholders at all levels (LSC, 2007). Although this approach appeared to be an encouraging development, how far individuals were notified or felt their voice would be heard is in question as only 108 detailed responses were received from a potential of many thousands (LSC, 2008 p.8). One response stated, ‘From the periphery it feels as if there have been numerous mapping exercises, consultations and reviews of the existing service which have not produced any new information or practical solutions to the complex world of offender learning’ (p.17). Other responders inferred the response forms were phrased in ways intended to steer them and neglected the soft/social skills needed to function purposefully in society without which reoffending might not be dependent on immediate paid employment (LSC, 2008 pp.13-14). The democratic tone changed towards the end of the report, reminiscent of themes underpinning Jon McKenzie’s (2001) warning to ‘perform or else’. It stated:

The LSC is developing minimum levels of performance, which determine the acceptable levels of achievement in key sectors and provision.
Performance that is consistently below these levels will result in notices to improve, or, ultimately, a retendering of provision. The LSC intends to adopt a similar approach to this for offender learning, and we intend that this will vary according to key settings and particular groups of learners (p.31).

Regardless of a 50% increase in the budget for prisons managing offenders in the first ten years of the new millennium, ‘almost half of all adult offenders released from custody reoffend within a year’ (MoJ, 2010 p.1). In 2010, the prison population in England and Wales had risen from 44,628 between 1992-1993 to over 85,000 (Prison Reform Trust, 2010 p.2). Although early OLASS reports indicated some success, the data collected between 2005 and 2006 show that 47% of prisoners said they had no qualifications and 13% said they had never had a job (MoJ, 2010 p.8).

In 2011, John Hayes (Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning) presented the Green Paper ‘Making prisons work: skills for rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2011) to provide a learning and skills context to Ken Clarke’s paper (MoJ, 2010) and ‘Skills for Sustainable Growth’ (BIS, 2010). A similar and reoccurring message declared that all before had been a disappointment, inferring the proposals it contained would provide the necessary improvements. The timing of both Clarke (MoJ, 2010) and John Hayes’ (BIS, 2011) Green Papers coincided with the early stages of this research and establishing a new Performing Arts Department (PAD) at the host site. It was not possible to predict how these policies would be interpreted, but the PAD project was encouraged by policy calls for prison education providers to ‘be radical and innovative, where it is appropriate to be, in order to make a real contribution to reducing reoffending’ (BIS, 2011 p.3). It promised: ‘We will work with providers to help them move away from ‘dull’ learning to develop engaging and motivational provision that works’ (p.18). However, from my experience, Hayes’ promise did not fully materialize and consequently the ‘Rehabilitation Revolution’ was replaced by ‘Transforming Rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2013).

This literature review ends by exploring a tension between those who decide and implement policy and the role of others responsible for ‘making it work’. It prepares the ground for the final section in this chapter that moves
closer to a prison educator’s perspective, one rarely afforded a voice in steering the direction of prison education, yet bearing the brunt of a ‘Cinderella’ identity.

The creative prison educator/researcher: who cares?

Describing prison education, Czerniawski (2016) suggests it engages with a wicked problem, and:

Wicked policy problems are complex, not fully understood by policy makers, highly resistant to change and seemingly immune to any evidence that is likely to bring about institutional reconstruction. Policy, in the case of prison education, is not driven by what works and is not evidenced-based. It is positioned by political expediency and the signaling of politicians’ ‘toughness on crime’ in different ways, in different times. Both resonate with elements in the media that construct prison as a site of punishment rather than a place for reform. This problem is exacerbated further by the perceived cost of prison education provision to the taxpayer (p.208).

Czerniawski’s (2016) assessment begins to strip away some layers that blur common perceptions of prison education in England and Wales as a ‘Cinderella Service’ in comparison to other educational contexts (see also, Bayliss, 2003 p.157; Crown 2005; Nahmed-Williams, 2011). This section draws on the few sources available to develop a focus on the prison educator’s role, showing a group of dedicated but disaffected specialists, compromised by mainstream comparisons and prejudice that resist the Cinderella label, against the odds (Lynne Rogers, Margaret Simonot and Angela Nartey, 2014). In doing so, prison educators’ voices are included in discourses about the work that they do and the ‘distinctive needs of those who teach in prisons’ (Julia Jeanes, Jeremy McDonald and Margaret Simonot, 2009 p.1). However, as a substitute for absent voices and to bolster a contribution to knowledge for a role mostly hidden from society, I include my own voice as a prison educator amid the scholarly literature.

The published material of the prison educator’s role includes (leading up to, and including, OLASS) the perspectives of prison officers on prison education (Braggins and Talbot, 2005); those of prisoners on education (for
example, Braggins and Talbot, 2003; Prisoners Education Trust, 2009). Others include multiple stakeholders and policy (for example, Bayliss, 2003; Bracken, 2011; Czerniawski, 2016; Schuller, 2009; Simonot and McDonald, 2010; PET 2016, 2017; PLA, 2013; 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2017; 2017a). Particularly useful to this thesis are academic studies about frontline practitioners and their professionalism (Behan, 2007; Bhatti, 2010; Jeanes et al., 2009; Nahmed-Williams, 2011; Rogers et al, 2014; Wilson and Reuss, 2000) and a smaller (non-OLASS) number written as autobiographical accounts of a prison educator/researcher (Reuss, 2000; Irwin, 2008). Irwin’s (2008) research, based on practice, is of particular interest because whilst her teaching techniques were not particularly creative, she sought out creative ways in which to practice despite restrictions within the regime. The context differs, for example being in Northern Ireland, outside OLASS and in a maximum-security prison, where employment or further study outside prison was not so immediate for most prisoners. Therefore, as the focus narrows, no direct comparison of the experience presented in this thesis has emerged from published material. Notwithstanding the growing body of ‘arts in prisons’ literature, which is almost exclusively non-OLASS, OLASS educator activity mostly remains within practitioners’ own personal experiences, away from public scrutiny and academic debate.

Here, we enter a (somewhat secret) world of extremely important work, yet it is mostly unknown within the general population, often highly criticised by those that don’t do it (and some of us that do), under-researched, undervalued and under paid (Rogers et al., 2014, p.4). In this world of prison education, some new recruits leave within days or even hours, unable to cope with austere prison surroundings and the regime. Others seem to settle with little fuss. Colleagues with many years’ experience predict such outcomes with a remarkable degree of accuracy, although what characteristics or aptitudes makes for a ‘stayer’ and how such a ‘breed’ can be predicted, remains a puzzle.

If being a prison educator necessitates particular characteristics or aptitudes then Ghazala Bhatti’s (2010) research suggests that prison educators are in some way ‘suited’ to the work and circumstances. Bhatti (2010) draws on Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s (1991) theory of
legitimate peripheral participation through experience and relates this to both prisoners and teachers. Bhatti (2010) argues that both feel equally marginalized ‘against a culture of acquiescence and unquestioning obedience demanded by both the prison regime outside the education classes’ and also when compared to mainstream adult education (p.31). For example, during in-depth interviews, one teacher talked about an employer-led bi-annual get-together with other (mainstream) adult educators, where neither party showed any interest in mixing. Moreover, within the teaching profession, being a prison educator does not simply mean a lower status; it can involve being associated with a kind of professional underworld. For example, Bhatti (2010) explains how a group of people disappeared at a Christmas party after discovering their occupation as if they had ‘an infectious disease’ and another whose neighbours moved to a new house in case released prisoners tracked her down (p.32).

This section continues by presenting some indication of who (on earth) does this work, why and what are the main challenges and rewards. Finally, I consider some implications of a research role for the prison educator and Cormac Behan’s (2010) call for radical resistance against hegemonic forces. Rogers et al. (2014) conducted research based on 278 questionnaire responses to over 1300 University and College Union (UCU) members working in prison education across England to learn more about them and their professional insights, professionalism and practice. In terms of motivation, they declared:

The intentions and aspirations of the prison education workforce coincided with what one would hope for in terms of professional ethos in such a complex sector. The workforce was skilled, committed and experienced. The data gathered, however, revealed that the contractual, physical and emotional context within which these teachers work went very little way towards recognizing their professionalism (p.21).

Rogers et al. (2014) employed some demographical information to describe prison educators as a ‘highly qualified group of practitioners with 97.1% possessing a qualification at level 4 or above and/or a teaching qualification’ (p.3). The most common teaching qualification was the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) at 39.4%, whilst 33.6% held the
Certificate in Education (Cert Ed). These figures compared favourably with the latest available from (post 16) Further Education (FE) at 24.2% and 23.9% respectively (p.18). Many prison educators move from careers such as administration, the arts, counselling and business management, but 80% have worked in other educational establishments. As many as 20% have worked in prisons for 12 years, but less than 10% worked as prison educators for 16 years and 10% declared a disability. The gender profile in the study consisted of approximately two thirds female, mostly of white British origin, with slightly more black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds than FE. Otherwise, this profile is generally in line with FE. The working age of prison educators tends to be older than comparable roles in FE (Ibid.). One reason for this could be the number of prison educators on part-time and sessional contracts, including what Nahmed-Williams (2011) describes as ‘late-career down shifters’ (p.172). Rogers et al. (2014) reported that prison educators are more motivated as a workforce than in mainstream FE or other Adult Education, driven to teaching in a prison to ‘make a difference’ and improve the life chances of prisoners, whom they perceive as having been failed by a ‘mainstream’ education system that often decries their (prison) practice (p.4). However, Nahmed-Williams (2011) suggests that instead of a conscious career decision, as made by most schoolteachers, many prison educator’s drift into a career ‘by accident’ (p.160). From my own experience over thirteen years, I cannot recall a new teacher recruit that planned to do so from school, but this might say more about attitudes to prison education as a career option in schools, than their pupils’ aspirations.

Questionnaire responses from prison educators showed that 49% made a deliberate choice to join prison education and 50.6% did not, but further analysis revealed a figure closer to 71% based on responding to advertisements and enquiries that were not included in questionnaires. A far smaller group of 16% had been encouraged by others to teach in prison. The smallest, but nevertheless identifiable, group (8%) had been introduced to teaching in prison as part of their initial teacher education (p.20).

In terms of workload and reward through pay, Rogers et al. (2014) found that over 44% of respondents were involved in up to five hours unpaid
work each week, 34.7% between six and ten and 7.4% working eleven or more hours. In terms of pay, ‘The modal salary for FE staff was noticeably higher than for prison education staff’, in prisons the modal salary was £23-28,000 and in FE £38-43,000 (p.22). Bayliss (2003) demonstrates the degree to which prison educators have been ‘overlooked’ by reporting that, at the time of his publication, ‘in the latest teachers’ pay initiative, the thousands of prison education staff were omitted initially, because they had been ‘forgotten’ by civil servants’ (p.1).

Bhatti (2010) describes how prison educators see themselves as different and excluded, as an ‘enduring marginality’ within the teaching profession (p.33), but also describing such marginality within the prison itself, citing one teacher’s frustration at serving ‘two masters’ (Ibid.), one being an employer (education provider), another the host (prison). Nahmed-Williams (2011) discovered similar managerial divergences and cultural conflicts when interviewing an education provider that declared ‘Custody is disempowering; education is empowering’ (Ibid. p.149), which Nahmed-Williams asserts is one specific distinction between education in prisons and education in other contexts. Moreover:

There is often a struggle because these are in direct contradiction with teaching values. There is a tension in the prison mission statement. The first paragraph is about locking up but the second paragraph is about empowering (Ibid.).

Perhaps this situation explains an additional finding that ‘Teachers’ identities as teachers were related to the prisoners’ identities as learners so that the two were mutually tied together in a reciprocal relationship’ (p.32). Although one teacher went so far as to declare ‘In a strange kind of way I became a bit like them’ (Ibid.), the degree of professional distance has to be negotiated in ways that encourage engagement with learning and pro-social interaction, but not through the exchange of seemingly insignificant personal details such as the car one drives, marital status, family information, holiday stories and so forth (p.34). The advice I was given when completing my initial induction in a prison was to either say: ‘I cannot comment’ or ‘just make it up’.
As there are too few published accounts of prison education from the frontline, at this point I am going to deviate a little from the conventions of reporting in a literature review. Therefore, what follows is intended to present material from experience absent from the literature, which cuts to the heart of practice in this autoethnographic thesis that might be used to inform learning from this context for the reader less familiar with these circumstances.

There was more than a hint of wry humour contained in the advice I was given at my induction (above), expressed by the way I left this sentence ‘hanging’ for the reader. For the uninitiated reader it cannot replace experience, but represents an essential duality of humour in a place where so much misery exists. Here are some often overlooked lessons, firmly rooted in the scholarly material, but in need of some cultivation. Humour often means the difference between settling into the prison context, yet is much more than being funny – although this can help if handled carefully. Juggling with humour is rarely covered in teacher-training manuals and, indeed, must be difficult to ‘teach’. As a prison educator, I have never tried to teach humour or have knowingly been taught. Some of the best prison educators I know have an inherent propensity for it, whilst for others, it is a vital skill honed ‘on the job’. I am already being over simplistic because there is more than one type of humour to juggle. For example, humour is useful when dealing with management and other authorities, which also demands a sub-section differentiating between, say, a line manager in education and the prison Head of Security. However, more directly related to teaching and learning is one’s effectiveness with humour when working with prisoners (see Bhatti, 2010 p.34; Rogers et al., 2014 p.29; Nahmed-Williams, 2011 p.228, 232, 272). Developing humour as a technique is a crucial component of what is termed ‘jail-craft’, but for many prison educators is a vital component of their creative teaching practice. It can avoid conflict in a context where mistakes have the potential for catastrophic circumstances.

For example, the lesson couched in wry humour used above, as a veiled warning by colleagues on my induction, was about the seriousness of ‘conditioning’ that often begins with ‘grooming’. Grooming can take different forms, sometimes disguised by prisoners acting ‘like children in class’
(Bhatti, 2010 p.35), or at other times through any kind of subtle vulnerability. In both cases, a chink in the armour of the prison educator can be exploited. Grooming represents a potentially dangerous crossover from a professional to a personal relationship of which prison education has its own particular boundaries. As one teacher explained to Nahmed-Williams (2011), for prisoners, ‘Being in prison is a loss of all control. Manipulating teachers is one way they feel they can get some sort of control back’ (p.212). Whilst manipulation might begin with prisoners appearing aggressive, trying to bully the teacher (Ibid.), it involves coercing a teacher into the smallest of favours, such as providing extra sheets of paper for writing home. Such ‘favours’ might appear infinitesimal, perhaps a subtle disclosure or additional help and support for a particular individual is all it takes. Once this (usually normal - indeed laudable - practice) is normalised and developed, grooming can turn to conditioning. Just because a prisoner struggles to spell, does not mean he or she has not the wiles to know the favour is unauthorised and not what the authorities deem to be directly educational. From the earliest deception, a prisoner has a bargaining chip, raising the stakes and gradually ‘reeling-in’ the unsuspecting victim, until the realisation of ‘a line crossed’ is too late. A typical ultimatum being, ‘You’ve done ‘x’ for me, although it was against the rules, so now I need ‘y’ if you want to keep paying your mortgage’. The choice for the prison educator at this point is to declare their position to the Security Department, with the likelihood of exclusion, termination of employment and family turmoil, or succumb to the prisoner’s demands.

There are too many instances in which the safety of all those in prison is compromised by the simple giving of a sheet of writing paper leading to staff smuggling drugs, mobile phones, weapons and even guns into the prison. Once allowed to go this far and found out, the likely consequence for anyone would be a prison sentence, depending upon the particular seriousness. It happens all too often; prisoners have lots of time to devise their plot and prison educators are (mostly) busy people (Rogers et al., 2014, p.4). Prisoner students consist of convicted rapists, paedophiles, terrorists, murderers, burglars, arsonists, fraudsters and so forth. They are in circumstances where some will do whatever is necessary to continue their lifestyle, garner ‘comforts’ or raise their status amongst other prisoners.
Each prison has its own procedures for monitoring influences that could increase staff vulnerability. For example, anyone preparing to work inside prisons has to undergo a series of checks before access is allowed. Once cleared, they are subject to unannounced searching and there is a responsibility to declare any new personal circumstances as they arise. Convictions or police warnings should be declared without delay. Each year, a ‘conflict of interest’ declaration should include any convictions or police warnings issued to oneself or close family, any work with other organisations or involvement with certain political or campaigning groups. Anyone experiencing money problems is expected to declare details to the governor and/or security department; the risk being that they are vulnerable to accepting bribes from prisoners. Therefore, prison educators’ survival skills necessitate a relentless interplay amid the process of learning to negotiate the prison’s regime and rules, whilst satisfying the requirements of their employer, the education provider. I have argued that to create the circumstances for learning prisoners should feel safe, yet to avoid grooming and conditioning a prison educator’s guard should never be lowered. They too need to be the social actor, ‘front stage’, relaxed and friendly, whilst covertly playing ‘the suspicious detective’ ‘backstage’ (Goffman, 1990 p.114), whereby there is no such thing as a ‘friend’.

Having presented scenes from my personal experience as an extension to the literature, underpinned by the existing published material, I now turn to Rogers et al. (2014) that posed the notion to prison educators that they might have a fulfilling career. It was dismissed by a third of those surveyed and half said that they were likely to look for a new job in the next twelve months. The main factors reported were, a lack of job security due to contractual arrangements, workload, salary in comparison to FE, frustration with security, lack of technology, insufficient resources, lack of access to prisoners’ past education records, lack of assistance for learners with disabilities, bullying from managers and a high turnover of prisoners (pp. 4-5). Rogers et al. (2014) also states that, ‘Most respondents indicated that their role was different from that of colleagues working in a college or university and that prison education presented greater challenges for which they would appreciate recognition as a specialist group’ (p.5).
Other contributory factors in the classroom include teaching sessions lasting three and a half hours without a break and a high proportion of prisoners with serious mental health problems. In some education departments, teachers are locked in with prisoners. There is no Internet access in classrooms and limited access for staff outside classrooms. Moreover, any resources brought from outside prison need to be cleared by the Security Department, which can be a lengthy process, sometimes up to three months for an answer and at the end of that time, access can be denied. Finally, there are limited routes for career progression (Nahmed-Williams, 2011 pp.146-147) and the academic year consists of fifty weeks without term-time where learners are not present. All marking of students’ work is restricted to being on-site for security reasons and unannounced closures due to security/regime issues hinder planning and progress.

Similarly, there are other issues instigated away from the classroom for prisoners that impact on the educational experience for all, which are rarely encountered in mainstream adult education. For example, many prisoners share and eat in a tiny cell where the toilet has no screen or toilet lid. They are often many miles away from their families and friends, vulnerable to bullying, debt and drugs. There are few places to hide. Making a formal complaint is seen as ‘grassing’ and not a safe option. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it condone criminal behaviour or being a ‘con-lover’ as Ruess (2000, p.47) defended in her appraisal of such circumstances. Instead, if we think about mainstream education settings and what might happen to notions of success if learners (and teachers) in those settings were in the circumstances described, it becomes clear that shoehorning prison education into mainstream FE / adult education is unrealistic. As Julia Jeanes et al. (2009) argue from their research using interviews and case studies of eight London prisons to explore the impact of the prison on teaching staff, prison education is:

…fundamentally affected by the custodial requirements of the British Legal system. This, together with the relative isolation that teaching staff face within an organisational culture which is peculiar to each prison, produces a learning culture that is very different from that of general Further Education (Ibid. p.1).
Therefore, prison education practice is compromised when aligned with mainstream education. This is not a justification for ‘lower’ standards, quite the opposite. It is a case for different circumstances and measures of success. The argument’s basic principles are in accord with many of the exemplary initiatives presented in this chapter that were constrained by their subjection. Perhaps the circumstances described above explain the findings of Rogers et al. (2014) that describe a:

…workforce whose terms of employment have become increasingly casualised, who are given very little recognition of their experience and little opportunity to use their judgment independently, and whose views are not consulted by those who manage them (p.4).

One possible explanation for tensions between prison educators and prison education management could be due to prison educators being promoted to management roles with little or no management training and relevant experience. In such cases it is not unusual to witness an affable teacher playing a management role based on how they have been managed. This is particularly troubling because in the prison context, it is essential that prison educators’ emotional wellbeing is managed. For example, Bhatti (2010) reports prison educator’s dedication to students that defy these complex circumstances. This was described as a ‘sense of loss’ of which ‘experiences had to be encountered at first hand’ (p.35). For example, one teacher described their feelings when, as so frequently happens, a prisoner making tremendous progress in class through careful nurturing by a teacher, then:

The hardest part is that one day suddenly you go in and the prisoner you have been working with for two years has disappeared. He has been moved to another secure prison, and you didn’t even know it, and you could not even say goodbye. That does feel bad. It feels awful, but there is nothing, absolutely nothing that you as an individual can do about it. And you know that you will never know what became of him. Did he stay out? Did he end up in another prison? (Ibid.).

Such circumstances have been described as an ‘emotional load’ by
Jeanes et al. (2009 p.3) (see also Bhatti, 2010; Rogers et al., 2014; Nahmed-Williams, 2011). These circumstances demand a constant vigilance for prison rules and prisoners’ tricks, whilst caring professionally for (mostly) transient learners. The consequences of these circumstances can weigh heavily on many prison educators. They have virtually no authority to change the fundamental circumstances in which they work and yet producing evidence to support any change through research is severely restricted and strictly controlled (see, for example, Nahmed Williams, 2011; Liebling, 1999). Of the few published accounts of insider prison educator/researchers, the additional emotional demands feature strongly, such as Julia Jewkes (2012) argument that the emotional investment required of ethnographic fieldworkers in such contexts ‘are felt more keenly than most’ (p.63).

Amongst such circumstances, the extra dimension of planning creative strategies and activities can be a daunting prospect.

Anne Reuss’ (2000) research, which pre-dates OLASS, provides an example of an education practitioner/researcher’s experience in a maximum-security prison incarcerating adult males. She goes some way to defending her methodological position by defining a ‘research insider’ as people that spend ‘four days per week working alongside the same group of prisoners over a number of years’ (p.26) as opposed to ‘academic tourists who visit prisons for a very short period of time’ (Ibid.). However, implied within her statement is the importance of research on the ground in order to fully appreciate the prison educator’s role. In Reuss’ (2000) case, she began teaching and researching in a prison simultaneously. Her aim was to understand any rehabilitative impact on students studying sociology and social policy at undergraduate level. At this level, and in the high security estate in which she taught and researched, the classroom tends to be comparatively ‘stable’. For example, outward expressions of anti-social behavior tend to be fewer compared with lower academic levels and prisons where the number of prisoners both arriving and leaving (churn) is much higher. Nevertheless, Reuss (2000) described how diplomacy and tact were crucial tools for managing tensions both inside and outside the classroom. For example, when listening to prisoners’ stories of ‘screws’ and, alternatively, when one prison officer referred to prisoners as ‘the dangerous
garbage of society’ (p.32). These exchanges are not necessarily restricted to prisoners and officers, as she pointed out, ‘The prejudices, hostilities, tensions and stigmatizations which exist between groups and individuals have become the fabric of the prison itself and as such are definitive of it’ (Ibid.). Therefore, the decision to undertake research in prisons as an insider-educator/researcher is not one to be taken lightly.

Tracy Irwin’s (2008) ethnographic research as an insider-educator/researcher took place over six years in a high security prison for adult male prisoners in Northern Ireland. Through her teaching practice, she adopted a more liberal position than Reuss (2000) in a belief that learners cannot be ‘forced’ to learn and should instead be guided to set their own goals and tasks within a context of social and informal learning. Irwin’s (2008) intention was as a corrective to the prevailing idea amongst regulatory organizations that qualifications gained in the quickest time is equivalent to genuine and sustainable learning and progress. She provided learners with tea and biscuits, allowed them to bring their own reading material, write their own documents (such as letters to girlfriends and solicitors), sit and ‘chat’ with a view to developing pro-social conversation and have ‘uncensored’ access to computers (pp.6-9). Irwin (2008) describes being criticized (mostly by prison officers) for her teaching methods; her classes being considered as places that attract prisoners to plot and pass drugs. Irwin’s counter argument was that social capital laid down the foundations for ‘trust and relationships so vital for the development of a learning culture or learning community within the prison’ (pp.9-10). No serious ethical or professional consequences were reported in Irwin’s (2008) research, but her approach promoting literal ‘freedoms’ (in contrast to being ‘free’ to explore new worlds through fiction, imagination and theatre as described earlier in this chapter) was a professional risk. One security mistake could mean exclusion and prevent any further research of a similar nature by anyone else for a long time.

Finally, Cormac Behan’s (2007) intersection between the creative and radical suggests that prison educators might transform their practice from the inside. He calls for prison educators to ‘distinguish themselves from current penal policy and avoid the concepts and concerns of those who may
have a different agenda and ethos’ (p.158). He goes on to assert that ‘There is so much outside the control of teachers and students that can impinge on our educational space’ (Behan, 2007 p.159) that measuring the success of teachers on recidivism rates makes no sense, just as its complexity cannot be ‘reduced to targets and business plans (p.161). Instead, Behan suggests that ‘Educators must open up a debate about how success is defined in a correctional setting’ (p.161). Such a confident position must surely involve providing alternative principles of practice and a language capable of challenging the fundamental culture of which it resists. Similarly, given the virtually unvoiced and powerless status of the frontline prison educator, such an initiative might involve creating a ‘safe’ platform with help from, say, unions and/or prison education campaign groups. If, as Behan (2007) suggests, prison educators are to find the ‘courage to challenge their practice and try to move away from traditional pedagogy and taken for granted routines’ (p.165), they should recognise the enormity of the challenge ahead to make even the smallest of gains. Creativity and innovation are words spoken by policymakers and recycled in the hyperbole of those in the middle. It is only those on the ground that can really experience genuine change amongst prisoners, yet it is those away from the ground that have the power to either demonstrate their own courage and integrity or protect the status quo and their own position. For the most part, prisons (and many of their partner organisations) employ a protectionist position, but should that position change then Behan’s (2007) somewhat revolutionary suggestions for bringing about change would need careful handling.

As this chapter comes to a close, allowing us to climb down from the metaphorical revolutionary barricade for a moment, it is time to consider what findings have emerged from the literature and what they might mean for this thesis. The most significant finding relates to the barriers that stand in the way of meaningful and creative education work and training in prison. At a macro level, perpetual policy and contractual change makes long-term ventures increasingly vulnerable, whilst half-way to the ground impression management, marketization, reductive approaches and the marginalisation of frontline workers, means that navigating such complexity and
contradictions can be overwhelming. The consensus of those publishing their creative exploits in prisons was that interventions could not reach their potential whilst prisons remain as they are. This reinforces a second salient point that the criminal justice system tends to favour the status quo over any reputational risk caused through actively engaging in creativity and innovation. Therefore, the odds are weighed heavily against the entrepreneurial practitioner/researcher with an aspiration to improve their practice or conduct research outside the parameters of institutional objectives.
Performing purposeful activity in prison: getting real with the façade

Abstract

In 2008, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons reported that only half the number of prisoners felt that education would help them on release and even fewer (42%) felt they had gained useful vocational skills (Prison Reform Trust, 2011 p.54). This article explores such capricious relationships between policy, prison, education, work and training in a mid-risk category prison incarcerating adult males. It is based on a small-scale qualitative research project, using observation and semi-structured interviews to explore the complex relationship between prison educators or trainers, prisoners, and the institutional practices they encounter and construct. The research project investigated a heavy-industry production workshop offering accredited training, a vocational training construction workshop delivering qualifications, a contract workshop (assembly and packing), and an education/training studio addressing ‘soft’ employability skills through an accredited drama/theatre programme. Drawing on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, I argue that there are multiple veils that constitute the notion of effective ‘performance’ of learning and work. On one hand, a business model of performance creates ‘unspoken’ ways of presenting and accepting ‘successful’ performance data. On the other, workshop settings often contain the props of industry such as grease and dirt (production workshop), others present themselves as preparing prisoners for a craft (vocational training) or for more generic work opportunities via the reconstruction of a factory production line (contract assembly/packing) which can ‘disguise’ evidence of the work that does not always really happen. However, the intensity of work was most evident in the drama-based activity, where those in charge described team-teach and intuitive techniques for the management of prisoners whilst challenging prisoners’ employability skills. Nevertheless, in each case social actors played along, developing alternative scripts of their ‘purposeful activity’ as coping strategies in the face of an unaccommodating prison setting that, on the whole, did not accommodate their needs. In conclusion, I argue that prison education, work and training as ‘purposeful activity’ can play a duplicitous role whereby its ‘performance’ for (the purpose of) reducing reoffending, is not necessarily a rehearsal for either employment or desistance.

Key words: agency, aptitude, desistance, employability, performance, place, policy, practice, prison and purposeful activity.

Places of work and vocational training in prisons have been critiqued as not representing a realistic working environment (Simon, 1999; McEvoy, 2008) and prisoners’ histories consistently reveal they are likely to have poor
employment, training, and education levels (Prison Reform Trust, 2012; Bushway, 2003; Simon, 1999). Therefore, it does not necessarily follow that the acquisition of costly accredited qualifications will lead to employment or contribute to reducing reoffending in the economic equation that reductionist policy often claims. Kristofer B Bucklen & Gary Zajac (2009) found that a major challenge for many prisoners’ reintegration with society was not necessarily getting a job (as difficult as that might be), but rather anti-social attitudes, unrealistic expectations and poor coping strategies. As Edward J Latessa (2011) argues, ‘Work is much more than getting someone a job – it involves how work is viewed, the satisfaction one derives from work, how one gets along with co-workers and supervisors, and other work related aspects linked to attitudes and skills’ (p.2). So, is employment important? Of course it is, ‘but that does not mean that employment programs will lead to significant reductions in recidivism unless we go beyond simply getting them a job’ (Latessa, 2012 p.89).

Many policymakers neglect such ideas, instead prioritising particular work experiences, technical skills and hard qualifications over developing ‘soft’ employability skills such as communication, tolerance, team-working, good manners, ‘self discipline and perseverance, without which learning of any kind is impossible’ (Bhatti, 2010 p.7). There is a lack of compatibility between the perspectives of many policymakers, institutional aims, and prisoners’ motivation that are challenging to navigate for those responsible for delivery on the ground. In a prison context, there is a seemingly inexhaustible list of additional institutional constraints that impact significantly on engagement and motivation. For example, conflict on the wing or limitations to a prisoner’s purposeful activity, enforced as a mechanism of discipline. According to Stephen Duguid and Ray Pawson’s (1998) study of education over twenty-years in Canadian prisons, the most important factor for educational progress and personal development is not dependent upon the curricula offer (see also Duguid, 1998a). Neither is it dependent upon qualification success rates as much as the creation of a space different to the prison, learner choice and democratic professional practice. Prisons in England and Wales are increasingly more crowded, dangerous and under-resourced (Prison Reform Trust, 2012). Therefore,
fashioning such spaces increases the emphasis on frontline supervisors to be creative and attentive to detail in order to satisfy competing definitions of success. This paper presents the results of a small-scale project exploring the extent to which circumstances are conducive to effective work, education and training. Carrying out interviews and observation in four contrasting training environments, the research found that stakeholders play to different agendas that manifest themselves as a series of performances and practices. It also revealed a number of problematic assumptions in prison education and training policy. Ironically, of the four settings, only in the drama activity where theatrical performance was an intended outcome did the intensity of prisoners’ training increase through the session. Uncomfortable moments of pressure were managed by a dual-teaching strategy involving attention to detail and minute-by-minute adaptation that both teachers described as ‘intuitive’. This setting appeared the most industrious and promising as regards the promotion and training of employability skills and aptitudes.

**Contextualising training in policy and theory**

In 2008, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) reported that only half the number of prisoners felt that education would help them on release and even fewer (42%) felt they had gained useful vocational skills (Prison Reform Trust, 2011, p.54). Against this backdrop, the average annual prison population in England and Wales rose from 44,975 in 1990 to 87,531 in March 2012 (Berman, 2012). Spending on offender learning increased from £57m in 2001-02 to £151m in 2005-06 (Crown, 2005, p.6). This brings into question the effectiveness of work and learning in prisons, in particular with reference to its effectiveness for the use of public funds.

These circumstances and the on-going impact of the economic crash of 2007/08 formed the basis of the coalition government’s rationale for wide-sweeping policy change, ‘breaking the cycle’ of crime through market competition for ‘working prisons’ that would herald a ‘rehabilitation revolution’ (MoJ, 2010) by the enforcement of hard work and acquisition of ‘skills for rehabilitation’ (MoJ, 2010; BIS, 2011). At a surface level, these assertions
might be underpinned by well-meaning utilitarian intentions, but they assume that prisoners will comply, those managing them will cope, and that increased competition between the public and private sectors will replace underperformers in ways that will inevitably ‘produce’ desistance, measured and rewarded with ‘payment by results’ (MoJ, 2010; BIS, 2011).

However, attempts to discover if education ‘works’, skills training ‘works’, work ‘works’, or that prison itself ‘works’ have not proved convincing and are unlikely to do so on their own. As Shadd Maruna argues, one factor alone cannot provide a solution to the complex problems involved (Maruna, 2012). The term ‘work’ has been interpreted in numerous ways, but criminologists commonly refer to an intervention, course, treatment, method, approach or punishment that, in itself, causes a reduction in reoffending, which has been termed: ‘What Works?’ The issue of causation in this context has been the subject of much disagreement (McGuire, 1995; Brayford et al., 2010). Furthermore, Maruna (2012) proposes that, ‘Surely, it is time to retire this ‘what works’ phrase once and for all and to agree that the word “works” does not “work” when talking about human lives’ (p.76). The ‘What Works?’ approach has tended to neglect the human complexities and instability by putting the intervention centre stage and, therefore, restricting the possibilities for ‘broader parameters than simply counting the number of people that show up or those who recidivate’ (Pollock et al., 2012). The implication, here, is that the circumstances are too complex for any single approach to accommodate, or that policymakers often imply.

Therefore, I argue it is important to be receptive to alternatives such as the ‘desistance’ approach, which has increasingly come to prominence in discussions of rehabilitation and reoffending. It promotes the view that moving out of a life involving criminal offending ‘is not an event, it is a process; a process of ‘to-ing’ and fro-ing’, of progress and set back, hope and despair’ (McNeill et al., 2011 p.4). Rather than placing the responsibility of reducing reoffending on a particular activity, ‘desistance-based perspectives stress the process of change exists before and beyond the intervention’ (McNeill, et al., 2011 pp.7-8). Moreover, ‘simply’ teaching technical skills or providing prisoners with a job does little to improve their employability (Bushway & Apel, 2012), rather employment success is more
likely if attitudes about work change providing the circumstances in which to
develop the necessary skills (Latessa, 2012). In this research, I closely
observe what is happening in the education, work and training environments,
in order to try to understand this to-ing and fro-ing and interactions between
learner and trainer in these different contexts.

The research methodology

The research explored the perspectives, professional practice and
activities in four education, work and training settings between May and
October 2012 in one prison. The purpose was to explore the interplay
between participants on the ground and the relationship between their
practices with institutional expectations against a backdrop of policy in
diverse settings. Qualitative methods were chosen because of their
established and widely recognised ability to explore the complex nature of
human subjects and their relationship with the institutions they encounter
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

The particular methods and analysis used were:

- Participant observation and a field research journal to capture informal
- Semi-structured interviews (approximately 45 minutes each) to record
  the perceptions of prisoners and staff supervising them in the four
  work and training settings.
- The data was subject to preliminary and primary analysis, using
  category and concept foundation, generation of theory and
  comparative analysis (Hammersley et al., 2001 pp.68-72).

Many of the prisoners declined taking part in interviews, so the prisoner
perceptions recorded are from those that self-selected. However, the sample
for a project of this size was not intended to be representative and accepts
the likelihood of bias. Moreover, the author was a member of the performing
arts department team and it is not possible to rule out any influence of this role whilst reporting the research. The project size also limited the choice of settings to four. These represent a wider range of work and training environments available to prisoners at the research site. The data was restricted by one-off, ‘snapshot’ observations and interviews.

The descriptions of settings which follow and the use of ‘R’ (respondent) followed by a number to represent a particular interview, is intended to identify both research setting and participants for research purposes, yet protect their anonymity. The prison managed Setting 1 and 3, whilst 2 and 4 were the education provider’s responsibility.

**Setting (1)** Production Workshop: managed by three supervisors involved in semi-skilled activity, making products for the Prison Service and external organisations whilst delivering National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) to a small selection (three of fifteen) prison workers. NVQs are work-based qualifications assessed in the workplace.

**Setting (2)** Vocational Training Workshop: related to the construction trades, in which one trainer was supervising eight prisoners.

**Setting (3)** Assembly Contract Workshop: low-skilled, repetitive tasks associated with assembly of components, with twelve prisoners supervised by one instructor. The prison has a commercial arrangement with an external organisation, which involves meeting production targets.

**Setting (4)** A Performing Arts Department (PAD): using drama-based methods to develop employability and social skills with an aim of performing in front of an audience of prisoners and staff. In total, two practitioners delivered the session, supervising nine prisoners. These practitioners were two from a team of three – of which I was the third, although not involved in the delivery of this session.

In total, thirty-seven prisoners and eight staff were observed; eight prisoners and eight members of staff were interviewed.
Setting 1: Production Workshop (semi-skilled) and NVQ qualification.

The workshop, an area approximately the size of two tennis courts, played host to noises of practical work. Something sounding like an air compressor started, then stopped. Materials were being processed and to one side pungent smoke wafted out from areas separated for particular tasks. Across the room, three prisoners were operating two pieces of machinery bigger than the size of two table-tennis tables and a few metres away see-through ‘teaching pods’, intended for English and maths support by specialist tutors stood empty. As prisoners went about their tasks, two instructors visited small groups and individuals to offer advice and training.

I could smell tobacco smoke from the direction of the prisoners’ toilets and in the middle of the workshop, two prisoners sat reading the paper, another two were playing cards, whilst one sat gazing into space. They were still in the same place when I left after two hours. At the end of the workshop, I could see a third instructor in a workshop office operating a computer, which is where the other instructors directed me for the interview I had arranged with them.

Despite instructor R8 predicting that between only 15-20% of prisoners attending were genuinely interested in related employment on release, he added, ‘They don’t work hard like we have to, but we don’t patronise, give negative write-ups or nickings, unless there’s no alternative, because they just don’t work either’. A ‘write-up’ is a report that can be recorded on a network available to relevant people within the criminal justice system and a ‘nicking’ is otherwise called a ‘Governor’s Report’ in which a prisoner has to answer to accusations made by a member of staff in a formal adjudication. The prisoner can appeal, but disciplinary measures are often imposed if upheld, which might have a serious impact on any possibilities for early release or category re-classification.

R8 suggested that, ‘In other workshops instructors behave as officers’. At that moment, two colleagues passed through the office, one adding in a joking tone ‘We are in tune’ and another saying, ‘Hey, do you remember IMB visiting and saying there is a different atmosphere in here?’ IMB is an acronym for ‘Independent Monitoring Board’, a voluntary but regulatory
group, based in prison intended to promote fair practices. The instructors’ tones, although humorous, expressed an underlying serious point about judging mood. When probed for further details, all three simultaneously became occupied with paperwork or a computer screen and were reluctant to elaborate. In doing so, their performance in the interview appeared to present a persona of ‘the craftsman’, having spent considerable time in industry using precise measurements and technical skills. However, in conversation and on the workshop floor, they were observed to apply a flexible team approach that was responsive to the nuanced shifts in tone and mood evident in happenings around them.

The prisoners I interviewed acknowledged the supportive practices claimed by the instructors. R10 said:

> You can talk to these, I don’t know if it’s because I’ve known them for a long time – I don’t know, I can talk to them – any of them and it makes it a bit easier, they’ll try and help. The instructors know what we want to do, just get on with our time, to keep busy so the days go quicker and don’t drag.

