

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A CASE STUDY  
OF STONY MOUNTAIN PENITENTIARY

by

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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Sociology

Department of Sociology  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

1995



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ISBN 0-612-13492-X

**Canada**

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**ROSE SACHDEV**

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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## ABSTRACT

Prison education programs exist in Federal and Provincial correctional institutions across Canada. These programs are administered and provided by co-ordinators, trained teachers, volunteers and peer-tutors (other inmates). Previous studies of prison education rely heavily on data from those who administer and provide the programs, and little or no attempt is made to involve the students. The purpose of this study was to explore the relevance of prison education from the inmate-students' perspective. An attempt is made to determine how human agency is manifested in the context of education programs in the correctional setting. The role of human agency is explored in this study by focusing on the thoughts, perceptions and involvement of inmates with their prison education program. Cultural resistance theories provide a conceptual framework for this exploration because of the attention they give to the individual. The findings of this study show clearly that, even within a controlling environment, individuals work to achieve important personal goals.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who I owe gratitude for their support during this research.

Firstly, I would like to thank Russell Smandych, my thesis advisor for his patience and guidance. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Ed Boldt and Denis Bracken for their insight into my research. I appreciated the way my committee members challenged me with their critiques.

Thank you to the students of the Stony Mountain Penitentiary education program. This research would not have been possible without your co-operation and willingness to share your experiences and insights with me. Thanks to the staff at Stony Mountain Penitentiary: Al Maclean, Winston Alexander, Ken Friesen, Jonine Anderson, and Linda Bloom.

Thank you to the Department of Sociology and the support staff, Sandy Froese, Dianne Bulback and Kathe Olafson. Thanks also to all my friends I met through the years as a sociology student.

Thank you to Daly De Gagne for keeping me focused and objective, and for assisting me with editing.

A very special thank you to my parents, Jyoti and Rai, and my brother Jeewan. There was never a moment that their support and love was not felt. I could never have done this without them.

Finally, to my fiance Fiadore Dadak. Even with the many miles between us his encouragement and support were always near. Thank you for inspiring me.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore student perceptions of prison education programs and to understand how individuals interact with their educational environment.

Prison education programs exist in federal and provincial correctional institutions across the country. My first exposure to prison education came through employment at Headingly Correctional Institution, a provincial jail, and volunteer activities at the Provincial Remand Centre, where I worked directly in literacy programming as a tutor and co-ordinator. Through this experience I began to develop certain understandings, criticisms, and questions with regard to educational programs within the correctional setting. This interest in prison education programs was enhanced by exposure to literature on social control (Cohen, 1979, 1985, 1989; Garland, 1985; Garland and Young, 1983; Melossi, 1987; Scull, 1984) which sees all programs being implemented for the sake of "social control,"<sup>1</sup> and which implies that prison programs, including education, are carried out, not with the interests of the individual in mind, but in the particular interests of each institute and its administrative agenda(s).

This literature offers valuable insight into understanding the value of social control theory and its theoretical relevance to prison education programs. However, by seeing all prison reform as

<sup>1</sup> "Everything we know about the way social control ideologies originate and function should warn us about the delusion of even expecting a synchronization of words with deeds" (Cohen, 1985: 155).

alternate forms of social control, social control theorists do not give sufficient attention to what actually occurs with individual inmates, or how their experiences are perceived as being beneficial.

From reviewing the sociology of education literature, it also became evident that social control, in the context of educational programs, was not a new phenomenon, as demonstrated by theories of reproduction (Althusser, 1971; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Cole, 1988). In the 1960's and 1970's, schooling was challenged as being anything but an equalizing force in society. In fact, research "provided powerful evidence that social structure and family background were more powerful determinants of cognitive (and non-cognitive) outcomes than even the best schooling" (Olson, 1981: 1). These conclusions were opposite to the liberal ideology of schooling as equal and "liberating to all." In fact, "the cumulative impact was a bomb-shell to the operated serenity that suggested that schools worked for all" (Olson, 1981: 1). The idea was that schooling within the larger realm of society could not be liberating under the existing structural constraints.

However, Giroux (1981) demonstrated concern with how this argument "is a notion of ideology that exists without the benefit of human agents" (1981: 5). Giroux, while recognizing the impact of ideology, noted that individuals are not necessarily passive agents. Theories of cultural resistance focus on how credence is not given to individual actors (Giroux, 1981, 1983; Dale, 1981; Willis, 1981). Giroux (1981), argues that reproduction theories ignore "conflict." He emphasized "the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the connection between their own experiences and structures of domination and constraint" (Giroux, 1983: 290). Theories of cultural resistance offer insight to the role individuals may play in their educational endeavours. These theories recognize that while contradictory agendas, including one of control, may be found in

education programs, there is also a strong recognition of the role of human agency.<sup>2</sup>

My interest in student perceptions of prison education was enhanced further by the lack of available research in this area. There are, as noted, conflicting ideas regarding prison education programs, yet there is a gap in the literature with regard to student perceptions of these programs. As Davidson (1992: 2) has pointed out: "One thing soon becomes clear: with rare exceptions those who write about prison education are not prisoners or former prisoners. For the most part, it is educators who dominate the discourse." It was also found that previous research tended to focus on inmates in post-secondary programs, therefore offering very little insight from individuals involved in the basic education programs.

This thesis, therefore, examined the perspective of the individual inmate involved in basic education programs. I wanted to understand how individuals interact with prison education programs and develop insight into their perceptions. The aim of the present study is to move beyond macro-level explanations of prison education and explore perceptions of the individual at the micro-level. Theories of cultural resistance are critical in this study as the focus is on the role of human agency within the educational arena.

The literature review follows in Chapter 2, which has four sections, each dealing with a different theoretical perspective. These four perspectives are relevant to understanding the importance of this study of student perceptions. Each of the included viewpoints varies in its outlook toward prison education, yet the perception of the individual tends to be de-emphasized in all of them. There has been literature from the point of view of theorists, educators, and correctional

<sup>2</sup> Human agency for the purposes of this research is defined as the interactions and actions that an individual brings to his environment. What a person does, consciously or otherwise, is seen as human agency.

administrators. However, there has been very little written from the perspective of the individuals involved with these educational programs, namely the student/inmate. As my review of previous studies of inmate perceptions of prison education will show, the literature is sparse and there is particularly little information available regarding lower (pre-university) levels of education.

Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative methodological approach that was used for this research. The specifics of data collection, the number of respondents, the interview process and other pertinent information will be presented and discussed. The focus of the study was on students currently involved in a prison education program at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, a male federal correctional institution in Manitoba.

In Chapters 4 and 5, an analysis and discussion of findings on the perceptions and viewpoints of the respondents is provided. The respondents provided meaningful information about their involvement with their educational program. These individuals were all actively involved in their education program and developed their own personal agendas to which they were committed. The students involved in this study clearly demonstrated the role of human agency within their program. This was even apparent with individuals that had fallen under the "trap" of the mandatory prison education program, whereby it was defined as a part of their "correctional plan."

Finally, Chapter 6 offers a conclusion in regard to the findings of the study. This chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study and implications it poses for future research.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review of the literature consists of four sections: 1) Ideas of social control in the field of prison education (2) Prison Education: the humanitarian side (3) Theories of cultural resistance (4) Research on inmate/student perceptions. Each section provides a perspective on prison education in Canada's federal corrections system. More specifically, these four sections provide the theoretical framework and rationale for my study regarding student perceptions of prison education programs at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. This literature reflects the wide spectrum of views held by social scientists with regard to correctional programming. One view (the social control perspective) is that prison education programs have a social control function. A variety of interests may be served simultaneously by prison education programs, especially with respect to the institution's control needs. This literature demonstrates how institutional personnel may implement programs that clearly reflect the interests of the institution over the interests of individuals. The literature on prison education with a more humanitarian focus, in contrast, demonstrates how these programs have been placed in correctional institutions to meet the needs of inmates and to benefit them. Finally, the literature review of theories of cultural resistance demonstrates the view of the role of education as viewed by sociology of education theorists. While acknowledging the various interests that education may meet, these theorists also recognize that individual inmates can be active agents in their educational environment. Inmates may bring their own interests to the programs,

perhaps rejecting or resisting other agendas explicit or implicit in what is presented to them. In the final section I present a review of previous research on inmate/student perceptions in the area of prison education.

