

'Education will set you free?'

– A creative exploration of the experience of educational exclusion,
from the perspective of prisoners and youth

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of educational exclusion, and the complex ways this is connected to social exclusion, based on extensive research with prisoners and youth in Ireland. Drawing on the practices and ideas of adult and community education and taking a critical Freirean (1970) approach it positions the prisoners and youth that participated in the research as the 'experts' and co-producers of knowledge. At the heart of the thesis are the voices of the people I worked with using participatory and arts-based methods including theatre of the oppressed, ethnodrama, forum theatre, transcript/research poetry and performative research (Boal, 1995; Faulkner, 2007; Prendergast, 2009; Richardson, 1993; Saldaña, 1999).

The core of the thesis is a research play which is a creative re-presentation of what was learnt through the research in a form which retains the vitality and truth of people's stories, and where the expression of meaning becomes central (Butterwick & Roy, 2018). The play has also been crafted as a problem-posing device (Freire, 1972) which bears witness to the complex, layered ways educational exclusion occurs, how it is rooted in wider social circumstances, and the impact, often severe, that this has on individuals and communities. The foregrounding of stories in this manner, both individual and collective, is based on the conviction that research can and should speak in a direct and accessible way to the people who participate in such processes (Leavy, 2013; Pelias, 2015), and seeks to break new ground in how research is pursued and presented, and in how we seek to learn and theorise from research. Grounding and presenting the study in this way; a 'bottom-up' perspective, is markedly and consciously different to how most research on educational exclusion has been approached, and comment and reflection on this is woven throughout the thesis.

As such, the thesis not only offers a new perspective, rooted in participants' experiences and stories, on the topic of educational exclusion, but it also documents and critically explores the craft of participatory research and creative dissemination. It makes a case, and offers an example, that the means we select to carry out and share our work can be simultaneously a methodology and a pedagogy; an instrument for social change. It approaches theory and methodology and form and content dialectically, in resistance to the dominant modes of research and dissemination which reinforce existing hierarchies in knowledge and power (Leavy, 2015). The process of inquiry and the research play aim seeks to overcome these hierarchies, but also reflexively explore the limits of critical research in the context such as prisons and in the face of deeply rooted, intergenerational inequality.

The thesis comprises an introduction and three parts. Part one outlines the construction and conceptualisation of the research play. The second part is the research play 'Education will set you free?' based on five years of intensive, recursive, participatory research with prisoners and youth and which draws on transcript interviews, notes, reflections and participant interactions to problem-pose an array of issues with social justice, educational and policy implications. In describing the research process that took place before the writing of the ethnodrama, and new research that followed after, and in articulating and foregrounding participant voice through the medium of transcript poetry, part three examines and argues for the power of arts-based research to engage with social research questions in holistic and embodied ways. This is offered as a both a personal reflection on the research and the pleasures and challenges of the process, and also as a resource for others interested in creative and participatory methods of exploration and dissemination.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the course of this research, I have experimented with arts-based approaches, such as film, theatre and poetry, with the aim of understanding and representing the educational journey of prisoners and ‘at-risk’ youth on adult and community education programmes. Drawing heavily from Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993), and the notion that knowledge acquired aesthetically is already, in itself, the start of a transformation (Boal, 1995, p.109), the study began by exploring participants’ lived school experience through a filmed dramatisation or fictional frame, which then evolved into the creation of an ethnodrama. The ethnodrama could not capture each participant’s individual experience, and this was particularly the case with prisoner narratives, many of whose stories were omitted in order to try to preserve a feeling of contemporariness to the research. I therefore returned time and again to the prison to discuss with individuals the content of their interview transcripts, concerned with how to present and preserve these narratives in their entirety. This resulted in the co-creation of performative poetry, and/or monologues, from interview transcripts.

When it came to submitting the research for consideration for a PhD, I found myself stuck. The traditional thesis format seemed unreconcilable, given all of the creative methodologies and modes of expression that had gone before. I am focussed on research that ‘does something’, and I aim to do research that speaks to, and on behalf of those who participated in it. Jerry O’Neill (2016) refers to his own struggle with the format of a PhD thesis, that in the end involves a huge amount of energy and work to create; ‘a big fat text of knowledge that would sit on a shelf somewhere’, raising the big fat question, ‘for who?’ (p.371). Peter O’Connor and Michael Anderson’s (2015) description of being inspired by research that acts as a ‘collaborative catalyst for change’, and that ‘gives back to the communities from which it springs’ (p.4) in turn inspired me. My initial draw to performative forms of research was as

an output for research findings to be represented in other forms than text or academic discourse, so as to be understandable and engaging to a wider audience. I understood this as the means to create change, both outside the academy and within. As I journeyed through this process, I began to believe that the creative process itself was the piece that was transformative, to some extent perhaps blinded by ‘new’ and ‘exciting’ ways to both conduct and present research. My view now, is that for research to be transformative, the research process needs to be aligned with the ethical values of critical Adult and Community Education. By this I mean that the research be a mutually beneficial and critically educative process for both the researcher and the participants in the creation of new knowledge.

‘*Education Will Set You Free?*’ is the research play that emerged over the course of this research. The play is in part ethnodrama and in part an ethnographic representation and creative expression of the research. Rather than considering this research play as the findings of the study, I consider it to be the container that can best hold the creative elements that preceded it, as well as offering a vicarious experience of what it was like to undertake this research. I was embedded in this project for over five years. The play affords the space, not only to present participants’ voice verbatim, but also acts as a vessel for my own thoughts, reflections and struggles, as well as housing some of the snippets of interaction, anecdotes and information that amused, perturbed and disturbed me during the process.

The research play is the central tenet to this thesis and is sandwiched by two bookends. In *Part One*, I set the stage by describing the process and some of the background. *Part Two* houses the play itself, and in *Part Three*, I return to the beginning, describing all that came before, and considering ‘where next?’ *Part Three* is also home to the video links of the fictional frame and the ethnodrama, as well as ‘*Finding Freedom*’; an anthology of the 10 transcript poems that were created during this research process and is the space where I reflect on the background to the research play. Links to creative research I have worked on

with people with convictions alongside this PhD research, and that feed into my academic and creative understanding of educational exclusion, are accessible also in *Part Three*. The reflections that offer an insight into my inner world; a world that I was unable to describe as effectively using traditional academic form, are captured intermittently and in narrative form through the thesis in the *Prologue*, *Interlogues* and *Epilogue*.

The title of this thesis is; ‘*A creative exploration of school exclusion from the perspective of prisoners and early school leavers.*’ Finding voice, being heard, and developing empathy were the principles on which this all of the elements of this research were based; all three are political activities that can contribute to social justice (Butterwick & Roy, 2018, p. 2). As adult educators, our work is to help participants view their experience in the context of wider systems, and to move away from the notion that individual suffering is somehow the individual’s fault (Connolly & Hussey, 2013). The methodologies we choose to use in adult and community education research can reflect this ideal and be both a methodology and a pedagogy simultaneously, an instrument for social change. Once we believe in the importance of research as a collaboration between what the researcher wants to know, and what the participant wants to be known (Grummel & Finnegan, 2020, p.3), participants are not viewed as passive in the research process but as active and equal co-creators of knowledge.

PROLOGUE

The traveller approached the kingdom with far less exultation than he had expected to feel at this stage of his journey. Rather, he found himself to be concerned with the more bothersome details of his expedition; the weight of his backpack, the blisters on his feet, the sunburn on his forehead. Exasperated by both his mind and body, he forced himself to shift his attention to take in the features of the castle's turrets. The impenetrable stone walls and battlements rose grandly above him as he approached the giant oak door. His eyes scanned the expanse of wood for a bell or a knocker and he wavered, feeling foolish, before lifting his fist tentatively to bang on the polished timber. Before his knuckles connected, a hatch swung open suddenly in a smaller narrow doorway, which he had failed to notice.

'Can I help you?' asked a man's voice through the iron grating.

Feeling an unexpected flush of awkwardness, the traveller moved towards the hatch, peered into the grating and as his eyes adjusted, he could just make out the features of an elderly yet distinguished face.

'Em- yes', said the traveller, conscious now of both his shabby clothing and his weather-beaten appearance, 'I've come with knowledge. Eh- new knowledge. Because I know that uh-this is where I'm eh-supposed to bring it'.

There was a pause, during which the traveller kicked himself for not having rehearsed his opening line.

'And what is there to know?'

The traveller hesitated, unsure of how to answer, and experiencing a puzzling irritability at the banality of the question.

'There is much to know', he replied finally, and as he began to speak, he became impassioned. 'My backpack is full of narratives and poems; stories of injustices, tales of inequalities, descriptions of discrimination; told by those who are rarely listened to and seldom heard'.

'And in what way do you know it?' asked the voice behind the grille.

'In what way?' repeated the traveller, his fervency quashed as he struggled to make sense of what the gatekeeper was asking of him.

'Yes', in what way?'

'Now look here', the traveller blurted out, exhaustion and frustration getting the better of him. 'It's not as though I've just wandered over here from the next village. I've been travelling for many years to get to this point. I've all but abandoned my family in the pursuit of truth. My backpack is overflowing with stories that were crying out to be told, and now, now that I'm at the end of my journey, I am to be concerned with 'ways of knowing'?'

'It would appear that you are not', replied the gatekeeper.

The traveller, who had lost all pretense of composure at this stage, rummaged in his pockets for a handkerchief to wipe the beads of sweat that had formed on his brow, and to try and soothe his temper, which was bubbling dangerously close to the surface. He realised that he had not heard the gatekeeper's last remark.

'Excuse me?'

'It would appear that you are not', repeated the gatekeeper, 'at the end of your journey, that is'.

By way of explanation, the gatekeeper slid a form under the grating. And there, directly

underneath the boxes for applicant name and address, was a larger blank box with the heading 'WAY OF KNOWING', and directly underneath that again the heading 'WAY OF BEING', with a box that ran onto the next page.

'It can't be left blank, -you see', said the gatekeeper, in a tone you might take with a toddler on the verge of a tantrum. 'And you can't be admitted without it, -you see, without stating your position'.

The traveller was close to tears as his anger evaporated and was replaced with burning shame.

'It's just that I don't really know my position', admitted the traveller, 'and more's the point, I don't understand what it has got to do with the contents of my backpack'.

He managed a small smile of resignation at the gatekeeper, though found when he went to turn on his heel that he was rooted to the spot. He remained there helplessly for what seemed like an age, until in the corner of his eye he noticed the reddish coloring of a fox, and his gaze was drawn.

'Now there's someone who knows their position' remarked the gatekeeper, giving the traveller a cursory nod that signaled the end of the conversation, and swinging the hatch firmly shut.

The traveller looked back in confusion toward the fox, who had vanished, and realised the gatekeeper was referring to a group of women who appeared to be working in one of the fields beyond the castle. Daylight was fading and not knowing where else to go, he began to make his way away from the castle walls toward them.

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PLAY - 'EDUCATION WILL SET YOU FREE?'

'... all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political, and theatre is one of them.' (Boal, 1993, p. ix).

INTRODUCTION

'Education Will Set You Free?' is the research play and medium that I chose to represent my doctoral study and creative exploration of educational exclusion from the perspective of prisoners and youth; a study that employed creative methodologies throughout to explore issues and to represent findings. My aim in presenting the research in the form of a play, was to stay true to the methodological ideals and principles on which this study is grounded, and to offer an emotive and embodied reflection of the experiences of the incarcerated men and 'at-risk' youth who participated in this study. I worked with two groups over the course of this study. The first were young people from the XLc, a family-run, non-state-funded alternative education centre in the South East of Ireland, which helps young people pass their state exams. The second cohort I worked with was through the education unit in Shelton Abbey Prison, a low security open prison in County Wicklow for men over the age of 19, who are regarded by the Irish Prison Service as requiring lower levels of security.

Diane Conrad's work *'Athabasca's Going Unmanned'* (2012) was hugely influential in formulating the decision to write up my research in the form of a research play, and like her, the intention behind my using ethnodrama as a means of dissemination, was to engender empathic understanding and to reach a more diverse audience by writing up research in a manner that is accessible. The play, I hope, provokes thought around a series of complex

social issues. It is a ‘problem-posing’ script, in that it does not attempt to prescribe solutions to these challenges, rather the aim is to elicit dialogue, promote critical engagement, and enact solidarity.

Inspired by Conrad’s (2012) portrayal of life and education behind bars for First Nation’s youth, the research play *‘Education Will Set You Free?’* offers a glimpse of life in Irish prisons that is rarely depicted from this perspective. For those of us concerned with social justice, the aim is to find ways of mitigating the issue of ‘othering’, or ‘us’ versus ‘them’. In the case of prisoners and ‘at-risk’ youth in an Irish context, the challenge of ‘othering’ is heightened through demonisation by the Irish media. The dehumanisation: a distortion of being more fully human that sooner or later leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so (Freire, 1972, p.60), is fuelled by the use of language such as ‘animals’ and ‘thugs’ (Lalor, et al., 2007, p. 38), and highly charged adjectives such as ‘stomach-churning’ or ‘sickening’. Added to this is the disproportionate amount of coverage given to rare and extreme crime that form the bulk of media reporting (Black, 2015). I believe that theatrical representation of research, that draws on Theatre of the Oppressed; the basic aim of which is to humanise (Boal, 1993), can help to encourage counterfactual thinking to the issue of ‘othering’.

‘Education will Set you Free?’ mostly takes place in an education unit of a prison and shows an aspect of the daily routine for many prisoners and ‘at-risk’ youth that many Adult and Community educators would be familiar with, but which many members of the public would not. In the confines of the classroom, ‘tough guy’ masks are lowered, and vulnerabilities revealed as part of the learning process. The characters in the play bring their shared experience of social injustice into focus, highlighting the systemic factors in the education system that affect children from working class families, moving beyond the logic of empathy

that constrains concern to worthy or exceptional individuals, by incorporating solidarity techniques to expand the scope of concern to the entire community (Varma, 2020, p.2).

While the plot of *'Education will Set you Free?'* has been fictionalised for dramatic effect, the details are either from research data or field notes. No one character in the play is based on any one participant, but each is an incorporation of the individuals I met while conducting this research. The vast bulk of the dialogue is created from selections from focus group and individual interview transcripts, the rest is made up of my own experience and reflections as an adult educator and precarious worker. Participants' transcript poems created earlier on in the research process and presented in detail in the 3rd part of this thesis, are interspersed throughout the play and for the most part performed in their entirety.

REPRESENTING EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION RESEARCH IN THE FORM OF A PLAY

Representing the research in the artistic form of a play has served as a catharsis for me. I have felt physically and emotionally lighter since writing *'Education Will Set You Free?'*, as it is as though the play is now the container for all the stories that up until then had been held within me. The central characters embody some of the characteristics and mannerisms of participants I worried about. Some of my personal issues and experiences around precarious and oppressive employment practices within the Adult and Community Education sector, as well as some of the complex inequalities for working mothers and the intersectionality of maternity in gender inequality (O'Hagan, 2014), were able to be aired through the character of the creative writing tutor, in a manner that has felt empowering for me.

While I was doing this PhD, I became a mother to three children. Prior to this, I was not aware of gender inequality, or if I was aware, I ignored it or engaged with it on a superficial level. Six weeks after returning to work from statutory maternity leave after my first child to

my precarious but busy job in adult education, I was made redundant. The play has been a space where I was finally able to reconcile that experience through the degree of separation afforded by theatrical representation. Augusto Boal (1995), speaks of the magnifying ability of theatre in that it brings things closer. *'Education will set you free?'* has also afforded me a space to house excerpts from conversations as well as content from letters and emails during this time that left me feeling disconcerted, the shades of which only became clear when framed and in context. Importantly though, I also enjoyed and had fun writing the play, which again reflects the vast array of emotions I experienced undertaking this study. On one hand, the experience was traumatic. Research with prisoners can be an emotionally draining experience that can make you reflect on life and its unfairness (Carrigan, 2015, p. 67). In addition, conducting lengthy in-depth interviews with those who have suffered traumatic events can trigger feelings of being 'emotionally burdened' as well as 'vicarious traumatisation' which can lead to a form of traumatisation in the interviewer themselves (Connolly, 2003, p. 28). I believe I experienced trauma partly as the result of this research. I developed eczema and psoriasis in my scalp, around my ears, and behind my eyes. I felt depressed and despaired at the state of the world, overwhelmed by the sense of injustice and inequality that I was witnessing in others' lives and in my own. I sought out professional help at various times, aware that I was isolating friends and family through 'heavy' and 'ranting' conversation.

Yet conversely my work with the young people and the men the prison, particularly the focus groups and the one-to-one sessions forming transcript poems, was hugely enjoyable and rewarding. I looked forward to my time with participants. I believe they also enjoyed the process. There was a lot of laughter and enthusiasm for the work, and an energy about participants that belied the heavy subject matter. Writing the play was a way to capture the spirit, intelligence and the banter that took place during the research sessions. There is often a

quick-wit that I find both enviable and disarming, that comes with street-smarts; the intelligence connected to being able to manoeuvre through structures such as poverty, the police, street culture, and abusive ‘others’ (Hatt, 2007, p.145). I failed to capture this quick-witted banter, and its black humour, by isolating prose from transcripts and framing them within an academic analysis. D. Soyini Madison (1998) writes about using poetry to capture the rhythms of black speech. The play, and I am hopeful also the performance that will ensue, does a better job of communicating what was such an integral part of the research process, and puts forward, as Leavy (2015) would describe, a more holistic account of the research endeavour (p. viii). It is also a more honest one, as it reflects my experience of teaching and facilitating creatively in Adult and Community Education settings, and that banter and humour are some of the reasons why I love the work and keep doing it.

I had some concern that in choosing to locate the research play in a prison, the voices of participants in prison would be foregrounded, and those of the young people I had spoken to would be given secondary consideration. I toyed with the idea of situating the story in a secondary school, but found my ideas lacked authenticity as I am not, nor ever have been, a high-school teacher. I also considered whether setting the research play in a prison, would suggest that prison was a likely destination down the line for the young people who participated in this study, and therefore could I be feeding into the negative connotations and stereo typing that accompanies the term ‘at-risk’.

Early school leavers, or ‘drop-outs’, are considered to be ‘at-risk’, which in this context refers to policy identification of being at risk of failing to succeed in society (Browning, 2014). Of all the terms used to describe students who struggle in traditional educational settings, few are used as frequently, or as casually, as the term ‘at-risk’ (Toldson, 2019). Policy identification of youth ‘at-risk’, a term that is framed as an advancement on ‘delinquent’, ‘problem’, or ‘bad’ (Foster & Spencer, 2011, p.128), simplistically focuses on the personal

attributes of young people, as opposed to what might be wrong with schooling (Kitty te Riele, 2006, p.129). Those who triumph against the odds are deemed 'resilient', which in social science tends to be explored through analyses of the variables that protect against risk, fostering an interventionist approach based on the logic that if 'saved' in time, 'at-risk' youth will not turn out to be deprived adults (Foster & Spencer, 2010).

All of the people in this study, felt oppressed and excluded in school. The most striking difference I noticed between the young people's and the prisoners' response to schooling was in regard to 'acting-out'. All of the prisoners I spoke to acted-out. By this I mean they identified themselves as a 'messenger'; an Irishism that is often used in the context of schooling and generally refers to someone who is disruptive. Among the young people, while there were several who identified as having engaged in 'messing' or disruptive behaviours to make the time pass faster or to survive in a school climate rife with bullying, there were several, who under the same conditions; namely boredom and oppression, 'acted in'. By this I mean their behaviour was internalised and they experienced depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, eating disorders and school refusal. The overarching emotion for these young people was how overwhelming they found the school experience and how unsupported they felt by the school and by their teachers. All identified in this study as having been excluded, although I imagine they would typically be categorised under the term 'school refusal'. Yet universally, all identified that the state had failed to provide them with a safe, stimulating or inclusive learning environment. Therefore, the rationale for identifying as 'excluded' was that they perceived the school environment as so 'unsafe' and intimidating, as to effectively exclude them from participation.

'I lost a lot of weight. I of course wasn't talking. I wasn't doing much, I wasn't sleeping, and I just didn't want to live at the time because of how I was in that school' – Darren

'I was getting a lot of hassle from teachers about not coming in like. Cos I was suffering with depression and I was getting a lot of hassle whenever I went back to school. They didn't even

ask. They just used to say how bad my attendance was. And every time I went in they used to say, 'oh you're actually in' and everyone used to laugh' – Ava

'Well I'd get pushed around it'd be maybe at break times, maybe outside of school. Maybe if a teacher was gone out of the room, never in front of the teacher, but I'd assume the teacher would be able to sense what's going on cos there'd still be a bit of laughing towards me. My stress was going up, my confidence was going down. I had depression. I was put on medication' – Conor

SCHOOL REFUSAL AND EXCLUSION

'School refusal', it seems to me, is another term that apports blame to the individual while managing to avoid looking at systemic faults in the system. The Irish Times (Quinlan, 2018) ran an article about school refusal entitled 'schoolflakes', a wordplay on the offensive and derogatory term 'snowflake', used to describe a generation deemed 'over-sensitive' and lacking the resilience to cope. I think we grossly underestimate what young people are coping with. At the time of writing, the country is reeling from the media reporting of the court-room details of a 14-year-old girl's rape and murder in daylight hours metres from her home. Two of the girl's classmates, two 13-year-old boys, are standing trial. The secondary school she attended is refusing to comment on the severe and relentless bullying the girl experienced in the period before her murder. Could there not therefore be an argument for school refusal being indicative of a healthy intuition? What I find baffling about the policy document on school refusal in Ireland (HSE, 2015), is the lack of any evidence of having talked to anyone about either their experience of school refusal, or what they might be coping with. Instead, the policy (HSE, 2015), recommends an overhaul of the child, through attendance on programmes designed to improve 'coping skills', and 'cognitive re-structuring to help unhelpful thoughts' (p.7). Parents are encouraged to get involved and 'limit attention' the child gets when at home from school and increase 'rewards' for attendance and disincentives for non-attendance (p.8).

Yet the same young people were thriving in the XLc, without the benefit of interventions.

'It's working here. I have friends. I haven't been bullied at all. Yeah, it's just fun. I'm enjoying learning, my confidence is back' - Conor

'I enjoy coming here and I enjoy the work I do here. It just comes so naturally it's no hassle at all' – Darren

I experienced school refusal in my first year of secondary school, when I was 11 years old. I had started in a large Roman-Catholic all-girls school. There were 90 in my year, and we were streamed; Gold, Silver, Sapphire, with Sapphire being the strongest academically and Gold the weakest. It took minutes for the entire year to crack that code! There were six classes of religion a week. I was not Roman Catholic, so before every class I was removed from the room and escorted to another room at the far end of the convent, where eight of us from different class years received religious education from a Protestant minister. At 11 years of age, all I wanted was to fit in, yet six times a week I was reminded that I was different, and a minority. Naturally I experienced taunting. The combination of the weekly religious segregation, combined with all the other adjustments; the uniforms, the crowds, the jostling in corridors, proved too much for me and so I got sick. I stayed in bed for four months. During this time, I was tested for leukaemia among a host of other childhood illnesses, until finally one doctor declared there nothing the matter with me apart from too much time in bed.

Religion continues to be a dominating influence on education in Ireland today, leading to the segregation of children, a heavy emphasis on faith formation and the denial of access to objective sex education (The Irish Times, 2018). 96% of Ireland's primary schools are under the patronage of the Roman Catholic church, as well as the majority of secondary schools. There have been small steps taken, such as the removal in 2018 of the so-called 'baptism-barrier' in school admissions, and a process to transfer patronage away from religious schools, but progress has been achingly slow. At the age of 11, I was unable to articulate my

embodied reaction to religious segregation in school, which was effectively to segregate myself completely through psychosomatic illness. Up until recently, the literature on school refusal has consistently focused on treating the individual. A review of published articles focused on school refusal between 2000-2010 concluded social skills training, social exposure, cognitive restructuring, and anxiety management, were the most effective treatments (Ek & Eriksson, 2013, p. 246). The voice of school refusers has been largely unheard and invisible, and there appears to be a bias towards professional and stakeholder discourses in school refusal research (Shilvock, 2010). Recently there has been a shift and researchers have begun to speak to youth and parents affected. Consequently, research has finally begun to focus on school-related factors, such as safety, teacher relationships, and physical environment, concluding that interventions that address school-based factors need to play an important role in remedying school refusal (Brouwer-Borghuis et al., 2019). The research play *‘Education Will Set You Free?’* is told more from the perspective of those who acted out or were disruptive in school, and who experienced school exclusion in the form of suspension and expulsion. School refusers are not represented, though school-based factors that contribute to school refusal are certainly tackled in the play. The young people I spoke to have broadened my understanding of school exclusion, the definition of which I would now extend to incorporate those who are precluded from participation in education because of a dangerous or intimidating school environment, perceived or otherwise.

‘AND WHERE ARE YOU?’

‘If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come here because your liberation is bound with mine then let us work together’ (Lilla Watson¹).

¹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla_Watson

Pelias notes that arts-based texts are ‘methodological calls, writings that mark a different space, that collect in the body like an ache (p.11). ‘*An Imaginative Exploration of Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing*’, was written out of a need to physically express the change and transformation that was happening to me over the course of this PhD. This expression took the form of a fantasy; a fairy tale telling the tale of a traveller on a quest. I have included and presented the tale in four parts throughout this thesis: *Prologue, Interlogue 1, Interlogue 2, and Epilogue*.

There was a period where I felt completely at a loss as to where my work was situated, where it aligned, and who it aligned with. I went searching for answers, much like the traveller in my story. My first port of call was to York in the UK. The 2016 Public Engagement and Performance conference, a small conference in its third year, was an interdisciplinary conference from a diverse range of fields that provided a forum to share, discuss and learn about diverse approaches to performing research and engaging the public. It was an exciting and imaginative space that for me expanded my awareness around the possibilities for engaging the public through research. Kim Etherington was the keynote speaker and she began the presentation of her research; ‘*Narrative Approaches to Working with Adult Male Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: The Clients’, the Counsellor’s and the Researcher’s Story*’ (2000), by telling us a fairy story about a wicked King. The method enchanted me, and undoubtedly was inspiration for my using fantasy as a process for self-exploration. I was also presenting at the event, and when I had finished and it was thrown open to the floor, Etherington asked me ‘and where are you...in the research?’ I don’t remember my answer. She apologised to me privately afterwards for having put me ‘on the spot’, but the aftertaste of her question, and more importantly, why it bothered me, lasted long after the event.

The next destination on my quest for answers was further afield. I applied for funding from the Irish Research Council, and in 2017 I travelled to British Columbia, Canada, under the mentorship of Professor Monica Prendergast in the University of Victoria. I had read poetry that Prendergast (2013) had written to express her experience working with inmates in William Head Institution, a minimum-security prison in Metchosin, and I had just finished working with the men in Shelton Abbey Prison on their transcript poems. Prendergast is the professor in Drama Education in UVIC and while I was there, I was immersed in Applied Theatre, a field of theatre that encompasses a range of practices, including Theatre of the Oppressed (Prendergast, 2011). On Prendergast's advice, I travelled to the University of British Columbia to meet with theatre professor, George Belliveau. I told him about my work, and he spoke about the Veterans Project (2017) he was working on, and the play *'Contact! Unload'* telling the story of combat veterans living with post-traumatic stress disorder. Still searching, I arranged a meeting with David Diamond, once a close associate of Augusto Boal, in the Theatre for Living headquarters in Vancouver surrounded by rocker-esque theatre posters. Theatre for Living had just finished working on *'šxʷ?am'ət (home)'* (2017), a Musqueam term that encompasses a sense of place and belonging. Diamond spoke about the motivation behind the work and the concept of reconciliation between First Nations communities and Canadians, as well as his relationship with Theatre of The Oppressed, a model he has slowly moved away from towards a community-based approach aimed at building bridges and collaboration (Diamond, 2008).

The work and people I was coming in contact with were fundamental in helping me envisage the scope of socially engaged art, but my sense of self and identity was floundering, and I questioned my situating myself and my PhD in Adult and Community Education, while at the same time struggling to see where I fitted in and what I was contributing to the field. During one of our research sessions, where we were creating poetry from interview transcripts, one

of the participants from the prison, Luke (pseudonym), asked me if I was ‘actually a poet’, a question that prompted me to seek out the advice of professional Dublin poet Colm Keegan. As highlighted by Luke in Shelton Abbey Prison, I am not actually a poet, nor am I actually an artist, and while I have made theatre, I would struggle to class myself as an ‘actual’ theatre maker, particularly in the company of those for whom it has been their life’s work. I was pondering all of this on a bench in the grounds of UVIC over a sandwich when a woman on a neighbouring bench struck up polite conversation with me. Darlene Clover told me a little of her interest in art galleries and museums in Canada and the U.K as important sites of critical pedagogy and social activism, and the work adult and community educators were doing aimed at social change in sites historically associated with elitism, sexism, colonialism, and racism (Clover, 2015). We also spoke about how adult and community education is misunderstood and therefore devalued in certain sectors. It was an easy and enjoyable conversation, a chance encounter, but for me, on a quest, it felt significant.

I returned to Ireland and shortly afterwards received a phone-call from visual artist Dr. Sinead McCann, who was looking for someone to work collaboratively with a group of former prisoners to produce a script on access to healthcare and human rights in Irish prisons (McCann, 2018). It was one of those rare moments, free from self-doubt. ‘Yes, I can do that’. Creative expression involves both a process a process and a product, with the latter no more important than the former (Butterwick & Roy, 2018). The project spanned six months, and while the finished product was undoubtedly successful in that it toured the country twice, for me, the project’s true success rested on the process and the level of engagement and involvement of the participants. Every week the men turned up to spend a morning with us creatively exploring their stories of prison in relation to human rights and historical accounts. I drew on the Applied Theatre methods I had acquired on my trip to UVIC and brought in actors to explore historical documents and to bring it to life. The sessions were audio-

recorded, transcribed and edited into the format of a script, and the group were actively involved in all of the stages. The project served to strengthen my commitment to participatory and creative ways of doing research, as well as helping me appreciate what adult and community ideals and pedagogy contribute to the facilitation of the process.

Following '*The Trial*' (McCann, 2018), I facilitated a peer led community needs analysis with prisoners and former prisoners around access and barriers to higher education (Meaney, 2019). I was in one of the prisons laying the groundwork. I knew they had been involved in a large-scale and successful research arts project, and casually inquired as to how it had gone. The question triggered an emotive and charged outpouring. 'They came and they just took'. I don't know whether this statement is a true reflection of the experience of the collaboration from all those involved, but it is a phrase I never want to forget, and one that reminded me of an experience early on in this research I had with a man in Shelton Abbey Prison, who agreed to speak to me privately about his experience of educational exclusion. He described his experience of being arrested at the age of 15 and made to sign for charges against him that he never committed, and which led to the first of many prison sentences. I listened politely but privately wondered how this fitted in with my agenda on school exclusion, and how or if I was going to be able to use the material. When I listened back to the audio-recording I was horrified at how my research objectives had eclipsed consideration and respect for this man who was entrusting me with his story. Thankfully, I had the opportunity to return to the prison to offer a heartfelt apology and to ask if we could begin again. We worked together several times and *25 Charges*, which incidentally is about school exclusion I just couldn't see it, is one of the most poignant of the prison poems, and the one that receives the most emotive reaction. My point is that I believe that if we give ourselves to the process the product will reflect this.

Boal's focus has been to actively engage people suffering oppression in their own liberation process, so that the emphasis is on play-building and participation rather than on presentation of a finished product (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994). Like Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), I believe that in many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate, leading one small step further towards self-determination (p. 130). Ultimately, what I have learned carrying out this research, and in the work I have been involved with since, is that I am striving towards facilitating a research process where ownership lies with the participants.

I continue to ask myself how I would answer Kim Etherington's question now if 'put on the spot'. Personally, I know I am all over this research, in my experience as an early school leaver, and in my experience as a recovering addict and alcoholic. My first visit into a prison was to run an AA meeting in the Dóchas women's prison in Mountjoy Prison campus in Dublin. The Irish Prison Service has identified that at least 70% of the general prison population are suffering from drug and alcohol addiction (Pollak, 2017), with an even higher percentage of women, estimated to be at 85% (Clarke & Eustace, 2015). Prison service is a normal part of AA and NA's 12 step programme and was part of my recognising the privilege that comes with social class, as undoubtedly my personal rock bottom would have been very different had I been born in a different post-code, or had I stayed on the trajectory I was on. In AA parlance this is the 'not yet's', and the expression is used to demonstrate the progression of the condition or 'disease' of addiction. It is not a coincidence that my research focus is concerned with participant narrative. Traditional education has often carried a bias against storytelling, whether personal or based on myth (Clover, 1997), whereas 12-step programmes provide a narrative template to persons entering recovery from addictions and situate the person within a story that makes sense of an otherwise chaotic and often tragic life

course (Marsh, 2011, p.66). My introduction to the power of narrative as a method to explore and reconceptualise one's past experiences began in AA.

Some ideas about gender and alcohol have remained remarkably persistent, and a double standard endures for women diagnosed as alcoholics (McClellan, 2017). I have watched male colleagues present at academic conferences, openly referring to their experience with addiction and be revered in what I can only describe as 'like rock stars', with members from the audience seeking photo opportunities following the presentations. I don't know, having never openly revealed my own narrative around alcoholism and drug addiction in academic circles, but I honestly doubt I would have parity of experience with my male counterparts. Public perception of alcoholism is frequently negative and stereotyped, suggesting a shared image of alcohol addiction affecting men of poor economic status with little education (Hill & Leeming, 2014). So much so, that often when someone gets to know you as a recovering alcoholic they don't believe you, leaving you with the dilemma of how and whether to convince them! Whether or not I would be willing to share this information in a public forum such as a conference, for me is therefore tied up with the concept of anonymity and prudence. Nevertheless, the question concerning where the spark of my interest in prisoners initiated, arises time and time again, mainly, it must be said, from participants, and for the most part when pressed, I find it beneficial to share a little of my experience; as I am doing here.

The quote at the beginning of this section is by Lilla Watson and is so often used it has almost become a cliché, but for me it aligns with the relation of solidarity I feel towards the youth and prisoners who participated in this research, as one who 'acted-in' and then 'went off the rails', and as one who 'lost my moral compass' and sanity in the throes of addiction. Empathy, though foundational to building a sense of solidarity, cannot be premised on the assumption of symmetry, or the assumption that we can fully understand or know 'the Other' (Butterwick & Roy, p. 90). So, while certainly I feel a sense of solidarity that comes from

aspects of shared experience with some of the participants of this study, equally I can be empathic to others who have had very different experiences. Someone who tells their story, is not only revealing their own path, but revealing the entangled processes of how different systems and narratives connect (Galimberti et al., 2020, p. 40). Added to this, creative and artistic expression can support these forms of speaking and listening across boundaries to differences, leading to greater understanding of ourselves and others (Butterwick & Roy, 2020, p. 90).

CREATING THE RESEARCH PLAY – HOW AND WHO?

The plot of *‘Education will Set you Free?’* has not just been fictionalised for dramatic effect, the details are either from research data or field notes. No one character in the play is based on any one participant, but each is an incorporation of the individuals I met while conducting this research. To safeguard anonymity and confidentiality, the names of all the characters, as well as any defining characteristics or identifiable details from research notes have been changed or altered. Stories and characters are composed from accumulated documents and experiences of multiple or blended participant details and experiences rather than any from one participant or singular experience. As such, the narrative detail is a composite of research notes and conversation with participants, and from what Irvin Yalom (1991) described as ‘symbolic equivalents’, affording a method of portraying people and events it would not otherwise be ethical to portray.

The vast bulk of the dialogue is created from selections from focus group and individual interview transcripts, referenced in footnotes. Some of the content is adapted from unrecorded conversations with participants or with former prisoners I was in contact with, who were not research participants, but who understood that I was carrying out a research study with prisoners on educational exclusion and were happy to share their experience with

me to broaden my understanding. Conrad (2006) believes that addressing social issues drawn from personal experience can lead to moments of crisis (p. 449) and ponders the ethical issues of raising sensitive subject matter 'in the classroom'. *'Education will set you free?'* considers this topic within the framework of the ethnodrama, for both the participants and also for the researcher/educator, whose personal emails and letters are pinged onto the stage revealing the backdrop of a precarious adult-educator and working mother and which are verbatim from personal correspondence. The ethnodrama and thesis is also where I disclose elements of my own truth, making me vulnerable in the process and begging the question of ethical care of oneself in this kind of sensitive research.

THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH – AN ONGOING PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

In asking participants to risk sharing their personal stories and experiences in a performative space, so it seems to me ethical that I risk sharing mine. In investigating my own experience, I too experienced a degree of crisis as my perspective of myself was destabilized, though I am certain that the experience of moving through this crisis led me to emerge with a stronger sense of identity and awareness. Yet an ethic of care must also include an ethic of self-care. Myntha Anthym (2018) operationalised her ethic of self-care for her arts-based dissertation in the primary forms of journaling and expressive writing (p.211). Like Anthym (2018), I used journaling (though with varying degrees of success) to write through emotion while conducting the research, but it was expressive writing that really gave me a sense of psychological release through the process. Some of these expressions found their way and their place in the thesis; in the story of the Traveller, in the dream sequence in the play, and in the play itself through the character of Fiona. Expressive writing for me, is also a means to protect the privacy of person(s) portrayed in the research. Writing creatively and expressively

gave me the freedom to evoke my experiences and emotions rather than describing them (Prendergast, 2014), as well as those from my interactions with participants. One example of this is through the character of Josh, who is a composite of several research participants. The character of Josh was a vessel within which to house excerpts from interactions, that had they been attributed to any one participant or analysed in relation to a specific theme could potentially have exposed identity or been disrespectful to the participant.

Nevertheless, the ethnodrama discloses risky stories and participants' transcript poems created earlier on in the research process and presented in detail in the 3rd part of this thesis are interspersed throughout the play and for the most part performed in their entirety. Conrad (2006) states that 'ethical performance requires dialogue, care, responsibility, and a focus on intent' (p.439). While we can aim to negate risk in sensitive research through robust ethical consideration, it is impossible to predict the emotional reaction any individual might have in engaging with research. The best we can do I believe, is to strive to do no harm and through self-reflexivity continue to attend to the ethical complexities of our work through care and respect for ourselves and for others.

One participant early on in this process asked me to remove details from his transcript poem out of concern for his anonymity once the performative nature of the research became more explicit. I do not believe the details he was concerned with could have identified him, but nevertheless it alerted me to reflect on whether I was placing the ethnographic performance above ethical responsibility or concern for the well-being of participants. Most importantly, this incidence highlighted to me the importance of recognising informed consent as an ongoing and relational process. Through giving considerable time and energy to what it means to be participatory and authentic; in the gathering, thinking through, representation and dissemination, ethics is not just procedural but the heart of the research,

READING THE RESEARCH PLAY 'EDUCATION WILL SET YOU FREE?'

The aim of the play '*Education will set you free?*' is to make the invisible more visible by making the stories that were captured over the course of this research available, in a voice that speaks to the terrible and magnificent world of human experience (Denzin, 2010, p.32). Dramatic text has the ability to get at and to present rich, descriptive, contextual experiences from the perspectives of participants (Leavy, 2015, p.182). It is more than the findings of the research but meant to provide the reader with a vicarious experience of what it was like to partake in this work, and the learning that was garnered along the way. This play follows the guidelines as laid out by Saldaña (1999) for creating an ethnodrama, by drawing on; interviews, field notes, observations and interviews with others connected to the case study, and from the research literature (p.62). But what I most appreciate about this way of writing, is that it affords the opportunity to include personal experiences, narratives and embodied knowledge, while simultaneously making the reader part of the learning process (Baur, Abma & Baart, 2014).

Criminal justice, education policy, class and social exclusion, and professional precarity are just some of the issues raised in this problem posing play. In line with Freirean pedagogy (1972), '*Education will set you free?*' does not attempt to propose resolutions to these challenges, rather the purpose is to provoke discussion, critical reflection, through a technique of radical inclusion that embeds a judgment that public discourse about marginalisation should begin with the perspectives of those deemed to be marginalised (Varma, 2020, p.11). Although it has been beyond the scope of this PhD to do so, it has been written with the intention of bringing it to production. A production that I envisage as a collaboration between actors and non-actors, prisoners and non-prisoners. MacLaren (2015) describes the pedagogical power of honest expressions of personal experience, and dialogical

inquiry as ‘magic’; difficult to describe with academic language, which stifles wonder (Ingoldsby, 2007). This play is an invitation to share in the magic.

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INTERLOGUE 1

As he drew closer, the traveller could see that not all the women were toiling the field. Some were gathered in small pockets, hives of activity, and undertaking domestic tasks such as washing, mending and cooking. Others were minding children, while some were clustered in circles, deeply engaged in dialogue and discussion. One larger group was formed around a small bonfire, where a group of dancers performed. The traveller found himself pulled toward the flames and twirling bodies and settled on the grass some distance apart from the crowd to watch.

He sat transfixed as the bodies contracted and hinged, suddenly sinking and almost instantaneously rising, the light from the fire fixing their faces in a moment of exaltation. Drums beat out a steady hypnotic rhythm, as three dancers grouped together, arms reaching high, fingers spread, heads tilting back. They separated as a group before returning and pulling together, pulsating over the body of a dancer on the ground. The drums pounded as they spun and flipped the lifeless figure, until the Traveller realised he was watching a re-enactment of a rape. The light cast by the flames danced across the dark trunks of trees, twisting and curling into obscure shapes. He bowed his head, rubbing his temples and eyes feeling nauseated.

When he looked up, he found himself subsumed in a burning, smoldering, dark place. An inferno of hell on earth. He watched in horror as savagery after savagery emerged from within the flames. He saw women howling in agony as they were burnt alive for being witches or widows. He looked on helplessly as young girls were held down for clitoridectomy, and others had their feet broken and bound. He witnessed and wept, as women were battered, raped and trafficked into sexual slavery and prostitution. He saw others, painting their faces and augmenting their breasts, purging, starving, strapping and girdling the realities of their bodies in competition with other women for beauty and male approbation. He watched women and young girls brutalised and violated, subjected to incest, forced into arranged marriages, mutilated and disfigured by acid attacks, and he took in graphic images of females dehumanised as sexual objects in scenarios of degradation and obscenity. He observed women alienated and isolated by childbearing and childrearing, and others carrying double work-loads nurturing, nursing, consoling, counselling, teaching and tending the old and the young, the sick and the disturbed, the homeless and the disadvantaged¹.

The traveller wept long after the flames had died, and the images had faded. He wept for women and for society. He wept for his wife and for his children, for his sisters and for his mother. He grieved for victims and for their oppressors, he grieved for humanity and he grieved for himself. When his angst began to subside, he became aware of an arm around his shoulder. He raised his head and looked into the grey eyes and creased face of an elder woman. Her hair was cut close to her skull and was the same shade of grey as her eyes; like pale smoke or quarry rock, full of heat and wisdom.

‘I didn’t know where else to go’, he offered by way of an explanation for his presence amongst the community of women. ‘

‘This community is for everybody’, replied the woman, and as she gestured at the surroundings, he saw that there were children and men too among the women, and men who were possibly women and women who were possibly men.

‘Here, we can all be who we are, living together, realising our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all created equal’².

‘Is that your way of being?’ asked the traveller, remembering what had drawn him here in the first place, and his commitment to the contents of his backpack.