Alternatively, some prisoners described difficulties of being around other prisoners before meetings as prison panel decisions approached such as electronic tagging and re-categorisation. Maintaining employment in an activity they consider ‘low risk’ for getting in trouble was very important. R9 stated:

> The problem is, trouble spills off the wings and isn’t just about here. Some will try it on when you’re going out and that’s hard - if you’re seen as weak, you’ll be a target so you have to front it out, but that could mean being in here for another year or more.

Although ostensibly a flagship workshop, focused on developing skills and employment, the space seemed to be valued as much as a ‘sanctuary’ for prisoners as a vocational training area. If ‘time is the enemy’, as stated in Setting 3 (below), then it is more easily defeated whilst being occupied. Therefore, for the prisoners interviewed, the goal was not necessarily towards an employment or training route upon release. That box was merely ticked on the application form to give them access to training in that
particular workshop. Their aim was to find a setting where time passed quickly, enjoyably (or at least tolerably), not too hard and not too unsafe. This setting appeared to work quite smoothly in terms of being a reasonably ‘safe’ place, providing minor discretions in behaviour and the pace of work were kept in line with expected practices of all concerned. The part it played in preparation for employment upon release was much less certain.

**Setting 2: Vocational Training Workshop (craft/trade)**

This rectangular workshop was around a quarter size of a tennis court with a capacity for up to ten trainees. The trainer’s office, located by the external door was constructed from timber at the bottom-half, the upper-half being mostly Perspex. Next to this, an iron cage stored security sensitive materials used in the training and on the walls locked shadow-boards stored tools. The few windows had bars against them and were high up above head height, which meant that artificial lighting was used throughout the day.

The session had been underway for around twenty-minutes when I arrived. At one end of the room, a trainer stood over five men that sat at a table. Some exercise books and training manuals were lying around. I nodded as I entered and two prisoners nodded back, one prisoner said, ‘Where you from, Boss?’ ‘Education’, I replied, ‘Just here for a look round and a chat’. He was about to ask another question when I caught the trainer’s eye. ‘Good morning’, he said which almost drowned out the prisoner’s simultaneous next question, ‘Chat about what, Boss?’ ‘That depends upon your instructor’, I said with a friendly smile that, nevertheless, hinted at protocol. At the desk, two prisoners were writing and three were chatting, then, occasionally writing. These prisoner trainees were catching-up on their written component of the course, whilst three others worked independently on their practical tasks. The atmosphere was calm and noise levels much lower than Setting 1.

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1 A ‘shadow board’ is a secure, lockable cupboard with a glass front that shows a shadow of
The trainer (R11) described his delivery style as 'laid back'; occasionally instigating practical jokes, which he argued were rewarded by learners’ reciprocal efforts and compliance. He stated that, 'It makes it entertaining I suppose, you’ve got to have banter. It’s a whole different ball-game if you don’t – even if you don’t jump on them for every minor discourteous observation about the institution’, he said with a wry smile. The trainer recalled his first ever session in prisons and said:

I first went in with an attitude that I’ll rule with an iron fist – well, that lasted about a morning after the first nicking, and three or four had squared-up to me, I realised this isn’t the way forward and changed to a ‘you be decent with me and I’ll be decent with you’ approach.

As in Setting 1, trainer (R11) considered that approximately 15 - 20% of his learners were genuinely interested in some form of manual work, but stated that many became frustrated, lacking the self-discipline and perseverance needed to develop the necessary competencies. The trainer spoke using phrases such as ‘tuning-in’, echoing sentiments from Setting 1 & 4. Similarly, as with Setting 1, the trainer spoke about his role and strategy in supporting prisoners to develop an attitude of perseverance:

Sometimes I allow men to become frustrated and then return after a cup of tea. Choosing the ‘right’ time to back off allows space for review, reflection, face-saving and a return to the task. We all have to adhere to the technical tolerance of measurement for cutting materials, but I make exceptions when learners clearly know what they’re doing and it would have a detrimental effect on their confidence to re-do work.

I asked learner R13 why he thought people in prison had such different attitudes to work and he replied:

Some people like to be sat around all day, but me I’d prefer to be busy because time flies ... it’s because they’re like that out there – I’ve always worked since I was fifteen. Out there, they’re on the dole, sat about all day out there, so they’re not going to come to jail and work, are they? They just want to lie around all day, but to me that’s just boring. Time is the thing, time is what you want to kill - you need time to go as quickly as possible. But you have to be so careful not to get into trouble; on the
‘dark side’ anything can happen. I’ve worked so hard to get up here, if in trouble it takes three months to get back and more trouble means you’re never getting back. People say in prison it’s too easy, but it is harder this way because we have TV, the doors are unlocked – over there on the dark side, you’ve got nothing to lose ... taking drugs, fighting. Prison is full of bad people, carrots can be dangled, but if you’ve nothing to lose ... In this workshop, it feels like this trainer has got time. Caring is really, really important. Even if the guy doesn’t care, as long as they show an interest in you, it takes you a long way really.

The interviewee’s focus was concerned with so many factors that were not related to policy and management discourses of reducing reoffending through training and employment. The penal circumstances in which R13 negotiates are not driven by employability factors. Alternatively, this appears to be a situation where some prisoner trainees are playing a role of the ‘aspirational craftsman’ whilst the relevant authorities play along. For example, as prisoners pass qualifications, education providers, prisons and the authors of relevant policies declare them a success. However, in reality all too often, considering the respondents’ comments, it appears to be a ‘performance of success’. This concurs with the trainer’s assessment that at least 75-80% of prisoners attending do so because they have found a place of sanctuary in an otherwise wider hazardous environment.

**Setting 3: Low-skilled (assembly workshop)**

This setting was housed in a temporary rectangular building around twice the size of Setting 2. It was quite cold because the heating had to be turned off over the weekend and it took a long time to warm up. Next to this, an iron cage stored security sensitive materials used during training and on the walls locked shadow-boards stored tools securely. There were windows covering half the wall on one side of the room only. Metal lockers were stacked to one side outside the instructor’s office containing prisoners’ work equipment and long tables were laid out mimicking a production line. In a

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2 ‘Dark side’, in this sense, refers to basic wings where privileges are few. Being ‘sent back’ in this context refers to a disciplinary punishment for ‘enhanced’ prisoners being returned to ‘basic’ status, which stands for a minimum three months.
corner of the room, the toilets were located next to a sink and boiler for making drinks.

Prisoners were released from their residential areas at 08:15 and arrived sporadically up until 08:45. As prison workers arrived, they looked tired and uninterested, but reasonably relaxed. There was no discussion about aims or targets for the day, but everyone appeared to know what was expected of them as they changed into safety-boots and overalls. People were respectful and the atmosphere was calm as they took positions on the long tables ready to begin light assembly tasks. Soon after 08:45, work began at a pace that appeared at the discretion of each worker. The tasks were dependent on each other, but were conducted individually with little sense of a team effort or interaction. There was nothing to occupy prisoners other than the work itself and the usual chatter or ‘jail talk’ about who is doing what and so forth. Nobody laughed until production stopped just after 11:00, around forty-minutes before workers were sent back to their residential units for lunch.

The workers I spoke to appeared to accept the monotonous nature of the work and expressed a preference to this over more varied activity available in other settings. R5 said for him the workshop was, ‘boring but there’s plenty of work, not like most workshops. So, I can just come in here and ‘zone out’; once you have a label that’s it, so what’s the point? Time is the enemy’, but referring to others attending work he stated, ‘Lads prefer to get out of their cells and get paid as long as they can play cards and talk with their mates all day’. Therefore, ‘productivity’ in many prison workshops has its own meaning and does not usually match the higher levels of commercial practice outside prisons. For R5, there was no building of a work ethic in this workshop because there was not one to build; he already had one and, if anything, the workshop was a destructive force for him, even though the numbers attending could give the impression of a prison performing well.

When I spoke to R6, he was more explicit about the negative impact of the work, claiming:
I’m just being held in prison, not doing anything productive – just passing time. Actually, this is the worst kind of deterrent because I’d never do this kind of work ‘on the out’ now, even if I was offered a job.3

If the intention of this purposeful activity was to instil a work ethic in these two prisoner workers, their responses highlight how such intentions are not so straightforward. Both appeared to have ruled out this type of work from the possibilities they might consider upon release. As Dan Bloom (2006) argues ‘many people enter the criminal justice system hard to employ and leave it even harder to employ’ (p. 3). For these two interviewees, this setting was both a vehicle to pass time and a place of prison employment that paid them around £9 each week. For the prison, it generated income and contributed to purposeful activity targets. The prison workers stated that practising a work discipline or gaining skills was not a motivating factor for them, and that in common with those in Setting 1 and 2, they were motivated by simply getting through their time the best way they could.

The instructor’s style of supervision and demeanour was calm and helpful to the prison workers. This was acknowledged and appreciated. The instructor provided ‘comforts’ such as electric fans when it was warm, which both worker interviewees explained, ‘go a long way’ in the prison environment. The instructor described his style as, ‘treating people like human beings’ and ‘applying discipline where necessary’ or ‘moving prisoners on somewhere else if not performing’. In this respect, the instructor reported that there are a number of prisoners that simply move from one workshop to another because they do not ‘perform well’. This practice might reduce disruptive influences in workshops for a short while, but how far it contributes to the ‘rehabilitation revolution’ (MoJ, 2010) through work and skills development is less certain. Moreover, for those prisoners being moved-on or not attending there might be a cost; ‘not a monetary cost, but an opportunity cost, perhaps a psychic or emotional cost. Showing up on time and following the rules might be costly to a cynical person who possesses an oppositional view toward the legitimate world’ (Bushway and Apel 2012, p.35). Unmotivated prisoners being moved-on, appeared to be

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3 The term ‘on the out’ means ‘not in prison’
the instructor’s only strategy, raising concerns about the management of such prisoners. Nobody mentioned the word ‘hope’ and there was little indication of this in their responses that desistence approaches suggest is crucial for the formation of identities to support successful desistence (McNeill et al. 2011, p.4; Vaughan, 2006).

**Setting 4: The Performing Arts Department (PAD)**

The session I observed was delivered by two male teachers employed by the education provider, which is unusual in a prison setting because performing arts interventions are mostly delivered by external specialist organisations. The PAD was open all week and the course ran for three weeks. It started with up to twelve students in an air-conditioned, thinly carpeted studio, a room slightly bigger than a quarter tennis court. There was an adjacent office and a small store that doubled as a staff kitchenette. Approximately forty chairs used to seat audiences were stacked to one side of the studio and twelve more were placed in the centre of the room facing inwards in a circle. Otherwise, the room was empty with no posters or prisoners’ work on the walls. The teachers told me that the lack of material on the walls (in contrast to commonly accepted good practice in most classrooms) was to avoid distraction and create a ‘neutral space’ for imaginative exploration.

The session began with learners taking a place in the circle, with some suggesting the possibility of teachers cancelling because as one said: ‘We might as well go back to the wing - if there’s only seven of us - it’s not worth it’. Nevertheless, after a conversation designed as a starter activity, the possibility of not doing work was not mentioned again. Afterwards, the group were encouraged to leave their seats and were introduced to a competitive warm-up exercise similar to the children’s game of ‘What time is it Mr Wolf?’, known to many drama practitioners as ‘Grandma’s Keys’. During the activity, learners exhibited a range of emotions such as frustration, anger and celebration as well as the application of team-skills and problem-solving abilities that needed concentration, patience, tenacity and fair-play alongside the management of honest responses and disappointment. There was
laughter and banter throughout, but on a number of occasions some decided to sit out of the exercise temporarily claiming, ‘This is shit’ or ‘What’s the point?’ At the start of the exercise one learner walked away claiming, ‘It’s just a game, nothing to get excited about’, but now ‘on show’ and struggling with his task, ‘You’re all fucking cheats, you’re all cheating bastards’, then returned after a minute as the group continued.

Teachers described being aware of certain practical factors such as the time of day, or day in the week that could influence a group’s mood. They commented that the activity I observed would not have worked on a Monday morning due to the levels of lethargy generally being higher at the start of the week. They explained that many others factors were even more difficult to predict and could also disrupt the sessions. To manage these circumstances, they claimed to have developed ‘intuitive skills’ that involved being able to ‘tune-in’ on multiple levels. According to teacher R2, ‘There is no typical session; they are unpredictable on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute basis. The mood can turn on a sixpence’.

Recounting examples handled with varying degrees of success, teachers spoke of ‘picking-up’ on signs, sequences and rhythms, which were of crucial importance to them. During the session, the teachers were guided by a conventional lesson plan but contingencies for the unexpected were vital components of their ‘professional toolkit’. The teachers described the difficulties involved whilst managing the studio as a ‘safe’ place, whilst engaging in activities with uncertain consequences that provoked many prisoners’ frustrations. Here, their purpose was to create a fictional scenario for a theatrical performance that could become a site of practise for employability skills. When I questioned the teachers about describing their work to managers, governors and so forth, R20 replied, ‘Not everything can be explained in a report or an email, sometimes you just have to be there, in the moment. That’s the way it is with this stuff.’

Discussion

The research found that much of the negative effects of the prison environment could be mitigated by the caring actions and strategies of the
teachers responsible for prisoners’ well-being and training. For prisoners in the first three settings there was a sense that a successful social script relied upon all having some kind of ‘belief in the part one is playing’ (Goffman, 1990 p.28) no matter how fabricated. In different respects, this was evident in all four settings. In Setting 1, prisoner R9 explained how important it was that the instructors tried to help and took time to talk, and in Setting 2 prisoner R13 stated that someone showing they cared (even if they did not) was ‘really, really important’. In Setting 3 small comforts such as providing a fan in summer went ‘a long, long way’ according to prisoners. Alternatively, prisoners attending that were unable to settle into work were moved around various work and training sites by the instructor because of their disruptive and unproductive behaviour and its effects on other prison workers. This raises questions about spending from a limited budget if prisoners are not ready to work or if ‘providing them with a job’ (which they are not interested in keeping) ‘does little to improve their employability’ prospects (Bushway & Apel, 2012, p.27).

In Setting 4, the drama-based activity provided opportunities to focus on strategies employed by teachers to enhance prisoners’ employability skills and capacities. Laughter and banter throughout the session indicated a safer place had been created in which difficult work could take place. It differed to the other settings in that angry outbursts and inappropriate language were witnessed. However, in those other settings, tasks were mostly individual and less reliant on cooperation or overcoming challenging social situations. The pace was slower in Setting 1, 2 and 3. There was no noticeable element of competition, people experiencing a range of emotions or any immediate risk of learners feeling stupid or failing. A distinction in Setting 4 is that prisoners were engaged with the intense pressures of creating and performing an employability-related piece of theatre to an audience in three weeks. These challenging, perhaps even exposing circumstances in social situations, meant that employability-related social or soft skills were being tested. The teachers were practiced in creating circumstances to simulate stress that felt real, but needed to be sensitive to signs, sequences and rhythms during a warm-up team-building activity. This
demanded that they balance industrious productivity, challenge, intense training and care.

Alternatively, in Setting 2, the trainer made a case for a ‘laid back, steady pace’, which he argued was reciprocated by prisoners’ efforts. Nevertheless, this trainer demonstrated flexibility by allowing frustrated prisoners space ‘for review, reflection and face-saving’. In Setting 1, there was a surreptitious acknowledgement by instructors of being ‘in tune’ or creating a ‘different atmosphere’ but their space represented a work identity with trades rooted in traditionally masculine perceptions or identities. In some respects, this might provide a sanctuary, in itself, for all concerned in this context. Setting 2 appeared so easy-going that such regular checks for mood were hardly needed and in Setting 3 the low level of engagement was concomitant with high levels of boredom, which led to some interviewees expressing a reluctance to undertake such work ‘on the out’, even if it was their only option, of which there are few for ex-offenders.

**Conclusion**

This paper has challenged assumptions of prison policy-makers and providers about purposeful activity, providing an insight into the complex relationships between policy, practice and the importance of place and performance in prison education and training environments. It reveals how settings with a greater emotional challenge, pace or attention to detail were more uncertain and unpredictable, as prisoners were pushed out of their comfort zone. In turn, this required specific techniques by teachers to ensure task completion. Notably, the delivery techniques in Setting 4 were arguably more complex and demanding than in other settings, despite commonly held perceptions of ‘arts in prisons’ as being ‘soft’ activities. Alternatively, in Setting 2, purposeful activity did not appear to have any meaningful purpose in terms of developing skills or aptitudes for employment. Prisoners stated that being in a safe space within the prison (and to some extent choices and flexibility) were important factors that seemed to promote positive behaviour. Increasing the intensity and challenge of training was not the intention in all but Setting 4 and, in this case, techniques were used that do not appear in
policy documents or many training/educational manuals, but were considered necessary to counter the penal circumstances.

The contribution of these findings to reducing reoffending cannot be fully evaluated until further research is conducted to get under the surface of interventions and circumstances that can provide more productive circumstances for both prisoners and those responsible for supervising them. It is unlikely this will be fully explored without some element of open-minded trialing and exposure to calculated risk. In the first instance, this might need to involve the difficult issue of public image, if as this study indicates, the efficacy of interventions are compromised without sufficient safety and care for all participants.
Chapter 1. Performative writing as autoethnographic method: laying a blend of fiction and lived experience

The research report was formerly considered to be an accurate, realistic, and comprehensive portrayal of the lifeways of those who were studied, with an underlying rhetoric of persuasion as to the realism of the account. Today qualitative research reports are often considered to be partial – renderings done from within the standpoints of the life experience of the researcher. The “validity” of these accounts can be compared to that of novels and poetry – a pointing towards “truths” that are not literal; fiction may be employed as a means of illuminating interpretive points in a report (Erickson, 2011 p.54).

Laying a blend

In the chapter’s title, ‘laying a blend’ refers to an old industrial technique of preparing raw post and pre-consumer textile wastes before recycling (shredding or ‘pulling’) back to fibres or a semi-fibrous state; an activity from a previous professional endeavour I have been frequently reminded of whilst developing this research design. Different ingredients were layered in a block (or blend) on a workshop floor (think: making a trifle) to achieve the best mix for shade and quality before pulling out armfuls from tonnes of material in the ‘same’ ratio of ingredients by hand (like cutting a cake) and feeding it through a recycling machine (rag grinder). Getting the blend ‘right’ at this stage was crucial to its ‘reincarnation’ when ‘carded’ (think: ‘combed’) and spun back into a yarn. Getting it ‘wrong’ usually meant trouble all the way to cloth and into finished garments. Similarly, designing a methodology with a ratio of ingredients for exploring and analysing professional experience is crucial for its design all the way to a thesis offering a significant contribution to knowledge. I am still ‘spinning a yarn’ of sorts from lived experience as a prison educator, exploring creative ways in which to accommodate the somewhat disturbing idea of ‘recycling people’.

The task of this chapter is to present a qualitative methodology for meaning-making from experiences of turmoil associated with researching, designing and delivering creative education and training programmes in a prison. A key challenge of the research was to establish a methodology underpinned by an approach responsive to ethical considerations so that the
research did not need permission from people who were part of the lived professional experience that comprise the data for this thesis, whilst at the same time taking every reasonable precaution to protect the anonymity of all those involved. In response to this challenge, I employ a hybrid approach that brought together autoethnographic and arts-based research (ABR) methods. An additional important element of this hybrid approach is what I have described as ‘fictional performative writing’. I use this term to describe an approach to fictional writing that draws on performance-like conventions (enlivened speech, dialogue and script, for example) to describe and interpret experience but also to achieve performative power – to evoke and even ‘incite’ realities that can be obscured by the prison system’s careful performance management. To illustrate some of my thinking in this chapter, I draw on this writing approach to assess my experience in industry before working in prison education, expressed through metaphor, which offers access to a deeper thread of interpretation/meaning-making as it weaves its way through the thesis, and especially this second part of the thesis portfolio. In some accord with Norman Denzin (2014), I argue that individual experiences are not ‘one-off’ events but a series of connected phenomena that comprise a continuum of joined intersections.

I acknowledge this somewhat progressive design might necessitate adjustment for readers unaccustomed to its usefulness, but the extent to which it is applied begins slowly and gathers momentum throughout this thesis. However, it should be stated from the outset of this chapter, that I am not arguing ‘conventional social science must be transformed or that standards for research reports be jettisoned in favour of fiction, nor will I attempt to repudiate any other aspect of scientific writing’ (Banks, 2008 p.155). Alternatively, I argue that the methods chosen for this research constitute a bespoke design in response to the problems encountered and represented in this thesis. I show how these methods also reveal a valuable layer of meaning and understanding that might be unavailable to more standard research approaches.

Throughout this chapter, I provide examples of creative writing for research purposes with varying degrees of performance and performative elements alongside explorations of autoethnographic writing from both
education and criminal justice research. I discuss how these are viewed philosophically and used as practical research instruments, establishing both theoretical and practical guidance for my own methodology. Towards the end of this chapter, I provide both examples from the field and my own ‘fictional performative writing’. These creative methods are balanced with ‘mainstream’ approaches from the field of education and training and here I draw on examples such as a group of doctoral and masters students in the 1990s that use a variety of terms such as ‘autoethnography’, ‘self-study in teaching’ and ‘life-history research’ as part of a growing interest with researching experience, the self, identity, memory, oral history and narrative approaches in educational contexts (Mitchell, O’Reilly-Scanlon and Weber, 2005 p. xvi). The interests of these practitioner/researchers are featured in chapters of a publication edited by Mitchell, O’Reilly-Scanlon and Weber (2005), which builds on a growing body of literature in the form of a two-volume publication, ‘International Handbook of Self-study of Teaching and Teacher Education’ (Loughran et al. 2004). Moreover, a peer-reviewed journal, ‘Studying Teacher Education: Self-study of Teacher Education Practices’ contributes to establishing a foundation for this field. The methods they select are significantly influenced by arts-based methodologies, providing a link between my education practice as a teacher-researcher and the arts practices I explore within educational contexts of criminal justice settings.

Beyond these educational settings, practitioners and researchers from a broad range of disciplines have identified alternative ways of constructing meaning according to methods tailored to their own preferences, curiosity, professions and circumstances. This is particularly relevant because this study is not only about creative education and training, but also engaging within a prison context.

Thus prevails an enduring concept in this study of different ways of knowing and particularly an embrace of ‘art as a way of knowing’ (McNiff, 1998; 2013). Arts-based research has its origins in the social sciences as they began to draw on alternative practices of inquiry. Amongst the examples I have chosen is Anne McCrary Sullivan’s (2000, p.211) poetic inquiry exploring an autoethnographic theme of ‘paying attention’ and, from
applied theatre, Chris Johnston’s ‘prison theatre’ chapter in Thompson (1998), in which a fictional dialogue between an applied theatre practitioner and a prison officer reveals institutional tensions at play. Similarly, Tom Hadaway’s (2004) collection ‘The Prison Plays’, re-creates fictional encounters from his imagination, employing lived experience as inspiration. Hadaway was a writer in residence over a twelve-week period in 1986. His plays were published some eighteen years after his experiences in HMP Durham but, writing the introduction, Val McLane states that Hadaway ‘expresses his own frustration at the limitations of his task as a prison tutor through the character of Harry who comments on the prison system through his discussions with George, the liberal-minded Assistant Governor’ (Hadaway, 2004 p.3).

Johnston and Hadaway’s respective works have provided inspiration for the methodological and ethical design for meaning-making, presentation and representation in this thesis. Their fictional scripts, based on lived experience, share a common thread with my own ‘fictional performative writing’ for this study, which is (in part) that of a performance-like creative expression. As Tami Spry (2001) comments, this ‘requires the performer of personal narrative to identify and critique the power relations rooted in the sociohistorical contexts of discourse that are occurring in the act of performing personal stories’ [emphasis in original] (p.718). This approach provides a foundation that protects the anonymity of people and organizations from which my reflective and reflexive experiences are drawn. As Peter Clough (2002) asserts:

As a means of educational report, stories can provide a means by which truths, which cannot be otherwise told, are uncovered. The fictionalization of educational experience offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real life events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings (p.8).

This blended methodology conflates both ‘real’ and conceptual data, presenting them for interpretation, analysis and further meaning-making by the reader. In this sense, the reader is respectfully invited to engage with this
study in ways that might differ from a more traditional thesis. As Norman Denzin (2003) states, ‘Performative writing requires performative reading, an active, collaborative form of reading [that] creates a union between reader and writer’ (p.94). Moreover, the methodological approach might be adaptable by other (practitioner) researchers drawing on their own professional experience to develop tailored forms of meaning-making that have pragmatic and critical value in context.

This chapter begins with a discussion of ABR and an argument that my interpretation of performative writing serves two main purposes. Firstly, to solicit fiction as a means of resolving ethical problems but also as a practical tool that re-scrambles and translates fabrications from professional experience to create more veracious interpretations. Autoethnography positions the methodology within an established convention of research from lived experience, whilst the chapter concludes by paying attention to details of genre, voice and register to cultivate a relationship between this meaning-making method and the reader.

**Arts-Based Research (ABR)**

Critical arts-based inquiry situates the artist-as-researcher (or researcher-as-artist) in the new research paradigm of qualitative practitioners committed to democratic, ethical, and just research methodologies. (Finley, 2011 p.435)

According to Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (2012, p. ix), both from arts and humanities disciplines originally, arts-based research began as a Stanford University educational event in 1993. Its purpose was to explore new ways of conducting research from ‘premises, principles and procedures’ employed by artists for use in the social sciences (Ibid. p. x). The broader literature on ABR largely corresponds with this account, although some argue that the rise of postmodernism generated a momentum, which provided a foundation for their ideas (Leavy, 2009 pp.1-10). Barone and Eisner (2012) claim to have stimulated significant interest over the following decade (almost exclusive to Stanford), coining the phrase ‘arts based social research’, with no hyphen between ‘arts’ and ‘based’. Put simply, their
definition of the word ‘based’ ‘means that arts based research is an
approach to research that we define as a method designed to enlarge
human understanding’ (Ibid. p.8). The phrase has been used in different
formats including Eisner’s (2008) own term ‘arts-informed’. Together, they
reject the suggestion that the phrase ‘arts based inquiry’ might be the most
appropriate on the grounds that using the arts in research is still research,
but a different version to that used (and often privileged) in the sciences
(Barone and Eisner, 2012 p.45). Some individuals use different phrases in
separate publications, for example in arts therapy Shaun McNiff (1998)
abbreviates to ‘ABR’, then later selects ‘art as research’ (McNiff, 2013),
whilst Patricia Leavy (2009), whose early studies began in the social
sciences alongside her personal interests in arts and humanities, chooses
‘arts methods’, ‘arts-based enquiry’ and ‘arts-based practice’
interchangeably. There are many other examples providing variations on
phrases, but what seems to bind them (and this study’s methodology) is an
argument for a way of understanding social and cultural phenomena aside
(or alongside) of what positivist and scientific approaches have to offer and
‘to that extent the work may provide an important public service that may be
otherwise unavailable’ (Barone and Eisner, 2012 p.13). In other words:

Art-based research is not presented as a panacea. It simply needs to be
accepted when it may be the most appropriate mode of addressing a
problem or need, especially within professions based on art as a way of
knowing (McNiff, 2013 p. xv).

Some of the ‘appropriateness’ to which McNiff refers above, is
‘particularly useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore, or
discover’ (Leavy, 2009 p.12). It is a methodology that can be adapted to suit
specific needs, ‘to create an expressive form that will enable an individual to
secure an empathic participation in the lives of others and in the situations
studied’ (Barone and Eisner, 2012 pp.8-9). There are many varieties of arts-
based research methods such as photography, painting, drawing, music,
dance and so forth (McNiff, 1998 pp.169-205). The section that follows
provides more detail about my specific use of ‘fictional performative writing’
and interpretations of creative written forms by others. More generally
though, ‘ABR explores the artistic process and brings forth new differentiations on the levels of intuition, perception, emotion, embodied and craft-based knowledge and intellect’ (McNiff, 2013 p. x). However, using the arts in research is not all; ABR can be a radical way of conceptualising what research might be for particular contexts, research problems and diverse audiences. For example:

…answers to questions and solutions to problems might not be arts-informed research’s long suit. This method of inquiry may trump conventional forms of research when it comes to generating questions or raising awareness of complex subtleties that matter. The deep strength of using the arts in research may be closer to the act of problematizing traditional conclusions than it is to providing answers in containers that are watertight. In this sense, the products of this research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions (Eisner, 2008, p.8).

ABR is one of two overarching frameworks used in the methodology for this study, the other being autoethnography, which is dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter. I use the term ‘overarching’ because, within them both, there are many offshoots, alternative terms, overlapping definitions and facets. One being that of reflexivity, which is relevant to autoethnographic meaning-making through arts and humanities outside a formal research context and over a lifetime and, as such, it was a natural shift in which to create an academic framework. However, although meaning-making from experience through the arts ‘work’ for me, it might not for every reader, in much the same way that using numbers and statistical analysis might limit this capability. Therefore, McNiff’s (2013) suggestion that, ‘Art is a way of knowing, problem solving, healing and transformation that we marginalize if we do not embrace it as a vehicle of research’ (p. xiii), suggests a ‘right’ to its use and a discrimination in its hindrance.

This tendency has extended to other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, women’s studies, history, social work, nursing, health policy, disability studies, business studies, sport and education (Knowles and Cole, 2008, pp.527-528; Loughran et al. 2004). This proliferation is apparent by the multi-disciplinary presence in, for example, handbooks of qualitative research, arts in qualitative research and performance studies (Denzin and
Lincoln, 2011; Knowles and Cole, 2008; Madison and Hamera, 2006). Many such sources describe a struggle to learn, discover and conduct research in ways that meet their needs as individuals or research problem and to offer audiences alternative access against a resistance of orthodox ideologies (Barone and Eisner, 2012 p.101). I argue these are struggles for equality and choice, of which any obstructions severely disadvantage and discriminate against.

There is another vital concern relevant to this study in what lies beneath much of this dissatisfaction and struggle. The ‘realness’ or façade within penal contexts can function as a consequence of its repeated or mimetic custom and culture, which ‘becomes the norm and then appears real’ (Madison and Hamera, 2006 p. xviii). Therefore, if the everyday ‘real’ is constructed and can vary in ‘realness’ according to social or political manoeuvrings and their interpretations, as I argue within a prison context, how can this ‘reality’ be experienced or analysed objectively? Therefore, a philosophical position of this methodology is not to assume an objective ‘reality’ as a starting point to address the research problems. Rather, it embraces meaning-making through the additional layers that fiction stimulates when re-constructing the performances many call ‘reality’ through ‘fictional performative writing’. According to McNiff (2013), ABR addresses two key dimensions. Firstly, the demand for clarity, form and method and secondly that creative processes can and should lead to unexpected results in one’s own research (2013 p. x.). As such, this study ‘addresses complex and often subtle interactions and … provides an image of those interactions in ways that makes them more noticeable’ (Barone and Eisner, 2012 p.3). As such, ‘arts based research is a heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world’ (Ibid.).

Therefore, having provided a case for the use of art as a basis for research methods in the context of research provided in this thesis, my next task is to explain the forms I have chosen to apply. First, I define how I am using the term ‘fictional performative writing’, followed by how other writing forms have been interpreted as part of a meaning-making process.
Fashioning a hybrid: fictional and performative writing

It is not as if fiction writers created fantasies and researchers created recorded facts. The material that writers use in fiction comes from real life and genuine human experience. Similarly, qualitative researchers very much shape every aspect of their investigation, imbuing it with meaning and marking it with their fingerprint (Leavy, 2013 p.21).

There are two main elements of the dialogic script form that is used throughout this thesis that I refer to as ‘fictional performative writing’, which more simply is ‘writing’ represented by the terms ‘fictional’ and ‘performative’ respectively. Scholars have used these terms in a number of ways, therefore, rather than introducing any new terms, my intention is to review how they have been used and define how I have applied them for this research methodology.

The adjective ‘fictional’ is a descriptive term for the noun ‘fiction’ that, when applied to writing, requires the artfulness of creativity to represent reality. Although I deal with ‘performativity’ that implies verb-like functions in the second-half of this section, fiction in this thesis is very much involved with the ‘doing’ of making new meanings through reflexivity, holding a mirror to the constructed nature of experience in a prison and providing a vehicle through which my story can be told.

Belfiore and Bennet (2010) present the argument that by refuting claims to truth and objectivity, postmodern theories have brought benefits that are ‘ethically, morally and politically more desirable’ (p.23). Their case is mostly based upon notions of democracy. For example, one account of an event involving people cannot be absolutely ‘true’, but numerous accounts can share contestable claims to versions of the truth (Ibid.). If these accounts contain partial truths, some will be subjective and constructed according to experience, which ‘if we make history’ they are constructions in themselves (Ibid.). In this sense, each account is as reliable (or not) as another. They go on to survey this discussion of attempts to capture ‘truth’ from the literature, considering the use of literary criticism in terms of examining setting, plot and character and other ideas of combining such analysis with empirical sources, which they describe as ‘reading scientific material’ (Ibid.). More
recently is the realisation for a loss of reality to nothing more than simulation (p.52). The loss might be most stark in reality TV and other media, particularly those reality TV or Internet-based examples of 24-hour surveillance in which roles and mass audiences are joined in the really unreal, which for some, is ‘real’.

So, what does this mean for the use of fiction in this study? Also, what does it offer the methodology that traditional notions of science are unable to accommodate? Leavy (2013) asserts:

Fiction differs from other forms in two ways that are central to the cultivation of empathy…we can enter into the intimate thoughts of characters – their internal dialogue. This access to what people are thinking and feeling builds a deep connection between readers and characters … Second, fictional narratives are incomplete and leave space for the readers’ interpretations and imagination. In other words, there are interpretive gaps in fiction, often intentionally included by the authors (p.49).

Therefore, if my representation is simply one of what could be many, no matter what pains for anonymity, exploration, representation and so forth, it claims nothing but a version of experience; one half imagined and the other remembered that, for now, makes some sense to me. This being so, any harm to others on ethical grounds has been mitigated and any objection on methodological grounds is restricted to those that do not recognise fiction as serving legitimate research. Thus:

Traditional representational forms that typically result in an account or finite set of conclusions may render invisible those interpretations not put forth by the researcher, creating the false appearance of “truth” that has been “discovered’. Fiction can, ironically, expose that which “factual representation” conceals by its very implication (Leavy, 2009 p.43).

The genre of fiction can express the mood of reality and ‘ring true’ (Leavy, 2013 p.80). Through extensive and meticulous research in the writing process, the aim is to achieve ‘verisimilitude’ to represent and present a version of the world which imitates the uncertainty of that which it explores, using form and expression to create meaning with its own empirical boundaries (Ibid. p.21). By taking this approach, I aim to spin from a blend of imperatives - protecting those from my lived experience, but also driven by
the public's right to know, insisting on a personal freedom to imagine and promote individual ways of knowing that might open up debate to spin new yarns amongst diverse (sometimes marginalised) audiences. As Leavy’s reminder of Francis Bacon’s quote states: ‘Truth is so hard to tell, it sometimes needs fiction to make it plausible’ (p.259). Therefore, I argue that fiction is a legitimate research method, indeed it might be necessary in particular cases when ‘off-the-peg’ methodologies will not do the job.

However, although fiction was central to my creative, theatre-like performance on the page with all the arts-based ‘reading between the lines’ this implies for both performer (writer) and audience (reader), as described earlier in this chapter, the writing is doing something more. It is this ‘doing’ that the term ‘performative’ represents. The ‘doing’ is not quite the same as intended by the earliest exponents of the (somewhat contested) term for understanding social and cultural activity, from the fields of philosophy and linguistics, such as John Austin (1975) and John Searle (1969). The ‘doing’ of something for this thesis is through an act of activism from an otherwise marginalised professional position. The implications are a pointer to contradictions of the ‘real’ and ‘unreal’, but also how the ‘performative’ might infiltrate such illusions in performances that are manipulated according to machinations of power. For example, in a prison context, power is often maintained through the status quo and creativity might appear as a threat to such power, but the performative can facilitate voices that speak back to power. Judith Hamera (2011) suggests ‘Performative utterances make interventions in the world as they are spoken. Through their repetition, these utterances stabilize the power of words and, by extension, the authorities and conventions undergirding that power’ (p.320). When performed on the page, this can become ‘the writing and rewriting of meanings to create a dynamic and open dialogue that continually disrupts the authority of meta-narratives’ (Finley, 2011 p.442). Moreover, Della Pollock (1998) argues:

Performative, evocative writing confounds normative distinctions between critical and creative (hard and soft, true and false, masculine and feminine), allying itself with logics of possibility rather than of validity or causality, the scientific principles underlying positivist distinctions between “true” and “false” (p.81).
In many respects, Pollock’s (2006) ‘six excursions into performative writing’ demonstrate a compatibility with ABR and fiction, reinforcing the philosophical and methodological position in this study. For example, writing being evocative (using metaphor, bringing readers to other worlds); metonymic (incomplete and open to representation); subjective (a contingent relation is performed between writer, subject and reader); nervous (unable to settle); citational (repetition and reiteration) and consequential (to make things happen) (pp.80-97). Therefore, what the ‘performative’ represents in this study is a response to the notion of marginalised voices. This phenomenon is revisited towards the end of this section in educational contexts and again at the end of this chapter in a section that explores the perspectives and position of prison educators, more specifically.

Additionally, writing reflectively as featured in the pieces employing connections to my industrial past is a further extension of performance-like writing often associated with autoethnography. It ‘involves paying attention to the specific perspectives of the researcher’ (Morwenna Griffiths, 2010, p. 184) and:

This is especially relevant for personal narrative (in whatever medium). In particular, it is this attempt at self-consciousness about value positions, positionality and personal relationships – while all the time acknowledging the incompleteness of the attempt – which distinguishes autoethnography and reflective action research from autobiography or the writing of a journal (Ibid. p.185).

At this point, I am tentatively introducing autoethnography and its relationship with ‘performative’ aspects of my fictional writing to prepare for the second-half of this chapter, but first there are some factors by which these approaches might be associated. For example, these approaches tend to a non-conformist heritage with postmodern roots, attracting multidisciplinary appeal, showing an interest in issues such as justice, democracy, and equity. They have been known to resist forces of power and to engage with the political as conduits for voices to be heard that might be otherwise silenced.

The remainder of this chapter’s first section is used to explore examples of writing that compare closely to a definition of ‘fictional
performative writing'. The first in a dialogic script comes from Hadaway (2004), followed by Anne McCrary Sullivan’s (2000, p.211) poetic inquiry as an example of how the interpretation of diverse written forms can be used to make meaning across contexts.

Hadaway’s (2004) play, ‘Postcard from God’, is an example of the overlapping relationship between lived experience, fiction and the performative. Hadaway, the playwright and prison creative writing tutor (in ‘real’ life) writes a monologue for the (fictional) protagonist, Judy, to be presented on the page, representing (the real life) Judith Ward. Judith and (the character Judy) were imprisoned for eighteen years for Irish Republican Army (IRA) activities before being released as new evidence vindicated them both. Hadaway creates the (fictional) Judy from his lived experiences using the (real) Judith, as these layers of real and fictional characters blur boundaries to explore injustice.

Judy’s monologue, written in the accent and dialect of England’s North East, is in response to the self-proclaimed ‘G.O.D.’s’ (Governor of Durham) invitation (by postcard) to speak to the Criminal Cases Review Commission as an example of a miscarriage of justice. The satirical acronym for the governor demonstrates the gulf between their positions, whilst words such as mercy, pity, justice, and faith intertwine her parody of the system that incarcerated her, unjustly. It is Judy’s voice that counts in this piece and the prison system in which she was forced to ‘endure’ education. Her requite for being mandated to education is to turn-down ‘God’, providing an ironic basis for her rhetorical argument, intellectually weighted by random quotes from Wordsworth. We join the poem part way through:

Are ya listenin’ God’? This is not ti plead mercy for the rejected. Or ti call on ya pity for them at the bottom o’ the heap. But to cry justice for the child! Justice for those not yet born! Ti break this cycle!