## 2.1) IDEAS OF SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE FIELD OF PRISON EDUCATION

Social control ideas are evident in the field of prison education. Bruce Wolford (1989), in an article titled "Correctional Facilities," states that the rationale for correctional education may vary depending on the needs of the educators, institutions, or correctional officials. He gives six possible rationales for correctional education:

- 1) providing institutional work assignments
- 2) providing passive control of inmate behaviour
- 3) providing inmates with basic academic and vocational skills
- 4) providing one means to reduce recidivism
- 5) providing inmates with an opportunity to change their personal behaviour and values
- 6) supporting the operational needs of the correctional institution.

These six rationales are quite different in their outlook and, depending on which ones are selected by the correctional institution, educator, or warden will determine the main purpose for correctional education and influence the role of the educator in the prison (Ibid.: 359). This suggests that the education of the inmate is not necessarily the institution's only concern.

It is also important to recognize the possibility that prison education may serve a multiplicity of contradictory purposes, each constraining the other and yielding contradictory outcomes. Wolford

emphasized that "correctional educators should concentrate their efforts on meeting the basic needs of the vast majority of inmates. Providing opportunities, literacy, and vocational skills should be the primary scope of correctional education" (Ibid.: 375). This statement demonstrates what the concern should be for correctional education, yet it does not necessarily indicate how it is perceived or what it is perceived as accomplishing.

A significant point is raised by Terry Wotherspoon in his article titled, "Prison Education and the Fiscal Crisis." Wotherspoon (1986) argues that:

In the administration of a system of penitentiaries, a program is likely to be given support if it can simultaneously meet fiscal demands and create an impression that the system is working within the class framework that conditions the operations of the state. **The provision of education, training and work opportunities for prisoners would be one such program** [emphasis added] (1986: 169).

This does not seem an encouraging rationale for prison education. In fact, the question may be asked, are prison education programs emphasized because they fit the mentioned criterion by Wotherspoon with minimal effort? On the other hand, prison education may be viewed as a program which benefits the involved individuals in the most humanitarian sense. Perhaps those involved in prison education perceive it as successful in meeting their own goals, while the goal of the administration and state apparatus are concurrently met.

Among prison educators and educational theorists there appears to be no general consensus about the role(s) of prison education. Michael Collins (1988) in the article, "Prison Education: A Substantial Metaphor For Adult Education Practice," states that educational programs in prison

settings are established to meet the ongoing functions of corrections. He believes that the structure of the prison encompasses all programs, and as such, education becomes a part of the overall prison surveillance system. "This ever watchful, distrustful environment, designed to individuate and control its population, infiltrates the entire educational endeavour. It shapes the context in which adult literacy programs...are delivered to inmates" (Ibid.: 102-104). In other words, education is affected and shaped by the environment in which it is delivered. A result of such shaping is presented by Goldin and Thomas (1984), in "Adult Education in Correctional Settings: Symbol or Substance?", who also recognize potential hazards in prison education. They see conflicts arising between the student, educator, and the needs of the correctional institution, therefore resulting in "symbolic rather than substantive" (1984: 123) educational programs.

In this view, education becomes affected by its surroundings, and is not necessarily a tool for alternate functions. However, labelling education as "symbolic rather than substantive," suggests that purposes of prison education have become altered from its original aims by virtue of the fact that it is in the prison context. "Symbolic cooperation is expressed by penal institutions in the establishment of formal structures of educational programming which may partially satisfy judicial, legislative and public pressures, but substantive cooperation in program implementation is much less apparent" (Ibid.: 124). Once again prison education is viewed as serving purposes other than ones benefitting the incarcerated individual. Goldin and Thomas also list a number of contributing factors that hinder education's role in prisons. These include the attitudes of the students, security concerns, and the structural factors of prisons themselves (Ibid.: 124).

In McCarthy's (1985) article "The Nature of Education Within Canadian Federal Prisons," another role for prison education is proposed. McCarthy argues (Ibid.: 441) that "the philosophy

of any education program, if it is truly to be called educational, must be based on the assumption that, as an activity, learning is undertaken solely for the sake of learning itself." However, McCarthy also reviews the present state of educational programs in Canada's federal correctional system and concludes that prison education

must incorporate a sound educational philosophy, develop programs which are academically rigorous and promote creativity, imagination and the maturation of thinking skills. It is only when these have been accomplished that CSC will be able to justifiably state that education exists within federal prisons. Until that time, such claims are only exercises in hollow rhetoric (Ibid.: 451).

If these educational programs are nothing but mere rhetoric, are we to assume that the inmates involved with the programs perceive them as such, and also feel that they do not benefit from the existence of education in prisons? This is a central question which is addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

From the review of the above literature it would seem that no educational program is carried out with the real interests of the prison inmate in mind. The underlying notion is that an alternate agenda, or guise for additional social control, always exists. By seeing all prison education as an alternate form of social control, critics of prison education may neither give sufficient attention to nor be open to other points of view and their emphasis on benevolence and humanitarianism. Regardless of the criticisms, and scepticism of social control theorists, the inmates receiving the correctional programs may have different perceptions. If this is the case, then it is necessary that the perceptions of program participants be studied and understood.

In summary the social control position on prison education contends that prison education is merely a form of social control and is not carried out in the individual's best interest.

## 2.2) PRISON EDUCATION: THE HUMANITARIAN SIDE

In this section I will outline the humanitarian view of prison education within the history of Canada's Federal Correctional system. Prison education is not a new phenomenon in Canada. In fact, since the 1930s concerns about education have continued to appear in reports and evaluations written for Canadian correctional administrators.

In 1938 the Archambault Royal Commission proposed that education programs were to be "structured to meet the needs, interests, and abilities on an individual basis of the potential student body, the majority of whom were found to be academically undereducated, vocationally unskilled, and culturally deprived" (Roberts, 1973: 43). The 1947 Gibson report also demonstrated the need for greater educational opportunities for those who were incarcerated (Ibid.: 43).

Although few programs were developed during the 1950's, education was not dismissed as a correctional program for Canadian federal inmates. "This trend in an humanitarian approach persisted and the Fauteux Royal Commission inquiry of 1956 accentuated still further a personalized attitude in correctional education (Ibid.: 43). This inquiry stated the importance of providing,

programs of adult education that would contribute to the maturation of those inmates exposed to it, provide programs of vocational training designed to teach the occupational skills required to compete in the labour market, and while doing so, hopefully bring about changes in behaviours and attitude to the extent that substantial numbers of inmates who enter federal institutions each year would avoid wasting their lives in the shadow world of the criminal (Ibid.: 45).

In 1977, a *Report to Parliament* (McGuigan Report) was completed by the Sub-Committee

on the Penitentiary System in Canada and the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. This report stated that the concerns, including those of education, highlighted in the 1956 Fauteaux Royal Commission did not seem to have been responded to through new programs in effect in Canadian federal corrections.

This report was written in response to growing unrest among inmates in Canadian correctional institutions. It noted that in 1970 the Canadian Penitentiary System was faced with "a series of upheavals (riots, strikes, murders, hostage takings) " that increased with each passing year (Ibid.: 5). It concluded that these occurrences were due to "anger, frustration and oppression within the tight and unnatural confines of prison over unresolved grievances" (Ibid.: 5), and it agreed that the time had arrived for change in Canadian corrections, especially since it appeared that the incarcerated were no longer tolerant of the situation.

An entire chapter of the McGuigan Report was dedicated to "Work, Education And Training." This chapter specifically made note of education and the rights of inmates to be educated. Recommendations were made for education and vocational training in federal corrections. The Solicitor-General's response to these recommendations was favourable, and reflected a recognition that the time for change in Canadian corrections had arrived. With respect to the education of incarcerated individuals in federal corrections, it was noted and agreed that programs must be recognized and updated. In 1979, a *Report to the Solicitor General of Canada Concerning the Educational Programs of Canadian Corrections System* (OISE Report) was completed in response to the Solicitor General's concerns. The reviewers had set out to determine the role education played in correctional programming. The OISE Report expressed a different view with respect to education. Ideally, according to this report, education should be seen as separate as possible from the

rest of the prison. The reviewers were extremely optimistic and they believed that "in the long history of corrections in Canada, this period may turn out to be one of the most positive in meeting the assigned responsibilities of the Federal system" (Ibid.: 15).

