ASHGATE

Education in Prison

Studying Through Distance Learning

EMMA HUGHES

Education in Prison
Studying Through Distance Learning

EMMA HUGHES
California State University, Fresno, USA

ASHGATE

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington
VT 05401-4405
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Hughes, Emma.
Education in prison : studying through distance learning.
1. Prisoners--Education--Great Britain. 2. Criminals--Rehabilitation--Great Britain. 3. Distance education--Great Britain.
I. Title
365.6'66'0941-dc23

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Hughes, Emma.
Education in prison : studying through distance learning / by Emma Hughes.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4094-0993-9 (hardback) -- ISBN 978-1-4094-0994-6 (ebook) 1. Prisoners--Education. 2. Distance education. I. Title.
HV8875.H84 2012
365'.666--dc23

2012009591

ISBN 9781409409939 (hbk)
ISBN 9781409409946 (ebk)

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the MPG Books Group, UK.

EDUCATION IN PRISON

This book is dedicated to the memory of Anne Peaker in recognition of her efforts to foster creativity and humanity in prisons.

Acknowledgements

The work on this book began in Britain and ended in the US. Along the way many people have provided support, guidance and inspiration for which I am grateful. I would like to make particular reference to the following individuals and organisations for help that they have given.

First, I would like to thank the School of Social Sciences at Birmingham City University (BCU, formerly University of Central England) and the Prisoners' Education Trust for co-funding the research on which this book is based. At BCU I benefited greatly from the advice and guidance of Joyce Canaan, David Wilson, Jane Hill and Mike King in the School of Social Sciences and the Centre for Applied Criminology. Joyce Canaan, through expanding my awareness of the literature on post-compulsory education in the community, has allowed me to bring a different perspective to this research than would otherwise have been possible. I am immensely grateful to her for the insight she has offered throughout this process. David Wilson was instrumental in the development of this research project and his wealth of experience as an academic and former prison governor provided much help to me as I undertook this work. I would also like to extend thanks more generally to my former colleagues at BCU for all of the support that they offered.

I thank current and former staff and trustees of the Prisoners' Education Trust for vital assistance with this project. I am especially thankful to Ann Creighton, the former director of the Trust, for sharing her wide-ranging expertise, and likewise to Pat Jones, the subsequent director, who meticulously addressed my last minute questions as I finalised the text.

I have benefited enormously from the perspectives and insight of Anne Reuss Wilson (cited as Anne Reuss within the text) and Loraine Gelsthorpe who have provided in-depth and much appreciated comments on an earlier version of this work. Shadd Maruna, Bonita Veysey, Johnna Christian and Damian Martinez have provided very helpful feedback in regards to aspects of this study. For the latter three this was in their capacity as editors of the volume, *How Offenders Transform Their Lives,* published by Willan (2009), to which I contributed a chapter and in which portions of this book have previously appeared. Anne Pike, Jason Kissner and Barbara Owen have helpfully directed me towards material relevant to this study.

My colleagues at California State University, Fresno, where I have been based through much of the writing of this book, have provided considerable encouragement and support, and I thank the Provost, and the Dean of the College of Social Sciences, for research release time. Since returning to the US, my interest

in education in prisons has been further stimulated by individuals met through the Inside-Out Prisoner Exchange Program and the Graterford Think Tank. I also thank Russ Bradley for his continual encouragement in this respect.

In regards to the production of this book, particular thanks are due to my editor at Ashgate, Claire Jarvis, for her patience, her expert guidance, and her very timely responses to all of my queries. I am thankful for useful suggestions made by assessors as part of the review process. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Michael Lester, the artist who created the striking drawing featured on the cover of this book. The drawing won the 2008 Kalyx Merit Award presented through the Koestler Trust's annual exhibition of prisoner art in the UK. I am very grateful to the Koestler Trust for facilitating the use of this work for the book.

My family and friends, both in England and the US, have offered me tremendous encouragement throughout this process and this has made such a difference. My parents and sister have been unwavering in their expressions of support and interest. I cannot begin to thank Stephen Edwards enough for the exceptional and invaluable role that he has played in regards to all aspects of this book from the very first days of my involvement with this project.

I would like to give thanks to the prison governors and prison staff who made this research possible. I would like to express my gratitude to the education department staff who organised my visits to the prisons. I greatly appreciate the assistance that they provided. I reserve my final thanks for all of the students who so openly volunteered their time and experiences for the purpose of this research. Their stories have been inspiring and I thank them for sharing these with me.