[O.S. The bell rings]

Di ya hear me ‘God’? To be declared by law unfit for ya own children. That’s the cruellest thing. Nothin’ compares to it. Tell ya commissioners! Have them read Wordsworth. Like ya did me.
Sufferin' is permanent, obscure and dark.
And has the nature of infinity.6

Tell’im study that fer sixteen year.

Sorry ‘God’! Just droppin’ ya in. Call it loss of faith. But I will not come back ti Durham town. You are on ya own. Fancy tryin’ a miracle? But tell ya commissioners the interestin’ quotes is scratched on the walls.

‘The first thing ya notice in prison, after the smell. There is no such thing as a new day.’

Tell ya commissioners!

(6) Wordsworth, W., *The Borderers*, 1795-96
Hadaway (2004, p.266)

Many of Hadaway’s characters are saturated in wry humour, often speaking in a gritty, colloquial, sometimes poetic, dialogic performances from the inside that gets under the surface, evoking emotions and renewed perceptions for audiences to take away and reflect upon; to make meaning from experience, to ‘know differently’. Additionally, from the male prison estate, Hadaway pays attention to humour in prison performances through exploring the character ‘Harry’ in ‘Yesterday’s Children’. Harry is new to HMP Durham, which at the time held male and female prisoners. A male prison officer (MPO) is showing Harry around the male wings, where he decides to initiate Harry with the category ‘A’ prisoner, O’Malley:

**M.P.O.** The net between the landings prevents any harm coming to the inmates who accidentally fall over the rail … [Pauses]
The door is three quarter steel. The card denotes the inmate … The name … O’Malley! His category … ‘A’ Sentence, twenty five years …

**HARRY** Twenty five years?

**M.P.O.** Have you seen in a cell yet sir?

**HARRY** Not yet …
The characters’ dialogue resists submitting to the institutionalised forces that normalise the unnatural existence of prison life. Hadaway provides context and atmosphere, recreating his experience some eighteen years’ later, showing the inside to the reader, uncovering what lays hidden to many. In this example, his script becomes his performance as dialogue and stage directions offer a way of experiencing; providing additional insights that represent conversations and positions taken. Through his fictional creation, Hadaway has expressed and exposed the synthetic, imitative nature of institutional life that becomes accepted as ‘real’. The play reveals and informs in ways unimaginable by what Barone and Eisner (2012) describe as: ‘the passive, third person, technical prose of standard research reports’ (p.132). As I read, albeit accustomed to the circumstances Hadaway creates, I can smell the prison, sense the tension, hear the keys, doors and accents. Consequently, Hadaway’s writing creates affect, evoking
imagination and context, empathy and alternative perspectives. His script is intended for a live performance to an audience and, although I cannot speak for him, the ‘doing’ of the ‘performative’ as a reader is born in the potential for an interpretation of ‘realness’; the opening up of new dialogue and discourse. Therefore, in addition to my own ‘fictional performative writing’ other forms of writing influenced meaning-making for this thesis (see below), except in this case I am doing the performative reading. Moreover, Monica Prendagast and Juliana Saxton (2009) argue that poetic forms are increasingly found in autobiography, autoethnography and narrative inquiry. They contend that ‘The potential power of poetic inquiry is to do as poetry does, that is to synthesise experience in a direct and affective way’ (Prendagast and Saxton, 2009 pp. xxi-xxii).

The example I have chosen is from Barone and Eisner's (2012, p.30) selection of Anne McCrary Sullivan’s (2000) ‘Notes from a Marine Biologists Daughter: On the Art and Science of Attention' because it demonstrates how meaning can be derived from situated contexts and then applied to others. In one respect, her theme of ‘paying attention’ ‘beneath the surface’ connects with ideas of which this thesis is preoccupied, from lived experience and ‘moments’ ‘on the ground’ in prison theatre (see Chapter Three and also Balfour, 2009; Thompson, 2008). Moreover, it employs an autoethnographic approach to both science and art whilst addressing her professional concerns as a teacher of students ‘paying attention … in an age of attention deficit disorder and of frequent teacher complaints that over-entertained children do not want to ‘pay attention” (Sullivan, 2000 p.211). I can relate to these circumstances with mandated Functional English ‘jack-in-a-box’ adult students that are incarcerated and often also medicated. In this case, Sullivan is about to describe searching amongst marine biology with her mother, but there are further depths and layers to her poem. In this sense, sometimes someone else’s writing creates new ‘performances’ in my imagination and, through my interpretation, can make-meaning differently. Sullivan’s writing or ‘poetic inquiry’ is a reflexive account of paying attention over a lifetime, according to ‘sensory and emotional aspects of attending and their implications for learning, teaching and research' (Ibid.). In this case, she is making a point about her experience as a child and the children she
experiences in her classroom and, as such, is a different example of how readers might engage with the ‘performative’ in her writing from lived experience.

**Notes from a Marine Biologist’s Daughter**

My mother loves the salty mud of estuaries, has no need of charts to know what time low tide will come. She lives by an arithmetic of the moon, calculates emergencies of mud, waits for all that crawls there, lays eggs, buries itself in the shallow edges of streamlets and pools. She digs for *chaetopterus*, yellow and orange worms that look like lace.

She leads me where renilla bloom purple and white colonial lives where brittle stars, like moss, cling to stone. She knows where the sea horse wraps its tail and the unseen lives of plankton.

My mother walks and sinks into ooze, centuries of organisms ground to past darkness. The sun burns at her shoulders in its slow passage across the sky. Light waves like pincers in her mud-dark hair.


Sullivan tells a story about being taught attention by her mother, a marine biologist, and claims ‘In doing so she made me a poet’ (Ibid. 221). Sullivan has learned from ‘a woman whose life had been grounded in attention … to that which is beneath the surface as well as to the surface itself’ (p.220) and all that implies for science, social justice, the arts and thorough research. The circle completes a full revolution, encompassing her personal life, science and education through arts-methods as a teacher-researcher that questions how to recreate her experiences in the classroom.
The principles of meaning-making underlying her poetry, using cyclical motion and past experience to understand the present, resonate my own use of metaphors in this thesis. Moreover, the act of being ‘on the ground’, but digging below the surface, is a crucial theme for this thesis, whilst for Sullivan (metaphorically, artistically and reflexively) pays attention to the intersections of memory, experience and imagination that connect over a lifetime.

In this section, I have provided both a definition and an explanation of how I use the terms ‘paying attention’ and particularly ‘fictional performative writing’ along with examples from the literature that demonstrate its usefulness as a research method, according to the specific context or research problem. In one way, I feel like McNiff (1998) declaring his ‘art studio to be a research laboratory dealing with empirical things’ (p. 24) as I test out lotions and potions with words, not knowing if Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde is being created. The blend of arts-based, ‘fictional performative writing’, autoethnography and the literature is a heady one, and in this context the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

**Autoethnography**

The choice of autoethnography as a method was partly to protect others from my lived experience, as the only ‘tangible’ research subject to be identified in this research is myself, but also due to its compatibility with meaning-making from lived experience and ABR. What follows next is a consideration of autoethnography as a method and, in particular, some philosophical underpinnings for its use as part of a hybrid methodology.

According to Laura Ellingson and Carolyn Ellis (2008), ‘the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult’ (p.449) and some have developed into what appear to be a hybrid of ABR, performativity and autoethnography, of which this study might be included.

Spry (2011) draws on the sensory, affective, embodied and emotional ways of knowing to emphasise the importance of reflexivity when writing performatively about loss and hope. She asserts that ‘Performative
autoethnographic writing is about the continual questioning, the naming and renaming and unnaming of experience through craft, through heart, through the fluent body’ (p.509). For Spry, ‘Performative autoethnography is a critically reflexive methodology resulting in a narrative of the researcher’s engagement with others in particular sociocultural contexts’ (2011, p.498) and she argues the deeply personal and autoethnographic become ‘co-performative agents in interpreting knowledge’ as she describes ‘moving in and out of trauma with words and blood and bone’ (Ibid.). Although my experiences are not dealing with the same kind of trauma that Spry writes about, they do contain despair, bewilderment, deep frustration, hope and loss. In this respect, I share her argument for the use of such methodologies when I write about the personal and professional being inseparable in my experience and the narrative I present. To leave out such emotion presents something incomplete or askew - even disloyal to an empirical response in what Spry calls a ‘crafting of research as an ethical imperative of representation’ (Ibid.). In other words, I would not be ‘paying attention’ to crucial aspects of the experience (Sullivan, 2000, p.211).

The reader, then, needs to know a secret - when I’m paying attention to such matters, true to many working class Yorkshire men of a certain age, I turn to wry humour. Therefore, as the threads of ‘fictional performative writing’ and autoethnography weave into a methodology I question what is happening to the relationship between methods, ethics and professional practice as I unravel my research problems through deep introspection, reflexivity and the making-up of stories about institutions that jealously guard reputation at the expense of transparency. The intention is not to sensationalise research, but to reach new meanings of what happens under the surface, to uncover a professional experience in a particular situation from a professional perspective. This is what many researchers seek to achieve through the use of autoethnography as a research method, but in this case, there is an imbalance of power between researcher and research site that resonates with Spry’s (2011) description of ‘a personal/political praxis, an aesthetic/epistemic performance, and a critical/indigenous/advocational ethnography that operates from a compassionate and lionhearted will to usurp and resist injustice’ (p.499). D.
Soyini Madison (2006) goes further than acknowledging an emancipatory role, implying a level of obligation on performativity itself:

In the dialogical performative, the expressive and responsive frequencies of reciprocity spark disruptions in the mesmerizing effects to conform. Like its enduring twin *praxis*, the performative does more than interpret and express, it initiates and incites (p.322).

Despite the interplay between a cautious ethical approach and what might appear as a practitioner/researcher’s ‘crusade’, there is a different balance between autoethnography and power in every circumstance. Such a balance is steadied by literature from the ‘Self-Study of Teaching Education Practices’ (S-STEP) movement, which demonstrates an increase in some education practitioners’ views that reflective and reflexive creative approaches to the experience of practice is a form of scholarship from which theory, knowledge and practice can be extended and developed. Its position is closer to exploring ‘ways of knowing’ that are not dominated by positivist principles, but explicit notions of disrupting and challenging the status quo. In the later sections of this chapter, I explore this further through interpretations of voice, metaphor, emotion and identity along with dialogic and professional ways of knowing.

Overwhelmingly, S-STEP represents experience from ‘mainstream’ education, as opposed to education and training in criminal justice contexts and, although many S-STEP exponents use ABR, the educator-researchers are not necessarily from an arts discipline or as influenced by extreme tensions in power. When they debate questions such as, ‘why is there so little self-study on social justice issues?’ or ‘why do self-studies avoid social justice issues?’ they focus on issues of equality and diversity in the classroom and professional life. Their base is a philosophy of fairness, caring and respect and how reflective practises of self-study can transform tentativeness and, therefore, induce action (Griffiths, et al., 2004 p.692-693). Indeed, writing their chapter in dialogic form involved a level of activism for non-traditional, and yet meaningful, ways of representation in the act of email exchanges.
As John Loughran (2004) argues, the ability to understand oneself in relation to others and for others to develop their own interpretations is at the heart of self-study. He affirms:

It is something that causes one to stop and pay more attention to a given situation.' It builds on reflective practice by taking a largely personal process into the public domain, with the potential to instigate other processes of reflection outside the author … so that it might be challenged, extended, transformed and translated by others (pp. 25-26).

Consequently, ‘Personal history self-study entails the opportunity to disrobe, unveil and engage in a soul-searching truth about the self while also engaging critical conversations, and most importantly continuing to discover the alternative viewpoints of others' (Samaras, et al., 2004 p.910). Context is crucial as Loughran (2004) states:

Hence, a thorough understanding of the context in which a study is conducted is important in shaping how teacher educators might construct their own interpretation of others’ results in their own situation. Understanding the context of a given self-study is then important in shaping the perceived relevance – or extent of application – of others’ work to one’s own (p.18).

Despite some (understandable) criticisms of narcissism (Delamont, 2009), autoethnography is an approach that can look outward towards institutional culture and the perspectives and actions of others from a position of personal experience within. When writing fictional dialogue, I employed a critical empathy with each character to recreate a representation that the reader might accept or reinterpret. As Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova (2007) state:

Narrative records human experience through the construction and re-construction of personal stories; it is well suited to addressing issues of complexity and cultural and human centeredness because of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been most influence on us (p. 1).

In the remainder of this chapter, the methodological arguments presented so far are considered in greater detail through an exploration of some specific features contained within autoethnographic and ‘fictional
performative writing’. These include form and genre, storytelling through dialogue, humour, voice and register.

**Form and genre**

Although still relatively new and emerging across disciplines, the research practice of narrative inquiry within educational research is now into its third decade since the so-called ‘narrative turn’ (Webster and Mertova, 2007 p.114). For the purposes of this thesis, the use of narrative or storytelling is mostly through the form of a realist dialogue as a means of exploration between imagined perspectives from lived experience that creates a genre of ‘fiction’. Although there are antecedents in other traditions, as a narrative, philosophical or didactic device, it is chiefly associated in the West with the Socratic dialogue as developed by Plato. Others such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Buber, and David Bohm have all written extensively on dialogue, but most helpful for this study is the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Whilst Freire (1996) argued that dialogue or conversation is an ‘act of creation’, he was also mindful of its capacity to ‘serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person over another’ (p.70). Rather, he argued that dialogue is the way humans can transform the world through the exchange of ideas. Through such action, he argues, ‘dialoguers engage in critical thinking [which] perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than a static entity’ (p.73). The use of dialogue in this thesis aims to share this philosophical spirit in that the position it represents is one person’s view at one moment in time. It ‘immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved’ (Ibid.) and invites others to join in.

Forms of monologue, on the other hand, can offer accounts in which meaning-making is more personal, which often involve techniques to tell the story in a different way through the use of, say, (wry) comedy. In other places later in the thesis, ‘interruptions’ by the ‘real’ author and characters appearing in scenes brought back from different ages in the conclusion are more commonly associated with a postmodern ‘magical realism’ that provide additional creative opportunities for meaning-making. Naturally, choosing an
approach that might be described as progressive, creative or exploratory needs to be tempered with an academic representation, despite this study’s ambition of reaching a broad audience base. In this section I aim to prepare readers by providing some explanation of how these factors are applied, along with examples from the literature and my own ‘fictional performative writing’ based upon lived experience.

There are others that have utilized a realist style in degrees of fictional script within applied/community/prison theatre to represent their work (see for example, Kershaw, 2004 pp.35-56; Conrad, 2005 pp.27-41). In the following example, Chris Johnston, the writer – not the character in his play, is an applied theatre practitioner specialising in prisons. He creates a scenario typical of conversations in this context, but states at the opening to his dialogue that ‘The characters and situation in this chapter are entirely imaginary and bear no relation to any real person or actual happening’ (Johnston, 1998 p.127). Moreover, Johnston’s chapter in James Thompson’s (1998) ‘Prison Theatre: Perspectives and Practices’ publication is particularly relevant as it recreates a professional conversation between two characters. One he names as John (a theatre company director) and Derek (a prison officer) as they debrief following a performance by prisoners assisted by a visiting theatre company. They start their discussion about the performance, which has just ended. As so often happens, two differing points of view emerge as their practice turns to philosophical considerations. We join the conversation as Derek is challenging a comment made by John about the prisoners:

**Derek:** Come off it, many of these blokes know exactly what they are doing. You make them sound like idiots. No way. A lot of guys have chosen to be burglars or con men. They reckon it’s a great way to live.

**John:** You’re missing the point. They can only legitimately maintain that position if they block out – consciously or unconsciously – the impact of their behaviour on other people. Drama is about bringing things into awareness, including those things we’d rather avoid.
Derek: Sounds like an argument for therapy to me.

John: A good number of these men would probably benefit from therapy. But the reality is, they won’t choose to do that whereas they might go into the arts.

Derek: Why? I reckon football’s a much better idea. Learn to be a team player.

John: But the thing is these guys are already accessing the skills and experiences that bring them closer to the artistic realm.

Derek: Blimey. You don’t talk like that to the blokes, do you?

John: I reckon crime probably involves talents which might otherwise be redirected into art.

Derek: Yeah? So what does that mean?

John: There’s a natural affinity between crime and art.

Derek: Oh, we’re back on this one? Criminal as misunderstood artist? Sort of ‘smash-the-old-lady-in-the-face-sorry-that-should-have-been-a-portrait’ kind of analysis? Interesting.

John: You haven’t heard me yet.

Derek: You carry on mate.

John: Certain kinds of criminal activity involve skills and experiences which parallel those of artists. In a way, criminals live in a kind of parallel universe, a fictional world of their own making …

(Johnston in Thompson, 1998 p.132).
Presented as a realist dialogue, Johnson explores a combination of the artificial nature of a prison, some of the complications associated with delivering creative activities and competing attitudes between long-standing employees and visitors of such institutions. The issues raised provide ample material for making-meaning through this realist form that abstract versions might otherwise unduly complicate or standard representations might subjugate.

I suspect Johnston’s fictional account was based on similar lived experiences, as I certainly recognise the kind of scenario presented. His imagined professional dialogue explores ‘ways to know’ that would otherwise remain ‘unknown’, which is not so different from the interpretation derived from ‘real’ events that Karen Guilfoyle, et al. (2004) within the S-STEP approach proposes as the notion of understanding the ‘discourse of dialogue as a way of knowing’ (pp.1134-1136). Their ideas for professional dialogue might be applied to the creative act of producing dialogue in fiction for research purposes because:

Knowledge grows in dialogue because ideas are articulated and analysed. As the centrifugal and centripetal forces of dialogue ebb and flow and coalesce around the ideas and thoughts voiced in dialogue and in the thinking of those involved, knowledge grows. We come to know in dialogue through these same two processes. When an idea or understanding is articulated, just the act of saying or the act of listening may be an act of coming to know. Disagreeing with an idea, or slight modification of it leads to recognition of your position on that knowledge. Every form of research genre and its findings may be produced as a part of a dialogue (Ibid. p.1161).

As shown, the principles outlined above can be allied to ‘fictional performative writing’ as poetic inquiry in monologue, but can also express the multiple selves that inhabit our bodies and minds as we re-construct our beliefs and values, evoking alternative interpretations to script and prose. The short verse below was written of frustration with the title used for prison education and arrangements in prison for mandatory education. It is a version of monologue, not a realist text or able to fit neatly into categorisations of ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’. Not unlike Hadaway (2004), the layers of
competing meaning are influenced by lived experience and conversations with prisoners about constructions of their identity being affected by people with power and influence over them. Alternatively, some teachers spoke of their resentment for prison students' apparent ingratitude or media reports of taxpayers begrudging ‘free’ education for perpetrators of crime, whilst paying for their own personal development. A methodological point here, though, is that the absent words and the scribbles, crossings out, cutting and pasting (not shown here) made me reflect – it made me ‘pay attention’ (Sullivan, 2000 p. 211).

**Offenders Learning and Skills Service**

The label ‘offender’
The inescapable payment
A ‘free’ service to learn
Somebody must pay

Alternatively, ‘You’d better sit down’ (below) creates an evocative and sensory autoethnographic position. This excerpt from a longer piece reveals the researcher clumsily getting the right and wrong blends; exposing features and facets in relation to experience and phenomena that limerick and pantomime-like forms and genres might provide a ‘safe(er)’ mode of expression.

**You’d better sit down**

A Prof Doc’s different from PhD,
It includes practice (with theory), you see.
A focus on doing (thinking as well),
Swimming through treacle can sometimes be hell.

So, working full-time whilst making this rhyme,
Fathoming metre, whilst getting deeper
Into the fight: now … how much do I write?
Not having a life – appeasing the wife!
The perspective represents a cultural ethnicity of an endangered species, from a period in time, place and industrial heritage that now initiates metaphor - a member of the last pre hi-tech generation, an artefact located in a small corner of the world from which performance, experience, interpretation and reflections are inseparable from this autoethnographic study.

Education manager in prison,
Thought he’d a curricular vision,
Performing arts - employability
Had a good ring of credibility

So long ago, the pains of a Masters
Now, oblivious to new disasters,
Makes the lurch of combining work, with research,
An institutional tale - how dreams can fail

A sometimes deliberately ‘cheesy’, self-deprecating and often tongue-in-cheek humour is used by many in the areas in which I grew up and is accredited with some therapeutic qualities for coping with, and making-meaning from, chaotic, turbulent (sometimes traumatic) experiences. Such approaches can be used as a disguise for the vulnerable, to tell my story, or tell it as someone else. Moreover:

Humour and laughter have been regarded as suitable topics for research in the social sciences, but as methodological principles to be adopted in carrying out and representing the findings of research they have been neglected. Indeed, those scholars who have made use of humour – wit, satire, jokes etc. – risk being regarded as trivial and marginalised from the mainstream. Yet in literature the idea that comedy can tell us something about the human condition is widely recognised. This neglect of the potential of humour and laughter represents a serious omission (Watson, 2015, p.1).

Cate Watson (2015) reminds us that during the Renaissance, comedy with all its features such as double play, parody, sarcasm and irony was afforded deep philosophical meaning. However, these ideas gave way to the Enlightenment and ‘Thus, with the emphasis on reason and the growth of empiricism, what is counted as knowledge became increasingly circumscribed’ (Ibid. p.2). During the twentieth-century, attitudes in
educational settings indicated that ‘The usage of both related and unrelated humour seemed to be linked with a decline in the author’s credibility as scientists’ (Zillman and Bryant, 1983 p.186) as ideas took root that being both playful and scholarly were not compatible. One scholar that resisted such ideas was Erving Goffman. Allan Dawe (1973) described Goffman’s approach as ‘the sociological jester, whose jokes always contain a shrewd observation on social life – but also a caricature and a denial of the real substance of that life’ (p.248). Alternatively, Goffman shows that contrasting comedy with seriousness can imbue meaning that might not otherwise be accomplished (Dawe, 1973 pp.248-250). Working out which-is-which could be a distraction for some, or a form of analysis, to others. There were professional risks for Goffman, but as Watson (2015) suggests in her ironic, but deliberately thought-provoking conclusion:

The importance of play as an orientation to research is very little recognised in academia. We locate our desiring identities in the serious – never so securely interpolated into the disclosure (desiring what the Other desires of us) as when wading through the terminally dull paper or experiencing the interminable glacial time period of the departmental seminar. All the while, the playful attitude we need to cultivate in order to re-see the world eludes us. What genuinely delights and sparks the sociological imagination is rare. Meanwhile, the clock ticks, the life blood drains out of us and we form the great academic army of the not quite dead yet, but looking more and more that way (Ibid. p.8).

There are, however, times when humour can be misread, cruel and offensive, for which consequences are uncertain (Salameh, 1983 pp.82-84). The distinction to be drawn, here, between a responsibility for discovery and ethics, cannot be ignored and raises concerns for how far artistic (and comedic) ‘freedoms’ are restricted by research ethics and professional attitudes. In terms of research and ethics, these conflations and contradictions are the stuff of utilitarianism, where the usefulness of meanings derived and new perspectives taken might (or might not) outweigh offence or upset. The notion of utilitarianism is given more space in the chapter that follows, but in terms of method there is a relevant point to be made with fiction’s role in this study. Maurice Charney (1983) suggests, when playing the ‘playwright’, the comic ‘illusion’ of ‘omnipotence’ (p.35) can
undermine power, particularly when ‘working on the edge of chaos’ where ‘There is a wonderful insolence in the comedian’s lack of concern for his audience’ (p.36) and the audience’s challenge is to play this intricate game. Therefore, ‘humour is a serious business’, (Goodman, 1983 p.3) yet ‘a wonderful gift for living with our imperfection; it is the synapse between the perfection we seek and the imperfection we have’ (p.15). Painting on the equivocal mask of a clown’s greasepaint, we can hold ‘a mirror to commonplace everyday events as a way of inviting people to laugh’ (Ibid.).

**Voice and register**

The remainder of this chapter deals with voice and register respectively. Firstly, I introduce a short background to voice according to the self-study literature, alongside definitions that apply in academic contexts for teacher education. I briefly describe how voice is positioned within self-study and its relevance in this particular study before providing an example of my own. In this section, I restrict the voice to its role within the methodology, leaving some aspects of ethical issues to be dealt with in the next chapter.

According to the self-study literature, voice has been considered either as a personal or social form, traditionally associated with authority, authenticity and identity (Elijah, 2004 p.248). Rosebud Elijah (2004) states that self-study teacher education practices have attempted to bridge the personal versus academic or emotional versus ‘intellectual ways of knowing in the teacher-ly world’ and the distinction between scholarly voice and the scholars’ own voice (p.251). Their concerns extend to audience and the ‘negotiation of meaning’ as ‘texts are always multi-voiced’ in which self-study can be both an individual task and a collaborative enterprise (Ibid.). Elijah (2004) draws on influences from postmodernism and the idea that ‘a coherent, autonomous self has given way to multiple selves that reflect a plurality of voices. The “I” writing is not singular, but plural, a fluid composite of cultural voices and individual selves within the writer’ (Ibid. p.253). In other words, what we regard as a voice from self is a constructed self, which changes over time and is inseparable from the experiences we encounter, interpreted according to ones already lived and those it will influence in the
future (Denzin, 2014). Therefore, our voices are subject to inconsistency, subjectivity and sustainability, just as the illusionary epiphany of a teacher’s authority in the ‘reality’ of a classroom, whilst voices are often curtailed in broader political and sociocultural contexts of school, college, university, curriculum and educational policy (Elijah, 2004 p.255). The challenge for understanding the notion of voice within a self-study methodology, then, lay between dominant academic conventions, cultural and political restrictions, care for students (and colleagues), negotiation of meaning with audience, professional frustration and tools for reflection, reflexivity and research. Thus:

... self-study researchers have experimented with different ways of knowing such as art and drama (portraits, painting, readers theatre, photography, mime etc.) in order to portray themselves and their work in authentic ways. Because self-study seeks to preserve complexity and because these researchers often emphasise process rather than product, alternative forms of representation seem to respond well to both methodology in, and findings of self-study (Ibid. p.258).

What, then, does voice mean for my methodology and the problems encountered in this thesis? There are comparisons, here, with student/teacher and teacher/management relationships in prisons as described in the literature review, which need an outlet of expression. When reflecting upon my experiences, writing provides a meeting place for (and beyond) my own voice, amongst other voices, registers and situations, providing different angles in different roles as an alternative to the triangulation used by traditional social scientists. This blending of imagination, memory, reflection and reflexivity through script or poetic inquiry can sometimes reveal what might, otherwise, be hidden either to the writer or reader (Barone and Eisner, 2012 p.36). By way of example, what follows is an excerpt from a scripted fictional scene. Although the fictional piece is set in the FEC, the title comes from a particularly frustrating day for everyone in the PAD when a prisoner that I have called ‘Mr Jones’, bundled red-faced into the studio after the lunch break with his own frustrations and declared: ‘Prisons, they’re just an head fuck!’ At that particular tense moment, everyone burst into laughter. Mr Jones had graced us with a
colloquially expressed logic that eleven other students and a total of four university degrees in the studio were unable to emulate. It was a comic, but momentarily unifying experience, used many times since (in code) as ‘Jonesy had a point’ and, therefore, seemed a fitting title in this case.

The scenario excerpt is a fictional account reclaimed from typical professional encounters, which has been recycled to take place between two Functional Skills teachers (T1 & T2) and a senior prison manager (SPM).

**Jonesy had a point!**

**Characters**

SPM

T1

T2

**SPM** Morning! A good morning?

**T1** Morning! We’ve been working on spelling and vocabulary …

**SPM** How many did you have; a full class?

**T1** We only got four out of twelve. One was missing because he’s just been transferred to another prison, another’s claiming to be sick, two have been taken off this (without any warning or discussion with me) [raises eyebrows] and put on that new substance misuse course. One’s being kept on the wing for his own safety, two turned up yesterday kicking off because they hadn’t put down to do education – they haven’t been replaced yet because I wondered if they’d come today and then a different couple came this morning saying they’d completed it, but their records hadn’t been up-dated. One had his certificate and I gave the other a diagnostic. He scored over level 1 in half the time allowed. I’ll let them know in ‘Allocations’ - they’ll send two more this aft, if it’s not too late.
**SPM** What did the two do that said they completed the course somewhere else?

**T1** I sent them back to their wing - there’s no point being here, they’d just get bored and spoil it.

**SPM** Teachers haven’t got the authority to send anyone back; wings don’t have the staff for prisoners coming and going – couldn’t you use them to help the others?

**T1** They’re new to the jail and didn’t know anyone in the group. It takes time to build relationships first.

**SPM** Have you nicked the two from yesterday that refused?

**T1** No, I’ve not put them on report yet, as I say – I was waiting to see if they turned up today, but I will … well, I will if she shows me how to do it [laughs].

* [T2 Nods and smiles to T1].

**SPM** Were the four that came all engaged?

**T1** Well, eventually we got somewhere, but it’s not that simple, it’s …

**SPM** What do you mean?

**T2** How are they going to be engaged when half of them don’t want to be here and the other half that do – well that did, are getting fed up of listening to the others moaning.

**SPM** They have to attend - that’s why they’re in prison. It’s because they can’t do what they’re told. They need to understand that if they get on with it then they’ll have an easier time in prison and if they don’t, they lose privileges.
T2 Aren’t we using education as a punishment then and where else would this happen in education outside?

SPM They aren’t anywhere else though – they’re in prison to be punished.

T2 I thought losing their liberty was the punishment …

SPM Weeell, [long vowel pronunciation] not entirely …

T2 What about us, the teachers?

SPM You’re in a prison too and it’s a lot easier than teaching thirty kids in a school!

There is a significant responsibility that, as the author representing all other voices from the ‘fictional performative writing’, to ensure points of view in the story change as I present ‘different voices’ (Denzin, 2003 p.96). The dialogue is symbolic in its representation of complexity and turmoil in this context as large multidisciplinary institutions, organisations and individuals perform to different agendas. Whilst a key aim might be to open-up conversation in ways that present new opportunities (Ellis and Bochner, 2006 p.435), the proviso raised by the self-study writers, Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber on behalf of teachers’ voices, provides some balance when they declare:

… we conclude that too many outsiders – film makers, novelists, politicians – have made it their business to represent teachers and schools, and too rarely have we as teachers as insiders made it our business to ‘write back’ to the colonists of teachers’ experience (2005, p.2).

Therefore, I argue that the notion of voice is a crucial component in this methodological design, which explores the space between what counts as research (and teaching/learning), who gets to have a say what counts and/or
orchestrates slippage between what counts as real and less than real. The concept of voice in this sense is a near stranger to the methods and approaches of the natural sciences, which could not rationalize or elucidate my response to the research problem, nor could the social sciences or traditional educational methods based on a similar model. However, it is also crucial that my position, here, is not misconstrued as representing a view that different methodological designs would not help other people. Indeed, I suggest that for inquiry into personal experience, a bespoke approach according to the enquirer’s own ‘way of knowing’ is a crucial consideration for meaning-making. After all, as Foucault (1991) asks:

What Great Observer will produce the methodology of examination for the human sciences? Unless, of course, such a thing is not possible (p.226).

As this chapter on methods draws to a close and the chapter focussing on gaining access to conduct research in a prison begins, Norman Denzin’s (2014) four lessons for qualitative researchers when writing interpretive texts on lived experience is timely: ‘the worlds we study are created through the texts we write; the social text is a performance; there is no external authority for textual representations and the experiential structure should reach out from the writer in moral and political terms and back to the world’ (pp.82-83). Denzin continues:

The intention, with each of these textual moves, is not to convince the reader, writer, or other that this interpretation constitutes the most valid or correct version of the Truth. Understanding is desired: the guiding question is simple: Have I as a writer created an experiential text that allows me (and you) to understand what I have studied? Understanding occurs when you (and I) are able to interpret what has been described within a framework that is subjectively, emotionally and causally meaningful. This is the verisimilitude of the experiential text, a text that does not map or attempt to reproduce the real (p.83).

Thus, if experiences of experience were dominated by science, reason and the inanimate, then numbers, statistical analysis, randomisation and other instruments of the cold and hard would explain the internal emotions as well as they serve the impervious external so effectively. But, my
experience of meaning-making through reflection embraces fictional devices that 'warm' the emotions as much as they can be 'cooled' by objective logic. This self-study embraces such 'real' phenomena through an intricate blend of lived experience with fiction; an interpretation of 'real' things from (and in) our lives, exclusive of claims to present a story of 'facts'. The research design does not attempt to reproduce a 'real world' that does not 'really' exist; rather it questions assumptions of its 'realness'. Neither does it attempt to imitate a positivist principle of research that appears incompatible with that which it seeks to understand. With few certain answers of the cultural worlds we inhabit, it revels in (rather than resists) the constructed nature of experience that we call 'reality'. Notwithstanding this rather 'unconventional' approach, I argue that the methodology’s primary purpose is a practical and pragmatic resolution in response to the research problem. Furthermore, I argue it is a contribution to a growing body of research that explores multiple ways of knowing from experience that represents an equitable diversity of the world from which we strive to make meaning.
Chapter 2. The power of ethics and the ethics of power: spinning the blend and labelling the cloth.

Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear (Allison, 1996 p.39).

Ethics: spinning the blend and labelling the cloth

In the old textile recycling days, everyone knew ‘the game of unspoken truths’ that belonged to us. We had our heritage and we all knew our roles. Contracts were not necessary – deals worth many thousands were made on a handshake. We were just trying to make an ‘honest’ living. Let me tell you a story about heavy industry, revolutions and ethics.

The textile recycling industry is over 200 years’ old. It began in West Yorkshire as Northern England harnessed the power of steam and (later) electric with engineering and the craft of automated textile production, despite the Luddites’ apocalyptic protestations of progress as unethical and unfair. The demise of the cottage worker eventually came to pass, but their prediction of large-scale unemployment was unfounded. Cottage industries faded and cottage workers became different kinds of employees in factories, as opportunities for employment changed. On the one hand, the industrial revolution brought mass-production that exploited some, yet provided opportunities for others outside families of privilege to gain from their creativity. This new technology brought prosperity to Great Britain, but it also assisted their colonisation across the world and subsidised the nation’s military growth with soldiers clothed in serge - much of which was (ironically perhaps) made of recycled wool.

Across the land tatters (rag and bone men) collected old clothes amongst scrap, whilst entrepreneurs began to experiment with discarded textiles as alternative raw materials using emerging technology. Pure new wool was expensive and supply could be unpredictable, fashions were different, there were no synthetic fibres with which to compete, people needed warm clothes and blankets for poorly heated homes, factories and transport. The ingredients for change were present.
As an alternative to new wool, textile wastes were sorted into shades and grades, then ‘shredded’ (in West Yorkshire, ‘pulled’) back to fibre. It was cheaper than dyed pure new wool and more readily available as periods of war interrupted supplies from overseas. This ‘old’ or recycled wool was called either ‘mungo’ or ‘shoddy’, depending on whether the fibres had been recovered from woven or knitted garments. The quality of fibre recovered from knitted garments is ‘shoddy’ and, perhaps paradoxically, considered the better of the two. The word ‘shoddy’ meaning made of inferior material probably refers to its processing limitations when compared to most grades of pure new wool. Nevertheless, manufacturers knew that selling yarn or woollen cloth at cheaper prices was likely to mean larger volumes for them. The stakes were high, but so were the risks. Buying the right blend from ‘trusted’ reclaimed fibre manufacturers and then creating the right blend in a ratio of this reclaimed fibre to new fibre, was crucial for efficient production and the desired character of yarn and cloth before continuing their journey into finished garments to begin a new life. However, there was a multitude of ways in which things could go wrong in creating the illusion of new from old.

Aside from production risks, an ethical problem for yarn and cloth manufacturers was what to declare, how to label: pure new wool, pure wool, 100% wool, wool, mixed fibres or fibre from someone’s old tat? On the other hand, as a fibre manufacturer supplying them, I felt absolved from the ethical responsibility of labelling the cloth, even though I knew someone else would carry this burden further down the line. Did this make me exempt from responsibility? My own ethical considerations were, how much ‘extra’ water to mix in with the processing oil (since we sold by weight) and also what (cheaper) ‘mungo’ waste might be ‘blended in’ to (more expensive) shoddy products.

I entered this dance of craft, commerce, industry and ethics so long after its birth that I could only be there to witness its slow demise in West Yorkshire some 200 years later. At work, I had only ever known being a reclaimed fibre (shoddy) manufacturer, trading with many of the last bastions of a heavy industry sinking to its dark satanic knees, bringing with it my first professional turmoil all of its own.
Now, as a researcher rather than a woollen or shoddy manufacturer, I am responsible for applying a label to my goods, my woven tales of recycled, fictional narrative contained not within a bale of fibre, a cone of yarn or roll of cloth, but a portfolio thesis. What shade and grade should I present to the reader, what gets blended in, what gets left out and how do I protect others (and myself) as I manufacture a reproduction; a fictional version of an unbelievable reality from my lived professional experience?

This chapter critically reflects on the way research ethics are used to control access for certain kinds of research and critical inquiry in prisons, and is central to the thread of argument in this thesis concerned with a marginalisation of those on the ground. Therefore, although ethical considerations relating to prisons as research sites are a key feature of this chapter, the systems of management that control researcher access to these sites, taking the name ‘Research Ethics Committees’ (REC), and those applying to gain access, are subject to closer scrutiny.

In resisting such forces, this chapter’s philosophical approach can be likened to Alain Badiou’s (2012) discussion of fidelity to an event. Badiou is interested in ‘an artist’s or scientist’s fidelity to a creative line of inquiry opened up by a discovery or break with tradition …’ (p.17), and he explores the way a commitment to fidelity culminates in knowledge that resists being ‘seized and displaced’ [emphasis in original] (p.253). Badiou contends that, in such circumstances, ethics grounded in a search for ‘truths’ ‘evokes the logic of being true to something, of holding true to a principle, person or ideal’ (p.17) and, therefore:

The ethical prescription can be summarized by the single imperative: ‘Keep going!’ or ‘Continue!’ For a truth is clearly difficult by definition. It implies an effectively selfless devotion to a cause. By going against the current, by going against the ‘natural’ movement of time itself, it is vulnerable to various forms of erosion at every moment of its elaboration. To keep going, then, presumes the ability to identify and resist the various forms of corruption or exhaustion that can beset a fidelity to truth (p.19).

Within this chapter there are numerous stories, some I can ‘just’ tell and others I reveal through a ‘disguise’ of ‘fictional performative writing’. At first,
the notion of a ‘disguised story’ might seem at odds with ethics and a drive to fidelity, but this chapter demonstrates how such presumptions are not always fully apparent or defined. For example, the denial of permission for conducting research to explore creative ways of delivering Functional English is crucial to the through-line argument in this thesis that contends that the prison authorities have a propensity to resist creativity and innovation in favour of the status quo. As such, I am unable to tell the story as it ‘really’ happened due to the circumstances in which the balance of power is loaded against professional autonomy and innovation from the ground. The turn to fiction, then, opened up by a crisis in the research process, represents turning further through my commitment to follow the fidelity of the event that I was initially interested in exploring – the workings and efficacy of creative education in a prison context.

This chapter begins with a brief consideration of the processes needed to gain ethical approval for research in prisons and how institutional authorities such as the criminal justice system might use research to cultivate their own interpretation of ‘reality’. This is followed by two examples from the field and a short section providing the sequence of lived events, analysed by means of a fictional story. The analysis suggests that what is deemed to be worthwhile research in prison education and training is institutionally grounded in norms and practices of power and performance, rather than research approval processes that privilege the ‘greater good’ of positive change that might come from doing things differently.