A significant point made in the OISE report was the need for inmates to be offered the same rewards and incentives for education as they would be offered for work. At the same time, they argued that participation in correctional education programs should be voluntary. The assumption was that if education became a voluntary choice, along with incentives, inmates who truly wanted to "learn" would do so with a full effort (Ibid.: 59). The onus was placed on the Canadian Correctional Service and its personnel to offer education as a real and viable opportunity for inmates. Education was looked upon as having a positive effect on inmates, one that might in turn lead to some change.

It cannot be imagined that the inmate-student is unaffected by the special circumstances of his or her participation in the program in question. What is implied, however, is that the learning should have some effect in changing criminal behaviour, in reducing the likelihood of the individual returning to a life of crime and to a penitentiary. The Reviewers, believe that it does, or that it can, though the somewhat questionable estimate of recidivist rates, and the total absence of any other reliable information, must leave the belief no more than an assumption at present. It is, however, the best we have at the moment, and combined with the other arguments would seem to provide clear justification for the mounting of adequate educational programs within prisons (Ibid.: 61).

The belief was that education did offer an alternative, an alternative that should be tried with full effort and not ignored.

Vantour (1991) in *Our Story: Organizational Renewal in Federal Corrections*, stated the purpose of Federal Corrections in Canada. This purpose was titled as the "Mission Statement," and

it concluded that,

the Correctional Service of Canada, as part of the criminal justice system, contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law-abiding citizens, while exercising reasonable, safe, secure and humane control (Vantour, 1991).

The interesting point of Vantour's report is that even with changes occurring and new directions being proposed, there is still a degree of past policies and concerns incorporated within today's correctional goals. Directly related to education is the recognition by correctional personnel that prison education should be an ongoing part of correctional programming. "The inability to read and write may not be a specific cause of criminal behaviour, but it does render many offenders unable to cope with the difficulties of daily ordinary life. **We believe that learning to read will help offenders upon release from prison**" (Ibid.: 72). It would appear that Canada's federal correctional system still supports prison education as part of its correctional policy.

However, beyond this recognition of education's importance was Vantour's recognition that inmates must actively participate in preparing for their "reintegration."

We want the offenders to contribute to the development of the policies and procedures and to the resolution of the problems that they, as individuals or groups, face...At the same time, we must listen to offenders and encourage them to work with us in meeting their needs for successful reintegration (Ibid.: 122).

This becomes an important aspect in relation to education, for prison education is seen as an

important part of inmate reintegration into society. The inmates must therefore be actively informed and involved with the ongoing status of their educational program. This truly becomes "humanitarian" because the voiced needs of those involved are listened to.

In summary the humanitarian position on prison education contends that prison education exists solely to benefit the individual and will aid with reintegration into society.

### 2.3) THEORIES OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE

The importance of cultural resistance theories is their attention to the individual. This "advance to link social structure and human agency in order to explore the way they interact in a dialectical manner represents a significant advance in educational theory" (Aronowitz, 1983:91).

Henry Giroux (1983) states that

aside from shifting the theoretical ground for analyzing oppositional behaviour, the concept of resistance points to a number of assumptions and concerns about schooling that are generally neglected in both traditional views of schooling and radical theories of reproduction (Giroux 1983: 289).

In fact, "the notion of resistance points to the need to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the connection between their own experiences and structures of domination and constraint" (Ibid.: 290). Giroux (1981) also notes that

this points to the importance of studying schools as social sites that contain levels of

determination which have their own specificity and which rather than reflect the wider society, have only a particular relationship to it (1981: 13).

Theories of resistance recognize that conflict and tensions exist in social environments such as the school. In fact, "they demonstrate that the mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction are never complete and are always faced with partially realized elements of opposition" (Giroux, 1983:100).

Paul Willis (1981) describes schools as a site for "cultural production", rather than reproduction. Schools are recognized as generating a variety of outcomes.

I am also describing processes which have their root in production not reproduction. Insofar as the school is one of the material sites and inputs of this schools do make a difference. They are productive as well as reproductive, have specific effects, and cannot be reduced to anything else (1981: 61).

His interest is with "cultural production" that does not occur as "planned." Willis recognizes that the school may have some independence, however "production" has no guaranteed results. The outcome is never pre-determined, "thus its repression, or partial diversion by whatever effectiveness the school does enjoy, can have unintended consequences" (Ibid.: 61). This suggests that individuals bring their own "lived antagonistic social relationships" (Giroux, 1981: 13) to their educational endeavours.

Roger Dale (1981) brings forward a similar argument:

Far from the well organised sweetly running formation of acquiescent automata implied by the correspondence principle, schools are, in fact, sites of struggle whose outcomes cannot be predicted in advance (1981: 66).

Dale recognizes that a constant struggle exists within this school environment, a struggle not necessarily to maintain capitalist interests, but rather to maintain some form of order with "organizational problems confronting them." In essence, the school has the capability to maintain and contribute to the "aims/needs/purposes" of capitalist society, however "the nature of these solutions, if not to subvert, is not necessarily, automatically, or unambiguously to facilitate the achievement of those aims/needs/purposes" (Ibid.: 70).

Theories of resistance direct attention to the important assumption that the fate of students is not pre-determined: "working-class students are not merely the by-product of capital, compliantly submitting to the dictates of authoritarian teachers and schools that prepare them for a life of deadening labor" (Giroux, 1983b: 260)

However, theories of resistance are not without weaknesses. As Giroux points out, there may be a tendency by resistance theorists to underplay the role of the state in shaping the environment of the schools. Also, the concept of resistance is idealized whereby the "dark side" is not readily acknowledged--anti-capitalist values do not lead inexorably toward socialism or to the dead-end of alienating labor (1981: 14). Giroux asserts that "resistance" requires more than mere opposition:

One must either link the behaviour under analysis with an interpretation provided by the subjects themselves, or dig deeply into the historical and relational conditions from which the behaviour develops. Only then will the interest embedded in such behaviour be revealed (1983b: 291).

If this is so, then the individuals involved may offer insight into their behaviours, reactions or

interactions. Giroux indicates that it is imperative to give individuals a voice and an opportunity to explain their behaviours. "It follows from my argument that the interests underlying a specific form of behaviour may become clear once the nature of the behaviour is interpreted by the person who exhibits it" (Ibid.: 291).

Michael Apple (1981) states also that there is a danger in "romanticizing" the notion of resistance. He feels that forms of resistance should be looked at carefully to determine whether or not they actually produce results.

Do students act against, partially transform, or somehow engage in activity which goes beyond mere socialization to and reproduction of, the norms and values considered legitimate in the hidden curriculum? Does this ultimately turn back against them at a deeper ideological level? (1981: 18)

It is evident that education can play a role in liberating individuals, yet this requires more than the theoretical awareness of this "liberating force." It does not necessarily follow that all resistance in the educational context allows education to play a liberating role for the individuals involved. The contribution of resistance theory is an increased awareness of the power of human agency to resist or to react to a specific context. "In effect, resistance theorists have developed a theoretical framework and method of inquiry that restores the critical notion of agency" (Giroux, 1983b: 260).

In summary, cultural resistance theories contend that focus must be directed to the individual who brings his or her own needs and interests to their educational program.

## 2.4) RESEARCH ON INMATE/STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

This section has been included in order to review previous research conducted on prison education as seen from an inmate perspective. Although there are relatively few studies that incorporate this dimension, they nevertheless constitute an important context for my own study.

Stephen Duguid (1985) discusses the Simon Fraser University Prison Education Program in an paper titled "The Prisoner As Student." This paper deals with the Simon Fraser program from the perspective of the educator, however, student viewpoints are also taken into account. Although the students' opinions were not systematically researched, however, it was found that,

the students often wish to escape prison mentality or the repetitive complaints that typify life in prison, and they see in the academic centre, quite rightly, a refuge from prison politics, parole board, classification complaints etc...The education program provides as normal an environment as possible (Ibid.: 14).

This indicates that the educational program allowed the students the opportunity to "escape" the daily rituals of the prison environment. It was also found that,

the prison...exerts a tremendous influence upon the students' attitude towards education...The typical inmate-student regards education programs within the prison as in many ways antithetical to prison and its ethos. Although some students consider educational programs as having a pacifying influence upon students, most feel that educational programs survive in the context of the prison because students and staff have fought against the institution in order to maintain the university program (Ibid.: 14).