¹ Tong, R. (1989). FEMINIST THOUGHT – A Comprehensive Introduction. London: Routledge.

² Hooks, B, FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY – *Passionate Politics*, (Canada: Cambridge, 2000), (Introduction

*‘Our way of being was made, not born, through choice and action, she answered. ‘Through following a direction determined by pain and trauma and compassion and outrage. Through understanding the way male domination has become institutionalised, and how it is perpetuated and expressed in everyday life. The soul of our way of being is the commitment to ending sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. This is a commitment to ending domination. For there can be no love when there is domination’.*⁴

The traveller paused as he tried to absorb all the meaning of her words. ‘And your way of knowing?’, he asked finally.

*‘We know that historically we are the first oppressed group’, the wise woman answered. ‘We know that our oppression is the deepest and most widespread of human oppression and therefore the most fundamental. We know that to end male violence against women is to end male domination, to end patriarchy, the social system that is the root of all oppression’.*⁵

The traveller could not grasp all that the woman was telling him. His brain felt foggy as he struggled to understand the meaning in her words. She smiled at him, and her smile was warm and comforting. ‘But you are tired’ she observed, ‘you need to rest. All will not be solved in one night’. And at her words he realised he could hardly hold up his head with exhaustion. ‘Come, there is place for you over here to eat and to sleep’.

The traveller let himself be led to a small clearing near the embers of the bonfire. He remembered being handed a bowl of something warm and nourishing and somehow unrolling his sleeping mat, before feeling his consciousness ebb away under the light of a *sickly, pale-face moon*⁶

*That night he dreamt of a new land. A land where women lived at peace with themselves, with men, and with the natural world. In this land, there was no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals. The power of technology, economics and military force did not rule the earth. The earth and the forests retained their power and mystery and people cared for each other and for nature*⁷

He awoke to the coolness of the air and its loamy fragrance, his mind a carousel of whirling ideas – a subtle awareness of who he was forming under the flow of thoughts. He was sure he could feel the heartbeat of the earth beneath his body, though it might have been his own. A movement attracted his eyes to the white tip of an ear. He lay frozen as the fox peeked her head out from the tall grass and sized him up with honey colored eyes.

*‘But a real vision, a real change, isn’t safe’, said the fox, ‘you pay with your life’*⁸. And in a flash of copper she was gone.

He had barely begun to consider the words when he noticed a crowd of demonstrators at one of the castle walls. He rolled up his sleeping mat, and without much by way of a second thought, began making his way in their direction.

³ Hooks, B, FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY – Passionate Politics, (Canada: Cambridge, 2000), (p. 7).

⁴ hooks, b, FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY – Passionate Politics, (Canada: Cambridge, 2000)

⁵ hooks, b, FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY – Passionate Politics, (Canada: Cambridge, 2000)

⁶ Raichō, Hiratsuka, and Teruko Craig. “Introduction.” In *In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun: The Autobiography of a Japanese Feminist*, Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. vii-xvi. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/raic13812.3

⁷ Plumwood, V. “Introduction”. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p.7.

⁸ Starhawk. *Walking to Mercury*. New York: Bantam, 1997, p170.

PART TWO

EDUCATION WILL SET YOU FREE?

AN ETHNODRAMA WITH PRISONERS AND YOUTH ABOUT EDUCATIONAL
EXCLUSION

BY SARAH MEANEY SARTORI

“I hope you will go out and let stories happen to you,
and that you will work them, water them with your
blood and tears and your laughter till they bloom, till
you yourself burst into bloom.”

Clarissa Pinkola Estés

This work is dedicated to the prisoners and youth I had the privilege of working with. Thank you for sharing your stories.

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INTRODUCTION

‘Education will set you free?’ is a 3 act play set in a minimum-security prison in Ireland. The prison building was a former industrial school, which was operational until the early 1980’s. The play focuses on six inmates who attend a new creative writing class in the prison’s education unit, where they begin to explore and unpick their primary experiences of education through story telling. The subplot of the play is that Josh; one of the participants of the creative writing class, his grandfather was incarcerated as a child in the industrial school 40 years previously. Over the course of the play, Josh becomes obsessed with how his grandfather’s story is intertwined with his own.

Based on extensive research with ‘at-risk’ youth, and incarcerated men, and drawing on my own experience as an adult and community educator and as a prison researcher, the play examines the link between school exclusion and crime. Issues such as social class, child abuse and notions of criminal justice feature prominently, as do issues that concern the adult and community education sector, such as precarious employment and participant vulnerability.

The Play

The play begins on Fiona’s first class in the education unit of the prison, where she is facilitating creative writing to a small group of inmates; Luke, Dean, Josh, Jimmy and Christy. Ryan, who at 19 is the youngest member of the group, joins the class on the second week, following his transfer from the main prison. Other colleagues of Fiona whom we meet are; Conor (history teacher) and Oonagh (education manager). The prison staff we briefly meet are; Tony (prison guard) and Ray (governor). Josh (early twenties) is a central character, as it his grandfather, who was incarcerated as a child in the prison’s former function as an industrial school. The story spans over an eight-week period, until the class is cancelled.

The story is told linearly for the most part, though when participants of the writing class read out their stories, these become performances that are accompanied by projections of images and newspaper headlines on screens to help ground the narratives and pull us into the past. The story is also interspersed with documentary footage, which provides some of the historical background, as well as Josh’s dreams, which are viewed as animations on screen, and which give us access to Josh’s subconscious world. The prologue, which is also the ending, is fictional and deliberately shocking, designed to provoke audience debate about the various social themes presented.

Background Research

The play is based on my PhD of the same name, which was a creative exploration of educational exclusion from the perspective of prisoners and youth engaged in adult and community education programmes in Ireland. The research was conducted with prisoners in a minimum-security prison and ‘at-risk’ youth in an alternative education setting. The Irish

Research Council financially supported this project, which gave me more freedom to be able to carry out this project according to my own ideals and belief in participatory knowledge creation, and in line with adult and community education values.

Over the course of my PhD research, I used and developed arts-based approaches, such as film, theatre and poetry, in an attempt to understand and represent the educational journey of prisoners and ‘at-risk’ youth on adult/community education programmes. I began this exploration of early school leavers’ experience of educational exclusion, by collaborating with Kildare Youth Theatre, a youth theatre in the east midlands in Ireland, which is owned by the young members, who run the company as a collective. We worked together over a series of drama workshops to create a short dramatisation of what exclusion from mainstream school might look like. The piece was filmed, and I showed it to focus groups in the prison and in the alternative education centre, who were asked how realistic it was, how it compared to their own experience, what they would change etc. This framing intentionally positioned participants as experts in their own stories, but unintentionally resulted in feedback that was highly descriptive and almost filmic in content, which I maintain was due to the ‘data collection’ method.

The feedback led to a re-make of the theatre piece, this time in the form of an ethnodrama, which is the practice of dramatising a script created from selections of research data from interviews or field notes and performing it as a play. The play was then presented as a piece of forum theatre, an interactive form of social theatre devised by Augusto Boal that invites the audience to intervene and explore different options to the issue presented, by stepping onto the stage and into the shoes of the protagonist. The ethnodrama was structured into three scenes, with the final scene performed so that the audience could intervene to try to change the outcome, which in this case was an expulsion or permanent exclusion from school. The piece was shown, either in excerpts or in its entirety to audiences of between two and 120, and to date has been seen by upwards of 300 people, mostly teachers in training.

But no one play could capture each participant’s individual experience. The focus group discussions led to follow on interviews with some of the twenty-six participants. Sixteen took part in initial one-to-one interviews and I became concerned with how to preserve the essence of the interviews and to give an overview of participants’ experience in its entirety. From my perspective as a researcher, this was essential, particularly with the prisoners, as in every story it was possible to pinpoint the events, or circumstances, that precipitated or preceded the criminal actions. Seven of the individual interviews were with men from the prison, and I went on to work with six of these participants several times over the course of almost a two-year period.

The participatory and creative nature of the work continued. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, as one does in traditional qualitative research, but then I returned to the prison with the transcripts, and went through these individually with participants, highlighting words and phrases that jumped out, and organising the structure into poetic form, so that a seven-thousand-word or fifteen-page interview transcript, was communicated in an average of three-hundred words over two or three pages. I re-worked pieces independently and with the help of professional poet Colm Keegan. I experimented with how best to get the stories heard and how to get audiences to engage. I handed the poems out at conferences and used actors’ voices to bring the words to life and played them over the speakers in university auditoriums.

I worked with a young actor from Kildare, Caolan Dundon, who came with me into the visiting centre of Wheatfield prison to meet one of the participants, and to get a better sense of how to embody the story he was enacting. Primarily though, I worked with Irish actor Tommy O'Neill. Tommy is a well-known character in the long running Irish soap opera, *Fair City*, but I wanted to work with him mainly because of his experience as an inmate of Mountjoy prison in the nineteen eighties and what I felt he could bring to participants' stories having had a lived experience that so closely mirrored that of participants. At every stage of the process, I was concerned with honouring participant voice.

When it came to submitting this research for consideration towards my PhD, my experimentation continued. I toyed with the idea of submitting everything in film format. I wrestled it into academic structure and form, I wrote poems and played with fantasy and fairy tales to try to capture the concepts and concerns I was aiming to communicate. The process felt frustrating, uncertain and stuck and I couldn't seem to progress. Finally, the idea for the research play began to emerge.

Research Play

This research play is essentially a consolidation of the arts-based methods I used over the course of this study to explore participants' experience of social exclusion, beginning with their experience in mainstream education. While the plot has been fictionalised for dramatic effect, the details are either from research data or field notes. While no one character in the play is based on any one participant, each is an incorporation of the individuals I met while conducting this research. The bulk of the dialogue is created from selections from focus group and individual interview transcripts, or my own experience and reflections as an adult educator and precarious worker. Participants' poems are interspersed throughout the play, and for the most part are performed in their entirety. Josh's animated dream sequence was formulated from a short story I wrote to try to make sense of the generational impact of institutional abuse. It was inspired by Gord Downie's, 'Secret Path'², which imagines the journey undertaken by twelve-year-old Chanie Wenjack, who escaped the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Canada, dying in the process.

This play is in part an ethnodrama, and in part an ethnographic representation and creative expression of the research findings over the course of this study. The characters are composite characters, and any defining characteristics or identifiable details from research notes have been changed or altered. As such, and to pay attention to ethical responsibility, the play has been constructed from multiple or blended participant transcripts, details and experiences rather than being based on any one participant or singular experience.

My aim behind disseminating the findings in the form of a play, was to stay true to the methodological ideals and principles on which this study is grounded, and to offer an emotive and embodied reflection of the experiences of the incarcerated men and youth who participated in this study, with the hope of fostering greater empathic understanding.

² Downie, G., & Lemire, J. (2016). *Secret path* (Simon & Schuster Canada edition.). Toronto: Simon & Schuster Canada.

The Play as Discussion

As adult and community educators, we are driven by the ideals of educators like Paulo Freire and the notion of education for conscientisation, or education for critical consciousness. Freire³ asks us to labour to create conditions where hope can survive through problem posing. This play poses the problem of education according to Freirean ideology in a prison environment, where conditions such as participant vulnerability are exacerbated, and where the provision of support for emotional well-being is restricted⁴.

Much of the play takes place in a classroom in the education unit, where often the dialogue is light-hearted, honest and humorous, a feature of my experience of working with incarcerated men. The ending of the play, however, serves as a reminder of the severe conditions under which prison education programmes and participants operate and navigate. As the play progresses, and we learn more about the participants' back stories and circumstances, a range of broad social challenges are raised with the intention of eliciting dialogue and discussion.

³ Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin.

⁴ Hinton-Smith, T. & Seal, L. (2018). Performativity, border-crossings and ethics in a prison-based creative writing class. *Qualitative Research*. ISSN 1468-7941.

CHARACTERS

TONY	White male. 50ish. A prison guard at the prison.
RAY	White male. 50ish. Governor at the prison.
OONAGH	White female. 50ish. Education unit manager at the prison.
FIONA	White female. Late thirties. Pregnant. Creative writing teacher at the prison.
CONOR	White Male. 40ish. History teacher at the prison.
DEAN	White Male. Mid-twenties. Serving a six-year sentence for drug possession with intent to supply.
JOSH	White Male. Early twenties. Serving a four-year sentence for possession of a firearm.
CHRISTY	White Male. Late forties. Serving a life sentence for murder.
JIMMY	White Male. Late-thirties. Serving a twelve-year sentence for attempted armed robbery.
LUKE	White Male. Late-twenties. Serving a two-and-a-half-year sentence for possession of stolen goods.
RYAN	White Male. Late teens. Serving three months of a six-month sentence for drug possession.

SETTING

Inside a minimum-security prison in Ireland. The scenes take place; in the creative writing class; in Dean and Christy's cell; in Luke's cell; outside the gym; in the toilets. Interspersed are video scenes of Josh's dreams projected on a large screen.

TIME

The play is set in the present day. It begins on the first day of the creative-writing class, and spans over eight weeks until the class is dissolved.

PROLOGUE

There is a metal bunkbed on the stage, and bars projected onto the back wall. There is a small desk and a chair to the right of the bunks. Josh sits bolt upright in the top bunk panting. Christy is asleep in the bunk below. There is a jangle of keys and a shadow of a guard in a hat can be seen through the bars. Josh swings his legs over the side of the bunk, jumps down quietly, and takes a blade out of his sock. He crouches down in front of the desk. Christy starts to stir.

CHRISTY

What the fuck? Josh?

JOSH

The crows man. They're here. They're fucking coming

Christy sits up in the bunk. There is another jangle of keys and the shadow through the bars has gotten bigger. There is a murmur of voices from outside the cell and the static from a walkie talkie.

CHRISTY

(Hissing) Go back to bed man. You're dreaming

JOSH

(Louder) They're fucking coming! It's for real. The fucking crows!

CHRISTY

(Hissing urgently) Shut the fuck up! You're losing it. You're hallucinating or whatever

JOSH

(Whimpering) They're fucking coming man. They're fucking here

There is the noise of prison guards shouting, keys jangling and lights outside the cell come on.

CHRISTY

(Annoyed) Yeah, they're fucking coming alright. You're on your own you fuckin' eejit

Christy pulls himself back into the corner of his bunk with his blanket over his head as Josh continues whimpering and rocking on the floor. The noises outside the cell increase. Josh covers his head. The shadows outside get larger. The cell door is swung open with a clang. There is screaming and shouting as Josh launches himself towards the cell door lashing out with his blade as the lights flash on and off in a strobe effect. Officers appear in riot gear and as Josh is carried from the cell, we become aware that a prison officer is on the ground in the cell and has been stabbed.

Stage goes black.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 – ANYTHING CREATIVE

The stage lights up on Dean, Jimmy, Christy and Josh, who are sitting on chairs in rows facing the audience on an empty stage waiting. There are 4 chairs unoccupied. There is a desk with a chair behind it facing the men.

DEAN

(Looking around) What's this class again?

JIMMY

Writing

DEAN

Writing?

JIMMY

(Looks up at Dean) Yeah. Writing.

DEAN

What sort of writing?

JIMMY

(Irritated) I don't fucking know. Do I look like the feckin teacher?

CHRISTY

(Looking around) Creative writing

DEAN

Creative writing?

CHRISTY

(Looking at Dean) That's what Oonagh said anyway

DEAN

Like poems and shit?

CHRISTY

Poems, stories... I don't fuckin know, do I?

JOSH

I fuckin' hate writing

CHRISTY

What the fuck are you doing the class for then?

JOSH

(Shrugs) I wanted to do the forklifting

DEAN

(Nodding) There's a mad waiting list for the forklifting

Luke arrives in, in a hurry and throws himself onto a free chair.

LUKE

(Nods) Alright?

DEAN

Where were you?

LUKE

I'm on the cleaning *(Pulls an old Nokia phone out of his pocket and checks it)* What time does this finish?

Fiona pokes her head around the corner of the classroom. She is dressed in a long hippy style skirt and has several facial piercings. As she enters it is clear she is pregnant. Christy and Dean sit up and start looking more alert.

FIONA

Am I in the right place?

CHRISTY

(Rolls his eyes) There's not one of us in the right place

Fiona puts her bags on the table and moves around the room shaking hands.

FIONA

Fiona

CHRISTY

Christy

DEAN

Dean

LUKE

Luke

JIMMY

Jimmy

JOSH

Alright

FIONA

What's your name?

JOSH

Josh

FIONA

Lovely to meet you Josh. Thanks for coming.

JOSH

No bother

Dean sniggers and Christy rolls his eyes.

FIONA

Lovely to meet you all. (*Surveys the room*) Will we move these chairs around a bit? It's very formal looking in here

Dean is first on his feet.

DEAN

What way do you want them?

FIONA

Well maybe if we pulled them into more of a circle and moved this desk out of the way

CHRISTY

Don't you be lifting that now in your condition

There is pause and everyone looks at Fiona, who says nothing as Christy looks awkward.

FIONA

(Starts laughing) I'm only messing with you

CHRISTY

(Relieved) Ah Jayzus, I thought I was in for it there

DEAN

(Laughing) You're lucky man. The last woman I said that to gave me a slap!

JIMMY

NEVER say to a woman that she's pregnant. She could have just put on a few pounds and you'll NEVER hear the end of it

FIONA

Well fortunately I am four months pregnant

CHRISTY

Congratulations. Jayzus though you nearly gave me a heart attack. That would be just my luck. Getting into trouble with the teacher on the first day

FIONA

(Laughing) Sorry. Couldn't resist

Everyone is on their feet and rearranging the seats into a semi-circle facing the audience. The desk is pushed to stage right.

CHRISTY

This isn't group therapy is it?

JIMMY

It looks like a feckin AA meeting in here

FIONA

Not quite. There that's better. It doesn't look so much like school

JOSH
I feckin hated school

Everyone nods in agreement.

FIONA
Did you?

CHRISTY
(Answering for Josh) Ah yeah. Wake up in the morning, open your eyes...school...ah shit!⁵

There is some laughter and nodding from the group.

FIONA
But before we start, will we just try and land ourselves in the room?

JIMMY
(Looking around at the others) You what?

FIONA
(She starts taking off her boots and her socks and explains) I think better in my bare feet

The group look quizzically at each other.

DEAN
(Looking confused) Ok...

FIONA
Right everyone up on their feet!

⁵ Participant 6 Interview 6 Shelton Abbey Prison

CHRISTY

(Under his breath) Ah here...

JOSH

(Looking around) Do we have to take off our shoes?

CHRISTY

(Emphatically) I'm not taking off my fucking shoes!

FIONA

Only if you want to. Up to you. *(With enthusiasm)* Everyone up on their feet!

The group gets slowly and reluctantly to their feet.

FIONA

(Loudly and with huge enthusiasm) Great, so we're going to land ourselves in the room by landing in our bodies, getting out of the chatter in our heads. Starting by shaking out our right arms 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

JIMMY

(Following the instructions) What's this the fucking army?

FIONA

...and left arm, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,, right leg, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, left leg, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, right arm, 1,2,3,4, left arm, 1,2,3,4, right leg, 1,2,3,4, left leg, 1,2,3,4, right arm, 1,2, left arm, 1,2,, right leg, 1,2, left leg, 1,2, and ONE, ONE, ONE, ONE. Shake out everything! Shake, shake, shake. Brilliant! Well done everyone! *(She starts clapping enthusiastically as the group sits back down awkwardly)*

DEAN

What class is this anyway?

CHRISTY&JIMMY

(Loudly in unison) Creative writing!

FIONA

(Hugely enthusiastic) Fantastic everyone! Well done. Yes, it's creative writing. Are we all feeling present?

The group slowly and self-consciously sits back down in their seats.

DEAN

Is that like poetry and stories and shit?

FIONA

It can be...

JOSH

(Quietly) I'm shit at writing

FIONA

Well it's not so much about writing as about finding a way to access and express the stories we carry within ourselves. I'm not going to be correcting your handwriting or your spelling, unless you want me to, but I am interested in your stories. Everyone has a story...

JOSH

(Shaking his head) I wouldn't be able to write a story

DEAN

(Loudly) He can barely write his name

There is some laughter and head shaking from the group

JOSH

(Loudly but good humouredly at Dean) Fuck off

FIONA

A story doesn't have to be pages and pages like a book. Some of the most powerful stories can be told in a few words. OK... here's a task for you.

Fiona jumps to her feet and starts pacing the room in her bare feet looking up in the air for inspiration.

FIONA

Right. Six words. Six words that tell your story. And...one of them has to be 'police'

JIMMY

What are we British? Police?

FIONA

Good point Jimmy

Fiona marches energetically over to a flipchart and writes the word police then crosses it out.

FIONA

What would you say?

CHRISTY

Guards of course

Fiona writes it down.

DEAN

Pigs

JOSH

Cops

LUKE

(Putting on an American accent) What are we American now?

JIMMY

The shades

EVERYONE EXCEPT CHRISTY

The shades?

CHRISTY

(Waves a hand) Don't mind him, he's from Cork

FIONA

So, six words to tell your story, and one of them has to be eh...one of these *(She hands out paper and pens)*

DEAN

So, like 5 words?

CHRISTY

(Sarcastically) We've a genius in the class

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. The characters on stage carry on as normal.

HR

10.45

Hi Fiona,

Please find attached New Tutor commencement forms to enable me to set you up on our system. I would appreciate if you could fill out the 6 attachments as soon as possible and return them to me.

Kind Regards

HR⁶

⁶ Verbatim from correspondence from HR when beginning temporary employment as an adult educator.

Everyone puts their heads down and holds their pens. Luke starts writing immediately

FIONA

You look like you have something Luke?

LUKE

(Clears his throat) My Story. Dog barked. Alarm rang. Police came

There's a pause for a second before the room erupts in applause and laughter.

DEAN

That's fucking brilliant!

FIONA

(Clapping enthusiastically) That is just fantastic Luke. Brilliant! Talk about nailing a task

LUKE

(Clearly pleased with himself) Well it's my story. That's what happened

FIONA

Anyone else got anything?

DEAN

It's not good or anything

JIMMY

Go for it Dean

DEAN

Hiding from the police. Head down⁷

⁷ Participant 1 Interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

FIONA

I'd disagree with you Dean. It is good. It tells us a lot. What does it tell us?

CHRISTY

That he's a scumbag!

There is some laughter from the group.

FIONA

That phrase 'head down' is very powerful. It implies a lot doesn't it?

JIMMY

Yeah. Something to hide

CHRISTY

Embarrassment. The opposite of pride

DEAN

It's shame. That's what it is. There's no pride in selling drugs. None. How can there be?⁸

There's some nodding from the group. The stage goes black. There is a spotlight on Dean who has moved into centre stage and is addressing the audience. Behind and above his head is a screen that begins black and as he speaks projects a collage of news footage of Ireland's gangland shootings which roles as he speaks. Dean paces the stage energetically using his hands to illustrate his point as if he's rapping. He pulls his hoody over his head.

DEAN

There's no pride in selling drugs. Hiding from the police. Keeping your head down. GO to a drug dealer. ASK him. Are you having a good time?

I looked at my father. He couldn't afford to buy us a pair of runners. I don't want THIS. I'm not living my life like THAT.

I was in a hurry to grow up. Money mad

⁸ Participant 1 Interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

Drug dealers. They had EVERYTHING. People that didn't work driving fancy cars. Nice clothes. Their own houses. 'He's a GREAT life'. Why work for a lousy couple of hundred quid? I can make what he makes in a week in an hour⁹

Eventually I got there. I had the cars. I had the houses. But there's still a sense of emptiness. Cos it's NEVER enough. It's always someone else's money. And you ARE working. You're working 24/7. There's no cut off point. 'Oh its 5 o'clock I can go home'. It's not like that.

No matter what I was doing the phone was ringing. It could be 3 o'clock in the morning. The phone's still ringing. The kids they're getting dragged home. Cos you've to go off and do something.

It makes you SNAP. At the wrong people. People don't have the money to pay. The violence comes in then. It's a VICIOUS circle. The people who owe YOU money are just as dangerous.

Watching your back. Constant vigilance. Looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life.

I'll NEVER walk through a park. Without looking behind me back.

EVERYONE owes someone. Anyone can kill you

'We'll do another year and then get out'. Your whole life spent chasing your tail. There's two options to get out of drugs. In JAIL. Or in a BOX. When he fucks up and can't fix it. That's it. You're DEAD.

I've seen it. I've LIVED it. I was LUCKY. I'm in jail. This is my 3rd Christmas. Me missus at home with the kids. On her own.

You're putting your KIDS in danger. You're putting every family member in danger. There's always someone bigger than you. You can't go home and shut your door. And know that nobody's coming through it¹⁰.

The stage goes black.

The classroom lights up and Dean is back in his seat addressing the group.

DEAN

There's no pride in selling drugs. Hiding from the police. Keeping your head down. GO to a drug dealer. ASK him. Are you having a good time?

The group gives Dean a round of applause.

FIONA

So that's the price?

⁹ From transcript poem 'The Price' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016 p.166

¹⁰ From transcript poem 'The Price' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016 p.166

DEAN

(Nodding thoughtfully) Yeah. That's the price

FIONA

(Still clapping enthusiastically) That was just fantastic Dean. Thankyou. There's so much we can learn from that isn't there? Wouldn't it be wonderful if young people could hear that story? Kids who might think that world is glamorous. Wouldn't it be wonderful if they could hear your experience?¹¹

DEAN

It's not glamorous. It's a horrible life. I'm only 26 and look at me. I'm going fucking bald!
(Laughs) From the stress!¹²

FIONA

(Rubbing her bare feet as Christy and Jimmy exchange glances) Stress from the amount of money you're dealing with?

DEAN

(Trying not to look at Fiona's feet) Yeah of course like. Something could go wrong, and before you know it you owe someone a LOT of money, and then you're working even harder. It's a horrible life. But I think if I had... I was too young to leave school you know. I wasn't fully developed obviously you know. 15, 16¹³.

FIONA

(Nodding) So what if we try to expand on the first task a little bit? *(She jumps to her feet)*

Everyone starts shifting nervously.

DEAN

Ah here Luke that's your fault for being too good

FIONA

So, the last task was six words. How about six lines?

¹¹ From conversation with participant 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹² Participant 1 interview transcript Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹³ Participant 1 interview transcript Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

DEAN

On what? On why we're in here like?

JIMMY

(Shaking his head rejecting the idea) Ah here...

FIONA

Well what about 'school'?

LUKE

School?

JOSH

I feckin hated school

FIONA

The negative is just as welcome as the positive

CHRISTY

Just as well cos I'm telling you right now there's no one here's had a positive experience in school

JIMMY

We wouldn't feckin be here would we? My mother said I was the quietest of them all. Used to sit and play with the milk bottle all day long. Until I went to school she said. That's when the trouble started. That was out of my mother's own mouth now like. It went from the teachers to the probation service then to the Guards, the courts and so on¹⁴.

FIONA

(Nodding sadly) I would love us to aim for something. I was hoping we could aim to write a story. So, how about if you could consider for next week what you'd like your story to be on

¹⁴ Participant 4 interview transcript Shelton Abbey Prison

DEAN

Come up with an idea like?

FIONA

Exactly

JOSH

I'm shit at ideas

FIONA

I can give you a word if that would help?

CHRISTY

Yeah go on. Give us a word

FIONA

Ok. Hold on a sec

Fiona jumps to her feet and starts pacing the room looking up at the ceiling for inspiration. Christy and Jimmy look at each other.

JIMMY

(Under his breath) Here we go...

Fiona stops pacing suddenly and freezes. She calls out the words, pausing after each word for dramatic effect.

FIONA

Mistake. Red. Star. Bold. Free. Care

DEAN

So, what we pick a word and write about it?

FIONA

Or, you can just write something that has that word in it. And if you don't want to write it...
Do those phones have a record feature?

LUKE

They do on their shite! They barely have a phone feature

There is some laughter from the group.

LUKE

What time does this finish? (*Pulls his Nokia phone out of his pocket and checks it*)

FIONA

What time is it?

LUKE

Half 11

FIONA

So, we're nearly finished then. We'd probably want to start wrapping it up. That was fantastic though. Brilliant. Well done everyone and thank you so much for your honesty. You're not short of stories that's for sure

CHRISTY

They're always telling me I should write a book. That'd be some read I'm telling you. The things I've seen¹⁵

Dean, Josh and Luke roll their eyes.

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. The characters on stage carry on as normal.

¹⁵ Participant 6 interview Shelton Abbey Prison

HR

11.25

Hi Fiona,

I will be setting you up with a new email address which you will use for all correspondence. I will also be sending you out a Tutor user guide to the on-line payment system.

Kind regards,

HR¹⁶

FIONA

Just before we finish can we do a bit of a check-in?

JIMMY

Is there an exam for this class?

FIONA

No. No there isn't

JIMMY

Thank Christ for that

FIONA

Look even if you just think of something, I can work with you and we can try and get it onto paper the next time. (*Enthusiastically*) Ok guys check out! Everyone onto their feet!

The group gets reluctantly to their feet.

FIONA

And give me a word that says how you're feeling. I'll go first. Excited! Jimmy?

JIMMY

Eh. Fine?

¹⁶ Verbatim from email correspondence with HR 2016

FIONA

Christy?

CHRISTY

Eh. Happy?

DEAN

Good, yeah?

FIONA

Great. Josh?

JOSH

Eh...happy

LUKE

Late

The group laughs

FIONA

Thanks Luke. I'll let you all go now. And just before we go. Can we agree that what happens in this room stays in this room?

Everyone nods in agreement

FIONA

And shake it off. Shake it off (*Fiona starts rubbing at her clothes as if she's brushing off dust*) Shake it off!

The group follows suit half-heartedly, looking at each other awkwardly

FIONA

(Bows slightly with her hands pressed together in namaste) And thank you everyone. See you next week

LUKE

(On his way out the door) That was alright. Thanks. See you next week?

FIONA

(Smiling) Yeah. I'll look forward to it.

DEAN

See yez. Thanks

CHRISTY

Will I give you a hand getting the room back?

FIONA

(Looking around) Maybe it's alright to leave it like this...

JIMMY

Nah Oonagh will do her nut if it's not left the way it was. We'll do it, don't you be...

Christy and Jimmy put the chairs and desk back into the traditional classroom layout, before heading out the door.

JIMMY

Alright. See yez

CHRISTY

Thanks Fiona. That was good that was. I enjoyed myself. See you next week

FIONA

Ah I'm delighted. Thanks fellas. Have a good week

JOSH

(Shyly) Can I talk to you for a second?

FIONA

Of course

JOSH

Do you know the story we've to do? Does it have to be about ourselves?

FIONA

No. Not necessarily. Do you have something in mind?

JOSH

Well it's just we've been doing about them industrial schools with Conor

FIONA

OK wow

JOSH

Yeah well you know this place was an industrial school back in the day

FIONA

I'd heard that yeah. I think some horrendous stuff went on

JOSH

Ah yeah, and I'd say we don't even know the half of it. Feckin dirt birds

FIONA

So, is that what you wanted to write about?

JOSH

Well you see my Granda was sent here

FIONA

Oh my God Josh that's awful I'm so sorry

JOSH

Yeah two years he got. It was in the 70's it was. The teacher threw him against the radiator and fractured his skull. When he got out of hospital, they were there waiting for him in the living room¹⁷

FIONA

Who was waiting?

JOSH

The teacher who did it. (*Sarcastically*) The big man. The local priest of course. And a suit from the Department of Education.

FIONA

Oh my God.

JOSH

They made my great Granda sign the forms, and they sent my Granda here for two years.

FIONA

Oh no, that's awful

JOSH

Sure, that's the way it was back then. The worst part my granny says was that my Granda never spoke to his father again after that. He could never forgive him for signing the forms

FIONA

(*Shaking head*) And how is your Granda now Josh?

¹⁷ From unrecorded conversation with a former prisoner 2017

JOSH

Ah he's dead a good while now like. He died before I was born. But my granny says I'm very like him. We were both giddy like. Couldn't sit still. Me granny used to say I had worms¹⁸

FIONA

(Laughs) So you want to do your story about your Granda?

JOSH

Joseph Doyle

FIONA

Wow. Even your names are similar

JOSH

Yeah, it's mad isn't it? And now I'm here and he was here

FIONA

And what age was he, when he was here, do you know?

JOSH

I'd have to check the dates with my granny, but I think he was about ten. Eleven at most

FIONA

(Shaking her head in disbelief) Oh God. So just a boy?

JOSH

Yeah. My granny says it was this place that killed him. Even if he went on and was in the army and all after, but she said the demons from here got him eventually

FIONA

I'm so sorry to hear that. It must be hard on your granny with you...

¹⁸ Participant 5 interview transcript Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

JOSH

Ah stop. She's devastated she is. (*Looking around*) But like, can people hear us through these walls like?¹⁹

FIONA

Em (*Looking around*) I don't think so...

JOSH

(*Laughs*) Paranoid. I don't let her visit or nothing. She's not able for it

FIONA

Em well, I think it's a powerful idea for a story Josh. A heart-breaking story. I'd be honoured to help you with it in any way I can, if you want to go there

JOSH

Great. Yeah. Thanks. When will you be here again?

FIONA

Next week. Same time same place

JOSH

Great. I'll be here anyway. Not going anywhere (*Laughs*) See ya

FIONA

See you Josh. Mind yourself

Josh leaves nodding at Oonagh, who is walking in. Oonagh is in her 50's. She is formally dressed in a skirt, jacket and heels but appears slightly bedraggled and frazzled.

OONAGH

Well? How did you get on?

¹⁹ Participant 2 interview XLc Waterford 2015

FIONA

Ah great thanks. Great. They're a lovely group

OONAGH

Good. Good. Who did you have?

FIONA

Em, Christy, Jimmy, Luke, Dean and of course Josh

OONAGH

Great. Yes, I rang for all of them this morning. I might have another one for you next week

FIONA

Great. No problem

OONAGH

He's only young. Nineteen. They're hoping to transfer him from the main prison. I'm trying to squeeze him into something here to keep up the momentum. I just don't have the space, and there'll be murder if I put him onto one of the popular courses...

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only.

MBS

11.45

Dear Fiona,

To qualify for maternity benefit, you must be in insurable employment and satisfy certain PRSI contribution conditions. Based on your current record and if provided you remain in insurable employment you appear to qualify for payment at the minimum rate

Regards,

Maternity Benefit Section²⁰

FIONA

Of course

²⁰ Verbatim from correspondence received from the Department of Social Protection 2013.

OONAGH

...Where there's a waiting list

FIONA

(Laughs) Well there's no waiting list here...yet!

OONAGH

Ah there never is for anything *(uses fingers as inverted commas)* 'creative'. Well except for the woodwork. But that's accredited. They feel they've achieved something at the end of it. You mustn't take it personally

FIONA

No no I wasn't...

OONAGH

You're doing a great job. I might have the budget to start an accredited course after the break if you're available

FIONA

Eh yeah...sure...that would be great. What is it?

OONAGH

When are you going on maternity leave again?

FIONA

Not until May

OONAGH

(Turns to a calendar on the wall) Let me see.... So, we're back on the 14th and then we'd run for 12 weeks...would that work? No. 10 weeks? Yes. 10 weeks could work. Would that give us the hours? *(Takes out a calculator and starts thumping in numbers)* 10 weeks at 1.5 hours per week that's 15 hours. 15 hours for a level 4? No. Let's see. If we ran it from 9.30 that would be two and a half hours for 10 weeks, that would be 25 hours. Yes. That would work. Now what room. You could have room 6. Oh no. Room 6 has literacy from 11. What about

room 3? Would we have enough computers in room 3? I'll have to check. Leave it with me.
But you would be interested?²¹

FIONA

Em yes...em I think so..what..?

OONAGH

(Checks her watch) God is that the time? I've a meeting with the Governor about the Forklifiting, he wants to expand it

FIONA

Em great...that sounds...

OONAGH

If I can get the funding. It's all dependent on the funding. *(On her way out the door)* Oh before I forget, timesheets are due this week. I need them before noon on Friday if you want to get paid next month

FIONA

Em..OK...sure...no problem

OONAGH

You should have got templates in your orientation pack?

FIONA

Em yes, I think so...

OONAGH

Page 34

FIONA

Em yes, I'm pretty sure I saw it...

²¹ Reconstructed from conversations with managers in adult education centres.

OONAGH

Well just print it and fill it out

FIONA

Could I just email it in? It's just that...

OONAGH

We need an original signature I'm afraid. And accounts should have emailed you a staff number?²²

FIONA

Em no, I don't remember seeing...

OONAGH

Oh for God's sake! Well you need to contact Bronagh in accounts or it's not going to be possible to process your payment

FIONA

Well I mean it's only for the two hours this month, so I don't really mind if it carries over to...

OONAGH

Unless it's absolutely unavoidable Fiona, I would prefer you didn't as it makes it very difficult to keep track of budgets if hours aren't submitted when they're supposed to be

FIONA

Oh OK no problem, I'll contact Bernie...

OONAGH

(Correcting) Bronagh. Good. The cubby for the timesheets is in the staffroom. noon on Friday. Latest!

²² Required by many payroll offices for part-time adult education tutors

FIONA

I'm not actually here on Fri...

Oonagh has left and Fiona starts gathering up her things. Conor the history teacher pokes his head around the corner.

CONOR

Can I come in?

FIONA

Oh, hi Conor, of course yeah

CONOR

How did you get on?

FIONA

Ah the lads were great you know.

CONOR

Ah they're a nice group. Was Josh talking to you about his grandad?

FIONA

He was. He's planning to write his Grandad's story actually

CONOR

Well, you know he was in here. Back in the 70's

FIONA

(Sarcastically) I'd say this place was lovely in the 70's

CONOR

Ah don't you know. *(Sarcastically)* Sure it's like a hotel now. Ah the stuff that went on.
Criminal

FIONA

He was saying you're doing industrial schools with the class

CONOR

Yeah it came up, so I ran with it and the lads were really into it so... I got them to show a documentary in the film room on education in Ireland this evening... 'The Short End of The Stick'... have you seen any of it?

FIONA

I haven't, but I've heard about it. Fair play to you!

CONOR

It features this place, so Josh should find it interesting

FIONA

(Nodding) Oh by the way Oonagh just said I've to get timesheets into her by Friday. I'm not actually here on Friday

CONOR

Have you time to do it now?

FIONA

Not really, but I guess I'll have to

CONOR

Well you can print it out here if you have the time. Do you have a printer code?

FIONA

Em no, I don't think so

CONOR

Here you can use mine, number 2 is set up to the printer I think....

Stage goes black.

ACT ONE

SCENE 2 - THE SHORT END OF THE STICK

The chairs are set out in rows facing the audience underneath the large screen. Josh is sitting stage left. He has a pen and a piece of paper and is writing something then crossing it out. Luke enters with his hood up and his hands in his pockets and sits in the chair next to him.

LUKE

(Nodding) Alright

JOSH

(Nodding) Alright

LUKE

Is there an exam on this?

JOSH

(Confused) On what?

LUKE

(Nodding up at the screen) On this. On the film?

JOSH

(Looks up at the screen confused) Is there?

LUKE

(Impatiently) I don't know do I or I wouldn't be asking you?

JOSH

(Irritated) What makes you think I know?

LUKE

(Nodding at Josh's pen and paper) You're the one sat here taking notes?

JOSH

(Emphatically) I'm not fucking taking notes! I'm working on the story for what's her name

LUKE

Oh Fiona yeah? *(Shaking his head)* What's the story with the fucking shoes?

Christy and Jimmy walk In and sit into two chairs behind Josh and Luke

LUKE

(Leans back to address Christy and Jimmy) Here. Is there an exam on this?

JIMMY

I don't fuckin know. *(To Christy)* Is there?

CHRISTY

(Emphatically) Conor didn't say anything to me about no exam

LUKE

(Nods towards Josh) Well he's here taking notes

JOSH

(Exasperated) I'm not fucking taking notes man! I told ye...

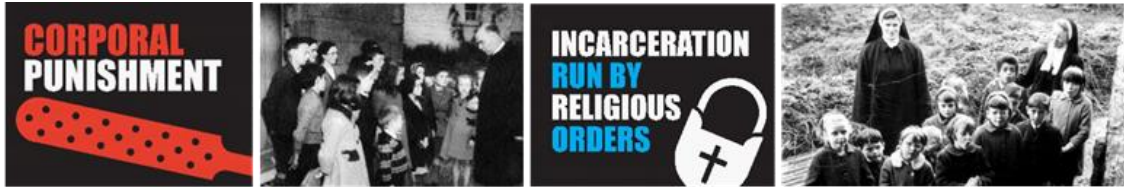
CHRISTY

(Loudly) Shhhhhhh!

The lights dim, and the film begins playing in black and white on the screen. Images of industrial schools and religious figures blur into each other while a narrator speaks. There is a sense of time passing as the audience is not watching the documentary in real time.

NARRATOR

To understand the issue of educational inequality in Ireland today, it is necessary to familiarise oneself with Ireland's educational landscape. Historically, Ireland relied on corporal punishment and a wider system of incarceration run by religious orders to manage student behaviour²³.



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NARRATOR

Up until the 1970's children's incarceration in special "schools" was sanctioned because their parents were considered to be neglectful and less capable as a result of their social status and moral disposition. Poverty was the overwhelming cause of children being placed in reformatory and industrial schools. These children were viewed as moral dirt²⁵ by large sections of Irish society



NARRATOR

School was a joyless affair, where a climate of fear prevailed, and where the treatment of the confined children was shocking. Children in these institutions were routinely punished for everything and nothing, completely at the mercy of the whims of those who were supposed to care for them²⁶.



NARRATOR

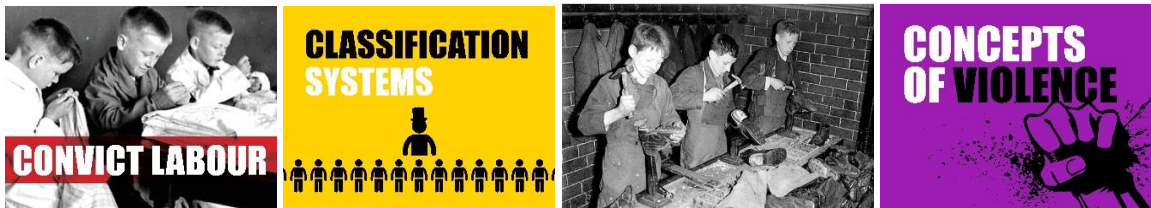
²³ Pembroke, S. (2013). The Role of Industrial Schools and Control Over Child Welfare in Ireland in the 20th Century. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol 21 (1), 52-67.

²⁴ Design by Susan Meaney

²⁵ Keating, A. (2015). Administrative Expedience and the Avoidance of Scandal: Ireland's Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the Inter-Departmental Committee of 1962-3. In *Estudios Irlandeses*, Vol. 10: 95-108.

²⁶ Raftery, M. & O'Sullivan, E. (1999). *Suffer the Little Children*. Dublin: New Island Books

The model which underpinned children's' education was in favour of practical labour. An approach indicative of colonial education and the concepts of convict labour and the classification systems



The documentary shows footage of a priest interviewing boys in the workroom.

PRIEST

So how do you find working in the shoe repairs?²⁷

BOY

I'm learning a lot, Father

PRIEST

What kinds of things are you learning?

The boy on the screen has been replaced by Josh. Josh sits straight up in his chair and looks around him to see if the others have noticed. However, no one else appears to have noticed anything untoward.