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

It is estimated that each year up to 4,000 British prisoners study through distance learning.[1] These students study a wide variety of subjects at a broad range of academic levels. They work independently on their correspondence courses within their prison, communicating with tutors at external educational institutions via the post. Yet despite their pursuits, these prisoner-students do not simply represent an academic elite who came into prison with numerous educational qualifications and strong employment histories. Although this can be said of some of the distance learners, many are more typical of the prison population as a whole. Stories of entering prison with no qualifications, of truancy and expulsion from school when younger, and of having struggled with literacy and numeracy, are common.

This book will examine the diverse motivations of those undertaking distance learning in prison, and will do so with a view to the students' educational backgrounds and personal histories. I will consider such questions as what influences a student's decision to study in prison, and through distance learning in particular, if they had previously disliked formal education. The book will go on to explore the experiences of the students once their studies begin, including the benefits that the students report, the difficulties that they encounter, and the impact of their studies on their sense of self. While exploring how the students' courses interact with and shape their time in prison, the book will also consider the potential impact of their educational activities on their post-release lives. Throughout, the focus will be on the students' own voices, on their own accounts of their educational experiences and future goals.

Prison-based distance learning has been the subject of only limited academic research (for notable exceptions, see: Worth 1996, Maguire and Honess 1997, Pike 2009). This dearth of research is perhaps not surprising given that distance learning constitutes a subset of prison education provision, and prison education itself has been described as an under-researched field (Mills 2002), although it is

1 Although exact figures are not known, this estimate has been provided by the Prisoners' Education Trust, a charity which offers grants for distance learning (Schuller 2009, see also Pike 2011). Pat Jones, former Director of the Prisoners' Education Trust, estimates that the figure could actually be somewhere between 4,000 and 6,000 students studying each year through distance learning (personal communication, 20 September 2011). For contextual purposes, at the end of September 2011 the prison population of England and Wales stood at approximately 87,500, having reached 80,000 for the first time in 2006 (Berman 2011), with the Scottish prison population at approximately 8,500 (Scottish Prison Service 2011).

one that continues to grow. Yet the extensive and varied educational experiences that distance learning in prison can entail, and the unique benefits and challenges that such a form of learning can present, are worthy of specific attention within this field, particularly given distance learning's primacy in offering prisoners the chance to extend their studies beyond the more basic level of education offered in the typical prison classroom.

However, it will also emerge that the experiences of distance learners in prison have relevance to more than just this specialised set of learners. Because many of the distance learners have studied within their prison education departments as well as through distance learning, this allows for a point of comparison with, and an exploration of, classroom-based learning in prison while at the same time offering insight into how classroom-based studies may lead to an interest in continuing education through distance learning. This study therefore contributes to the growing body of research on adult education in prison in general, and specifically to that aspect of the literature that examines educational experiences from the perspectives of the students themselves.

An exploration of distance learning also provides a unique entry point into the world of the prison and what sociologists have referred to as 'inmate society' (see, for example, Clemmer [1940] 1958, Sykes 1958). Because distance learning takes place largely within prison cells rather than in the dedicated classrooms of a prison education department, the students' undertakings are particularly prone to the influence of prison-wide policies, the actions of staff, managers, and other prisoners, and the more general culture that pervades a particular prison or wing of a prison. Questions can be asked regarding whether the students find prisons to be encouraging or discouraging of their constructive and potentially rehabilitative pursuits. In exploring these issues, larger questions about what prisons are for, and what they are designed to achieve, can be addressed. Because many of the students who took part in this study are actively engaged in a variety of prison activities, some of which inspired their education and some of which grew out of their education, the book will further examine how the students may in turn influence their surrounding prison environment.

Therefore, as much as this book is about distance learning in prison, it is also a book about educational life histories, broader rehabilitative undertakings within the prison environment, possibilities for personal transformation through education, the influence of others on such pursuits, and the influence of the students on those around them. Through the findings there are implications for how educational and related activities in prison might be encouraged, if so desired.