It seems evident that this program has a positive impact on the students' attitudes towards education, as well as positively affecting their stay in the correctional institution.

Edna Erez's (1987) study "Rehabilitation in Justice: The Prisoner's Perspective," deals specifically with the perception of inmates and available treatment programs. This study points out that

if prisoners feel they are active participants in the criminal justice system rather than merely spectators, they might be more inclined to accept the existing rationales and approaches which the system seeks to impose on them (Ibid.: 5).

This study does, however, note that

despite a recognition of the merit and importance of "consumer perspective" in criminal justice studies, particularly from rehabilitative aspects, there has been so far no study that addressed the inmates' perspective of their rehabilitation and needs, and their sense of justice concerning rehabilitation programs and practices (Ibid.: 6).

This study looked at inmate perceptions of various correctional programs. The purpose was to determine "which programs should be instituted (or eliminated), and program participation or which criteria should be used for allocating correctional resources" (Ibid.: 7). At the core of this study was the idea that

inmate willingness to participate in rehabilitation programs and the

success of such involvement is bound to be affected by their attitudes and perceptions of correctional programs and practices, by their perceptions of their own needs and by their assessment of the benefits that may result from their participation (Ibid.: 7).

The sample in the Erez study consisted of 348 respondents (inmates). It was found that of these respondents, "87% stated they were interested in programs (such as academic or vocational education) that will assist them to adjust to the outside world. In fact 2/3's [sic] of the inmates interviewed indicated their criminal involvement was due to a lack of skills or education" (Ibid.: 9). It was also found that the inmates felt that they could define their own needs. "I think that the only person suited enough to make decisions concerning inmate programming is the inmate" (Ibid.: 13). This indicates that inmates involved with the programming have their own developed opinions of what is "best for them."

Also from the inmate/student perspective is an article by Keith Whetstone (1981), "How the Prisoner Sees Education." Whetstone presents the perspective of an inmate/student personally involved with the University of Victoria Program. At the time of this article Whetstone was in the process of completing his Bachelor of Arts degree in this program. His initial hesitation in joining the program was lessened by the inmates he refers to as "university program advocates," individuals who would push other inmates to join the program by appealing to another's "self-interest." He states that they would push inmates with the argument that "what else are you going to do, you've got a lot of time to kill, the university is the best go in the joint, no hassles, no pigs, and your [sic] doing something for you" (Ibid.: 83). From this perspective it would appear that the University of Victoria program was seen by some inmates as being "self-serving."

Whetstone also indicates that "the university area itself was a refuge from the violent tensions of the prison, for once that door was shut it was seen as if the prison was locked out" (Ibid.: 86). However, what originally may be considered a retreat from prison life may turn into a positive learning experience. "Education initially entered into as an escape from prison is often taken back into the prison community as a positive force by the same individual" (Ibid.: 89).

As clearly stated by Whetstone, "education was a liberation in every sense of the word, for it filled the vacuum of prison with something meaningful" (Ibid.: 90). Prison education (Whetstone 1981) also has the ability to affect the individual's self-esteem,

given the confidence of hard won intellectual abilities, and success at an enterprise positively regarded by all, from fellow convicts to family and society, the individuals' self-image appears to take a positive leap (Ibid.: 90).

In fact, the student's future outlook is also affected - "the individual's perception of his relation to the future is dramatically altered" (Ibid.: 91). In short, from Whetstone's point of view, prison education at the university level has a positive effect on the student and perhaps also helps develop some "self-interests."

Fox (1994), in a preliminary draft of her dissertation entitled "Education Rituals and the Marginal Status of Prison Education in a Canadian Federal Prison: A Study for Advancing Adult Education in Prisons," discusses "whether the prison educators and their students perceive that prison educators are marginal in the prison institution" (1994: 15). Marginal was defined as being "peripheral to the main purpose of that institution" (Ibid.: 07). A total of 22 students participated in

this study. In general it was found that

although the students believed that the educators were important to the education programming, they did not believe that their overall status was high in the overall organization of the institution. The basis for this reasoning was that the primary purpose of the institution was security (Ibid.: 141).

In fact it seemed that some respondents believed that "the educators' positions were politically based, and as a result the educators were agents of prison control" (Ibid.: 142). This perception of the importance of "control" in the prison was also suggested "because the students are incarcerated and are reminded of their incarcerated status every day, the correctional officers were viewed as being more important in the running of the whole institution compared to the educators" (Ibid.: 142).

Even though most of the respondents indicated that they participated in the education program to help them upon release, the overall feeling was that the prison educators were "marginalized."

Overall the students believed that because the institution's primary focus is to maintain security and control, then the correctional officers were the most important workers in the prison. The prison educators were therefore, marginal to the workings of the institution (Ibid.: 143).

Fox (1994), however, did state that "it appears that the participants in this study benefit from their incarcerated status because they are given the opportunity to learn. Therefore, the prison has a positive influence on their learning opportunities" (Ibid.: 169). From a review of this study it would

appear that even though the "educators" are perceived as being marginalized, the inmates do "benefit" from participation in the education program.

Wildman's (1987) M.S.W. thesis entitled, "University Education: a study of its impact on the lives of former prisoners," examines the effect of education on the lives of former prisoner-students through their own perceptions. These perceptions include the "subjective understandings" of the individual's own changes in attitude.

The five respondents in this study offered a number of reasons for initially participating in prison education programs. These included "a) for the challenge; (b) for something to do; (c) for the stimulation; (d) the education program was more appealing than other institutional alternatives, and (e) the subject was influenced by friends taking similar courses" (Ibid.: 87). However, Wildman concludes that regardless of the original reason for joining the prison education program, once the individual becomes involved, "something happened that made them want to continue with their education" (Ibid.: 88). He states that this motivation to continue with education is due to

feelings of increased confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, the satisfaction of accomplishment and the vague belief that what they were doing was externally validated outside the prison and might somehow provide a path to a new life on the street (Ibid.: 90).

It also seems evident that the subjects felt that through exposure to university education their outlook broadened, allowing them to identify with situations from more than one point of view.

It seemed to be a recurring perception of the subjects in the study that their engagement with university education allowed them to view

people and situations in a larger context which in turn allowed them to better understand their own lives and experiences against a broader frame of reference (Ibid.: 93).

It was also found that the positive effects of prison education can be "maximized" by developing a release plan that includes the "continuation of education on the street" (Ibid.: 127). However, it should be noted that even though all of the subjects in this study included university education as part of their release plan, the transition from prison to street was difficult (Ibid.: 104).

The courses I took on campus were in 1982 when I was on parole...I didn't fair [sic] really well on campus because...I wasn't out that long...it was a big adjustment...being on your own (Ibid.: 105).

However, even with the difficulties in adjusting, the university experience carried the possibility of "providing an interim place of adjustment" (Ibid.: 106).

University provided for me a completely different life experience life circumstance [sic]...University gave me space to come terms with myself...to try and develop an approach, an understanding, a means of dealing with the world as a square-john. Which I'd never really done (Ibid.: 106).

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the positive effect university education had on the students, while recognizing that "prison education programs cannot be the elixir for the problems of the prisoner-student" (Ibid.: 127). All in all, it was found that "given the restrictive nature of the prison environment, it is unlikely any other kind of institutional programming can hope to accomplish

as much for the prisoner" (Ibid.: 127).

Brian MacLean (1992) in "Post-Secondary Education in the Prison: Cognitive and Moral Development or Social Control" poses the question, can "...this form of educational programming be seen as a form of personal development or as a form of social control?" (It should be noted that MacLean has participated in prison education programs as an inmate/student). He states that the main purpose of corrections is the control of the inmate population, and he sees prison education as having the same purpose of control. "I would like to suggest that the post-secondary educational programs should be seen in the same light; as a strategy of control by prison administrators under the guise of liberal, rehabilitative ideology" (Ibid.: 27). Maclean examines the University of Victoria's post-secondary program for federal prisoners in British Columbia. The success of this program is discussed in terms of changing prisoners' attitudes and eventually behaviour. However, Maclean raises an important question, "it should be asked that with all this emphasis on the efficacy of the UVic program to improve the level of moral development and thereby reduce the rate of recidivism, is anyone concerned with the value of education itself?" (Ibid.: 26). "Who amongst us would like to have our academic achievement assessed on our demonstrated ability to avoid contact with the police?" (Ibid.: 26). All in all, he states that education as a form of control is not a new phenomenon to prisoners.