If I were to speculate on the ‘back stage’ (Goffman, 1990 p.205) reasons provided by the prison Governor and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) for declining permission to conduct research, they would entertain notions of a somewhat risk-averse protectionism, lacking in appetite for creativity and innovation and/or any subsequent publications. The problem with such speculation is that it is partly fuelled by professional disappointment. However, Professor of Communications, Clifford G. Christians indicates this is not a phenomenon limited to my experience. From his research into authorization by institutional review boards (IRB), he argues that ‘IRBs in reality protect their own institutions rather than subject populations in society at large’ (2011, p.67). Christians
(2011) goes on to explore how fixed interpretations of what is considered legitimate research might stem from particular institutional cultures embedded over centuries and, nevertheless, prevail today (Ibid. p.61).

**Examples from the field: educational research in prisons**

Criminologist Lindy Nahmed-Williams (2011) describes her difficulties in gaining permission to conduct prison research for her PhD that explores the marginalisation of prison teachers in the wider education community. She explains that there were ‘numerous obstacles to overcome beyond the usual ethical considerations present in any research study’ (p.85). At first, her plans were to address four main research questions in seven different prisons, exploring prison educators’ experiences of their training and how prison education is operating. However, for research at more than one prison, permission needs to be awarded centrally by Her Majesty’s Prison Service (HMPS) and they refused on the grounds that ‘the research was not deemed to be useful’ (Ibid.). Nahmed-Williams could not understand the response because ‘the (Select Committee Report, 2005; DfES/DWP, 2005:29) expressed a need for further research in this area’ (Ibid.). The second reason for this refusal was that ‘sufficient research had been done in this area’ (Ibid.).

Nahmad-Williams (2011) also speculated that political influences were responsible for the initial refusal, suggesting that educational research in prisons is ‘steered towards the effectiveness of government policies and initiatives as opposed to encouraging researchers’ interests with extending the frontiers of knowledge’ (p.87). Her argument asserts that the Prison Service ‘had been adept and active in attempting to prevent this research from taking place’ (Wilson, 2003 p.412 in Nahmed-Williams, 2011 p. 88). This, according to Nahmed-Williams, was not so much an ethical review process as a coercive authority manipulating the design of research methods and questions to suit the Prison Service. Nahmed-Williams was tenacious in her approach, redesigning her research and thereby able to continue. Eventually, she was helped by the influence of a prison governing
body chair and a magistrate by introducing her to a prison with a more receptive governor.

Another useful example is from a blog run by staff and students at the University of Oxford and includes the perspectives of a serving governor. Written by an MSc criminology candidate, Dominic Aitken, and posted by Julia Viebach on 18 November 2014. The blog reports on a seminar for sharing experiences of gaining access to prisons in England and Wales. Two speakers were invited, one being Jamie Bennett, a Research Associate and Governor of the specialist therapeutic community prison ‘HMP Grendon and Springhill’. The other was Ben Crewe, Deputy Director of the Prisons Research Centre (University of Cambridge). The speakers were asked why certain kinds of research seem to be excluded from prison and the blog reports:

Academics are at the mercy of this fact to some extent, albeit indirectly. Bennett therefore stressed the importance of tailoring research proposals to the strategic priorities of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Crewe warned against the use of polemical or inaccurate language in proposals. Further, he stressed that work with a clear activist orientation will – in many cases – compromise research access or inhibit publication (Aitken, 2014).

Such circumstances, that could be construed as being an effective mechanism of surveillance and control over prison research, evokes Foucault’s (1979) theoretical interpretation of Jeremy Bentham’s (1791) ‘Panopticon’, providing a framework in which to examine further. This is the name given to a circular building with a central tower in which the inspector can survey people within the institution at all times, ensuring that their activities reflect the central drive for productivity, power and control. Bentham advocated its use for large-scale institutions such as schools, the poorhouse or hospitals and as such this was an early version of public services being designed with a ‘market strategy’, inspired by a late eighteenth century industrial model for commercial efficiency developed in Russia by Bentham’s brother. Reflecting on this, albeit in bureaucratic rather than architectural forms of management, the image of the contemporary penal institution is carefully controlled, as argued by Nahmad-Williams
(2011) through her comment that the view from the inside is strictly regulated before being shown to the outside (p.89). Here, instead of prisoners being the sole object of control, the inspector’s attention is focussed on everyone within the institution.

Perhaps, then, an insider-researcher poses particular problems for a prison and the broader networks of power and control in which it is embedded. Insider-researchers have a view from inside their own metaphorical Inspection House, which might challenge versions of ‘reality’ being projected to the world outside.

**A story of permissions I can tell: contextualising experience**

This section provides an overview of the lived circumstances in which I applied for permission to conduct research. It is followed by ‘A Research Application: On Trial’, which pays attention to the detail of these circumstances via ‘fictional performative writing’. The fictional piece is drawn from combinations of conversations, email exchanges and transcripts from two separate meetings, written within 24 hours of these ‘real’ events.

Four separate research proposals were developed over the course of my doctorate. Three were intended to conduct research in a prison, of which only one took place. This thesis represents the fourth, which was constructed to make meaning from these (mostly) thwarted endeavours in a way that remained faithful to my original intention of examining creative prison education. The first was a proposal to conduct a pilot over 12 months, testing research instruments for exploring education, work and training practices. This was accepted and is documented in the publishable article of this thesis. The next application built on these findings to explore the Performing Arts Department’s (PAD) work in greater detail. As normal for research involving prisoners, the application followed the same rigorous research ethics protocols as the pilot. The University of Manchester (UoM) Research Ethics Committee (REC) accepted the proposal and an Instigated Research Application System (IRAS) application was prepared for submission. The main role of IRAS is to conduct rigorous, ethical reviews on research involving clinical trials in the National Health Service (NHS). They
also review applications for research in prisons. However, in the interim period and as a result of the PAD being closed, following a curriculum review, I was assigned to teach Functional English. A new application was submitted to the UoM REC, based on exploring creative approaches to Functional English and a more detailed version was submitted to IRAS, which included sections for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) REC, as done for the pilot study. The IRAS review process necessitated my attendance at a panel where around twenty people with various specialisms encouraged me to respond to their scrutiny. After some minor amendments, the application was accepted. However, permission to begin any research is subject to the NOMS REC and the governor/s of the prison/s involved. The Functional English research application was denied, following an appeal. The Governor was the third appointed in four years, and the two previous governors had expressed support for my research. Eight concerns were raised in the first rejection of the application, which escalated the appeal process similar to the way most court cases are heard in a Magistrates Court before transferring to the Crown Court for more serious crimes. Five of the initial concerns were dealt with satisfactorily before the appeal, leaving three remaining, as represented by the ‘fictional performative writing’ piece below and Crown Court case in Act 1, from which a verdict is declared in Act 2.

At this point, the details of this story are relayed via the ‘fictional performative writing’ in this chapter. My intention is not to confuse readers, but quite the opposite in that I have tried to create a space in which the audience can enter. However, ‘it cuts across genres and is always partial and incomplete’ (Denzin, 2003 p.95), inviting the reader to engage between the lines. For example, in the opening to Act 1, the leaflet containing braille infers a diversity of ‘knowing’ in the world. The portrayal of the fictional characters Bob and Arthur is significant; their working lives in a dark coal mine acts a counter to the assumption of panopticonic omniscience, high above the ground. They embody an ‘everyman’ perspective and, in the spirit of ‘performative reading’ (Denzin 2003, p.94), invite the reader to interpret their position with perspectives of power and supposed omniscience from the Inspector’s Lodge of the Panopticon. This type of analysis is how I
interpret Sally Denshire’s (2013) reference to autoethnography falling ‘between anthropology and literary studies’ (p.1) as discussed in the Introduction. Moreover, as Denzin (2003) asserts, ‘Performative writing requires performative reading’ (p.94). Denzin (2003) explains further stating that ‘Performative writing often politicizes’; focussing on ‘mimicry, iteration, simulations and repetition’; it is meant to be ‘evocative, reflexive and multivoiced’ and it works best as a creative and collaborative meaning-making experience (p.94). Therefore, Bob and Arthur’s commentary might represent what Ellis and Bouchner (2006, p.435) or Elliot Eisner (2008, p.8) meant by autoethnography’s potential for ‘opening-up conversation’ for informed public discourse. These ideas might be extended further to consider the potential of encouraging discourse (in the public interest) towards the importance of transforming prisons into better places to do the work of exploring how to reduce criminal activity.

A RESEARCH APPLICATION: ON TRIAL

No one without a strong stomach should watch sausage or laws being made.
(Fine, 1993 p.267)

Characters

Criminal Justice Professionals

JUDGE
COURT CLERK (CC)
CROWN PROSECUTOR (CP)
APPLICATION’S DEFENCE (AD)
FOREMAN

Watching from the gallery

ARTHUR STEPPINGHALL
BOB SWIFT
Position unknown
ME

Act 1

The Crown Prosecution

10:00 am

[At Crown Court, the JUDGE is in chambers, meanwhile the jury, the APPLICATION’S DEFENCE (AD), CROWN PROSECUTER (CP) and COURT CLERK (CC) are in place. The gallery is only a quarter full and BOB is late for his weekly excursion with ARTHUR. Amid the hushed tones and chatter of apparent small talk, BOB bustles in].

BOB [Whispering]. Sorry Arthur.

ARTHUR Everything alright?

BOB [Whispering]. Men’s room.

ARTHUR Are you still no better with that …?

BOB No, Arthur.

ARTHUR Bloody hell, Bob.

BOB What can I do?

ARTHUR When do you go back?

BOB Never mind about that, what’s happening? [BOB nods down to the dock].
ARTHUR [Looks at BOB for a moment and shakes his head slowly then holds up his bumpy notes, scribbled on braille of a foyer leaflet]. It could be an interesting one this. I was downstairs talking to that usher bloke and he said I’d picked the right court this week. Some bloody teacher in a prison …

BOB Teacher … in a prison?

ARTHUR Yes, shut up; you know I’ll have to start from the beginning if you break … some bloody teacher in prison wants to do research in a prison …

BOB What, instead of teaching?

ARTHUR [Warning BOB to be quiet with his eyebrows, struggling to keep a hushed tone]. Some … [he pauses in anticipation of another interruption] okay … some bloody teacher in prison - used to do acting or something with prisoners - anyway, they stopped that. Then, the teacher wants to do research with English and teach using some of the acting stuff and can’t bloody understand why they’ve said: NO!

BOB [Holding back laughter, but unable to conceal a smile]. Daft sod! Anyway, whose ‘they’?

ARTHUR No bugger knows who ‘they’ are – just wait and see.

BOB Is the teacher-researcher - or whatever they are - on trial, then?

ARTHUR Keep up Bob, the application is on trial not the teacher – or at least that’s what ‘they’ said. Instead, somebody’s defending the application, though. I haven’t seen anybody looking like a nervous teacher. Maybe she stayed away.

BOB And, you wonder why all the bloody jails are full …
CC All rise.

[JUDGE, sits and makes eye contact and nods to the APPLICATION’S DEFENCE and CROWN PROSECUTOR before turning a gaze to the jury].

JUDGE This is an unusual case. A research application is on trial, rather than the applicant, and the only witness called for cross-examination is the Application’s Defence. The Defence is not cross-examining any witnesses. [Pause]. There has been some media interest in this case, but whatever has been written or broadcast must not interfere with the jury’s decisions. The only evidence on which to base your decisions must be limited to the evidence heard in this court. Remember, in criminal law, the Defence does not have to prove ‘innocence’. This is probably the most fundamental principle of criminal law. You should keep in mind that an application approved through IRAS is not a ‘given’ as approval for research in prisons. The prosecution must prove guilt, or ‘ineligibility’ in the case of this application. On the other hand, just because the ‘burden of proof’ rests with the Crown, it does not necessarily mean that the application does not need to defend (or should I say ‘justify’) itself. The logic is, nevertheless, quite simple: ‘not sure’ is equal to ‘not guilty’. [Pause]. The decision of the court will be final. [Pause]. Of the eight charges presented at Magistrates Court, five have now been dropped. These five must be discounted from your deliberations to concentrate on the following three charges:

Firstly, the methodology is not scientifically robust enough to inform future policy and practice; secondly the research is unlikely to add value to the delivery of educational services at the research site or other education sites in prison in the prosecution’s opinion and, thirdly, the research is not closely enough linked to NOMS business priorities.

[JUDGE gazes at the jury two seconds, before glancing round the court].

Can we, please, hear the evidence for the Crown?
Thank you, Your Honour. Members of the jury, we live in times of cuts to public services. The resources available within the criminal justice system have been significantly reduced. Governance at individual establishments is faced with two overriding challenges. They strip away anything that deviates from their business priorities and maximize the value of everything in which it invests. It is in the interests of the taxpayer and public protection, of course. This is the crucial dilemma we are dealing with in this case. Allowing this application, and its unscientific design, the potential cost outweighs any gain. It is simply a pragmatic approach to a practical challenge. Your Honour, I call the research Application’s Defence to take the stand.

This application is concerned with research on the use of Functional English with incarcerated male prisoners. Before we go any further, can you please explain to the court what ‘Functional English’ is and how it differs from, simply, ‘English’.

Typically, it includes everyday tasks such as writing to an employer, emailing a landlord, reading information from a community poster and so forth. These are the ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ parts, but ‘speaking and listening’ is also assessed.

They seem to be worthwhile goals for both students and employers’ needs, but can I detect a tone of tentativeness in your explanation? Is the application at odds with this type of English provision?

Very little research has been done to investigate Functional English teaching and learning practices or its impact in prisons. Lessons and courses are planned in accordance with guidelines from awarding and
regulatory bodies, which tend to discourage things like storytelling, fiction, poetry or drama.

**CP** You are aware, are you not, of research policy updates by the Criminal Justice System?

**AD** They seem to change all the time, but I’ve kept up with the general direction.

**CP** And, how would you describe that *[sarcastic tone]* ‘general direction’?

**AD** Well, that quantitative, evidence-based, measurable approaches are encouraged, which assume more rigorous and scientific outcomes with the potential to prove economic or social benefits, in accordance with Prison Service objectives.

**CP** ‘Assume’, you say?

**AD** Yes, Sir: assume! They say, ‘what gets measured gets done’ and that’s as maybe, but how do you know the tools of measurement are providing results that can be trusted, how do you know if you’re measuring what you think your measuring and what else isn’t being measured that should be?

**CP** *[Exaggerated sarcasm]*. Are you questioning the whole basis upon which scientific research is founded?

**AD** The application’s methods are ones used in social science – interviews and observation *[pause]*. But ‘scientific’ forms of measurement might not be the only game in town – the application infers exploring where some of the methods might be tailored to whatever is happening during the research process. Maybe other games can help *[smiles back to CP]*.

**CP** *[Sounding impatient and frustrated]*. And, your point is?
The applicant told me a story …

Really?

If something isn't working, maybe there are other ways of looking at things, based on what works really well in different contexts – even if it seems odd, at first.

Can we just hear your 'story'?

Things happen in prisons and prison education can defy logic. There was a prisoner that applied for a really expensive training course and was accepted on the basis that he seemed to be a candidate likely to pass – to succeed. It turned out he did not intend to use it to work in the industry – he just wanted to get out of his cell and do things with his buddies. Some ‘things with his buddies’ that cost the taxpayer three thousand pounds!

Oh, come on, this is just a one-off example. You're leading the jury …

I'm explaining detail from the ground. Another story is about a prisoner doing a joinery level 1 course when an Ofsted inspector asked, ‘Why is this person doing this course?’ meaning, ‘how does this course fit into any meaningful rehabilitation and resettlement plan?’ The reply was, ‘Because he applied!’ It might have helped him in other ways, but an important target for the prison is to maximize the number of men out of their cells during the daytime. It’s called engaging in ‘purposeful activity’, but as you can see that's not necessarily what’s being measured, is it?

Oh, come on now, that wasn’t Functional English …
AD I’m using it to show how ‘success’ is not always the ‘success’ claimed. And, if all the research methods, systems and controls are doing just fine: why the chaos?

CP [Taking a different approach]. Would you say the application’s methodology was sufficiently allied to the objectives as set out for research in criminal justice settings?

AD It was designed to respond to the research question, which was about improving skills in English, whilst exploring implications for employability and reducing reoffending, so yes!

CP Why, for example, is there not a control group - one being taught as before and the other being tested with new activities or approaches?

AD When the application was written, Functional English, at the research site, was in a developmental phase and the department’s staffing structure was under review. How classes might be organized could not be predicted or pre-planned.

CP But, how can the research be rigorous and scientific if there isn’t a control group?

AD If one group performed much worse than another because of research activity, this could be unfair. So, if there is any ‘control’ element, it is with comparisons of numerical student performance data from previous cohorts.

CP But, how will causation be proven?

AD Local policy, procedures, prisoner population and courses change all the time without any notice. This makes planning in a controlled laboratory-type, stable environment problematic and probably not a helpful way to approach such complexity. It is exploratory because it’s on such shifting sand.
**CP** And, the benefits?

**AD** It’s not possible to predict what benefits might emerge as a *direct* consequence of this application, but when more is known about how ‘Functional’ English is ‘functioning’ (or not), as the case may be – then figuring out what other benefits might lead to more research is a later stage. Sometimes something isn’t working, you don’t know why or how to fix it, but doing research to find out what you don’t know is a good start, right?

**CP** I can’t see any compatibility with the application and the regulations for research set out in the Prison Service Instruction, specifically ‘PSI 22/2014’. How will it be known if the research objective *and* the objectives of the Prison Service in the PSI have been met?

**AD** The research objective is to explore and learn about functional English in a prison context. Ofsted criticized teaching for being too paper-based, not practical enough and low success rates. The trouble is, prisoners are not assessed by practical activities, they are assessed on being sat down and concentrating, by reading and writing exams lasting over two hours. This is all stated in the application.

**CP** And what about the prison service objectives *pause* those described in the 2014 PSI? *Even longer pause*. Let me help you. On page thirteen, 3.37, it states:

Research applications must be methodologically sound with a clear and logical research design tailored to the type of policy and the specific research questions.

**AD** The latest PSI came out after the application had been submitted to IRAS and so it’s based on the one current at the time of submission.

*[CP pauses, looks down at case files, looks up firstly towards the jury and then pauses once more before resuming the cross-examination]*.
**CP** Are you saying that the application is based on a PSI different to the one now in use?

**AD** The application was made with specialist research supervisors, the University of Manchester Research Ethics Office, then IRAS using whatever PSI was in use at the time, 2012 I think [slightly raised voice]. Anyway, I also looked at the statement on the 2011/12 NOMS Annual Report because surely it wouldn’t conflict. [Mimicking CP]. Let me help you. [Long pause]. On page 25, in the section entitled ‘Our Values’, it states NOMS will:

… be open, honest and transparent; incorporate equality and diversity in all we do; value, empower and support staff, and work collaboratively with others; treat offenders with decency and respect; embrace change, innovation and local empowerment; and use our resources in the most effective way, focusing on outcomes and delivering value for money for the taxpayer.

That’s NOMS (2012)!

**CP** Thank you. [Pause and glance over glasses to jury, preparing to change the subject]. I have not seen a schedule showing the types of [sarcastic expression] ‘explorations’ or experiments intended; how will they be conducted and what is the aim? It all seems a bit woolly and fluffy.

**AD** Some examples are documented in the application – you must have seen them. Some were from learning in the PAD that was closed.

**CP** Are you saying that a closed-down acting course is fundamental to the application’s research objectives with Functional English?

[In the gallery].

**ARTHUR** Hey up, Bob, watch! This should be good; I think the Defence is about to flip.

**BOB** He’ll just be acting - like that teacher …
ARTHUR You’re joking mate, they’re all bloody acting.

BOB SSsh! Listen! I’ve got to hear how he gets out of this one.

[In the dock].

AD Okay, as I’ve already stated, there’s very little research of Functional Skills in prisons …

CP Functional Skills or Functional English?

AD Functional Skills includes maths and English. The application documents some of its concerns, like the intensity of the course, lessons lasting over three hours and with a high percentage of prisoners that have learning difficulties or poor cognition through substance misuse.

CP But, these men are in prison to be punished and rehabilitated, are they not? What good does it do if research encourages teaching practice that makes this easy for them?

AD When prisoners do not pass qualifications ‘failure’ is usually attributed to teaching but it’s not that straightforward. For example, when workshops have too few prisoners to meet occupancy targets, they take them from education classes. [Becoming frustrated]. Maybe it’s the regime and partnership working that’s failing!

CP Is there a tone of frustration in the application [staring to interrogate] – even anti-regime, maybe?

AD. Look! Like I’ve said, everything is in the application. I’ll give you another example. Permission was given to pilot interviewing prisoners before starting the Functional English class to make sure they were suitable, eligible and available. Before this, they were automatically assigned as a mandatory rule across the board. Apparently, ‘Get up – Education’ is how they get to know
early in the morning. Although time-consuming and demanding for teachers, filters and manners improved student behavior. The idea is that it might transfer to better experiences for all, better performance data, success-rates and better Ofsted judgments. But the person giving such permission has moved to another job and it’s gone back to where it was before without consultation or notice.

[The conversation begins to gather pace, both characters appearing frustrated].

CP Was the prison governance aware this was being done?

AD I assume it was cleared.

CP ‘Assume’?

AD Apparently, the relevant line manager was informed and they were supposed to do the rest. Anyway, going back to that other point, you’d think it was common sense to consult with prisoners before starting a course, at least you’d think so from the corporate mission statements. Maybe this could have been one of the issues for the research.

CP [Glaring]. Don’t you mean proposed research?

AD Yes of course - the proposed research, sorry.

[CP pauses and moves away from AD, takes a deep breath and pacing a small circle in the courtroom, raises an eyebrow whilst glancing over glasses to the jury before returning to the cross-examination].

[In the gallery].

BOB Look Arthur, the prosecution lawyer…doing that walking around thing and pulling funny faces.

ARTHUR I’ve told you, they’re all at it – it should be at Bradford Alhambra Theatre this …
[In the dock, the moment’s pause has brought some calm].

**CP** Just supposing that *if* the research was allowed and completed and *if* something further was worth doing, who’d follow it up?

**AD** Once published, others will have access and the potential to develop it further.

**CP** Not the teacher-researcher?

**AD** Possibly.

**CP** Well, this leads us to another concern; a lack of any added benefit or value shown in the application. Is there a plan demonstrating any economic and social benefits?

**AD** Implicit in this application are social and economic benefits, but I can’t provide a bottom-line figure. The application proposes making the thesis portfolio available in the prison library and possibly other prison libraries, sharing with colleagues in prison education and the possibility of a conference that could include education provider prisons in England and Wales. The University of Manchester expressed an interest in how they might help with funding a conference site to alleviate costs to the education provider or Prison Service.

**CP** Was this discussed with Prison governance?

**AD** It is in the application, as a suggestion. That’s what the application is for, isn’t it?

**CP** *[Changing the argument].* At what point will prisoners and staff know they are involved in the research?
AD People will be aware of their involvement from the start. But, the application describes a need to capture people in 'real' situations, or at least 'in the moment'.

CP When discussing research with students in class, should they be learning Functional English and how will this impact on the students?

AD Teaching Functional English to those that do not want to be there isn’t all about where you put the apostrophe - as important as this might be. Developing a relationship is not an easy task - the research will be about exploring such things, to uncover anything about ways of working together. This is extremely important.

CP Developing a ‘relationship’, you say?

[AD pauses a moment and takes a deep breath and shuffles a little awkwardly before fixing a serious gaze].

AD I have been to see what happens in prison education and it's dirty, demanding and sometimes demoralizing and dangerous. Almost every gain is carved out of stone. The application rejects any acceptance of being content with how things are. What facilitates or hinders progress in this particular context could inform how things might be done differently - better. I think this is how you put it [a mimicking expression]: ‘it is simply a pragmatic approach to a practical challenge’.

CP I think you may have missed my point [glancing at the jury].

[In the gallery].

BOB Whoa, I thought it was a good point well made, especially stealing the prosecution’s own words.

ARTHUR Yeah, the Defence case is growing on me.
**BOB** The Prosecution’s not going to take that, though. Just watch CP go now!

*In the dock*.

**CP** Moving on, what would happen if a student refused to be involved with the research?

**AD** He’d be left out of it.

**CP** What if a student was not happy with the group being used in research?

**AD** There’s also the rights of those that *do* want to take part to consider. This problem will be avoided or minimized by consulting students beforehand.

**CP** How will the research be kept on track?

**AD** By regular contact between the teacher-researcher’s academic supervisors, a professional doctorate mentor, a monthly report on progress sent to relevant people, responding promptly to any comments or concerns and keeping a reflective journal. It’s all in the application.

**CP** So, how are the supervisors qualified - will they take part in the fieldwork?

**AD** They are very experienced in working and researching prisons … *AD pauses and sighs*. Look, I don’t wish to be disrespectful, but all this information was fully examined by IRAS and is contained in the application I sent you. *If you have read it all, you will know this is where all the evidence for the Defence is contained.* *Turning to the Judge*. Your Honour!
**JUDGE** Prosecution! This line of questioning does seem to be going over unnecessary ground.

**CP** Your Honour, my last line of enquiry, please. [*JUDGE nods slowly*]. I can see there’s a PhD in this for someone, but what is the research going to offer the Prison Service towards its strategic objectives? They cannot just be the ‘host’ for a teacher-researcher’s professional development, through accepting this application.

**AD** It goes without saying that a PhD is an intended outcome of this research, but it involves a significant personal and financial commitment on the teacher/researcher’s part. Everyone working in the Prison Service could gain from research that explores what might work better.

[*In the gallery*].

**ARTHUR** Here it comes, Bob. Prosecution’s in for the kill now – they can’t take that.

[*In the dock*].

**CP** What if the research is not approved?

**AD** It is committed to conducting this study.

**CP** Why do you think it should be approved?

**AD** The teacher-researcher has been the Chief Investigator of a successful pilot research project at the same site, approved by the University of Manchester, IRAS, NOMS and prison governance. A contingency was not expected.

**CP** Maybe it’s something that should have been thought about sooner?
AD Maybe.

CP [Turning to the JUDGE]. No further questions, Your Honour, the prosecution rests its case.

JUDGE Thank you.

[In the gallery].

ARTHUR Well, it was good, but not quite as convincing as I was expecting, eh?

BOB No, me neither. They had the Defence ‘on the rails’ a few times, though.

ARTHUR I wasn’t surprised the Defence got wound up; it was winding me up! Did you get the feeling that the prosecution had already made …

BOB [Shrugs and shakes his head]. We’ll never know.

[The JUDGE turns to AD].

JUDGE Before the prosecution’s closing arguments and we adjourn to allow the jury to come to a verdict, have you anything else to say?

AD Your honour, I am not sure I can add much more, only to reiterate that this research proposal is intended to improve the Functional English provision across the prison, and hopefully beyond.

[AD removes and infolds an A4 sheet of paper].

Actually, there is one last thing, Your Honour. May I quote from page 10 of the 2011 Green Paper, ‘Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation’, published by BIS, or should I say the ‘Department for Business Innovation
and Skills?

**JUDGE** Please do!

**AD** Evidence shows that prison education and vocational interventions produce a net benefit to the public sector ranging from £2,000 to £28,000 per offender (or from £10,500 to £97,000 per offender when victim costs are included): we are determined to secure those savings for the public purse … So, if we are to make substantial progress with our reforms, the skills system for offenders must be an authentic part of the system, and this will require all those involved to think differently about the way we do things. We know that a top-down focus on targets and delivery fails to deliver the right conditions locally to meet the complex needs of offenders.

*[AD continues]*. Your Honour, this research is in response to this national policy. I contend that the methods are consistent with traditional education and social science research and similarly its intentions are consistent with the strategic aims of Prison Service policy. Thank you, Your Honour. I rest my case; this is my closing argument.

*[In the gallery]*.

**BOB** I’m not sure national policy and prison policy are the same, but that’ll take some beating, Arthur.

**ARTHUR** It will, but you know, this prosecution’s good and institutions are powerful. When all is said and done, not many take on the establishment and win.

**BOB** Even King Arthur couldn’t manage it … Arthur. *[No answer as Bob reminisces thoughtfully - staring at court – not making eye contact]*. I said, even Ki …

**ARTHUR** I heard Bob, I heard.
[In the court, JUDGE shuffles papers and turns to CP].

JUDGE And, the closing argument for the Prosecution …

CP Your Honour, [CP turns from the JUDGE to face the jury and moves slowly towards them] members of the jury, we have not heard from the teacher/researcher. We don’t know if the teacher-researcher is a good teacher or a good researcher, but we have heard about, [pause and raised eyebrow] let’s say, ‘a well-meaning person’. But, do not let this sway your decision from the facts. Are these the qualities we need to contribute to the evidence-base for quantifiable, measurable, rigorous, scientific and objective research? I know the research application is on trial, here, but we cannot separate the proposal from the management of it. The proposal, as it stands, does not meet the requirements as set out in the PSI. Prisons are not places in which people should be running around, disrupting operations, stepping out of role and coming up with their own ideas for procedures and presenting additional security risks by people with … how did the Defence put it … ’creative ideas’!

AD Your Honour!

JUDGE Prosecution! You are straying from the facts.

[JUDGE turns to jury].

CP One last point, Your Honour.

JUDGE Go-ahead.

[CP pausing, then turning to the jury with a serious face that, nevertheless, portrays an expression somewhere between being sympathetic and patronizing, removes glasses and speaks more slowly and quietly].

CP This application cannot contribute towards the strategic business priorities of NOMS, nor is it of any value to other classes or courses at the
proposed site, or prisons in general. All this is a waste of time and money. For these reasons, in particular, the original decision made by the authorities with overall responsibility for managing the research site should be upheld, and deny permission to conduct the proposed fieldwork.

[For, what seemed, a well-rehearsed moment, CP holds eye contact with the jury then, once more, turning a downward gaze, CP turns slowly to face the JUDGE].

Your Honour, this is our closing argument; the prosecution rests.

JUDGE [Turning to the Jury, JUDGE sums up each case, then concludes]. On balance, compliance with up-to-date Prison Service regulations and objectives is a vital factor. Any research carried out must be within their terms of relevant research, management of security, financial management and control of day-to-day business. These considerations must outmaneuver the requests of a single professional’s research application; regardless of how laudable it might appear.

The Bailiff in Chambers will ask you to select a foreman to chair your deliberations and announce your verdict in open court. Your decision must be based on the evidence you have heard in court and you must not seek any influence from outside the court such as the Internet or social media.

Court adjourned.

[In the gallery].

ARTHUR Well, what do you think now?

BOB Did that Judge just lead the jury?

ARTHUR Chuffin’ ‘ell, Bob, just look around. Look at where we are – the Crown on the wall and all the trappings. He doesn’t have to …

BOB I still can’t call it for sure, Arthur, it’s down to the jury now.
ARTHUR It’s common sense what’s fair but …

BOB If common sense and fairness had anything to do with it, Dickens would’ve had much less to write about.

ARTHUR You been down the library again, Bob? [ARTHUR grins and BOB grins back].

BOB Have we got any sarnis left? [BOB scrambles in a bag under their seats] Where’s that snap tin?

ARTHUR You’re not supposed to bring ‘em in …

BOB There’s a lot of stuff you’re not supposed to do, Arthur.

**Act 2**

**The Verdict**

16:30 pm

[The jury, defendant, prosecution and courtroom clerk are back in place. A few people are in the gallery with BOB and ARTHUR and the mood is tense].

CC All rise.

[JUDGE enters to silence and sits].

JUDGE Foreman of the Jury, should permission to conduct fieldwork as presented in the application be granted or denied? What is your verdict?

FOREMAN Denied.

JUDGE Is that the decision of you all?
FOREMAN It is, Your Honour.

JUDGE Case closed: permission is denied.

[After the gavel’s thud, there is little noise from the court for a while, but slowly whispers emerge in the gallery].

ARTHUR Phhh! Did you see that coming?

BOB [Nodding towards AD]. I wonder if AD did.

ARTHUR At first, well I …

BOB We were both the same … but, you’re right, Arthur – you can’t beat the system.

ARTHUR They’ve got some fancy ways with them though – some fancy ideas …

BOB Who?

ARTHUR Them!

BOB Is that the same as ‘they’? [Looking at ARTHUR with a slightly mocking, but friendly, grin that fades as he thinks].

[Arthur never answers the question – they sit in silence for a few seconds].

ARTHUR Don’t get me wrong, I’ve enjoyed this case and I’m glad we stuck with it. But … something … something about it that just doesn’t … just …

BOB Aye, I know …

ARTHUR Funny old world …
BOB Isn’t it just.

ARTHUR Pub?

BOB [Nods]. Aye, pub!

ME Dear reader, this is ME – we haven’t really met yet, but I’m the author of this dialogue and you’ll never guess what: I’ve temporally lost the power of omniscience – it happens all the time. Well, all powers to do with the script and plot, anyhow – and that’s just about the same thing. Everything went fuzzy and I lost sight of BOB and ARTHUR. I wonder if they’re still in the gallery. I’ll miss them when this is all over. All I remember at the end was something about the application being … well, it’s only a story, anyhow. I don’t suppose you’d know what … what do you think … Sorry, I shouldn’t ask. Anyway, it’s great we’ve got this far together – hopefully you can stick around.

Discussion: Inverting the Panopticon

‘An Application: On Trial’ extends beyond the fictional reconstruction of a story that I chose not to tell in its original form because whilst writing I wove in some of the frustrations, expressions and nuances representing lived experience to evoke readers’ engagement. These were abridged, as I did not want to fully inflict the frustrations of my lived experience, but the reader may have shared some, not least the abrupt way in which a final decision was made in the scenario. The characters do not necessarily represent any single person from my lived experience, although some alliances are closer than others. Whilst writing I moved them around different viewpoints according to the varying degrees of power and their position within the institutional spaces of both lived and created experience. For example, the judge observes high and centre stage, the impression is of an all-knowing position, whereas only seats in the viewers’ gallery are physically higher, offering the appearance of an open democracy where people can observe justice being performed – a further premise being that seeing is equivalent to transparency. Bob and Arthur’s commentary is
grounded in the lay spirit rather than the expert. Bob and Arthur are contrastingly thoughtful and playful. They do not necessarily represent views of the author, but in the absence of the author’s appearance, they provide voices of the ordinary citizen that could be so vital to relevant debates.

To invert the Panopticon, as the subheading above heralds and synonyms suggest, is to upturn or capsize it. In doing so, I offer the reader a metaphor that involves toppling over the idea of omniscience and introduce a view from the ground. Doing so involves excavating the philosophical principles that underpin ‘panopticonic’ archetypes, which have their foundations in power, control and economic efficiency. In the discussion that follows, I aim to uncover some of the dualisms, contradictions and competing tensions associated with Bentham’s conceptualization that relate to those from my lived experience and the fictional performative modes of expression employed. An important goal for this chapter is to make-meaning from lived experience of being denied access to conduct research as someone already inside the system, which forms part of a wider aim to explore the circumstances that thwarted attempts to teach and research creatively in a prison.

In the ‘forward’ to Anne Brunon-Ernst’s (2012) chapters of ‘New Perspectives on Bentham’s Panopticon’, Claire O’Farrell suggests:

There are traditionally two schools of thought in Bentham Studies. On the one hand, the authoritarian school contends that Bentham is the mastermind of authoritarian state control. On the other hand, the liberal school contends that Bentham thinks in terms of the rule of law, and aims at promoting civil rights and political rights. These two schools of thought are mirrored in the construction of Bentham’s Panopticon (Ibid. pp.1-2).

Here lies the paradox of Jeremy Bentham’s utopian architecture as the organization of ‘correcting’ individuals in a dystopian space. Power is symbolized by this vantage point, as Foucault states:

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in the central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualised and
constantly visible (Foucault, 1991 p.200).

Therefore, Bentham’s (1791) design is intended to impose penal control on all those that enter its space. As such, ‘the servants and subordinates of every kind, will be under the same irresistible control with respect to the Head Keeper or Inspector, as the prisoners or other persons to be governed are with respect to them’ (Bentham, 1791 p.29). Bentham’s idea that prisons should resemble factories for processing people efficiently and cost effectively was justified on the idea of the greater good for the state. This argument was clearly made by CP and JUDGE (above). According to new writing on the Bentham/Foucault debate, Foucault’s (1991) interpretation of Bentham’s Panopticon is ‘a symbol of what was going wrong in late capitalist politics and culture [as an] abstract paradigm of power relations’ (Brunon-Erst, 2011 p.45). Foucault (1991) goes on to coin the term ‘panopticism’, which quickly became shorthand to describe Bentham’s utilitarian theory as a whole. ‘Panopticism’, then, is the theorisation of surveillance society derived from Bentham’s project of a prison, with an all-seeing inspector’ (O’Farrell, 2012 pp.1-2). Therefore, if such an all-seeing inspector is also responsible for permitting, making conditions for, or preventing research through a process under the guise of ethical approval, this could also be a euphemism for ‘information control’ (Goffman, 1990 p. 141). Moreover, if such realities are constructed for release to the world based on political censorship, what is left for a version of reality but a fiction? Perhaps, just as disconcerting, is the manner in which this is accepted by most, as Foucault argues:

It is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism (Foucault, 1991 p.217).

Reflecting performatively on this uneven power divide and accepting that my role in this thesis has sometimes played the marginalised and
supressed victim, I draw on social scientists Gaile Cannella and Yvonne Lincoln (2011, p.81) to explore meaning-making with ethical responsibility in circumstances where the division of power restricts practice.

Being critical requires a radical ethics, an *ethics that is always/already concerned about power and oppression even as it avoids constructing ‘power’ as a new truth*. The intersection of power, oppression, and privilege with issues of human suffering, equity, social justice, and radical democracy results in a critical ethical foundation. Furthermore, ethical orientations are believed to be played out within the personal core of the researcher as she or he examines and makes decisions about the conceptualization and conduct of research as either oppressive or emancipatory practice (Ibid.) (Italics in original).

Cannella and Lincoln (2011) call for qualitative researchers ‘to take hold of our own existence’ (p.87). Thus, through ‘fictional performative writing’, I was re-balancing control whilst being mindful of taking care ‘in and of the field’ (Mienczakowski and Moore, 2008 p.457). My struggle has been for a fair balance that involves interrogating the shortcomings of my own position within lived experience, without being an apologist for others. It is subjective because objectivity in these circumstances is unattainable. It was written through a deeply reflexive autoethnography using fiction where ‘truths’ and power might otherwise collide, yet without surrendering ‘fidelity to an event’ (Badiou, 2012 p.170).

However, ‘the self is not fully transparent to itself’ (Griffiths, 2010 p.184) and there are always ‘truths’ not yet realised, even though many times ‘In that moment of composition, I come to see what I believe, what I did not know before I started writing’ (Pelias, 2011 p.659). I employed strategies in writing that I learned from applied theatre practitioners such as ‘one step removed role play’ whereby ‘Participant plays self or other(s) in enactments of purely hypothetical or close-to-life (fictionalised) situations or roles’ (Baim et al., 2002 p.152). The internalised dialogues and roles involved an introspective interrogation of experience, re-constructing a representation of reality through fiction and performance to ‘ring true’ (Leavy, 2013 p.80), of which the pre-fieldwork ethical review cannot compete. Through this internalised process, I gain metaphoric access to the ‘Inspector’s Lodge’
(Bentham, 1791). My ethical responsibility is expressed by offering this version of lived experience for reinterpretation by the reader.

I suspect, though, there remains an elephant in the room for some readers - should I have asked permission of all the people from these lived experiences to use my imagination in a creation of which they were involved? My response is that, in an ideal world, I would. But, we do not live in such a world and so this was not possible. If ethics are about morals and conduct and if ‘The only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether’ (Bronfenbrenner, 1952 p.453), then accepting and minimising risk is preferable to abandoning our quest for understanding the world through research. Moreover, sometimes a full explanation of one’s purposes would overwhelm the listener’ (Bulmer, 2008 p.154) and although I was aware that in the not telling, there was a minor deception of sorts; informed consent is not always practicable. Christians (2011, p.65) argues:

Given the search for knowledge is obligatory and deception is codified as morally unacceptable, in some situations, both criteria cannot be satisfied. The standard resolution for this dilemma is to permit a modicum of deception when there are explicit utilitarian reasons for doing so.