Distance Learning in the Context of Prisoner Education Provision

Distance learning provides an opportunity for prisoners to advance their education, via correspondence, beyond the basic skills instruction in literacy, numeracy and other key skills that is currently the focus of prison education departments

in England and Wales (HM Prison Service 2000a: Prison Service Order 4205, Ministry of Justice 2010c: Prison Service Instruction 33/2010). For prisoners who have already achieved educational qualifications up to Level 2, including GCSEs,[2] distance learning remains the most viable option, and in many cases the only option, for continuing formal academic education (A. Wilson 2010). Although this form of study often requires the students to secure their own funding, with exceptions for some university courses as will be explained below, students may seek out this mode of study when they have completed the courses on offer within their prison but still have long sentences left to serve, when they come into prison having already having earned such qualifications, or when they wish to pursue a specialist subject. However, before exploring students' decisions to undertake distance learning in prison, a subject that is the focus of much of this book and the following chapter in particular, it is helpful to examine the broader context of prison educational provision.

According to the American criminologist Edwin Sutherland, the origins of prison education programmes can be traced to the religious instruction provided for prisoners by visiting priests and preachers during medieval times (Sutherland and Cressey 1955). The modern prison began to emerge between the mid eighteenth and mid nineteenth centuries across Europe and North America and imprisonment became the primary means of punishment for serious criminals (Morgan 2002). Prison reformers of the late 1700s, such as the widely influential British Quaker, John Howard, envisioned prisons as places where offenders could find penitence in part through religious study and reflection. Indeed, Sutherland argues that 'the development of secular educational work in prisons resulted directly from the effort to teach prisoners to read the Bible and the tracts' (Sutherland and Cressey 1955: 530).

Nevertheless, not all were supportive of these educational developments. Sutherland notes that the early 1820s saw resistance to prisoner education by some prison officials, both in Britain and the United States (US), on the grounds that teaching prisoners to write might lead to crimes of forgery. Echoes of such concerns are still heard today in objections that education in prison might simply result in criminals better able to avoid detection. Despite such reservations, educational provision continued to develop in a piecemeal fashion through the nineteenth century. Then in 1908, England and Wales saw the introduction of formalised prisoner education (House of Commons 2005). The Open University (OU), the UK's largest distance learning-based university, opened in 1969 and made its university courses available to learners in prison. In fact, post-secondary educational opportunities for prisoners were expanding in Britain as well as North America during the mid twentieth century (Gehring 1997, Duguid 2000a). As

2 A GCSE is a General Certificate of Secondary Education. Students typically take GCSE exams in a range of subjects at the age of sixteen, thereby marking the end of compulsory education. A grade of A* to C on a GCSE exam is equivalent to Level 2 in the National Qualifications Framework.

education provision moved away from its roots in religious instruction, it also, depending on the location, grew to incorporate vocational and life skills education within its remit.

Yet, the history of prison education is one of fluctuations and shifts rather than a straightforward tale of gradual expansion. The nature, level, and goals of the education provided at any given time or locale are subject to the influence of prevailing views on the causes of crime as well as attitudes regarding the desirability and viability of rehabilitation of offenders as a goal of the penal system (as opposed to a focus on retribution/punishment, incapacitation or deterrence). Equally, budgetary concerns, specific institutional contexts, the views of individual education programme providers, trends within adult education more generally, as well as broader social and political factors within and beyond the criminal justice system, influence the nature of educational provision in prisons (see, for example: Forster 1998, Bayliss 2003, Gehring 1997 regarding the US, and Duguid 2000a regarding Europe and North America). Illustrative of such shifts, the college programmes that had been expanding in US prisons during the mid twentieth century began to collapse with the move away from rehabilitation as a primary goal of the country's correctional systems. The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act passed by the US Congress made prisoners ineligible for federal grants available to assist students with their college tuition, a political move associated with the 'tough on crime' stance that was sweeping the country at the time (Batiuk 1997, Gehring 1997, Ubah and Robinson, Jr. 2003). The loss of these funds resulted in the closure of most in-prison college programmes, sometimes to be replaced by programmes staffed by volunteer college instructors or supported by external universities.[3]

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, when the research for this book was undertaken, prisoner education in England and Wales found itself, at least according to official pronouncement, positioned as part of a government agenda to reduce reoffending through a focus on basic education provision (Social Exclusion Unit 2002, Home Office 2004).[4] With an escalating prison population, an associated increase in costs, and 58 per cent of released prisoners reconvicted within two years according to 1997 data (Social Exclusion Unit 2002), education formed part of a strategy to reduce recidivism through increasing the future employability of prisoners (HM Prison Service 2000a: Prison Service Order 4205). The interest in 'outcomes' for prisoner education can be seen as a departure from

3 For examples of such programmes see the Prison University Project associated with San Quentin prison in California (http://www.prisonuniversityproject.org/), the college programme at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York (Fine et al. 2001), and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program through which college instructors across the US take 'outside' college students into prisons to share classes with 'inside' students from the prison (http://www.insideoutcenter.org/).