In short, prison education posited as moral education is first and foremost an effective form of social control masked as a form of rehabilitation and evaluated not on its pedagogical merit, but on its efficacy of reducing recidivism. That such manipulation of purposes takes place in the prison comes as no surprise to most prisoners (Ibid.: 27).

Each of the studies reviewed offers insight into the area of prison education, however only the studies by Erez (1987) and Wildman (1987) involved actual interviews with student/inmates. Both of these research pieces suggest that the humanitarian/cultural resistance perspectives have merit. However, neither specifically focus on student perceptions of the prison education programs. Erez's study does look at student perceptions, but largely focusing on perceptions of correctional programs rather than specifically on prison education.

There is a definite gap in the literature with regard to student perceptions of education programs in Canada's correctional system. Education has been a part of the correctional system since the 1930's (Archambault Royal Commission) yet very little systematic research has been carried out in the area of student perceptions. As stated earlier (chapter one) it was found that previous research studies tend to focus on inmates in post-secondary programs, therefore offering very little insight from individuals involved in basic education programs. There is a need for qualitative research which will give students an opportunity to lead research rather than limit their parameters for discussion.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter the qualitative methodological approach that guided this research is presented and discussed. Qualitative research allows for research which reflects on existing policy and on those directly affected by the policy, allowing their viewpoints to be considered.

Qualitative methodologies refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. This approach, as we see it, directs itself at settings and the individuals within those settings holistically; that is, the subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole (Bogan, 1975: 4).

This research project followed an inductive approach as an attempt was made "to make sense of the situation without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomenon or setting under study" (Patton, 1990: 44).

Accordingly, qualitative interviewing was conducted in the form of a case study at Stony Mountain Federal Penitentiary. Stony Mountain Federal Penitentiary is a medium security, male federal correctional institution in Manitoba, and was chosen over one of the provincial institutions because individuals sentenced to two years or more are sent to federal institutions, and are therefore exposed to programming over a longer period of time than individuals at provincial institutions

would be. Another reason for choosing Stony Mountain was that more literature is available on federal than provincial correctional policy. Security clearance was required and obtained by the researcher for access to Stony Mountain Federal Penitentiary.

Initially, volunteers for the project were recruited by going to each of the classrooms. The project intent was explained and opportunity was provided for the students to raise questions or concerns. Those individuals who volunteered to be interviewed were again given an opportunity, immediately prior to the interview, to ask any questions they might have.

Interviewing was conducted in a semi-structured manner ( See Appendix 1). The interviews were taped, so as not to miss any of the important details. "In addition to increasing accuracy of data collection, the use of a tape recorder permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee" (Patton, 1987: 137). Respondents were made aware that they would be taped, and that they did not have to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with. The respondents were also assured of their anonymity. Each of the respondents was asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview (see Appendix 2). One of the respondents did not sign the consent form, but still agreed to do the interview. The only explanation given was that he would not sign anything without the presence of legal counsel.

A sample of 20 respondents was chosen from the total population of the school at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. A purposive method of sampling was used because certain characteristics were more important to the study than others. The main criteria for respondents were current enrolment in the education program at Stony Mountain, and that they not be working as tutors, aids, or teaching assistants. There were no restrictions with regard to age, length of current sentence or time enrolled at the school (all respondents had been at the school for a minimum of three months).

A total of sixteen respondents were obtained in this manner. As mentioned previously the researcher was able to obtain respondents by going to each of the classrooms and recruiting volunteers for the project. The interviewer also used the contacts of the initial inmate/students to obtain other potential respondents. A total of 4 respondents were obtained using this “snowball” technique. In other words, respondents were asked for referrals to other students whose experiences they believed should be included.

Interviews were held in a classroom at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. The interviews ranged in length from one to two hours. The interviews were conducted in a room where there were no correctional officers or any other school officials standing outside the door. Whenever an interruption occurred the tape was turned off and the interview was temporarily stopped. Each of the respondents was assigned a number, so that only the researcher is able to identify them. Also, it was decided that a table containing detailed demographic information about the respondents would not be included in this study, as the number of students at the school is not very high and the respondents were assured that there would be no means of identifying them. There are a few respondents in the sample who could be easily identified because their language is spoken only by themselves or, at most, only a small number of other inmates. However, general information about the respondents is provided in Appendix 3.

The response rate for this study was 100%. Each of the subjects that was asked to participate agreed; in fact, there were students that approached the researcher asking to be interviewed. Once the sample had been identified, data were collected through qualitative interviewing. The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to get an understanding of the individual’s perspective and experiences within the environment under study. This form of interviewing allows the researcher to learn from

their "terminology and judgements, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experience (Patton, 1980: 205).

The interviews were transcribed in their entirety. Students' responses were subjected to a content analysis. Content analysis requires identifying patterns that emerge from the data. Similarities are looked for in the quotations that reflect the understandings of the individuals. According to Patton (1987: 149):

The analyst looks for quotations or observations that go together, that are examples of the same underlying idea, issue or concept...The evaluation analyst first pulls together all the data related to this issue, then subdivides that data into coherent categories, patterns, and themes.

The interview schedule grouped similar questions together. The literature reviewed prior to interviewing was helpful in constructing the interview schedule in the three areas of control, humanitarian and resistance: there was, however, no pre-conceived ideas of which way the respondents would perceive the education program and, therefore, the open-ended questions allowed the respondents to direct the interview to their areas of concern or focus. Once the data had been collected, a code book was developed to identify categories. From this a series of themes developed which allowed for some understanding. These initial categories were then further divided to produce sub-categories within the themes.

The coding categories were not pre-identified and, therefore, the data lead to the development of these particular themes. As the focus was on the students' perceptions it was imperative that their understandings lead the analysis. "The purpose of interviewing begins with the assumptions that the

perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990: 278).

A complete presentation and discussion of the findings is included in Chapters 4 and 5. In these chapters there are numerous direct quotations that reflect the nature of students' responses. Each of these quotations is coded in a way which identifies the respondent by number (from 1 to 20), and the specific question asked which elicited the particular response given by the student (as listed in the Interview Schedule included in Appendix 1).

Most of the terms used in the study are generally well understood. However, the possible exception is resistance. Because of the many ways in which this word is used and the fact that it is an evolving concept (Ortner, 1995; Smandych and Lee, 1995), it is necessary to develop a working definition of resistance for purposes of this study. This working definition has been included in Chapter 5 with the discussion of the findings related to resistance.

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS ON THE VALUE OF PRISON EDUCATION

The literature review on the history of prison education demonstrated that education has been an integral part of Canadian prison reform programs since at least 1938 (Archambault Royal Commission). Education has been included as a humanitarian aspect of the prison environment and, in turn, it has been a positive influence in the lives of the incarcerated.

The respondents in this study were no different from the studies reviewed in expressing the positive impact prison education had on their lives (Erez, 1987; Fox, 1994; Whetstone, 1981; Wildman, 1987). It was interesting to learn that the individuals being kept in an environment which exerts such blatant control nevertheless would demonstrate feelings of a positive nature. The subject's positive feelings toward prison education are described under these headings: 1) self-esteem (2) learning (3) prison education: the first positive educational experience (4) goals.

#### 4.1) SELF-ESTEEM

It was apparent that this study did not differ from other studies (Duguid, 1990; Duguid and Hoekema, 1986) looking at the effect prison education has on an individual's self-esteem. It was quite evident that students felt good about the way school made them feel. As one 42 year old student clearly stated, "(6.25) it gave me the confidence to learn." This same student also noted that he had completed what he called a grade 2 1/2 on the street, but had now achieved to a grade 10 level. He

had reached this level in the two years spent at the school at Stony Mountain.

Altogether about 40% of the 20 respondents spoke of the positive effect the school had on their self-esteem. These students, when asked what they were learning at the school or how they felt about the school, expressed how it was more than learning because they were able to build their confidence.