In this study, the fieldwork had already been collected in my experience before I developed my proposal. In my view, a new application to the Prison Service would have been unfair considering I felt disadvantaged by Prison Service attitudes to my choice of methods and approaches. I decided that requesting permission retrospectively would not be dealt with equitably. Moreover, as Laura Ellingson (2011) suggests from her illuminating chapter in ‘The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research’:

Those of us who feel passionately that our work holds the potential, to promote social justice, to shed light on complex problems, and to significantly influence our disciplines need to make sure important work that serves those goals get done and published (or otherwise shared). If that goal requires being subtle (or even sneaky), so be it (p.606).

Anything ‘sneaky’ has been declared here. Moreover, Ruth Armstrong, Lorraine Gelsthorpe and Ben Crewe (2014) argue that a researcher’s
practices should be developed despite pressures for ‘legalistic adherence’ and they call for them to be afforded:

... the freedom to adapt and to be inventive which is beneficial for both knowledge production and for analytical frameworks ... such flexibility might also lead to more ethical research, and develop more ethically sensitive researchers who report the realities of their labours candidly ... where research is not judged by the absence of ethical ambiguities, but by evidence of ethical sensibilities through practices that return us to the heart of the matter - respect for autonomy, beneficence and justice (p.216).

Consequently, I argue that consent to protect privacy or confidentiality from my lived experience beyond the measures described is not necessary. If, when reading this fiction, a realisation of oneself in a character or situation promotes reflection, it might encourage new directions of inquiry through a process as old as fictional literature itself. Accordingly, this study has wider implications for researchers across diverse fields and circumstances beyond criminal justice contexts. For example, if knowledge being released into the world accords only with, arguably, narrow political ends, research findings produced under such conditions are likely to skew knowledge and therefore encumber any policy decisions that rely on their authentic representation. Therefore, although the challenge of endeavouring to conduct research in such circumstances was considerable, a sense of injustice (whether justified or not) and a determination to complete the research meant there would be no turning back. These are the circumstances in which I found myself, why I had something to write about, why it was so difficult and why it had to be written.
Chapter 3. Small performances of our own making: working from the ground in the PAD

We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies (Picasso, 1923).

Warp and weft: working with contamination

In conventional woollen cloth manufacturing, a warp is made from yarn that runs parallel to a cloth’s length, but is ‘hidden’ in its centre. The warp is fed from cone-shaped bobbins (to reduce surface tension) through a frame that allows yarn to be loaded onto a drum. Next, the drum is positioned on a loom, turning slowly to deliver warp threads running the length of the cloth. For most good quality woollen cloths, both warp and weft yarns are of a similar construction and fibre content (say, mostly wool). For some cheaper alternatives, ‘hidden’ (often cotton) warp yarns can be ‘covered’ by the woollen weft, making the ‘face’ look good on the cloth’s surface. The intention of the fabric designer is to appeal to the market on price and appearance and not be concerned with any unintended costs when such fabrics go unnoticed during recycling by shredding or pulling, which contaminates other ‘pure’ woollen garments in a blend. Indeed, if unnoticed and blended with new wool by the yarn-maker before spinning, the problem intensifies. Moreover, if still noticed during spinning and weaving, until the cloth dying stage where a wool dye will not colour cotton, the costs are potentially catastrophic.

By way of comparison, this thesis has argued that people and teams protect their reputation or marketability using whatever means of advantage available to them, even if they contaminate policy objectives, or in this case, the lives of people in prison dealing with consequent turmoil (Goffman, 1990 pp. 83-108; Treviño, 2003 pp. xvi-xvii) and bewilderment (Thompson, 2008 p.21). Similarly, one-size approaches for burgeoning prisoner populations might appear more attractive (weft-like) in terms of solutions, bolstered with weighty (sometimes) misleading arguments for cost and efficiency according to any utilitarian intention for the greater (commercial) good. However,
without taking time to ‘pay attention’ (Sullivan, 2000 p.211) through scrupulous inspection of detail under the surface, or the continual checking-in of ideology versus practice integrity (Balfour, 2009) the potential for contamination (cotton warp) increases. The economic cost of searching for clues in small performances of our own making could be negligible, but democratizing decision-making to meaningfully include (and reward) those on the ground might be a price that those relinquishing power are not prepared to pay. Such a situation may be the stalemate that tends to contaminate potential for ‘real’ progress.

In this chapter, I examine experiences in a prison performing arts department (PAD) that initially aimed to contribute to ‘What Works’ aspirations (see, for example, BIS, 2010; BIS, 2011; MoJ, 2010; MOJ, 2012; MoJ, 2015). As a brief reminder for the reader, the phrase ‘What Works?’ is both a term that summarises a criminological approach and it is a question. The question asks - what interventions with prisoners prevent reoffending? At the beginning of the research process, my position was far more open to the possibilities of generating ‘What Works’ ‘answers’, and I accepted that creative work in the PAD would play a role in this particular penal system’s agenda. However, the extent to which the PAD was increasingly expected to demonstrate success and generate income for the education provider, with a concomitant reduction in professional autonomy as well as other variables in prisoners’ lives began to reveal restrictions and limitations through relying upon this approach alone. Increasingly, I became concerned, firstly, about the way in which the phrase (and expectations of any research in its name) was being deployed in performance management. Secondly, that I was unable to work out how some ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) from a ‘theatre of little changes’ (Balfour, 2009 p.7) that I began to notice from ‘the ground’ (Thompson, 2008 p.147) in the PAD (illustrated in the fictional performative writing scenarios that follow) could be fully analysed and understood statistically. It was at this point in the research, around six months after work in the PAD began, that desistance theory first appeared to offer some of the flexibility needed to accommodate my experiences of practice.
This chapter presents an argument in three overlapping and interrelated assertions. Firstly, that social and professional performances of ‘impression management’ (Goffman, 1990 pp.203-230) drive management systems in prisons, which in turn construct a ‘prison reality’ that leaves some ‘bewildered’ (Thompson, 2008) and others institutionalised. Secondly, ‘arts in prisons’ interventions are amongst the most vulnerable to being reduced or cut, but such decisions are more likely to be ‘political’ and public-image-based. Thirdly, despite such politically-driven performances and manoeuvrings that have a propensity to ‘infect’ (Balfour, 2009 p.1) the direction of ‘prison theatre’, the fictional representation of experiences presented in this chapter provides a case for their usefulness, a usefulness revealed as well as enhanced by ‘paying attention’ (Sullivan, 2000 p.211) from a position ‘on the ground’ (Thompson, 2008 p.147).

At this point in the thesis, it is worth a further reminder that factors such as precise dates and names of organizations or people are rarely featured in this thesis, lest their inclusion identifies or compromises actors and agencies from my lived experience. Having established this reminder, next a little clarity about key concepts used in the chapter is needed before moving on. ‘Social performances’ refers to the way in which everyday actors and agencies (people and teams) perform in relevant social and professional contexts. Implicit within my use of this phrase are tensions between the protection and ‘presentation of self’, often apparent within institutional contexts (Goffman, 1990).

‘Bewilderment’ is a term used by Thompson (2008) ‘in many different but connected ways’ in a ‘prison theatre’ context (p.22). Briefly, one of these ways is ‘a shorthand for the importance and positive effect of amazement, fascination and doubt’ [which can be] ‘the stimulus for critical and questioning research’ (Ibid.). Alternatively, for some prisoners and those working on the ground in prison, it refers to baffling circumstances and effects, more of which is explored through ‘fictional performative writing’ later in this chapter.

‘The ground’ is a reference to frontline practice arising from my appreciation of Thompson’s (2008) reflections on theatre-based practice, including employment and training programmes (similar to those I examine
in this thesis) in prisons during the mid 1990s. Thompson uses a number of phrases to extend this metaphor of ‘the ground’ or ‘road’ such as a ‘democracy of the ground’ and ‘the heat of the ground’ (p.148) that contrasts with a description of actors away from the ground as ‘donkey riders’ (Ibid.). These terms arise from the homily, presented as an epigraph in a chapter concerned with theatre action research and a democracy of the ground, as follows:

A person who rides a donkey does not know the ground is hot.


Informed by practice, ‘the ground’ infers a frontline practice that can be ‘heated’ through action (Thompson, 2008 p.147). Being away from the ground, supposes actions by others with varying degrees of power making decisions for the ground workers. Metaphorically, they are on ‘the backs of donkeys’, away from the ‘heat of the ground’ (Ibid.). However, if we accept that ‘understanding and meaning arise from the struggle that takes place in interactions on the ground’ (p.148), then Thompson’s (2008) ‘democracy of the ground’ implies that a reconfiguration of influence (brought about by the inclusion of disparate voices) might introduce insightful perspectives rarely heard. What emerges strongly here is a sense of a marginalized position and consequently missed opportunities for discovery on the ground. In the bewildering context of prison education, the smallest of gains are immensely significant, but cannot be seen from managers’ offices, eluding the assumptions of surveillance embedded in management systems. Neither do they feature in the dramatic solutions proclaimed by policymakers’, but rather they emerge from practice ‘on the ground’ (Thompson, 2008 p.147; Balfour, 2009 p.7).

Next, I provide an historical context for the PAD and its development, which is followed by the first piece of ‘fictional performative writing’ that aims to provide the reader with a ‘real’ sense of the ground. The intention is to encourage discourse and further meaning-making, which extends what is
possible through more conventional commentary, interspersed between fictional and performative representations (that can be enhanced by performative reading), as described in Chapter One (Denzin, 2003 p.94).

**Context setting: The PAD.**

My training and professional experience in prison education began by working as an English teacher for a department specialising in peripatetic delivery outside prison classrooms, such as prison industries and vocational training workshops, segregation and residential units, supporting prisoners one-to-one or in small groups. The theoretical initiation for the PAD was provoked in my first year of full-time prison education whilst searching the literature on creative education and training during my part-time Masters in Education. My curiosity was provoked by a combination of Hughes’ (2005) literature review of ‘arts in prisons’ and the various atmospheres and moods apparent in different curricula areas/subjects in prison.

The PAD presented an opportunity to explore this phenomenon further and relied upon many converging components. For example, the national government at the time broadly supported the principle of arts’ projects in prisons, whilst the education provider, prison governor and funding body approved the venture locally. In the prison, relevant managers were being reasonably supportive and I secured both a suitable venue and equipment after a financial grant of £50,000 was granted by an organisation established to improve the quality of education occurring in diverse circumstances, for which prison education qualified. At its inception, without the benefit of hindsight and this analysis, I believed the prospects of sustaining practice and research over the six years of a part-time doctorate seemed reasonable, unaware of the complexities and unravelling that would ensue.

The financial award was on condition that doctoral research measured the project’s effectiveness (the responsibility of which I undertook) and our work was recorded on video over two years, creating a documentary showing what had been learned. I transferred from manager to a teacher-researcher role in the department to train ‘on the job’ and research on the ground. However, I needed insider subject specialists to support my
knowledge gaps in performance skills, which led to a search that culminated in finding two male colleagues. One had taught drama at a further education college since graduating and the other was an English/Drama graduate that appeared in West End theatre productions before his long-standing career in the creative industries. Despite the skills and experience we shared, to begin with none of us had ‘arts in prison’ backgrounds, and this was a key argument built into the award application that requested funds to support training with external ‘arts in prisons’ specialist practitioners and organisations. In the sections that follow, at times I refer to ‘us’, ‘our’ or ‘we’ to represent my interpretation of joint approaches to our practice as a PAD team. Where I use the ‘I’ it represents my view and I am unsure of my ex-colleagues’ perspectives, one way or another.

A further condition of the £50,000 grant was to make a film documentary that could be useful to others considering similar ventures. We purchased a camera comparable with BBC specification and were fortunate that one in our team had significant experience using cameras in TV media, but we all underwent camera training by a professional operator. Although hundreds of hours were filmed, the documentary was never produced because of the department’s closure; this thesis is the only record of our two-years’ experience. Many characters and plots in my ‘fictional performative writing’ are inspired from memory of professional experiences, some of which are represented in footage that, as far as I am aware, is locked away in a prison safe. There are a number of ironies, here, considering my experience in waste and recycling, in that even when cuts to the public services were so severe, valuable data potentially rich in clues to policy problems became wasted records; neglected examples of creative interventions that might inform policy-makers or aspiring practitioners.

As our skills-set was biased towards drama-based work, this soon became the focus for developing our longer-term practice and my research. For example, we worked alongside visiting practitioners in their residency programmes, fluctuating between roles of being a participant and observer amongst prisoners and specialist practitioners, according to the circumstances and activities involved. Additionally, we attended training sessions with two separate ‘prison theatre’ companies outside prison at their
own in-house residential venues. This training could be broadly described as a form of ‘applied theatre’ practice, which most often occurs in unconventional theatre settings such as, community centres, refugee camps, church halls or prisons, involving participants that are not trained actors and organised by practitioners aiming to have a positive impact on the participants’ lives (Thompson, 2008; Nicholson, 2005).

A further challenge in year two necessitated developing both our own course and practice in line with OLASS funding to become fully financially independent of our £50,000 grant. We chose to deliver a qualification at two levels of complexity and between two academic levels. For example, at levels one and two, we offered either an ‘Award’ or ‘Certificate’ in ‘Skills for the Creative and Cultural Industries’ using two units: ‘Develop Performance Skills’ with ‘Improvisation and Performance Skills’. Although direct comparisons between levels of education for children and adults are not always helpful, level one is often cited as equivalent in complexity to a GCSE at grade D-E and level 2 between A-C. Assessments of competencies were recorded in a portfolio of evidence for each learner, collected throughout the three-week course. We expected students to attend full-time (Monday morning until Friday lunchtime) in sessions lasting approximately three hours each.

The organisation regulating our assessment and issuing certificates, known as an ‘awarding body’, was recognised as specialising in personal and social development (PSD), which is one strand of prison education that includes areas of the curriculum such as visual art, domestic cookery, healthy living, parenting and so forth. The next strand is Functional Skills (FS), including English, maths and information / communication technology (ICT), then thirdly Vocational Training (VT) including subjects such as painting and decorating, joinery, plumbing and commercial catering. The content of the prison curriculum was adjusted regularly but, as a general rule, when the PAD began it consisted of approximately 40% VT (including employability subjects such as business studies or preparation for work), 40% FS and 20% PSD. Two years following our inception, PSD had shrunk to 10% with the balance being distributed between VT and FS. Both FS and VT had priority over PSD in terms of curricula share and income generation.
per qualification from the ‘funding body’ that, at the time of writing, is a government controlled organisation called the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Consequently, considering the squeeze on PSD, there was an element of risk in our choice of a PSD awarding body specialist, but we were unable to identify another awarding body offering a suitable course eligible for OLASS funding. Moreover, the awarding body allowed us almost complete freedom of content providing that learning outcomes were evident to meet the course criteria.

I was the only full-time member of staff in the PAD, teaching seven of nine sessions per week. In each of these sessions, one of my two colleagues delivered alongside me (team-teaching) and they taught together when I was allocated to administration and lesson development duties. Initially, we established a ratio of two OLASS teachers to twelve prisoner participants for our own drama-based course, influenced by our experiences of working and training with ‘prison theatre’ specialists. The ‘fictional performative writing’ piece, below, is inspired by some of the sessions in which I taught and others I witnessed. In this case, the reader might recognise this activity from the pilot study in the publishable article, which I have extended for this chapter. All the fictional scenarios aim to offer the reader a ‘panopticonic’ view inside the PAD as the closest substitute for ‘real’ experience or film footage, otherwise confined and, as such, I invite the reader to feel the ‘heat of the ground’.

Performances in prison: on hot ground and donkeys

List of Characters

Teachers

TEACHER DAVE
TEACHER MIKE

Prisoners
Hello reader! Sorry, I know you were about to get started with this piece, but it’s ME again, you know, from Chapter Two. Anyway, I just wanted to introduce this scenario of Bob and Arthur watching a play that opens with the theatre in darkness. The intermittent spotlight serves as a cautionary reminder of ‘the drunk who looked for his car keys under the lamppost, not
because he thought they were there, but because that was where the light was best’ (Maruna, 2012 p.75). [ME drifts away looking smug about his fancy quote].

[BOB shuffles around in his seat, shrugging his shoulders when Arthur declines his offer of the performance program].

**ARTHUR** Comfy Bob? [Pause with a grin]. So, we’re actually going to see what really happened way before that research thing got turned down in court then, eh?

**BOB** Arthur, we’re not going to see what really happened, we’re going to see some sort of reconstruction – a story.

**ARTHUR** It’s probably the closest we’ll get.

**BOB** I heard they’d found some video recordings in an old prison safe and picked bits out.

**ARTHUR** They might as well watch them, it’s something to do on a Tuesday night – there’s never anything on tele …

**BOB** No, it’s not for …

**ARTHUR** Shush! It’s starting …

**BOB** I’m just saying there is hours and hours of stuff and they’ve …

**ARTHUR** BOB!

[The spotlights fade on BOB and ARTHUR, as the staged area curtains open. On stage, ten prisoners and two teachers sit in a circle of chairs. In the background, the occasional shout can be heard as prisoners clown around whilst making way to their activity; keys and chains rattle as they open and shut doors, whilst a prison officer’s radio echoes in the bare corridor outside].
TEACHER MIKE So, we need to explore material based on employment, work or volunteering. You know, for a performance at the end.

STEVE Performance?

TEACHER MIKE Yeah

STEVE Just to us, though! Just to us, right?

TEACHER MIKE To an audience, Steve.

STEVE It’s a mad ting - swear down …

[Learners look round at each other and some start laughing].

ABDUL Fuuuuck …

GARY No fucking chance.

STEVE Innit!

TEACHER MIKE It’s the performance we talked about - on your wing …

STEVE [Half laughing]. You said nothing about a bare audience, narrr it’s a mad ting, swear down, still!

TEACHER MIKE We did talk about performance …

STEVE Phhhh, you did, not me – nothing about an audience … [to ABDUL] it’s peak, fam!

ABDUL Stich up …
[All prisoners join in the resistance].

**TEACHER MIKE** Okay, okay! Gents, we’ve done loads of performances before and we always … look, just trust me!

**STEVE** I’m not doing it … do ya get me?

**TEACHER MIKE** [Teasing STEVE using his arms and hands in an ‘urban’ gesture]. Like I say, we’ve done it with bare audiences … boom! [A few prisoners, but not all, laugh at TEACHER MIKE].

**STEVE** [Looking away, STEVE sucks his teeth quietly]. Blood clot!

[DAVE stepping forward, trying to change subject and mood].

**TEACHER DAVE** So, our theme of employment, work and volunteering – you know, the brief for the qualification – the one everyone signed up to. The creative material is probably within our experiences – anyone?

**TEACHER MIKE** [Adding to TEACHER DAVE’s idea]. Okay, what about the easiest or hardest hundred quid you ever worked for, the best or worst boss, the funniest thing you ever saw at work …

[Some in the group sigh, whilst others grin and start to exchange ideas of quick ways to make money amongst themselves].

**VAN** [Sat slightly out of sync with the circle – muttering with his hand in front of his mouth, only the occasional word heard].

**STEVE** [Looking at VAN]. What fam?

[Van makes only fleeting eye-contact then stares to the floor and continues mumbling beneath his hand].

**STEVE** [Looks round at the group]. What’s up with him – do ya get me? [Half laughing].
PERRY: That's all his done since we started – I haven’t heard him talk yet.

STEVE: It's peak, he's not even listening to what I …

TEACHER MIKE: [Breaking the conversation]. Okay, teamwork then, lads! One main point of the course is learning to be a team …

STEVE: [Mocking Van with his hand over his mouth]. Seems fucking weird to me …

ABDUL: [Looking over at STEVE with a face somewhere between serious and making a request]. Give him a break, man …

TEACHER DAVE: Right! Let me tell you about an experience I had working in a Cat A prison … [all the prisoners lean forward].

[Enter PRISON OFFICER to check status, advise on absences or prisoner appointments].

A PRISON OFFICER: Morning …

[All the prisoners lean back moaning and groaning].

ABDUL: Go on Boss …

TEACHER DAVE: Just a minute. Hello Miss, the register’s over there… [DAVE points to a small table and PRISON OFFICER moves towards making notes]. Yeah, one experience I …

[All the prisoners lean forward again].

PRISON OFFICER: [Butting in]. Brown’s not here because he’s got beef and Macintyre’s in the Seg …
[All the prisoners lean back moaning, groaning and swearing more loudly].

TEACHER DAVE Thanks Miss, I’ll catch-them-up with what we’ve been doing … [turning back to group]. Anyway, like I was saying, one time when I was …

PRISON OFFICER [Butting in]. Smith’s got a special visit at second move and Green’s got a Resettlement meeting.

TEACHER DAVE What, he’s going now?

PRISON OFFICER No, when the roll’s correct. I’ll come back for them.

[PRISON OFFICER turns and leaves].

TEACHER DAVE Mr Smith and Green, you’ll have to catch up next session, but we should ask before you go: what work experiences have you had?

ABDUL Hang on, hang on, Boss! What happened in that Cat A …?

[A fire alarm rings loud].

TEACHER DAVE We’ll have to come back to this. For now, we have to leave the building …

[Learners all complain together as they leave, but VAN has not yet left his seat and still has his hand over his mouth].

ABDUL You coming or what … Van?

[VAN’s attention moves from his thoughts, looks up and follows the group outside].

BRENDON It’s pissing it down out there …
[The set changes to outside the building where learners are shielding from the rain, pulling sweatshirts over their heads as teachers shelter in the doorway. PRISON OFFICER is in the background and can be heard on his radio].

**PRISON OFFICER** Requesting the Fire Officer, over.

**CONTROL DEPARTMENT** That’s a negative, the Fire Officer is on leave, over.

**PRISON OFFICER** Then, who’s coming over, over.

**CONTROL DEPARTMENT** That’s a negative. There is no cover!

[All learners laugh mockingly and complain at the same time].

**PERRY** [Shouting]. It’s going to fucking burn [laughs].

**STEVE** [Joining with PERRY using a mock ‘urban’ accent]. It’s mash up …

**PRISON OFFICER** We have a fire alarm and need assistance, over.

**CONTROL DEPARTMENT** Assistance called for, over.

[All learners continue to mock the system in a joint tirade].

**GARY** [Shouting]. Come on boss, we’re pissed wet through and it should be break time now, in any case … when are we having a break?

**PERRY** [Looking towards Gary]. Is it soche tonight?

**GARY** No association for us mate – it’s bang-up!

**ABDUL** [Grinning]. Anybody got a Rizzler?
[Curtains fall on the staged area, whilst the spotlight turns to the gallery …]

ARTHUR It’s bloody chaos, Bob! How do they get anything done?

BOB There’s a lot of stuff going on in there, more than we …

ARTHUR Hey, it can’t be the interval yet.

BOB It’s not. I’ve been reading about this …

ARTHUR Oh, aye …

BOB Really, it’s some sort of theatre and research mixed up – you get loads of little intervals …

ARTHUR That’ll be good for you, Bob, well for your, your … you know …

BOB Never mind about that - it’s supposed to help people think and talk about stuff in the play.

ARTHUR I don’t know about research - that’s for folk in white coats.

BOB Just hang on a minute, there’re some things that are blindingly obvious here. I can’t believe anyone can’t see it.

ARTHUR Go on then …

BOB That character Van - the clues are blinding. How would he ever get a job like that? How does he even get through the day like that?

ARTHUR The thing is, nobody seems that surprised.

BOB I suppose weird things become normal things in jail.
ARTHUR I understand that if you hurt people, you’re put in jail, but what gets me is that to ‘rehabilitate’ – to get ‘normal’ in other words …

BOB Yeah, I know, the preparation … the treatment to get to normal is [pause] to be in the most unnatural place you can imagine.

ARTHUR It beggars belief …

BOB Aye!

ARTHUR You couldn’t write it …

BOB I know …

ARTHUR That ‘what works’ thing in the program … [looks at Bob with one eye, who shrugs]. I had a quick peak! How can you know what’s working and how can that mean the same thing for everyone?

BOB It can’t!

ARTHUR Abdul stuck up for Van. That must have taken guts - maybe those two should be encouraged to work together …

BOB Go get your white coat, Einstein!

[The spotlight fades on BOB and ARTHUR].

Commentary

In the PAD, and elsewhere in prison, I worked with many characters suffering serious mental health problems like Van. Bob had a point when he said, ‘weird things become normal things in jail’ and it is not as if the authorities were unaware. According to Anne Owers, former HM Chief
Inspector of Prisons, ‘Prison has become ‘the default setting for those with a wide range of mental and emotional disorders’ (Prison Reform Trust, 2017b p.1). For example, 62% of sentenced prisoners have personality disorders (Ibid). The problem is reported to be so serious that in 2015 the government invested £74m, which would only bring liaison and diversion services for all mental health conditions up to 53% across England. However, just because big problems can be seen from the Panopticon, does not mean efficient and effective responses follow.

As the examples of ‘fictional performative writing’ demonstrate, complexity, unpredictability and bewilderment were evident in moments in the PAD studio, a place rarely frequented by donkey riders. As a reminder, Thompson (2008) uses the term ‘bewilderment’ in a ‘prison theatre’ context from Simon’s (1999) publication of ‘prison work and vocational training’ (p.163). Simon used the term to describe the confounded state in which some prisoners find themselves on release from prison. Thompson (2008) extends this idea of a ‘transitory state between awe and the struggle to comprehend’ (p.22) to include ‘the perplexed condition of the researcher and practitioner as they seek to understand theatre projects in unusual locations or with troubled communities (Ibid.). As such, bewilderment might be associated with many characters appearing in the fictional scenarios of this thesis.

On one particular occasion, a character (represented by a blend of Gary and Abdul in this scene) took on the mantle of mentor for someone like Van, a character inspired by a number of people that attended the PAD with similar difficulties. This mentor, created from my lived experience, happened to be early middle-aged and his body showed the reward of time spent in the gym. His short-cropped hair and tattoos made any outward expression of compassion legitimate, where it might not be so easy for someone presenting as ‘less masculine’, in this context. Perhaps, there are some lessons for the thoughtful construction of groups, here, rather than an apparently random allocation system.

Indeed, groups in the PAD often agreed that contact should be maintained beyond the course, but they regretfully realised the system would never accommodate such an initiative. If such groups had greater belief in
the system, they would have agreed to request special circumstances from the authorities, but they didn’t - so we never made one. If we had, and such a culture was amplified across the estate, it might improve some people’s lives, but to do so would probably involve giving over some power to the ground. Imagine the possibilities, though, if personal development (in all its guises) in this context could extend beyond the narrow confines of student performance data as the main criteria for institutional judgement, reputation and success. These include, for example, retention (dropout rate), achievement (numbers completing course) and success (numbers passing course).

There were numerous occasions when the PAD team raised concerns with management about particular prisoners or how it might be possible to explore different ways of working, but the conversation almost always got closed down on the grounds of funding, mainstream success measures and local performance targets such as the numbers attending interventions. Before the end of our first year in the PAD, dwindling numbers each session led management to raise the number of prisoners starting a course from twelve to fourteen. When ‘drop out’ meant numbers still fell below twelve, we requested sufficient non-teaching time to explore the reasons, but our request was refused. The increase in starting numbers made little difference to the numbers completing, but it did mean that new courses became more difficult to fill with ‘willing’ participants. However, although we never finished a course with the same twelve that started, the ones completing were overwhelmingly positive about their experience. I suspect the PAD team were never allowed the time to investigate because, even though over the long-term any potential to improve retention would probably ‘pay off’, those costs would take time to recover and education contracts were usually renewed every three years.

Discovering why a participant really stopped attending (rather than any reason provided by the duty officer as in the scenario) was rarely easy within the prison system and often necessitated an inordinate amount of a teacher’s time. The underlying reasons could include embarrassment with their own ability or pending performance nerves, a reluctance to work hard, mental health problems, being bullied - or the opportunity to bully
somewhere else, to make illicit trades elsewhere, a lack of agency or any number of other possibilities. As such, the prison held the education provider accountable for full occupancy of education and training areas, regardless of bewildering flaws in the regime’s inability to despatch prisoners efficiently and effectively. Sometimes the regime transferred, disciplined or assigned prisoners to Offender Behaviour Programmes (OBPs) with priority over education, but the most frequent reason for non-attendance was prisoners refusing to attend.

[The curtains lift without notice].

TEACHER MIKE Let’s start by going around the circle.

[ABDUL starts to grin and then laugh, looking at some of the others in a ‘knowing way’].

TEACHER MIKE What? … What?

BRENDON I think I know what he means, Boss. [BRENDAN looks at ABDUL and they laugh]. You mean doing both, don’t you?

TEACHER MIKE Doing both what?

ABDUL Working two jobs, you know – the double life.

TEACHER MIKE Go on.

ABDUL I’ve had good jobs in the city, in banks, stocks and shares and making good money by day, but even more at night.

TEACHER MIKE Oh, now I get it, but didn’t the two lives interfere with each other …?
**ABDUL** It’s a smokescreen - to have different identities. But, it didn’t interfere; it was the perfect foil; Dick Turpin’s mask …

**BRENDAN** You’ll not believe this, but I worked in a solicitor’s office for a couple of years and yet …

**TEACHER MIKE** No!

**BRENDAN** And, Yes! It wasn’t just the money; it’s the buzz and the different lifestyles. We’d talk differently, even listen to different music or eat different food.

**ABDUL** Yeah, I was just the same. When I was out doing my thing, I’d play that kind of music in the car, spits some beats, make money, eat takeaways, talk in code and it’s all about the bitches and violence, being ruthless, on your toes and on the edge. Then I’d come home and I’d be playing the loving husband and devoted father with hugs and kisses, healthy salads, respect and relax, days out and stuff. The next thing, I’m getting up for work with my office head on, polite, dressed smart, reliable, motivated but reserved.

**TEACHER MIKE** That’s amazing, it’s like you were three different people and the job …

**ABDUL** The job just made it easier - and more fun to do the other stuff. Mo’s played the game a bit, eh Mo [turning to Mo, who nods back].

**MO** Just keep a low profile me, mate, nicely under the radar.

**TEACHER MIKE** It makes you wonder about the blanket emphasis on work for prisoners, doesn’t it?

**ABDUL** All the prisoners in here couldn’t do what we did and there’s plenty that don’t work at all, but prisons always do that – they just treat as all like a
bunch of criminals! [Everyone laughs]. You know what I mean – as though we’re all the same and it’s not that simple.

[The spotlight fades on the stage and turns to BOB and ARTHUR].

ARTHUR Do you think that’s realistic - you know, what learning looks like in a prison? [Pauses, shakes his head and laughs]. It’s, well it’s … it’s …

BOB It’s just one example, Arthur, but I suppose we’ll see some more.

ARTHUR It’s a long time since we were at school, but can you imagine?

BOB No.

ARTHUR Do people ever really rehabilitate - and rehabilitate from what? They’re not all axe murderers - does making a play do that? Well, for that matter does learning long multiplication or writing a CV – and how much is all that costing? And another ‘and’ Bob: if the smart ones don’t get caught, why would they want to make criminals smarter?

BOB A fair point, well made …

ARTHUR I can’t see how they’re going to make a play for an audience. I wouldn’t do it out here, so I don’t blame them for not doing it in there!

Commentary

Abdul and Brendan are characters that present as socially erudite but placed on the same course as Van and in-between these somewhat polarised examples of social ability there is an incalculable diversity of cases within the prison population. Geese Theatre Company are prison theatre specialists of almost thirty years, during which time they have recognised the complexity of social performance by prisoners through the development of ‘mask’ as a creative metaphor. During performance, actors can be asked to
raise their mask to reveal the ‘real’ person underneath. Geese Theatre explain:

We call them fragment masks because each symbolises a prominent strategy - or fragment of behaviour – used in threatening or stressful situations, or just to ‘con’ others. In particular, Fragment Masks represent key self-protective strategies such as blaming others, denying, using charm, acting out aggressively or playing the victim role (Baim et al. 2002 p.184).

Although ‘Playing, like ritual, is at the heart of performance’ (Schechner, 2013 p.89), Bob and Arthur’s role is not only written for the sake of frivolity that might stimulate a reader’s imagination. They occupy a somewhat ‘liminal’ performance space ‘betwixt and between social categories and personal identities’ (Schechner, 2013 p.66), never really revealing if ‘their mask’ is raised, or not. In this piece, they are seated in a panopticon-like galleried position of a theatre in contrast to a view from the people’s gallery of a courtroom where justice is seen to be done (Foucault, 1991). Just as this thesis makes an argument that prisons are a product of their past, Bob and Arthur watch the play through their own perspective of a lifetime at the coalface underground before decisions were made above their heads to close down. Now retired and less encumbered by corporate or organisational political manoeuvrings, they (too) join us in ‘paying attention’ (Sullivan, 2000 p.211) to the heat of the ground (Thompson, 2008 p.148).

In their conversation, Bob and Arthur scratch at the surface of tensions between social masks, criminal disguise and a point where ‘camera lights and action’ changes so much for the scene’s characters. They question how some prisoners enrol to formal accreditations for employment and training purposes where others use them as a foil to pass the time. Passing the time is part of prison life, but in a world increasingly influenced by economic factors, Bob and Arthur question further, do they need to cost the same? Arthur has already suggested there could be sound reasons for the selection of group cohorts with different abilities, whereas at other times serendipitous collaborations might happen. There are few easy answers, but I argue if complexity is performed on the ground, the ground can be a vital site for decision-making based on responsiveness, flexibility and individual
approaches. Alternatively, what really happens, from my experience, is that broad-brush solutions of national policy fail to deal with the complexity involved and too many on the ground feel powerless to act.

[Theatre lights dim, the staged area illuminates as the curtain rises. ABDUL is sat in a chair with his back to the others playing the role of ‘Grandma’. The other prisoners are in a ‘frozen’ position, ready to sneak up behind Grandma quietly to retrieve the string of beads under her chair. (Beads had to be used instead of keys because the Security Department ruled out the use of any real keys – even though they could have been a redundant set from outside prison). Both teachers act as referee. If Grandma spots any prisoner moving when ‘she’ turns around, they all have to go back to the starting line. They have been trying unsuccessfully for over thirty minutes. As a reminder, the activity is called ‘Grandma’s Keys’, which is loosely based on the children’s game, What Time is it Mr Wolf? The prisoners begin to creep up on Grandma, but as they do Grandma turns and …].

ABDUL [As Grandma]. Gary! Gary was moving …

GARY Was I fuck …

ABDUL [Mocking]. He was shaking like a shiting dog!

DAVE Gentlemen, language! Anyway, Grandma never lies – and Abdul, she doesn’t swear either. [ABDUL holds his arms outstretched]. Everyone back behind the line. Try again!

PERRY My Grandma swears more than me …

[All the prisoners moan, grumbling about fairness].

GARY It’s shit this – for fucking kids

WINSTON It’s mash-up …

MARK It’s my last time, if we don’t do Grandma this time: I’m done!
TEACHER DAVE He can be your real Grandma if you want, Mark, but we need to figure out a team strategy to perform better than her! Another time out?

BRENDON Hey, come here - I’ve an idea … [Everyone huddles for a team talk apart from GARY].

ABDUL [Sat in GRANDMA’s chair facing the opposite way, glances over his shoulder to show a mocking grin and fairy-tale voice]. Come on lads, Grandma’s waiting for you – My, my dear: what big, stupid plans you’ve got!

GARY You’re all fucking twats, I’ve done.

ABDUL [As GRANDMA]. Ah! I make no wonder you all got caught out there!

BRENDON We’re all innocent, Grandma, every one of us!

PERRY Yeah, I’m done as well. Fuck it!

[GARY sits to one side on a chair whilst PERRY moves to slouch over seats nearby. The others start again with a new tactic - they get much closer and take the string of beads (keys) before ABDUL (as GRANDMA) turns once more and guesses which prisoner is holding the keys].

ABDUL [as GRANDMA]. Winston! Winston’s got ‘em!

TEACHER DAVE Everyone back behind the line again [pointing to the start line].

WINSTON What’s the fucking point of this shite?

GARY [Remaining seated and out of the activity]. You’re all getting fucked over, it’s just a stupid game …

PERRY Losers!
TEACHER DAVE Thanks Gary, but you’ve taken yourself out of the activity ... give *them* a chance.

GARY What about him? *[Nodding towards PERRY]*. He’s not doing it.

BRENDAN Can we time out again? I have another idea!

PERRY I hope it’s better than your last one ...

TEACHER DAVE It’s never over until it’s over – sticking with it is the most important thing. Go on – teamwork and tactics, teamwork and tactics.

*[The group gather together once more and change their plans]*.

GARY You’re all fucking losers …

PERRY That’s what I said – losers!

GARY You only say something when I do, you’re a fucking loser …

PERRY Fuck it then! *[PERRY stands and moves to re-join the group]*. Brendan, what’s the plan … *[BRENDAN ignores PERRY]*. Yo, Brend … lads, what’s the … lads …

TEACHER DAVE Well done Perry, Gary come on! They’re winners whilst ever they’re trying, *not* losers Gary. They’ve not given up yet … hey, here they go again.

GARY Fuck’s sake! *[Reluctantly standing and walking over to the group]*.

*[After some considerable time, the team complete their task successfully beating GRANDMA, followed by loud cheers, laughter and ‘high fives’. Van has not held a conversation with anyone in the group, but he played a key non-verbal role in the teamwork problem solving activity. In doing so, he*}
obstructed GRANDMA’s view with his sweatshirt, revealing his self-harm scars. It allowed the group to place the keys (beads) on a chair behind the start line without GRANDMA detecting who was holding them. All cheer, whoop and taunt GRANDMA].

[As the curtains fall, BOB and ARTHUR turn to each other].

BOB What do you think was the point of that, Arthur?

ARTHUR Maybe, if they can do that, they might just do that performance thing at the end.

BOB It’s not the same though, is it?

ARTHUR Eventually, they all did it.

BOB Did what?

ARTHUR Played a game that they knew was a game in the room, whilst playing the game! You know, the real game. Some were more game than others, but that was the game in their heads, that nobody could see.

BOB You’re trying too bloody hard now, Arthur – I know I said you’re on to stuff, here, but I was only joking about that chuffin’ white coat!

Commentary

I had too much material, here, for the space allowed in this thesis, which meant editing-out a significant part of the section above. It was included in the first place to show the length of time involved and the frustrations within the group that were performed in very many different ways. I hope this came across to the reader. Bob and Arthur were playing their own ‘game’ of being ‘Bob and Arthur’, but Arthur really was on to something – Bob just wasn’t ready to encourage him. In time, they will chat about the Panopticon and how everything could not be ‘known’ by this one viewpoint alone and, maybe, there was something about the players who
outwardly expressed the duplicitous character of their lives (like Abdul and Brendan) that seemed to engage more easily in the outward expression of ‘the game’ – let alone what the PAD might have learned from this, and more.

A combination of interpreting lived experience and learning from the literature has shown how widespread institutional performances were played out across time to different scripts as Goffman (1990) argued through his theatrical interpretation of social interaction and Foucault describes as ‘carceral’ mechanisms’ in conclusion to his seminal publication, *Discipline and Punish* (1991):

And that ultimately what presides over all these mechanisms is not the unitary functioning of an apparatus or an institution, but the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy. That, consequently, the notions of institutions of repression, rejection, exclusion, marginalisation, are not adequate to describe, at the very centre of the carceral city the formation of the insidious leniencies, unvowable petty cruelties, small acts of cunning, calculated methods, techniques, ‘sciences’ that permit the fabrication of the disciplinary individual. (p.308).