JOSH

I'm learning how to cut and sew heels onto shoes Father and how to hammer the nails Father

PRIEST

What's your name boy?

JOSH

Joseph Doyle Father

²⁷ 1963 RTE Television Documentary *Radharc* St Patrick's Institution

Josh is almost on his feet at this and looking around for affirmation from the others. Once again, it appears no one else has noticed anything untoward. The narrator starts speaking again, and the footage changes

NARRATOR

The Catholic education system was the main area where poor children were educated. Corporal punishment was standard practice and widely accepted as necessary. In 1974 the Irish Union of School Students published a report ‘Corporal Punishment – the Brutal Facts’²⁸.

RTE NEWS

On 26 August, RTÉ News spoke to Tony Kinsella, from the Irish Union of School Students, who talks about the use of corporal punishment in post-primary schools. Kinsella reports that 84% of second level schools use corporal punishment as a form of discipline. The most common method of corporal punishment used is the leather strap. Other methods include the cane, ruler, furniture legs, and tree branches.

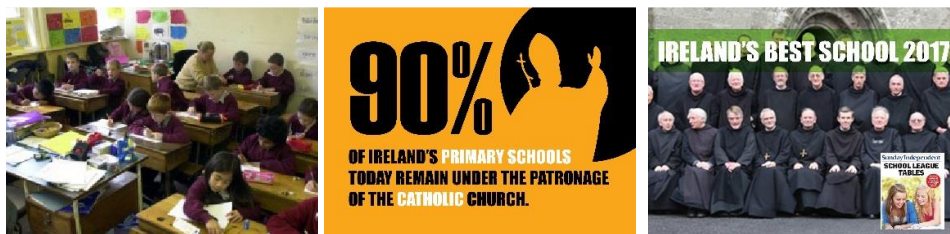


KINSELLA

There is a latent hostility amongst the community to corporal punishment which needs to be addressed. There are some sadists and other sexual perverts in charge of classes in Irish schools.

NARRATOR

Today in Ireland, approximately 90 per cent of Ireland’s primary schools today remain under the patronage of the Catholic Church.



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²⁸ Irish Union of School Students. (1974). ‘Corporal Punishment the Brutal Facts’. Dublin: IUSS.

²⁹ Design by Susan Meaney

NARRATOR

Sex segregation in Irish schools is still common, most Irish school children still wear school uniforms, and the banking method of education is still the most favoured method of delivery.



NARRATOR

The socially disadvantaged have continually fared worst under this system. Access and progression to third level education in Ireland can be determined by your postcode.³⁰ School detention, school suspension, and school expulsion have replaced confinement and corporal punishment



NARRATOR

Ireland's teachers are overwhelmingly female, white and middle-class and a disproportionate number of the students who receive the most severe punishments are students with learning disabilities, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, children in care and students who are homeless.³¹



NARRATOR

Students are often labelled troublemakers and potentially dangerous after the first disciplinary incident. Paulo Freire³² said education can never be neutral. It is either an instrument of liberation or an instrument of domestication. Unless the system is fundamentally ultimately, many of our young people will continue to be given the short end of the stick.

³⁰ HEA. (2015). *National Plan for Equality of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*. Dublin: HEA.

³¹ Devine, D. & McGillicuddy, D. (2016) Positioning pedagogy—a matter of children's rights, *Oxford Review of Education*, 42:4, 424-443, DOI:10.1080/03054985.2016.1197111.

³² Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin.

The credits start to roll, and the lights come on.

JOSH

(Rubbing his head) Jesus! That was a bit mad that was

LUKE

(Rubbing his eyes) What did I miss?

JOSH

(Looking at Luke) Were you fucking asleep?

LUKE

(Yawning) I'm bleedin wrecked man

JOSH

How the fuck are you wrecked? You're in on your own

LUKE

(Laughing and rubbing his face with his hands) Video session with the girlfriend

JOSH

(Laughing) You're fucked man if they find that phone! *(Whispering)* I'd your man *(nods over his shoulder at Christy)* keeping me awake half the night with the bleeding light on.
(Sarcastically) Working on 'his story'

LUKE

(Looks over his shoulder) Who? Christy?

JOSH

(Sarcastically) Thinks it's the start of his autobiography

LUKE

(Incredulous) You serious?

JOSH

I mean who the fuck would be interested in his life-story?

LUKE

The fucking Guards

JOSH

(Laughing) Yeah. I just want him out of my cell man. It's not on. I'm telling you, that Ray fella has it in for me

LUKE

The Governor?

JOSH

He's had it in for me since I got here man³³

LUKE

(Changing the subject) That looked boring as fuck, was it?

JOSH

Nah it was good man. Really interesting man. My Granda was in it

LUKE

Fuck off!

³³ From unrecorded conversations with participant in Shelton Abbey

JOSH

I'm serious. He was being interviewed by a priest. Said it there on the screen. 'Joseph Doyle'.
Had to be him. They had him mending the shoes. Looked like me and all so he did

LUKE

(Shaking his head) No way! That's mental

JOSH

It's mental alright. *(Looking around)* I mean he could have been sitting right in this here spot
all them years ago

LUKE

The gym used to be the workroom for the shoes

JOSH

(Looking incredulously at Luke) No way!

LUKE

Have you not seen the plaque on the wall no? Over by the door

JOSH

No way *(Thoughtfully)* and here's me, years later... It's mad man

LUKE

(Changing the subject) You going for a smoke?

JOSH

Yeah. Go on

Luke and Josh stand up and the stage goes black

ACT ONE

SCENE 3 – NOT TONIGHT

The stage lights up with the bunkbeds stage left and the desk and the chair to the right of the beds. A spotlight on Christy who is sitting at the desk. There is a small reading light on the desk, and he is writing and crossing out.

CHRISTY

(Thinking) Free Free Free. Education will set you free? I always felt trapped!. *(Nodding)* Yeah that's good. Trapped. *(Thoughtfully)* Caged? No. Trapped. That's it. Wake up in the morning, open your eyes, 'School aah shit!' *(Clears throat and starts again)* Education will set you free? I always felt trapped. Wake up in the morning, Open your eyes, 'School', 'Aaah shit!'

For years and years I was tormented. had an English accent on me. The more they singled me out. The worse I became. I wasn't 'settling in', Sir or Mr or Brother or Sister, *(Angrily)* Who were these people speaking down to me? In my life supposed to give me direction, *(Angrily)* But all they gave me was violence and abuse...*(Thoughtfully)* Abuse...*(Thoughtfully)* Abuse...³⁴

Josh enters the cell and throws himself on the bed stage left.

JOSH

(Slightly threatening) You going to be at that all night again tonight?

CHRISTY

(Shaking his head resigned) Nah. Not tonight

Christy moves over to the other bed slowly and sits down. He removes his glasses and rubs his eyes wearily. His posture is slumped, and he appears much older than he did in the classroom. He sighs and bends to take off his shoes. Josh notices Christy's mood appears off, but he kicks off his runners and rolls over to face away from him. Christy leans forward and turns off the desk-light. We can just make out the two men as they make their preparations for sleep.

Stage goes black

³⁴ Participant 6 interview Shelton Abbey Prison

ACT ONE

SCENE 4 – JOSH’S DREAM PART 1

A screen above the stage shows a close up of Josh’s face as he sleeps. His body tosses and turns slightly in the bed. The image of his face becomes interspersed with another image that flickers, as though coming into focus, and we realise that he is dreaming.

The dream appears as an animation on the screen above Josh and Christy as they sleep in the cell. Periodically the picture flickers back to Josh’s sleeping face. At time, Josh tosses and turns in his bed.

ANIMATION OF JOSH’S DREAM PART 1

There is a black and white animation of Josh up the front of a church, holding a wriggling baby over a baptism font. The baby in his arms is struggling to squirm out of Josh’s arms, arching his back and waving his fat fists in protest. Josh is jiggling the baby frantically in one arm and attempting to loosen his tie with the other. The priest has a doughy expressionless face, and a stream of words is droning from his un-moving mouth

PRIEST

...unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God...

The baby’s tiny mouth is stretched wide and he releases a siren-like yowl, before intensifying into a high-pitched shriek, broken only by gasps for breath in-between.

PRIEST

...what is born of the flesh is flesh, what is born of the Spirit is spirit...

The priest’s voice is barely audible above the din, and the musty smell of prayer books and metal polish are making Josh nauseated. The baby continues to writhe eel-like, and Josh is in danger of dropping him head-first onto the marble steps. The priest crooks a gnarly finger at Josh, signalling him to tip the baby’s head closer to the font. Josh looks up and notices a huge arched stained-glass window where Mary and the Baby Jesus are gazing down sorrowfully. Without warning, Josh’s heart starts hammering inside his chest, the room spins, and the Madonna and Child splinter into a whirling kaleidoscope of multi-coloured crystal as Josh’s head is submerged suddenly and violently under water.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN...

The tepid water rushes up Josh's nostrils searing the back of his throat and stinging his eyes. He struggles to take breath, only to gulp down mouthful upon mouthful of foul-tasting water. He feels his head and shoulders engulfed and submerged by the body of water as his vision blurs, and he thrashes and flails his arms and legs about helplessly as he is sucked deeper and deeper, headfirst down a swirling abyss.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN_____

___ *There is a rushing, whooshing noise in his ears. He can hear the baby's muffled screams and tries frantically to propel himself back in his direction. But he is swallowed deeper-*

-DOWN

DOWN

DOWN.

He can no longer hear the baby. He can no longer hear anything but the roar of water and the pounding of his own heartbeat -

-DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

'I wonder how many miles I've fallen by this time?'

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN_____ *His limbs gave in and he surrenders to the magnetic pull of the blackness*

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

When suddenly,

THUMP!

Josh lands heavily on his right knee. It immediately starts to bleed, unprotected as it is in the short trousers he is wearing. He stares, strangely mesmerised at the black pieces of stone and gravel embedded in the cut. Then comes the stinging rush of pain, and the blood and grit swim in front of his eyes and a fat tear plops onto his bare skinny thigh.

CRACK!

The whip to the back of his legs shocks him to his senses and the pain has barely begun to penetrate when,

CRACK!

The second crack sends him jumping into the air, his hands rod-like straining to protect the backs of his bony legs. The large pink-ringed whip snakes away, and Josh sees it is attached to the giant furry behind of a monstrous rat. She spins around at lightning speed, head thrust towards him, a screeching cave of razor teeth. He squeezes his eyes tight until he feels himself jostled into the midst of a moving march of small bodies.

When Josh dares to open his eyes the rat's massive form had scurried further up along the line of scrawny scruffy children. Her tail, a colossal grotesque worm, snaking alongside keeping them in check.

The children are a sorry little band of vagabonds as they are marshalled into the railed and gated yard of 1960's schoolhouse. There are pockets of better kept children in the yard, some of whom snuck furtive glances from time to time, but otherwise keep their distance. A smaller, but equally hideous rodent, uses her tail to pull on the chain of a brass bell. The yard empties, two by two, through the narrow doorway of the schoolhouse, until it is Josh's turn. They huddle together, terrified of drawing the attention of either of the beady-eyed monsters, who have taken to scrabbling and snapping at each other in an indecipherable interchange of unpleasantness. Finally, they crack their tails at their ankles and herd them through the doorway.

The schoolhouse is grey and cold. A giant crow is blocking the entrance to a second doorway into what looks like a classroom. As Josh approaches he throws back his greasy head, emitting a deep throaty squawk.

Josh is shoved through the doorway against a barrage of sharp blows on the back of his head and neck from the crow's beak. Once inside, the ghastly oily form of the bird leaps from the doorway in a terrifying flurry of claw and feather to a platform at the top of the room. The giant bird is ungainly as he turns his plumed back on the room towards a chalkboard, and Josh slides into whichever wooden chair is available as silently and inconspicuously as he possibly can. The crow uses one of his enormous, wrinkled talons to begin an intolerable scratching and grating of unintelligible white marks onto the board's black surface.

Josh has hardly settled into his place when he becomes aware of eyes on him.

LITTLE GIRL

(Whispers in a hiss) 'You smell'

The voice belongs to one of the better dressed children from the yard. Josh snatches a glance at his tiny neighbour, who is wrinkling her little nose in disgust and shifting uncomfortably in her seat. Her dimpled arm shoots up in the air.

LITTLE GIRL

(Calling out to the crow) Sir

JOSH

(Hissing at the girl in disbelief) Sshhh! What are you doing?

LITTLE GIRL

(Hisses back with contempt) My mammy says I'm to stay away from the likes of you!
(Louder to the crow) Sir, sir!

Josh makes a grab for her arm, scraping his chair in the process. The crow pivots around from the board, his fiery eyes scouring the room for the source of the disturbance. The classroom freezes.

The crow omits an ominous croak in the direction of Josh's neighbour, who is rubbing her arm and sniffing theatrically. Josh stares horrified as the monstrous scavenger locks his piercing eyes on him, and he slides down into his chair praying for the ground to swallow him up.

Within seconds Josh is lifted bodily from his seat by the back of his collar and dangled from the crow's huge beak, before being flung over the ducking heads of his classmates. He hits a radiator on the back wall with a thump that robs him of his breath and crumples him into a limp heap on the bare floorboards.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

Josh is drifting in and out of consciousness as he is flung into a grey tiled washroom, his head coming to rest under a urinal.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

The blows from the beak fall on his head, legs, backside and genitals.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

It was as if there were 8 beaks ravaging him.

'Would this ever stop?'

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

Josh's face is pressed against a slimy drain, his cheek wedged against the metal grate, then it slips through the bars until with a plop, his whole face is under the gutter, spluttering through the filth.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

His head and shoulders are wrenched through, then his torso, his legs, all of him slide into the sewer, propelled downwards, headfirst into its slime and stench and darkness.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

Josh covers his head and ears against the roar of the pipes as he freefalls like a cannonball into the chasm.

The screen goes black

Josh sits up in his bed panting

The stage goes black

ACT TWO

SCENE 5 – I BLAME MYSELF

The stage lights up and Fiona is standing in a circle with Christy, Jimmy, Dean, Luke and Josh. Ryan, a young man in his late teens has joined the group and is standing self-consciously, a little to one side with his hood up. They're playing Zip-Zap-Boing. Fiona has her shoes off.

CHRISTY

(Passing an imaginary ball to the right to Luke) Zip

LUKE

(Passes it on to the right to Dean) Zip

DEAN

(Throwing it across to Josh) Boing

JOSH

(Passing it to the right to Jimmy) Zap

JIMMY

(Correcting) That's zip you eejit

JOSH

(Correcting himself) Zip

JIMMY

(Passes it back to Josh) Zap

JOSH

(Passes it back to Jimmy) Zap

EVERYONE

(Loudly) Zip!

JOSH

Ah here! *(Throws it towards Ryan)* Boing

RYAN

(Catches it self-consciously and throws it back to Josh) Boing

JOSH

Ah here *(He throws it to Fiona)* Boing

FIONA

(Smiling) Thank you.

Everyone sits down.

FIONA

(Enthusiastically rubbing her feet) Ryan it's great that you're joining us. Welcome to the group

RYAN

(Looking at Fiona's feet) Alright

FIONA

(Continues rubbing her feet) Does anyone want to fill Ryan in on what we've been doing?

DEAN

(Tries not to look at Fiona's feet) Yeah alright. We were just talking about how things were for us in school, like how we ended up here and stuff. Kind of our life stories. Would that be right?

FIONA

(Starts running her feet on the spot) Yeah, absolutely. Thanks Dean. Anyone else?

CHRISTY

(Trying not to be distracted by Fiona's feet) She gave us these words, what were they? Red, free, star, stuff like that, and we had to pick one and write a story. It was good. Got you thinking

Fiona places her hands on her lap and stops moving her feet. The group visibly relaxes.

FIONA

Thanks Christy. That's exactly it. We've been seeing what stories come up and trying to capture them. Does that make sense?

RYAN

Yeah. Will I pick one?

FIONA

A word? That would be great

*Fiona jumps up. The group look at each other as if to ask 'what next?'. She starts flipping through the flipchart until she brings up the words; **Mistake, Red, Star, Bold, Free, Care.***

RYAN

Have you any paper?

Christy pushes over paper to Ryan, who immediately starts writing.

FIONA

(Sits back down and slaps her thighs) How did the rest of you get on during the week?

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. Everyone else carries on as normal.

HR

10.45

Dear Fiona,

I refer to your email. As your maternity benefit is more beneficial to you than your salary, you will not receive a supplementary payment.

Regards

HR³⁵

DEAN

(Nodding) Alright

JIMMY

(Nodding) Yeah. Not bad

CHRISTY

(Impatiently) She means with the story like

DEAN

(Penny drops) Oh right

FIONA

How did you get on Luke?

LUKE

I didn't write anything like, but I was thinking about the word Star

FIONA

Great. And what did it make you think of?

³⁵ Verbatim from correspondence from the Department of Social Protection 2013

LUKE

(Looking around) I was thinking about this guy who sponsored me for me confirmation. He'd turn up in his military clothes. It looked cool. He'd bring you back these badges from the Lebanon. *(Enthusiastically)* Stars and stripes and stuff like that. *(In a deep voice)* 'Stay out of trouble and I'll get you into the army'. *(Laughs sarcastically)* Well that dream went out the window³⁶.

The stage goes black

The stage lights up with a spotlight on Luke who has moved into centre stage. His hood is pulled up and he is walking as if down the street.

LUKE

(Addressing the audience) They picked me up when I was on the street. It was easy for them. 15 years of age. Young and alone. They knew me. They knew the family. *(Sarcastically)* An easy touch³⁷

Jimmy and Christy acting as police officers walk on either side of Luke. Christy is carrying a chair. They stop and stand on either side of Luke and Christy puts a hand on his shoulder forcibly and pushes him into the chair.

LUKE

(Addressing the audience panicked) In the police station by meself. The questioning room. A table. Two big men. 25 charges that I never done. *(Looks behind his shoulder)* A hole in the wall

CHRISTY

(Pointing over Luke's shoulder) The last fella that didn't sign for charges. That's where his head went

Luke starts pacing the room like a caged animal. Jimmy and Christy keep pushing him back into the chair.

³⁶ From participant 5 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

³⁷ From transcript Poem '25 Charges'; Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

LUKE

(Shouting) They wouldn't let your Ma in. They wouldn't get you a lawyer. *(Screaming)* I just want to go home!

JIMMY

(Pushing papers under Luke's face) Sign here. Sign here. Sign here. Sign here

LUKE

(Frantically scanning the papers) Malicious damage. Breaking into a car? I couldn't even drive!

Jimmy and Christy exit the stage and go back to their seats. Luke moves to stage right. His hands in front as if in cuffs.

LUKE

St Patrick's Institution for a day. It was rough

A spotlight lights up the Fiona from the shoulders up

LUKE

The judge she asked

FIONA

(Sternly looking down her nose) Well, what did you learn?

LUKE

(Confused) What do you mean?

The stage goes black and there is a loud clanging noise

A spotlight lights up Luke on his own

LUKE

Back in for another week for being cheeky. (*Pleading*) I wasn't being cheeky. I just didn't know what she meant. (*Angrily*) That week went on for 6 months. My first trouble with the police... I didn't get in trouble. 25 charges that I never done. (*Sarcastically*) 'What did you learn?' (*Sneeringly*) What do you mean?³⁸

The stage goes black.

The stage lights up and Luke is back with the group and is sitting in his place. The group is giving Luke a round of applause. Josh has become extremely agitated by Luke's story.

FIONA

(*Enthusiastically*) Well Luke that was just...

JOSH

(*Interrupting*) And we're the criminals? For fucks sake man. What chance did you have? I mean what chance did you have.³⁹ It's like the film we watched last night. How you end up in life depends on your post code. On your fucking post code!

DEAN

Ah come on man, it's got slightly more to do than your post code

JOSH

(*On his feet now*) Does it? Does it man? I mean how many of us in here have a posh postcode. Do you? Cos, I fucking don't

JIMMY

That lad who got done for dealing on the Internet

EVERYONE

(*Turns abruptly to look at Jimmy*) What?

³⁸ From transcript poem '25 Charges' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

³⁹ From focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

CHRISTY

Yeah, what's his name? (*Prompting looking for the others to remember*) They were selling drugs online. He's posh⁴⁰

RYAN

Ah yeah. (*Shaking his right hand trying to remember the name*) Mark. He's alright he is

DEAN

(*Interrupting*) I'm not in here because of my postcode. I'm in here because of crime. I was interested in crime. I wanted to commit crime. That's just what I wanted. I wanted money. Simple as that⁴¹

JOSH

But you come from a poor background

DEAN

Yeah I come from a poor background. My ma and da hadn't got money, and I always said, I don't want that, I'm not growing up with no money. I made a choice!⁴²

JOSH

So that's not really a choice then is it? I mean my Granda was in here. 11 years of age and the teacher fractures his skull and he gets sent here. Not the teacher. Was that a choice? Do you think that would have happened if he wasn't poor? No way man! And now here's me, his grandson, 40 years on and nothing's changed

LUKE

Except you're not in here because you're poor. You're in here because you got caught with two and a half kilos of coke in your hot-press

Everyone laughs

⁴⁰ From unrecorded conversation with participant Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁴¹ From focus group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

⁴² From focus group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

DEAN

And the rest!

JOSH

(Getting more agitated) You're missing the fucking point man. It's the criminalisation of the poor. It said it in the film. Luke just said it there in his story. The whole system is set up for us to fail. The schools, the teachers, the guards... What teacher did you ever meet came from a bad area?

LUKE

(Nodding) That's true cos none of the teachers would have been from the area like

CHRISTY

I think there's pressure on teachers as well. They have a set agenda so if you have someone in the class, and I didn't realise this when I was in school, but if you have someone in the class who's messing, they're slowing down learning⁴³

DEAN

They don't just have to control you, they've to control everyone. So, you can't blame them for everything. I blame myself too like. Do you know? For fighting, not attending, abusing teachers. My brother and sister stayed in school and they never committed a crime in their life. I just didn't give a crap. I just didn't want to be there. No interest⁴⁴

FIONA

And why no interest?

RYAN

(Without raising his head from his writing) Cos it's fucking boring *(Look's up at Fiona)*
Sorry!⁴⁵

⁴³ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁴⁴ Interview with participant 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁴⁵ Focus group XLc Waterford 2015

JIMMY

I think it's just cos you're young

DEAN

You don't see the benefit in learning History or Irish or whatever and you'd be saying to yourself, sure I'm not going to be using these, it's irrelevant⁴⁶

RYAN

(Looking up from his writing) You'd be learning more outside than anything else you know what I mean? The only attention you'd be getting was *(pointing towards an imaginary door and shouting)* Get out of the effin' class!⁴⁷

DEAN

(Nodding his head) Once you knew how to count money you were alright

CHRISTY

(Explaining to Fiona and using his hands to include the whole group in the statement) School didn't matter. Our Ma's and Da's left school when they were young. That's the background we came from⁴⁸

JIMMY

And sure, once you were inside...

JOSH

(Still agitated) So you're telling me your life would be the same if you'd had a different background or grown up in a different area? *(Looks at Luke)* So your life would have turned out exactly like it has if the guards hadn't done you for doing fuck all! *(Turns to Dean)* And you wouldn't have made a different choice if you hadn't come from a shithole area?

RYAN

(With his head down still writing) If you can't see it you can't be it

⁴⁶ Focus group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

⁴⁷ Focus group XLc Waterford 2015

⁴⁸ Focus Group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

EVERYONE

What?

RYAN

(Looks up) Have you not heard that one no? It means you need to see people around you succeeding to help you believe that you have potential

JOSH

(Excitedly) Exactly! So, if all you fucking see is fucking junkies and dealers and drop-outs

FIONA

Well it's like Luke was saying about his sponsor for his confirmation. He was a role-model. Someone he looked up to. Would that be right Luke?

LUKE

Well my Da was an army man as well like, but he was tough. The other guy, he was more like a father to me cos he'd listen to you. He'd encourage you and stuff like that. I looked up to him. Still do today⁴⁹

FIONA

That encouragement is so important isn't it?

The group nods

FIONA

What about you Jimmy? You're looking very thoughtful there

JIMMY

Well I only wrote down a few notes like, but I was thinking about the word 'bold'

FIONA

Great. That was the word you chose?

⁴⁹ Participant 5 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

JIMMY

That was me like. 'He's a bold child'. Up the front. On his own. They reckon I had ADHD when I was young. And at the time they didn't really know like. Cos I was thrown out of three primary schools. One after another. I never made it to secondary⁵⁰

FIONA

And what kind of things were you thrown out for?

JIMMY

It'd be like Luke there. More giddy than anything else. There wouldn't be any malice or anything like that. Throwing stink bombs now and things like, do you know? (*Laughs at the memory*)⁵¹

DEAN

(*Teasing*) Jesus man. How old are you? Stink bombs? We were setting off fire extinguishers

JIMMY

(*Laughs*) I went into the school. For young kids thrown out of other schools. Everyone bunched in together. All feeding off each other. Funny enough everyone who was in that school ended up in prison⁵²

FIONA

Isn't that just unbelievable?

JIMMY

Yeah, but my young fella now, since I came into prison, he's been kind of rebelling a bit like. Like he's only 8. And my partner went into the school, and he was sitting up the front like facing the wall. At a table on his own. And that was only 2 weeks ago⁵³

⁵⁰ Focus group 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

⁵¹ From focus group 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

⁵² From transcript poem 'A bold child' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁵³ From focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

CHRISTY

I've 2 grandchildren and the eldest one, only 4, was able to tell me that in her crèche they have a bold corner. At a crèche! She's able to come home and tell me...a little girl of 4, that such and such a boy was in the bold corner. That to me is identifying him at a very early age. Because that crèche has so many children that will meet each other again along the road, and that child at a very early age is being singled out. You know? (*Puts on a baby voice*) Oh, so and so was put in the bold corner. (Angrily) And it's like a fire being lit⁵⁴

Everyone is nodding in agreement

JIMMY

Well my young fella like now, the teachers want to get him assessed because they think he has ADHD

DEAN

They'll put him on medication. Like my little fella he's 5 and he's going to a counsellor's now cos of me being in jail⁵⁵

JIMMY

But he's still coming home with white cards. Like he's barred from the yard for a week for tripping some fella, and then when they're all out in the yard, he's to sit outside the staffroom on a chair⁵⁶

RYAN

Ah that was like the primary school I was in man. They had a red card system. Like P19s.⁵⁷ It was a bad primary school. Up the barracks. It looks a bit better these days. I heard⁵⁸

The stage goes black

The stage lights up and Ryan is centre stage addressing the audience. A red brick wall has appeared behind him. On the floor a red line and a yellow line has been marked out.

⁵⁴ From focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁵⁵ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁵⁶ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁵⁷ The 'P19 System' refers to the disciplinary system in place under the Prisons Act, 2007, which allows Governors deal with prisoners who have committed breaches of the Prison Rules

⁵⁸ From transcript poem 'Red line Yellow line' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

Ryan

(Using his fingers to illustrate) A yellow card was for doing something bold. Three yellow cards you got a red card. Three red cards you got suspended. *(Addressing the audience directly)* That's my word. Red.

My foster Da got me off one time. On a technicality. The yard is like the size of this room *(Uses his arms to indicate the space)*. I got one for runnin'. *(Incredulously)* Outside! Are you for real?

We started power walking. *(Power walks up and down the stage)*. *(Puts on a posh voice)* 'You're walking too fast'.

(Indicates at the floor). The yellow line. *(Shouting)* 'Stand on the line!' You stand on it for 5 minutes. Nose touching the wall. You could see the bullet holes *(Uses his hands to trace bullet holes)* Red line is 15 minutes. Your mates weren't allowed near the thing. A big box drawn round it *(Uses hands to indicate the box)*. They didn't bring that in until 1st or 2nd class. I was about 7.

(Sarcastically) Multi-denominational it calls itself. This fella from Egypt. A good foot taller than everyone. Like 15 with facial hair. Only short of driving to school *(swaggers around the stage pretending to smoke)* Coming in smoking. Kind of a bully. I just clashed with him. His Da was nuts like. *(Shouts in a put-on Arabic accent)* 'I'm going to cut your head off!'

All me mates, who I'd been with from 5-12, all goin' to Pats⁵⁹. *(Nodding and agreeing)* Right, I'll go with you. *(Loud voice)* 'No!' *(Gestures over his shoulder)* Me foster parents. *(Posh voice)*. 'We don't think that school would suit you'. *(Incredulous)*. What do you mean it wouldn't suit me? *(Posh voice)* 'We're going to put you into the High School.' *(looks around incredulously)*. Wha?!⁶⁰

(Posh voice) 'This is a better school. It's posh'. *(Whispering in a posh voice)* 'If we put him in this school, he might become posh.'

The only person from a common area in the whole school. *(Addresses the audience)* What do you think is going to happen here like?⁶¹

The red brick wall and the lines disappear and are replaced with the white lines of a pitch

RYAN

I was standing on the pitch. Looking around. I didn't know anyone. I didn't talk like anyone. Some big huge lank of a thing runs at me. *(Jumps backwards)* What the fuck? Spills his bag of popcorn. *(Deep posh voice)* 'You spilled my popcorn'. *(Incredulously)* Starts yelling at

⁵⁹ Shorthand for St. Patrick's; a common secondary school name in Ireland.

⁶⁰ From rehearsals of transcript poem 'Red line Yellow line' – Shelton Abbey Prison, with actor Caolan Dundon from Kildare Youth Theatre 2016

⁶¹ From transcript poem 'Red line yellow line' – Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

me! Starts pushing me! He's after giving me loads, but he swings at me! (*Addresses the audience*) What's the story here?

(*Ducks as if dodging a punch*) I moved (*Punches out*) I punched him (*Shaking his head*) He had braces, and the braces messed up his mouth (*using his hands to illustrate the horror*) came through his cheek, (*flapping hands in at his sides*) he was like that on the ground. Like a fish. Aaaah shit. It was a mess

(*Looks up and over to stage left*) There's the big fat vice principal running up the pitch. How's he moving that fast? Ever since that day, they just thought, that fella's trouble like.

A lot of things used to go missing, from the lockers. I'd be dragged up to the principal's office. (*Posh voice*) 'Just tell us where it is, and we'll forget about it'. (*Emphatically*) One thing I never was, was a thief. It wasn't my thing. A lot of me mates were into robbing. But I was never into it. Anything I owned I paid for meself.⁶²

The lines of the pitch disappear.

RYAN

A few teachers wouldn't let me into their class. I had to go up to this little SNA⁶³ room. Mrs something with a D. Mrs Murphy as well. They were great. They just understood.

(*Sadly*) I got into a bit of a fist fight kind of thing. With the owl fella. Actin' the bollox. I got into a boys' home. I got put in there. There was a bus stop just there. And this big, huge hedge (*uses arms to indicate*) Goes round this yellow house. (*Shaking head*) My head was all over the place.

I was with this girl. Something happened. Ah a long story. But I was only 15. And this big thing going on. We were fighting in the corridor. The principal comes out. (*Shouting*). 'You! Get back to your class!' (*Shouting back*) I'm talking to her! (*Louder*) Go back to fucking class! (*Roaring*) Get the fuck out of me way! (*Kicks with his feet*). Booting the door through. (*Roaring at the audience*) I don't give a fuck about this school! I don't give a fuck!! This is beyond this!!⁶⁴

Stage goes black

Stage lights up and Ryan is back in his seat addressing the group

Ryan

(*Quietly*) That was it then. They'd had enough

⁶² Participant 2 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁶³ Special Needs Assistant's room

⁶⁴ From transcript poem 'Red line yellow line' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

The group gives Ryan a round of applause. Fiona is on her feet clapping enthusiastically.

JIMMY

I see the same thing with my young one, she's 15 now. She was feeling she was being picked on by the teachers and we were having meetings over and over you know? (*Posh voice*) Ciara was cheeky. But Ciara was explaining that they were screaming at her first but standing up for yourself is seen as being cheeky. One of her teachers said (*posh voice*) 'What are you doing?' And she goes 'Nothing'. Then she got a detention because she was being cheeky.⁶⁵

DEAN

Ah they always caught me with that. 'What are you doing in class?' Nothing. 'Yeah you're doing nothing'. (*Slaps thigh to show defeat*) Ah shit! (*Shaking head*) They always caught me with that one⁶⁶

Everyone laughs

JIMMY

So now she's losing interest in school. We're trying to push her and keep her in it. And they seem to be trying to push her out⁶⁷

CHRISTY

In my day it wouldn't have seemed like they were trying to push you out. You would have just been pushed out the door and clattered on the way out⁶⁸

JIMMY

Ah they're more sneaky now

FIONA

Guys, I'm so sorry, we're almost out of time. (*Enthusiastically*) Ok up on our feet

CHRISTY

(*Looking at Ryan*) And she's off

⁶⁵ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁶⁶ Focus group XLc Waterford 2015

⁶⁷ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁶⁸ Focus group 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

FIONA

(She sticks a long length of tape to the floor) Ok guys so over here is amazing. And over here is completely shit.

The group gets slowly to their feet and starts looking at the tape

FIONA

So, position yourself somewhere on the line, which is appropriate to how you're feeling in this moment

Everyone slowly starts taking up a position on the line

FIONA

So, just say what feeling you think your position corresponds to

There is a pause as everyone looks at each other standing on the line

DEAN

(Standing in the middle) Eh...fine?

Ryan and Jimmy change their positions on the line after hearing Dean

LUKE

(To Dean's right) Eh...Good

JOSH

(To Luke's right) Eh... Happy

CHRISTY

(Looks at Josh) Eh...very happy

JIMMY

Good

LUKE

(Addresses Jimmy) I'm good!

JIMMY

(Acting irritated but good humouredly) What am I supposed to do? Stand on top of you?
Quite good. I'm quite good. Is that alright with you?

Luke gives the thumbs up to Jimmy.

RYAN

(To Dean's left) Alright

FIONA

Brilliant guys. And let's just agree that what happens in the room stays in the room
and...Shake it off! *(She starts energetically brushing at herself)*

Some of the group roll their eyes but follow suit

Oonagh puts her head around the door

FIONA

Shake, shake, shake... Oh, hi Oonagh

OONAGH

(Looks a little confused at everyone standing on the line brushing themselves) You got a
second Fiona?

FIONA

Oh yes of course, we're just finishing up here, aren't we lads? We'll see each other next week

CHRISTY

Thanks Fiona (*Nods at Oonagh before leaving*)

JIMMY

Cheers that was great

DEAN

Thanks. See you

LUKE

Cheers

FIONA

Well done Ryan great to have you in the group. See you next week?

RYAN

Yeah. Thanks

The group leaves the room, but Josh hesitates.

FIONA

You OK Josh?

JOSH

I just wanted to ask you... (*Looks at Oonagh*) It's OK I'll get you next time

FIONA

If you want to hang on?

OONAGH

Are you not on kitchen duty Josh?

JOSH

I am yeah...

OONAGH

(Checking her watch) Well you'd better get a move on so

JOSH

(Nodding) Right so. See you next week *(He rushes out the door)*

FIONA

Sorry Josh I'll talk to you then. *(To Oonagh)* Is it about the pay-claim? I wasn't able to get a staff number, Bernie is on leave

OONAGH

(Correcting) Bronagh. Yes, I know. I saw your post-it. I submitted it to pay-roll anyway and we'll just have to hope for the best. No. I wanted to talk to you about Josh

FIONA

Josh?

OONAGH

Yes. Apparently, he's been acting a bit off

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only.

HR

11.45

Dear Fiona,

Due to the closure of education services for the summer, you will be laid off from 30th June 2019 and will return to work on 26th September 2019. You are not due holiday pay.

If you have any queries, contact the HR section.⁶⁹

HR

FIONA

Off?

OONAGH

(In a whisper) Strange. Odd. Have you noticed anything?

FIONA

I mean I've only had him for the few sessions. He seems like a lovely chap. Sensitive. Very aware

OONAGH

(Doubtfully) Hmmmm. Well, can I ask you to keep an eye on things. The Governor is concerned

FIONA

Certainly. Yes. I mean I won't see him now until next week, but of course

OONAGH

Good good. I've spoken to Conor as well. *(On her way out the door)* You're doing a great job. Everything else OK?

⁶⁹ Verbatim from correspondence with HR of Adult Education services 2013

FIONA

Yes thanks. Oh, I was hoping to do something with images next week. Do we have a projector I could use?

OONAGH

I think so. You'll have to fill out an equipment release form, but you can do that online. Submit it to Susan in the office. Give her plenty of notice

FIONA

Em sure. Well it's not until next week

OONAGH

It shouldn't be a problem if no one else has booked it. Get your request form in pronto that's my advice⁷⁰.

Oonagh leaves the room and Fiona stays tidying up her belongings. Conor puts his head around the door.

CONOR

How'd it go?

FIONA

Good. Intense. Some of the stories...

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only.

HR

11.55

Dear Fiona,

We are not in a position to indicate whether it will be possible to renew your contract in the autumn term. Subject to the needs of the service and the availability of funding, we will contact you if any opportunities arise. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to our students.

HR⁷¹

⁷⁰ Verbatim from conversations requesting access to equipment in adult education centres

⁷¹ Verbatim from correspondence from Adult Education Services 2013

CONOR

Are you alright?

FIONA

I'm not sure. How are you getting on?

CONOR

Ah, I'm here a good while now. It starts to roll off you more. Did Oonagh talk to you about Josh?

FIONA

She did yeah. What's going on there?

CONOR

Hard to know, but enough that he's causing a few red flags to go up inside anyway

FIONA

What should we do about it?

CONOR

Well what can we do? You're here what, once a week? I only have him for History. I'll try and have a chat with him but he's on kitchen duty, so he usually has to leg it

FIONA

(Changing the subject) Here what's this about release forms for the projector?

Stage goes black

ACT TWO

SCENE 6 – WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU?

The Stage lights up and Luke is mopping the floor in the toilets. He stops and sniffs. He continues mopping. He stops and sniffs again before kicking open a door to reveal Josh sitting on a toilet with his legs pulled up smoking a joint and writing on a piece of paper.

LUKE

What the fuck man?

JOSH

Here take it easy

LUKE

(Hissing) Take it easy? Are you fuckin stupid or what? You’ve got fuckin acres and acres here to have a smoke and you’re doing it in the fucking jacks?⁷²

JOSH

It’s bleedin freezing and I’m working on my story

LUKE

I don’t give a fuck! Who do you think they’re going to come looking for if they smell hash in the toilet?

JOSH

(Placating) Take it easy man

LUKE

(Continuing angrily) The fuckin eejit who cleans the place and has a possession charge that’s who!

⁷² Adapted from an unrecorded conversation with a former prisoner

JOSH

Alright alright I'm putting it out

LUKE

(Angrily) Fucking right you are! What's wrong with you man? Acres and acres around the place and you're shitting on your own doorstep.

JOSH

Here take it easy!

LUKE

(Getting wound up) Shitting on my doorstep!

JOSH

(Getting angry) Here bleedin' relax, would you?

LUKE

(Incredulous) Relax? I'll burst you man if I find you in here again

JOSH

Relax man I'm going

Josh walks off stage. Luke goes back to his mopping.

LUKE

(Shaking his head to himself) What's fucking wrong with you?

Stage goes black

ACT TWO

SCENE 7 – CHICKEN BREASTS

Josh has his towel over his shoulder and is heading into the gym to workout. He has stopped to read a plaque on the wall. A prison guard approaches him.

PRISON GUARD

You alright there, Josh?

JOSH

Yeah. I'm just reading this. It says this was the shoe repair shop back when this place was an industrial school

PRISON GUARD

And now it's a gym. You lot don't realise how lucky you have it

JOSH

My Granda was in here, in the workshop

PRISON GUARD

The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree

JOSH

What?

PRISON GUARD

(Ignoring Josh's question) What was his name?

JOSH

Joseph. Joseph Doyle. He was in here in the 70's

PRISON GUARD

My uncle used to do the deliveries back when it was an industrial school

JOSH

Deliveries?

PRISON GUARD

To the kitchen. The meat. What age was your grandad?

JOSH

About 11

PRISON GUARD

The cook, the brother, was a right piece of work apparently. An absolute lunatic. He had this leather strap. The kitchen boys were all terrified of him (*laughs*) and it wasn't just his strap they were afraid of (*laughs again*). You work in the kitchen don't you Josh? I wonder was your Granda one of the kitchen boys. That'd be a coincidence, right? (*Laughs*)

JOSH

(*Nodding thoughtfully and speaking slowly*) Oh yeah. Your family are butchers yeah? Tobin's isn't it? Your brother yeah? I seen the vans coming in...And going out. Do us a favour will you?

PRISON GUARD

I'm not here to do you favours

JOSH

(*Carries on as if he hasn't heard*) Ask your brother why it is that the chickens here have no tits?

PRISON GUARD

What?

JOSH

No tits! Just legs. Legs and wings. Where do all the tits go? You know? Tits. The breasts. Chicken breasts. (*Uses his hands to make breasts on his chest*). (*Looks straight in the prison guard's eyes*) It's the strangest thing. (*looking upwards as if for inspiration*) I can't put my finger on it at all⁷³.

The Guard is speechless. Josh walks away whistling to himself

PRISON GUARD

(After Josh under his breath) Fucking scumbag

Stage goes black.

⁷³ Crafted and adapted from unrecorded conversation with a former prisoner

ACT TWO

SCENE 8 – HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE

Christy is working with pen and paper at the desk in the cell with the lamp on.

CHRISTY

Education will set you free? I always felt trapped. Who were these people? Sir or Mister, Brother or Sister. (*Nodding to himself*) Yeah, I like that. All they gave me was violence and abuse

I started hitting back. Lashing back. The physical seemed to be getting me places. The outcome was still the same. I was going home no matter what.

Fighting seemed to be the thing. I had the name at this stage. Bigger people to prove myself to. (*Angrily*). Of all the lessons I could have taken from school. That's the one I took⁷⁴

Josh enters the cell and throws himself down on the bed. He looks at Christy, rolls his eyes, and rolls into the corner where he pulls the cover up over his head. Christy looks up as if waiting to be challenged. Then goes back to his poem

CHRISTY

Of all the lessons I could have taken from school. That's the one I took. My whole world a goldfish bowl of boxing (*Nodding to himself and scribbling quickly*) Yeah that's good. A goldfish bowl of boxing. I didn't have fear, I never thought consequences, hurt people hurt people (*nodding and writing*)⁷⁵

The screen above Josh's bed starts to flicker as he starts to dream.

CHRISTY

(*Writing and speaking more animatedly*) That's me, that's what I do, All the aggression, the fears, the resentment, The HATE HATE HATE HATE!

Josh stirs in the bed. Christy looks over and pauses before continuing more quietly.

⁷⁴ From transcript poem 'Finding Freedom, Shelton Abbey Prison

⁷⁵ From participant 6 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

CHRISTY

Everyday drinkin', druggin', hungover. Hating the world. Hating myself. Waking up sick.

Josh stirs again and Christ pauses before continuing.

CHRISTY

It was on the cards. It was inevitable. For years and years and years, but I didn't see it.
(*Shaking head sadly*) I didn't see it...

The screen flickers again and we move into Josh's dream as Christy continues working on his poem in the lamplight below.

Stage goes black.

ACT TWO

SCENE 9 – JOSH’S DREAM PART 2

ANIMATION OF JOSH’S DREAM PART 2

Josh is tossing and turning in the bed as the animation runs on the screen above. Christy can still just be made out working on the desk

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN_-----

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

THUMP!