4 As Forster (1998) has identified, prison-based instructors themselves maintain a broad and varied range of goals for the education that they provide to their students.

the less 'utilitarian' flavour of prisoner education that had previously existed and which had in this respect been a point of contrast with North American approaches (Duguid 2000a, Bayliss 2003). Additionally, as both Ainley and Canaan (2005) and Bayliss (2003) observe, a focus on employability emerged in broader adult education policy in the community as well.

Research support for this official agenda in England and Wales has been drawn from a growing body of studies demonstrating the ability of prison education programmes to effect positive changes in recidivism outcomes (for an overview of the research literature, much of it derived from the US and Canada, see Gaes 2008 and Brazzell et al. 2009;[5] see also Chapter 6 of this book), as well as from government reports detailing the low levels of educational attainment prevalent amongst prisoners. Whilst there are of course important exceptions to this picture of limited educational achievement, the overall image that emerges from these studies is one of an undereducated population. The Government's 2002 Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) report identified that 52 per cent of adult male prisoners and 71 per cent of adult female prisoners held no formal qualifications. Moreover, one half of the adult prisoners in England and Wales had a reading age of 11 or younger, two-thirds had the numeracy skills of an 11-year-old or younger, and four-fifths wrote at the level expected of an 11-year-old or younger. The significance of these findings is highlighted by the fact that 96 per cent of all jobs minimally require the skills expected of an 11-year-old, the equivalent to Level 1 (SEU 2002). A more recent report from the Ministry of Justice (Stewart 2008), the UK ministerial department with responsibility for prisons in England and Wales, found that approximately 46 per cent of a sample of prisoners surveyed between 2005 and 2006 held no academic or vocational qualifications. A follow-up report (Ministry of Justice 2010b) points out that while 53 per cent of prisoners were found to hold at least one qualification, by comparison, 85 per cent of the general population of England and Wales holds one or more qualifications.[6]

---

5 The recidivism reduction attributed to education has led to renewed interest in the rehabilitative potential of education programmes in the US as well, although it has not led to a large scale return of taxpayer supported post-secondary education (PSE) college programmes despite such programmes pointing towards particularly favourable results in terms of recidivism reduction (Batiuk et al. 2005; see also Duguid 2000a, Chappell 2004, MacKenzie 2006).

6 For the purpose of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) survey, qualifications included the following: a GCSE (or its predecessor the O-level, or its equivalent), a qualification higher than GCSEs/O-Levels, or a trade apprenticeship (MoJ 2010). It must be noted that the findings regarding educational attainment are not unique to England and Wales. Spangenberg (2004), writing of the prison population in the United States, notes that prisoners are 'disproportionately and increasingly undereducated, with low skills in the basics of reading, writing, math, and oral communication' (2). A Federal Bureau of Prisons report (Harlow 2003) states that US prisoners generally have 'lower educational attainment' (2) than the general population; 'an estimated 40% of State prison inmates, 27% of Federal inmates, [and] 47% of inmates in local jails … had not completed high school or

In order to fulfil the stated rehabilitative agenda, the focus for prison-based education in England and Wales was placed, and continues to be placed, on instruction in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy along with other key skills such as information technology (HM Prison Service 2000a: Prison Service Order 4205).[7] The financial commitment to prison education increased during the early years of the twenty-first century in order to support these rehabilitation goals (Schuller 2009), reversing budget cuts for prisoner education that took place in the 1990s. Those budget cuts, combined with the contracting out of prison education provision from 1993 (provision that had hitherto been provided by Local Education Authorities), and the introduction of nationally set Key Performance Targets (KPTs) throughout the prison system in 1992, had reduced the educational offerings within prisons. The KPTs set for prison education specifically focused on basic and key skills provision. Given their limited resources, many education departments had to abandon higher-level courses such as A-levels,[8] arts-based courses and a broad range of subjects at GCSE level, as they concentrated on meeting the KPTs for the number of qualifications earned by prisoners at Entry Level, Level 1, and Level 2. In spite of the influx of additional financial resources in the early twenty-first century, prison education provision nevertheless retains this emphasis on basic and key skills instruction, an emphasis that continues to be encoded within the KPTs for education set by the National Offender Management Service (A. Wilson 2010).