8.9) Right now I'm working at my GED trying to get my grade 12. I wrote last week the GED and I didn't pass them all. But I think it's my writing skills I need to go over again. I'm going to help my children. It's going to help me so much with confidence. Just the confidence. Being able to have enough confidence in myself to...I want to do everything. I want to take a course. I want to become something.

14.9) Well my reading skills have come up quite a bit. That's going to be real helpful. I had my grade 11 on the street, but I only had grade 6 reading level. My spelling is still way down, but it's coming up slowly but surely. I have more confidence. Oh I can read a lot more than I could before. And that helps a lot too because out there you need to read a lot.

14.14) ...good question...I can kind of...I enjoy school. Cause I finally got my self esteem back up where I can get into it again. So I'm enjoying myself while I do my work because I'm learning new things.

8.15) Everything. The environment. It's normal. The teachers. That I'm doing something for myself. Ahh I don't really have a favourite part. I really enjoy all of it. I kind of enjoy it. The learning. The more I learn. The more I learn to do math better or spelling better, the more I learn the more confidence that is built in me. And so it really gives me a good energy. It gives me a really good feeling about myself. That's what keeps me coming back.

It was also found that many times just the ability to speak up for themselves was an elevating experience.

13.9) Well I'm learning things in school uhh which really uhh in my own personal point of view would be helpful in work. To be able to understand and say hey...This

guy went through school he must know something. But knowing...for me to know what I know is really helpful and uhh for me to be able to talk and understand. To know what to talk about and to get the point across at least and to understand. It's helpful to me. To be more confident in myself and to continue going and striving for more schooling after I get out of here. It's something I want to do. And that's exactly what I'm going to do. It's beneficial.

This same student had noted that when he had been on the street he had "picked up a charge" he was not guilty of, and if it had not been for the confidence that he developed in the school he would not have been able to fight the charge. He fought the extra charge and proved his innocence.

Understanding people for the first time was also a positive aspect of the learning process.

18.9) It's great to be educated. There's no way. There's nothing better than saying I can sit here and say I know what you're talking about. I understand what you're talking about. I ain't no illiterate idiot. You see so it's a good feeling.

The above respondent and others of this study demonstrated that self-esteem was related to the inmates own self perception. Duguid (1990) also states that incarcerated individuals must acknowledge their own self worth before others can recognize it in them.

Subjects also reported feelings of positive self-esteem in realizing over time that they were not the only ones that had difficulty with school and that they could be themselves and not have any pretences.

7.11) Sometimes I feel embarrassed when they ask me a question. They ask me to read and I see this word I can't read. No one laughs or makes you feel bad. We all understand each other.

Students of this study reported that self-esteem was bolstered from their being involved with the prison education program. For example, they were able to validate their feelings and accomplishments through seeing their work in print in the quarterly school paper Inside the Walls, which is distributed to all inmates and to different places in Winnipeg. The respondent's response to having his work published corroborates the position taken by Morin (1981) that individual self-esteem can be reinforced by printing work inmates have successfully completed. Writing and publishing as a means of self-expression and a way to bolster self-esteem are clearly important as demonstrated by the following respondent. He had begun prison education with a mandatory correctional plan and, subsequently, completed his GED in prison. He provides a "before and after" perspective of this experience and the impact of being published.

13.10) And as for the programs it all depends on what you're in for. Every program you learn something and it's all educational. If I was going to school and I had a job I don't think I would be here. I never had the confidence before to go to school. It was just day to day living. There was no future. My outlook on life now is completely different from a couple years back. Even as I go from day to day I feel positive and I see things happening to me and when you do that and you go out and do things...goods things happen to you. And you attract good things. When I started doing creative writing my confidence went up. I submitted one of my poems in a amateur paper...Native Guidance in BC and it got published. There were a lot of submissions, maybe thousands. Then they only selected had a few. I never had confidence in anything other than signing my name whenever I was admitted into a prison or signing a welfare check. That's as far as my writing used to go.

Respondents of this study also said that the interaction they had with the teachers resulted in a positive feeling. Inmates reported experiencing mutual respect between the prisoner and teaching

staff, and that they found this rewarding in itself.

13.15) The atmosphere. The teachers have also been good with that. They don't look at you like anything but students. That's the positive part of that. They treat us as people. There's a big difference when you come to school. When I'm out there I'm an actor. Everybody's not themselves..who they really are. It's just that you walk around with this mask in population. You're not really that person who you're acting. When you come to school--you're your self. Which makes it more easier for understanding each other. For explaining when you come across a problem. Basically talking to one another. In here I don't have to act. I like the way they cover..if I have a problem the teachers will cover it and explain. They take the time. It's not as if they say go figure it out.

8.16) This place feels good. The school is excellent. School wise I couldn't ask for a better place. The thing they got going on here--you couldn't ask for better people. Like you know the guy that runs the maintenance [program]...I went up to him and said I don't know if my case manager got a hold of you or got me on the list...he takes me aside and gets my name and says he'll check it out for me. They're more than teachers here for me.

#### 4.2) LEARNING

More than one third of the respondents stated that learning was an important aspect of the prison education program. The ability to read for many of the subjects interviewed was a rewarding experience in itself. Many of the individuals interviewed had lived much of their lives not having the ability to read or write. The knowledge learned from reading brought a whole new experience for them.

12.9) I am learning all the time. I'm learning about life. It's giving me the way to express my knowledge. Well it's gonna be helpful because it will speed up my process. In my own time I'm learning how to function. This is getting my thoughts ready.

16.9) Well I'm learning a lot in here that will be helpful for me cause like anything

that I do right now..I'm seeking knowledge. It's helping me a lot. Learning in here. I need the knowledge to pursue what I want to do. I need to know and understand.

7.9) Reading, writing. For me it will help lots. Sometimes I can't write anything. Now I have more understanding on how to write things. Now I have more understanding of things--so I am able to make decisions that are better for me. I now have ample knowledge.

Respondent 18 had never had a formal education prior to his incarceration at Stony Mountain Penitentiary.

18.9) Well I'm learning hopefully by the time I finish this I will be able to write a letter comfortably. I'm learning...learning mathematics. I know what  $1 + 1$  means instead of 11. And it's educating me.

Respondent 6 identified that his level of education prior to entering Stony Mountain was at a grade 2 1/2 level. He was currently completing his GED in the program after spending two years at the school at Stony Mountain.

6.14) Good. Because I'm learning something. I'm learning a lot now more than I ever did before in other schools. Well when I came here I didn't know anything about this. Now I'm able to pick it up. Things are slowly coming to my mind. I'm more focused.

At times the importance of learning was more than for the sake of learning, it became a means to an end. The ability to read and write became an important factor when facing the parole board. As this 30 year old respondent stated, writing a letter becomes important when facing the parole board. Education had been defined as part of his correctional plan and therefore necessary to attain parole.

15.12) Probably--It will help me get parole, hopefully. And especially writing. Cause you have to write a letter to the parole board explaining why you want to get out. What you want to do. What your plans are. So then education is an important factor in parole. Lot's of people don't understand what the parole board says to them. It's hard. They get nervous. If they had education maybe they could understand. It could be keeping them in here. So writing, reading can be important.

Respondents also confirmed that being given the opportunity to learn without the duress of the prison environment positively reinforced the learning process. (cf. 13.5 and 8.16 above).

9.16) No I can't argue. The door is open if you want to get some fresh air or have a smoke. We have a coffee room. A smoking room. They got everything here. Bathrooms, water. I feel kind of free. Free from your cell. They let you work at your own level. Your own pace. They don't hurry you to speed up or finish something. They just want you to learn.

Even those individuals that may not have initially wanted to come to school found the learning a positive experience.

20.18) First I just did it because I wanted to hang out in the school. I heard it was pretty good. Just chill out, drink coffee. I didn't want to work. I hate working. Being told what to do. At first I just wanted to hang out. Not work. I didn't care if I passed or failed. That changed after awhile. Then I wanted to learn. It made good use of time.

Respondents in this study also expressed a good feeling about receiving "formal recognition" for their scholastic achievements. Sedlak and Karcz (1989) also discuss the importance of formal

recognition mechanisms for the prison education program. "The formal advance from one grade to another, and the award of certificate or the end of a unit or a course, are strong motivational factors for those who left school without any such evidence of achievement" (p.27). The following respondent expressed the importance of being recognized. He had been at the school at Stony Mountain for close to two years and was in the process of completing his grade 12. It had a strong affect on his confidence.