Josh lands on all fours on a freshly mown field. Several pairs of pale legs in sports shorts race past his sprawled body and there is the thunder of feet pounding close to his head.

FRECKLES

(Shouting) Hah Doyler ye feckin’ loser!

A freckly lank of a lad laughs over his shoulder as he sprints past. Josh surveys his surroundings and realises he’s been spat out onto a sports-field mid race. The crows are still there. Two of the hideous beasts are perched on the goal post at the far end of the pitch, looming over the proceedings. Josh struggles quickly to his sneakered feet. At the same time, a plump pasty looking kid overtakes him with a pained expression on his flushed face. The rest of them are approaching the finish, and Josh realises with jolting clarity that if he doesn’t beat Fatty he’ll have more than the crows’ attention to worry about.

Josh pulls his chest over the line with a couple of meters to spare, though his heart is hammering with the effort. He executes what he imagines to be a nonchalant looking stroll over to where Freckles and the others are sniggering and pointing at Fatty, who is doubled over red-faced and gasping. Josh is still deciding how to react when the crows began their ungodly squawking in their direction, and they all bend their heads and file out of the pitch towards an imposing grey building, leaving Fatty straggling behind.

The gym block is like something out of Auschwitz.

Fluorescent tube lighting chatters and flickers psychotically, periodically revealing yellowing tiles around a sunken sloping communal shower area. There are no shower curtains. Everybody starts stripping, throwing their grass and sweat stained kits in a heap in the corner. Josh can feel the panic rising⁷⁶.

'They were going to notice the peck marks'.

Josh scans the room frantically for an out. One of the crows is blocking the doorway they had just come through. The only other exit are fire doors, which have signs on the handles declaring themselves alarmed. Some of the boys have started to shower and Josh notices with relief that they keep on their underpants.

FRECKLES

Aaah lads, Doyler's gone all shy on us. (Cawing tauntingly) What's wrong with ye princess? Afraid we might see what ye haven't got!

The others start laughing. The laughter intensifies, and Josh feels his cheeks flush. He pulls off his kit in one deft movement, kicks off his runners, and slides into the centre of the shower block on his socked feet, Elvis style. Holding his sodden t-shirt in his right hand like a rodeo whip, all eyes are on him as he slaps it with a flourish across Fatty's backside. There is a chorus of mirth from the crowd.

JOSH

(Retorting) Nah, just don't want to get too close to youze homos, particularly Piggy here.

Fatty has pressed himself further into the tiled corner outwardly engrossed in soaping himself, though his shoulders are shuddering, and there is a red mark across the flesh at the top of his chubby thighs. Josh gets a flash of a memory that stabs into his stomach. He spins around and begins lathering himself, whistling the psycho whistle song from Kill Bill. It's impossible to cry when you're whistling.

FRECKLES

(Appreciatively) You're a bad bastard Doyler!

Josh feels a surge of adrenaline coursing through his body that stands his hair on end and makes him feel ten foot tall. He intensifies his whistling in the direction of the doorway where the crow had been, but it is empty.

⁷⁶ Description adapted from interview with XLC participant 1 2015

The soap bubbles are yellowed like the tiles, like the sports socks Josh is still wearing. He watches as the foam swirls around the rusty plughole, and it can't be more than a fraction of a second before his head is the first to start spinning, then his body.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN...

...It is the first time Josh is going down feet-first. Breech. He was in control of this. He was even beginning to enjoy it. He lets out a roar.

'WHOOOOOOOOO!'

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

Josh tenses his limbs, pulling his arms in tight against his sides to increase his speed and falls like a bullet, like an arrow, into the bowels of the sewer, darkness and debris whistling past.

'WHOOOOOOOOOOO!'

The screen goes black.

Josh is jolted to sitting upright in his bed. He takes a minute to survey his surroundings, before lying back down and settling himself.

The stage goes black

ACT THREE
SCENE 10 – THE LUCKY ONES

Christy, Jimmy, Dean, Ryan and Josh are sitting in a circle with Fiona. Luke enters the room looking hassled and throws himself angrily down on a chair.

FIONA

Good to see you all

LUKE

(Clearly upset about something) Alright

FIONA

Will we do a bit of a check in before we get started? So, if you pick a number between 1 and 10 to reflect how you're doing today. 1 being completely shit, and 10 being absolutely brilliant. So, as an example. For myself, I'd say I'm about a 7. I'm not sleeping great, and the heartburn is murder, but I'm really pleased to be here with the group and having some adult time away from the kids. Christy? How about you?

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. The characters on stage carry on as normal.

HR

10.30

Dear Fiona,

I am in a position to clarify that our previous correspondence was not in fact issued in error. I regret to inform you that due to funding restrictions we will not be in a position to renew the fixed term contract.

I would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication and wish you every success in your future career.

HR⁷⁷

CHRISTY

I'm good today. I'd say I'm about a 7 as well. I've got TR this weekend

⁷⁷ Verbatim from correspondence with HR in Adult Education centre 2013

FIONA

TR?

CHRISTY

Temporary release. So, I'm looking forward to that. Seeing the family. I'm enjoying the class as well, so happy to be here. Get my head out of this environment for a few hours⁷⁸

FIONA

Great. Thanks Christy. Dean?

DEAN

What is it? 1 is shit and 10 is good? I'd say I'm about a 5. I've been to the gym so that's good. But Christmas is coming up. This is my third Christmas you know. So that's tough on the kids you know?⁷⁹

FIONA

Thanks Dean. Jimmy?

JIMMY

I'd say I'm about an 8

JOSH & LUKE

(Incredulously) An 8?

JIMMY

I'm happy. I'll be happier on the outside, but I'm happy today.

CHRISTY

That's very fucking philosophical! You reading the Secret or something? *(Laughs)*

⁷⁸ Focus group 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

⁷⁹ Participant 1 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

JIMMY

(Laughs good-naturedly) It's true though isn't it? Put your head down. You have to work to get through it. Do you know? Life can be hard, life can be easy it's all about how you choose it, you know? That's how I am today anyway. Could be a different fucking story tomorrow
*(laughs)*⁸⁰

FIONA

Thanks Jimmy. Luke?

LUKE

Two. I don't feel like talking today. Nothing personal. Is that alright?

FIONA

Of course, it is. Thanks Luke. Josh?

JOSH

Yeah, I'm happy. There's a lot you can be happy for. You'll never be a hundred percent happy like. But you can make the best of a bad situation, you can learn from it. You can grow. Don't be so caught up in life. Just let go⁸¹

LUKE

(Shaking his head to himself) What the fuck are you saying?

JOSH

(Doesn't hear Luke or is ignoring him) Let go and like be happy. As long as you're healthy. There's a lot of diseases coming. There's a lot of cancer on the rise. So just be happy that you're not one of them like⁸²

LUKE

(Continues shaking head, speaks under his breath) What the fuck are you talking about?

⁸⁰ Participant 5 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁸¹ Participant 2 interview XLc Waterford 2015

⁸² Participant 2 interview XLc Waterford 2015

FIONA

So, lads I got my hands on the projector and I wanted to show you a couple of images. They're a bit disturbing. But I wanted to get your take on them and see where things go from there if that's alright with you? So, this is from a Barnardo's campaign

DEAN

That's the kids' charity yeah?

FIONA

Yes. This is one of a series of images they used

An image of a prison cell appears above the stage. There is a large, tattooed man in the top bunk and a small boy in the bottom.



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DEAN

Ah that's fucked up that is

FIONA

It is fucked up. And what do you think it's trying to say

⁸³ Award winning Barnardos Advertising Campaign 2006

CHRISTY

It's saying if you don't look after kids, they'll end up in prison. Like in the schools. Pushing them to one side, the troubled ones, instead of helping them. Instead of 'hold on, we'll help Peter here, cos he wants to learn, so let's give him more attention', and 'don't mind Ryan sitting over there, he's just messing'⁸⁴

JIMMY

(Nodding) Then rather than being in school, being on the street and getting picked up. I ended up then going to court for not attending school. I picked up a few charges then for stupid things. Shoplifting around the town, taking bikes that weren't locked on to poles and things like that. And the judge sent me to Clonmel then for four years from when I was 12. A little college for crime. When I left, I couldn't read or write⁸⁵

JOSH

Same as myself. I was in care for pretty much all my teenage life like. They did their best to give the children an education, but obviously...

RYAN

When you're in that frame of mind and when you're in them type of places, education is the last thing on your mind!⁸⁶

JOSH

(Nodding) You're only trying to think like, when am I going to be out of here. I mean I feel like that picture could be me. I think I got lost. Going from Primary. Basically, a fucking day-care. Out into the world. Into like the deep ocean⁸⁷

The stage goes dark except for a spotlight on Josh who moves to centre stage. As he speaks a series of images appear on the projector of Ballydowd care unit and newspaper headlines on the unit over a period of 10 years.

JOSH

Going from primary school. To this big warehouse. 1 teacher to like 30 students. Hundreds upon hundreds. Sheep. All following the herd. Trying to find themselves. On their fucking

⁸⁴ From transcript poem 'The troubled ones' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁸⁵ From transcript poem 'A bold child' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

⁸⁶ Participant 2 interview XLC Waterford 2015

⁸⁷ From transcript poem 'A mistake on a page' XLC Waterford 2016

smart phones. All these fucking selfies. When they don't even know themselves. If you're vulnerable in any way. You're going to have a hard time

Young lads. They want to impress each other. Everybody wants to be the top man. Think they're gangsters. Until it comes to the point. When the fun's over

I'd have been pretty wiry like. I was going to say fast, but that doesn't mean anything. Just you know...Wiry

A lot of built-up anger. A few issues underlying. Nobody knew

It wasn't a punishment. It was more of an assessment. My behaviour wasn't right, for a lad my age like. I had to be contained, do you know to...Eh...Stabilise me⁸⁸

Newspaper headlines and images appear on the screen above Josh's head as he speaks.

Children in care unit forced to urinate on floor - HIQA report⁸⁹

JOSH

It's called a special care unit. But there's fences and locked doors and cameras. Hatches on the wall. The whole 9 yards. I was in with armed robbers. There would have been murderers.

Lads my age smoking heroin. A lot of cases of like...child abuse

HSA review into special care unit prompted by staff injuries⁹⁰

JOSH

They have these meetings. They hold you there. Indefinitely. On one of their orders. High Court orders. The highest of the highest

Boy accused of attacking care centre staff granted bail after going missing⁹¹

⁸⁸ From transcript poem 'A mistake on a page' XLC Waterford 2016

⁸⁹ O'Brien, C. (2015). 'Children in special care unit forced to urinate on floor - Hiqa concern over use of safe rooms and 'single separation' to manage behaviour'. *The Irish Times*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/children-in-special-care-unit-forced-to-urinate-on-floor-1.2334987> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

⁹⁰ Baker, N. (2018). 'HSA review into special care unit prompted by staff injuries'. *Irish Examiner*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20465303.html> (Accessed 9th October, 2020).

⁹¹ Online Editors. (2016). 'Teenager accused of attacking care centre staff granted bail after going missing for weeks'. *Independent*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/courts/teenager-accused-of-attacking-care-centre-staff-granted-bail-after-going-missing-for-weeks-34988718.html> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

JOSH

It does something to you. When you're young. In them sort of places

THE DIRECTOR of a special care unit for troubled children turned a high-powered firehose on a teenage girl after she refused to get out of bed⁹²

JOSH

You carry it with you. Stuff they label you with. Always there, In the back of your mind

Care unit staff forced to rely on gardaí to help manage safety⁹³

JOSH

It still haunts me

Children in special care centre 'living in a youth prison'⁹⁴

JOSH

Every other teen. You'd be at home. Learning new things. Out there having fun. Going home to their families⁹⁵

Teens being 'criminalised' while in care of the State⁹⁶

⁹² O'Brien, C. (2010). 'Director of care unit turned firehose on teenage girl'. *The Irish Times*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/director-of-care-unit-turned-firehose-on-teenage-girl-1.621892> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

⁹³ Edwards, E. (2016). 'Care unit staff forced to rely on gardaí to help manage safety - Hiqa finds risk over approach to allegations against staff at Ballydowd facility for children'. *The Irish Times*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/care-unit-staff-forced-to-rely-on-garda%C3%AD-to-help-manage-safety-1.2878121> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

⁹⁴ Baker, N. (2018). 'Children in special care residential centre 'living in a youth prison''. *Irish Examiner*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30885485.html> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

⁹⁵ From transcript poem 'A mistake on a page' XLC Waterford 2016

⁹⁶ Hough, J. (2016). 'Teens being 'criminalised' while in care of the State'. *Irish Examiner*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-20385910.html> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

JOSH

I missed out on that. Social anxiety comes with that then. Because you haven't had time to develop. You get this stigma. You carry it with you. Paranoid. Stuff like that. Then you think...

Director of unit for troubled teens to face assault charge⁹⁷

JOSH

Why me? Like why me? Why the fuck was I even put here in the first place? I think you're given that life, from the day you're born. That was the book I was given.

But we're not here for very long. I don't have plans. But I've got a feeling. I've a good feeling.

There has to be something good, at the end of all this. Cos if there's not. I just feel like. What's the point?⁹⁸

The lights come on and Josh moves back to his seat to a round of applause.

RYAN

What was your word man?

DEAN

Care? Was it?

JOSH

Nah shit. I forgot the word that kicked the whole thing off

Josh takes a piece of paper crumpled up in his pocket and reads it out

⁹⁷ Smyth, J. (2010). 'Director of unit for troubled teens to face assault charge'. *The Irish Times*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/director-of-unit-for-troubled-teens-to-face-assault-charge-1.645016> (Accessed 9th October 2020).

⁹⁸ From transcript poem 'A mistake on a page' XLC Waterford 2016

JOSH

(Looking around at the group) You know if you make a mistake on a piece of paper? You can rip it up and start again?

Some of the group nod

JOSH

I'd fucking love to do that with my life⁹⁹

Josh folds up the paper back in his pocket

JOSH

Mistake. My word was mistake

FIONA

Thankyou Josh. That was just powerful. Thank you for sharing that with us. And Ryan, you mentioned 'care'?

RYAN

Yeah. That's what he was taking about yeah? Care?

FIONA

Would that have been similar to your experience?

RYAN

It would yeah. Sure, I was in the same place!

FIONA

Oh my God, were you?

⁹⁹ From participant 2 interview XLc Waterford 2015

RYAN

Ah I was in loads yeah. I was in foster care since I was one. Then I got bleeding put in Grove Lodge¹⁰⁰. My social worker...(sarcastically) a Guardian of Light¹⁰¹

FIONA

A guardian of light?

RYAN

Yeah that's what the top social workers are called yeah. He suggested it was better 'cos you keep your room'. Trust me whoever ends up with him is fucked! 'It's not that far' he said 'read this, sign that'. I'm signing contracts that thick since I'm 8 or 9. I've had 24 different social workers. That's what care is like¹⁰²

The stage goes dark and Ryan moves to the centre of the stage where images of St Ita's Portrane are shown on the projector interspersed with facts on Grove Lodge residential children's care home.

RYAN

Away from everywhere. Huge big red-brick building. Grey granite columns above the cliffs. Even on a bright day it's all fog¹⁰³

Grove House, a 10-bed facility for boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17, was opened last January 2009 on the grounds of St Ita's psychiatric hospital in Portrane¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ From participant 2 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹⁰¹ Guardian ad litem – definition – (guardian at law) is an independent professional person who is appointed to represent the wishes and interests of a child in specified Court proceedings

¹⁰² From participant 2 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹⁰³ From transcript poem 'In care of the state' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹⁰⁴ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. *The Irish Times*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/residents-seek-relocation-of-centre-for-teenage-homeless-1.693572?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fresidents-seek-relocation-of-centre-for-teenage-homeless-1.693572> (Accessed 9th October 2020).



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RYAN

You can barely see the water. Grey sand, grey everything. It was the year we got the snow.
The bus one day once a week. Some oul' crazy doing mad things at the back. 3 hours up and
3 hours back to YouthReach



The centre has security cameras, with fencing around the perimeter and an intercom
system at the entrance gate¹⁰⁶

RYAN

The minute you walk in, aaaah no. I've made a mistake. It was like a prison with the corridor
system. The same windows, Plexiglas with the grates, a TV room, couple of manky couches,
television on the wall, two or three stations, signs everywhere for this and that. Big bright
lights that never turned off

A room like a cell. White walls, no shelves no wardrobe. The bed a big box, that fits them
blue prison mattresses. Out from the wall like an island¹⁰⁷



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¹⁰⁵ Images of St Ita's Portrane by Obscuraprint

¹⁰⁶ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

¹⁰⁷ From transcript poem 'In care of the state' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹⁰⁸ Images of St Ita's Portrane by Obscuraprint

The staff of Grove Lodge are doing an excellent job trying to care for these out-of-the-home teenagers, with limited resources and in an unsuitable location¹⁰⁹

RYAN

They'd wake you up at 5 o'clock. Open and check you're there. Wake you up then slam your door. First couple of nights they didn't have sheets. I was just on the mattress

Anti-social behaviour is challenged by management and staff and leads to sanctions being imposed on the young people

RYAN

You'd get into fights. They'd have to restrain you. One day the big fella comes over. I swung at him. He swung at me. The staff broke it up. Later my room door's hanging open. My room's trashed. A load of stuff missing. Personal stuff. The only picture of me out' fella...



I took a kid under my wing. They'd these doors on landings. That just close and that get locked. They used to just lock him in between there. Until he'd calm down. He was only 11 or 12. I stood up for him¹¹⁰



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These sanctions may include the withdrawal of privileges, pocket money or participation in activities, and may lead to the ultimate sanction of the young person losing their placement depending on the extent and context of their misdemeanours¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

¹¹⁰ From transcript poem 'In care of the state' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹¹¹ Images of St Ita's Portrane by Obscuraprint

¹¹² O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

RYAN

If you were out with your friends. They'd ring the Garda station. 'He's missing he's in care of the state'. Back to the station, give you a hidin'

RESIDENTS IN north Co Dublin have called on health authorities to relocate the centre for homeless teenagers after what they say is a marked increase in violent and threatening behaviour¹¹³

RYAN

If you've no way home. You're supposed to present yourself. 'I'm in care of the state'.
(Loudly) 'Fuck off we're not a taxi service, you've two legs, don't you?'

Community council says it is concerned about "threatening behaviour" aimed at elderly psychiatric patients, as well as an increase in vandalism and violence

RYAN

(Shaking head) I never touched drugs 'til I got to that house. Then one day (*grabs with his hand*) 'give me that'

Continuing problems being experienced by residents of Portrane and Donabate due to the unacceptable behaviour of some of the residents, particularly in the early hours of the morning¹¹⁴

RYAN

I came back in bits. Like I was dying. (*Clutching his chest*). Called the staff panting. (*Panting and shouting urgently*) Call an ambulance! (*Mimics staff*) 'I'll look up what's wrong with you'. (*Bangs fist into palm*) BOOM! I drop onto the floor. Head banged off a mate's door. He looks at me, he looks at them, takes out his phone...

They defibrillate me on the floor

In care of the state

That's what care is like

A mad place

(*Emphatically*) I mean MAD

¹¹³ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

¹¹⁴ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

A mad house
It got closed down¹¹⁵

CONTROVERSIAL children's' residential centre in Portrane could be closed within a year, following a review of its operations.¹¹⁶

The lights go back on and Ryan takes his seat in the group to a round of applause. Josh is clearly agitated and has started pacing the room

FIONA
Are you OK Josh?

JOSH
It's just wrong. I think it's wrong

RYAN
I suppose they have to put you somewhere

JOSH
But like the care unit. You don't know WHEN you're getting out. You don't know IF you're getting out. It's basically a juvenile prison but they hold you there indefinitely. It's worse than prison¹¹⁷

RYAN
Ah yeah it was a kip yeah

JOSH
And locked up with all the crazies. In a fucking mental asylum! A care home?

¹¹⁵ From transcript poem 'In care of the state' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹¹⁶ O'Brien, C. (2009). 'Residents seek relocation of centre for teenage homeless'. The Irish Times. [Online]

¹¹⁷ From interview transcript with participant 2 in XLC Waterford 2015

RYAN

It's not like a care home, it's more like a hostel for children

JOSH

I understand they've to do something with you, but it is very extreme like. That's a bit extreme in my eyes ¹¹⁸(*He looks around the room looking for affirmation*). And there's my Granda locked up in here...

LUKE

(*Rolls his eyes*) Here we go

JOSH

(*Addressing Dean*) When he was a kid of 11 years of age! Locked up with psycho priests! And what's changed man?

RYAN

Ireland is a backwards country. It's like 10 years behind every other country. I don't think in our lifetime anything's going to change¹¹⁹

JIMMY

Nothing's going to change. In Ireland's eyes, everything's perfect now. Everything's going smoothly or whatever¹²⁰

CHRISTY

So, they say anyway. No, nothing's going to change. It would have changed by now. Like fair enough the economy's grown a bit but there's still no help like or anything¹²¹

DEAN

(*Getting impatient*) But you just get on with it. What are you going to do? Sit in a corner with your head between your legs and sulk? You just get on with it¹²²

¹¹⁸ From interview transcript with participant 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹¹⁹ Interview with participant 2 from XLc Waterford 2015

¹²⁰ Focus group XLc Waterford 2015

¹²¹ Interview with participant 2 from XLc Waterford

¹²² Interview with participant 5 from Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

Josh moves back to his chair

JIMMY

It's true. You can come into prison and do nothing and feel sorry for yourself and do nothing, and you'll end up with nothing¹²³

CHRISTY

We're the lucky ones. You can see the lads who don't go to school, hanging around the landings doing drugs, fighting¹²⁴

RYAN

Or the landing cleaners. They just get up, sweep and mop the floor and then go to bed for the day. I'm not wasting my time in prison. Get myself qualifications. Things I can use¹²⁵

JIMMY

I have a load of certs now, and I'd be as proud as punch of them like. Showing the kids and everything¹²⁶

LUKE

It helps. And to get through the time. Keep yourself busy. Cos if you didn't, you'd be bored out of your head

DEAN

I love it. I just love learning. I actually feel myself getting smarter. I feel like my eyes are only opening you know. The difference that was in plain sight, how did I not know that? I used to say 'what's the point' but now you see the point. It's better for yourself. You feel better. You think more positive. Everything's not all negative. You're studying to achieve something. Before that, you're not doing anything and before you know it you're 40 or 50 and you're nothing¹²⁷

¹²³ Interview with participant 5 from Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹²⁴ Focus group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹²⁵ Interview with participant 2 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹²⁶ Focus group 3 Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

¹²⁷ Interview with Shelton Abbey Prison participant 1 2016

CHRISTY

I know I'm one of the lucky ones. Over the years of coming to school it's given me back a bit of respect for myself. You know I can only give back what I feel myself. I do respect the teachers, and sometimes it's hard to say it, but even some of the staff I respect¹²⁸

DEAN

Ah now I wouldn't go that far (*laughs*)

JIMMY

There's a good buzz around the school

CHRISTY

(*Agreeing*) That's it. A good energy, a good vibe. You don't get that in the rest of the jail¹²⁹

FIONA

Fellas we're coming to the end of our time. Just to say thank you so much for today. The stories are powerful. I really mean that. I wanted to ask you to try and think of a way we could collect them...you know...capture them. (*She gets to her feet*)

The group gets to their feet and forms a circle. Fiona starts counting as they shake out their limbs

FIONA

(*shaking arm*)...left arm, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8

RYAN

(*Copying Fiona*) What like a book?

FIONA

(*Shaking right leg*)...right leg, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, Yeah, or a recording...

¹²⁸ Interview with Shelton Abbey Prison participant 6 2015

¹²⁹ Focus group 1 Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

DEAN

(Interested) Do you think people would be interested?

FIONA

(Shaking arm)...right arm, 1,2,3,4, I do, yeah

CHRISTY

(Excited) You'd have to change the details, though right?

FIONA

(Shaking arms and legs) 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2 Absolutely

JIMMY

(Thoughtfully) Anonymise it yeah?

FIONA

(Shaking arms and legs energetically) 1,1,1,1 and shake it off. Shake, shake, shake, shake.
Yes absolutely, anonymise everything. But it could be good yeah?

Christy and Jimmy start to put the chairs back in the traditional school layout behind desks

LUKE

We're finished yeah?

FIONA

Of course, Luke. See you next week

RYAN

See ya

FIONA

Thanks Ryan

DEAN

Thanks. See you next week

JIMMY

That OK?

FIONA

Thanks Jimmy you're a star. See you next week

CHRISTY

Have you got a minute?

FIONA

Of course

CHRISTY

(Shyly hands over a piece of paper) Would you have a look at this and see what you think?

FIONA

Absolutely

CHRISTY

It's not finished. But I wouldn't mind knowing if it's any good

FIONA

Of course. Do you have time to go through it now?

CHRISTY

Nah next week is good. Like I said it's not finished yet

FIONA

I'd love to. Thanks. Leave it with me and we'll make some space to discuss it next week

Christy leaves the room and Josh approaches Fiona

FIONA

Hey Josh, everything OK? Thank you for sharing your story with us. Are you alright after that? That's some experience you went through

JOSH

Ah yeah. I mean it's like always there in the back of your mind. It can affect your life like but we're not here for very long are we? So that stupid shit from when I was younger is only a tiny portion you know¹³⁰

FIONA

Well it's fascinating stuff, but it must be painful to revisit it

JOSH

It's helping me cos I'm trying to find out who I really am. I'm on a spiritual journey if you want to call it that. Cos we're all only multidimensional beings, aren't we? I'm just trying to figure out what I am in life. What my purpose is¹³¹

FIONA

I suppose that's what we're all doing

JOSH

Well there'd be a few like that but when I mention this sort of thing to so called 'normal people', they look at you like, 'what the fuck is he on about'? Cos they're all asleep. They're

¹³⁰ Interview with participant 2 from XLc Waterford 2015

¹³¹ Interview with XLc participant 2 2015

asleep! Their fucking head is too far up their own arses. They're caught up in a system. They're like sheep. All following the herd. I think it's hilarious. To be honest¹³²

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. The characters on stage carry on as normal.

DSP

11.45

Dear Fiona,

I am writing to you about your claim for Jobseekers Allowance. To qualify for this scheme, you must meet certain conditions:

You must be free to take up full time work

You must be making real efforts to find work

Please complete the attached form within 14 days.

The Department of Social Protection¹³³

FIONA

What's hilarious?

JOSH

Well like we're all atoms. You know that don't you? These walls aren't here. Do you ever hear of the pineal gland in your brain? When that starts to open up. You know how fluoride calcifies it? I think it's decalcifying it, as that opens up more and more you can see the grey in things rather than just the black and white¹³⁴

FIONA

(Confused) Right...

JOSH

(Speaking increasingly fast) You can use others negative energy to have a better outcome for yourself. You can use that to your advantage. You can learn from it and THANK God you're not like that yourself!¹³⁵

Josh pulls out his Nokia from his pocket

¹³² From transcript from interview with participant 2 from XLC Waterford 2015

¹³³ Verbatim from correspondence from the Department of Social Protection 2013

¹³⁴ Interview with XLC participant 2 2015

¹³⁵ Interview with XLC participant 2 2015

JOSH

Shit. I've to go. (*Very elated*) You could talk about all that pineal gland sort of shit for fucking days and days and days without coming to a sort of conclusion. It's just amazing stuff like. I better leg it. Thanks Fiona. See you next week yeah?

FIONA

Thanks Josh. (*Worried*) Hey Josh, is there anyone you can talk to in there about this stuff?

JOSH

There'd be... it's hard to say. There wouldn't be a lot of people who'd have the same opinion as me. They're fucking braindead you know? Uneducated people. Sheep! (*Laughs*) All these selfies. All that fucking bollox¹³⁶

FIONA

And what about a counsellor or a chaplain?

JOSH

(*Laughs*) Are you shitting me? Tell them nothing. NOTHING

Conor pokes his head in the door

CONOR

Hey, sorry, didn't mean to interrupt...

JOSH

Hey Conor. Here have you got any more films like the one you showed us there? That was good that was

CONOR

Did you like that yeah? I wasn't sure cos we haven't seen you for a while in the class

¹³⁶ Interview with participant 2 from XLc Waterford 2015

JOSH

Ah something came up, sorry about that. I'll be in this week though

CONOR

Anything I can help you with?

JOSH

What? *(Laughs)* Ah no man. Thanks. It's all sorted. See you on Thursday yeah?

CONOR

See you Josh

Josh leaves and Conor and Fiona look at each other

CONOR

What do you reckon? *(He closes the door)*

FIONA

I'd be worried

CONOR

Did he say anything?

FIONA

It's not so much what he's saying, or not saying, I mean he was talking about the pineal gland...

CONOR

(Confused) Ok...

FIONA

He just seems a bit unstable, I mean I'm not qualified or anything, but from what I've learned about his past in this class, that seems to be his background... Shit! Is that breaking confidentiality?

CONOR

What? No. It's not like we're gossiping. This is out of concern

FIONA

Just I'm supposed to be holding this safe space where they can explore their stories, so if I'm discussing that outside of the space...

CONOR

Yeah sure, but it's coming from a place of concern, and in fairness he's setting off alarm bells all over the place! Plus, they're going to know most of that stuff from his record

FIONA

(Nodding) Here, do you know what's going on with Luke?

CONOR

No, he was grand the last...

Oonagh pokes her head around the door

OONAGH

Oh good you're both here. *(To Fiona)* How did that go?

FIONA

Well the class was great, but I was saying to Conor, I'm a bit concerned about Josh

OONAGH

Ok?

FIONA

I mean I'm not qualified or anything, but he seems a little eh unstable to me

OONAGH

Did something happen in the class?

FIONA

No, nothing in particular, I mean he always participates and is polite, but he seems to be getting quite agitated. Though in fairness, some of the stories are quite upsetting so...

OONAGH

In what way upsetting?

FIONA

Well, the guys are writing about experiences in their lives, so of course that's highlighting issues of social injustice and inequality and...

OONAGH

That certainly sounds like a recipe for disaster

FIONA

Excuse me?

OONAGH

I have a motto when I'm teaching, and that is that we leave our problems at the door when we step into the classroom

CONOR

But part of our jobs as adult educators is to draw and build on the knowledge that's in the room

OONAGH

In relation to our subjects. Not if it's going to trigger a mental breakdown in our students.
We're not counsellors or psychiatrists, we're teachers

FIONA

Are you saying that this class is responsible for a decline in Josh's mental health?

OONAGH

There's no need to get defensive Fiona. You're doing a great job. But I'm saying that, particularly given the environment, it might be better to avoid subjects which might 'upset' the learners. Your word not mine

CONOR

I think in fairness, Josh's issues were coming up long before he started Fiona's class. I mean this all came up because of his grandad having been here when it was an industrial school.
(*Sarcastically*) Maybe I shouldn't have covered industrial schools in class

OONAGH

Maybe not

CONOR

I was being...

OONAGH

(*Holds up a hand to stop him*) I'm not here to apportion blame. If that was the case, maybe I should have had a tighter rein over the content being covered in class, I'm here to discuss a solution. What are we to do about Josh? It does not sound to me as though he is well enough to be participating on courses at the minute, would that be a fair assessment?

FIONA

So what? You're proposing to suspend him?

OONAGH

I don't see that we have much alternative Fiona. It's only a matter of time before it has a knock-on effect on the others if it hasn't already. Did I overhear you say there was something going on with Luke?

FIONA

Eh...well yes, I was saying to Conor, he did appear 'off' today

OONAGH

Did he become (*uses fingers as quotation marks*) upset, during the class

FIONA

No. Luke has been enjoying the class. As have the others

OONAGH

Fiona, this is not an attack on you personally. Nobody is questioning your professional ability, but this is a unique environment and at the moment it is clear that we have participants, who for whatever reason, are unsettled

FIONA

I'm just not sure that removing Josh from the class is the answer. The class seems to be one place where he can express what's going on for him

OONAGH

But at what price? Today it's Luke who's off, who is it going to be next week?

CONOR

Well we don't know if the two are connected...

OONAGH

I think I'll sit in on the class next week. If you don't want to suspend him, I think that's the best course of action for now

Conor and Fiona look at each other

Oonagh looks up at the image of the child in the prison bunk from the Barnardo's campaign looks at Fiona and Conor and shakes her head as she walks out of the room.

Stage goes black.

ACT THREE

SCENE 11 – OR WHAT?

Josh is sitting on the toilet, with his feet pulled up smoking a joint. Luke enters with his mop and bucket. Josh puts out the joint and freezes. Luke puts the mop slowly back in the bucket and approaches the toilet door quietly, listening. Luke mops the floor quickly and then pretends to leave the toilet. He stands around the corner, waiting. Josh listens for a while, then slowly lets himself out of the toilet. Luke pounces on him and pinning Josh up against the wall.

LUKE

What the fuck man? I told you! I fucking told you!

Josh pulls out a blade and in a quick scuffle it is Luke who is pinned up against the wall as Josh holds the blade against his face.

JOSH

(Shouting) Or what? Or fucking what?

Josh shoves Luke away from him, knocking over the mop and bucket, putting the blade back into his sock.

JOSH

(Over his shoulder) Fuck off

Josh walks out of the toilets, leaving Luke to pick up the mop and bucket.

Stage goes black.

ACT THREE

SCENE 12 – EDUCATION SET ME FREE

The stage lights up with a spotlight on Christy who is sitting at the desk alone in the cell writing.

CHRISTY

(Reading his words back to himself). This life sentence is going to kill me. I took another human life. *(He scratches out the previous sentence).* This life sentence is going to kill me. It's something I'll carry 'til the day I die¹³⁷. *(He scratches out the previous sentence)* This life sentence is going to kill me. The sentence was murder. *(He scratches out the previous sentence).*

This life sentence is going to kill me. This life sentence is going to kill me. Hanging around the landings. Doing drugs. Doing what I do well. Fighting¹³⁸

I started going to school it was different. *(Animated now)* There's a good buzz, a good energy, a good vibe. A different click. A camaraderie in the classroom

We were adults. But yet we were like kids. Getting to know people. Other people who are struggling. And the interest grew

This is brilliant! Being able to pick up a newspaper or write a letter. little conversations about worldly affairs, got my head out of this environment.... for a few hours

The screws started to know me. More of the staff were saying hello. *(Proudly)* Respect me cos I go to school.

There's days when I really feel it you know. That education set me free.

Education set me free

The stage goes black.

¹³⁷ Participant 6 interview Shelton Abbey Prison 2015

¹³⁸ From transcript poem 'Finding Freedom' Shelton Abbey Prison 2016

ACT THREE

SCENE 13 – WHAT HAVE WE HERE?

The stage lights up in Luke's cell, although it is not yet clear who it is. Luke is lying in bed, but the blanket is pulled up over his head and there is a glow from a smart phone half visible under the blanket. Luke is having phone sex with his girlfriend.

LUKE

Oh yeah baby. You're so hot. You know that yeah?

The blanket starts pulsating up and down and it is clear that Luke is masturbating

LUKE

That's it baby. Oh yeah baby

There is the noise of prison guards outside the cell and lights outside the cell are turned on. Luke turns off the phone tucking it under his mattress and rolls over pretending to be asleep. Two prison guards appear at the door of the cell and there is the sound of keys as Luke's door is opened.

PRISON GUARD 1

Inmate Kelly out of your cell

LUKE

What's going on?

PRISON GUARD 2

Out of your cell. Now!

Luke gets out of bed and goes over to stand where the guards have come in. The guards proceed to tear down pictures from the walls and turn over every piece of furniture violently. It is not long before they find the phone. Prison guard 1 picks up the phone and holds it up for Luke and prison guard 2.

PRISON GUARD 1

Well, well, well, what have we here?

Luke looks down at the floor.

The stage goes black.

ACT THREE

SCENE 14- JOSH'S DREAM PART 3

Josh comes into the cell and throws himself down on the bed. Christy looks over at him and is about to say something then changes his mind. He puts away his work slowly and turns off the light. Christy begins making preparations for bed. Josh starts tossing in the bed and the screen above the cell flickers to life as he starts dreaming

ANIMATION OF JOSH'S DREAM PART 3

Josh is tossing and turning in the bed as the animation runs on the screen above.

Josh is falling down a dark tunnel feet first. He tenses his limbs, pulling his arms in tight against his sides to increase his speed and falls like a bullet, like an arrow, into the bowels of the sewer, darkness and debris whistling past.

'WHOOOOOOOOOOO!'

DOWN

DOWN

*DOWN*_____

_____*I wonder how far I've fallen.*

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN.

He uses his hands for balance and begins to brace himself for the landing. There was no way he was going to be caught on his knees in front of anyone. Not this time.

DOWN

DOWN

DOWN

THUD!

Josh lands with his feet planted firmly on the ground but is propelled forward at such speed that his legs have to rotate like windmills to keep up with the momentum of his upper body.

It is dark, and the sky burns orange as Josh and two other youths all wearing hoodies tear across a concrete plain of wasteland. Their feet crunch on gravel and broken glass, manoeuvring over and around endless boxes, rubbish, broken pipes and barbed wire. They fling themselves onto the chain link fence at the end of the stretch, grabbing hold of the metal links with their fingers and scrabbling with their feet, until they are able to haul themselves

over the bars and clang down to the other side. They turn to look back at the school and to catch their breath.

The building looks like the venue of some crazy rock concert, every window brilliantly lit up, pulsating in an aura of orange flames. The first wail of a siren can be heard, and Josh pulls his hood tighter around his face instinctively. The next thing he is howling manically with the others like pack-wolves or hyenas. Wild and feral, and violently alive. Josh picks up a metal rod, about the length of a hurley¹³⁹, and they set off across a housing estate.

The Polish man doesn't stand a chance. The first blow from the bar makes a strong, cracking contact with his jaw. He lets out a shrill primitive shriek and Josh and the others steam in, swinging and kicking, relishing the fear that fills his eyes.

The scream of police sirens fills the air, and the three leave the man on the ground and tear down the street whooping.

Josh starts scanning the telephone wires for crows as they run, but it is the toads that come out at night. They catch up with the three as they are scaling a wall into one of the back yards of the estate. There is a swarm of them. One moment they are miles away, and the next, they are metres, and with the next bound of their reptilian hind legs they descend on the youths. A flick of the tongue and a clamp of the jaw, and Josh is plucked from the brick face. The toads squirt them with their noxious toxin that has them foaming and retching.

Josh starts drifting...

DOWN...

DOWN...

DOWN...

Josh wakes with his face stuck to a blue plastic mattress. His head feels dull and cloudy and every muscle and bone aches. The room is grey concrete, bare, except for a metal toilet, and someone has scratched into the wall with black biro...

We all start with innocence

Even the toads and the crows?

The metal door has been left open.

There are some girls with the toads, trading for beer and cigarettes. The air reeks with forced joviality. Josh can get a good look at one, who is gorgeous. She couldn't be more than fourteen. Dark red hair and a beautiful twisted pout to her lips. She is sitting on one of the toad's laps, necking a can. For a second, she looks directly at Josh, her eyes filled with unease. Then she turns as if she hasn't seen him and goes back to downing the can. A forked tongue darts out of a bulbous toad head and flickers inside the waistband of her leggings.

Josh's stomach heaves involuntarily and he hauls himself across the plastic until his face is staring down the barrel of the metal toilet bowl. As he pulls on the flusher there is a shrill

¹³⁹ A hurley or hurl or hurling stick is a wooden stick used in the Irish sports of hurling and camogie.

whooshing sound, like the noise the toilet makes in an airplane only louder, and he is in free fall again, except this time he isn't falling, he is floating.

He looks so much younger from above. So much smaller and thinner. His legs are pulled into his stomach in foetal position, and his shaved head rests, eyes closed on the metal toilet.

...then he is flying. Flying or moving at cosmic speed. A ball of fire and energy, a comet, racing through time and space. Then he is back

Josh sits up in the bed.

The screen and the stage go black.

ACT THREE

SCENE 15 – THE CROWS ARE HERE

The stage lights come back on and Josh is sitting bolt upright in the bunk panting. Christy is still asleep in the bunk below. There is jangle of keys and a shadow of a giant crow head can be seen through the bars. Josh swings his legs over the side of the bunk and takes his blade out of his sock. He crouches down in the corner behind the desk. Christy starts to stir.

CHRISTY

What the fuck? Josh?

JOSH

The crows man. They're here. They're fucking coming

Christy sits up in the bunk. The shadow of the crow's head has got bigger

CHRISTY

(Hissing) Go back to sleep. You're dreaming

JOSH

(Shouting) They're fucking coming! It's for real. The fucking crows!

CHRISTY

(Hissing urgently) Shut the fuck up! You're losing it. You're hallucinating or whatever

JOSH

(Whimpering and rocking behind the desk) They're fucking coming man. They're fucking here

There is the noise of prison guards shouting, keys jangling and the lights outside the cell come on

CHRISTY

(Annoyed) Yeah, they're fucking coming alright. You're on your own you fucking eejit

Josh continues whimpering and rocking in the corner of the cell as the noises outside the cell increases. The shadow of the crow continues to get larger. The cell door is swung open and Josh launches himself lashing out with his knife as the lights flash on and off in a strobe effect. Officers appear in riot gear and Josh is carted from the cell and we become aware that a prison officer has been stabbed.

The stage goes black.

ACT THREE

SCENE 16 – HEALTH AND SAFETY

Oonagh is standing with the governor of the prison and a prison guard in the classroom.

OONAGH

No, I absolutely agree. I have a motto that when you come into the classroom you leave your lives at the...Fiona...I'm not sure you've met Governor O'Leary

Fiona enters the room in her jacket with her bags looking visibly upset. The governor holds out his hand.

GOVERNOR

Ray

FIONA

(Taking his hand) Fiona. No, we haven't met. Pleased to meet you

GOVERNOR

I'm sorry it's under these circumstances Fiona

FIONA

Yes. It's awful. I'm in shock. How is the guard?

GOVERNOR

Tobin. It's not life threatening but his face is in a bad way

FIONA

My God. And Josh?

GOVERNOR

Inmate Doyle has been transferred to a secure unit pending a full inquiry, which I trust you will be able to help us with Fiona?

FIONA

Of course. Anything to help

GOVERNOR

I gather the content covered in your class was quite...intimate?

FIONA

Eh...it was life experience, school experience, that kind of thing...

GOVERNOR

Mmmm. (*Looking at Oonagh*) And what were you teaching again?

OONAGH

(*Taking over*) Creative writing

GOVERNOR

Accredited?

OONAGH

(*Shaking her head pointedly*) No

GOVERNOR

Mmmm

OONAGH

Fiona hasn't been with us long Governor, but she's been doing a great job

GOVERNOR

Well maybe she could take control of the theory element to the forklifting. (*Turning back to Fiona*) I don't know if Oonagh spoke to you about this already Fiona, but we're planning on rolling out the forklifting on a much bigger scale

OONAGH

Absolutely, yes and the Health and Safety element should ideally be running in tandem

GOVERNOR

(*Addressing Oonagh*) Is there any reason that we couldn't start that up immediately

OONAGH

(*Clearly pleased*) Not at all. Fiona and I will have a look at it now

GOVERNOR

Good good. And Fiona we'll be in touch about the other thing

FIONA

Of course

There is an electronic pinging noise and an email to Fiona appears onto the screen above the stage that is visible to the audience only. The characters on stage carry on as normal.