In this sense, Foucault appears to be concluding that a single institution is, just an institution. It might have a name that symbolises its main function, occupy a building equipped with all manner of things, but an institution’s bewildering condition comes from the performances of actors and agencies that are its inhabitants and corporate partners. It is ‘In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of ‘incarceration’, objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy’ (Ibid.). Therefore, whilst prisoners are unable to leave at the end of the day, all the prison’s inhabitants make up the social interaction of the prison. In agreement with Thompson (2008), I find ‘descriptions fail to capture the full scope of that effect’ (p.22). My contribution, here, involves distilling small performances of our own making into a fictional performative script from the murky and unpredictable complexities of ‘arts in prison’ practice. Perhaps, they might illuminate areas where policymakers seek their own lost keys and influence new ideas of working that democratize curricular decision-making and flexibility within research and practice in this context.
[On stage, the curtain rises].

TEACHER DAVE Well done! Come on, let’s take a seat - pull up the chairs [the whole group make a circle with their seats]. It took some doing, but you did it!

ABDUL [Ex GRANDMA]. I gave it up; just felt sorry for them, Boss.

[All other prisoners laugh mockingly whilst rejecting ABDUL'S teasing claim].

BRENDAN Yeah, and what about him [nodding with a smile at VAN, now sitting in his usual withdrawn pose, hand over his mouth].

ABDUL Okay, he did me, but not you lot … [looking towards VAN, they made brief eye contact for the first time. Although only VAN’S eyes were visible over his hand, they went from a dull glaze to a fleeting glint].

VAN Thanks Grandma [short pause; all those present, stop clowning around and hang on to the unexpected words] I’ve never had a Grandma …

GARY Where the fuck did that come from?

ABDUL We’re family, man [smiling and trying to make a joke].

GARY At least he’s fucking talking to us now…

TEACHER MIKE Gary, without the ‘F’ word please [GARY looks at TEACHER MIKE with incredulity].

VAN I’ve no family. I’m twenty-six tomorrow and can’t remember any…

[The group leans forward in unison waiting for VAN’s story].

ABDUL What about your mum and dad?
VAN I’ve been in and out of kids’ homes and prison as long as I can remember, I think I know what she looked like, but I just … well, I don’t even think about …

PERRY Is it true they call you Van because you lived for months in an old van on a scrap yard? [A few laugh, but PERRY has misjudged the serious mood].

GARY [Nudges PERRY and speaks in a softened tone]. Is all this why you do that weird thing, you know … [GARY puts his hand to his mouth and mumbles, then smiles at VAN].

VAN [Looking nervous]. The thing is, once this course is over - in about two weeks … [VAN looks increasingly troubled]. Well … in three weeks I get released and I know I’ll struggle. I’m not used to being out there and …

GARY There’s fuck all help mate – are you going to a hostel?

VAN That’s when I do the talking thing, when I’m anxious - It’s like a comfort thing.

GARY Hostels are pretty shit, but then it’d just be like being in here, eh?

[VAN shrugs and bows his head].

[The group freezes again, the curtains fall, whilst in the gallery…]

BOB Well, I wasn’t expecting that!

ARTHUR No, I don’t think anybody was.

BOB What, Gary or Van?
**ARTHUR** Both – well just about everybody.

**Commentary**

The fictional example being offered is symbolic of infrequent, but provocative moments in which I witnessed sensitive disclosures, care and support amongst prisoners in the PAD. In these remarkable moments, some prisoners exhibited seemingly spontaneous compassion that belied the male prisoner stereotype. In some cases, they contradicted simple characterisations of Gary and VAN, not knowing what other masks they concealed. Just as desistance theorists identify the point in which an offender desists and then explores the particular circumstances, I became interested in the process in which prisoners like Van and Garry seemed to undergo (possibly) temporary transitions. If Van was to revert back to the individual that walked in the PAD, what chance for him on release with a travel warrant, around £40 in cash, nowhere to stay and no family. According to the Prison Reform Trust (2015), 'people who lived with family after release were less likely to offend within one year (48% compared to 61%)' (p. 59). The odds were stacking up against Van, the group in this scenario could see it and yet felt powerless beyond their own simple, but (sometimes) poignant, acts.

*[On the staged area, the group are positioned where they were before the interval – leant forward]*.

**TEACHER DAVE** Thanks for sharing Van; happy birthday for tomorrow.

**VAN** I’ll be here …

**TEACHER DAVE** Anyway, there’s a couple of things to talk about … first of all, well done for sticking with it, for completing the task.

*[The group lean back in unison; returning into their normal, over-relaxed positions]*.
GARY Phhh! [Losing interest].

TEACHER DAVE Is there anything we could have learned if the keys hadn’t gone back?

GARY [Sarcastically]. Err, Grandma’s keys didn’t go back!

MARK Ah! Not keys, not … they, they were …

ABDUL [Looking at MARK with a pained expression]. Let it go, mate …

TEACHER DAVE Beads, then! We can’t have keys! Why was it hard?

GARY Not hard, just stupid …

TEACHER DAVE But, eventually you re-joined the group to help them …

GARY It was long; it pissed me off …

PERRY And me …

WINSTON Yeah …

[PERRY and WINSTON start a whispered conversation between themselves whilst the group discussion was taking place].

TEACHER DAVE Okay, but in terms of work – hard work, what did we…

PAUL How will this get me a job?

GARY It was too fucking long!

TEACHER DAVE Okay, before we talk about jobs, what did we learn from the activity?
STEVE Fuck all …

TEACHER DAVE Okay then, the other thing I need to talk about is the language being used …

GARY How do you mean?

TEACHER DAVE I can see how emotions run high with some activities, but we should practise being able to …

GARY We’re all men here …

TEACHER DAVE What makes you think all men want to hear it? There’ll be women in the audience.

[The whispered conversation between PERRY and WINSTON continues].

TEACHER DAVE Perry! Winston! Give us a chance – one conversation please. [PERRY and WINSTON grin at each other and bump fists].

GARY We’ll not swear when they’re in …

TEACHER DAVE So, why not practise that now?

GARY Tell you what, just take me off this course – it’s not for me …

PERRY Take me off as well, Boss.

TEACHER DAVE Sorry, we can’t do that …

PAUL How will this get me a job?
TEACHER MIKE [Leaning forward]. We’re just coming to that, Paul. What did we discover from that last activity that might be related to work?

PAUL How to steal Grandma’s keys! No offence, Boss, but I know how to steal! [Most prisoners laugh].

TEACHER MIKE Our objective here is to examine our performance whilst making a play using creativity and imagination. We’re testing and developing our employability and social skills in a ‘real’ [MIKE imitates inverted commas with his fingers] situation. And, of course, we aim to gain a qualification.

PAUL Will the qualification get me a job?

TEACHER MIKE In itself, probably not.

[PERRY and WINSTON re-start a whispered conversation between themselves whilst the group discussion was taking place].

GARY [Standing and taking a seat outside the circle]. So, what’s the point of doing it then?

TEACHER MIKE Gary, you’re welcome to join in. Come on, come and sit in the circle …

PAUL Will it help me get my tag?

TEACHER MIKE It’s good to be able to tell the tag board that you’ve been engaging in …

PAUL Will you write them a letter?
TEACHER MIKE We have to get permission for that kind of thing, but sometimes the tag board contact us and then we can let them know how you’ve been …

GARY [From outside the circle]. So, you can’t help us …

MARK Does it go on the computer system, on NOMIS?

GARY It doesn’t does it, Boss …

TEACHER MIKE Gary! [MIKE looks over giving a warning look for speaking outside the circle].

MARK So, whatever we do here is not automatically logged onto our NOMIS account?

TEACHER MIKE Not automatically Mark. And Gary, it depends on what kind of help you thought we could provide – anyway, you need to be within the circle to comment. We’re developing employability skills here. Last warning!

PAUL I know all that, but I’m not going to be an actor out there, so: how the fuck will this get me a job?

TEACHER MIKE Even people with degrees are struggling to find jobs they think they deserve. The key to success is not giving up.

PERRY So, we do all this not giving up and it’s not recorded on the system that they use for getting enhanced status, tagging, early release and Cat D: Nothing!

TEACHER MIKE Well, not automatically, no but …

[STEVE sighs deliberately loudly and stands up. He walks over to join GARY outside of the circle and now PAUL has joined in the separate conversation]
with PERRY and WINSTON, the details of which are becoming increasingly audible].

PAUL You know, that woman screw - that Miss Smith on our wing. She’s gagging for it …

PERRY Yeah, I terrorise myself after she’s banged me up …

[Most learners are laughing and commenting, but some look embarrassed and say nothing].

TEACHER MIKE Guys! Guys!

STEVE When I get some gash, I’ll fucking destroy it – do ya get me?

TEACHER MIKE Woaah, that’s enough …

PERRY Start with some of this [mimicking oral sex].

TEACHER MIKE [Standing]. That’s it! We’ve two choices, either we get on with it and recognise we’re in an education class or you go back and we decide what disciplinary stuff we need to do. Oh, and by the way: it will go on NOMIS!

TEACHER DAVE Yeah, what’s brought this on? We said at the beginning, this course would be tough! We agreed a code of conduct and everyone …

PERRY Look, we’re all men, aren’t we? And, we’re prisoners, Boss. We all talk like this!

TEACHER DAVE All men and all prisoners don’t talk like this. The point is to know where and when you can do it. If it leads to nickings, then we’ve all lost!
GARY Boss, I'm not being funny but I'm on basic, I've got restricted canteen, I can't be arsed with gym, they've taken my telly, like him [nodding towards VAN]. I've nobody out there to visit me: what are they going to do – put me in prison?

[Actors hold their positions in frozen pose whilst the curtains fall in the staged area. The spotlights are focused on BOB and ARTHUR].

ARTHUR He's got a point, there's not much more they can punish him with, Bob.

BOB Maybe they've tried the carrot, but he's too busy playing the tough guy.

ARTHUR So, where or when do teachers intervene with their own version of reality, or do they get drawn into the same thing?

BOB What, you mean like they're institutionalised in a different way?

ARTHUR Isn't their job to offer a new reality?

BOB I don't know, but I'm surprised they let it go that far …

ARTHUR And do what to punish him – kick him off or keep him on?

[The spotlights switch to the stage where TEACHER MIKE and TEACHER DAVE reflect on the session].

TEACHER MIKE What was that all about?

TEACHER DAVE It's every time they break from the circle.

TEACHER MIKE It only takes one …

TEACHER DAVE Did we push too hard?
TEACHER MIKE Did we get pushed back?

TEACHER DAVE It’s not all of them or all the time. Some of them just turn into … well, you heard them.

TEACHER MIKE You just wonder if it’s all worth it.

TEACHER DAVE I suppose we ought to do a nicking for the stuff they were saying …

TEACHER MIKE Will it help?

TEACHER DAVE We’ve got to make a stand somewhere. [Pause]. What about that security course with the video? The one that said if you thought about it, but didn’t do anything, then prisoners were already conditioning you.

TEACHER MIKE Do you think we were too …? [Pause]. If we’re teaching ‘not giving in’ and skills for jobs and life as much as – well, more than, making a play …

TEACHER DAVE Is that what we’re doing? I suppose just giving out nickings seems like we’ve given in and they’ll just push back. [Half smiling]. They did have a point about that NOMIS thing…

TEACHER MIKE [Half laughing]. Yeah, it makes you wonder how things aren’t worse. What did Gary say …? [mimicking GARY] ‘What are they going to do – put me in prison?’

TEACHER DAVE We haven’t much time to do the nickings now anyway, let’s see what mood they’re in when they come back. Let’s see what they say – maybe we can wait until a more productive discussion with them and just turn it to rules or behaviour and say ‘Do you remember when …’
TEACHER MIKE Hey, talking about remembering, do you remember when we did that Christmas panto?

TEACHER DAVE What, ‘Screwge!’ with the pun on ‘screw’ and ‘Screwge’ …

TEACHER MIKE Yeah, played as the mean No. 1 Governor …

TEACHER DAVE They really took to satire, just keeping on the right side of festive fun – hey what about that servery queue scene: ‘One chip, one pea, one chip, one pea’, as they moved along [big grins from both].

TEACHER MIKE And then when him playing the ghosts got stage fright - everyone in the wings literally threw him on stage …

TEACHER DAVE Yeah, and all you heard from the wings was: ‘Get on that stage and be a ghost, you twat!’ - the audience were pissing themselves …

TEACHER MIKE Who’d have thought he’d step up at the last minute? He’d been a pain all through the course, but he just got up and went into character …

TEACHER DAVE Yeah, [breaking into big grin] the holes cut out of his white sheet had moved – he could see fuck all [both laugh].

TEACHER MIKE What was his haunting thing, his chain-rattling chant? [Doing scary hands and face mime].

TEACHER MIKE TEACHER DAVE [Both chant together]. ‘Change yer ways, change yer ways, change yer ways’ [both laugh].

TEACHER DAVE Big audience that day – the prisoners loved it …

TEACHER MIKE And the teachers …
TEACHER DAVE Wrong time though, wasn’t it – all that talk about reducing reoffending through punishment and the ‘working prison’ – top brass weren’t going to be associated with this stuff no matter what they really thought …

TEACHER MIKE I remember thinking - driving home after, the No. 1 could have done more good in terms of internal relations that day, showing up to a play at Christmas taking the piss. Then, to say a few kind words would have done more than all the plotting and planning behind closed doors …

TEACHER DAVE If not, then any one of the functional heads could have come. They were all invited, but they didn’t …

TEACHER MIKE Anyway, what do we know?

TEACHER DAVE Sad, though, eh?

TEACHER MIKE Yeah, it was …

TEACHER DAVE Quick cuppa?

TEACHER MIKE Why not?

[The curtains fall on the staged area].

Commentary

If the meaning was not entirely clear when my colleague in the PAD talked about anti-social behaviour in the publishable article that the mood ‘could turn on a sixpence’ (change very quickly), the ‘fictional performative writing’ above provides an example. Certain moments in the studio could swing from one extreme to another, but the prison mantra of ‘zero tolerance’, as endorsed by the education provider, is expected of all their employees. Therefore, problems in the ‘act of applying theatre’ (Thompson, 2008 p.20) are not always entirely compatible with insider roles of disciplinarian, teacher
and researcher. The party line is to challenge the first minor discretion, but moving to initiate a disciplinary sanction so quickly usually hinders learning and does little to cultivate positive relationships. According to Peter Duffy’s (2015) edited chapters on (mis)adventures in drama education, the reflective agonising represented by Teacher Mike and Teacher Dave, above, is not restricted to drama and theatre in prisons. However, one major feature in a prison context is the conflation of predictability and uncertainty with participants, all of which have committed crimes and are incarcerated. A fundamental role of the practitioner in prison is to ensure good order and discipline (as a contribution to reducing reoffending), despite having little autonomy over the penal circumstances in which this takes place.

No matter how often I examine circumstances of uplifting moments, represented in this case by those with Gary and Van earlier and difficult moments with Gary, Steve, Paul, Winston and Perry above, identifying some common formula always eludes me. I needed to pay more attention. Nevertheless, I noticed there was a rhythm to each group’s three-week course that occurred so often as to be uncanny and each scene in this chapter could be allocated to a particular phase. The first week was a period of getting to know each other and attempts to establish a level of trust within the group. Although one or two within the group often tried to make their mark early with a little tentative showboating and even proclamations of acting prowess, these characters rarely followed through on such promise and many dropped out as the performance date drew close. More often than not, reserved characters took ‘star’ roles when the show-boaters dropped out. Each cohort began with men arriving at the studio, a large empty room except for a circle of chairs. Those accepting their fate, even if tinged with regret for having accepted a place on the course, sat waiting for everyone to arrive, which is usually around thirty minutes. In the PAD, most sat stony-faced in silence, arms folded, legs tucked under their chairs with eye contact firmly on the carpet. During many first sessions, at least one new starter would burst through the door, looking angry, stating they were refusing to attend before they really knew what they were refusing. In this case, prisoners often adopt an aggressive demeanour as a tactic to intimidate teachers, whilst other students (our audience) in the circle of chairs would
assess the practitioner’s performance of resistance. Anything less than a firm but fair response risked others emerging from the circle to use the same tactic despite their initial engagement or compliance.

At midpoint in the course, drama games increased in difficulty alongside devising plot, creating characters and improvising scenes before full rehearsals and performing to an audience. For many, the stiff body language was replaced by a propensity for slouching, the language gone from reserved to pushing the limits and beyond. These situations sometimes deteriorated further before improving. However, it was the bewildering mid-point of the course that difficult or bonding moments almost always occurred. Sometimes both could occur within minutes, hours or days, but crucially for the ‘What Works’ agenda as my original pursuit, some kind of bewildering transition happened for a brief moment that I could not explain. Such an explanation was the elusive focus of my research intentions at this stage.

[As the curtains rise, ABDUL and BRENDA are the first to walk into the studio where TEACHER MIKE and TEACHER DAVE are waiting].

ABDUL [Talking to BRENDA]. I don’t know about Perry, but that Gary had something to do with it. I got talking on the way back yesterday … we’re on the same House-block. He said he knew some artist on the 2s that owes him a favour and would make a card. He owed burn, I think …

BRENDA So, where’s the card now?

ABDUL He said he’d be early so everyone could sign it …

TEACHER MIKE Is this from yesterday?

ABDUL Morning Boss!

TEACHER MIKE Morning!

ABDUL You remember, Van talking about not having family and stuff?
TEACHER MIKE  Gary, you mean Gary … Gary?

ABDUL  I know! I just think he felt …

TEACHER MIKE  What, for Van?

BRENDAN  We’ll see – he’s never early …

[Enter GARY, PERRY and MOHAMMED].

GARY  Where is everybody?

TEACHER DAVE  This is normal, the route’s only been open ten minutes, it’s you that’s early, Gary!

[GARY looks around as though he’s doing some dodgy deal and reveals an envelope].

GARY  Sorted it!

TEACHER DAVE  What’ve you sorted, Gary?

GARY  Come on, sign it before he gets here …

[Gary’s already removed the card from the envelope]

GARY  You got a pen, Boss?

TEACHER DAVE:  There’s some on the chair with your folders

[Enter STEVE, MARK and WINSTON].

GARY  [Looking at STEVE, MARK and WINSTON]. You’re late!
[STEVE, MARK and WINSTON – in close unison]. We’re fucking late! That’s a joke; you are always late! Why are you early?

[Enter VAN].

GARY [Looking daggers at STEVE, MARK and WINSTON then flicking his eyes towards VAN to remind them]. You know, it’s what I said yesterday…you'll need this [passing them a pen].

VAN [Looking at STEVE, MARK and WINSTON and flicking his eyes towards GARY]. What’s up with him?

TEACHER DAVE Let’s sit down.

[GARY hands VAN the card and everybody takes a seat. VAN opens his card and everybody leans forward, hanging on to the prospect of his comment].

VAN This is the first birthday card I ever had.

GARY They just need to sign it [nodding towards STEVE, MARK and WINSTON. VAN hands over the card and doodles on the envelope].

VAN It’s the kindest thing I can remember … this is probably the best birthday I ever had.

TEACHER DAVE That’s quite something, Van.

TEACHER MIKE Yeah, that’s – wow! Quite something.

[There’s an eerie silence as nobody speaks or dares to make eye contact lest a trace of deep emotion is noticed].

VAN I’ve got an idea for this play.
TEACHER DAVE Let's hear it.

[The group quietly gasp in anticipation, leaning forward even further].

GARY Just no more of those fucking gay games though!

STEVE Just this audience though, Boss: it’s just us, right?

ABDUL Shut the fuck up and let him talk.

VAN What about …

TEACHER DAVE Yes …

VAN This for an idea …

[All the prisoners freeze in position. In the background, the occasional shout can be heard as prisoners clown around whilst making their way from their activity back to residential units; keys and chains rattle as officers open and shut doors; prison officer radios echo, the curtains close and the theatre lights fade. In the gallery, BOB and ARTHUR turn to each other…].

ARTHUR What … what! Did they use Van’s idea or what? Come to that – what was it? And how much would it matter?

BOB I know you sneaked a look, but have you seen the back page of the program? [Passing the program to ARTHUR]. Look, it’s Van’s ‘scribbles’ from the envelope …

ARTHUR [Reads what is now projected onto a screen above the stage].
Institutionalised

In my iron-cage sanctuary
An unlikely crew cared for me
Lifelong friend is my trembling hand
You can rest now until I land
Back in a world with little hope
Then, you’ll return - when I can’t cope?

[Spotlights fade on BOB and ARTHUR – the theatre remains in darkness for a moment before the main lights brighten].

Commentary

Against such a backdrop, what can be learned about a new role for prison education and how can we imagine prison education and training that develops a strategy for creative education from the ground? How could prison educators work with autonomy that is not necessarily constrained by formal accreditation and mainstream judgements of success, in closer collaboration with prisons? As a guiding theoretical framework for education in criminal justice settings, we might look towards ‘desistance’. If, as Maruna (2012) suggests, ‘The best signals for making these judgments are those that would be the most costly to mimic’ (p.77). The signals of care by fellow prisoners for Van in the previous scene above surely qualify. Disappointingly, they could not be formally acknowledged and promoted.

There is one critical point to be made as this chapter comes to a close. All the ‘fictional performative writing’ has been concerned with the practice of prison educators and what happens in that practice with prisoners. The reader will be forming her or his own opinions to the most authentic portrayal I could provide and, whatever they are, at least they have been informed by the closest experience I could create of being in the PAD through this thesis.

When the PAD was closed, not one of those people making that decision had ever been to see the work we did, talk to our students, or us. I found out we were shutting by a senior prison manager taking someone
round the studio to discuss how it would be used after the closure, which happened one week later.

In this chapter, I have explored the PAD and my position as an inside prison educator-researcher in and amongst multidisciplinary tensions and performances. My call for a ‘democracy of the ground’ (p.148) extends Thompson’s (2008) to speculate on the idea that prison education and training might benefit from being uplifted and separated from mainstream aspirations. Such a separation does not mean that qualifications cannot be gained, but a wider set of achievements might be possible if unencumbered by the pretence that success means the same as success by a mainstream definition. In the next chapter, these ideas (and more) are explored through the context of a Functional English classroom.
We create differences, oppositions, and presences which allow us to maintain the illusion that we have captured the “real” experiences of “real” people. In fact, we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices (Denzin, 2014 p.6)

This chapter represents a period approaching four years that followed the closure of the PAD, after which I was transferred to teach Functional English in the somewhat limited constraints of a traditional classroom which, unlike the PAD, is widely ascribed permanency, legitimacy, curricular privilege and status. These different circumstances provide two complimentary and contrasting insights into creative prison education practice whereby the phenomenon of ‘small miracles and changes’ (Balfour, 2009 p.8) alongside other ‘less than satisfactory moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) are viewed from the ground.

I have arranged the chapter into a number of connecting sections, the first of which provides a brief overview of the syllabus and politics of Functional English, followed by a description of the FEC, leading to the first two pieces of performative writing. They are entitled, ‘It’s never going to work, Boss’ (challenging policy that generalises prisoners’ ability and restricts teacher’s professional autonomy) and ‘I’ve done this! Take me off, Boss’, (which extends the former argument through the lens of mandatory adult prison education). Afterwards, further commentary examines both reductive top-down directives that banned fiction in the FEC, followed by examples of Functional English practices deemed creative in other prison settings. The next fictional scenario (From ‘Keepy-Uppy’ to ‘The Selfish Giant’) is in two parts and explores the use of space, play and fiction in the FEC. The last fictional scenario in this chapter examines my experiences of employing creative approaches with mixed degrees of success entitled, ‘I’m not being funny, Boss, but this isn’t for me!’ In particular, the scenario shows what can happen if activities are not properly planned, in particular without sufficient knowledge of the prisoners involved. Being creative almost always includes things going ‘wrong' that we might call 'failure' if lessons are not
An important contribution to knowledge in this thesis resides in its rarity as a record of experience from a prison educator’s perspective in England and Wales within a particular period of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). Specifically, this chapter captures a phase whereby fiction was ‘cleansed’ from a prison FEC for being a distraction to enhancing functionality. Too quickly, this act might be erased as time passes and memories fade, but arguably this action carries symbolic meaning in terms of the perspectives taken by authoritative institutions as a consequence of complying with policy in favour of my professional protestations and learners’ educational experience on the ground. Therefore, as a counter to forces that might otherwise create their own historical fictions or ‘information control’ (Goffman, 1990 p.141) when documenting prison education in this period, I urge the reader to pay attention to the fictional accounts provided in this chapter. I argue that, firstly, they demonstrate the usefulness and diversity of fiction as an educational and research practice. Moreover, I contend that they might open-up desistance-related possibilities, encourage new ways to collaborate with creative research methods and contribute to circumstances conducive to teaching and learning. As Maruna (2001) suggests, ‘By paying attention to these stories, we can learn not only about offenders but also about ourselves’ (p.167).

From the outset, Functional English was not designed for use in prisons. It was mainly introduced as an alternative to (‘more academic’) final year school exams and for school leavers returning to post-compulsory education. In prison education, some aspect of employability (and later Functional mathematics) had to be included as a component for each Functional English lesson in response to government concerns about producing a workforce with the basic skills needed to compete in a global economy (Leitch, 2006). Moreover, as part of Functional Skills (English, Mathematics and Information Technology), Functional English became a limiting grade for Ofsted inspection judgements. This meant that an overall grade for the education provision at an establishment could not be higher than that given for Functional Skills. On one hand, the education provider aimed to demonstrate its educational performance through success ‘proven’
by course performance data. On the other hand, prison policy aimed to present a tough line on crime by insisting on Functional Skills being mandatory for prisoners below level one, arguably ignoring the importance of choice, a key finding about the circumstances conducive to learning in prison, arising from the ‘Canadian study’, explored earlier in this the literature review. However, most relevant to this thesis was the prescriptive way in which Functional English was imposed by regulatory bodies and implemented by prison management, restricting the autonomy I needed to explore creative forms of fiction for Functional English, on the ground.

**The Syllabus, Policy and Politics of Functional English**

Functional English comprises speaking and listening, reading and writing. ‘Speaking and listening’ involves discussion in formal and informal situations at level one and an element of presentation skills at level two. The types of documents appearing in reading and writing examination papers included formal and informal letters, newspaper or magazine articles, community notices, posters and emails. The latter had to be feigned in a hand-written form because prisoners did not have legitimate access to the same email accounts as used outside prison. At level one, the subject matter ‘expected’ for reading included:

‘Skimming’ of a newspaper article to gain an overall impression and understanding of the main purpose and central theme, and scanning for the location of more detailed information (for example, identifying information about costs in a report) is necessary (QCA, 2008 p. 29).

Writing tasks could include a formal report or letter in which:

The points made should follow each other in a logical sequence through, for example, the structure of a CV or a brief description of an accident for a health and safety incident book’ (Ibid. p. 32).

Therefore, although the Functional English standards did not prohibit the use of fiction explicitly, the expectations were clear in that they limited the practicalities of using English to perform ‘everyday practical’ tasks,
filtered from employers’ frustrations and influential reports such as Leitch (2006). When the introduction of Functional Skills began as a pilot for some regions in England and Wales across most educational settings throughout 2007, it was in response to reports of gaps in skills according to employers’ needs. Warnings from influential organisations argued that the nation’s lack of skills was losing a competitive edge against emerging economies. For example, Mike Tomlinson’s (2004) report identified that it was possible for young people to gain a ‘C’ grade at GCSE without having the necessary standard of skills. The rationale for including Functional Skills for some students as opposed to GCSE qualifications has been described as follows:

This is not simply a matter of young people not being ‘good at maths’ or ‘not being able to spell and punctuate’. While some may have these weaknesses, the real problem is that even those who can demonstrate the knowledge and understanding required by GCSE do not know how to use and apply their knowledge in practical work-based contexts; this is a problem of skills rather than of knowledge (Babcock, 2008 p.10).

Moreover, speaking on behalf of employers, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) claimed that the basic skills levels of those leaving school and seeking employment are inadequate (DfES, 2006) and Sandy Leitch (2006) announced:

In the 21st century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential. The prize for our country will be enormous – higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice (Leitch, 2006 p.1).

In 2006, Leitch presented an influential case for the UK that ‘Without increased skills, we would condemn ourselves to a lingering decline in competitiveness, diminishing economic growth and a bleaker future for all’ (p.1). Linking a lack of attainment and skills with insufficient innovation and social inequality, Leitch praises the performance of most universities, but raises concerns about the nation’s productivity attributed to poor basic skills, or what the report describes as ‘a considerable weakness’ (Ibid.).

Today, more than one third of adults do not hold the equivalent of a basic school-leaving qualification. Almost one half of adults (17 million) have
difficulty with numbers and one seventh (5 million) are not functionally literate. This is worse than our principle comparators. Continuing to improve our schools will not be enough to solve these problems. Today over 70 per cent of our 2020 workforce have already completed their compulsory education’ (Ibid.).

Whilst Leitch’s comments were not aimed directly at the prison population, the educational profile of prisoners represents a sector of society of most concern to Leitch.

Back on the ground, although I had no concerns about programme closure in the FEC, I had much less space for creativity within these protected (functional) areas of the OLASS curriculum than in the PAD. In terms of the relationship between Functional English design and reducing reoffending, the rationale behind the curriculum seemed to offer little other than a reductionist, sequential, utilitarian argument of a certificate to evidence basic skills competencies, provide subsequent employment, a crime free life and, therefore, successful prison education. Alternatively, the most poignant moments in the FEC did not occur whilst figuring out apostrophe rules for ownership or the layout of a CV (notwithstanding their importance), but through the reflective and reflexive processes of fiction and story.

Prison education management did not discourage creativity per se, providing that it followed a reductionist path of enhancing employability on the way to creating a productive citizen. For reasons, probably best known to them, this objective precluded fictional texts such as novels, plays or poetry. Later in this chapter, case studies of Functional English at other prisons are provided, which were published as examples of creative ‘best practice’ by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). These examples also did not use fiction or storytelling. Indeed, creative English forms were almost treated as a prohibited substance and were considered out of bounds in a number of manuals bought by managers, as educational guidance intended for teachers. One stated unconditionally:

The reading and writing in these books is functional – the kind of skills you would use in the real world. There is no literature – novels, plays or poetry, instead it is about letters, articles, reports, posters, notices and

The Axis Education teaching manual, cited here, claimed to offer practical solutions as a means/ends instrumentalism whereby teaching functionality could ensure a conversion from dysfunction into functionality and employment. Such a solution aims to evidence competency with a particular task in order to satisfy an external examiner, but not necessarily a sustainable engagement with English that will develop or sustain such competencies. Other commercially developed manuals intended to support teachers delivering Functional Skills, claiming to offer material in which skills for both reading and writing could be applied in vocational contexts and these were ‘entirely work focused’ to the exclusion of any other aspect of life and personal development (Garner and Collins, 2011 p. v).

However, as we discover from the ‘fictional performative writing’ in this chapter, fiction has the potential to explore individual ‘truths’ that, for many, can open up possibilities for alternative perspectives. Through reading and writing fiction (either analyzed or created), the meaning-making of texts and discussion (speaking and listening) meant passing opportunities often arose for prisoners’ life evaluation, reflection processes, self-narratives and identity re-construction.

Moreover, there is a long-standing use of fictional literature in prisons. For example, in 1992 the ‘The Writers in Residence in Prisons Scheme was established across prisons in England, as documented by Clive Hopwood (1999). During a similar period in the United States (US), the ‘Changing Lives Through Literature’ (CTTL) project emerged founded by Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Robert P Waxler and Professor of Humanities at Middlesex Community College, Jean R. Trounstine (Waxler and Trounstine, 1999). In the former, links were made with the ‘Storybook Dad Project’ that originally began with the Probation Service and developed in HMP Wayland before being extended to other prisons and eventually ‘Storybook Mums’. This project aimed to improve the relationship of families, by recording stories on compact disc read (and often written) by parents in prison for their children. Edited chapters in the ‘Writers in Prison’ publication (Hopwood, 1999) contain many examples where story is used to maintain
family relationships and re-shape identities as two factors commonly associated with successful desistance (Maruna, 2001 pp.165-168).

Hopwood (1999) concludes that, ‘Stories can change the world. Not all on their own perhaps, and not all at once. But most certainly they can change lives’ (p.81). In the US the CTTL founders argued that their work ‘was based on a vision that insisted that literature was the best tool we had in our culture to explore human identity and keep it ‘alive’ (Ibid. p.8). They also argued that the democratic circumstances and discussions about literature in reading groups cultivated personal reflection and reflexivity, adding weight to the claims made by the ‘Canadian study’.

Closer to OLASS ground, my teaching purpose was to explore the possibilities of blending elements of performance and fiction with lessons learned from the PAD in a Functional English context. In short, I aimed to introduce practical aspects of creative delivery and explore their contribution to teaching and learning in prison. Initially, in terms of Functional English research, I was interested in discovering what such explorations might reveal in both the more traditional prison education classroom, but also across disparate spaces and teacher/student/mentor ratios and cohorts. In many prisons, this peripatetic approach to delivery is called ‘outreach’ and when in vocational training sites, is often referred to as ‘embedded learning’, as briefly described earlier. As a basic principle, this practice is concerned with developing English skills in places that suit the learner and group size in which they are best able to learn. For example, many prisoners prefer support through one-to-one sessions in their workplace, segregation unit or residential wings, lasting up to an hour. These contexts offer an alternative for personalized and individual learning, but during my experience with Functional English, they were significantly curtailed and even blocked at times by managers. Their explanations were related to factors such as funding problems, prisoners being pandered to and inferences of teachers trying to evade working in the FEC with difficult groups.

In practice, I experienced decreasing levels of professional autonomy and opportunities for innovation and creativity as the constraints of what could be included in Functional English narrowed. Naturally, in my role of Functional English teacher I was concerned that prisoners were able to gain
the necessary technical competencies, but as a prison educator/researcher fresh from the PAD, I was also interested in what aspects of English might sustain an interest beyond certification and what might happen when trying out PAD strategies in the FEC.

The FEC

The FEC was a conventional looking classroom with chairs placed in a variety of configurations. There were posters and examples of learners’ work on the walls, filing cabinets and metal cupboards, some locked, containing worksheets and a considerable amount of resource material left over from teaching the ‘Adult Literacy’ qualification, which was superseded by Functional English. On the teacher’s desk, seven pens (some end-chewed) rested in a box that had survived being smuggled out of class. A mixture of budget cuts and security concerns meant that teachers were buying their own pens and bringing them to class. A recently networked, but old, computer allowed some sharing of information between six classes in the building. The computer had no Internet access and restrictions with teachers using electronic storage devices varied between an outright ban and files loaded onto an encrypted pen from home (subject to the Head of Security’s permission) or DVDs sent direct to the Security Department for clearance before use. Near the teacher’s desk, a Smart Board was mounted on the wall, but the projector bulb had broken some weeks earlier. The apparent lack of urgency for its repair was mainly due to the window blinds being so damaged they could not prevent the screen appearing very faded when the projector did work. The desks, chairs and some parts of the windowsills bore the hallmarks of those that had passed through since the last refurbishment. A little putty was missing around the windows, plucked by prisoners for a variety of uses, some of which include a mold to make a key impression or potentially, in the use of explosives. In the security book, which requires a signature to check the class inventory four times each day, there was a note that a ‘Universal Serial Bus’ (USB) from the end of a mouse had gone missing. The last teacher signing had some explaining to do as prisoners use them to charge mobile phones that are illegal in UK prisons. Apart from
some short story pamphlets that had escaped the ‘fictional amnesty’, the space had become a sterile environment of practicality. However, despite the ban on fiction, a level one exam paper for ‘writing’ at the top of a jumble of papers relied upon the candidate imagining himself as having a sandwich selling business and a friend that, apparently, helped develop the business sometime before. The Functional English task was to improvise by writing an email, making up reasons for plans to expand a pretend customer base and ask for help handing out flyers that did not really exist at a destination the learner would need to conceive.

The classroom capacity was a maximum of twelve learners on a roll-on, roll-off, basis in which a prisoner completing or withdrawing makes space for a new starter. Therefore, within the group, most prisoners would be at different stages in the course. Each level of Functional English had a notional course length of forty-five guided learning hours per learner, or in other words, the hours of time being taught. During my first weeks in the FEC, the speaking and listening component of the course allowed me to explore the use of drama games as warm-ups for live assessments, which were performances in the form of discussions at level one and a presentation at level two. Some learners found the performance of public speaking a very stressful encounter, even the ones that were normally talking (when it would have been better if they had not) could struggle at the point of ‘camera, lights, action’ to the classroom as audience. Most learners were relieved to complete the live assessment and conversations afterwards were often reminiscent of some in the PAD following difficult tasks, as they relaxed to reveal aspects of their lives, many of which were in relation to functionality and employment experiences, demonstrating the shortcomings of successive government attempts to develop a catch-all policy.

The setting for the following piece of ‘fictional performative writing’ is the FEC. The group have been involved with a speaking and listening activity about prison life and what follows is a general group conversation about the ‘What Works’ agenda and employment, from which many small performances emerge. The reader might notice a different ‘feel’ to the pieces in the PAD and this is a deliberate attempt to evoke an atmosphere representative of both settings. Other differences include the language,
which is less ‘street’ in this chapter and any swearing in this next scene is limited to (and therefore highlighted by) Big Al’s contributions. The atmosphere is relaxed and convivial, but there is much less physical movement or exposure. As in the PAD, there is some evidence that employability and entrepreneurialism can take on particular meanings, at least when performed in such settings.

It’s never going to work, Boss!

Characters

ANDY
BIG AL
BOSS
MO
SAJED
BRET
VINNY

BIG AL It’s never going to work, Boss.

BOSS What do you mean by ‘work’?

BIG AL It’s just not going to work! If it were going to work, it’d have worked by now – and yet there’s all these people being paid all that money: AND, the jails are still too full!

BOSS It’s not that simple though …

BIG AL It’s simple! They get paid shed loads for us to fail – well, for them to fail …

BOSS Some prisoners turn their lives around …
BIG AL Not *because of* prison, they either shouldn’t be here in the first place or just by chance some will change. Prison will even claim these as success! It’s shit! We pay for prison’s failure!

BOSS Language please, Al - but point taken …

BIG AL And, when you think about it … I mean somebody gets it wrong, they make a mistake, maybe, and what happens? They say …

BOSS They, AL?

BIG AL Them! Them making all the decisions saying, I’ll tell you what we’ll do: we’ll put them in this big shitty place, away from their family, kids, and away from sex with the Mrs …

BOSS Or, Mr …

BIG AL I’m not being funny, but don’t start with that shit again, Boss – like I was saying, with loads of other mistake-making shits, still rattling or a bit mad, in a shitty cell where you have to shit in front of your pad mate, eat shitty food and then get sent to shitty courses [pause] no offence boss …

BOSS None taken …

BIG AL … Get screws to treat us like shit, can’t go to KFC or have a drink and they expect us just to lie down and come out all changed. Oh yeah, that’s really going to work …

BOSS I lost count of the ‘shits’, Al …

BIG AL Sorry Boss,

BOSS [Nods forgivingly]. So, is ‘What Works’ all about ‘working’?
ANDY [Holds up apologetic hand to BIG AL for interrupting]. Not all of it, but a big part of it.

BOSS Why’s that?

ANDY Lots of reasons. [Looks across at BIG AL]. Sorry for jumping in, just helping out with reducing the shits … [Big grin]

BIG AL [Laughs tiredly]. Cheers mate …

ANDY [Turning back to BOSS]. Not everybody is in here because they didn’t have a job, but then others expect to be kept and they’ll make money any way they can. I mean, I’ll not be working. Well, not working like you work.

BOSS What, you mean the devil makes work for idle hands, then?

ANDY Sometimes.

BOSS I heard some quote like … not too sure about the numbers, but something like [pause] 10% of lawyers’ kids become lawyers, 20% of teachers’ kids become teachers and 80% of prisoners’ kids go to jail … something like that …

BIG AL No shit! [Everyone grins and some shake their heads at BIG AL].