16.10) I think the school is one of the most important. Well the school is important because you got to learn how to read and write in order to do anything. Even with the other courses. It's very important to even just get your GED. To have that certificate. To say look I have this. It's very beneficial for you if you have nothing.

Getting back "passed" grades or being moved from one class to a higher class also seemed to have a very positive affect on the learning process experienced by respondent 6, who said:

6.26) I have more options now. I want to be able to do something for myself. It was hard always thinking that I couldn't learn. Now I know I can. I even have the certificate.

This 42 year old respondent had entered the program with a grade 2 1/2 and was now at a grade 10 level. The progression through the various levels appeared to be very positive.

Morin (1981) discusses what he calls "assessment" which can be a crucial component of the learning process, especially for individuals that have a "background of educational deprivation." The prison school may be the only place in the institution where the individual can experience some sort

of success or recognition.

17.9) When I pass the tests or I do good on the tests or something it feels good. Makes me feel good. It's just seeing that you can do it. It's good.

Even though the respondent acknowledged that his federal record might keep him from getting a job in spite of his education, he expressed satisfaction at having been part of the educational program: "At least I know something."

Another respondent enjoyed the feeling of "moving up."

15.23) I don't know. It's much different eh..Much different. I find it different because you get to sit down and write and pick up grades, but then in regular population you don't do anything. You don't work or do anything. Just lay in bed. Get up. Go to the washroom. Turn on the tv. Sleep. School's better because when you just lay down and think about something you get stressed out. With school you move up. You know you're learning.

Learning in a prison environment can be equated with not wasting time. The use of time to learn was also demonstrated as being important for the individuals involved with this program. This idea was also recognized by Morin (1981). The importance of time was expressed by this 23 year old respondent that had been at the school at Stony Mountain for four years when interviewed.

2.9) My writing skills are greater. Learning in itself has been helpful. I try to remain positive. This is the one place in here that can be related to what I want to do when I am released. I plan on going to university and therefore at least my time is not completely wasted.

An interesting component to this study was that when students were asked what their idea of an ideal school would look like, many responded by identifying the school at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. Many believed that their learning experience was very positive, and that it reflected any other "normal" school. They did not seem to be bothered by the fact that this school was located in a correctional institution.

#### 4.3) PRISON EDUCATION: THE FIRST POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

More than half of the respondents said their experience with education at Stony Mountain was their first positive experience. Ironically, they had to be placed in the most physically controlled environment to have a good experience with education. Their earlier educational experiences had been negative, and therefore education was not perceived as an option. For some inmates the prison education experience had been positive enough to encourage them to further this experience once released, or even to the point where release dates were deferred so to continue their education inside Stony Mountain. When asked what he liked about the school at Stony Mountain, one student stated:

4.15) As I said I like it. This is the first time that I've wanted to learn. School was never like this.

The following 22 year old student also agreed that this was the first time that he was "really learning."

9.9) It will help me when I start making a life for myself. Stable living place. I can

make my own bank account. I can decide how I want to budget my money. Save some money. Buy what I need and basically budget enough money to last me until the next payday. When I get paid on the street. It helped me a lot. Because I'm starting to build up on it. It's not really coming back because I never really had it. This is the first time that I can say that I'm really learning in school. Because I'm making progress. Passing a lot of my tests--my teacher shows me chart sheet of where I am and how far I'm going. She tells me that I'm starting to progress. So to me it makes me feel better because if I know where I'm going and what basic work I've done...

Another student, when asked if he would be in school on the street, replied,

7.26) Oh I would never have come to school. I would probably be drinking.. It's the first time I really got to go to school. So now out there I can give it a chance.

One respondent noted how after being almost 50 years old he had to come to prison to learn. This same individual had been at the school at Stony Mountain for three years. He began in the basic literacy class and was now taking courses in a Business Administration Program.

19.15) It's good here. I never got to go to school. I'm 48 and I finally get to go. It's good here. I would never have gone. This has been a chance for me to learn. Just think prison brought me this...

One respondent even went as far as to state that the prison and the school saved his life. This student had lived most of his life believing that he was incompetent, because he had been placed in a "slow learner" class when he was growing up. He discussed how he had been labelled as being "slow", but in reality at a very young age lost both of his parents to alcoholism and had never recovered from the

shock or adjusted to the many years of foster care. The recognition that he was able to learn changed his outlook on life.

8.25) It will keep me on track. The only thing I was lacking before on the street was confidence. And lack of identity. Lack of education. Now it's totally different. With the education and identity--I have the confidence. I understand the seriousness of my alcoholism. It saved my life. Prison, school, saved my life. It's all connected. Coming to prison saved my life. I don't like being in prison. It's the only way I could have been saved. It gave me a chance to take a look at my life and do something positive with it. I would never have had a chance out there. Definitely.

The positive experience was enhanced because the respondents could go to school with students that had similar life experiences and therefore understood them better.

14.25) It will help me achieve my goal. It will help me get my licence. It will help me bring my reading up, my math up. It will be give me more..., it will help me understand things better. It will also help with my self esteem. It has been a lot easier to come to school in here because I don't have to worry about anything else. Also all of the guys here didn't finish school, so you're not working against people that school comes easy to.

This same student was now completing his third year at the school at Stony Mountain.

Many of the respondents reported negative experiences with school on the street, even after trying to go to school more than once. From the results of this study it became apparent that regardless of the initial reason for attending, school at Stony Mountain was perceived in positive terms, and often as the respondent's first actual positive experience with education. A contributing factor to the positive perceptions of prison education, are the intrinsic differences between life on the

street and in prison. As one respondent explained:

20.9) It's helpful for me to get my education. Because on the street I wouldn't have done it. It just wouldn't be something I would bother with. My lifestyle out there wouldn't have allowed me to go to school. I wasn't into school. I was into making money. I'm part of the Club. Los Bravos. With the crowd I hang out with school wasn't the thing. I tried to go to school once already. I didn't fit in there. I didn't fit in at all. Well I guess maybe I took the wrong approach... what I was wearing. That's what I see now. Being an asshole. Now I see what I want to do is take an education. Get out and try it again. Sort of blend in.

Contrasting lifestyles between the street and prison were also a factor for this respondent who laughed when asked if he would be in school if he were on the street:

13.26) (laughs) The school here is good. In order for things to work for me I have to do them on my own. I only got my confidence back with school when I came in here. I would never have thought about school again. In a way I'm glad I'm here today. Where I'm at. With myself. I have come to accept what happened to me. And uhh I've come to accept exactly where I'm at. In a way to a point this has been a positive experience.

Other students also expressed that if school had not been a positive experience at Stony Mountain they may not have considered it as a possibility after their release.

20.24) I don't know if school will help me...not for the first things I want to do (laughs). University. Yeah well now I can get in. I have my grade 12. I wouldn't have done it on the street. Not after I tried once.

20.26) Not if I hadn't have tried it here. I tried a couple of schools on the street. I didn't fit in. Like I was the biggest kid in school. I didn't like the atmosphere. I really want to go to university. I never thought about it before. Now I can.

The positive experience may have come through the teachers and their understanding how many of these individuals may have had difficult lives.

8.10) The staff here in the school is too nice and feel sorry for a lot of the guys and understand that they have had a hard life. I see that there are lot of people in Stony Mountain that want school and they should be able to.

4.14) I like it. I don't know they just make me feel comfortable in the school. On the street in school I never felt good. It's not like in here. In here they make you feel welcome. They understand you. That's why I like coming here. I'm pushing myself to come here to learn. So I can get somewhere.

8.14) I think it's fantastic. They got everything in here. They got literacy to any kind of course you want to take. You can take correspondence, university... whatever you need. And you have the people in here that are more than happy to help you. More than happy to be there. People that are not going to put you down. The people that come here they are doing more than their job. They are really reaching out. If you need any help or if you got a problem with any question in your work or even if you have something you want to like...like I've been to them to ask them a personal question you know...you know about personal things and they are helpful. I value their advice. To think prison brought me this.