DSP

10.30

Dear Fiona,

I am writing to you about your claim for Jobseekers Allowance and wish to let you know that your means have been calculated as follows:

Total Weekly Means €0.00

If you are not satisfied with this decision, you may appeal to the Independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Sincerely

Deciding Officer¹⁴⁰

The governor and the prison guard exit the classroom

¹⁴⁰ Verbatim from correspondence with Department of Social Protection 2013

OONAGH

Fiona shall we move into my office. (*Oonagh indicates out of the room to Fiona*) Oh! Before I forget. Good news. Payroll approved your pay claim

FIONA

Eh...great

As Fiona and Oonagh exit the room Oonagh sticks a piece of paper to the door of the classroom

Class Cancelled

Shortly afterwards Christy enters onto the stage holding folded papers in his hand. He stops and reads the sign on the door. He pauses and continues to look at the door, before dropping the folded papers into a nearby wastepaper bin.

Christy shrugs and walks off the stage.

THE END

PART THREE

WHAT CAME BEFORE, PRISON POETRY, BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PLAY & WHERE NEXT?

'I...want the Spectator to take on the role of the Actor and invade the Character and the stage. I want him to occupy his own space and offer solutions'. (Boal, A. 1979. Preface).

STAGE 1 – WHAT CAME BEFORE

INTRODUCTION TO PART THREE

I first became interested in educational exclusion and oppression while studying for my M.Ed. I wanted to specialise in Drama in Education, but a family member talked me out of it, strongly suggesting that Aggression Studies might be more useful in terms of employment options given all the focus on classroom management in the press at the time. Much was being made of a report from the association of secondary teachers in Ireland (ASTI) about the amount of time and effort teachers were spending dealing with continuous disruptive behaviour in Irish schools and the negative effect this was having on the quality of teaching and learning and on teachers' welfare (ASTI, 2010).

I thoroughly enjoyed doing a Masters but regretted not pursuing theatre as a specialisation. I was the only person teaching young adults on the course, working at the time as a full-time English language teacher. I regularly used drama and role-play in English Language Teaching and was responsible for running the language school's drama club. The aggression studies course focused heavily on school bullying, the psychology of aggressive behaviour, and various preventative programmes to combat bullying. The other course participants were all working with children and young people in mainstream education as primary or secondary school teachers. I was immediately struck by how the issue of bullying seemed to be almost

entirely focused on children's behaviour from the perspective of adults, while the behaviour of adults in school cultures rife with bullying did not seem to feature. Conspicuously absent from school bullying policies is any recognition of teacher-student bullying as a problem, or any formal mechanism to report teachers in the event of abusive behaviour (McEvoy, 2005). Studies also illustrated a belief held among school staff that teachers who mistreat students will not be held accountable, and that the behaviour could be justified on the grounds that the child was a 'troublemaker' (McEvoy, 2005, p. 7). I chose to explore teacher-student bullying for my thesis from the perspective of young people, in an attempt to address this imbalance, and I chose to speak to young people who had left or who had dropped out of mainstream school.

This decision led me for the first time to Nuala Jackson's project in Waterford, the XLC, a family-run, non-state-funded alternative education centre, which helps young people pass their state exams. The External Learning Community (XLC) was started in 1998 by former nun Nuala and her son Eoin, in response to a 'flawed school system'. The XLC cater for young people, who for a variety of reasons are unable to remain in mainstream education. This cohort was of particular interest to me, as the impetus to acquire state exams, to me, indicated a motivation to progress in the mainstream education system, but one that was unable to be fulfilled by the state school system. To date the project has helped over 1000 students 'failed by the system' pass their Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. When I first met Nuala in 2010, she told me the XLC was an Ivan Illich school. Having come to know the XLC, I equate her comment to mean that the ethos of XLC, and indeed that of Nuala Jackson, are aligned with the central ideas outlined by Illich (1971) in the introduction to *Deschooling Society*, namely that new educational funnels must be the institutional inverse of traditional schooling, heightening the opportunity for 'learning, caring and sharing' (p. vii).

All of the participants I spoke to in the XLC described their mainstream schooling as occurring within an oppressive system, where they had felt unheard, dis-respected and undermined. Some students described active efforts on behalf of teachers and school principals to push them out of school, leading in some instances to their being expelled, and others described instances of informal exclusion or expulsion; a disciplinary practice used by schools, that may take the form of a child being refused access to certain classes; attending school for half days or partial weekly attendance; being segregated from class mates either within the classroom or to another room altogether; managed moves or transfers that involve moving a pupil from one school to another. It may also take the form of the school ‘turning a blind eye’ to truancy and/or advising parents or guardians to choose a different school before formal exclusion becomes inevitable (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011).

Nuala Jackson makes a promise to everyone starting in the XLC, that she is going to put the joy of learning and the triumph of achievement back into education. When asked ‘who took them out?’, she replies ‘school’. Every young person I spoke to ‘lit up’ when describing their experience at XLC, and everyone I spoke to at the XLC affirmed that there was ‘no bullying’. The research and conversations with Nuala Jackson and the young people in the XLC led me to readings not on the prescribed reading list of my Masters including Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society* (1971) and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972); the latter which inspired me to leave English Language Teaching to commit to working in the Adult and Community Education sector.

I used to have a friend who always said, ‘what’s meant for you won’t pass you by’. I hadn’t been working in Adult and Community Education very long, when I received a phone-call asking me if I would deliver a module in theatre to a group of adults on a community outreach project recovering from heroin addiction. The co-ordinator, who made the call after noting my interest in theatre on the ‘hobbies’ section of my CV, batted away my protests that

I wasn't experienced enough. 'You'd be brilliant at it', she enthused, a phrase I have come to hear several times since in my career, and one that I have found often seems to equate to 'we have no one else available nor naïve enough to take this on'. Needless to say, I was horrendously out of my depth. My amateur drama training was just simply not going to cut it with this group, many of whom were traumatised recovering from addiction, homelessness and prison. On top of this, some of the group had extensive experience of drama in prison with accomplished theatre experts such as Helen Hunt in Wheatfield Prison.

I heard about a facilitators course in Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) being run out of the National University of Ireland in Galway in the west of Ireland. Created and elaborated by Brazilian theatre maker and activist Augusto Boal in the 1970's, in Theatre of the Oppressed (1993), the audience becomes active 'spect-actors', exploring, analysing and transforming an issue presented on stage. The course facilitators included Julian Boal, Boal's son, and Adrian Jackson, Boal's translator and founder-director of Cardboard Citizens theatre company, who produce work by and for those who have experienced homelessness. I immediately signed up and one weekend a month headed West on the bus to Galway, returning to Dublin after each training weekend to practise the fruits of my learning on my drama group. That year was one of the most challenging and rewarding teaching and learning experiences I have ever had, and it changed me. We proudly wrote, produced and presented a play on the cycle of addiction and crime called 'Swings and Roundabouts' that was performed in the municipal theatre, and which the project manager informed me participants were still talking about one year on. I went on to facilitate drama to diverse groups of people; people with acquired brain injury, adults with learning disabilities and incorporated elements of Theatre of the Oppressed into my work with migrant English language learners, carers, and long term unemployed. In every instant I was simultaneously challenged and blown away by theatre, and in particular TO

(1993), as a method for engaging marginalised learners and for foregrounding participant voice.

When I returned to university to commit to a PhD in Adult and Community Education, I began with the idea of carrying out a mixed-methods study, as this was my understanding of how research was conducted. I had used mixed methods in my MEd thesis and felt that the statistics gave the study more ‘bounce’ or weight by highlighting the statistical frequency of negative teacher-student relationships or interaction as a contributory factor in the decision to leave school early. It seemed to me that informal exclusion in mainstream education, the overriding theme from my Master thesis, could be fully explored in my PhD research, and that statistics would serve to expose its pervasiveness. ‘Who is the research for?’ I was asked. ‘It will influence policy’, I argued. However, as the realities of the actual scope of a PhD thesis became clearer, I became less certain of my ability to be able to generate enough data around the issue in order for it to stand up against official national data. I was also becoming less comfortable with the idea of approaching participants with questionnaires or a list of interview questions.

I had gained access to prisoners in the education unit in Shelton Abbey prison, a minimum-security prison on Ireland’s East coast, and was planning to work with men there as well as revisiting the XLC. I was expressly interested in the issue of educational exclusion as it is tied up with social exclusion, as to understand school exclusion you need to understand both how it is experienced and the various forms of social exclusion that lie behind it which are complex, socially structured and intergenerational. I knew that my relationships with the centre manager in the prison education unit and Nuala Jackson in the XLC, had the potential to create a power imbalance, and I was conscious of not wanting to adopt methodologies that could be interpreted as interrogative and authoritarian, particularly for participants with experience of police questioning rooms, courts, social services etc. Most importantly though,

it took me a while to understand that this traditional mixed method approach would clash with my values as an adult educator, which were first and foremost about participatory methods that foreground learner voice and using creative means of expression to have it heard.

Throughout this period of flux in relation to methodological and pedagogical approach, the language I used to describe the aim of the PhD remained constant. I continuously used the word 'explore'. I wanted to 'explore' the 'experience' of school exclusion. Not once did I say 'measure' or 'validate'. There is an overused quotation that I still love in experiential education attributed to Confucius among others;

'Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand.'

I began to consider ways of research that would involve me in participants' experience.

THE XLC PROJECT

In total 25 participants took part in this research. 13 from the XLC and 12 from Shelton Abbey Prison. XLC participants ranged in age between 15 and 21, four of whom were female and nine of whom were male. We held one large focus group of all thirteen participants, and there were seven follow-on one-to-one interviews.

As outlined in the introduction, my fascination with the Ivan Illich school, the XLC, began during my M.Ed. as to my mind the XLC is an example of quality community education, embodying many of the philosophies and ideals of critical Adult and Community education. The XLC Project has been lauded by Irish educators, particularly adult educators who have worked extensively with this cohort of learners, namely, young people who are not catered for in mainstream education. This endorsement of the ethos and praxis of the XLC has been

published in academic books and journals and made available to an International audience, such as that by Dr. Scott Boldt (2004), or more recently, Dr. Stephen O'Brien, who selected the XLC as one of four world-wide education projects in order to explore the art of good learning in his book *Inside Education* (2016).

The XLC relies heavily on peer tutoring, and although students are all working towards the state exams; The Junior Certificate, typically held at the end of the three-year junior cycle in second-level schools, and the Leaving Certificate, the university matriculation examination in Ireland and the final exam of the Irish secondary school system, unlike mainstream second level schools, students are supported in pursuing any Leaving Cert subject they wish. Eoin Jackson, who co-founded XLC with his mother and teaches at the school, emphasised this point by sitting 30 subjects in the Leaving Cert 2010, including Hebrew, Japanese and Russian. He took on the task in order to raise awareness and much needed funds for the XLC, and in an attempt to take away the 'terror' and 'to demystify it (the Leaving Cert) and to help my students see it as a challenge' (Independent, 18th August 2010). According to Illich (1971), most learning happens casually (p.12) and 'free and competing drill instruction', i.e., peer tutoring, 'is a subversive blasphemy to the orthodox educator' (p. 16). The 'About Us' page of the XLC website concurs, and an 'emphasis on 'good learning' above the myth of 'good teaching', is listed as one of their core philosophies and pedagogies. I recall a conversation with Nuala where she told me candidly that 'we wouldn't dream of giving classes to toddlers on how to toddle' but how this was exactly the illusion on which the school system rests. This might go some way to explaining why XLC has been unsuccessful in obtaining Government funding despite its operation as a Leaving Cert school and indeed exam centre, for the past twenty years, the absence of which has been referred to as 'baffling neglect' in the Irish Times (2010). In terms of what that means for the XLC, every year the school is threatened with closure due to lack of funds, although this year Nuala assures me

that she has given up worrying because they always manage to scrape by. Not, however without volunteer help and mammoth fundraising efforts, including song recordings, 'The XLC Song', book releases, 'Whopee! I'm going to die' by Nuala Jackson (2011), and the aforementioned world record bid for sitting the most Leaving Cert subjects undertaken by Eoin Jackson (2010).

Illich (1970) believes 'the quality of the environment and the relationship of a person to it will determine how much he learns incidentally' (p. 79). He is outwardly disdainful of the traditional school system, which he describes as being of 'unusual incompetence' (p.6) and calls instead for learning webs, skill exchanges, peer-matching and professional educators; all of which I have seen evidence of in the XLC despite its commitment to the national curriculum. If Illich's proposal for school is revolutionary, and the XLC are operating under his principles, then the XLC is unlikely to be financially supported by a government wedded to the ideals of progress and institutional control. Indeed, were the XLC to fall under the umbrella of the Department of Education, and Skills (DES) under any government, particularly without a force such as Nuala Jackson at the helm, I believe there would be the very real danger of it being moulded into a version of a mainstream sanctioned education programme under the guise of 'alternative'. This has been the experience of sectors within Adult Education in particular, where we have seen how in the organisational re-structuring of the Further Education sector, Adult Education is increasingly becoming part of the world of work and training, and its emancipatory power through critical discourse becoming marginalised (Grummell & Murray, 2015). To my mind, Illich's criticism, though written in the 1970s, is extremely timely at present, where we see the schooling of society evident in the growth of certification for even the most rudimentary of tasks; giving toddlers graduation certificates upon completing crèche, and adults certificates for recognising healthy foods from unhealthy ones. It would seem that an unhealthy obsession for profit and economic

growth, coupled with a concern for conformity and productivity, has led to exactly the kind of education system which Illich urges us to abandon, though to quote Freire; 'It would be a contradiction in terms if the oppressors not only defended but actually implemented a liberating education system' (Freire, 1972, p. 36).

Five years after first meeting Nuala, I travel again to the XLC in 2015 to present my research proposal. The building; a community centre in Waterford, looks fresher and more modern than I remembered. Inside, the place is a hive of activity. Happy looking young people mill around with backpacks. I'm early and it's obviously break-time. The billiards-room on the ground floor has a steady stream in both directions and the energy is humming. I use the spotless toilets before going up to find Nuala and her crew, and once again am reminded of Nuala fuming over the absurdity of signage instructing young people 'not' to do something. 'Don't write on the furniture', 'don't graffiti the walls', neither of which to Nuala's thinking would cross anyone's mind were it not for a sign drawing attention to it! 'My only rules are they cannot do anything which is against the law'. Like Illich (1971), who highlights the rules, regulations and sanctions in school, which would be unacceptable to adults, Nuala likens modern teaching to policing and an overfocus on what the child does 'wrong'; 'wrong tie, wrong shoes, wrong hair'! Nit-picking may seem trivial but speaks to the overwhelming power held forth by the teacher, who 'pontificates as pastor, prophet and priest' (Illich, 1970, p. 31), and the lack of protection afforded to the child in the face of that power. Illich is perhaps more qualified than most to make such a statement, given the fact that he was in fact a priest, resigning from active priesthood in the late sixties due in part to his condemnation of Vatican bureaucracy. Nuala Jackson, interestingly, is similarly qualified after taking the decision to leave convent life, which might also in part explain her deep affiliation to the Austrian philosopher and social critic. The former nun exited the Ursuline convent seven years after entering the order at the age of seventeen because she wanted to be a teacher. 'I

was so young – I didn't know there was a choice between being a teacher and a nun'. Finding herself unable to live under monastic piety, and neither able to find value in the suppression of personality nor of self, nonetheless it was a difficult decision to take. 'When I left it was complete disgrace. It was considered worse than having a baby outside of marriage back then, but people get over these things eventually'.

A student helps me find Nuala, her son, her daughter, two volunteers and a curly haired toddler in a small room on the second floor drinking tea before classes start up again. A mug of strong tea is plonked in front of me and the conversation continues, casually bouncing between family issues, 'your favourite word is 'no', isn't it?' – addressed to the toddler, school matters 'what do you want to teach?' – addressed to one of the volunteers, and the matter of my research 'so how do you want to do this?' Before we pile out of the room and into a big bright classroom where I am introduced to the students of XLC 2015-2016.

Painfully aware of the low boredom threshold of teenagers, and finding myself surprisingly nervous, I trip through a hurried description of my research project. Students help pass around information sheets, and happily there seem a few interested parties despite the shaky sales pitch. Sign-up sheets are distributed to everyone and gathered up again irrespective of whether or not they have been signed, making it difficult to separate interested from disinterested parties. I am pleased with how this goes, as regardless of my desire for participants, my desire to stay true to my ethical principle that no-one feels obligated to take part is stronger.

In a presentation for the Festival of Learning in Waterford in 2012, Jackson stated that the XLC caters for the child of the future, 'the child who will not submit to the straitjacket of a fascist school system' and stated that the XLC was not an alternative school for those who do

no 'fit in' but in fact the only one 'in step'. According to Nuala Jackson the rhythm that keeps the XLC in step is trust. 'Trust in the child, trust in the teacher, trust in the future'.

DOING AND REFLECTING ON RESEARCH IN SHELTON ABBEY

Jane Carrigan's (2015) memory of first entering a prison as a novice researcher is one of brilliant sunshine and blue skies (p. 64). Mine is of ducks...and pheasants.

When I recall my experience beginning my PhD research inside the education unit of Shelton Abbey, Prison, one of two minimum security prisons in Ireland, my most vivid images are of long-tailed gamebirds with red fleshy cheeks crossing the woodland driveway and tripping over the mallards that congregate on the steps of the education unit. I don't offer this image in any way to paint a picture of prison as some sort of resort, or to give traction to the rhetoric that can sometimes be heard on radio talk shows, where callers-in who have never set foot in a prison purport conditions to be akin to those in hotels. But the ducks to me are symbolic, as they help me recall the dichotomy of emotions I went through, during a process that systematically challenged my expectations and preconceptions of how I thought researching inside a prison would be. It is five years since I first entered Shelton Abbey Prison. Since then I have carried out work in other more typical prisons, full of metal with barbed walls and security scanners, and the range of emotion I experience has narrowed as my acquaintance with the environment has increased. Yvonne Jewkes (2014) stresses the importance of researchers documenting their emotional responses to the highly charged and challenging task of conducting prison research, as even the most alien of environments become familiar over time and we can become blasé about our feelings and experience, despite those feelings being poignant and eminently sociological (p. 18). Personally, I enjoy the identification and emotional connection I experience when I read journal articles and entries that capture the

day-to-day life in a prison. I think Adam Key and Mathew May (2019) manage this beautifully in *'When prisoners dare to become scholars: prison education as resistance'*, through their vivid and dynamic description of the 'carceral classroom', which pulls me, the reader, into the experience. Work such as this inspire me to experiment with the use of narrative as a tool to share the complexity of lived experience. The goal being that when we present and share our research, we not only expose others to it, but also affect those who read our work (Leavy, 2013, p. 35).

For me, initially entering the prison environment caused considerable anxiety. Prison is frightening, and rife with bullying and threats of violence. The air in a prison is thick with indicators that prison is nothing like a 'hotel'. Prison is alienating, bureaucratic, status oriented, disciplinary, and brutal in its capacity to strip prisoner's sense of self, hope and meaning (Costelloe, 2014, p.32) Prisoners are required to appear when ordered, and to demonstrate their complacency and compliance to authority, and to a system that de-humanises through various structural deprivations; liberty, autonomy, security, goods and services, and heterosexual relations (Key & May, 2018). The loss of the societal markers of hegemonic masculinity can be seen as contributing to a reconceptualisation of masculinity through extreme adapted behaviours; high levels of violence, callous sexual attitudes, and experiencing danger as exciting; a reconceptualisation that can result in hypermasculinity, or what Anna Curtis (2014) refers to as 'dangerous masculinity'.

Movies, television series, and the press, tend to offer contradictory images of prisons, either as violent and disordered hell holes (Jewkes, 2014), or as holiday camps for pampered inmates. Undoubtedly, some prisons are worse than others, but all of them can force you to address concepts such as liberty and human rights (Carrigan, 2015, p. 67). Shelton Abbey Prison is decidedly un-Shawshank. More Downton Abbey than Alcatraz. There are no massive fences, no airport-style security, no netting. One participant told me that the first

time he saw the building he had been terrified as he thought he was being transferred to a 'mental asylum'. Shelton has also received recognition for being 'Ireland's most progressive prison' (Cuddihy, 2017). Shelton houses a working farm; cows raised on the farm have been sent to poverty-stricken families in Rwanda; there is a Buddy Dogs Programme, where inmates train dogs for the disabled; and the stunning grounds and beautiful buildings are maintained by the men incarcerated there. It doesn't suit everyone, the manager in the education unit told me that 'some lads can't handle it', and one former inmate of Shelton Abbey Prison told me of experiencing relief when he was transferred back to Mountjoy, a large medium-security prison in Dublin, 'at least I knew where I was. I knew I was in prison'.

Huge proportions of offenders have been expelled from mainstream education (Murphy, 2010). 4.7% of early school leavers will be imprisoned during their lifetime as compared to less than 0.2% for those having finished their secondary education (Smyth and McCoy 2009, p. 50). The majority of prisoners have never sat a state exam, with more than half of Irish prisoners having left school before the age of 15 (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2016). As far back as its official inception, evidence has emerged that suspension and expulsion are not only counter-productive but that schools most frequently punish the students who have the greatest academic, social, economic and emotional needs (McCoy et al, 2014). As I noted earlier in relation to the research by Skiba and Devine in the US (2002), a disproportionate number of the students who receive the most severe punishments are students with learning disabilities, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, children who are in care and students who are homeless. These students are often labelled troublemakers and potentially dangerous after the first disciplinary incident. Suspension gets students who disrupt classrooms out of the way, and once suspended, the same students too often are expelled, get referred to juvenile services, get involved in school failure, drop out of school and ultimately end up in adult prison (Heitzegs, 2009). A community needs analysis I carried out with

prisoners and former prisoners (Meaney, 2019), exploring barriers to education, found the vast majority of participants' experience at school to have been profoundly negative.

Participants drew links between their socio-economic background and discriminatory attitudes towards them by teachers, who in some instances lacked empathy or understanding of working-class children, but more often were punitive and excluding in their pedagogical approach (Meaney, 2019, p. 8).

Prisoners in Shelton Abbey are no different from prisoners in other prisons in Ireland in that the education level acquired through mainstream education is extremely low, with 80% having left school prior to Leaving Cert, more than half leaving before Junior Cert, and a quarter never having attended secondary school at all (O'Brien, 2018). Shelton Abbey prisoners were of particular interest to me for a number of reasons, not least practical. I was living close to the prison at the time and the education unit manager in Shelton Abbey Prison was very supportive of the research and willing to permit me as much access to participants as required. Participants in Shelton Abbey's education unit are motivated by the notion of progression, most are preparing for release or some level of integration back into society, which the manager felt would lend itself well to the self-evaluative and reflective process that the research could induce. On top of this, at the time this research took place, the prison education unit had a comparatively high attendance level of between 60-70%. The national average of participation in education in Irish prisons is around 37% (IPS, 2016, p.24). There were long waiting lists for courses and the research I was doing had the potential to fill gaps in the timetable. Institutional barriers, such as landings being locked meaning access to education is delayed or denied, or unavailable to those on 'protection', can place limitations on learning, or indeed research, within the institution of a prison (Oates, 2007). Shelton's operation as an open prison, meant that participants could access the education unit independently, so meeting with me was relatively straightforward once an initial relationship

had been established. Nevertheless, it took the guts of a year for my application to talk to prisoners in Shelton Abbey to be approved.

Prisons are notoriously difficult to gain access to as an outsider, and the process of obtaining permissions and dealing with gatekeepers can be daunting and frustrating (Jewkes & Wright, 2016, p. 659). Researchers must complete a lengthy ethics application to the Irish Prison Service (IPS), if they are to engage with imprisoned populations in Ireland, and authorisation from the governing governor in the prison, while not explicitly stated, is also a pre-requisite. Applications are considered from an ethical perspective by the IPS Research Officer in conjunction with the IPS Research Advisory Panel, and the evaluation considers issues such as the value of the research to the IPS and demands on time and resources (IPS, 2019). Coupled with this, the requirements of university ethics boards around confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent and participant follow-on support, can be difficult to navigate and to maintain in a prison environment. Regardless of how thoroughly one engages with the ethical requirements, I believe the extent of the ethical complexity of researching in prisons can only be grasped through practice. In my experience, prison guards and governors regularly ‘pop in’ to rooms where research is being conducted, undermining promises of anonymity. A significant proportion of the prison population is illiterate (IPRT, 2019), which requires spending a considerable amount of time in the initial meeting with participants going through consent forms and information sheets, a process that I have found can detract from rapport building by setting a bureaucratic tone. Prison provides inadequate support for emotional well-being, restricting the potential to be able to arrange or signpost follow-up support (Hinton-Smith & Seal, 2018, p. 3). A list of support agencies is of little use when access to email or a phone-call is almost impossible, as would be the norm in most prisons. bell hooks (1994) says she would not expect students to take any risk that she would not take (p.21), yet I wonder if we underestimate the risk prisoners, or indeed anyone vulnerable,

takes in participating in critical education or indeed critical research. Understanding how a context of fear and trauma may impede pedagogical action and limit freedom to examine ways of thinking, are important considerations (Vaughn, 2016, p. 270). I worked as a lone doctoral student on this research with minimum resources. I received ethical approval from both the academy and the Irish Prison Service and had put a lot of consideration into assessing the risk element for vulnerable participants. Nevertheless, I am not sure if we can ever truly predict how people might react to opening the can on aspects of their lives or circumstances, which in certain instances can be harrowing or extreme. On top of this, there are dynamics at play, particularly in institutions such as prisons, which one may not be aware of until the game is in full swing. From my conversations with inmates and former prisoners during this research and since, it would seem to me that in prisons, nothing is done 'for free'. In this climate, it would stand to reason that there may be hope of getting preferential treatment in exchange for participating in prison-based research (Copes, Hochstetler & Brown, 2012). I only became aware of these forces in work however, in hindsight. I had been working with one participant at Shelton Abbey Prison over several months and our relationship had become quite relaxed, when he casually mentioned how he was enjoying our research sessions despite having initially signed-up to indulge the education unit manager, whom he thought in exchange might move him up the waiting list of a popular fork-lifting course.

This is an uncomfortable area of consideration for me, as I am passionate about critical research and education, and like to believe it is ultimately a positive and potentially transformative experience that is partaken voluntarily and out of free-will. I understand transformative to mean learning that leads to profound change in an individual, and that has the potential to significantly advance one's conscientisation and ideology, by instilling a lasting capacity to transform perceptions of self and others (Costelloe, 2014, p.34). This can

happen in spaces which foreground participant's interests, where their socially situated knowledge can be validated, and where the knowledge generated from their lived experiences is valued (Duckworth & Smith, 2018). While I remain uncertain of the extent to which one can practice free will while incarcerated, researchers have expressed amazement at how often the word 'freedom' appears in prisoner's descriptions of prison school, and how this concept could be evoked within a system created to deny it (Carrigan, 2015, p.66). Personally, I have heard prisoners refer to the prison classroom as a 'sanctuary', an 'escape', and a place where 'you can forget where you are'. Prison culture is brutal in its capacity to strip prisoners of their sense of self (Costelloe, 2014, p.32), yet within this system, adult education functions to restore individual's self-worth and as a means of resistance to the discourse that prisoner lives do not matter (Key & May, 2019). Similarly, in a study into inmates' experience of the benefits and harm of prison interviews (Copes, Hochstetler & Brown, 2012), participants unanimously stated they did not experience harm, and many said they felt 'better' after talking to someone (p. 185). The education unit in a prison occupies a precarious position within the prison system due to its reliance on the prison (Carrigan, 2015, p.66). Against this precarious backdrop, the classroom provides a 'back-stage' where students can be themselves and resist hypermasculinity by revealing their vulnerabilities and participating in a discourse that produces them as learners instead of threats, and people instead of numbers (pp. 14-15).

Shelton Abbey participants were aged between 19 and 59 at the time of this study. Three focus groups were held, of 5, 5 and 2 respectively. Seven participants met me again for one-to-one interviews, and I worked individually with six participants several times after this to construct poems from participants' interview transcripts. Irrespective of age, I found participants in Shelton Abbey Prison education unit to be respectful, polite...gentlemanly. I smiled with identification reading a poem by Monica Prendergast (2013) after her theatre

work with inmates in William Head Institution, a minimum-security prison on Vancouver Island.

(i have never

felt safer

than here)

their chivalry

toward us

charming

old-fashioned

(ironic)

(Prendergast, 2013, p.320)

INTERLOGUE 2

As the traveller walked back in the direction of the castle, he was struck by how much lower the walls seemed. The top of the protestors' placards was almost level with the parapet. On approach, he could see that what he had originally supposed were placards, was in fact hoarding, which marked out a makeshift stage and theatre at the foot of the ramparts. 'REHEARSAL FOR THE REVOLUTION' was painted across in giant, bold red and black lettering.

Everywhere he looked there were people rushing about; some were playing games, others were busy setting up stage, while many were just watching, perched along sections of the castle walls. Hunkered center stage in the middle of the chaos, adjusting the bells on the fingers and toes of his purple and black costume, was the wiry sprite-like figure of a court jester. He looked up with a grin as the traveller joined him on the platform. His brown eyes were clear and luminous. 'We've been waiting for you', he greeted warmly. The traveller surveyed his surroundings from his position on the stage. 'Rehearsal for the revolution' he mused, trying to absorb fully its meaning.

'Oh, but it is', responded the jester flashing a mischievous grin. *'For theatre is a weapon, and a very efficient one at that, and it is the people who should wield it.'*¹

His impishness was infectious, and the traveller found himself beaming back at his new companion. 'And how did you come to...this...?' the traveller asked, signaling at the area around the stage which was thronged with people

*'In the beginning theatre was like this. Dithyrambic; the carnival, the feast. The ruling classes took it over. Built their dividing walls, separating actors from spectators – the party is over! We are liberating ourselves once more. Making theatre our own. Tearing down the walls.'*²

He winked conspiratorially at the traveller.

'But can liberation really be achieved by simply transitioning from spectator to actor?' The traveller was dubious.

*'Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal or revolution! This is theatre as the practice of freedom. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for themselves.'*³ *It may sound simple, but liberation is as painful as childbirth, for it is a transformation in which the oppressed emerges as a new person*⁴

The jester laughed at the traveller's puzzled expression. 'But come, my words are confusing you and it will make more sense as an actual experience rather than a description of an experience. We can talk again later. For now, it's the time for action -show-time! And for exploring the contents of that backpack of yours'. The jester sprang lightly to his feet, spun himself center stage, and with a flourish of his hat and a theatrical bow addressed the crowd as they settled themselves.

*'Fellow citizens. Theatre was created by the people, for the people. It was a celebration. Everyone could participate. Freely. The ruling elite took possession of the theatre. They divided the people into people who act and people who watch. We were encouraged to think in a way which is presented as the 'right' way of thinking, discouraged from acting, discouraged from even speaking! And yet we know, to speak is to take power; because whenever we become the speaker we are empowered. Should actors and characters continue to dominate the stage while we sit while we sit stock-still in the audience? I think not. We need to possess the characters. Guide them. Show them the path that we think is right.'*⁵ *We need to invade! With our bodies, with our hearts, and with our minds. We are not trespassers. This is our space. Let us occupy our own space and offer solutions to our own problems.*

'Fellow citizens. LET THE GAMES BEGIN'.

² Boal, A. Theater of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc, 1993.

³ Boal, A. Theater of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc, 1993

⁴ Boal, A. Theater of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc, 1993

⁵ Freire, P. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Penguin, 1972.

A CHANGE IN APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Ann Hegarty (2016) was a major influence in my changing my approach to research. Ann was on the same doctorate programme, but further along in her research, and she changed the way I see, understand and practise research. Her study was on family literacy, masculinities and the role of the father. She was using a participatory learning approach to frame interviews and focus groups, a democratic and dialogic approach, designed to enable research participants to be truly heard. Ann used Photovoice, a participatory action research method that uses photography to stimulate critical dialogue and analysis. Our doctorate group meetings were once a month in an intimate room in the Adult and Community Education department in Maynooth University, and as I listened to Ann reflect on her research, I found myself challenged to reconsider how to reposition the ‘subject’ as an ‘actor’ within the research in a more democratic and transformative form of research, much in the same way that I was doing in my practice and in my work with Boal’s TO (1993). Up until this point I had considered research and practice as divorced from one another. Now for the first time, I began to see research as an extension of my practice. Listening to other research practitioners in the Adult and Community Education department in Maynooth University, my research focus began to shift towards how to create the conditions to engender trust and to engage participants to voice their experience, as well as creative forms of expression to communicate these voices to an audience. I began to approach the design to my research methodology very much as I would devise a module or a session, with the focus on the experience of participation for participants rather, than on a predetermined set of research objectives.

Of course, adult educators and researchers oriented to addressing social injustices and inequalities have long been concerned with the matter of voice, and the literature exploring how art-based practices such as poetry, film and theatre, have supported marginalised groups and individuals communicate their stories and truth is expanding (Butterwick & Roy, 2018).

Nevertheless, there were times throughout the process when I felt very alone. I didn't know as I began this journey that I was standing at the edge of the emerging field of arts-based research and that there was an entire community of which I could be part. The arts continue to be seen as frivolous and trivial (Clover, 2011, p. 12), and there were times, particularly at academic conferences, where I felt my work and methods were interpreted as being exactly that. In hindsight, however, I can appreciate that presenting and discussing a creative exploration, particularly in its infancy, is tricky. A creative exploration is messy. As Patricia Leavy says of arts-based research, 'there is no prescription for how it must be done. It is a project not a plan' (2010, p.14). And as Fiona Whelan (2019) describes, it is often a project without direction, and requires trust that in time it will lead to something of significance.

In the classroom I often use video as a means to generate discussion and debate. I use drama and theatre methods for precisely the same reason. Dramatic reconstruction for the stage or screen can capture aspects of human experience and social life in unparalleled ways (Leavy, 2015, p. 173). I began to consider the use of drama and film as a way of framing focus groups, to bring research participants together to explore shared understandings of what it means to be excluded from school. I began the exploration by partnering with Kildare Youth Theatre. Together we created a filmed fictional frame as a tool with which to broach and encourage engagement with the issue of educational exclusion on a critical level with focus group participants in the XLc Project and Shelton Abbey Prison Education Unit. 'Dropped Out or Kicked Out?' was a 9-minute filmed theatre play that emerged after eight two-hour workshops drawing heavily on Augusto Boal's methodology for Theatre of the Oppressed (1993).

‘DROPPED OUT OR KICKED OUT?’ - THE FICTIONAL FRAME

Since the official abolishment of corporal punishment in 1982, schools rely mainly on various forms of exclusion to attain and maintain control over students, and to discipline students deemed to have breached school rules (Skiba et al., 2002). Devised to be a way of framing focus groups to explore the experience of school exclusion, and in line with a trend in community theatre for original work which addresses issues, the purpose of the fictional frame or ethnotheatre, was not to create a commercial Broadway hit or anything which might be remounted by another theatre company (Saldaña, 2005), but rather to bring research participants together to explore shared understandings of what it means to be excluded from school. The theatre process creates a space to establish some distance from one's experiences that supports critical reflection and deeper understanding (Butterwick, 2002), so I reasoned a fictional frame would afford participants the same opportunity when it came to examining their own experience, compared and contrasted with the shared experience of their peers. When shared conditions of social injustice experienced across a community are brought into focus with an ethic of solidarity, we bring ideas and shared perspectives into focus that are missing when people identified as being marginalised are only permitted to speak at the level of personal emotion with structural factors evacuated from view (Varma, 2020, p. 14).

On top of this, a common claim within adult education discourse is the importance of adult educators creating safety (Butterwick & Roy, 2018, p.3). I had committed to conducting one-off focus groups with participants, so laying foundations of safety and trust week by week as one would do with other groups was restricted in this scenario. I rationalised that the use of the ‘fictional frame’ would provide the safety to engage emotionally and honestly (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015), as participants could engage critically with the protagonist’s story presented on screen, creating meaning through distance while at the same time remaining

prudent about their personal experiences in front of the group, unless or until such time as it felt safe or judicious to do so.

The other motivation behind designing the fictional frame, was to create a dramatic device that could be used interactively in schools or in teacher training, as there is no possibility for change if there is no audience for these voices (Butterwick & Roy, 2018). The premise of the fictional frame was to raise awareness of the issue from the perspective of those being excluded, in an attempt to shift the focus away from the characteristics of early school leavers to triggers of disengagement that are within the remit of the school. Boal (1993) sees theatre as a weapon, and empathy as; ‘the most dangerous weapon in the entire arsenal of the theatre and related arts (movies and TV)’ (p. 113). To illustrate this point, he gives the example of ‘wild west’ movies, where we empathise with ‘the cowboy who takes out 10 bad men...even when those men are Mexicans defending their land and even when the audience is Mexican!’ This of course, is the antithesis of stimulating societal transformation, in that it is designed to bridle the individual. I concur with Anita Varma (2020) and believe that moving beyond empathy and personalized stories that foster feelings of shared humanity, towards solidarity and politicised stories that facilitate people’s analytical discourse of their own plight, is even more effective. I was hopeful that the creation of a fictional frame, that described and presented the educational experience from the perspective of someone on the cusp of being excluded, could help to foster greater empathic understanding and to reduce the existential gap between those for whom the education system works, and those for whom it does not. At the same time, I was interested in facilitating a process that brought participants together to critically analyse the experience of educational exclusion from a shared perspective.

MAKING ‘DROPPED OUT OR KICKED OUT?’

In January 2015, the theatre project to create a filmed fictional frame began with Kildare Youth Theatre (KYT), founded by my colleague in Maynooth University, Peter Hussey. The project attracted 11 participants of mixed gender between the ages of 15 and 20, who had expressed interest in the topic, and who were prepared to commit to two months of weekly evening workshops. All the group were experienced in dramatic play and performance. All the participants, bar one, were in mainstream secondary education.

The piece ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out?’ evolved from eight two-hour workshops, co-facilitated by me and Medbh Boyle, a youth-worker and good friend. Initial workshops followed a format employed by Boal (2002) for preparing for Theatre of the Oppressed workshops. Sessions began with physical warm-up and disinhibition of the participants by means of games and exercises. Boal (2002) outlines games and exercises in five different categories in an attempt to re-harmonise the body with the senses. General Physical Exercises to re-structure muscle relations; Changing Walks to make us more conscious of the possibilities of our bodies; Massage or ‘Touch’ exercises to help the body relax and release; Integration Games to get participants comfortable with working as one group; and Gravity Exercises to become aware of how we economise our movements to save energy. For the most part this outline, was followed in the structure of the ‘play’ stage of the workshops. The ‘favourite’ warm-ups quickly became clear, and as the weeks progressed, participants would call out games they particularly enjoyed playing, and these were often led by participants most familiar with them.

The Warm-up or Play stage of the session was followed by Image Theatre work. Boal (2002) uses Image Theatre as another form of language, but one where we do not try to apprehend the exact meaning, but rather to allow our imaginations throw up our understanding of the

image from the feelings it evokes (p. 175). In Image theatre, participants wordlessly sculpt a theme; of 'family', of 'power'; and a number of people look at the image and offer their response to the image, be it emotional, intellectual or physical. As such, the message of the image is dependent on both the sender and the receiver, as the multiple reflection reveals to the image maker its hidden aspects. Emerging themes from the literature around school exclusion were explored using Image Theatre such as; power, social exclusion, support, and bullying; and included additional themes which emerged from participants' own experiences and observations such as; ADHD, troublemakers, youth stereotypes, family dysfunction and favouritism.

The final stage of each workshop involved improvisation, which evolved from the dynamisation, or bringing to life of the statues or sculptures created during the Image Theatre work. For example, in one image of 'social exclusion', the sculpture appeared to depict two people in a position of power physically apprehending two others. When the actors in the image were invited to begin inter-relating with each other, an improvisation emerged whereby two youths were being thrown out of a fast-food establishment by security for 'loitering'. Whether or not the youths had been doing something which warranted being evicted remained unclear during the sketch, but what was abundantly clear was management's perception that they were 'up to no good'.

In Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal states that the subject of 'the family' is probably the most discussed and most varied in terms of the image of family which is presented depending on the culture, class, country and age of the sculptor/participants (Boal, 2002 p. 182). The images of the 'Irish' family made by KYT participants in these workshops often involved a sofa, either in front of a television or a play-station, and a separation between parents and children. Either the parents were on the sofa or the children were on the sofa, and the missing party was indicated to be in another room of the house. When the images were 'dynamised' or

became 'theatre', conversations generally indicated unhappy or separated marriages, poor or violent communication between parents and children, and 'blended' family units or 'step-families', made up of one or both parents remarried and bringing children of the former family into the new family. While parents in the improvisations were depicted as being too caught up in the drama of their own lives to be able to offer much by way of support to their children, siblings on the other hand for the most part played a supportive role with each other.

One of the strongest images which emerged while dealing with the subject of school exclusion was inevitably the classroom. Peer support had been emphasised during discussion time as a major influence in the decision to remain in school, and consequently themes such as bullying and exclusion of students by peers had been explored. Warm up exercises had been conducted which focused on occupying space to take position and power, and as such when participants occupied the image of the classroom, definitive characters emerged. For example, the girls who took their places at the back of the class, immediately started creating trouble, which they cleverly deflected from themselves by directing focus onto other students. The boys who occupied the seats at the front of the class were engaged in the content of the lesson and appeared to want to create as much distance between themselves and the chaos at the back of the class. While the students who occupied the middle rows, used their phones and headphones and in many ways were the most disengaged in the scene. Consequently, the teacher, who was aiming to maintain his position of power and authority at the front of the class, spent much of the action distracted by the goings on from these three distinct positions, and as a result achieved little by way of teaching. In fact, invariably in classroom improvisations, the content and dialogue circulated around maintaining power structure or position rather than on lesson content. The amount of time spent maintaining order and discipline in the mainstream secondary school classroom is of course an issue which has been highlighted in education research by both teachers and policy makers alike and attributed to

everything from mental health issues and the recession (ASTI, 2010; TUI, 2006) to sheer boredom and frustration (Kohn, 1993; OECD, 2000).

During the classroom scene improvisations, a main protagonist emerged in the form of a young male, who arrives late to class, sparking off unwanted attention and becoming a target for bullying from the girls at the back of the class. His entire demeanour, from his body language (feet on the table) to his clothing (hood up), indicates dis-engagement and dis-association. The girls at the back are unable to resist the challenge of trying to draw him into an altercation, and an argument subsequently ensues and escalates. The math teacher, who at this stage is frazzled from trying to maintain control and has already ordered one student to leave the room for answering back, is not prepared for the stand-off when he orders the protagonist to leave the classroom for using bad language and is met with a refusal on the grounds that 'I didn't do anything'. The teacher rushes to get back-up in the form of the headmaster, and our protagonist is subsequently removed from the class.



A story developed around a central character, or protagonist, Charlie, the 14-year-old son of a single mother, whose seeming lack of educational prowess combined with his difficulty in 'fitting in', leads to his having a series of difficulties in school. Participants from KYT felt strongly that a family scene was vital to this piece, in order to paint the picture of the background to the protagonist. The family scene opens with the protagonist on the sofa with his older brother playing PlayStation. During the mono-syllabic and distracted conversation which ensues (both boys are engrossed in the video game), we learn that the parents, and

indeed the family are separated with the protagonist living with the mother and the older brother living with the father. We also become privy to the information that the mother appears to have been suffering from depression for some time, 'crying all the time', 'Is she still at that?' The protagonist eventually shares his recent school drama with his brother, and we are made aware of the seriousness of the issue. 'They're kicking me out'.