BRET Boss, it’s all that post-code lottery stuff, being born in the right or wrong bed, family support, staying off the gear and it’s about employers’ acceptance.

BOSS Go on.

BRET I’m twenty-seven and I’ve spent twelve years in jail, on and off.

BOSS Almost half your life then, Bret …
BRET I’ve got four kids though – not seen my youngest and she’s four this year.

BOSS Will that change when you get out this time?

BRET Every time I’ve tried to find a job, but when I tell them about being in prison you should just see the look on their faces. They close the interview down and can’t get me out quick enough. I’d try again and again and eventually I’d go back to what I know best.

BOSS Which is?

BRET What do you think?

BOSS Selling drugs?

[BRET opens his arms, makes a ‘what do you think’ expression, but says nothing].

MO It’s right boss, every time I’ve been let out with forty-quid release money in my pocket, staying at a hostel - employers don’t want to know …

BIG AL Prisons don’t make our lives better, in reality they make them worse!

BOSS Would you think any different if you weren’t in here?

BRET I know we’ve done bad stuff, but what’s the rehabilitation thing all about?

BOSS What if you were the victim?

BIG AL [Ignoring the question]. That’s why we don’t bother with these courses – what’s the point?
VINNY We just do the courses to get stuff off the canteen and so we don’t get nicked – just to get what we need. We don’t need courses out there – we only need them in here!

BIG AL I’m fifty-five years’ old. What do I want with a level one English qualification now? Go on Boss – what?

SAJED I’ll tell you what. At least, I’ll tell you what I’ve done. I sold an ‘air guitar’ on eBay, but I just sent an empty box and advice on how to play it [acts out playing air guitar] – that’s an air guitar. [Everyone picks up their ears]. Then I advertised ‘build your own plane’ but just sent instructions and some paper to make a paper plane. [Acts out throwing paper plane and everyone grins].

BOSS Didn’t they complain?

SAJED Yeah, but I didn’t have to refund them because I hadn’t advertised it wrong; it was the buyer that didn’t read the small print!

BOSS Reading is important, then …

SAJED But, who was ‘functioning’ best, Boss?

BOSS You’ve got a point – somehow …

SAJED It’s like when I sold a ‘lap-top’… ‘in polystyrene’. Nobody read the ‘in polystyrene’ bit. How’s about that for English that ‘works’ Boss? Function that!

[Everyone laughs].

VINNY Go on Saj …
SAJED My brother sold a house on-line for £198,000 and it never existed. He took a picture of someone else’s [looks at BRETT] - in a different post-code. The money got frozen in Pay Pal and now nobody has the dosh [more laughter by all]. The poor bastard that bought it is screwed, well for now anyway [hysterical laughter by all].

SAJED [Keeping the momentum of his audience]. Then, listen then – listen to this, I’ve got to tell you this one and its true - straight up…

BIG AL Go on …

SAJED I sold something I called ‘Miracle Grow’ - I copied the name from that grass advertisement thing. But, the only thing growing two inches in seconds involved two heavy wooden blocks with two elastic bands that needed attaching to … well, use your imagination!

[permanent laughter now].

BIG AL No shit …

SAJED I sold about one hundred to the USA at £80 each.

[Everyone collapses laughing].

SAJED It’s mad, Boss …

BOSS It is gents, it is …

Commentary:

The conversation in this scenario around “What Works’ demonstrates the over-simplified ‘does it/does it not’ work binary that has seeped into related discourses at many levels. Too easily, the reductive language of performance management has increasingly influenced the way approaches
such as ‘What Works’ (which were intended to deal with social complexity) have become conflated with values more closely associated with the marketization of education, or in this case, Functional English. I argue that the turn to desistance theory as an alternative is, in part, a reaction to this situation and makes a strong case for hegemonic forces to be more receptive to a broader range of theories and research methods that provide creative, flexible ways of knowing and problem solving, regardless of the resistance this might receive.

After all, it is not as though prisoners are unaware of the systems that operate around them. I can recall how prisoners have articulated this to me over numerous years in prisoners’ own inimitable way. In the scenario, above, prisoners were aware of the numerous cycles of prison reform that have failed to improve their lives and, in a section not included here due to insufficient space, many did not see the point of learning how to write a formal letter, newspaper article or business report. Such practices were either not considered important, remote from their life-narratives or perceptions of insurmountable barriers for change.

In the scene, above, the tendency is towards ‘condemnation scripts’ (Maruna, 2001, pp.73-84), favoured by ‘active offenders’ that can create the circumstances for ‘generative scripts’, favoured by ‘desisters’ (p.118-130) that offer prisoner rehabilitative opportunities. The circumstances for debate were created here, but prisoners appeared to have few in-roads to engaging with this debate other than the performance of bravado. Such debates can provide opportunities to explore self-narratives that can play an important role in constructing identity, but the introduction of fiction can offer an alternative narrative for analysis with the potential for multiple interpretations, as suggested later in this chapter. As Denzin (2014) pointed out (cited in the epigraph to this chapter), ‘we create the persons we write about, just as they create themselves when they engage in storytelling practices’ (p.6).

In the following scene, I use numbers rather than character names and there are two main reasons for this. The first is for practical reasons, to assist the reader with so many different names and roles to accommodate over a number of short scenes and to allow an easier distinction between prisoners and the teacher. The second reason was partly creative, but
mostly performative in terms of its underlying political connotations. For example, as the scene depicts, prisoners were being mandated almost randomly without any consideration for each person being on the ‘right course at the right time’ and without any prior notification. As such, they were being managed as a number rather than a person with an identity. It is from this rather flawed starting point that prison education success rates are generated, and compared, with those in mainstream education.

I’ve done this! Take me off, Boss!

Characters

PRISONER 1
PRISONER 2
PRISONER 3
PRISONER 4
PRISONER 5
PRISONER 6
TEACHER

[The setting is a Monday morning FEC. TEACHER has noticed that two new names have appeared on the register, which is not an unusual occurrence. Some prisoners out of a group of ten are already seated. They had been involved with similar situations in the previous weeks to the one about to play-out, as PRISONER 1 arrives angry-faced. He uses an aggressive tone and body language that made no suggestion of surrender].

PRISONER 1 What’s this?

TEACHER This is Functional English …

PRISONER 1 Fuck’s sake - I’ve done this …

TEACHER But, we don’t use that kind of English … Mister …
**PRISONER 1** Take me off it …

**TEACHER** I didn’t put you on it and I can’t take you off it …

**PRISONER 1** [*Looking increasingly menacing.*] I know you can, so just take me off!

**TEACHER** If you’ve done this before, have you got your certificate? What did you say your name was?

**PRISONER 1** I’m on recall - packing certificates wasn’t the first thing on my mind when I got sent back …

**TEACHER** Your initial assessment says you’re entry-level three, which is one level below level one – weird I know to have a three lower than a one, but …

**PRISONER 1** I’ve done that assessment loads of times, I couldn’t be arsed trying to …

**TEACHER** Okay, I get that, but you can see what’s happened, right?

**PRISONER 1** Look, I’m a self-employed bricky out there, I’ll walk straight back into work and I’ll not need any fucking certificate …

**TEACHER** But in here …

**PRISONER 1** I thought being in here was about being ready for out there and out there I probably earn more than you do in here!

**PRISONER 2** [*Shouts to PRISONER 1 from the back.*] We’ve been through all this mate – once they’ve got you in here, you’re stuck.

**PRISONER 1** [*To TEACHER.*] How long is it?
PRISONER 3 [Aged 59 – to PRISONER 1]. I was twenty-three when I started in here [grins].

TEACHER [To PRISONER 1]. Somewhere between four and six weeks…

PRISONER 1 It isn’t happening, it’s just not fucking happening – I’m telling you, take me off …

TEACHER These are the choices we have: if you can produce a level one certificate … Mister …

PRISONER 1 Smith …

TEACHER Then you can be taken off, or instead you can do the course and pass, or …

PRISONER 1 What if I don’t pass?

TEACHER You won’t need to pass if you already have a certificate …

PRISONER 3 [To PRISONER 1]. They’ll make you do it again, bud! [Big grin].

PRISONER 1 What, the whole thing?

PRISONER 3 [To PRISONER 1]. You’re staying, then?

TEACHER Not the whole course, just some revision and an exam re-sit.

PRISONER 2 [Calling out to PRISONER 1]. It’s like I said, you’re in here ‘till you pass – it’s what they [nodding at TEACHER] call success, even if you don’t.
TEACHER [Looking at PRISONER 2]. Thank you very much [looking back at PRISONER 1] or - and this is the last resort - refuse on the House-block.

PRISONER 1 Then they’ll nick me and I’ll lose my visits and …

TEACHER The trouble is, if you do come down and refuse to try, I’ll nick you anyway [pause]. You could save yourself the walk.

PRISONER 4 [Bouncing into the FEC and interrupting the conversation]. I can’t do this Boss I’ve got dyslexia and ADHD …

TEACHER Just take a seat, for a minute, Mister …

PRISONER 4 Billy!

TEACHER [Checking register]. I haven’t got a … what’s your surname?

PRISONER 4 Just call me Billy, Boss - anyway, I’m not staying …

TEACHER [Handing over a document to PRISONER 4]. For now, Billy, just take a look at this and tell me if you can understand it.

PRISONER 4 [Looks at document briefly]. No, I can’t …

TEACHER No, after you’ve read it, I mean.

PRISONER 5 [Now bored and shouting out of the window, closely followed by PRISONER 6]. Ben! Ben! You fat bastard! [Pause] You lucky bastard, you fucking salad dodger!

PRISONER 6 Fuck, yeah! He’s out this week …

TEACHER [Turning his attention from PRISONERS 5 & 6, leaving PRISONER 4 with his arms outstretched and a look of incredulity]. Hey, no
shouting out the window – your targets are on the board and they need to be in your learning plan. And, please stop dropping the ‘F’ bomb.

PRISONER 5 [Turning from the window]. Boss, I’ve just sat my tag board and I’m out next Tuesday, so there’s no point sitting any exam and no point being in here …

PRISONER 3 Yeah, just put me in for the exam, Boss, they’ve stopped my key worker pay, so the reward for working hard in the workshops is to send me to education and put me on less than a third pay. Come on, what would you do, Boss?

TEACHER [Looking at PRISONER 5]. If you sat an exam on a computer …

PRISONER 5 I’m shit with computers - plus they’re shit computers …

TEACHER We have some live paper exams …

PRISONER 5 But it takes about six weeks to get a certificate and, even if I do pass, I’ve no address to send it to. It’ll be lost just like his … [looking towards the direction of PRISONER 1, but he is no longer in the classroom] and I’ll have to do the fucking thing all over again.

TEACHER [Turning towards the whole group]. So, good morning gentlemen. The ‘plan’ for this morning is …

Commentary:

The scene above shows some of the difficulties created by Functional English being mandatory for prisoners who are unable to produce a certificate that evidences their competencies at level one. These unproductive circumstances were compounded for prisoners that had settled into the FEC, yet started the day listening to the protestations of others. Forcing prisoners to develop basic skills might appear to be a worthwhile
utilitarian act, but this policy had a negative impact on many prisoners’ attitudes to attending education. Most prisoners did eventually surrender to these forces in terms of compliance to the point of avoiding disciplinary action, but it created unnecessary obstacles for introducing performance-related activities such as reading aloud, working in fictitious roles and other speaking and listening activities.

There are many creative ways in which basic skills can be developed, but some of the teaching materials provided by those involved with the management of Functional English in the prison education classroom seemed more concerned with employment as a consequence of passing the qualification to claim competency rather than a more sustainable interest in the subject. For example, one of two manuals (one ‘reading’ and the other ‘writing’ at level one) states, ‘Tasks in this book are straightforward, but are very much work-focussed’ (Axis, 2015; 2015a). This comment infers that this narrow approach is the only route available to explore employability (see also Garner and Collins, 2011). There were other manuals that were designed to supplement FEC activity as guides for ‘study and test practice’ (Gregson et al. 2012) but these, too, were more about techniques to pass the exam than developing a lasting interest in English. Furthermore, they were produced for mainstream education and missed opportunities for content related to prison, life afterwards, or benefits such as reading with their children. Another example, ‘How to pass Functional Skills: English’ (Lawson, 2011) with its section for ‘Tips and techniques on how to pass’ (pp.12-19), demonstrated a ‘route-one’ approach which, arguably, was more about the authorities claiming success with qualification pass-rates than genuine positive change for individuals. Notwithstanding a close alliance with ‘how to short-cut the system’ (if not ‘cheat’), many projects these manuals contained were unsuited to prisoner identities and particularly patronising to long termers, such as ‘A camping trip’ (pp.21-34), ‘A Day out in Devon’ (pp.35-48) ‘Selling on-line’ (pp.63-76) and ‘A summer music festival’. For some prisoners, placing themselves in such fictional scenarios was a step too far on the road to functionality. Speaking as a prison educator, masquerading as a Functional English teacher, the imposition of
these restrictions curtailed opportunities to introduce the creative approaches I hoped to develop.

I recall a professional pressure to embrace this new form of English unconditionally and my disbelief as an amnesty was declared for any publication or worksheet containing fiction and creative writing to be purged in specially ordered skips (the creative writing class was closed with the PAD). The greatest literary works in the English language were replaced by ‘how to’ manuals. The prohibition of fiction was so intense that, on the few occasions in which I defied protocol to include creative English in my lesson, it felt tantamount to a clandestine smuggling operation. What followed was a stronghold of functionality until Coates’ new prison reforms in 2016 began to suggest the importance of increased flexibility, including a return to embrace arts in prison education.

**Functional English: who decides which parts of English function for whom, when, how long and in what circumstances?**

Despite Functional Skills being designed for mainstream use, by 2010 they were fully implemented across prisons as education providers placed the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum to one side and focussed on the Functional Skills Standards (QCA, 2007). However, a problem with such policy is that it tends to generalise, which is rarely sufficiently challenged or individualised during its implementation. For example, the prison population is very diverse and a good number of prisoners come to prison from very responsible jobs to which they will return. Alternatively, according to the Prison Reform Trust (2015), the ‘fastest growing age group in custody’ is people aged sixty and over (p.3). Therefore, a functional work-focused task is not necessarily the best way to motivate prisoners such as the retired, established self-employed or others with entrenched constructed identities of being a criminal and at the margins of compliance with ‘functional values’.

From a reducing reoffending perspective, the importance of competence with practical and everyday English skills mirrors reductionist assumptions by policymakers and some policy-deliverers that completing vocational tasks will necessarily lead to employment and reduce reoffending.
As reported in the publishable article based on the pilot study in this thesis, it is evident that such assumptions are too simplistic. Of course, in some cases there will be a correlation between attendance and reduced reoffending but these may be prisoners most determined not to reoffend rather than as a consequence of any skill practised being responsible for their decision. Furthermore, and I accept an irony that the statistics I am about to present generalise, but policy for mainstream purposes and prison circumstances do not necessarily accommodate individual prisoner’s physical, emotional or mental health needs that are so vital for increasing the prospects for employment. Moreover, people from the profile below are unlikely to represent the school leavers and graduates frustrating employers because of disparities between their good academic qualifications and disappointing practical ability to which Leitch (2006) alluded. For example:

… 36% of prisoners are estimated to have a physical or mental disability. This compares with 19% of the general population. Nearly a third (32%) of people assessed in prison said they had a learning disability or difficulty. Four-fifths of prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties report having problems with reading prison information – they also had difficulties expressing themselves and understanding certain words. People with learning disabilities and difficulties are more likely than other prisoners to have broken a prison rule; they are five times as likely to have been subject to control and restraint, and around three times as likely to report having spent time in segregation. Prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties were almost three times as likely as other prisoners to have clinically significant anxiety or depression, and most were both anxious and depressed (Prison Reform Trust, 2016, p.9). 42% of prisoners had been expelled or permanently excluded from school. Half (51%) of people entering prison were assessed as having literacy skills expected of an 11 year old – over three times higher than in the general population (15%) (Ibid. p.11).

Given the circumstances described above, if success is going to be measured solely in either qualification passes, employment gained or a calculation that simply counts the numbers of reconvictions, these macro factors are unlikely to provide a complete account of the complexities involved. This chapter does not dispute the importance of such phenomena or the potential of work, education and training in the development of constructive, productive ‘good citizenship’ (Thompson, 2008 p. 107).
Instead, it questions the pretence in which it is claimed and the destructive influence through deceptions encountered by the people it is meant to serve (Thompson, 2008 pp. 84-85). As such, included in this chapter’s argument are issues of balance, performance management and reality. For example, the design of Functional English was being formulated at a time when political circumstances converged to pronounce threats to economic prosperity (Leitch, 2006), followed by the economic crash of 2007/08 and a new government extoling the virtues of punishment (MoJ, 2010), from which the idea of a ‘working prison’ was recycled. How far these speculations of the political zeitgeist influenced Functional English design, I cannot be certain, but it emerged in a form that interpreted fiction as not having a practical function in reality. Neither can I be absolutely certain of management protectionist practices, but inconsistent policy suggests that educational or reducing reoffending considerations were not the priority. For example, prior to the introduction of Functional English, creative fictional forms were encouraged as a fundamental constituent of English. By the time I became involved with Functional English, education management positioned themselves somewhere between restricting and forbidding its use.

So far in this chapter, the reader has both seen inside the FEC and learned about some of the key circumstances associated with its rationale, content and rules of engagement in a particular period and prison context. The next section provides some examples of research with Functional Skills in other prisons, which were considered innovative. They were all conducted within three years of Functional Skills’ main roll-out in prisons. It is followed by a fictional example of tensions between attitudes on the ground, shifting policy and its implementation.

**Functional Skills: Examples of research on the ground**

In this section I examine some organisations that were involved with developing Functional English practice according to policy objectives across England and Wales. In January 2013, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) published a report of a project in
collaboration with The Manchester College, which examined the use of Functional Skills in a range of prison types. The project drew on practices used in the delivery of intensive Functional Skills by the British Army as the new Functional Skills qualifications introduced in prisons were being more strictly restricted to 45 hours of teaching per level. The main objective for this study was to explore how teachers and prisoners coped with a qualification in a more intense manner and reduced period of time (Novitzky & Jones, 2013).

The research was conducted in six different prisons with practitioners already involved in Functional Skills delivery. However, in this case, courses were delivered in cohorts, rather than roll-on, roll-off delivery; the latter being the most common arrangement for prisons. The study sought to compare existing course delivery practices between ‘non-intensive’ and ‘intensive’ military-style course design. Mixed methods were used to gather data from prisoner and non-prisoner participants. Activities for developing English skills did not explore the use of creative forms such as poetry, drama and fictional novel; rather they appeared to have accepted the assumption from policy interpretation that ‘functional’ English meant avoiding such forms, which would more readily bring about vocational and employability gains. The clearest finding from this study, however, was that ‘one size fits all’ approaches do not meet students’ complex needs (Novitzky & Jones, 2013).

Intensity, the report concludes, suits some students and not others. There was no evidence that a military-style, intensive approach was beneficial. Its application to mathematics indicated minor gains, but the indications for English were that it could be detrimental. Teachers felt that the level of intensity would leave little or no space for anything other than practice for the exam, which could portray an image of success for some and yet discriminate against others.

Beyond the NIACE research, a small number of case studies explored alternative practices with Functional English in prisons around the same time. They were presented as novel approaches of best practice that supported employability outcomes. They were sponsored and publicised with the assistance of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), which ceased its active involvement with practitioners on 31 May 2013 as a
consequence of funding cuts (LSIS, 2013). In 2011, HMP Onley aimed to respond to criticisms from an Ofsted inspection, such as English being focused on working towards learners’ targets through individual tutorial-style classes. Ofsted reported a ‘lack of sparkle common during group activities’ (LSIS, 2011 p.1), but did not provide any further explanation of what the word ‘sparkle’ might mean, how to add ‘sparkle’ or any case of an Ofsted inspector demonstrating ‘sparkle’ day-in-day-out. Nevertheless, HMP Onley responded by introducing ‘active learning’ (Petty 2009, 2009a). Geoff Petty’s educational research is mostly concerned with mainstream education practice, but his claim that ‘The most effective methods expect the teachers to do less, and the students to do more’ (Ibid.) resonates with the drama-based activities used in both the PAD and FEC to promote engagement. HMP Onley’s case study states, ‘It is still early to assess the outcomes of the development work carried out’ (LSIS, 2013b p.4) but infers that students were better engaged with relevant employability-focused content. The following examples describe methods and techniques used in their Functional Skills delivery:

These can be in familiar contexts for prisoners, such as a gym or less familiar contexts, such as a decorating job for an imagined self-employed trader. Prisoners are working collaboratively on real-life problems, such as how to go about painting a room, where they first have to decide what needs to be done, then what skills are needed and how to apply the skills in the context. In other words, following the functional skills problem-solving model and reflecting the skills needed in the world of work (Ibid, p.3).

The practices explored at HMP Onley were close to the approach I was suggesting in my original FEC research proposal in terms of using practical tasks, including employability-related material, whilst being creative in diverse learning spaces. A key difference, however, was the interpretation of what restrictions should be placed on fiction and drama-based approaches. For example, in their report HMP Onley showed no interest in fiction as a tool for teaching Functional English, yet they were engaged in activities such as asking prisoners to imagine themselves in role as a self-employed trader. Therefore, in being promoted as an example of good practice, it was
necessary ‘to give the impression’ (Goffman, 1990 p.112) of functionality, so the report disguised such activities by not mentioning arts terminology such as fiction, performance-based role-play, drama or theatre. By not doing so, the initiative was more easily presented as being about self-employment.

In the scenario presented below, two learners had not arrived and one refused because he felt so awkward with the activities that he came to class eating and drinking, knowing that the teacher would refuse him entry until he had finished. He eventually refused to attend and took the disciplinary punishment of a negative entry on his prison file. Slowly, the scene shows how relationships were forming with others, but a scene not presented here due to insufficient space, revealed three prisoners declaring serious mental health problems and very withdrawn. They found joining-in difficult, but there were glimpses of more confident, capable and relaxed personas at different times whilst involved. In ‘part one’ (below) the activity used was ‘Keepy-uppy’ to energise people ready for learning together and facilitate discussions such as teamwork and effective communication; elements necessary for the Functional English qualification. It can be played a number of ways, but in this case, it involved keeping a soft beach ball in the air by bodily contact. People can use any part of their body, but cannot not touch the ball again until someone else does. The ball is still in play when rebounding off furniture. If the ball touches the floor, the number of touches counted up until that point, stops. This represents the score achieved and the group decide if another attempt might be worth trying to beat the previous score.

From ‘Keepy-uppy’ to ‘The Selfish Giant’
(Part One – Keepy-uppy)

Characters

AMID
AMIR
BEN
JOE
[TEACHER is playing with a beach ball as the group arrive, occasionally offering prisoners a ‘feel’ of the ball. Many look perplexed and seek sanctuary close to the furniture at the periphery].

AMIR [First to enter the classroom and looks around]. What we up to Boss?

TEACHER Bit of a warm-up, I thought [throws ball].

AMIR [Catches the ball, moves to a table stacked by a wall and stretches]. Not been sleeping, it’s those bloody beds …

TEZ [Arrives]. Hey, what’s this?

AMIR [Throws ball to TEZ]. What’s it look like?

[BEN, WARREN and LEE arrive with sheepish nods and head for the furniture, TEZ feigns throwing them the ball but there are no takers. Teacher holds out a hand and TEZ throws the ball. ALS arrive, smiles at TEACHER, then takes a place close to the furniture].

TEACHER [Looking at ALS]. Can you catch? [Throws ball before any reply].

[J OE arrives with his head down and a heavy walk. The Adult Learner Support worker (ALS) helped him in the last session and has discovered that he claims to suffer from anxiety, depression and paranoia. JOE looks up briefly, ALS catches his eye and mimics a throw with a smile. JOE shakes his head and looks back towards the floor as he moves to prop himself against a stacked table].

ALS Morning Joe [JOE nods].

BEN What we doing, Boss?
TEACHER Just waiting for Amid, then I’ll explain [TEACHER throws the ball forward to bounce before it reaches Joe at chest height].

BEN He’s moving cell, I’ve seen him this morning – he’s on my wing. Well, he was.

TEZ Has he got enhanced?

BEN Opposite mate, I think he’s going to the dark side.

[In the meantime, JOE has taken the ball on his chest, bounced it from his knee on to his head, where it rested for a second before dropping to the back of his neck, then flicked off to bounce on his left foot, then right, left, right a little harder until it returned to chest height where he caught the ball, paused, raised an eyebrow at TEACHER and threw it back].

TEACHER Hey, you’ve done that before … [The group offer praise, making jokes about his skill and how it’s wasted – some ask questions about who he’s played for, but JOE just grins. It is the first time anyone in the group has seen him in any other persona than ‘JOE the recluse’ – but he soon goes back into character].

JOE [The ‘sparkle’ gone from his face]. Whatever, but I’m not doing it.

TEACHER Doing what?

JOE Your stupid game!

ALS Joe!

TEACHER [walking into the middle of the room, circled by the barricade of furniture]. Okay, these are the rules of the ‘stupid game’ [TEACHER explains the rules, giving advice about health and safety, being aware of surroundings, moving away from furniture, not being too heroic and so forth]. WARREN! [Taps ball to WARREN]. One! [WARREN strikes the ball]. Two! [The ball hits the roof and re-bounds to the floor]. So, the first learning point is … [the group answer at the same time with varying responses such as the
best body part to contact ball, how hard, in which direction and so forth – expect for JOE, still by the furniture]. So, now we’re problem solving. Problem solving is a foundation stone of Functional Skills: TEZ! One! [TEACHER taps ball to TEZ, he knocks it to ALS], Two! [ALS to WARREN]. Three! [WARREN to TEACHER]. Four! [TEACHER to AMIR]. Five! [AMIR to LEE - but LEE is not concentrating].

AMIR [Looking at LEE]. Yo! [The ball hits LEE’s shoulder].

TEACHER Six! [The ball falls to the floor, despite WARREN’s stretched out foot that fails to make contact and the group groan].

LEE This is shit …

WARREN It was you …

TEACHER [Collecting the ball]. Okay, regardless of our disappointment, which is a good sign …

AMIR Why?

TEACHER Why do you think?

AMIR Because we want to do better …

TEACHER Exactly. Regardless of our disappointment, then, why did we perform three times better than the first time?

TEZ We talked about what to do.

TEACHER Did we all agree?

TEZ Not about everything.
TEACHER So you had to convince others.

TEZ I persuaded them because I showed them.

TEACHER There you go – persuasive communication comes in lots of forms - your argument was by a practical demonstration: Functional English right there [TEZ looks puzzled at first, then grins].

AMIR We’d have done more if he’d been awake [nodding at LEE].

LEE Fuck off …

TEACHER We all come with different skills and different moods each day – so AMIR, think about what you did to try and help LEE, which was great, but could it have been better? [AMIR stares into space and TEACHER turns his gaze to ALS]. Did you spot it?

ALS I think so …

TEACHER [Raises hand in a ‘don’t say yet’ gesture and looks at AMIR]. Straight after you threw it when you realised he wasn’t ready …

AMIR I called him …

TEACHER That’s it and so what were you doing?

AMIR Telling him, warning him …

TEACHER You were using the ‘c’ word …

AMIR Not me, Boss …

TEACHER You were communicating to improve the team’s performance and that’s called what? A ‘t’ word …
AMIR Teamwork!

TEACHER So even when we’re disappointed, there are things to learn or recognise – so how could communication have improved performance?

AMIR If I noticed him quicker, I could have done a ‘Yo’ sooner.

TEACHER Boom! Communication and teamwork - maybe it’s not such a stupid game after all, but in the meantime, that’s the score to beat …

[Pointing at a metal cupboard with the number ‘42’ and a date written on it in removable marker].

And, we only have time for another three attempts.

[The group tries again and scores twenty-seven, which is followed by more analysis, problem solving and suggestions, then a voice speaks from amid the furniture].

JOE I’ll tell you what’s going wrong. When it doesn’t get hit hard enough and drops in the middle nobody gets it, in any case if two jumped in they’d bash into each other.

TEACHER So, what’s the solution?

JOE You need someone in the middle that can field the mistakes …

TEACHER There’s only one person I’ve seen in this room with those kind of ball skills [giving JOE ‘the look’] – come on help us out here …

[JOE rises slowly from the furniture takes his place in the middle and the next score reaches fifty-one. After the cheering and whooping, TEACHER was about to speak].

LEE Can we put the table and chairs back now, Boss?
TEACHER Of course, we are victorious! [People start moving the furniture]. Watch your fingers and toes with the tables, Amir watch that back of yours – you’ll still have that same bed tonight.

[The room is restored to a traditional classroom and people are now seated].

TEACHER A key problem for us right there, then, was how to improve our performance from a score of two to the dizzy heights of fifty-one, Ben, how many twos in fifty-one?

BEN Twenty-five and one left over.

TEACHER Nicely, Ben. So, we had to improve by a factor of over twenty-five before the morning break and that’s going some. The thing is, if we can figure out how we did that, maybe we can apply what worked to other situations. Warren, do you remember what happened when we scored a two?

WARREN It’s a bouncy ball though [laughs].

TEACHER Of course, getting to know how the ball reacts is one side of it, which is why people were being encouraged to get a ‘feel for the ball’ early on, I seem to remember you declining – maybe there’s something to be learned there. Hitting it too hard is the other side of that particular problem - of ball control. Maybe it’s a hard, physical skill to know how to approach the ball, but perhaps it’s a soft skill (that’s actually harder) not just to clatter it because of embarrassment - only you need to know, Warren.

WARREN You mean, it’s not just what you do with objects it’s how they make you feel?

TEACHER They say that about skilled trades and crafts – why should English be different? What are our objects?
WARREN Well, obviously books and writing and stuff, but that was speaking and listening and messing with a ball.

TEACHER It was. AMIR, what word can involve speaking and listening? I’ll give you a clue, it’s a ‘c’ word … [For a fleeting moment, AMIR’s has mischievous expression]. Don’t even think about it – Amir.

AMIR Communication, Boss.

TEACHER Nicely, but we learned more than that. Tell me more, Amir.

AMIR What, you mean about the timing?

TEACHER Yeah, the timing and that it might not be the same timing for everyone because we’re all different. So, if you were at home helping to cook a meal, would you expect to work on the same timings with your eighty-year-old gran and your eight-year-old sister?

AMIR I get it.

TEACHER And, finally, Joe. With your help, we went from twenty-seven to a world-beating, well, cohort-beating score of fifty-one. What was it that made the difference?

JOE My skill [the grin returned – this time extra cheeky].

TEACHER It had a lot to do with it, but you weren’t on your own …

JOE Okay, working in teams …

TEACHER When do we do that in class?

JOE Like working in pairs for reading and writing stuff.
TEACHER Yeah, giving things a go - even when it feels awkward or we’re not sure about who we’re paired up with, especially now we know collaboration can improve our performance. Once some of the principles behind problem solving are realised, the next step is applying them to other situations in everyday life, work and play. Maybe the ball game was just a different way of getting to that point, rather than just telling you because (as Amir knows) we all roll differently. But, look at the clock, it’s break time!

Commentary:

The scenario reveals that the removal of the furniture seemed to present a threat to participants. Certainly, at the first opportunity, after Keep-uppy, Lee requested, ‘Can we put the table and chairs back now, Boss?’ in spite of the criticism by many prisoners in Functional English (including from Lee in an earlier scene) that ‘This is just like school - the same old shit’. Although some expressed sitting behind a desk as tantamount to torture, the desks and chairs seemed to become physical things of comfort, to which they clung. This different configuration shifted participants’ comfort zone, recreating a scenario encompassing the development of coping strategies for emotional challenges akin to a ‘real-life’ situation. The scenario suggests that practising Functional Skills under such circumstances is ‘hard’ and ‘real’; not the ‘soft’ option implied by proponents of the purely functional and quasi-punitive approaches. However, in many respects, there are risks involved when exposing people suffering from anxiety (such as Joe and Lee) or schizophrenia (such as Ben) to situations where they might feel more vulnerable and the reasonably satisfactory outcome could have owed as much to good fortune as considered planning.

Nevertheless, it was the group’s crisis that eventually produced what appeared to be the least anxious moment for Joe, up until that point, reminiscent of Van in the PAD when he became a key-player in the ‘Grandma’s Keys’ activity. Sometimes the moment with the greatest potential for positive change came at times and places least expected. Both in the PAD and in the FEC, it was often such moments that created the
circumstances for prisoners to reflect. These could occur straight away, but also later in the lesson or during a re-cap the next day.

None of this complexity was dealt with in the Functional English handbooks and manuals that made their purpose clear as providing systematic, instrumental and prescriptive ways to pass the qualification. Notwithstanding the importance of successful course completion, these texts were emblematic of the ever-diminishing spaces and time to work creatively. Alternatively, if creative prison education has a role in promoting reflective practice as a contribution to reducing reoffending, then creating memorable events can become material for re-telling in story form. As the scenario implies, stories such as this often led to exploring other experiences through personal narrative, such as Sajed's entrepreneurial efforts in 'It's never going to work, Boss!', earlier in this chapter. Moreover, the Functional English handbooks assumed a level of learner engagement that cannot always be taken for granted in a prison context, as shown in the fictional scenarios. In this respect, approaches were developed that were learned in the PAD such as drama games, which can be used as a distraction, interrupt the monotony of some Functional English tasks, promote discussion, create a different environment and so forth.

The main stimulus for the next scenario in two parts is a fictional children's story written by Oscar Wilde entitled, 'The Selfish Giant' (1998), originally published in 1888. An important reason for its selection is to develop an argument in this chapter for examining the practice of using imaginative and improvisational skills that are needed in both Functional English summative assessment and 'real life'. The scene shows how concepts might 'stretch' prisoners at level one when interpreted as an adult morality tale, whilst establishing narrative approaches for learning with lower level prisoners in the class. The former were provided with Wilde's 'Ballad of Reading Gaol', originally published in 1898 under the name 'c.3.3.' that represented Wilde's prison location: cell block c, landing 3, cell 3, but did not reveal his identity until some years later. In this sense, there is an irony that needs the imaginative interpretation of the reader in that Wilde's story, based on 'real' events, was smuggled out of prison as a memory and later written whilst disguising his identity. Alternatively, in this scenario it is being
‘smuggled’ into a fictional FEC context to imagine creative ways in which identities might be explored or new identity formulations discovered and as a research tool for this chapter.

Wilde spent most of his two-year sentence for homosexual offences from 1895 at Reading Prison. While he was there, a trooper in the Royal Horse Guards was executed by hanging for cutting his common-law wife’s throat. Wilde’s story is both a description of the trooper’s hanging and a commentary on prisoners, jails and the penal system.

The scenario that follows in sequence is not shown in this thesis due to insufficient space. It shows how Teacher chooses a functional purpose for ‘higher ability’ students by asking them to practise summarising techniques of the text to the group, the principles of which can later be applied to their writing to be more concise. Moreover, a learning task I imagined whilst writing this scene was that some prisoners would read Wilde’s poem in their cell, ready to present a brief report to the rest of the group and facilitate a short discussion on diversity. For some in this case, however, the benefits were not instantaneous, as shown (below) in the scenario that continues.

From ‘Keepy-uppy’ to ‘The Selfish Giant’
(Part Two – ‘The Selfish Giant’)

[TEACHER introduces the story and explains how, although it is a children’s story, men in the group might want to share with their children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces. Alternatively, it can also be analysed in a more mature way. A functional purpose in respect of the competencies and qualification is to prepare prisoners for a wide range of material possible for the reading assessment/exam. Being adaptable to a range of texts is important, TEACHER explained].

TEACHER The first thing I’d like us all to do is take time to read the story to yourself, circle any metaphors, similes or personification you recognise from what we have just discussed, but also make a note of any other points you want to talk through.

[For a moment it is quiet].
JOE Why do I have to do this? [Nobody responds]. What would you feel like? [Still, nobody replies]. How can they put us in here? How can they force us to do this stuff? Well, not force us, but we get IEP warnings, lose our telly, visits, tag and all that stuff - being in jail should be enough …

TEACHER Just read a small section at a time, JOE.

JOE You’re not listening …

TEACHER I am, but I can’t do anything to help, but listen. For now, we’ve got this task and I’ll help all I can. After we’ve read it quietly, we’ll read it out loud with as many as possible having a go, so get to know at least one section [it falls quiet until everyone has finished reading].

LEE I’m not reading any out loud …

JOE I’m not …

TEACHER [Looking at LEE]. That’s okay, if you indicate which section you would have read and why, pointing out anything you noticed to do with language, spelling, punctuation or grammar, somebody else might read it for you. If not, I’ll read it. Same for you JOE. Who wants to read the first section? Remember, when the reading is done we should all show our appreciation for the reader [holds up hands and mimics applause].

AMIR I’ll do it! [AMIR reads which stimulates discussion].

LEE I can never get this stuff – like what are flowers doing talking, then going back into the ground?

TEACHER Do you watch cartoons and Disney films?

LEE Sometimes …
TEACHER Ever seen non-humans being ‘human’? Ever wondered why it’s so popular?

LEE It’s for kids …

TEACHER What if your task in the reading exam is to analyse some information intended for a young audience? What if in the writing exam you have to design a text like a poster for a nursery or primary school?

LEE No!

TEACHER Could be – it could be anything to do with being a productive citizen in everyday life.

WARREN I’ll read the next bit, Boss.

TEACHER The stage is yours, Warren! [After the applause, a discussion takes place, but this time LEE joins in].

LEE I’m still not reading, but I can imagine how the snow and sleet could manifest themselves into other things, now.

TEACHER Like what?

LEE Well, they’re not just the wind and snow and all that stuff, they could represent how cold and barren the giant’s life was when he was selfish …

TEACHER Now, you’re getting it and we’re getting short on time: TEZ!

TEZ I was going to do this bit [he reads and the group analyses].

JOE I’ll do this bit!

[JOE reads, everyone applauds and the group picks the section apart, once
JOE That's the first time I've ever read out loud

TEACHER What! You mean, ever?

JOE In prison and most of school. I didn't stay in school long, but I'd try to read and mess up. Then, people would laugh at me and then I'd punch their faces in, then I'd get into trouble.

TEACHER You volunteered here - what made the difference?

JOE I trusted that the people in here were not going to laugh or make fun. It happened in school once, which was the only time I've ever read out aloud and, I'm telling you I banged him big time. That's when I got expelled. I went to a few special schools after but got kicked out of them all. That was it, then. Now, I just think people are laughing at me all the time and that's why this is just the worst thing – I'd rather do anything else! I work out there and in here I'd rather be breaking rocks than this ...

TEACHER You've reached a milestone this morning Joe, have you recorded it in your learning plan?

JOE Done it.

[The entry recorded by JOE states: ‘I'm proud of myself today – I read aloud for the first time’].

Commentary:

Comments such as Lee's somewhat profound and unexpected declaration that ‘I can imagine how the snow and sleet could manifest themselves into other things, now’ really happened in my lived experience on a number of occasions. That it seems ‘out of character’ in the scenario (above) reminded me of such occasions and how I wondered what identities
might be concealed ‘behind the mask’ (Baim et al., 2002 p.182-185). In this respect, the scenario (in two parts) demonstrates how the exclusion of fiction and drama-based enrichment activities in Functional English was not a ‘functional’ position at all. Indeed, perhaps functional or employability approaches alone are unable to either stimulate or accommodate such moments, shown in both the PAD and FEC scenarios. As such, some crucial ‘functions’ might be neglected that could develop social skills and aptitudes that many employers seek or that promotes thoughtful conversation in the home. Therefore, I argue that the Functional English approaches being prescribed during my lived experience largely wasted the potential of creative exploration, as imagined in this scenario.

However, the final fictional scenario below provides a forewarning as to what might happen if ground-workers do not pay sufficient attention. This scenario shows a lesson that had been reasonably successful previously and the sequence of activities had been planned carefully. However, the session was being delivered without sufficient knowledge about the individuals involved and in a prison context that was becoming increasingly unsafe (see Prison Reform Trust, 2016a). Consequently, the activity needed to be abandoned with positive outcome/s difficult to identify.