Although qualified prisoners may be eligible for funding or fee waivers to continue their studies through the Open University (Open University 2009), not all prisoners interested in continuing their studies are qualified for, or feel ready to undertake, university-level coursework. Whilst the need for literacy and numeracy training is clearly evident, questions have been asked by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005), and also by educationalists and criminologists (D. Wilson 2001, Schuller 2009), as to whether restricting

its equivalent' while only 'about 18% of the general population failed to attain high school graduation' (2).

7 Although in England and Wales there has been a tradition of vocational training remaining separate from academic provision (Bayliss 2003), in the early twenty-first century there has been an increased emphasis on vocational training as part of the 'Offender's Learning Journey' (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills 2007). On this point see also the Government Green Paper, *Reducing Reoffending through Skills and Employment* (HM Government 2005), in which proposals are made for relevant skills training sessions in prison run in conjunction with local employers with a view to expanding the limited vocational training opportunities that were available for prisoners (Forum on Prisoner Education 2005; see also Ministry of Justice 2008, as well as the more recent Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2011 critique and review of offender learning).

8 A-level qualifications generally involve two years of study and are designed for students who have completed GCSEs. They are available in a range of subjects and are often used as indicators of suitability for university.

the standard academic provision to basic and key skills limits the potential that education might have within the prison environment not only for improving future employability, but also for encouraging other benefits that may be derived from education. This is an issue that has also been raised in a critique and review of offender learning by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Ministry of Justice (2011), and this is an issue that shall be returned to throughout the rest of the book.

Distance Learning Provision in Prison

For those prisoners wishing to advance their studies through distance learning, but who are not currently eligible for the OU's fee waiver scheme because, for example, they have not yet completed a required first year course (Open University 2009), or for those who wish to explore distance learning options outside of the OU but who lack private funds to support such endeavours, organisations such as the Prisoners' Education Trust provide a practical way forward. The Prisoners' Education Trust (the Trust) is a UK-based charity that is the primary grant provider for distance learning in English and Welsh prisons. The Trust accepts grant applications from prospective distance learners at all prisons in England and Wales. In 2010 the Trust issued 2080 grants enabling prisoners to begin new courses. The charity has been issuing grants since 1989.[9]

Prisoners who wish to be considered for funds from the Trust must submit an application along with a letter of support from a prison-based tutor that confirms the applicant's eligibility and suitability for the selected course. The Trust does not inquire about the applicant's criminal conviction but requires verification from the education department tutor that the nature of the offense does not make the course choice inappropriate (see also Ministry of Justice 2010c). The Trust will consider funding any academic or vocational correspondence course delivered by a recognised educational institute that can be completed within a prison environment. These courses cover a broad range of academic levels from GCSEs and City & Guilds[10] to post-graduate level studies, and the Trust also funds courses that offer certifications and qualifications that do not fit within the traditional educational framework. As evidence of the variety of courses undertaken the Trust has provided funds for: Accounting, A-level History (nineteenth-century British), Animal Behaviour, Business Start-up, Car Maintenance Theory, Exercise and Fitness Knowledge, GCSE Psychology, GCSE Spanish and Introduction to Counselling Skills. The Trust also administers grants for introductory and first year OU courses (which are not eligible for tuition exemption through the OU's fee waiver scheme) based on funding received from the Department for Business,

9 For a list of other charities, such as Women in Prison, that also offer funding for distance learning in the UK, see the *Prisoner Funder Directory* (Hardman Trust 2011).

10 City & Guilds qualifications are primarily vocational qualifications that are offered in a variety of industry areas. They cover a range of levels from entry level to post-graduate.