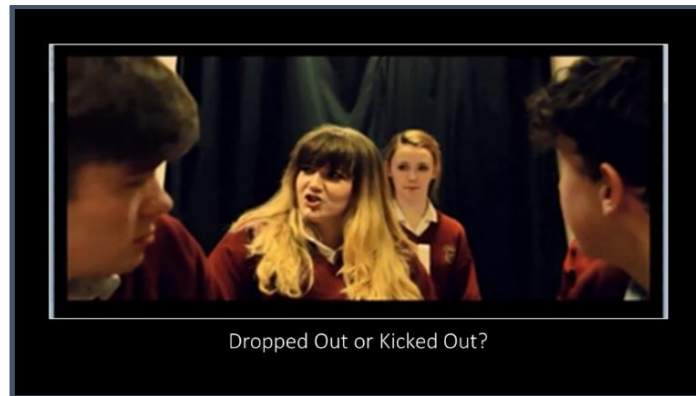


Due to the topic of the project, it was perhaps inevitable that the final scene of 'Dropped Out or Kicked Out?' take place in the principal's office. The dialogue which emerged from improvisations for this scene were interesting for a number of reasons. The headmaster wastes no time in suggesting the removal of the protagonist to more 'alternative' education options to learn a trade such as 'plumbing'. That this suggestion is made in an extremely condescending manner was revealing of how 'alternative' options were interpreted by the young participants at KYT. That the suggestion of 'alternative education' was being offered only because the school did a) not believe the protagonist was intelligent enough to pass his school exams, and b) because they did not want him in the school, was not lost on anyone and appeared representative of how alternative education options are perceived in relation to mainstream or Higher Education. The mother puts up an argument on the grounds of her son's age (15), but her world-weary demeanour and nervous manner are no match for the two men in authority.



Throughout the workshops I took notes and at the beginning of the following workshop, after the ‘play’ stage, we would come together in a circle to discuss the elements from the previous workshop that we felt worked well, and those we felt were less successful. Based on the editing decisions of the group, I wrote the improvisations into a script, which was rehearsed the following week, and so on until all three scenes were finalised. The process felt democratic and inclusive. Participants worked as both actors and authors. The group were aware of what the end product was for, and committed to working towards this with us, but likewise Medbh and I were conscious that we were guests invited into the youth theatre and were committed and put work into devising and facilitating fun and dynamic workshops in return. We consistently checked-in with participants to ask how they felt about the project, and feedback was generally very positive. All the participants stayed with the project from start to finish, a process which spanned over ten weeks in total to include filming. Given no-one was under any obligation to participate and given all the other commitments the young people had, particularly in relation to school exams, we interpreted this as an indication of the project’s success. KYT participants took charge of all the filming and editing of the fictional frame, which was shown to all members of the youth theatre as part of post-production celebration evening.

‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out?’ made with KYT in 2015 is available to watch here:



<https://vimeo.com/124295832>

FACILITATING FOCUS GROUPS USING A FICTIONAL FRAME

Excerpt from 'Dropped Out or Kicked Out?'

TEACHER

(Sarcastically) Good of you to join us Charlie

CHARLIE

(Slumps into a chair, the hood of his sweatshirt pulled up over his head)

TEACHER

Do you have anything to say for yourself?

CHARLIE

(Under his breath while rolling his eyes) Oh for God's sake

TEACHER

What was that?

CHARLIE

(Silent, studies the ground)

TEACHER

(More threatening) What was that?

CHARLIE

(Staring at the ground) Nothing. Sorry right, OK? Sorry

TEACHER

(Nods his acceptance that for this time a situation has been avoided and makes his way back up to the board)

This is the beginning of the opening scene to 'Dropped Out or Kicked Out?' I'm showing it on a projector to a group of five men between the ages of 19 and 49 in the education unit of

the prison. The scene culminates with the school principal being called for after Charlie refuses to leave the class for using bad language. I pause the video.

'Would any of that be reflective of your experience in the classroom?'

There is a marked pause and some studied tea stirring before one of the group responds politely but clearly conveying that the scene witnessed bears little similarity to his personal experience.

'Just the messing. A lot worse than that one. Yeah, a lot worse. Anytime the teachers would turn around someone would get hit with something. Get a smack with something flying across. Rubbers going flying.' (Ryan, 19)

The others follow suit, keen to contrast their experience with the dramatisation now that the cat is out of the bag with regard to how far removed the performance is from their reality.

'If you were talking like that in the class (in the video), the teacher, the nearest thing to them, the duster whatever they had, just thrown at you.' (Simon, 24)

'When I came to this country I had an English accent on me, and the Christian Brothers trying to teach me. I...I just couldn't get Irish. I couldn't even pronounce the words...so they used to just kill me. They used to just bait me. And the more they'd bait me the more I just switched off... and I just became where I just sat down like your man on the telly (in the video).' (Christy, 49)

'The teachers are idiots in that. Do you see the way he was told to leave the class? We would have been dragged out of the class. And he wouldn't have said 'I'm going to get the headmaster'. You would have just been taken out and whipped to bits like.' (Leo, 41)

It soon became clear, that for many participants, the fictional frame fell short of accurately illustrating the lived experience of research participants, particularly those of the older generation. Up until the nineteen-eighties, corporal punishment of children was standard practice in Ireland and widely accepted as a necessary measure to instil respect for authority and to maintain discipline, and from the limited available evidence it seems the use of

corporal punishment, which today would be classified as abuse, was scarcely questioned (Maguire & O’Cinnéide, 2005). Participants were not shy about setting me right. They spoke of the chaos of the classroom and the corridors, ‘the messing’, rebelling, the beatings, the punitive punishments, the endless rules, irrelevant subjects, the injustices; being left out; being singled out; being left behind. In the audio recordings, they can be heard engaging with each other, then trying to explain, often with vivid visual description, the school environment as they remembered and experienced it.

To my mind, this exemplifies Norman Denzin’s explanation as to why social programs which are intended to alter and shape the lives of troubled people so often fail. According to Denzin, (2010), ‘the perspectives and experiences of those persons served by social justice programs must be grasped, interpreted and understood, if solid, effective, applied programs are to be created’ (p.25). I am an early school leaver. I had conducted research and with early school leavers on their experience of school before. I was well informed on the literature around exclusion and early school leaving and worked with a youth theatre to create the drama, all bar one who were currently attending school. I incorrectly assumed that these factors combined would enable an accurate dramatic replication of participants’ experience. Yet, as Denzin (2010) contends, we mistake our own experience for the experience of others, and often the interpretations and judgements we make on other’s are incorrect.

The short play culminates with Charlie being transferred out of mainstream school and into an alternative education setting ‘more befitting of his needs’. The scene comes to a close with Charlie and his mother leaving the principal’s office having lost the argument for Charlie to stay in school. The credits roll, and I turn off the projector in the XLc Waterford.

So, would your experience in the principal’s office have been anything like that?

‘Spot on. That’s the way they spoke to my mother. They kept telling her things, they’d take the words out of her mouth and just turn them around. They only let me into the school in the

mornings for an hour and that was it. Then it was 2 and a half months later we were brought in for a meeting, and that's when I was told to leave the school'. (Owin, 19)

'My mother never really came in, cos I used to mess a lot. Like, a bad messer...so I was always on my own in the office.' (Ian, 17)

'My principal was afraid of my mother. My mother has really long red hair. So, she'd throw it up in a high ponytail and she'd have big gold hoops, so she looked like a traveller going in there'. (Katy, 17)

'They don't talk like that whatsoever. The main principal won't actually associate with the teacher. They get straight to the point and add little bits in and take little bits out. If I was in that room, I'd feel like I was getting arrested'. (Alicia, 17).

'They brought my father in. Cos they only felt safe in the room if my father was in the room. Whenever I was in the room with my mother, I'd just like crack up and throw chairs around' (Joe, 16).

I felt this stage of the research was more relevant for participants of XLC than it was for participants in Shelton Abbey Prison. Members of the youth theatre were of a similar age cohort as XLC members, whereas prison participants ranged in age from 21 to 59. And while all of the participants were experts on this research, in that they had all identified as having experienced school exclusion, certainly XLC participants seemed to identify more with the fictional frame and the character of Charlie. Shelton Abbey participants were quicker to point out the differences between the situation depicted on film, nevertheless I feel the methodology worked well, as it facilitated a shift away from personal experience that created the freedom to critically examine situations and decisions taken.

Throughout the focus groups, I experienced participants as supportive of one another, and there was a good deal of laughter and humour as the more outrageous stories were relayed. Like Patricia Leavy (2007), I believe that this is because the arts evoke emotional responses, and so the dialogue sparked by arts-based practice is highly engaged. Furthermore, by connecting people on emotional and visceral levels, artistic forms of representation facilitate empathy (p.14). Accordingly, I found participants in the focus groups to be kind and encouraging to one another, when it came to expressing both their experience and their points

of view. In some of the recordings, several participants are speaking at once, highly animated in their reactions. The example presented below is an excerpt from one of the focus groups in the prison. The interruptions presented here were not disrespectful to the speaker, but rather demonstrate the enthusiasm and high level of engagement of participants.

- Holmes: *'I think it depends on what area you come from. If you're from a wild area and the schools in the wild area, the teachers have a kind of a thing...'* [Interrupted]
- Bressie: *'Where they have to have control straight away...'* [Interrupted]
- Holmes: *'Yeah, but you can't tar everyone with the one brush like'*
- Bressie: *'Yeah...'* [Interrupted]
- Holmes: *'But that would be the attitude then because of the area. You know 'oh these are rough and ready; we'll treat them rough and ready'*
- Brosnan: *'Which is wrong'* [Interrupted]
- Bressie: *'Cos none of the teachers would have been from the area like...'* [Interrupted]
- Holmes: *'That's what I'm saying like...'* [Interrupted]
- Brosnan: *'And you'd have been labelled from like first year...'* [Interrupted]
- Holmes: *'That's what I'm saying like'*

In some recordings, the language participants chose to describe their experience was extremely visual, which I maintain was in response to the medium chosen to facilitate discussion. Most importantly though, I argue that the method used here enabled me to interpret and understand participants' perspectives and experiences in a manner that I had not been able to grasp before and would not have been possible using traditional research methods. In line with Freirean pedagogy (1972), focus group participants were asked to take part because of their experience or 'expertise' on the issue of school exclusion, in a deliberate positioning of participants as active stakeholders in the research process. By presenting my understanding of educational exclusion, through the work with KYT and in the format of a filmed fictional frame, research participants were immediately privy to a jargon-less

understanding of where I was coming from. My cards were on the table, which I believe contributed to participants trusting me, but also afforded them the opportunity to correct, contradict and inform me. This immediately catapulted me into the role of learner shifting the researcher-participant power-dynamic, a shift I attribute largely to the methodology, a method I would advocate as having a strong commitment to social critique and to supporting the empowerment of marginalised groups.

Arts-based practices have supported marginalised individuals and groups tell their stories and speak their truths (Butterwick & Roy, 2018, p. 4). My experience of using a fictional frame in this arts-based research study, leads me to argue the case for more incorporation of creative methodologies in adult and community education research. Creative methods provoke insights that traditional research methods might fail to capture, as in arts-based research the expression of meaning becomes central compared with science where meaning is stated (Butterwick, 2002, p. 4). Artistic and creative expression, thoughtfully carried out, can enliven adult learning, promote risk taking and empathy for others, and move toward relations of solidarity. (Butterwick & Roy, 2018). I believe arts-based research also reflect adult and community education ideals – ‘empowerment, participative democracy and societal transformation’ (Grummell, 2007, p.6).

‘DROPPED OUT OR KICKED OUT? 2’

‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2’ as an ethnodrama, originated from research participants’ feedback on the filmed fictional frame. The feedback on the frame from participants in the XLc Waterford and the education unit of Shelton Abbey Prison, was recorded and subsequently transcribed, and extracts from the transcriptions were used to create an ethnodrama in what came to be known as ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2’, or ‘DOKO 2’.

Ethnodrama is a relatively new genre of arts-based research, which ‘maintains close allegiance to the lived experience of real people while presenting their stories through an artistic medium’ (Saldaña, 2005 p. 3). An ethnodrama is based on research data such as interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries etc. so simply put, this is dramatizing the data (Saldaña, 2016, p. 13). Most ethnodramas are written by researchers, many of whom have virtually no theatre or playwriting background (Saldaña, 2005 p.14), yet who are drawn to its emancipatory potential for motivating social change and exposing oppression through its artistic rendering of political discourse (Denzin, 2003).

The ethnodrama for ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2’ was created from responses from research participants to the fictional frame, as well as from excerpts from some of the 15 individual interviews that followed on from the focus groups. Once I had listened to and transcribed the interviews, I selected what I believed to be captivating and/or pivotal instants from participants’ narratives. In two separate workshops, members from Kildare Youth Theatre read the excerpts aloud, and those which worked best dramatically were selected. Work began with KYT to recreate the incidents much as they were told. Instead of portraying the classroom experience from the perspective of one protagonist, we essentially portrayed six separate events from six different participants. These were events which worked dramatically, but also ones I felt covered some of the themes which had emerged during the focus groups and individual interviews; fear of other students and lack of protection within the school system; being singled out for punishment due to family background or socio-economic background; hefty punishments for minor issues such as failing to adhere perfectly to the school’s policy on students’ uniform; teacher-student racism and discrimination; teacher-student violence; teachers exaggerating student behaviour in order to justify exclusionary practice. The presentation of the research from multiple perspectives with an

ethic of solidarity, shifts focus from the relatable individual, who garners empathy, to the contours of systemic factors that effecting a community (Varma, 2020, p.2).

Most ethnodramas are primarily monologic in structure, which is probably down to the fact that they are mostly created from interview transcripts – a solo voice telling his/her story (Saldaña, 2016). Speaking directly to the audience, creates a more intimate and immediate connection, while when a character speaks to another character, we become witness to the individuals in action which serves to generate more belief in the character and surrounding context of the narrative (Saldaña, 2016, pp. 64, 65). The excerpts in ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out 2?’ were performed as separate monologues, primarily spoken directly to the audience, punctuated with interaction with another/other character(s) on stage.



Excerpt from ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2’

JOE

(Addressing the audience with his hand raised as he sits in a classroom) They used to go around the classroom and tell you to pull your pants up to see if you had the right socks on like

TEACHER

(Marching up and down the classroom pointing at students’ ankles as they dutifully pull up their trousers to show their socks) Pants up. Pants up. Pants up. Pants up. Pants up.

JOE

(Head down, addressing the audience with a worried expression) I actually came in in normal clothes before

TEACHER

(Dripping with sarcasm) Joe! Not only are you not wearing the right socks, you've decided that you don't need to wear a uniform at all. Because you're special. Isn't that right? Special Joe doesn't need to wear his uniform like everyone else.

JOE

(Pleading reason to the audience) It could have been in the wash that day. Something could have been wrong with it like. Like they didn't even ask!

TEACHER

(Voice raising in anger) Well seeing as you're so damn special, you can go to a special place Joe. You can go to the study hall and spend the rest of the day there

JOE

(Moves to a chair on stage left alone, addressing the audience angrily) And they sat me down there for like fuckin 5 hours! On my own! They wouldn't let me out. For nothing like. Cos I wasn't wearing my uniform.



When it came to creating the family scene in the ethnodrama, by choosing to show six separate and different family backgrounds that are communicated and witnessed in a collective context, we get a sense that family is not really the issue at play here, thereby recognising the influence of societal structures and social inequality on early school leaving and shifting the blame away from young people and their families (Byrne & Smyth, 2010, p. 26). The presentation of analytical perspectives on the basis of shared lived experience can move beyond empathy, or conversely the apportioning of individual blame, and enact solidarity (Varma, 2020, p.2).

In the original version of ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out?’, the protagonist’s mother comes across as quite a weak character, and her attempts to argue her position for her son to remain in school lack the weight to change the outcome of the final scene. Most research participants, however, spoke proudly of how their parents had defended them against the perceived injustice, but how this had often been to the detriment of the relationship with the school, and in many cases was the final nail in the coffin.

‘They made my mother out to be a horrible person.’ (Lisa, 16)

‘They blame the family straight away.’ (Rory, 17)

‘My Da gave the teacher a slap for hitting me. As my back was turned and as I was walking away I heard the teacher getting a slap. I looked around and the teacher was kind of ducking away like. And I heard me Da saying ‘no-one hits my son only me’. I got put out of school for good after that. It was the 6th class in Primary.’ (Leo, 41)

‘And like they sent the chaplain around... Just to see if there was like anything, to check me, to see if there was anything they could use against me.’ (Eoin, 17)

For other participants, particularly those in the older age bracket, ‘real life’ meant that education at the time was not an option for them, highlighting some of the adult responsibilities placed on children, and in some cases the cyclical nature of how education is not as valued in working class families (Reay, 2001, Mahoney & Zmroczek, 1997). A consistent thread in these conversations, however, was the lack of understanding on the part of the school with regard to the reality of young people’s lives. Young people for whom there is a mismatch between the cultures of home life and the school environment are more likely to become caught up in a cycle of ‘acting up’ and ‘being given out to’ by teachers, a cycle of misrecognition which reinforces their disengagement from school (Byrne & Smyth, 2010, Reay, 2001, Ingram, 2009). School success is predicated on dominant possession or access to cultural resources in terms of values, attitudes, language skills and styles of interaction transmitted from parents to children, which are acquired in school more quickly by children

already familiar with them (Byrne & Smyth, 2010: 27). This in turn cements a negative judgement on the capacity to progress based on social background. Predestined to viewing education as a waste of time and effort, perhaps subconsciously as a result of identifying the unlikelihood of beating the odds, the disadvantaged student is either precluded from achieving a higher level of education either because of academic performance, or because he or she effectively excludes himself or herself through disengagement. Children from different social classes are therefore predisposed to experiencing the education system in radically different ways (Bourdieu, 1977).

There were obviously many stories that did not make it in to the ethnodrama DOKO 2. Some were cut during rehearsals with KYT simply because we were unable to make them work aesthetically. Not all of these editing decisions were reached easily, yet, as Saldaña (2005) asserts, with ethnographic performance comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is 'aesthetically sound, intellectually rich and emotionally evocative' (p.14). I found it particularly difficult to omit stories that I felt were pertinent to the central issue of the research, or which had touched me emotionally.

This was particularly the case with stories from prisoners. Some of these did not make it into the ethnodrama because they were of a different era from the others, and I did not possess the directorial ability to be able to weave them into the script without it seeming as if the entire production were of a different period. I was doing quite a lot of work with teachers at the time and saw the play as having the potential to work as a transformative tool with teachers in training, I wanted the performance to be as relevant as possible to the teachers of today.

Consequently, I think it would be fair to say that participants in the XLc have stronger representation in the ethnodrama than Shelton Abbey prisoners. This was also partly down to the age similarities between XLc participants and Kildare Youth Theatre members, and which experiences resonated with the young actors and therefore came across most strongly

in rehearsals. The other factor was without doubt down to my own artistic limitations and my struggle with how to marry cross generational narratives into a singular performance. I managed to resolve this successfully in subsequent work, *'The Trial'* (McCann, 2018), examining prisoners' access to health care between the 1800s and 2000, so can recognise how my experience at the time of creating *'Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2'* affected my ability to capture participant experience across the board.

There were other limitations in the creation of this ethnodrama, which certainly impact on the aesthetics of *'Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2'* besides my own artistic limitations. There was no budget for instance. Every inch of it, from the acting, filming, lighting and staging, to the editing and dissemination, to ferrying young actors to conferences to perform, all of it depended on peoples' good will and their belief in the project. *'Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2'* was staged so as to look like 'theatre', as some of the criticism of the original performance centred around its 'realism'. There were always going to be limitations as to how 'realistic' it was going to appear, especially given the constraints around budgeting, so I deliberately chose to film the revised ethnodrama in a theatre in the hope of accentuating its merit as a theatrical production, and avoiding comparison with reality TV, ethnodrama's 'theatrical distant cousin' (Saldaña, 2005 p. 9).

The final scene of DOKO 2 bears most similarity to the original play, in that it takes place in the headmaster's office and involves the informal expulsion of the protagonist in the presence of a parent. The changes that were made in response to reflection on focus group participants' feedback were mainly subtle but important changes to behaviour. The headmaster and vice principal's manner in our original version had been far more jovial and used humour to distract from what was actually happening, which contrasted sharply with participants' lived experience.

‘When you walked into the headmaster’s office it was big and burly like you know. Loud and in your face. It wasn’t like telling you to go and get a plumbing job. It was the cane.’ (Leo, 41)

‘They look like Guards. They don’t talk like that whatsoever. The main principal won’t actually associate with the teacher, and they won’t laugh at each other and tell stories.’ (Ian, 16)

‘If I was in that room I’d feel like I was getting arrested.’ (Josh, 19)

‘They don’t sit there and chat. They get straight to the point. And add little bits in and take little bits out.’ (Katie, 17)



Based on this feedback, for DOKO 2 the scene was played so that the behaviour and demeanour of the two authority figures was more severe and threatening. Many of the participants felt as though the school was just waiting for the chance, ‘the final straw’ to kick them out. Schools are required by law to follow fair procedures when proposing to suspend or expel a student (NEWB, 2008). Poor academic performance, poor attendance or lateness, and minor breaches of the code of behaviour are deemed inappropriate grounds for exclusion (NEWB, 2008). Yet research that represents the voice of school leavers has consistently shown these disciplinary procedures being issued for relatively minor misbehaviours (Downes & Maunsell, 2007). This was particularly well highlighted in one participant’s story where his expulsion from school was for ‘running in the hall’, which was the story on which the final scene in DOKO 2 was subsequently based. Based on participants’ comments and input on the original version of the play, the scene in the revised version culminates with the

protagonist's father losing his temper and storming out of the office with his son, leaving the school management discussing whether or not to involve the chaplain.

THE FORUM OF 'DROPPED OUT OR KICKED OUT?'

Forum theatre turns the notion of traditional theatre, where there is a separation between the actors on stage and a passive audience, on its head. In a Forum Theatre production, a Joker character, who exists in the time and place of the audience, represents the author's point of view and presents the argument of the drama. In Boal's initial experiments in the 1960s, the system of the joker, was a way of 'combining play and analysis', of introducing a figure 'who is a contemporary and neighbour of the spectator' (1995, 174–5). The Joker leads the audience in an educational analysis of what is happening and calls the audience to action at the end of the play. Spect-actors intervene directly through replacing the protagonist in the dramatic action, trying out different solutions in order to change the outcome. Therefore, instead of a play being a static event that the audience merely watches and absorbs, it becomes a living breathing real life situation which can be engaged with critically in order to explore solutions and complexities, but at an embodied level, thereby offering insights which often elude disembodied intellectual academic reflection (Pineau 1994, pp. 16, 17).

To date there have been two forum theatre presentations of DOKO 2 with over 20 'spectators'. The first presentation was at the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) 8th triennial European Research Conference, which was held in Maynooth University in September 2016, and the second, was at a workshop to first year students of a Youth and Community Work degree as part of their Community Drama module, also in Maynooth University. There have been several other smaller presentations of DOKO 2 with different groups of student teachers, as well as two presentations with Doctorate in

Education students, most of whom were school principals. The following paragraphs offer a brief synopsis of the larger presentations at ESREA and with the Youth and Community students.

At the ESREA conference, the play was performed live by actors from KYT to a conference audience of about 20. The final scene was played through once, culminating in Mark's expulsion. Before the scene was played through again, acting as 'Joker', I explained the 'rules' of Forum Theatre to the audience. That is, that the scene is to be played through again, but if anyone notices or thinks of anything that either of the oppressed, in this case Mark or his father, could say or do differently that might change the outcome, they should say 'STOP'. As Joker, I then play a short 'voice warmer' exercise with the audience using 'stop' and 'go', to help lower audience inhibitions around using their voice to stop the performance. I also explain that if no one says 'stop', then the performance will play out to its predetermined conclusion and that nothing will change.

The biggest risk in a forum production is that no one will intervene, which happily was not the case at the ESREA conference presentation. Spectators needed little encouragement to jump up on stage to replace either Mark or his father, or indeed both. The scene is replayed and has barely begun before someone says 'stop'. The first suggestion is that the protagonist should be more forceful in his manner of defending himself against the school management. The person who suggested the 'intervention' is then invited onto the stage to replace the protagonist/Mark and try out this strategy. The actors in KYT are well rehearsed and stay firmly in character, and in this instance, it is clear that taking a more aggressive stance against management does little but to hurry the scene towards its conclusion with even greater speed. The 'intervener' is applauded for their courage in stepping up, and a short discussion then ensues to explore why the proposed solution was not successful. The game then starts up again, someone else says 'stop' and so on. The Joker in essence is similar to the facilitator,

although Boal prefers the term ‘difficultator’, (1995, p. xix) as he/she is charged with steering participants away from simplistic solutions and keeping the dramatic process open (Prendergast, 2009, p. 126). The Joker’s task is to both support and provoke (Osterlind, 2008), so following each intervention I engage the audience in a discussion on what they have witnessed and experienced. In the Youth and Community Workers group, one man, who stepped in to replace Mark, became quite verbally aggressive towards the teachers during his intervention. This man later explained how aggression has been a default position for him as a young man when he felt threatened and explained that the feelings of powerlessness evoked by taking up Mark’s position on stage had triggered old pattern of default behaviour. He challenged anyone to take up the oppressed position, and not to feel helpless and immobilised. His performance, and subsequent honesty regarding his emotional reaction, led to an interesting discussion about the difference between thinking out solutions to issues and being able to resolve them in actuality.

The most successful intervention was later on with the same group. In one of the final interventions, a man stepped up to replace the father, Mr Doyle, and discussed with the teachers his ideas for managing his son’s behaviour in cooperation with the school management. His suggestions, such as staying in open contact with the school, sitting in on his son’s classes if there was an issue, or removing his son from the class to work with him alone in another room until his behaviour had calmed down, were so reasonable and well thought out, that the management team struggled to argue for the expulsion. It transpired that this man’s job involved advocating for students who were at risk of expulsion. This led to an interesting dialogue about the challenge for parents from working class backgrounds in helping their children navigate the state education system, and the need for support around this.

Boal sees the invasion of an audience member onto the stage as a symbolic trespass, a necessary step in the path to freedom from whatever it is that oppresses us. In so doing, the spect-actor transforms not only the fiction of the performance, but himself (Boal, 2002, p. xxi). I often use an exercise with student teachers that I stole/borrowed from my colleague in Maynooth University Peter Hussey, where I ask students to identify the space in the room. The 'teaching space' for example is usually at the front, sometimes on a raised platform, and most often hosts all the technical equipment, giving the distinct impression that this is where the 'action' happens. The 'learning space' is generally situated towards the back of the room, laid out in rows of seats, impressing upon us the notion of learning as a passive activity. After students have analysed the two spaces, they work in groups to devise activities that would have learners 'occupy' the 'teaching space', to symbolically take control of the learning process and to work towards equalising power relations in the classroom setting. Boal's theatre opens up thinking on other forms of practice, and how it is conducted. In the case of research, the intention is to open up the possibility for research participants to trespass upon aspects of their own experiences (Flint, 2015), thereby transforming his or her social reality. Theatre of the Oppressed also affords spectators a space within which to seek solutions to a problem, thereby creating inclusive decision making, and in this study with the intention of fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility in the research process.

I continue to use DOKO 2 as a tool for provoking thought, discussion and insight with student teachers, and the play is still being shown, mostly as a film, though sometimes as a live performance. Where possible, the last scene is forumed and participants and spectators have the opportunity to try to change the final outcome. This is a strategic decision, designed to foster more empathic feeling between teachers and students who are on the verge of expulsion, by literally setting up a dramatic scenario where teachers and student teachers are invited to sit in the seat of the 'troublemaker'. Boal (1995) argues that one of the properties of

the knowledge-enhancing power of the arts is self-reflexivity, that is that it has the capacity to allow us to observe ourselves in action, imagine ourselves as actors and agents of change.

Essentially the process of combining ethnodrama and forum theatre is a process demanding reflection and praxis; Paulo Freire's (1972) concept of 'conscientisation', or what Maxine Green terms 'social imagination'; the ability to imagine new possibilities and to believe they can make a difference (1995, p.5). Boal has argued that oppression is an embodied experience, and therefore the struggle to overcome oppression should include approaches that engage participants' minds and bodies. Liberatory or emancipatory knowledge is characterised by its ability to challenge dominant ways of knowing and is seen as key to transformative learning (Ryan, McCormack & Ryan, 2004). I believe that Adult and Community education research benefits from being disseminated through platforms that create space to interact with the findings not only intellectually but emotionally and physically. In essence, told through an assortment of dramatic and narrative arrangements, a case is made, all the more compellingly, for productive consideration and potential action (Pelias, 2015).

The video of 'Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2' is available to watch here;



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIKkpISHiCM>

PART THREE

STAGE 2 – MAKING POETRY WITH PRISONERS’ TRANSCRIPTS

We want poems

Like fists...

Poems that shoot guns

Poems that wrestle cops into alleys

And take their weapons (Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones, 1969)

THE PREAMBLE

Following on from the ethnodrama piece, which was in a sense a collective expression of participant voice, I worked with a number of participants from the prison individually, transforming interview transcripts into performative poems or monologues. The ethnodrama could not capture each participant’s individual experience, and this was particularly the case with prisoner narratives, many of whose stories were omitted from the ethnodrama in order to try to preserve a feeling of contemporariness to the research. I therefore returned time and again to the prison to discuss with individuals the content of their interview transcripts, becoming concerned with how to present and preserve these narratives in their entirety.

How we know the world in emotional, embodied and psychic ways, stretch far beyond the typical format of prose selected from an interview transcript. Methods such as transcript poetry, can reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions of a life spoken as a meaningful whole, a whole which makes sense of its parts (Richardson, 1993). This is especially crucial in research with prisoners, as this is where the oppressive structures that preceded, or as Irene Baird (1999) would say ‘precipitated’, the criminal actions are made visible. The research methodology can therefore be considered an instrument for social change, also within the

academy and in academic writing, where despite the rise and acceptance of arts-based research, there remains a bias in favour of statistics and selected quotes.

Working from the idea that poetry can enlarge understanding, when it seems that prose fails to adequately capture ““a moment of truth”” (Faulkner, 2007, p.219), participants and I worked together, highlighting, cutting and pasting sentences from transcripts into themes until a poem or monologue emerged. I re-worked pieces independently, and with the help of professional poet Colm Keegan. I enlisted professional actor and former prisoner Tommy O’Neill to record some of the poems, the main goal being to preserve and prioritise orality and the power of spoken word. At every stage of the process, I was concerned with honouring participants’ voice, and in finding methods that could engage an audience on an empathic level.

THE POEMS

The three poems, or monologues, presented in this chapter as examples, are the outcome of a participatory process of representing participants’ interview transcripts poetically. Christy, Dean and Luke (pseudonyms) were three of 12 incarcerated men, who chose to participate in this doctoral study. Dean and Luke were in their early thirties at the time of interview, Christy was in his late forties, and the only participant whom I did not manage to see again after interview. Two of the poems chosen for selection here describe participants’ experience in mainstream school, contrasted with their experience of Adult Education through the prison system, as this theme is probably of the most interest and relevance to the field of Adult and Community Education. The third poem describes a participant’s experience as a relatively significant figure in the world of drug dealing and is included as it was his story that was the

catalyst for my working with poetic inquiry and might therefore be of interest to anyone considering incorporating poetry as a methodological approach.

The initial idea of condensing the interview narratives from my doctoral research into poetic form originated because of an interview I had with one participant. Dean, an incarcerated man in his early thirties, who had been particularly candid with me about his experience of drug dealing. His story had resonated strongly with me because of an unsettling experience I had had, working with ‘at risk’ youth in Dublin, and witnessing their attraction to the glamour and status of the criminal underworld, especially as depicted in the popular Love/Hate TV series glamorising Dublin gangland culture. I observed the teenage group I was working with, during the height of the show’s popularity, aspire and strive to emulate the glamorous mobster culture portrayed on screen. Dean’s lived experience in Dublin’s drug gangs painted a different picture. He was deeply regretful of the life decisions he had made, which he described as ‘no life’, and how he had put his own and his family’s lives in danger. I shared my experience of working with the teenage group, and we spoke about how we might shape Dean’s story into a monologue or performance piece that would have the potential to be used as a learning tool for working with ‘at-risk’ youth. The idea sprang from a method schools often use in collaboration with recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or Narcotics Anonymous, whereby a recovering alcoholic or addict is invited into a school to conduct a talk with students with the hope of deterring destructive alcohol or drug use. However, having spent two years attempting to engage the teenage group, I was doubtful that this method would have any positive impact with this particular cohort due to its similarity to a lecture. My idea was to harness the aesthetics of theatre in combination with Dean’s true-life story, to provoke critical thought and help to dispel some of the romanticism around life as a drug dealer.

Dean and I met up several times and worked together on his interview transcripts, highlighting sentences and phrases we felt stood out, and grouping and numbering these until we gave cohesion to his story in a condensed form. I now know that this is a common method of poetic transcription that researchers use in an effort to reveal the essence of participants lived experience, and as a means to evoke emotional response in readers and listeners (Faulkner, 2005, pp. 7- 9). What is perhaps less common in poetic inquiry, is the collaborative nature that my work with participants took. This is rooted in a Freirean commitment to Adult and Community Education ideals and pedagogy, and the deliberate positioning of the participant as ‘expert’ and active stakeholder in the research process. It also requires that I relinquish all notion of myself as ‘expert’. I found that when I revisited transcripts with participants, that I had frequently misunderstood the significance of certain events. Boal (1993) gives an extremely effective example of this from one of Freire’s literacy workshops in Peru, where youngsters were asked to photograph a symbol of oppression. One boy took a photo of a nail on the wall, which initially facilitators took to mean that he had misunderstood the assignment. Through dialogue, they discovered that the boys, who survived by shining shoes in the city, had to pay a fee to the landlords to be allowed to hang up their signs. So, the nail in the wall represented this oppressive practice. In the absence of dialogue, the facilitators, having never been shoe-shine boys in Lima, could not have understood the noteworthiness of a nail in the wall to their participants. For me in this study, it was often only when I positioned myself from the perspective of the learner and asked questions, checking and re-checking, that I could begin to understand the nuances of participants’ stories.

Dean expanded on the details of some of the aspects of his experience, which I duly recorded and transcribed, before returning to repeat the process. As the poem took form, he also made the decision to remove certain details, particularly personal details, and those which he

believed could possibly expose his identity. This was an interesting turn of events and coincided with the research moving into a more performative and therefore potentially more visible sphere. It is worth mentioning that several of Dean's associates had been killed in the preceding months, and this also undoubtedly influenced this decision.

The Price

There's no pride in selling drugs

Hiding from the police

Keeping your head down

GO to a drug dealer

ASK him

Are you having a good time?

I looked at my father

He couldn't afford to buy us a pair of runners

I don't want THIS

I'm not living my life like THAT

I was in a hurry to grow up

Money mad

Drug dealers

They had EVERYTHING

People that didn't work driving fancy cars

Nice clothes

Their own houses

'He has a GREAT life'

Why work for a lousy couple of hundred quid?

I can make what he makes in a week in an hour

Eventually I got there

I had the cars

I had the houses

But there's still a sense of emptiness

*Cos it's NEVER enough
It's always someone else's money*

*And you ARE working
You're working 24/7
There's no cut off point
'Oh its 5 o'clock I can go home'
It's not like that*

*No matter what I was doing the phone was ringing
It could be 3 o'clock in the morning
Your phone's still ringing
The kids they're getting dragged home
Cos you've to go off and do something*

*It makes you SNAP
At the wrong people*

*People don't have the money to pay
The violence comes in then
It's a VICIOUS circle
The people who owe YOU money are just as dangerous
Watching your back
Constant vigilance
Looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life
I'll NEVER walk through a park
Without looking behind me back*

*EVERYONE owes someone
ANYONE can kill you*

*'We'll do another year and then get out'
Your whole life spent chasing your tail
There's two options to get out of drugs*

In JAIL

Or in a BOX

When he fucks up and can't fix it

That's it

You're dead

I've seen it

I've LIVED it

I was LUCKY

I'm in jail

This is my 3rd Christmas

Me missus at home with the kids

On her own

You're putting your KIDS in danger

You're putting every family member in danger

There's always someone bigger than you

You can't go home and SHUT your door

And know that nobody's coming through it

There's no pride in selling drugs

Hiding from the police

Keeping your head down

GO to a drug dealer

ASK him

Are you having a good time?

THE PROCESS

Turning research interviews into poetry or monologues, has been a process of discovery for me and came about largely from fear that I would not be able to accurately represent participants' stories through traditional qualitative methods. The conversations with

prisoners, which all began with childhood as the first question I asked was about their experience in school, all described the transition from the innocence of childhood to criminality. When viewed in its entirety, it seemed possible to pinpoint the events, or cumulation of circumstances in participants' narratives that had culminated in a prison sentence. However, during the data collection, as I isolated phrases from the transcripts to support the various research themes of my research, I felt I was losing the essence of the stories and thereby the core findings of my research. Consequently, I became obsessed with finding a method to present a synopsis of the stories as a whole. This is the purpose of research poetry, that is poetry that utilises participants' exact words in a compressed form in an attempt to convey the central message (Faulkner, 2007).

I started working with other participants in the same way, some to a greater or lesser extent than with Dean. It was important and preferable for me, where possible, to involve the men in the analysis of their own transcripts so as to affirm firstly they had been truly 'heard', and secondly, to ensure that the elements which held most significance to them held a place in the representation. I engaged with D. Soyini Madison (1999) and identified with her use of poetic transcription to capture the rhythms of black speech. There was a colour, depth and humour, an oral swagger in participants' speech, which is unique to Irish working class and which I was anxious to try to encapsulate, and which I believed the poems, or monologues, came closer to achieving. The goal was to preserve the speaking style, while at the same time capturing the spirit of the story (Faulkner, 2005, p. 7).

Sandra Faulkner's (2007) article, 'Concern with Craft: Using Ars Poetica as criteria for reading research poetry' did just that - and alerted me to concerning myself with the craft and aesthetics of poetry. Attention to craft is attention to images, to line, metaphor and simile, music, voice, emotion, story, and grammar (Faulkner, 2007, p.17). Very often participants' transcripts were full of repetition of certain words or phrases. Poetic form offered a space

whereby reiteration could be presented, and its implications considered. I loved that poems allowed space to consider its implication. Frequently participants would use a metaphor from a film or from television to describe an aspect of their experience. ‘Shutter Island’, for example, to describe a children’s home, or ‘Angela’s Ashes’ to describe a primary school. Exploring with participants the meaning they wished to convey in their choice of metaphor often led to richer and clearer description, such as ‘grey granite columns above the cliffs’ and ‘one day he grabbed me up against the wall by the throat’.

I had followed much of Glesne’s (1997) method for re-presenting research through poetic transcription instinctively, having only come across her work in hindsight. Glesne (1997) identifies three rules to guide the process of poetic transcription; namely that; the words be those of the participant not the researcher; that phrases could be extracted from anywhere in the transcript and juxtaposed; that the poem should be presented according to the participant’s speaking rhythm (p. 205). I found working with participants on their transcripts with highlighters and scissors, and literally cutting and pasting lines into verses helped mould interviews into poems. The act of physically isolating phrases and words from text, mirrored a method I had found to be successful in my previous work as a literacy tutor, that I also felt took into consideration the literacy issues for this cohort. Participants seemed to enjoy the physical aspect of moving and grouping phrases into position. With some of the younger men, who were more confident with reading and writing, we worked directly with the cut and paste functions on a computer.

Honouring the speaking rhythm meant copying sentences and phrases in their entirety, which meant for me, that I often returned to the audio recordings, paying more attention to the pause and the natural punctuation of participants’ speech. Some participants spoke in short, punchy phrases, which leant itself well to poetic form. Some of the poems read better as monologues, and we visualised them as performance pieces rather than poetry.

THE POET

'*So, are you actually a poet?*' asked Luke as I enthused about the merits of his transcript poem. '*Eh, no. Not actually*', I admitted, '*but I think I might know someone*'.

Sandra Faulkner (2007) describes the inertia inducing experience of reading and listening to 'lousy' poetry masquerading as research and vice versa (p. 220). I can only imagine, that for actual 'artists', amateur renderings of their particular art form by researchers experimenting with form and genre must irk the sensibilities of those deeply involved in its culture. Patricia Leavy (2015) recommends 'interdisciplinary collaboration' as a criterion for assessing aesthetics in arts-based research. By this she means working with other professionals outside of our own disciplines in order to 'maximise the aesthetic qualities and authenticity of the work' (p. 18). As a researcher, I was satisfied that the transcript poems met with Glesne's criteria for poetic transcription. However, although transcript poems can be less concerned with 'artsy' concerns than say interpretive poetry (Faulkner, 2007, pp. 221-222), I was interested in the work reaching and engaging an audience on an aesthetic level, so it made sense to ask the opinion of someone who worked in the area of performative poetry, particularly as I wasn't 'actually a poet'.

I contacted Dublin poet Colm Keegan. Keegan is a writer and performance poet who has been shortlisted four times for the Hennessy New Irish Writing Award for both poetry and fiction, and who won the All-Ireland Poetry Slam in 2010. My ulterior motive for contacting him regarding this research, however, was also down to his typecast as a working-class poet. Colm Keegan is originally from Ballymun, an area on Dublin's Northside, notorious for its high-rise tower blocks and flat complexes and the social problems that arose from poor planning and government policies. Most, if not all of the prisoners I was working with, came from areas that would have experienced similar levels of neglect and social deprivation.

Keegan's work etches a portrait of working-class Dublin in a voice that isn't heard too often in the poetry world, so I figured that his opinion would be the one most likely to carry sway with participants. Furthermore, I reasoned his background and life experience positioned him perfectly to be able to judge whether these research poems were successful in helping the reader or listener access the speaker's world.

We met late one evening in a hotel over tea, chips and poetry.

'They're good', he said.

I realised I had been holding my breath. *'Are you sure?'*

'They're really good. I'd like to meet them. The men'.

Faulkner (2007) admits that describing a 'good' poem, is an impossible task, as its definitions are variable and elusive, not to mention highly personal (p. 222). Nevertheless, with research poetry, it should be possible to assess whether it succeeds aesthetically by asking whether the use of creative analytical practices opens up the research and invites interpretive responses, and whether it is artistically shaped, satisfying, complex and not boring (Richardson, 2000). One is unlikely to want to meet the author of work that is thought to be mediocre or dull, so I took Keegan's comments as indication that at least some aesthetic success criteria were being met, and we set about concerning ourselves with artistic details. Colm suggested some changes to the poems I had brought. These suggestions were concerned with craft and looked at elements such as line length and verse, punctuation and the pause, and the use of metaphor and repetition. I took note of all the suggestions and returned to the prison bolstered by the advice and reassurance.

Participants appeared encouraged by the suggestions, and all accepted and made changes accordingly. The response to receiving positive endorsement of their life poems from a professional poet, was in some instances very moving. Luke (pseudonym), who asked me if I

was a poet and whose poem ‘A bit better’ (below) is about his struggle in school with undiagnosed dyslexia, swung back on his chair holding his finished poem and holding eye-contact,

‘It is good, isn’t it?’ he beamed.