I’m not being funny, Boss, but this isn’t for me!

Characters

ALS
BRIAN
CONNER
ENDA
FAZ
IAN
JEZ
JIMMY
[TEACHER explains about the course and the potential of working together and how one of the basic elements of this process is to get to know each other's name. TEACHER asks how many names each person knows and how long they think it might take to get to know five, then ten, then all of them. Nobody knows more than two names and prisoners' predictions of the time it might take to know them all by the end of the session indicates a lack of interest in the activity. TEACHER explains that apart from getting to know names, one purpose of the activity is to demonstrate how alternative methods can improve our performance with learning. Based on previous groups, TEACHER declares, all should exceed their expectations within fifteen minutes].

TEACHER [Playing with a squeaky dog ball]. Say your own name and pass the ball along to the next person on your right. Teacher! [Passes to the right].

JIMMY [Looking awkward]. Jimmy [passes to the right].

BRIAN [In a very low mumbling voice he passes the ball]. Brian.

TEACHER Sorry, I missed that …

BRIAN [Slightly clearer and louder]. Brian.

ALS [Smiling at BRIAN]. ALS!

[Passes the ball, but noticed a few down the line that were looking increasingly awkward. One put his head in his hands and another was looking to his right and shaking his head].

CONNER Conner!

[Passes the ball to FAZ, but two seats away, as the ball approaches, IAN has stood up and is heading to stare out of the window].
FAZ What …

TEACHER Just say your name and pass it to the next person …

FAZ Faz! [Passes].

JEZ Jez! [Passes].

ENDA Enda!

[The speed has quickened in what seems to be a bid to end the activity - ENDA passes].

LIAM Liam! [Passes].

ZAK Zak!

[Just as ZAK is about to pass, PHIL stands up and joins IAN at the window. TEACHER holds up his hands and ZAK passes the ball].

IAN [Looking at PHIL]. Fucking shite, this. I'm not fucking staying …

PHIL Like being at fucking school …

TEACHER [Looking over at IAN and PHIL]. Give us a chance to complete this, lads, we’ll have a chat when we’ve done … [looking back to those in the circle, most were looking very uneasy] has anyone got a name or two they didn’t have a couple of minutes ago? [Nobody answers straight away, but eventually three that nodded or mumbled that they had]. Okay, let’s go back the other way in the circle, before we move onto the next stage. Teacher! [Passes to ZAK].

BRIAN I’m not being funny, Boss, this isn’t for me …

TEACHER Okay …
PHIL It's Bollocks!

TEACHER It's meant to get to know each other's names - and have a bit of fun.

PHIL It's bollocks!

IAN I'm not doing this shit, I'll refuse on the wing and get nicked first …

TEACHER [Looking at people in the circle]. Do you all feel the same? [Two prisoners shrugged as if to indicate they were not bothered either way, but the rest made noises or faces that they were in agreement with IAN, PHIL and BRIAN].

Okay, but that means putting the tables and chairs back to get on with diagnostic paperwork …

BRIAN Anything's better than this … [PHIL and IAN move from the window to begin moving the tables and chairs into rows].

TEACHER Four sets of two tables lads, so we have four groups that can work together. Make sure they go back-to-back so you can get your feet under at both sides. Watch your fingers don’t get trapped [PHIL and IAN look at each other raising their eyebrows, but arrange the furniture as requested with BRIAN joining them]. Can we have a chat at break time?

BRIAN Whatever …

PHIL Take us off, Boss …

TEACHER [Picking up a stack of diagnostic assessments and starting to place them with a pen in front of people now seated at desks]. You'll have seen these before, they tell teachers what you know and what we need to help you with – so don’t copy or ask advice. Otherwise, I can’t find out what
you know or can do – just what him next to you knows or can do. And, think on – he might not know …

PHIL Or do …

TEACHER There’s just enough time before break. Enjoy!

Commentary:

As shown in some of the previous scenarios, the layout of the room appeared to create a level of discomfort. Once returned to a more traditional format with a pen and paper task, I imagined that Phil, Brian and Ian would slowly accept the work involved. Alternatively, some in the room appeared relieved that the level of exposure had reduced, others mumbled things about ‘the same old shit’ and one exclaimed ‘I’ve done this before, Boss. Just let me do the exam!’ Therefore, although Teacher began the last scenario as with previous groups, some within this one were unable to engage with Teacher’s intentions. Once more, I imagine Teacher found out later that some people in this group were dealing with personal problems and other external pressures outside the FEC, but then much the same could be said about the previous groups. Pre-course interviews might have helped, but there was no certainty that sincere disclosure would be forthcoming. Holding back with exploratory activities for a few sessions might have informed lesson planning better, but the earlier groups agreed that a ‘different’ experience of education from what they expected helped them work together sooner. In my scenario writing about other sessions with this group (not included here because of lack of space), most remained reluctant to engage. The few that initially appeared ready seemed restricted by the attitude of the reluctant ones and chose to protect themselves by solidarity within the group. The objection to the name game, using the ball and a circular seating arrangement, seemed to make most people feel uncomfortable, but later Teacher used one-to-one tutorials, which engaged some of the group in creative or more playful content from the ‘safety’ of their desks and the privacy of their thoughts and writing. Teacher would
need to reflect further because, as this last scenario demonstrated, the level of complexity involved leaves no space for complacency, taken for granted assumptions and for not paying attention.

Therefore, if Functional English teachers have a role in dealing with factors that might contribute to creating circumstances conducive to both learning and reducing reoffending, then a focus on the acquisition of skills sufficient to pass a one-hour assessment, may limit such prospects for both prisoners and teachers. For example, earlier in this chapter we learned how Sajed made money long before attending the FEC and yet an education provider would claim his qualification as evidence of success for presentation to regulators such as Ofsted. Additionally, Joe’s declaration in his learning plan was a signal of much more and although for most Functional English teachers in prison, developing confidence and reflective practice with prisoners such as Joe as a means of encouraging engagement, is a part of everyday practice. However, it is a much harder task when resources and autonomy are restricted. Hence, creative approaches to education have much to offer in the pursuit of positive change, but require flexibility and adaptability from all concerned.

This chapter’s examination of my lived experience in the FEC demonstrates my struggle to introduce innovative approaches to employing fiction in Functional English to explore its potential for prisoners’ reflective practice during a particular period in which authoritative voices strongly resisted such endeavours. The chapter shows how fiction can contribute to influencing special moments in learning spaces that might be described, with a degree of sincerity, as successful. However, the research findings presented in this thesis portfolio indicate that the blend of ingredients to create such circumstances might never be spun into a fine yarn whilst the condition in which they are manufactured is contaminated with an inflexible, authoritarian and punitive regime. Although the review by Coates (2016) has influenced a whole raft of authoritative voices that now commend such practice, lone ground-workers might find both solidarity and greater progress by joining with others on the ground that share an aspiration to explore creative professional practice unencumbered by the seemingly unceasing
cycles of short-term reform. Paying attention to the smaller learning spaces they are able to create may be the only long-game possible.
Chapter 5. Conclusion

To complete a thesis or dissertation is a formidable task in itself, and new scholars and their supervisors working with arts-related approaches face additional challenges that make the thesis/dissertation journey all the more full of uncertainty and surprises. Risk taking, courage, openness to unknowing, and tolerance for ambiguity – on the part of both emerging scholars and their supervisors – are prerequisites for developing an arts-based project (Knowles and Promislow, 2008, p.519).

In much the same way that posing a single research question would counter the philosophical principles of this thesis (which embraces the complexity and unpredictability involved in this research context), I maintain that a single answer is unlikely to suffice. Nevertheless, some readers accustomed to claims in ‘containers that are watertight’ (Eisner, 2008, p.8) may feel unfulfilled without a response that can be provided in narrower prosaic terms. Therefore, I argue that according to the research findings in this thesis portfolio ‘what restricts working creatively in prisons impedes creativity working, or not working well enough and really creative initiatives that bring about change often require risk’, as suggested in the Preface (Part Two).

Whilst the claim above is intended as the headline research finding, this assertion is unable to capture either the full extent of my experience or the complexities involved. Therefore, in this chapter I return to a pattern of ‘fictional performative writing’ interspersed with critical commentary to summarise further. In doing so, I push the boundaries of this method a little further in this chapter. Consequently, its success as both a reflexive and thought provoking instrument that cultivates other ‘ways of knowing’ and meaning-making is increasingly reliant upon the reader to engage in ‘performative reading’, as described throughout this second part of the portfolio (see also Denzin, 2003 p.94). Therefore, the reader might find it helpful to be open to a notion that so-called ‘real life’ in the professional circumstances of my experience is not fully ‘real’ in the way many of us often assume, as Goffman (1990) demonstrates through his observations of performances and presentations involving more ‘back stage’ manoeuvres than most of us would feel comfortable admitting (p.205).
ME Sorry again, for bursting in, but let me tell you something about things being unreal and the ground. The first thing my line manager said to me after the release of the review by Dame Sally Coates (2016) was, ‘What about that drama stuff you used to do - could you work some of it into Functional English?’ Well, I don’t know what ‘back stage’ (Goffman, 1990 p.205) strategies must have been happening that ‘involve the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others in a form of ‘information control’ (Ibid. p.141), but all of a sudden the rule changed. Instead of restrictions and a fiction ‘ban’, the remit of suggestions from ‘donkey riders’ included ideas in which there were no ‘wrong’ answers, to use ‘free blue-sky thinking’, try new ‘risky’ things, perhaps even make prison more like colleges with chill-out zones. From somewhere, money was now available for new ideas that management reminded ground workers could take place outside the traditional classroom. The only proviso being, that activities must contribute to reducing reoffending, although no new advice was offered on what that means or how progress might be measured on the ground – or elsewhere (see comments on thesis pages 12-16). You couldn’t write it, could you?

However, my experiences have taught me to be cautious in the space between policy and practice and how the review is implemented remains to be seen. Moreover, since the publication of Coates (2016), the impending divorce between the UK and European Union known as ‘Brexit’ has further complicated the political landscape. The heat has cooled on ‘free blue-sky thinking’ and already Coates’ (2016) timeframe is ‘slipping into the institutional treacle’ as the OLASS contract has been extended from 31 July 2017 until 31 July 2018.

Making meaning from the (ostensibly) impenetrable: with a little help from my friends

Characters

ARTHUR
BALFOUR
[BOB and ARTHUR are at the bar and getting ready for the ‘What Works’ pub quiz. Due to the difficult theme this week, there’s only one question, which happens to be the same one posed in the Introduction to this thesis portfolio: ‘What are the challenges and opportunities for creative education, work and training in a prison context?’ The pub is full of the people that have been in this thesis – some have speaking parts, whilst others are waiting for a part in a scene that has not yet been written].

Scene One

BOB There’s a lot in here tonight, I bet they’ve come in for the quiz.

ARTHUR We don’t stand a chance - what do we know? We’re the ‘non-experts’ here!

BOB Maybe, but we’re here now. So, what have we found out?

ARTHUR All we’ve got to go on is in a thesis, written by one of those … those … what was it Nahmed-Williams called them, ‘late-career down shifters’.
BOB Aye, maybe …

ARTHUR [Deliberately changing the subject to avoid BOB’s difficult question]. Hey, if new people are going to be drafted in, then it’ll mean some prison teachers are going. It’s tough for them, but do you know what, if that makes more people’s lives ‘better’ then it’s probably no bad thing. Well, a utilitarian greater good, ‘no bad thing’.

BOB Will it do that? If getting rid of the risk-takers, those battered down by the system, trying to do creative stuff… I mean like, well - did someone say ‘swimming in treacle’? It’d only be a matter of time before Coates’ bright new scholars get stuck in the same system - the same, sticky treacle.

ARTHUR Unless the system changes …

BOB People make the system …

ARTHUR Is Coates trying to make a new system based on some fundamental faults?

[GOFFMAN, FOUCAULT and THOMPSON wander over to the bar and join BOB and ARTHUR]

FOUCAULT We’re all in it together, we can criticise but we all become part of the system because we can’t escape the machine. We are the machine! All of us …

THOMPSON Same old donkey riders too though …

ARTHUR Aye, they’re not without fault …

GOFFMAN I call it ‘backstage’ rather than ‘fault’, Arthur. What you see ‘front stage’ is only the version of reality being presented. It’s not the same as...
what’s going on ‘back stage’. It’s complicated, but that’s people and testimony to the fragility of appearances.

**BOB** How do measure all this, then, how do you quantify it?

**SULLIVAN:** *[Serving behind the bar]*. There are more ways than one to pay attention. Maybe we need a mix of ways to think about problems. Do you remember the things my mother did and how it helped me do what I do?

**BOB** But, what works is about measurement!

*[MARUNA waves at GOFFMAN and walks over]*

**MARUNA** I can see it’s going to be a long night, mate …

**SULLIVAN** Coates says she’ll measure prison education’s success by the ‘distanced travelled’ or the progress prisoners make on their learning plan (when they eventually all have them, that is) and by reducing reoffending. Ofsted inspectors will focus on attendance and the number of qualifications passed and especially Functional Skills. The trouble is, even the numbers can be, well, fake-ish. Even if not entirely fake, it’s not surprising if those volunteering for education and training are less likely to reoffend, is it?

**ARTHUR** Will punishing those that don’t attend really turn them away from anti-social stuff, though? And, will those forced to attend make it worse for those that want to learn?

**MARUNA** Then there’s all the other stuff going on in people’s lives, how can one thing explain it all? You see folks, nobody will win the pub quiz tonight because there’s no single answer. It’s all a bit of fun in the pub, but it’s different out there on the ground and in the field, hey Goffy [placing his hand on GOFFMAN’s shoulder].
GOFFMAN Change and performance is constant. Even here in the pub, we're jostling and playing ‘the game’ one way or another, eh MARUNA? [Grins at MARUNA and nods at his hand, still on his shoulder].

FOUCAULT Some say that free space for creative intellectual reflection has given way to mass production and consumption in education – I suppose like the churn in prisons and qualifications. It extends to mass-produced ideologies because that are more likely to warrant compliance than resistance.

MARUNA Wow! [glancing over to FOUCAULT and back to GOFFMAN]. What do you think Goffy?

GOFFMAN It’s that old chestnut, ‘free will’, it gets me every time [grins]. Things aren’t what they seem out there or in here … [grins wider and winks].

Commentary

An important purpose of Scene One is to revisit the machinations of social, professional and institutional interaction (particularly explored in the previous two chapters) that those working in large institutions tend to accept as ‘reality’, whereas underneath the surface or ‘back stage’ (Goffman, 1990 p.205), everything is not always as it might seem. Similarly, an important function of the method being employed, is to accept that underground and ‘back stage’ (Ibid.) areas really exist. The implication here, of relevance to professional practice and research processes, is that the search for full or comprehensive knowledge of what is happening in such circumstances may never be attainable, whatever the research method or professional approach.

Alternatively, evidence of moments (as shown by the scenarios in this thesis from the ground) offers a small contribution to Hughes’ (2005) suggestion that ‘absence of evidence does not mean there is an absence of effect’ (p.25), indicating that (within these institutions) protectionism and performances in arts practices closer to the ground might have the capacity
to work differently. In this sense, the research story is taken full circle to experiences that first provoked my curiosity over thirteen years ago when witnessing ‘arts in prison’ for the first time. Importantly, perhaps, ‘arts in prison’ has intrigued many others as reported by Dame Sally Coates and documented in the form of moments (Thompson, 2008 p.91) or little theatres of change (Balfour, 2009 p.7). Therefore, despite the blurring of institutional realities, this conclusion has reached a point in which it rejects the idea that ‘nothing works’, but also contends that we are a long way from really knowing (my original research intention) ‘what works best for whom in what circumstances’ (Hughes, 2005). Moreover, further discovery is likely to be compromised without creative practice and research with the autonomy to explore performances from the ground.

Scene Two

[As Scene Two opens, the characters have been discussing ideas related to the commentary above. Otherwise, the setting continues from the end of Scene One].

BALFOUR [Wiping beer glasses from behind SULLIVAN where he’s emptying the dishwasher]. It’s like this - here’s some dishwasher stains on this glass, [holding a glass to the light] you can see them here, but when I wipe them I erase all those ‘marks’ and ‘glitches and less-than-satisfactory moments’ [nodding and smiling towards THOMPSON who’s now queuing with FOUCAULT and SIMON next to GOFFMAN and MARUNA at the bar].

THOMPSON So, are we saying some things are bumping-up against each other – would regulators like Ofsted see a ‘difficult’ moment as a failure or recognise it as seeking more successful ways of working? And would the education provider think that progress wasn’t being made if qualifications were not being churned out?

FOUCAULT In mainstream education, the mass production of qualifications and high grades is counted as success.
BALFOUR Maybe, but in prisons surely the outcomes need to be very different. Look at Van and Lee and all those …

THOMPSON [Nodding to BALFOUR]. You’ve got a point. I wonder if Coates has experienced any prison ground and how she knows what to expect from the arts? What if success in prison is not the same?

BALFOUR Or, as Baz Kershaw said, is the work just going to be ‘at the beck and call of the dominant order’ and all that entails?

THOMPSON [Nodding to BALFOUR] If those that work in prison theatre are still figuring things out, how come the ‘donkey riders’ have all the say? I mean, it’s great to hear about the review by Coates and support for arts in prison, but does she really know what she’s saying ‘yes’ to any more than those that closed the PAD knew what they were saying ‘no’ to?

BALFOUR [Nodding to THOMPSON]. Boom! [Big expression with hands].

BOB Well, if prison governors are going to be responsible for ‘proving’ the quality of education, and if prisoners’ sentence length might be adjusted according to the ‘progress’ they make, who knows what new performances will emerge? [GOFFMAN raises his eyebrows whilst taking a drink].

Commentary

The scene (above) critiques Coates (2016) by posing questions around what success (and failure) means in prison education and how these concepts might (or might not) be comparable to mainstream education. For example, remember what ‘employability’ meant to the entrepreneurial Sajed in the first scenario of Chapter Four, ‘It’s never going to work, Boss’, or the shape-shifting Brendon and Abdul in ‘Performances in prison: on hot ground and donkeys’ from Chapter Three. Both of these responses profoundly challenged the basis on which new education initiatives were being prescribed. Furthermore, consider how the end of a qualification might
reinforce the idea that, for characters such as Van, Lee or Joe, the purposeful activity on offer, benefits institutional partners more than learners themselves.

The next scene continues a theme employing the analogy of ‘swimming through institutional treacle’, by considering risk taking in learning spaces, teacher frustrations, success and failure. It includes a number of characters from previous scenarios, therefore a quick reminder could be useful. For example, ‘Boss’ from Chapter Four joins in; he is the character that enjoyed some ‘unconventional’ positive moments with Sajed, above. Teacher had some positive moments with Joe and Lee in ‘From Keepy-uppy to The Selfish Giant’ (Parts One and Two), but experienced a difficult situation when he had to abandon the drama-based ice breaker, particularly with Phil and Ian in ‘I’m not being funny, Boss, but this isn’t for me!’ in Part Two (Chapter Four). Teacher Mike featured in the longer piece ‘Performances in prison: on hot ground and donkeys’ in the PAD, Chapter Three.

**Scene Three**

*People have moved around the bar and some new ones have joined them.*
*To one side of BOB and ARTHUR, TEACHER is playing a fruit machine and overhears their conversation. Without turning away from the machine, except for a glance.*

TEACHER They look at computer screens! You don't see them anywhere near a classroom.

BOB *[Looking at ARTHUR].* Who?

TEACHER Education ‘messengers’ they are …

ARTHUR *[Looking at TEACHER].* We’re on about managers aren’t we - you mean ‘managers’, right?

TEACHER Do I?
ARTHUR We’re on about decision-makers, then!

TEACHER They tell teachers, who are already on their arses, what to do, but then say ‘You are the experts – just apply our rules to your context’. Brilliant! When it all goes tits-up, it’s not their fault!

BOB Had a tough day, mate?

[IAN and PHIL from the FEC are stood at the bar with their backs to the conversation and turn around].

IAN [Big grin]. You’ve not been throwing that fucking ball about again have you, Boss?

PHIL [In a mocking voice, mimicking a drama game]. My name is Phil and I’m a prisoner having the piss taken …

TEACHER It just goes tits-up with this lot …

BOSS [Moving to stand with TEACHER for solidarity, but playfully provoking]. They were okay with me in the FEC. Come on mate, you’ve got to have a laugh …

TEACHER You didn’t have that lot [nodding towards IAN and PHIL] and I forced them to live through their worst chuffing nightmare. Anyway, you were just chatting bubbles with them – you didn’t try stuff from the PAD in English like I did, did you?

BOSS Who’d want to? [Gives TEACHER a playful nudge].

TEACHER MIKE Hey, we had kick offs in the PAD. Admittedly, times were different and they’d signed up for it. [Winding-up TEACHER]. I’d hold that ‘cherry’ if I were you, mate.
TEACHER Sessions lasting three hours plus for a full 87p, getting nicked, bad stuff going on - it seems ‘they’ [BOB and ARTHUR turn around] are just making everything as difficult as it can be …

MARUNA [Rocking back on his bar stool and looking over his shoulder at TEACHER]. You remember the ‘changing identity through fiction’ stuff – what happened with these guys? [Grinning as he looks over to IAN and PHIL who hold their arms outstretched, grinning back].

TEACHER MIKE In fairness, mate, [turning to MARUNA] I can’t count the number of times prisoners in the PAD said, 'It’s not like being in prison in here'. We’d talk about what they meant and they might not use our fancy education words, but it amounted to knowing they we’re in a physical space that was still part of a prison, but ‘felt different’.

TEACHER Wow! Well, they never said that in the FEC, but we had some amazing moments with people in different groups. Phil and Ian’s group were different though – well most of them. I’m still figuring it out though … [Becoming increasingly frustrated with drop-down option on fruit machine].

IAN You never will, mate, not at that rate … I can’t wait to see how you’ll get on in the fucking pub quiz … [turns to grin at Phil, who holds out a high five hand].

KEN CLARKE [Sitting at a table on his own close by] Look! I know what needs to be done, when I was the Justice Minister … [Most people in the bar start sniggering and FOUCALUT loses a little beer as he splutters]. Look! I know what prisons and prisoners need, they need … [most people in the bar groan and KEN CLARKE waves a hand, turns and gazes out of the window where he can see VAN. VAN is mumbling into his hand whilst sat rocking on the pavement outside the pub across the road, an old sleeping bag wrapped around him].
TEACHER [Still facing the fruit machine, TEACHER presses ‘start’, then places fingers in ears]. Rah-di-rah, di-rah-di-rah …

ARTHUR It’s weird, though, that the further away from the thing you’re trying to fix, the more ‘say’ and money you get. I know what it’s like to work at the coalface and be kept in the dark! [looks towards KEN CLARKE and raises his voice], what about you, Ken?

[FOUCAULT walks over to the jukebox dabbing his mouth and makes his selection, looking over to BALFOUR behind the bar, he mimes ‘turning up the volume’ as ‘Things can only get better’ by D:Ream plays. Some people turn around to see FOUCAULT who gives an ironic shrug with outstretched arms].

BOB [Looking at ARTHUR]. What’s with the fruit machine thing? [Nodding over in the direction of TEACHER].

ARTHUR I think it’s meant to represent the idea of chance for ground workers that are kept in the dark, like we used to be, and something about ‘looking for keys (or answers) where the light is best’ - kind of thing, remember? I think the main point, though, is that the system in the machine is control!

BOB Hey I’m impressed, Arthur! I didn’t think we had to be so self-aware in this scene – the reader really has to pay attention, eh?

Commentary

A primary quest throughout this research has been to explore how creativity works in prison activities, with a particular focus on arts and humanities. One important example of this in the previous scenario was presented when Teacher Mike claimed that on numerous occasions prisoners in the PAD stated 'It’s not like being in prison in here'. Despite some fraught moments in the PAD, both Gary and Abdul showed Van tremendous kindness and care, which appeared to contribute to
improvements in Van’s mental state significantly. Moreover, in such circumstances some (previously reluctant) prisoners progressed to other courses, (see also Coates’ quote on page 14 of this thesis). In this sense, the environment the characters created had ‘transported’ them to a place where they could behave differently (see Nicholson, 2005 pp. 12-13). Such ‘safer’ places were an important theme throughout the prisoners’ responses documented in the Publishable Article (see pp. 67-84). Furthermore, along with ‘choice’ and ‘a democratic ethos’, safety was a factor that Duguid and Pawson claimed was crucial to success for engaging prisoners in the ‘Canadian study’ (Duguid and Pawson, 1998). Without such engagement, any cause and effect calculation was not feasible, demonstrating the importance of place and culture for maximising the efficacy of ‘What Works’ initiatives.

Alternatively, a number of examples in this thesis indicate what does not seem to work. Factors include punitive and ‘overly-authoritarian’ circumstances such as mandatory education, even when the teaching style is relaxed, as shown in ‘I’ve done this! Take me off, Boss!’. Moreover, in the last FEC scenario (that was problematic for Teacher), two key errors could account for the situation. Firstly, Teacher was complacent about the checks for prisoners’ mental health and secondly (possibly as a by-product of such complacency), Teacher assumed that the group in question would respond as previous groups. In that sense, Teacher became the ‘overly-authoritarian’ person in charge that made a general assumption and was not flexible enough to respond sooner. Sometimes, though, more can be learned by mistakes than the satisfaction of a ‘trouble-free’ lesson.

As a prison educator, the experiences in a number of roles, both on and away from the ground, have increased my respect for and recognition of the important work done by ground-workers. I now believe that the most important role in prison education is at the point where the professional works with prisoners and should be rewarded accordingly. After the final scene (of this thesis portfolio) that follows, I will outline key learning points in terms of research.
Scene Four

[The pub is full, but the spotlight is now fixed on BOB and ARTHUR].

ARTHUR Hey-up, they’re turning the music down, I think the quiz is going to start. I heard the question is just something like that (kind of) one in the introduction, ‘What are the challenges and opportunities for creative education, work and training in a prison context?’

BOB I think you’re right. But, hey I think we’ve covered some ground between us [pause] there are loads of learning points, but they’re not really answerable in a closed question pub quiz way …

ARTHUR Yep! There’s an irony in the whole setting. Nice pint though, Bob [raises his glass to inspect the beer’s clarity].

BOB You might not understand this, Arthur, [raising eyebrows playfully] but think of problems like these as dynamic - just like problems with computers and that’s why we have to do software up-dates all the time. This is why they have to do research with people all the time because things are always changing.

BOB How do you measure this thesis, then – do you think anyone that reads it will think any differently, even slightly afterwards?

SULLIVAN [Leans over – taking advantage of the lull as people take their seats for the quiz] I think they might …

ARTHUR Do you think the ‘right’ people will read it?

BOB Do you remember Ellis and Bochner from the chapter on methods? They reckon if it opens-up conversation that’s enough, especially conversations that would not have happened or are happening in ways that otherwise wouldn’t – it might continue long after …
SULLIVAN Maybe this is not the end then, just a different beginning … [SULLIVAN turns to serve TEACHER another drink].

BOB I wonder what would happen if this was made into a play and taken on tour to show people [big sarcastic grin]. Maybe if it works on the stage it’ll work in other mediums and that’ll really get people talking – who knows where it’ll end?

ARTHUR Do you know what holds back change for prisoners and prisons? Mostly it’s down to public opinion. Well, public opinion and the popular media. Down to, well, people like us. Just the ordinary Joe …

BOB Not a vote winner, though, is it?

ARTHUR In a strange way, though, if something was done really, really, well …you know, publicly, it could maybe help people think differently about education, work and training in prisons. You’re right, who knows? Hey, think about change in our lifetime, hardly anybody had a TV back then – but when we did, think about – you know, [increasingly embarrassed] that … that first like, gay kiss on that TV soap, what do they call it …

BOB You’re thinking about Eastenders, Arthur …

ARTHUR That’s it! There was an outrage, but now it’s every time I turn on the TV there’s …

BOB It was 1987 that, Arthur, thirty years ago …

ARTHUR Time, eh Bob, Phh …

BOB Just over twenty years before that, they were locking people up for it …
**ARTHUR** It just shows, how they can get it wrong – and if they can be that wrong about that, what else are they wrong about? It makes you wonder, eh Bob?

**BOB** We’re back to ‘they’ again, Arthur …

**ARTHUR** It just shows how things are always changing, which I suppose is why we’ve heard so much about keeping the conversation going …

**BOB** Anyway, I thought this story was going to end with a stalemate, like that’s just the way prisons are’ and if you have to create certain circumstances to do the work then that’s where you have to be creative. Doing a play was just a throwaway comment and it’s not an answer. So, what are you saying?

**ARTHUR** Do you know what - I think very differently about all this – prisons I mean, than I did at the beginning and I reckon there’s loads of people out there that would too, but have only seen the Hannibal Lecter stuff or sitcom-style *Porridge*.

**BOB** So, you mean … like taking the Goffman performance thing and using artistic performance to influence social actors?

**ARTHUR** It’s a novel way of making research do something in the ‘real’ world [*raising his voice and turning towards the pub with a wry grin and a Groucho Marx impersonation*] A PhD dissemination pitch and a bit more fun and bite than a conference, though eh?

**BOB** I wonder if somebody - or an organisation - would fund it, and if not through the arts, then through the social sciences, or both. It needn’t be a play. It could be a film, novel, TV drama – Internet, maybe. [*Looking towards everyone in the pub and trying copy Arthur’s raised voice and ‘Groucho style’*] There’s a funding pitch if ever I heard one!
ARTHUR  It’s never over until it’s over, Bob, but there’s ‘fidelity to an event’ then there’s …[Winking and grinning – pleased with himself that he remembered Badiou (2012)]

BOB Yeah, but it doesn’t have to be the author of this thesis. Maybe this is a chance for different researchers and practitioners to work together – the author has been banging on about that all through this thesis. The right approach for the particular problem … [deciding to use his ‘new phrase’ with a half-cynical tone that might just allow a retreat, if necessary] it could be a ‘quasi-arts/science project’ … a social enterprise!

BOB Yeah, activism without activism! Remember what Morwenna Griffiths said about a dialogic form of activism or Judith Hamer’s ‘voices that speak back to power’.

ARTHUR Aye, or Cormac Behan’s call for radical resistance and educators opening-up a debate about how success is defined. Only this time through the people and media – through art, yet as a social science experiment to see if public opinion can influence the polemic and – well, prisons and people’s lives … even a little bit and …

ME Wooah there folks! Let’s keep our feet on the ground here! All this talk of revolutions, complete turns, circles cycles and back to recycling ideas about the power of spinning new yarns is all moving a bit too quickly.

Reflecting on my own practice and comments by other prison educators towards the end of the literature review that document the lack of resources and working conditions (see pages 53-66), I am demoralized and worn-down by the relentless obstacles and apparent institutional disinterest for creativity and innovation. I know that many people working in prison education, work and training would not want to undertake the work or research represented here, but any that do are likely to encounter an energy-sapping environment. I am mindful of the need to ‘put on one’s own life jacket first’, lest aspirations to ‘beat the system’ against the odds might be looking for those keys where the light shines best. For now, I will continue to pay attention in learning
spaces to nurture small, (but manageable) moments that (just as fleetingly) makes the effort worthwhile.

Commentary

Despite the comments by ME (above), Bob and Arthur’s idea is an intriguing prospect. It is, perhaps, ironic that the idea came from two fictional characters representing ‘everyday people’ and yet their tactic is intended to influence public opinion, not the authorities or policymakers directly. It might be inconceivable that these fictional characters could carry out such an initiative on their own, but they might collaborate with others or write under a pseudonym. Playing with this idea for a moment, they would need to be careful not to glamorise criminal activity, instead making the common-sense case about the importance of exploring better ways of doing things in prison as something for everyone’s benefit. I imagine that they would create a commercial, humorous and yet thought provoking piece. A key theme might centre on the idea of promoting what might be called ‘institutional malleability’, in other words being more open to change and creativity, especially from the ground. Indeed, their ideas embody Ken Robinson’s (2011) definition of creativity, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis portfolio (see page 18). As a reminder they include: ‘imagination, which is the process of bringing to mind things that are not present to our senses; creativity, which is the process of developing original ideas that have value, and innovation, which is the process of putting new ideas into practice’ (pp.2-3 italics in the original). There is, therefore, a more sober point about how research impact could emerge as a collaboration of sorts, working horizontally across the ground as a consequence of such speculation, which may lead to unpredictable (yet enticing) effects. It is unlikely, however, that any of this will happen without some element of risk.

Returning to the practicalities of the ground and the forthcoming implementation of Coates’ (2016) recommendations, I argue that instead of prison education mimicking mainstream practices, a (more) specialist service with greater autonomy might serve prisoners and policy objectives better. It might elevate the status of prison education, provide its teachers
and trainers with more flexible ways of working and a review process that responds by digging for evidence from the ground. The bracketing of Coates’ (2016) proposals in the introduction (similar to the way the end of a movie can be shown at the beginning) and the critique in the concluding fictional scenarios (above) frames the cycles of review, policy and reform that both thwarted my creative endeavors and yet rarely leads to reducing reoffending or safer prisons; a key thread woven throughout this thesis.

In the Abstract to this thesis portfolio, I argue that research methods engaging voices from the frontline of educational environments can reveal seemingly small details relating to the challenges and possibilities of creative education in prisons that, nonetheless, have significant implications for developing productive and innovative approaches to desistance from crime. Towards such a vision, the phenomenon in this thesis of ‘paying attention’ (Sullivan, 2000 p.211) to small ‘happenings’ (Clough, 2002 p.8), ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p. 91) and ‘little theatres of change’ (Balfour, 2009 p.7) during creative endeavor on the ground is, on one hand, a mimetic parody of the cycles and recycles of reform, promising big solutions from elsewhere. Therefore, they are not presented as a grand solution, as almost all roads to discovery about the relationship between ‘arts in prison’, reflection, ‘moments’ (Thompson, 2008 p.91) and change were hindered in my experience. Thus, I argue from my autoethnographic perspective, that they remain overlooked and undervalued. Thus, the potential for a different mode of exploration is offered here as a practical and grounded re-shaping of Coates’ (2016) support for ‘arts in prison’ as starting point. It is intended to employ their usefulness more effectively by learning about the processes involved and the circumstances in which they take place.

Having considered some research findings relevant for practice and prison education, more generally, I now turn to outline two of the most significant findings in terms of research approach, method and methodology. Firstly, the criteria for research access did not seem standardised. For example, I could find no justification for the research pilot (documented in the Publishable Article) being approved when compared to the refusal of the FEC application. Arguably, it is plausible that these decisions were made via the subjective judgment of the prison (and/or MoJ) authorities, which may
have been influenced by local or national political factors (Goffman, 1990). Moreover, there is a strong indication that other research into areas that might challenge the policies and procedures of the MoJ, prisons and their partner organisations will not be allowed, which is supported by some of the examples and experiences as documented in this thesis (see Nahmed-Williams, 2011; Aitken, 2014).

Secondly, although autoethnographic arts-based methods were adopted as a solution to institutional barriers in terms of access, they are an example that could act as a precedent for other researchers in similar circumstances. Moreover, the methods (and in particular ‘fictional performative writing’) became much more than a vehicle to complete the PhD - and all that implies for the potential of its dissemination. They helped me to think deeply about my practice and its relationship with others in many different ways, to explore lived experience through multiple realities, which (I hope) introduced some readers to alternative ways of meaning-making and other ways of knowing for both research and practice.

At the opening to this conclusion, I argue that ‘what restricts working creatively in prisons impedes creativity working, or not working well enough and really creative initiatives that bring about change often require risk’. The impasse, here, is that the criminal justice system is risk averse, arguably influenced by a view that containment and creativity are not entirely compatible. Therefore, if creativity and change involve risk and yet the status quo dominates, then progress is compromised. The interface is a stalemate whereby the powerful and conservative hold sway. In the final scenario, Bob and Arthur speculate on the ‘what next’ factor. Their playful exploration for the potential of ‘arts in prisons’ to challenge such stagnated social and political circumstances in different ways demonstrates the sometimes unsettling nature of creativity. The sentiments underpinning their ideas incite and invite artists to apply their talents in creative ways, raising awareness of social and political problems for those concerned and, more specifically, to prepare the ground for ‘arts in prison’ practitioners, participants (and others) that aspire to finding a better way, a way informed from a position on the ground.
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Appendix 1

Glossary

**Adult Learners’ Week**: Awards for all adult education.

**ALS**: Adult Learner Support for helping prisoners with learning difficulties and disabilities.

**Baby Mother**: A woman that has given the speaker a child – not wife.

**Badly**: Not feeling well.

**Bang-up**: Locked in cell.

**Banged him**: Hit him.

**Bare**: Many.

**Basic**: Low privilege status in jail.

**Beef**: At risk of being attacked (physically or otherwise).

**Bitches**: For some prisoners, this is street talk for female-friend or partner and may have different meanings across ethnicities.

**Blood clot**: Idiot (or ruder connotation).

**Boom**: The end, a conclusion or a surprise.

**Boss**: any male person other than a prisoner.

**Brethren**: Friend or ‘brother with a different mother’.

**Bricky**: Bricklayer.

**Burn**: Tobacco.

**Cat A**: High security prisons.

**Canteen**: a system whereby prisoners use the money to by goods

**Chatting bubbles**: General informal chat (often used when a conversation has lost its meaning and/or lasted too long).

**Churn**: the number of prisoners entering and leaving a prison over a given time

**Do ya get me?**: Do you understand?

**Fam**: Family or friend.

**Gash**: Female genitalia

**Gear**: Drugs.

**Gov**: any male person other than a prisoner.

**House-block**: Residential unit for prisoners.
IEP: Prison system for controlling prisons called ‘Incentive earned privileges’.

Innit: Usually not conforming to grammar rules with multiple precise meanings such as, ‘isn’t it’, aren’t I or ‘don’t I’ or do you understand?
Example: ‘I’m going gym, innit’

Key worker: A privileged role in ‘purposeful activity’ rewarded by higher pay and greater autonomy.

Koestler: Awards for ‘arts in prisons’

Lockdown: When a prison prevents anyone moving from their current position until checks are made.

Mad ting: Mad thing, usually meaning ‘unusual’.

Mash up: A mess.

Miss: any female person other than a prisoner.

Negative entry: A negative record on prisoner records.

NOMIS: A computer system ‘National Offender Management Information System’.

PSI: Prison Service Instruction.

Peak: Maximum or almost maximum.

Personal Learning plan: a teacher’s planning tool for negotiating personal and course targets with a learner.

Poor coper: someone finding prison especially difficult.

Resettlement: A department in a prison with the purpose of preparing prisoners to resettle back into the communities outside prison.

Rizzler: Cigarette paper.

Roll: A check on prisoner numbers after movement to activities.

Route: Designated route and time for prisoners to attend and return from activities.

Safe: A greeting such as ‘Hello’ or ‘is everything okay?’

Sarni: Sandwich.

Screw: prison officer.

Second move: First opportunity for prisoners to leave designated activities.

Seg: Segregation Unit.

Servery: A place where food is served to prisoners.

Shadow board: See through cabinet for seeing and holding tools securely.
**Snap tin:** Food container.
**Soche:** Social Activity – time out of cell.
**Special visit:** A meeting with solicitor (for example) – not family.
**Spends:** Prisoners’ pay.
**Spits some beats:** Makes new music with a microphone.
**Still:** Nothing has changed.
**Swear down:** Believe me.
**Terrorise myself:** Masturbation.
**Tag:** Security device usually worn around the ankle by prisoners released early on licence.
**Tag board:** A panel of people that decide if prisoners are suitable for release from prison wearing a ‘tag’ (see above).
**2’s:** Second floor of a residential unit.
**Wing:** Residential unit (also called ‘House-block’).