Innovation and Skills. In 2010, grants for 851 OU courses were awarded through these means (Prisoners' Education Trust 2010; the 851 grants form part of the total of 2080 awarded by the Trust in 2010). As the Trust's website explains, the charity 'provide[s] access to broader learning opportunities for prisoners, to enhance their chances of building a better life after release' (Prisoners' Education Trust 2011b).[11]

Whilst far from providing an exhaustive account of the complex and fragmented history of prisoner education in England, Wales, and elsewhere, a history that is riddled with changing, overlapping, and at times, conflicting goals and agendas (see, for example, Davidson 1995b, Forster 1998), the preceding has been intended to convey a sense of the backdrop against which the students featured in this research undertook their studies. Although the students' stories about their involvement with education in many respects transcend the particularities of the location and time at which they have engaged in their coursework, nevertheless, their educational experiences are inevitably impacted by the current agendas, provision, and policies with which they are faced.[12]

The Nature of this Study

The qualitative research on which this book is based draws primarily on in-depth interviews conducted with 47 distance learners. All of these students have undertaken courses funded by the Prisoners' Education Trust. Additionally, many of these students have studied through prison education departments as well as undertaken distance learning supported via other financial means. The following provides an overview of the methods used for this study.

---

11 The Prisoners' Education Trust financially contributed to early stages of this research project with a view to learning more about why prisoners apply for distance learning and what they encounter once their studies begin, in order to help with their service provision. Distance learners who receive funds from the Trust are not required to maintain contact with the charity after receipt of their course, although they are encouraged to do so if they wish. A designated education department tutor liaises with the Trust and provides twice-yearly updates regarding students' progress. However, due to prisoners being transferred between establishments and/or released, and because many of the learners have no other contact with their prison's education department as they work independently on their courses primarily in their cells, such updates on progress are not always available to the Trust. At the time of writing, methods were being developed in order to maintain more direct contact with the students themselves (Pat Jones, former Director of the Prisoners' Education Trust, personal communication 2011). Further funding for this research was provided by Birmingham City University, formerly the University of Central England.

12 For readers seeking an in-depth account of the history and development of education provision in prison, see, for example, Gehring (1997) regarding post-secondary provision in the US, Davidson (1995b) on North America, Duguid (2000a) on educational programmes in North America and Europe, and Bayliss (2003) regarding England and Wales.

To identify research participants a short-answer questionnaire about educational experiences was sent to all of the students that the Trust currently funded at nine adult prisons in England. The nine prisons, one of which was a women's prison, were selected to reflect a full range of security classifications, to include local and training prisons, and to cover a variety of geographic locations.[13] Students were advised that their participation was optional and would in no way affect future funding opportunities, that their responses would be kept anonymous, and specifically that the Trust would not be informed of the participants' identities.

A total of 76 questionnaires were completed, with the response rate by prison varying between 45 per cent and 72 per cent.[14] Of the 76 respondents, 47 took part in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews that were arranged at the selected prisons. Almost all questionnaire respondents expressed interest in being interviewed, but prisoner transfers and releases shaped the number of interviews that took place. Participants were reminded of the anonymity of their responses and the optional nature of their involvement. With the permission of each interviewee and prison, almost all interviews were tape recorded for later transcription. The format of the interviews allowed for the development of a dynamic dialogue, typical of an 'interactive methodology', whereby discussion about educational experiences rather than a strict question and answer format was developed (see, for example, Gelsthorpe 1990, Reuss 2000). The passage of time between the return of the questionnaires and the conducting of interviews (sometimes a gap of up to one year for logistical reasons) had the advantage of allowing for insight into the students' experiences at different stages of their courses. During the intervening time, some had completed their courses, some were still working on them, and some had abandoned their courses.

The interviews and questionnaire responses enabled an in-depth examination of educational experiences and motivations as told by the students themselves. Throughout this book the emphasis is placed on the students' own narratives and voices, in keeping with explorations of 'prisoner' education, as opposed to 'prison' education. From this perspective the focus remains on the student rather than the system, on the student experience rather than on the evaluation of education according to officially set goals (see, for example, Reuss 1999, D. Wilson and Reuss 2000; see also Davidson 1995a, Germanotta 1995). Such an approach represents a clear departure from recidivism-based analysis of the impact of education on reoffending, and students were not selected for participation in this

13 Women comprise approximately 5 per cent of the prison population in England and Wales. Local prisons typically hold remand prisoners (those in custody awaiting trial or with a trial in progress) as well as those serving short sentences. Training prisons are designed for prisoners serving longer sentences.

14 This was an encouraging result, particularly given the frequency with which prisoners are transferred between establishments. In some cases the students returned their questionnaire from a different prison to the one at which they had been contacted, my letter having been forwarded through the system.