Many people with previous convictions have had profoundly negative experiences of school (Meaney, 2019). Most of the people I spoke to over the course of my research, rarely experienced praise, endorsement or validation, and yet it has been effectually argued that the self-esteem of children is central to their education development (Humphreys, 2004). I chose to collaborate with professionals such as Colm Keegan and actor Tommy O’Neill, as I felt that their opinion would carry weight with participants. That Luke could self-evaluate his work ‘A bit better’ so positively at the end of the process, to me is indicative of the transformative value of the methodology.

A bit better

I left by choice

But I wasn’t learning

I didn’t pass or anything

I was more behind

What was the point?

Just sat around

Bored

Going backwards

Instead of going forwards

More messing than learning

Suspended a few times

For throwing stuff

Fighting

You learnt more outside

Dossing around

Getting into cars

Into trouble with the police

Stuff like that

What you do

Didn't really have a plan

They should have learnt me more

Focus on who was behind

If I could turn back time

And stick it out

Learn how to work 'round it

It's hard enough

Not able to read and write

The likes of big books

Application forms

Stuck on words

'Here, what's that say?'

Awkward

The shame of it

I wanted to get back

To help me like

Start using this brain

And to get through the time

Start off with basic stupid stuff

She thinks we're in playschool

I know how to start

I want to go forward

Instead of fucking backwards

She says I'm going from back to front

*I'm kind of backwards
Trying to spell it that way
When it should be that way
I do be guessing
Then looking at her to see
If she's going to give me the answer*

*I'm getting a bit better
She says
A bit better
I'm trying
Break it up
Put it all together
And it all makes sense*

PERFORMANCE

I began to view all of the transcripts as a series of lyric poems, with an implied narrative that could make this world accessible to the reader, a method which Richardson (1994, pp. 8-9), believes come closer to achieving this than any other form of ethnographic writing. Most important in all of this is of course the written and oral tradition of poetry, and how this lends itself to the dissemination process. Creating research poetry is a performative act (Prendergast, 2009), and just as Boal (1995) spoke of the 'magnifying' ability of theatre, in that it brings things closer, poetry too has the attraction in that it can be read, performed, responded to, and presented in diverse settings to different audiences, bringing social theoretic understandings 'live' to bars, theatres, research conventions and media (Richardson, 2002), thus bringing the research 'findings' closer.

For the performance of the prison poems, I enlisted well-known Dublin actor Tommy O'Neill, as much for his acting experience as for his background and for how he would be

able to relate to the poetry, which I felt would enhance the performance. I met Tommy on a dark October evening in 2016, at his home in South-West Dublin City. Prior to this meeting, I knew very little about Tommy O'Neill, except that he was a working actor on Fair City, Ireland's long running soap opera, and that he had been to prison.

'I've won awards, you know', he says, 'but they always focus on the prison thing'.

The 'prison thing' in fairness is very interesting. O'Neill was convicted of bank robbery and sentenced to nine years in jail, reduced to three; he gave himself up to Gardaí after having a *'conversation with God in his head'*. He describes the conversation as 'a spiritual awakening', an event he attributes to becoming a father, and a gnawing realisation that the lifestyle he was leading was going to end in fatality.

Tommy's stories from prison are horror material but told with such mad-cap good humour that they entertain much in the way a Tarantino film appeals. He speaks of men being shivved (knifed) while queuing in the canteen; of being upturned from a mattress in the middle of the night during cell searches; of rapes; of working on 'the mysteries', where in the absence of cell-toilets inmates would toss their excrement wrapped in newspaper out through their cell bars.

'Your job was to collect the newspaper and you never knew who done it so it was called 'the mysteries'.

O'Neill's descriptions are so vivid and detailed; I am surprised to learn his incarceration was over three decades ago, each a performance in their own right, complete with multiple characters and accents, mime and facial expressions. It's easy to see how he got into acting. His pace is frenetic, and his narratives jump, unconstrained by time and date yet recounted at such speed, you get the impression that time either has to be made up for or is running out.

'I got angry reading the poems' he tells me, 'I didn't sleep well last night'.

O'Neill's own experience of school was fraught, to say the least. *'My worst memory of school is some young lad had his coat taken and I was blamed'*. He tells the story of how he was brought around all of the classes and beaten in each one in front of everyone as a message to any would-be thieves. In one classroom he remembers locking eyes with his brother.

'The only person who knew categorically that I hadn't done it. We weren't brought up like that. The next day a woman came in and said that her son had taken it home by mistake. That always stuck in my mind'.

O'Neill believes his terrifying school days in Dublin contributed to his emotional problems. He was diagnosed an acute alcoholic at the age of 17 and became hooked on heroin in the 70's and continued a life of drink and drugs, which he reflects on as a 'death wish'. O'Neill's return to education was in Mountjoy Prison, where he recalls how he used to love Dublin poet Pat Ingoldsby's creative writing classes. Mountjoy prison is also where O'Neill wrote his first play in the 1990's.

Two of the recordings were played at the Irish Prison Service Supporting Prison Education Conference in Portlaoise in 2016. Several conference participants described the poems as 'powerful' and 'emotional'. The poem which has been played the most, and the one I used most recently in a peer-to-peer research project with prisoners and former prisoners around barriers to Higher Education (Meaney, 2019), and the poem that was the inspiration behind the research play I wrote as part of this doctoral study, was 'Finding Freedom'.

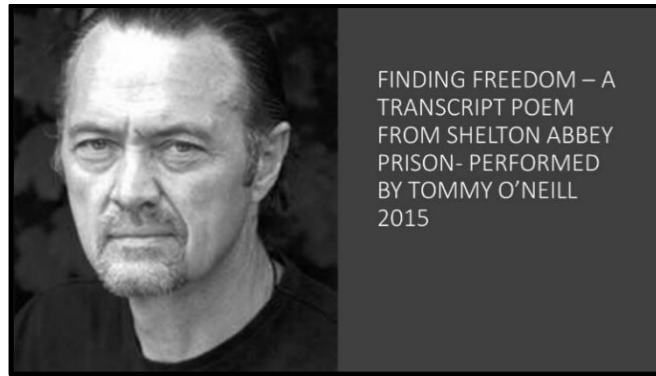
Christy (pseudonym) was one of the first men to talk to me privately about his experience of attending primary (elementary) school in Ireland, and he spoke of the difficulties and abuse he experienced at the hands of the Christian Brothers. Christy's family had returned to Ireland after living for a period in the U.K, and Christy attributed his being 'singled-out' as a

target for abuse in school, due to his having acquired an English accent. He also talked about the positive impact adult education had on his return to education as an adult via the prison education system, and how this had impacted positively on his self-esteem and on his relationship with prison staff.

Christy's was the only prison poem that I crafted without input from the participant, as Christy was transferred to a more secure institution and I could no longer gain access, nor would it have been appropriate to attempt to do so. I spent a lot of time on Christy's audio recording as a result. Without the benefit of participant collaboration to check facts and details, I listened and re-listened to Christy's contribution in the focus group and to his one-to-one interview several times. Poetic inquiry requires us to listen deeply. It embraces the notion of speech as an embodied activity, honouring speakers' pause, repetitions and rhythm (Prendergast, 2009). Where there was uncertainty, I tried to reflect this in the poem, by leaving elements open to interpretation. Where there were details that Christy may not have wanted included, I erred on the side of caution and respect, and omitted them.

This act of witnessing through deep listening raises many ethical questions about the role we have as researchers in reflecting the hard realities we witness and about the possible impacts of our renderings on those embedded in what we study. I have no way of knowing the significance of involvement in this study for Christy. I can be reassured that I acted ethically and adhered to the guidelines, principles and procedures as laid out in the ethics approval for this research. However, Christy's narrative, *Finding Freedom*, which ironically is one of the more 'hopeful' of all the prison poems, will always serve as a stark reminder to me of the tentative nature of Adult Education and the vulnerability of its participants.

'Finding Freedom' performed by Tommy O'Neill is available to listen to [here](#);



<https://youtu.be/l8p3zPk-kv8>

POSTSCRIPT

The process of shaping that occurs in poetic transcription is different to the type of editing that takes place in traditional qualitative research data analysis. In this study, I chose where possible, to adopt a collaborative research strategy that involved participants in the shaping and editing of their own transcript poems. One of the critics of poetic inquiry, Michael Schwalbe (1995), argued that poetry cannot access social worlds, nor uncover and interpret their frameworks. This, however, runs contrary to my experience of working with data creatively and collaboratively. I would argue that the only way we can access another's social world is through our imagination and it would therefore stand to reason that research methods that furnish imagination, empathy and emotive response are more conducive to doing so.

All 10 transcript poems from this research are presented together in this thesis in the next chapter.

Finding Freedom

– An anthology of transcript poems from participants in Shelton Abbey Prison and the XLc Waterford



Image by artist and former prisoner-

Jimmy Leonard

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Foreword

The collection of poems presented here, evolved from a PhD research study with prisoners and youth, that creatively explored their perspective and experience of school exclusion. We worked with participants' interview transcripts to edit them into poems or monologues.

I believe there is so much that can be learnt from these stories, and I hope that each takes the reader on a walk in somebody else's shoes.

Sarah Meaney Sartori, June 2020.

*My poems do not need
academics or study notes
or lectures or any of
that other self-serving,
ego-massaging stuff which
diminishes beauty and
stifles wonder.*

*All my poems need is me.
All my poems need is you.*

It is as simple and as beautiful as that.

Pat Ingoldsby¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Ingoldsby, P. (2017). *Can I get in the bath?* Dublin: Willow Publications.

25 Charges

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

I found it frustrating, the sitting still
Concentrate, look up here, learn here, don't be...
It was my own fault I think
being giddy always messing
putting other lads off
Me granny used to say I had worms

I was taken out of class one day
by the scruff of the neck
pushed against the wall
grabbed by the throat
Do I have to take this in school and at home?
I knew then I didn't want to be staying

There was a guy who sponsored me for me confirmation
he turned up in his military clothes
it looked cool
He'd bring you back these badges from the Lebanon
stars and stripes and stuff like that
Stay out of trouble and I'll get you into the army
That dream went out the window

They picked me up when I was on the street
it was easy for them
15 years of age
young and alone
They knew me
they knew the family
an easy touch

In the police station by meself

the questioning room

four tables

two big men

25 charges that I never done

a hole in the wall

The last fella that didn't sign for charges

that's where his head went

They wouldn't let your Ma in

they wouldn't get you a lawyer

I JUST WANT TO GO HOME

Sign here, sign here, sign here, sign here

Malicious damage, breaking into a car

stuff like that

I couldn't even drive!

St Patrick's Institution for a day

it was rough

The judge she asked

Well, what did you learn?

What do you mean?

Back in for another week for being cheeky

that week went on for 6 months

My first trouble with the police...

I didn't get in trouble

25 charges that I never done

What did you learn?

What do you mean?

A Bit Better

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

I left by choice
but I wasn't learning
I didn't pass or anything
I was more behind
what was the point?
just sat around
bored
going backwards
instead of forwards
more messing than learning
suspended a few times
for throwing stuff
fighting
you learnt more outside
dossing around
getting into cars
into trouble with the police
stuff like that
What you do!
didn't really have a plan

They should have learnt me more
focus on who was behind
if I could turn back time
and stick it out
learn how to work 'round it...

It's hard enough
not able to read and write

the likes of big books
application forms
stuck on words
Here, what's that say?
awkward
the shame of it

I wanted to get back
to help me like
start using this brain
and to get through the time
Start off with basic stupid stuff
she thinks we're in playschool
I know how to start
I want to go forward
instead of fucking backwards

She says I'm going from back to front
I'm kind of backwards
trying to spell it that way
when it should be that way
I do be guessing
then looking at her to see
if she's going to give me the answer

I'm getting a bit better
she says
a bit better
I'm trying
break it up
put it all together
and it all makes sense

A Bold Child

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

My mother she said I was grand
no bothers
the quietest out of them all
Used to sit and play with the milk bottle all day long
Until I went to school, she said
That's where the trouble started

He's a bold child
up the front on his own
barred out of the yard for a week
sitting outside the staff room
a white card or something it's called
other kids thinking
Oh, he's the boy

The first time I was expelled
was for throwing a stink bomb
in the assembly hall where we were lining up
him catching me by the ear and locks
I went home on my own
and they never took me back

I went into the school
for young kids thrown out of other schools
everyone bunched in together
all feeding off each other
funny enough everyone who was in that school
ended up in prison

I picked up a few charges for stupid things
shop lifting around the town
taking bikes that weren't locked on to poles
the judge sent me to Clonmel then
for four years
I was twelve

It was run by brothers
we used to get lashed
with a stick
I used to run away all the time
to get home

When we were making the confirmation
they brought us into the town to pick out our clothes
the day we were making the confirmation
they said I was messing
misbehaving
they sat me up the front
in the pyjamas, a housecoat and slippers
one staff on one side
one staff on the other
so I never actually made it
I never got the day

With the ADHD I could go off very fast
there was a staff in Clonmel
a woman who put time into me
she'd sit down
and I'd sit down next of her
she'd give me a fag
she'd talk to me

look you in the eye

oh, she cares

she was the only staff I'd do something for

I'd stop

A little college for crime

when I left I couldn't read or write

I was rightly wild

picked up a load of charges

and when I turned 16

St Patrick's and down to Spike

but as wild as I was

they used to say

He's very soft you know

big tough fella and look at you there, nearly crying!

oh but you've a great heart

a loveable rogue

Even though we've the ADHD

there's still a heart there

Do you know?

A Mistake on a Page

by Anonymous XLc Project Waterford

You know if you make a mistake on a page
you can rip it up and start again
I'd fuckin love to do that
with my life

I think I got lost
going from Primary
basically a fuckin day-care
out into the world
into like the deep ocean
this big warehouse
one teacher to like thirty students
hundreds upon hundreds
sheep
all following the herd

trying to find themselves
on their fucking smart phones
all these fucking selfies
when they don't even know themselves
if you're vulnerable in any way
you're going to have a hard time

Young lads
they want to impress each other
everybody wants to be the top man
think they're gangsters
until it comes to the point
when the fun's over

I'd have been pretty wiry like
I was going to say fast
but that doesn't mean anything
just you know
Wiry

A lot of built up anger
a few issues underlying
nobody knew

It wasn't a punishment
it was more of an assessment
my behaviour wasn't right
for a lad my age like
I had to be contained
do you know to
eh
stabilise me

It's called a special care unit
but there's fences and locked doors and cameras
hatches on the wall
the whole 9 yards
lads my age smoking heroin
a lot of cases of like
child abuse
They have these meetings
they hold you there
indefinitely
on one of their orders
High Court orders
the highest of the highest

It does something to you
when you're young
in them sort of places
you carry it with you
stuff they label you with
always there
in the back of your mind
it still haunts me

every other teen
you'd be at home
learning new things
out there having fun
going home to their families

I missed out on that
Social anxiety comes with that then
because you haven't had time to develop
you get this stigma
you carry it with you
paranoid
stuff like that

Then you think

Why me?

I think you're given that life
from the day you're born
that was the book I was given

I don't have plans
but I've got a feeling
there has to be something good at the end of all this
cos if there's not...

what's the point?

Finding Freedom

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

Education will set you free?

I always felt trapped

wake up in the morning

open your eyes

school

ab shit

For years and years I was tormented

I had an English accent on me

the more they singled me out

the worse I became

I wasn't *settling in*

Sir or Mr or Brother or Sister

who were these people speaking down to me?

in my life supposed to give me direction

but all they gave me was violence and abuse

I started hitting back, lashin' back

the physical seemed to be getting me places

the outcome was still the same

I was going home no matter what

Fighting seemed to be the thing

I had the name at this stage

bigger people to prove myself to

of all the lessons I could have taken from school

that's the one I took

My whole world a goldfish bowl of boxing
I didn't have fear
I never thought consequences
hurt people hurt people
that's me
that's what I do
all the aggression, the fears, the resentment
the HATE HATE HATE HATE
everyday drinkin' druggin' hangover
hating the world
hating myself
waking up sick

It was on the cards
It was inevitable
for years and years and years
but I didn't see it
I didn't see it

*This life sentence is going to kill me
hanging around the landings
doing drugs
doing what I do well
fighting*

I started going to school it was different
there's a good buzz
a good energy
a good vibe
a different click
a camaraderie in the classroom

we were adults
but yet we were like kids
getting to know people
other people who are struggling
And the interest grew!

This is brilliant

being able to pick up a newspaper
or write a letter
little conversations about worldly affairs
got my head out of this environment
for a few hours

The screws started to know me
more of the staff were saying hello

Respect me cos I go to school

there's days when I really do feel it you know

that education set me free

In Care of the State

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

My social worker a Guardian of light
suggested it was better
cos you keep your room
trust me whoever ends up with him is FUCKED
It's not that far
he said
read this, sign that
I'm signing contracts that thick since I'm 8 or 9
I've had 24 different social workers
That's what care is like

Away from everywhere
huge big red-brick building
grey granite columns above the cliffs
even on a bright day it's all fog
you can barely see the water
Grey sand, grey everything
it was the year we got the snow
the bus one day once a week
some owl crazy doing mad things at the back
3 hours up and 3 hours back to YouthReach

The minute you walk in
ah no I've made a mistake
it was like a prison with the corridor system
the same windows
Plexiglas with the grates
a TV room, couple of manky couches
television on the wall

two or three stations
signs everywhere for this and that
big bright lights that never turned off

a room like a cell
no shelves no wardrobe
kept my stuff in a bag in the corner
the bed a big box
that fits them blue prison mattresses
out from the wall like an island

They'd wake you up at 5 o'clock
open and check you're there
wake you up then slam your door
first couple of nights they didn't have sheets
I was just on the mattress

You'd get into fights
they'd have to restrain you
one day the big fella comes over
I swung at him
he swung at me
the staff broke it up
later my room door's hanging open
my room's trashed
a load of stuff missing
personal stuff
the only picture of me out' fella

if you were out with your friends
they'd ring the Garda station
he's missing. He's in care of the state

back to the station
give you a hiding
if you've no way home
you're supposed to present yourself
I'm in care of the state
fuck off we're not a taxi service
you've two legs don't you?

I never touched drugs 'til I got to that house
then one day
give me that
I came back in bits
like I was dying
called the staff panting
call an ambulance
I'll look up what's wrong with you
BOOM drop onto the floor
head banged off a mate's door
he looks at me
he looks at them
takes out his phone
they defibrillate me on the floor

In care of the state
that's what care is like
a mad place
a mad house
it got closed down

No One Cares

by Anonymous XLc Project

I wasn't asked to leave
I left because
how do I put it?
it was no way good for my health
by the end

I was just pushed aside
just kind of ignored
saying that they were trying to do stuff
I waited and waited
and nothing

I lost a lot of weight
wasn't talking
wasn't doing much
wasn't sleeping
I just didn't want to live
the stress was bad
walking in every day
but the depression lingered
after I'd left the building
it still stayed

there was so much noise
I could do so much better
if I could go up to higher...
they wouldn't let me
you have to stay in ordinary

there were so many messers
you can see them
compacted in the corner
all just sitting there
at the back
there were like small messers
and there was the king
the ringleader
he was the one who strangled the kid
at the back
Strangling a kid!
until that kid nearly passes out
on the floor trying to breathe
and that kid who was strangled
he got in trouble as well

I was signing out
I couldn't go in without wanting to throw up
she said *you can't keep leaving*
another one of these conversations

You know PE?
you'd always put your bag down
and get undressed
to change
I just kind of kept to myself
but going into the shower block
there was no curtains
there was no cubicle
it was like a rectangle hole
like just a big gaping hole
I was saying I'd forgot my stuff

just so I didn't have to
I didn't want to
I was bit underish weight
Oh you're anorexic
I'd run out of excuses
I'm not having a shower
You're going to get a detention

I was like slowly losing it
it was like we were just animals
abuse shouted at you
being talked down to
shouted at for no homework
teachers saying that they care
I'm here for you
I care about you

but you know in your heart

no one cares

Red Line Yellow Line

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

I was real like angry
you know yourself
but it was a bad primary school
up the barracks
it looks a bit better these days
I heard

There was this red card system
like P19s
a yellow card was for doing something bold
three yellow cards you got a red card
three red cards you got suspended
me foster Da got me off one time
on a technicality

The yard is like the size of this room
I got one for running
outside
Are you for real?
we started power walking
you're walking too fast!

The yellow line
Stand on the line!
you stand on it for 5 minutes
nose touching the wall
you could see the bullet holes
red line is 15 minutes
your mates weren't allowed near the thing

a big box drawn round it
they didn't bring that in until 1st or 2nd class
I was about 7

Multi-denominational it calls itself
this fella from Egypt
A good foot taller than everyone
like 15 with facial hair
only short of driving to school
comin in smoking
kind of a bully
I just clashed with him
his Da was nuts like
I'M GOING TO CUT YOUR HEAD OFF!
and all this

All me mates
who I'd been with from 5-12
all going to Pats
right, I'll go with you
NO!
me foster parents
we don't think that school would suit you
What do you mean it wouldn't suit me?
We're going to put you into the High School
WHAT?

This is a better school
it's posh
If we put him in this school
he might become posh
The only person from a common area

in the whole school

What do you think is going to happen here like?

I was standing on the pitch

looking around

I didn't know anyone

I didn't talk like anyone

some big huge lank of a thing runs at me

Wha the fuck?

spills his bag of popcorn

You spilled my popcorn!

starts yelling at me

pushing me

he's after giving me loads

but he swings at me

What's the story here?

I moved

I punched him

he had braces

and the braces messed up his mouth

came through his cheek

he was like that on the ground

like a fish

Ab shit

it was a mess

there's the big fat vice principal

running up the pitch

how's he moving that fast?

Ever since that day

they just thought
that fella's trouble

A lot of things used to go missing
from the lockers
I'd be dragged up
to the principal's office
just tell us where it is
and we'll forget about it
one thing I never was
was a thief
it wasn't my thing
a lot of me mates were into robbin'
like shops
or obviously more serious things later
but I was never into it
anything I owned
I paid for meself

A few teachers wouldn't let me into their class
I had to go up to this little S&A room
with a table
Mrs something with a D
Mrs Murphy as well
they were great
they just understood

I got into a bit of a fist fight kind of thing
with the oul' fella
just actin' the bollox
I got into a boys' home
I got put in there

There was a bus stop just there
and this big huge hedge
goes round this yellow house

Me head was all over the place
I was with this girl
somethin' happened
ah a long story
but I was only 15
and this big thing goin' on
we were fighting in the corridor
the principal comes out
You, get back to your class!
I'm talking to her
Look go back to fucking class!
GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY WAY!
bootin' the door through

I DON'T GIVE A FUCK ABOUT THIS SCHOOL
I DON'T GIVE A FUCK
THIS IS BEYOND THIS

That was it then

they'd had enough

The Price

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

There's no pride in selling drugs
hiding from the police
keeping your head down
go to a drug dealer
ask him

Are you having a good time?

I looked at my father
he couldn't afford to buy us a pair of runners

I don't want this

I'm not living my life like that

I was in a hurry to grow up

Money mad

Drug dealers...they had everything
people that didn't work driving fancy cars

nice clothes

their own houses

he's a great life

why work for a lousy couple of hundred quid?

I can make what he makes in a week in an hour

Eventually I got there

I had the cars, I had the houses

but there's still a sense of emptiness

cos it's never enough

it's always someone else's money

and you are working

you're working 24/7

there's no cut off point
Oh its 5 o'clock I can go home
it's not like that

No matter what I was doing the phone was ringing
it could be 3 o'clock in the morning
your phone's still ringing
the kids they're getting dragged home
cos you've to go off and do something
It makes you snap
at the wrong people

People don't have the money to pay
the violence comes in then
it's a vicious circle
the people who owe you money are just as dangerous
watching your back
constant vigilance
looking over your shoulder for the rest of your life
I'll NEVER walk through a park
without looking behind me back
everyone owes someone
anyone can kill you, you know?

We'll do another year and then get out
your whole life spent chasing your tail
there's two options to get out of drugs
in jail or in a box
when he fucks up and can't fix it
that's it
you're dead

I've seen it
I've lived it
I was lucky
I'm in jail
this is my 3rd Christmas
my missus at home with the kids
on her own

You're putting your kids in danger
you're putting every family member in danger
there's always someone bigger than you
you can't go home and shut your door
and know that nobody's coming through it

There's no pride in selling drugs
hiding from the police
keeping your head down
go to a drug dealer
ask him
Are you having a good time?

The Troubled Ones

by Anonymous Shelton Abbey Prison

It started when me father left
them couple of hard months
the '*getting used to*' stage
it was up and down
it was all over the place
I never sort of settled back
I was never given the chance

There was no understanding
it was never picked up
and like they knew
me mother was over to the school
explaining to them

You'd have your bad days
cos there was things on your mind
things were very tight
she was after losing the house
I'd to step in
I was the eldest

If I was having a bad day
if I done something wrong
I was out of the class
down to the principal's office
back of the classroom
up at the top

Even if I was having a good day

I could never have a good day
like when I was up
I was brought back down
I was in with the crowd
and it wouldn't stop
if they done something wrong
I'd be blamed
even if it wasn't me
if it wasn't anything to do with me
I'd be sort of involved in it
I'd always be involved in it
RIGHT. OUTSIDE!

A lot of lads
they were on a different route
I wanted to drift away from that
move away from them
easy to fall into that trap
it wasn't the life I wanted to lead
strung out on drugs

The opportunity came
it just came on so quick
a full apprenticeship
I enjoyed it
I loved learning stuff
the work factor
there was money coming in

But authority
...working under somebody
I made a decision

took an apprentice
it grew from there
one job then another job
it just got bigger

I made a mistake
back in the bad times
I'm paying the price
I have to get on with it
I'll make the most of it
to further meself
for when I get back out

I truly believe in education
if you don't have education
you'll get nowhere
but pushing them to the side
the troubled ones

*We'll help Peter here
cos he wants to learn
and don't mind Ryan
he's just messin*

letting the child get worse
and worse
try help it
deal with it!

Instead of pushing them to the side

The troubled ones

A note about the Authors and the Poems

By Sarah Meaney Sartori

25 Charges presented as the first poem in this anthology, was created in collaboration with a man in his 40's incarcerated in Shelton Abbey Prison awaiting release. Liam (pseudonym) agreed to speak to me about his experience of educational exclusion and told me about how after being thrown out of school, he was picked up by the police, and charged at the age of 15 with crimes he did not commit.

During the course of our conversation, I tried to manipulate the dialogue to bring it back to my agenda of educational exclusion, missing what Luke wanted to be known about him. Thankfully, after listening appalled to the audio recording, I had the opportunity to return to Shelton to apologise. Liam agreed to work with me on his interview transcripts to formulate his transcript poem *25 Charges*. We worked together many times and developed what I considered to be a strong and positive working relationship, despite our rocky start.

A Bit Better was created in collaboration with a man in his 30's in Shelton Abbey Prison about his experience of having undiagnosed dyslexia and falling behind in school. Luke (pseudonym) and I used methods such as chopping up the text, in this case the transcript, and highlighting and grouping sentences to make meaning.

During one session as I was complementing our work together, Luke and he asked me if I was actually a poet. His highlighting the fact that I wasn't, led to my contacting professional poet Colm Keegan to review the poems. Luke taught me about the importance of artistic validation and collaboration on art-based methods.

A Bold Child was told by a man who was in his late 40's at the time of this research and incarcerated in Shelton Abbey Prison. We met a total of four times, and I re-worked most of his poem independently, returning with feedback from poet Colm Keegan.

The part of Jimmy's poem about not being allowed to make his confirmation, and the manner in which he was humiliated in the church in front of his peers and their families held huge importance to him. During our first interview I did not properly understand what had happened. He kept repeating the phrase 'I never got the day'. It was only when I returned having listened and relistened to the audio and asked what he meant, that he described the event to me in detail, and I began to understand the significance of a special day while incarcerated, and the impact of this punishment. I was then able to structure this verse, all the while checking with Jimmy that his meaning was clear.

A Mistake on a Page was crafted by me independently from the interview transcript of a young person from the XLc Waterford, whom I had the occasion to meet with twice. Josh (pseudonym) was the inspiration behind the central character of the research play *'Education will set you free?'* I found working with Josh challenging. A young man of 20, he had a volatility that kept me on edge, and it was only when I returned to his interviews to work them into a poem, that I was able to connect emotionally with Josh's story.

I attempted to contact Josh sometime later, as a charity organisation in the UK were interested in using his transcript poem for their work with school leaders to better understand the issue of school exclusion. My attempts were unsuccessful, and I wondered if his engagement with me had been experienced negatively from his perspective. Josh taught me to consider the risk element of critical research with prisoners and youth.

Finding Freedom was the only prison poem that I crafted without input from the participant. I met Christy (pseudonym) twice, before he was transferred to a more secure institution following a series of incidents that caused authorities to become concerned about his behaviour. Christy was in his late forties and a lifer, who was approaching the end of his sentence at the time of our meeting. Christy's transfer affected me deeply and again caused me to reflect on the risk element of critical research with vulnerable participants.

In Care of the State is without doubt one of the most collaborative poems in the anthology. I worked with Ryan (pseudonym) many times over the course of this research on two research poems, 'In care of the state' and 'Red line yellow line'. Ryan was a young man in his early twenties, and we clicked. He was receptive to the research from the outset and did much within the prison to promote it to other inmates.

Ryan and I worked a lot on the computer with his stories, and when we received feedback from Colm Keegan, Ryan would provide more detail that I would transcribe, and then we would return to the process, highlighting, cutting and pasting, until we were satisfied with the running order and the central message of the poem. Ryan was always quick to point out that he knew many others with 'far worse' stories than him. He was always good humoured, motivated, and someone who gives a lot to a process.

No One Cares is from one of the participants in the XLc and was crafted by me independently from Danny's interview transcripts. Danny (pseudonym) was mid-teens at the time of our working together, we met twice. Danny's story was synonymous with many of the participants from the XLc and told of the negative impact of secondary school on his mental health. A former Mensa student, Danny's ability was never recognised in his secondary school. He internalised his frustration, and fear, in what he perceived to be an unsafe environment, resulting in mental illness and school refusal. Danny taught to expand my notion of educational exclusion and his story resulted in my reflecting on my own childhood experience of school refusal.

Red Line Yellow Line was crafted with Ryan (pseudonym), who also collaborated with me on his story 'In care of the state'. We envisaged 'Red line yellow line' as a performance piece rather than a poem. Ryan's account of his schooling was sarcastic and amusing and we felt we failed to capture this by relying on the written word alone. I enlisted the help of young Kildare Youth Theatre actor Caolan Dundon to perform the piece, which I recorded and attempted to involve Ryan in the performance. Unfortunately, Ryan was transferred to a more secure institution following a security breach.

The Price was the catalyst for my working with transcript poetry in this research. The poem was the first to evolve following my conversations with Dean (pseudonym), a prisoner in Shelton Abbey. We worked together many times on his transcript to create a tool that we felt could be used with youth as a possible deterrent to becoming involved with drug dealing. Dean had many aspirations as he was looking forward to release at the time of this project and was planning to go to college. Poet Colm Keegan subsequently borrowed Dean's poem for workshops with inner city youth.

The Troubled Ones presents the story of a man in Shelton Abbey who was in his early forties at the time of this research. We met several times, and when I returned to Shelton Abbey to present him with his finalised poem, he looked at me with amazement and thanked me. 'That's my life there in three pages'. It was moments such as these that for me validated both the method and the process.

PART THREE

STAGE 3- THE RESEARCH PLAY

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PLAY

'Education will set you free?' is set in the present day in a minimum-security prison in Ireland, and begins on Fiona's first day, where she is facilitating creative writing to a small group of inmates; Luke, Dean, Josh, Jimmy and Christy. Ryan, who at 19 is the youngest member of the group, joins the class on the second week following his transfer from a higher security prison. Fiona is pregnant and employed on a casual basis, which is representative of my own precarious employment situation in the Adult and Community sector, a precarity that has been exacerbated by motherhood. Fiona's story draws attention to the high levels of professional precarity and underemployment in the sector, and the knock-on effect this is having in terms of undermining and marginalising the field (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2018, p.58). Other colleagues of Fiona whom we meet are; Conor (History teacher) and Oonagh (Education Unit Manager). The prison staff we briefly meet are; Tony (Prison Guard) and Ray (Governor).

The backstory to the play centres on Josh (early twenties), whose grandfather was incarcerated as a child in the prison's former function as an industrial school. This back-story gives us the opportunity to consider the punitive measures the Irish state adopted to deal with children considered deviant or 'at-risk' historically. From 1869 to 1969, 105,000 Irish children were committed to Industrial Schools (Ryan, 2009). Run by the Catholic Church, they housed children who were who were living in poverty, or deemed 'neglected, orphaned, or abandoned', and therefore considered to be 'at risk' of committing an offence (Ryan Report, 2009). As the play progresses; the story spans over an eight-week period, Josh begins to create links between his grandfather's oppression and incarceration in the Industrial

School, and his own marginalisation. We also learn that Josh has had mental health problems as a teenager. Mental health was highlighted as an issue for nearly all of the teenagers I spoke to in this research. The most recent large-scale study into the mental health of teenagers in Ireland reports depression and anxiety on the increase, with ‘seldom-heard groups’, of which early-school leavers are one, showing particular vulnerability with heightened anxiety and suicide attempts than their age-matched peers (Dooley et al., 2019). Over the course of the action, we witness Josh becoming more and more mentally unstable until he is transferred to a ‘more secure’ unit.

JOSH & JOSEPH’S STORY

The prison building that acts as the setting for ‘*Education Will Set You Free?*’ had previously been operational as an industrial school, a decision inspired by the theatre piece ‘The Blue Boy’ (2011) by Irish Theatre Company ‘Broken Talkers’. The title, ‘The Blue Boy’ refers to the rumour of the ghost of an infant said to have died at Artane Industrial School in Dublin and who is said to roam the corridors of the building today; a building that remains fully operational as a Catholic all-boys secondary school under the domain of The Christian Brothers, a religious community known chiefly for their work in the evangelisation and education of youth, and synonymous with Ireland’s legacy of child abuse.

Some of the participants of this research were incarcerated in institutions as children, and I have met many prisoners and former prisoners since, who carry this legacy. Early on in the play, we learn that Josh, one of the inmates, had a Grandfather, Joseph Doyle, who was incarcerated as a child in the same building 40 years previously. Joseph was taken from his parents at the age of 11 and committed for two years, after an incident in school where he had been hospitalised by his teacher.

The industrial model was essentially a prison system for children run by the Catholic Church, with the full complicity of the Irish state and large portions of the Irish population (Pembroke, 2018). It was a brutal system, with universally harsh regimes, cruel and excessive punishment, and where children were deprived of proper food, medical or psychological care (Arnold, 2009). Children who were living in poverty and therefore considered ‘at risk’ of committing an offense were targeted (Garvin, 2005). Child abuse was rampant, and children were subjected to horrific physical, mental and sexual abuse (Ryan Report, 2009), completely at the mercy of the whims of those who were supposed to care for them (Hutchinson, 2001). In 2009, the Ryan Report, a 2,600-page inquiry into child abuse at residential institutions run by the Catholic Church between 1936 and 1999, was published. The scale of the abuse was unprecedented, and not the result of ‘a few bad apples’, involving a wide and active network of people within an abusive system (www.industrial memories.ucd.ie). 1090 former inmates were interviewed by the investigation committee (Pembroke, 2018), and the intergenerational impact of the abuse is widescale (Lynch, 2018). Along with converging evidence supporting the concept of intergenerational trauma, and more recently the claim that the effect of the experience of trauma is ‘passed’ somehow from one generation to the next through DNA (Lehrner & Yehuda, 2018), the evidence shows that institutional childhood abuse and neglect, affects survivors’ capacity to parent their own children (Lynch, 2018). Similarly, exclusionary school disciplinary practices not only result in a number of adverse collateral consequences within one generation of respondents, the negative effects of such experiences are also felt by the next generation, with the children of parents who were suspended or expelled during adolescence, likely to have reduced bonding to school (Dong & Krohn, 2020).

As the research play ‘*Education Will set You Free?*’ develops, we see Josh becoming obsessed with his grandfather’s story, and how it is intertwined with his own. On a

subconscious level, Josh processes this through his dreams, which we witness on a large screen. The three-part animated dream sequence featured in the play, is formulated from a short story I wrote to imagine the generational impact of institutional abuse. It was inspired by Gord Downie's (2016) '*A Secret Path*', which envisions the journey undertaken by twelve-year-old Chanie Wenjack, who escaped the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Canada, dying in the process. I travelled to Vancouver Island in 2017 as part of this PhD to work with the University of Victoria on a 'knowledge exchange for impact' scheme, funded by the Irish Research Council. I was struck by the similarities between the cultural genocide visited on First Nations' children in Canada's Residential Schools' model, where the objective was 'to take the Indian out of the child' (Fine, 2015), and the Industrial Schools model in Ireland, where children were believed to be contaminated and treated as 'the moral dirt' of a social order determined to prove its purity and subjected to ethnic cleansing' (Ferguson, 2007, p.123). In Josh's Dream Part 1, he is a small schoolboy in what appears to be sometime in 1950's Ireland. The poem 'Con Game', written by Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe (2016), opens with the line, 'The children were meat for the scavengers' (p.23). In the dream, the schoolmaster is a giant raven, that Josh is ravaged by after being flung against a wall and rendered unconscious, in a reimagining of his Grandfather's experience. As the story unfolds, we witness Josh becoming more and more mentally unstable, ultimately culminating in a violent incident that leads to his 'transfer' and it is at this point that we lose connection with him.

Although the ending of the play is fictional, it is an imaginative exploration inspired by two experiences that happened with participants during the research process. In the first instance, contact with a prisoner ended abruptly due to his transfer for security reasons. Over the course of the study, I met with this participant a total of three times and then never saw him again as he was transferred to a more secure unit. This was unexpected, as the participant had

been an inmate of the minimum-security institution for a long time. I was told he had displayed signs of mental instability, resulting in his being transferred largely out of concern for the safety of others. I have no way of knowing if our conversations contributed to his agitated mental state, nor would it have been ethical for me to attempt to find out. At around the same time, there was a particularly vulnerable participant from the alternative education centre in Waterford, with whom I was collaborating. I attempted unsuccessfully to contact this participant again following the research, as a UK charity, The Difference, who train school leaders to better understand the issue of school exclusion, were interested in using his transcript poem 'A Mistake on A Page' (included in the poetry journal '*Finding Freedom*') in their training workshops. I tried several different avenues to speak with this young man, but eventually was forced to give up.

Both these situations affected me deeply, and I wondered in both instances whether partaking in the research had ultimately been a negative experience for these participants. Both participants, though from different generations, had been committed to institutions as children. I re-visited audio transcripts searching for clues or possible triggers, of which there were many. In the absence of facts, I resigned myself to my imagination. Writing '*Education Will Set You Free?*', afforded me a creative space to be able to explore the 'risk' element of critical education and research with vulnerable persons; namely prisoners and youth. In the research play, Josh is the character through which I explore the issue of risk for research participants and pose the question as to whether there is enough hope, a central part of critical pedagogy in Adult Education (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2018, p.52), to negate risk, particularly for those participating in the process while ensconced in hostile environments such as prison. Josh, the main character in the play, is the one who most represents the young participants' voice. The performative poem 'A Mistake on A Page' (*Finding Freedom Poetry Journal*) about his struggle in secondary school, which ultimately ended with his being incarcerated in

a juvenile detention centre for assessment, was crafted from the interview transcripts of a young person from the XLc.

A Mistake on A Page

I think I got lost

Going from Primary

Basically a fucking day-care

Out into the world

Into like the deep ocean

This big warehouse

1 teacher to like 30 students

Hundreds upon hundreds

Sheep

All following the herd

Trying to find themselves

On their fucking smart phones

All these fucking selfies

When they don't even know themselves

If you're vulnerable in any way

You're going to have a hard time

Josh's internal world is also visible to the audience, through a 3-part animated dream sequence that we witness on a large screen above the stage. Josh's second dream, though fictional, is heavily based on an individual interview with an XLc participant, who articulated the trauma he suffered from being forced to communally shower after sports class with students who were bullying him. The young person experienced considerable anxiety trying to come up with excuses to avoid being humiliated at the hands of his tormenters, leading to him being publicly shamed by his teacher. In the shower scene in Josh's dream, Josh, who in

a previous dream was the victim, is here the bully, and 'Fatty', a plump, pasty kid with asthma, the target. Josh degrades Fatty as a way to achieve status among his peers, and in a misguided attempt to recover his dignity following an earlier incident where his own dignity was destroyed. Early research tended to dichotomise bullies and victims into one of two groups, (Cook et al., 2010), yet bullies and victims are not mutually exclusive. The sports shower dream scene was a creative space where I could explore bullying from the perspective of the bully and imagine the transition from victim to bully. Josh is initially close to tears after his intimidation of Fatty, yet this is replaced with a power rush when he receives an endorsement from one of the bystanders that elevates his status among his peers. This feeds into Freire's (1998) assertion that every relationship of oppression is by definition violent for both dominator and dominated; 'the former dehumanised by an excess of power, the latter by a lack of it' (p. 17).

Acts of bullying rarely take place with no-one else present (Rigby, 2002), and most episodes involve primary perpetrator and secondary by-stander roles, with witnesses sometimes becoming as psychologically distressed, if not more so, than the victims (Rivers et al., 2009). One XLC participant recounted an incident where he witnessed a student be strangled at the back of the classroom by another student, until the first was on the floor and close to unconsciousness. This story was dramatised in an ethnodrama made earlier on in the research process with Kildare Youth Theatre participants, as I think it offers an effective illustration of the impact of school bullying on bystanders. The participant who witnessed the strangling, which happened while the teacher was in the classroom, experienced profound anxiety and mental distress as a result.

FIONA'S STORY

Fiona is an adult educator, which isn't simply 'teaching adults', but means she leans on the philosophy of Adult Education that seeks to understand how each of us are shaped by experiences both personal and social (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2018, p.iii). If the prison classroom of itself is precarious (Carrigan, 2015), Fiona's position is doubly so, in that she is brought in once a week to teach the Creative Writing class, a typical schedule for many in the field, who are underemployed and professionally precarious (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2018, p. 58). Fiona is also teaching a subject that carries less institutional weight than those that involve job skills and up-skilling. In the current climate of neoliberal thinking and the growing privatisation and marketisation of education, policy is reflecting global economic policy, funding is dependent on performance (Reay, 2012), and the value of the 'process' is eclipsed in the scramble for 'result'. This is reflected in the current state of affairs in Adult Education, where critical and emancipatory forms of adult education are increasingly marginalised as an approach to adult learning that works to the advantage of the marketplace and a casualised labour force is promoted (Grummell, 2007, p. 1). I believe this is further exacerbated by the dubious pursuit and measurement of 'quality', that is numerically assessed through learning outcomes across the domains of 'knowledge', 'competencies' and 'skills' (Fitzsimons, 2017, p.4). My personal experience working as a drama teacher in the sector in Ireland, would indicate that creative subjects have continually fared worst. Drama for example, is generally only included in the curriculum either when there is an intention of an element of recovery; so with prisoners, addicts, the homeless, special needs groups etc., or as a stand-alone class timetabled in at the beginning or the end of the academic year to provide some light relief from the 'real' subjects. This is unsurprising given that creativity by its very nature involves risk taking, surely the antithesis of pre-determined and measurable outcomes.

This problem is posed in the research play, where we see Fiona's class in the prison sparsely attended, while she is made aware of the long waiting lists for the classes in forklifting.

In the research play, the creative writing class in the prison is a space where a variety of teaching and learning methodologies are incorporated, where individual experience is brought to the fore, and where participants garner awareness and insight into their lives.

Based on Freirean principles (1972) that via the facilitation of critical thinking and through the development of transformative awareness, comes the construct of liberatory knowledge that challenges dominant ways of knowing and the status quo (Ryan, McCormack & Ryan, 2004), the class occupies as a radical forum for liberation within the oppressive confines of the prison. As the play progresses, we see participants making sense of the personal and social factors at play that have culminated with a prison sentence. Their individual life stories begin to take on the shape of a collective, and participants begin to call out oppression and structural inequalities and reflect on their reality as they make and re-make it (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.13).

A central tenet of this is Fiona's facilitation as a critical educator, where she is both activist and artist, with attention to both liberation and creativity (Connolly & Hussey 2013). Aspects of Fiona's story are of course aspects of my own, and aspects of her personality are drawn from educators whose eccentricities I have admired. Fiona removes her shoes and socks before each session 'I think better in my bare feet', and draws much of her inspiration on the spot, while I tend to over-plan my facilitation. In the background we get a sense of some of the personal and social factors at play in Fiona's life, as her emails are pinged onto a screen on stage as they arrive on her phone. Fiona never once checks her phone while on stage, but the messages give us an insight as to the conditions and circumstances that form the backdrop of her professional persona. The first few emails are concerned with paperwork and the bureaucracy involved in setting up her new teaching position with HR. The content is

verbatim from emails I have received from HR in the Adult and Community Education sector in Ireland and highlights the inordinate amount of administration for the precarious worker, which is often completely at odds with the amount of teaching hours being assigned and payment received.

Research has highlighted the sheer volume of work that is involved in engaging with recruitment processes in the adult and community education sector in Ireland (O'Neill & Fitzsimons, 2018, p. 67). I would suggest that this is merely indicative of what is to come. Navigating the tutor commencement process, the 'do-it-yourself' payroll system, along with the myriad of access codes for modules, photocopiers, PCs and printers, could prove challenging for staff in situ let alone those who might only be working in an organisation or centre for a couple of hours a week, ten or twelve weeks a year. Jerry O'Neill (2015) refers to the Lidl bag, which served as his office as a precarious adult educator (p. 265). Personally, I carted my own sizeable 'office' around on the back of a bicycle between four adult/community education centres, to try and avoid the panic or delays that would ensue if you were hoping to print or photocopy materials for your class. In the research play, we see the hoops Fiona has to jump through in order to gain access to an overhead projector, highlighting some of the day-to-day frustrations of the adult/community educator precariat. While these hindrances may seem like minutiae in the bigger picture of precarious employment, I would argue that they contribute to the internalisation of precarity and state of constant tension experienced by many precarious workers in the adult and community education sector (Finnegan, et al., 2019).

Later in the play we learn through Fiona's emails that there is some uncertainty around whether or not she is entitled to a payment while she is on maternity leave. Concern about whether their very low hours and earnings would disqualify them from Statutory Maternity Pay, has been highlighted in research on women and casualisation (TUC, 2014). The

correspondence included in the play is from my own correspondence regarding my right to a maternity payment. The ambiguous language, ‘certain contribution conditions,’ and ‘appear to qualify’ compounds the uncertainty and thereby intensifies the experience of precarity.

Towards the end of the play, we find out that Fiona’s contract is not being renewed, although it is not clear from the email whether this relates to her work in the prison. The use of casual contracts to undermine rights, including maternity pay, and the prevention of mothers returning to work has been flagged as particularly concerning in research into pregnancy and maternity discrimination (TUC, 2014, p. 13). The email Fiona receives informing her that her contract will not be renewed in the autumn, is copied verbatim from a letter I received from HR after returning to work following maternity leave. Conspicuously absent from the letter, was any mention of entitlement to a redundancy payment.

Throughout the play, Fiona’s role is also to support Josh’s transformative learning experience; which is partially being facilitated through the creative writing class and is also occurring non-rationally and triggered by his experience of being incarcerated in the same building as his Grandfather some 40 years later. As much as transformative learning is premised on an autonomous learner, it also tends to be premised on an autonomous and transformed educator who can act as an agent of change (Vaughn, 2016, p. 284). In oppressive contexts, and under employment conditions of precarity and uncertainty this is not a given, and so the problem is posed in the play as to how these conditions are undermining a transformative agenda.

The research play ‘*Education will set you free?*’, again served as a vessel for me to explore my experience of precarity as an adult and community educator. While a more traditional text could certainly have afforded me a platform to do so, the play allowed me to explore it while in relationship with my work and with my students. The ‘pinging’ of highly charged bureaucratic emails onto the set while Fiona is facilitating a group of prisoners to unpick their

own social situation, paints a clear picture of the reality of precarity in the sector. Fiona's transformation as a result of her experience facilitating a creative critical learning process within the prison is not captured in the play. Her's is the only story in the classroom that is not performed, and while we can piece together aspects of her life from the emails that appear on screen, we do not know her background, or how the conscientisation that is happening for participants is raising her own critical consciousness in relation to her personal world view. The creative writing class in the prison is cut short, so there is the sense that the window on Fiona is also prematurely closed.

BOAL, CONSCIENTISATION AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

I have referred to how Boal (1995) speaks of the magnifying effect of theatre and how it brings things closer. *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993), I believe also allows for that crucial degree of separation, which to my mind is key in raising critical consciousness and creating the conditions for transformation. It is through the creation of an objective distance, by which to critically analyse self and situation, that conscientisation through the transformation of self begins (Cañas, 2013). When a social theme is analysed using a tool like Forum Theatre (Boal, 1995); through embodied investigation and collective understanding, the theme and experiences are presented to the people as performance. This fosters a sense of community through the realisation that though the details may differ, each can identify in the central oppression.

A theatrical approach to reflection marks a significant departure from dominant, cognitive-linguistic modes of reflection, through the foregrounding of emotion and its expression through the body as legitimate knowledge (Forgasz, 2014). The theatre structures and interactive forms through which stories are shared and examined can facilitate a fresh

understanding; existing perspectives can be communicated through the visual representation of knowledge, and new perspectives gleaned through reflection on others' representations (Mills, 2009). The degree of separation provided by the performance, I believe, is key to being able to identify and pinpoint the oppression or structural inequalities, which although not necessarily new knowledge, is in fact a new perspective by the very fact that is seen and experienced through a different lens. A simple shift of perspective for example, can change the reflective surface of a pond mirroring its surroundings, to a translucent window onto the world below. Similarly, using Theatre of the Oppressed methods in teacher education to foreground the lived experience of youth who experience educational exclusion, can give teachers space and time to access the insights of their students. As new perspectives are encountered, so too the conditions are created for transformation.

Theatre of the Oppressed, originally published in 1974, was inspired by Freire's work and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and the concept of teacher-students and student-teachers and a problem-posing education that encourages critical reflection, and from which a type of discomfort springs leading to some form of transformative action or revolution. Forum theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed are platforms for problem-posing and based on Boal's supposition that theatre is rehearsal for the revolution. From Boal's perspective, his poetics of the oppressed are poetics of liberation and freedom that work toward self-actualisation, much in the same way as Freire's assertion of humanisation through dialogue and naming our worlds. Boal (1995) bridges the traditional divide between actors and spectators through theatrical interventions that extend an invitation to trespass onto the stage; a space typically reserved for the actors, where the protagonist role is assumed, and the dramatic action changed. This act of theatrical trespass and occupation, together with the transformation from spectator to actor is synonymous with the transformation of self (Cañas, 2013, p.105).

The very purpose of engaging in Theatre of the Oppressed poetics lies in recognising the self as oppressed, for without knowing the self as incomplete the potential of TO is reduced to a methodology (Cañas, 2013, p.106). In ‘*Education will set you free?*’, we are invited to observe an adult education classroom, where self-narrative and the sharing of personal experience, together with Boalian warm-up exercises are combined to facilitate transformative learning. While it may be seen as comical or even trivial to watch a group of ‘tough guys’ in a prison take part in icebreakers facilitated by a pregnant woman in her bare feet, the exercises are cleverly crafted to establish trust and rapport and are the beginnings of moving participants towards an embodied approach to self-reflexivity. As an aside, facilitating ‘tough guys’ to do anything at odds with the ‘tough guy’ persona, particularly drama games which by their very nature opens one up to the risk of appearing ‘silly’ or ‘ridiculous’, is no mean feat. Professor Monica Prendergast (2013); a vastly experienced actor and drama educator, used poetry to reflect on her experience and nerves mentoring 16 male prisoners in a theatre production of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.

what am i doing here?

my beating heart

betrays my nerves

but i smile

& smile some more

shake all their hands

play name games

learn who they are

know (from

lived experience)

it is the process

of play creation

that will bring us

onto common ground (Prendergast, 2013, p.316)

The application of techniques from Theatre of the Oppressed (1993) invite the integration of cognitive, emotional, and bodily knowledge, while simultaneously being a political turn in the context of education, subverting some fundamental assumptions about what constitutes teacher professionalism and the manner in which we learn (Forgasz, 2014). Similarly, through re-shaping the classroom for the purpose of movement and play, the physical conditions for transformation are created by blurring the lines between the spaces traditionally reserved for teaching and learning and turning a traditional structure on its head.

If it had been possible or if I were doing this research anew as a collaboration rather than as a PhD, which is an individual process, I would try to make the research more theatrical with participants from the outset as I would have used theatre methods to physically explore the research topic of school exclusion with participants. In actuality, our research groups were more resemblant of dialogue circles, where participants engaged in conversation with me and each other around the central issues, albeit framed by the filmed theatre piece made with KYT. Nevertheless, through consciously applying the poetics of Theatre of the Oppressed and instigating and focusing conscientisation through the tools of artistic expression, this allowed for the dual claiming of theatrical and social voice (Cañas, 2013, p.116). In this space, a critical community was formed concerned with accurately representing the experiences of young people who are excluded from education. This was on the understanding that I in turn would use their representation to create a dramatic tool and a framing device to be used in teacher education. This approach facilitated transformative learning process and changes in self-perception for both the Shelton Abbey Prisoners and the young people from the XLc, namely; a realisation of structural inequalities, a shared oppression, a capacity to take action, a capacity to affect change, and crucially for prisoners, of mattering.

My own perspective of transformative learning is explored and expressed creatively through the story of the Traveller interspersed through this thesis. In this instance the application of the poetics of Theatre of The Oppressed is in the narrative form of a fairy tale, but one which sees the protagonist move through culture circles and the realisation of female oppression, to the stage, where he meets with Boal's Joker (1995) at the 'rehearsal for the revolution', and ultimately through taking action, to transformation. This creative expression of theory is simultaneously a political turn because it challenges fundamental assumptions about what counts as 'ways of knowing' in the context of higher education (Forgasz, 2014), and the modes by which we express knowledge. This is in of itself a transformation; when individuals look upon themselves as agents responsible for expressing and changing the world (Cañas, 2013, p.116).

PART THREE

STAGE 4 – WHERE NEXT?

CONNECTED WORKS PORTFOLIO

I have referred to and aimed to describe the internal transformative journey that this PhD has taken me on, but this transformation has also happened on an external level and is most evidenced in the recent body of work I have been involved in. Over the past three years I have had the good fortune to have worked on three other research projects, all of which incorporated arts-based research methods to greater or lesser extent, and all with prisoners and former prisoners, with the third a collaboration between young inmates and university students. I am referencing these projects here in a Connected Works Portfolio, as I believe they offer an illustration of my trajectory of learning over the course of this study, and to my mind provide an evidence-based picture of my progression as an arts-based researcher who foregrounds participant voice and participation. They are also inextricably connected with this PhD, given the subject matter, the use of arts-based methodology, and the fact that work on these research projects occurred simultaneously. Undoubtedly the learning on the doctoral programme has fed into this body of work, and similarly the learning gained on these external projects has fed back into the PhD, in a reflective learning cycle.

THE TRIAL

I have referred to the visual arts installation, *The Trial*, already, but not explicitly with regard to how collaboration on this project was an explicit opportunity for me to hone and develop the learning acquired on this doctoral programme and my collaborative work with prisoners in Shelton Abbey Prison on transcript poems. The producer and director, Dr. Sinéad McCann contacted a colleague as she was looking for someone to work collaboratively with former

prisoners to turn their stories and experiences of access to healthcare and human rights in prison into a script for a multi-screen installation to be housed in Dublin's iconic Kilmainham Gaol for a two-week period. Fortunately for me, my colleague pointed her in my direction, and we worked together over a six-month period collaboratively with former prisoners in the Bridge Project, a centre for ex-violent offenders.

Drawing on my experience with men in Shelton Abbey Prison, I designed a series of 12 weekly workshops with the small group of men, all of whom had experienced long-term incarceration. Using Applied Theatre methods designed to facilitate the sharing of stories and experiences relating to the themes of health and human rights within Irish prisons, sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed, and we returned the following week with the transcriptions to reflect on the content before moving on to the next theme. The process speaks to participatory action research methods, in that participation, action and research were operating concurrently (Heron & Reason, 1997). Each week the plan or outline for the following workshop was shared and discussed with the group, who were involved in the decision making around the structure and content. Attendance at the sessions was close to 100% for the duration of the project, and participant ownership of both the content and the space was inspiring to witness. UCD historians contributed historical documents to the project, and actors were hired to bring these to life. Once again the services of former prisoner and actor Tommy O'Neill were engaged. Collaboration in art practice sees those engaged, being integral and full members of a shared process (Whelan, 2019, p. 52). Tommy went on to be the principal actor in the *The Trial*, a decision that was made by the group, as his role directly represents participant voice. O'Neill remains in contact with the group to this day.

In line with Saldaña's guidelines (1999, p.62) on how to create three dimensional portrayals, prisoner narratives performed by Tommy O'Neill were substantiated by input from

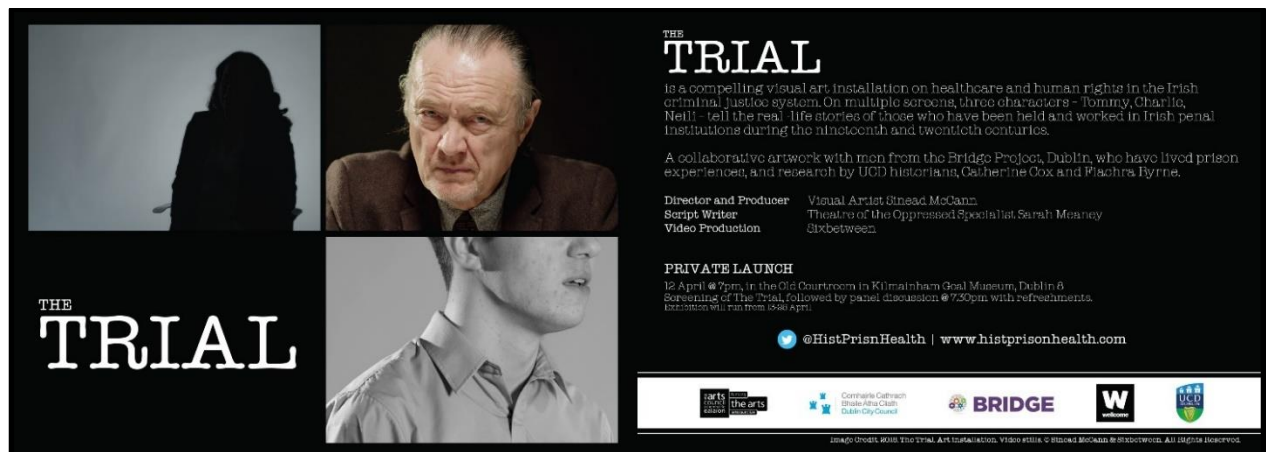
professionals including a member of the Irish Penal Reform Trust, two former Governors, and a former prison chaplain. Professionals were given excerpts from the script, and asked to provide a response, which I worked into a role played by actor Neili Conroy. The young actor Charlie Hughes Farrell, from Kildare Youth Theatre, who worked with me on both versions of ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out?’, played ‘young Tommy’ on screen, and served to bring to life historical documents; including a report from 1963 investigating alleged child abuse in St Patrick’s Institution. The interweaving of perspectives meant that *The Trial* could offer social insight through the inclusion of professional voices and theory, as well as fostering emotional response from the audience through the development of monologues that revealed the essentials of a character; their motivations, frustrations, fears etc. (Saldaña 1999, pp. 63-66).

‘The Trial’ (McCann, 2018), had a comparably generous budget, that facilitated a freedom in the way of working that was simply unattainable to the same extent in a PhD process. The project incorporated collaboration with a team of people including actors, camera people, videographers, and sound technicians, as well as with artist and producer Sinead McCann herself. On top of this, there were obvious advantages to working with men no longer incarcerated, such as being able to draft in external actors, and a freedom of expression for participants both verbally and physically that is curtailed when prison officers or Governors are liable to pop into the room at any given moment. Most importantly however, *‘The Trial’* (McCann, 2018) afforded me the opportunity to work in the way I would have aspired to work with men in Shelton Abbey Prison had I the prospect to do it again. Furthermore, I gained experience in constructing an ethnodrama that spanned across different timeframes. When I created ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out? 2’, there were participant stories that were omitted from the final production. McCann’s concept of a multi-screen presentation presented the opportunity to be able to weave cross generational narratives interspersed with historical documentation. Not only that, it gave me the experience of crafting an ethnodrama

at a professional level, an experience that was able to be fed back into my PhD and which gave me the confidence and inspiration to submit the research play ‘*Education will set you free?*’ as the central tenet of this doctoral study.

‘*The Trial*’ (McCann, 2018) was installed in Dublin’s Kilmainham Gaol for two weeks in April 2018, playing on a loop in the old courthouse. In 2019 it went on to tour Spike Island Prison in Cork, Lifford Courthouse in Donegal, and finally Dublin Castle as part of the Arts and Human Rights Festival.

The Trial is available to watch here;



THE TRIAL

is a compelling visual art installation on healthcare and human rights in the Irish criminal justice system. On multiple screens, three characters - Tommy, Charlie, Neill - tell the real-life stories of those who have been held and worked in Irish penal institutions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A collaborative artwork with men from the Bridge Project, Dublin, who have lived prison experience, and research by UCD historians, Catherine Cox and Piachra Byrne.

Director and Producer: Visual Artist (Sinead McCann)
Script Writer: Theatre of the Oppressed Specialist Sarah Meaney
Video Production: Sixbetween

PRIVATE LAUNCH
12 April @ 7pm, in the Old Courtroom in Kilmainham Gaol Museum, Dublin 6
Screening of *The Trial*, followed by panel discussion @ 7:30pm with refreshments.
Luncheon will run from 12-14 April.

@HistPrisonHealth | www.histprisonhealth.com

arts festival Dublin | The Arts Council | Connairé Cathrach Shúla Aifric Cluain Dubh-Cheann | BRIDGE | W | UCD

IMAGE (TOP) 2018 THE TRIAL ARTS FESTIVAL DUBLIN. VIDEO (MIDDLE) © SINEAD MCCANN & SIXBETWEEN. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDihv_Ode0

COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS WITH PRISONERS AND FORMER PRISONERS

In 2019, I was approached by College Connect; a cross institutional Higher Education initiative aimed at increasing representation at HE for under-represented target groups. They were looking for someone to do research with prisoners and former prisoners around access and barriers to education. The project spanned 6 months and was a peer-to-peer study that involved my supporting and training a team of people with previous convictions to carry out a community needs analysis with 34 prisoners and former prisoners to find out how to better

support access and progression to Third Level. The *College Connect Community Needs Analysis with Prisoners and Former Prisoners* (Meaney, 2019) was an opportunity for me to practise the ideology acquired on this PhD and the participatory approach of carrying out research with as opposed to ‘on’ participants. The research and community engagement process of the project was based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) frameworks (Heron & Reason, 1997; Thomas, 2000), and involved research partners, researchers and participants collaboratively leading and developing the project at all stages in an iterative cycle of research, reflection and action.

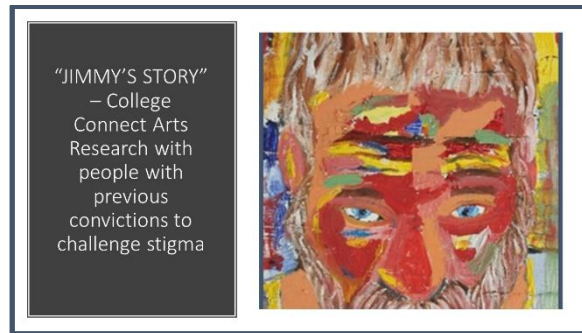
Again, arts-based methods featured prominently in this project, both in the exploratory and in the dissemination stages. Participants were asked to bring photographs that represented the barriers or hurdles they experienced in accessing higher education. Photovoice, is a term first coined by Caroline Wang (1999) and is rooted in what Connolly (2008:55) posits is the ‘Golden Rule’ of adult education in that the process begins with participants’ lived experiences (Cited in Hegarty, 2017: 185). The sharing that resulted from using the photographs to elicit conversation was more emotive and descriptive than might have otherwise arisen and formed the foundation for trust-building and dialogue (Meaney, 2019, p. 28).

Participants also listened to the research poem ‘Finding Freedom’, crafted with a participant from Shelton Abbey Prison, about his educational journey, and responded by identifying with their own story. The motivation behind the use of the ‘frame’ was similar to the notion of the fictional frame ‘Dropped Out or Kicked Out?’ employed for this PhD study, and was incorporated to allow participants create meaning through distance, while providing the safety to engage emotionally and honestly (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015).

Two creative outputs were created to represent the research findings in an alternative format to academic discourse, that could be shared with the participants and communities who contributed to the study. The first, Jimmy's Story, was crafted with peer-researcher and artist Jimmy Leonard, using exactly the same methods used to create the transcript poems collaboratively with participants in Shelton Abbey Prison. The interview was turned into a 'transcript poem' or 'research poem' (Prendergast, 2009), which in turn was narrated by Irish actor Jimmy Smallhorne, perhaps most famous for his role in Ireland's hugely successful TV show, 'Love/Hate' (2010-2014). The three of us worked collaboratively shaping this piece, which was recorded over an afternoon in Dublin's Camden Recording Studios, and the narration plays on screen to a montage of Jimmy Leonard's paintings. The essence of the piece details how a man, who was deemed so dangerous that he was kept in a cage in prison, was completely transformed after being introduced to art through the prison education system.

Jimmy's Story for me marked a progression from my way of working with men in Shelton Abbey. Saldaña (2016) states that in order for work to be well received by audiences, meaning to achieve authenticity and fulfil the hopes inspiring the research endeavour, the result must be artistically sound. The constraints of working alone on an arts-based PhD means that one is limited, and constantly seeking to balance creativity with the art of the possible. The availability of a budget on the College Connect project, meant that I was able to engage professional services such as audio and videography, vastly improving the artistic and aesthetic quality.

Jimmy's Story is available to watch here;

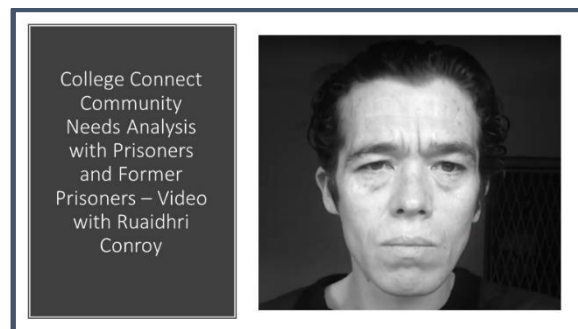


<https://youtu.be/FpVMZpW9 Y8>

The second creative output developed from the College Connect Community Needs Analysis with Prisoners and Former Prisoners was a Spoken Word Performance performed by actor Ruaidhri Conroy. This was created from an initial analysis of the interviews, and involved my selecting quotes that represented emerging themes, and collating these into one story or monologue for performance. Again, this marked a progression for me in terms of my work with transcript poetry, as it was the first time I created a single monologue out of multiple participants' stories. In academia, professional presentations and articles are major ways that research is disseminated. However, dissemination of research findings to the people and communities who participated in the research is many times forgotten (Vaughn et al., 2012, p. 30). The Spoken Word Performance was created to communicate the findings in an alternative to academic discourse, to support public engagement, and most importantly to be able to be offered back to participants for feedback to check that their voices had been heard. The piece was first performed by Conroy live at a participant recognition event in Dublin Castle, in what was formerly the Children's Court, in a deliberate reclaiming of civic space. Following the performance and presentation, feedback was invited from participants who were facilitated to work together in small groups. Again, this way of working was one I attempted to facilitate on the PhD process, when I visited a participant in prison with the

actor Caolán Dundon to seek feedback on the performance of the participant’s transcript poem ‘Red line yellow line’. Unfortunately, circumstances during the visit were not conducive to performing the piece. We met in a visiting booth separated by a wall of plexiglass, and several officers on both sides of the division, regularly poked their heads into the booth to ‘check-up’ on us, and we were forced to abandon the plan. The event in Dublin Castle was a chance for me to invite participant feedback on the artistic representation of the research, involving research participants in the process. Due to the global pandemic, and the subsequent cancellation and postponements of gatherings, as well as all visits into prisons, the decision was taken to create a filmed version of the spoken word performance, so as to be able to continue the dissemination of the findings.

The College Connect Community Needs Analysis with Prisoners and Former Prisoners Video is available to watch here;



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTAH2uycmyE>

THE STORY EXCHANGE PROJECT

Towards the end of 2019, I was engaged to research and document the Story Exchange Project, the first concrete initiative of a partnership between Maynooth University and Mountjoy Prison partnership. The Story Exchange Project brought together young people incarcerated in Mountjoy Prison Progression Unit, and university students in the Maynooth University Access Programme for 13 workshops. Part of this project involved participants

collaborating as a team on a creative output to illustrate the project, which in this instance was an animation. Participants also participated in the research element of this project, which included their participating in focus group discussions about their experience of taking part on the project.

The peer-to peer aspect of the Story Exchange Project, that is the bringing together of university students and inmates to learn collaboratively has been happening on an International level in the form of programmes such as the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (1997), Canada's W2B (Walls to Bridges) Programme (2011), and in the UK's Learning Together (2015). There are, however, no similar programmes that we are aware of in an Irish context. Furthermore, other programmes have involved students coming together to learn together on a semester long university course, while the Story Exchange Project involved collaboration to achieve an award, with a specific focus on empathy-building and breaking down barriers (Meaney, 2020).

To put forward a multidimensional presentation of this project I drew on many of the research methodologies I had practised to date including; taking part in the story exchange as a participant, the incorporation of fieldnotes, prison participants' and university participants' story exchange, focus group interviews, stakeholder interviews, and arts-based methodology. Participating in story exchange workshops afforded me the opportunity to pursue co-construction of knowledge in line with the metaphor of researcher as 'traveller' rather than tourist (Hinton-Smith et al., 2018), and my reflections on elements of my participation are captured intermittently and in narrative form through the report in a prologue and epilogue, using a similar format adopted in this thesis.

The Story Exchange Project was very focussed on the development of a creative output, as the value of a visual tool that could be used by all of the stakeholders to share a project that

was seen to be positive and innovative held obvious attraction. Digital animation has been identified as a novel approach to the dissemination of research findings to targeted communities (Vaughn et al., 2012). It also fit well with a prison context where the use of cameras or video recorders would be problematic, both in terms of permission and with regard to anonymity. For me, who had been exploring the idea of animation as an arts-based research method in Josh's dream sequence in the research play '*Education will set you free?*', this seemed like the perfect opportunity to put this idea into practise. I contacted graphic harvester Eimear McNally, who worked with us to illustrate participants' description of the project and stories from the exchanges, to give a window into the learning and bonding that occurred during these workshops behind the prison walls. Participants were actively involved in the creation of the animation, which involved two separate sessions, both of which took place in Mountjoy Prison. The first involved my facilitating participants identifying the benefits of using creative device to capture the project, followed by the audio recording of participants describing the project. The second, involved artist Eimear McNally joining us for a workshop that was also audio-recorded. Eimear, who is what is known as a 'Graphic Harvester', drew the conversation as doodle pictures or cartoons onto large white sheets taped to the walls. The technique, which originated in the community sector as a means of catching the energy, takeaways, or inputs from workshops and meetings goes by many names; graphic recording, visual scribing, visual notetaking, but essentially involves illustrating the most important topics to capture the gist or essence. Through synthesising information into an easy to navigate graphic, it helps create shared meaning from the process, so fitted perfectly with the concept of the Story Exchange Project. Eimear subsequently began work on storyboarding the audio for the animation. The finished result was a three-and-a-half-minute animation featuring authentic participant voice, to illustrate and share the project in an engaging manner transferable in a variety of contexts.

The finished animation of The Story Exchange Project is available to watch here;



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYMTg5mY1ig&t=64s>

WHERE NEXT?

Researching and documenting the projects above marked a turning point for me in the value I place on academic presentation, which has been a site of struggle for me throughout this doctoral programme. In 2016, my first academic article ‘Exploring school exclusion and oppression with Boal’ (Meaney, 2016) was published. I proudly sent the article on to my father, who was the principal of a further education college at the time.

‘Well?’ I asked.

‘Very good’, came the reply.

Though when pressed further,

‘I didn’t actually understand any of it’.

In academia, professional presentations and peer-review articles are the major methods by which research is disseminated, and arts-based methods, are seen as being important methods of disseminating the findings to the people and the communities who participated in the research, although this often does not happen (Vaughn et al., 2012). I argue that alternative dissemination methods are important methods for all forms of public engagement, not just the

people and communities who participated, as I am not sure if those of us in academia are able to grasp the full extent to which our diction may be unintelligible to those outside of academic circles. For a time during this doctoral process, I rallied against academic discourse, and the inaccessibility of what I perceived to be pompous rhetoric that seemed to me to serve no greater purpose other than to inflate the egos of a privileged minority who had command of the language. The average academic article is read by only a few people, and those folks have a highly specialised education (Leavy, 2015, p.2), and I struggled to appreciate its point or purpose. For a time, I was convinced that time and energy was far better spent focussed on non-academic dissemination methods.

The Story Exchange Project Report (Meaney, 2020) and the Community Needs Analysis with Prisoners and Former Prisoners Report (Meaney, 2019), both served to accentuate to me the necessity for both academic and alternative dissemination strategies. The latter provided a springboard and incentivised a series of funding applications that helped lead to two major developments. In the first instance, an application was approved to break down barriers between custody and the community to support better reintegration for people with convictions into society through education, and specifically through the establishment of a formal partnership between Mountjoy Prison and Maynooth University. In the second, a proposal to unlock potential through a strategic overhaul of the university convictions policy received support, the aim being to reduce systemic barriers to HE access for this cohort.

The research report of the Story Exchange Project is due to be published, so whether and how it will influence policy developments for people with previous convictions is yet to be seen. I can say that the report clearly situates the Story Exchange Project within the framework of international literature on prison exchange partnerships, and signposts potential for novel and exciting ways to bring the university into the prison and the prison into the university in ways that would otherwise have been unimaginable (Meaney, 2020, p. 33).

Similarly, I can appreciate that writing and reflecting on this PhD process signposts where I want to position myself and the direction in which I want to go. Bríd Connolly (2018) describes the importance of reflection that happens through a feminist lens, meaning reviewing our blind spots to interrogate where we stand with regards to socially situated lives, and how this is implicated in our practice, and how it is turned into knowledge (p.32). I have had the pleasure, and discomfort, of being facilitated by Bríd in Maynooth University, one of those rare educators who makes it appear as though they are not doing much, yet over the course of her sessions acknowledgement of gender blindness seems to happen through osmosis; a redress that opens the floodgates (p.33).

As I come to the end of this thesis and reflect on my work thus far I can identify many blind spots, some which are recognised and remedied through the cycle of reflection, and others that remain only partially so. Leavy advises us to make peace with our work, once it is released into the world, to make peace and to let go, for it will never be all things to all people (Leavy, 2015, p. 31) including ourselves. Artist Jimmy Leonard (Meaney, 2019) describes his paintings as mirrors that keep changing.

*The paintings are mirrors
the mirror keeps changing
sometimes I look in the mirror and I feel ugly
and sometimes I see that I'm Ok
You're alright (p. 58)*

I think it's time to let this changing mirror go.

EPILOGUE

'They say to dance like nobody is watching. I think that implies that we are afraid or ashamed to dance in front of the people. I say dance like everybody is watching. Dance like your children are watching, your ancestors, your family. Dance for those who are hurting, those who can't dance, those who lost loved ones and those who suffer injustices throughout the world. Let every step be a prayer for humanity! Most of all dance for the Creator, who breathed into your soul so you may celebrate this gift of life!' - Supaman

No one seemed to pay much notice to the slight, skinny character who was led onto the stage flanked by two guards, until without warning his leg began to shake and he fell to the ground and the last of the applause was lulled into a bereft silence. One of the guards gave the prisoner a jab with his foot while the other delivered a blow with his baton before they jerked him roughly back up on his feet.

'Your majesty', the smaller of the two guards addressed a king in royal robes seated on a throne made from broken pieces of hoarding. 'This is the scumbag we caught trying to rob the merchant's house'.

The traveller experienced a profound sense of Deja-vu, as the narrative surrounding the character of the prisoner unfolded.

'He was acting with an accomplice. We received information about the planned raid, and lay in wait for them, and caught them entering the house. This one ran away and we caught him hiding in a ditch', the second guard sneered. 'This is not his first time in trouble, I might add, -the lowlife'.

'In his defense your majesty', put forward an advocate immediately, 'the accused has had a hard life. He comes from poverty and is an orphan. He has no means of income other than begging and has spent most of his life in institutions. His mother is here to advocate for him if she may'.

An old woman dressed in rags, her scarfed head bent over a stick, hobbled onto the stage. She raised her head a fraction and addressed the king and court.

'He was grand', she said gently. *'The quietest of them all. Sat and play with the milk bottle all day long. Until he went to school'* her voice began to break. *'That's when the trouble started'*.¹

There was an awkward silence as it became apparent that the woman's train of thought had become stuck and that the pain of the memories had stolen her voice. She stayed in a state of confusion, opening and closing her thin mouth like a dying fish, until the advocate put an arm around her, bending her back over her stick, and assisted her off the stage.

We recommend that punishment be lenient your majesty', the advocate called.

The merchant, an overweight pompous looking character dressed top to toe in crimson velvet, threw back his head and snorted in derision. The action reddened his complexion and apple cheeks, producing the unfortunate effect of making him appear pig-like.

'Your majesty if I may? If we are to be lenient with thieves who would break into a man's property, where does it end? Are we to descend into a land of lawlessness and outlaws because we take pity on these vagabonds? Take pity on my wife and daughters, who are afraid to sleep in their beds at night. They are living in constant terror.'

'He's right' conceded a woman's voice from the crowd. 'The prisoner doesn't deserve pity. You heard the guard; this wasn't the first time.'

¹ Interview with Sarah Meaney Sartori Shelton Abbey Prison, 2016

‘Certainly, *exposing God-fearing citizens to this sort of risk from gangsters should not be tolerated*’, mused the king. ‘*There has to be a deterrent.*’² What do you have to say for yourself boy? Answer me!’

The prisoner, who was barely conscious having slumped back onto the floor during the proceedings, attempted to speak, and the traveller finally recognized him as one of contributors of the stories that he carried in his backpack.

What came out of the prisoner’s mouth was a barely audible whisper.

‘Sorry’.

‘Sorry?’ barked the king, ‘sorry? Well if that doesn’t go down in history as the most watery expression of remorse ever made. I should sentence you to life in prison’.³

The two guards yanked the prisoner to his feet in preparation for sentencing.

The crowd exploded into heated discussion and took some time to notice a peasant woman who had entered the stage carrying an infant. The baby started to wail loudly, and the noise of the crowd receded until all attention was on the two figures.

‘I worked in the merchant’s cloth factory from the time I was thirteen years old’, the woman began in a shaky voice. ‘I never missed a day until I had my baby. She wasn’t a week old when he told me my services were no longer needed’. She spat her last statement bitterly in the merchant’s direction.

‘That’s the real criminal’, shouted a man at the front pointing at the merchant. Some of the audience mumbled in agreement from where they were seated on the castle walls, which the traveller observed had shrunk even further height in height so they functioned much like seating in an amphitheater.

‘But the merchant is not the man on trial’, contended the king, ‘he is the victim in all of this’.

‘He doesn’t look much like the victim’, pointed out a voice from the crowd, and there was a good deal of laughter as everyone took in the merchant’s lavish clothing and rotund figure. ‘The same thing happened to my wife that happened to that poor girl. That can’t be allowed. Who’s protecting these women from the terror of poverty, from the terror of redundancy?’

There was much nodding and discussion and the king had to stand up out of his throne to make himself heard.

‘Ladies and gentlemen do not lose the run of yourselves altogether! I repeat; the character of the merchant is not on trial here. The merchant is not the one up on charges for attempted burglary and striking fear into the hearts of folks in their beds’.

‘Well he should be’, interrupted an ageing man, shuffling onto the stage with difficulty as though every movement pained him. His face was a web of deep lines, not so much wrinkled as wizened, like a raisin that had been left out in the sun.

‘I worked for the merchant and his father before him all my life. Every year, he’d take a ‘contribution’ from my salary to take care of me in my old age. Except then he made a bad investment. Ended up buying bales of fabric he couldn’t shift. And when I went looking for my pay out, he told me it had been absorbed into the business. I gave my blood, sweat and tears to that business, and now I’m resorted to begging for my bread and lodgings.’

² Irish Examiner (2014). Gang boss jailed for 12 years over foiled raid by Liam Heylin.

³ Irish Examiner (2014). Gang boss jailed for 12 years over foiled raid by Liam Heylin.

‘Why are we wasting our energy on poor sods like the orphan, who can’t even open his own mouth to defend himself?’ roared a woman up on her feet on top of the castle wall. ‘The true villains are robbing the eyes out of our heads’.

The crowd erupted and the traveller watched as the jester twirled and spun around the stage in a frenzy of purple and black, like a spinning top stirring the energy of the mass.

‘The merchant is not the man on trial’, bellowed the king above the roar, ‘and even if he were- he has committed no crime. You may not like all his actions, the decisions taken by a businessman are not always popular, but they are for the good of the industry. How much more unpopular would he be if he were forced to close his factory? I don’t need to remind you how reliant you are on the generosity of the merchant for your livelihoods’.

‘*What quality of a livelihood is it, if to work for the merchant is to be dependent, insecure and permanently threatened?*’⁴ demanded a voice close to the stage. ‘it’s no better than slavery. You protect the merchant from the people, but you fail to protect the people from the merchant, who is getting fatter and fatter in front of our noses’.

The crowd laughed again, and the merchant, his face flushed the color of his costume, strode furiously to the front of the stage.

‘How dare you! Do I need to remind you who you are speaking to? This is pure ingratitude and envy talking. I don’t see you starving! Is it a crime to be successful? Any one of you could have achieved the same success if you were willing to commit one ounce of my effort. If I have acquired ‘more’, it is deserved, through my efforts, through my courage to take risks, and I will not be vilified because of your laziness and incompetence!’⁵

‘Risk taking that cost the old man his pension’, shouted a voice from the back. ‘The orphan didn’t succeed in robbing even a red cent from you and is behind bars, while you have been extremely successful in robbing entire livelihoods for your own gains.’

There was a roar of approval from the mass and the speaker was lifted out from the crowd and carried by a wave of hands until she was deposited on the stage where she stood to face the merchant. The woman sized up her opponent, before turning to face the throng. Her voice was strong and clear.

‘I may not be starving, but I want to be more than a well-fed cog in the merchant’s machine. A machine that values profit at the expense of people and the planet, and views everything, be it human, animal or natural resource, as an inanimate object of its purchasing power.’⁶ I demand freedom, *not only from hunger, but freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture.*⁷ I demand this for myself, and more importantly, I demand this for my children.’

The crowd applauded and the speaker continued unwavering.

‘The orphan and the merchant are both guilty, to the extent that both are involved in taking something and causing harm. However, in the case of the orphan, while we may not condone his actions, we can understand them as the result of his circumstances. Prison is used as a deterrent but is ineffective as it fails to recognise the conditions as the problem and so the cycle of crime is perpetuated. In the case of the merchant, the real issue lies in the fact that his actions are not considered criminal, despite the levels of injury he inflicts, and unlike the orphan, we cannot put his behavior down to his circumstances. There is no deterrent, so he continues, his increasingly

⁴ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

⁵ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

⁶ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

⁷ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

criminal activities going unchecked *in his unrestrained eagerness to possess and his materialistic concept of existence*.⁸ The king's power is arbitrary. He has no right to punish the orphan, since the system of justice on which this punishment rests is fundamentally unjust.'

The traveller paused just at the moment of realisation that these were his words and his mouth uttering these convictions.

'And now, who am I?'

The travellers' eyes took in the sea of faces from this new position and turned back to survey the king and the merchant. From her smaller and slighter female form, the threat of violence from the two powerful men felt conceivable, and so she stood, transfixed, uncertain of what to say or do next. Sensing the beginnings of familiar feelings of doubt and awkwardness, magnified by her visibility on stage, she experienced a wave of self-disgust as her eyes filled with tears. Just as she was in danger of succumbing entirely to the paralysing internalisation of shame and inferiority, the jester appeared in a blur of indigo and removed the crown from the head of the king. The crown was barely in the jester's ringed fingertips, when a band of people in brilliantly colored clothes and faces of every hue and shade swarmed the platform and began to de-robe the king, and the traveller was caught up in a pulsing mass of bodies.

Drummers beat out a throbbing trance rhythm and suddenly everyone was dancing and crying, their feet pounding the earth. They caught hands and whirled into a long chain, winding and spiraling, spilling over the walls into the grounds of the castle, its bowl-like shape a vessel for the heaving throng of people. Fires were lit along the tops of the castle walls underneath a sky that burnt pink with streaks of silver. Against the twilight the glowing silhouette of the fox stood over the celebrations, while the traveller danced, eyes uplifted, head high, until her heart burst with joy and her soul sang;

'This is the essence of being, remember?'

'I remember', she sang back.

They danced until they were too exhausted to dance anymore and the spiral wound around a giant bonfire amassed from the oak of the castle door, sending sparks that exploded and rained down in amber and ochre. She felt a hand slip into hers and give a comforting squeeze, and she turned her head to find herself shoulder to shoulder with the gatekeeper, and for a moment they said nothing as they enjoyed the reflection of the fire in each other's eyes. The gatekeeper was the first to break the spell and look back towards the flames, where a group of children were laughing; skipping and dodging the firefly-like embers. The traveller felt her heart ache with a pang of longing for the soft, heady scent of her own children.

'You appear to have found your way to the end of your journey. Congratulations.'

'To this stage of my journey, perhaps', replied the traveller. 'But I realise now that a way of knowing and a way of being is really just a signpost.'

'So, where next?' asked the gatekeeper.

'Home', she replied, drinking in the innocent, playful energy of the children in the firelight. 'Home. The revolution will have to wait'.

⁸ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Penguin, 1972.

RAFAEL'S RAINBOW MOUNTAIN



One of those days, towards the very end of this PhD, to cheer me up, my son Rafael (age 5) drew a picture of me and him climbing a rainbow mountain.

‘We’re nearly there Rafa’, I said somewhat wearily, noting its steepness.

‘We’re at the top’, he corrected, pointing out the flag.

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