14.5) The teachers are fairly friendly. They're not prejudice against prisoners. Umm they are willing to help. They are willing to take the time to sit down and explain something to you. That's another thing I like seeing here because on the street they don't do that. They don't take the time. If you can't do it..too bad for you. I really like working on the computer. I never learnt [sic] on one before so I'm learning how to use a computer. Working with the different programs. Learning how to understand it. It's kind of fun. It's easier to use it here. You don't have to pay for it.

As some of the quotations have already suggested, some of the students were able to take their prison experience and make it positive by recognizing the opportunity it provided them to go to school, something which may not have appeared to be an option before.

13.27) I think the school should stay in the system. It's the best thing in here. A lot of these guys have never...didn't have a lot of chances to get into school. Because of the set of where they come from. A lot of these guys come from reserves. It's a good experience for the guys that come to school. It's something different than what they grew up with.

8.27) It's a luxury for the guys in here. The prison system should have a school all the time. Going to school is a luxury. In a way I'm fortunate that my life was a mess...because by coming to the prison system I got something in life that I would not have. To me that's a luxury. I feel very fortunate in some ways. We should all feel fortunate that there's a school here. If the guys want to take school it can help.

#### 4.4) GOALS

Positive feelings were also demonstrated in the manner that the school could meet the student's needs for attaining goals. It was evident from this study that the individuals involved with prison education saw this program as being an important aspect of future goals.

12.8) It's very important for me cause I if I didn't have school I wouldn't be able to try and educate myself. Or teach myself. I wouldn't be able to do something for myself. It can open doors. It's necessary. School will give you the necessary tools to use through different avenues. School gives you a lot of avenues. There's lots of different opportunities that society has to offer. One has to be aware. Like I'm seeking an opportunity that will lead to financial gain. School may be helpful in that process...It's necessary for me to do what I can while I'm in here. Being here gives me the chance to do some of the things I need to do for my education.

Future goals entailed more than having the skills for future employment. One respondent's goal involved doing something positive for aboriginal people coming out of the correctional system. He believed there was a strong need for a system which could meet their cultural specific needs. In fact, since this individual was interviewed he has been released, and a proposal has been submitted for

funding such a system.

1.9) It (the education program) will help me to achieve some of the goals I'm trying to reach. To set this organization up so that it will benefit the people that are having a difficult time in life and knowing what life is about and their individual life. About their identity. Who we are. And about the things that have happened to us in the past. Our history. What we're missing in school is a history course. Dealing with native issues because they are not what people perceive them to be. Or want to and make them out to be. We're missing a native history course. Our history was written but it wasn't written by us. We had no say in our history, but we know what our history is about. We want people to know. There are a lot of young people in school that aren't aware of their history. That's one of the problems that they lose their identities. That's causing a lot of problems. That's what brings them in to the institution also.

This same respondent said that this awareness of his people's history is more important than simply having an education for the sake of an education.

1.27) It's important that we know about our history and about what really happened in the past because a lot of times...people have this belief of what history is about because of these John Wayne movies and this Murphy character or whatever his name is. And so our history was written to benefit white society and put us down as a people...hold us down. To make us feel ashamed of who we are. Feel ashamed of our history, our culture. Our entire way of life. So one of the things I've learned is about my way of life. It is important that they have a history course in the prison for the benefit of the people that are there because they are lost. They are ashamed of themselves. The majority in the prisons are native. There are 75 or 80 %.

The subjects of this study also talked about returning to school when released. A number of them spoke about going to community college or university and saw the program at Stony Mountain as part of reaching their goal. For example:

16.26) Probably university. I'm happy here, because here for the stuff that I'm taking you got all the resources that you want or need. And that's the main thing. You should use the resources that are available to you. They are easy to get to. The teachers are very helpful. They have more resources here. They help you apply with applying. I do what I want in here. It's my choice. Well I'm using my knowledge I'm getting in here to help me do what I want to do in the future.

In summary, respondents from this study generally expressed very positive perceptions about their involvement with the prison education program at Stony Mountain . The increase in self-esteem, as well as learning were apparent. Significantly, more than half of the students associated their first positive educational experience with being incarcerated in a federal Canadian penitentiary.

## Chapter 5

### FINDINGS ON PRISON EDUCATION AS CONTROL OR RESISTANCE

This study looked at how the students perceived the prison education program at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. To a greater or lesser degree, all 20 of the respondents expressed their recognition of control in the context of the prison education program. At least equally apparent, however, was how these students reflected on and expressed their exercise of “resistance.” For example, some students reported situations where they felt limited by the choices they faced, but often these students were able to turn these apparently constraining circumstances to their advantage so as to meet their own personal needs. The following section examines the respondents’ perceptions in the light of ideas related to control and resistance.

#### 5.1) PRISON EDUCATION AS CONTROL

As demonstrated by the literature that was reviewed earlier (Collins, 1988; Goldin and Thomas, 1984; McCarthy, 1985; Wotherspoon, 1986), it is evident that education administered in the prison environment can be yet another form of control used against the individuals that are incarcerated. This method of control is accentuated by the fact that Canadian federal prison education programs may be mandatory, rather than voluntary. Prison education programs become

mandatory when a case management<sup>3</sup> includes them as part of inmates' correctional plan<sup>4</sup>. As part of the correctional plan, participation in the prison education program becomes a pre-requisite for parole. Any inmate scoring less than grade 8 level on a test administered when he was admitted to Stony Mountain has the education program automatically included in his correctional plan. The following sections discuss 1) education as an aspect of control in terms of how the education program relates to parole, and (2) of how the education program is perceived by the respondents as an extension of the system.

## PAROLE

As noted above, education became a part of the control mechanism in the institution through inclusion on the correctional plan, thus making it mandatory and a pre-requisite for parole. Respondents in this study recognized the mandatory nature of the prison education program when it was included in their correctional plan.

14.8) And it's also part of my correctional plan. My correctional plan--and if you don't follow the plan the way it is now you lose your pay, lose your job. Everything. And they won't even recommend you for parole. So honestly it's part of my plan and I want to get parole. And also finish off my education.

<sup>3</sup> A member of the Stony Mountain school teaching staff confirmed that the education program is routinely included in correctional plans.

<sup>4</sup> A correctional plan is the mandatory programs that case management states are necessary for each individual before an pre-release program, including parole, is considered. When an individual applies for a pre-release program, their correctional plan will be referred to, to confirm that the individual has taken all necessary programs that case management felt he should take.

5.12) This is the step in my rehabilitation. Showing them that I can change. If you want to get parole you do. To get parole you have to show them that you changed. It's part of my plan. But that's not important. It isn't for me.

Even though respondents can always exercise the choice of not attending, as the following student states, the consequences with regard to parole limit the extent to which non-compliance can be seen as a real choice.

18.18) No I chose to study this. It was my choice. I could have said forget school and stayed up in the culture centre. But... Well in the long run I would have to, because when I go up for my review if it fits in my correctional plan they will turn around and say it says right here that you were supposed to take school here...you never did. Yeah I never did. I ain't gonna have an answer for them saying why. It's either going to be I didn't feel like it or I didn't want to--then they're going to turn around and say we'll see you in a couple of years.

One respondent did not see a practical personal benefit for education, apart from parole.

15.24) School might help with some of it. You might get some knowledge in measurement if you work in the store. If you have experience you don't need education. See what happens. All I have to do is avoid this, avoid that. It might work for awhile. School won't help that much. Hopefully it will help with parole..I'm not saying it will. That's the way it's supposed to work.

As this respondent demonstrates, the control issue is driven by the possibility of parole being denied.

The following respondent did not feel that education was important to his life, yet he recognized that to have a chance at parole he would have to complete his educational requirement. He also recognized that parole was not certain even if he adhered to his correctional plan:

15.8) Not that important I guess. Because I'm from a reserve. I want to go back to my reserve. The work I will do won't make a difference if I have education. My family's there. This won't make that much difference...I didn't tell the judge I don't need school for the reserve. I don't know why. I should have. [Does it bother you that they made you come to school?] No it doesn't. I guess I just have to do what they ask me too. It will be my easy way out. (laughs). 'Cause parole. if you want parole you got to do this and that. To get your parole. But sometimes they just deny them.

This respondent also felt that school would not make much difference in his future life.

17.8) In terms of helping me in the future I don't think it's too important. I will...be good to have it. For a guy like me with a bad record I guess doesn't matter what kind of education I got. It won't get me a job or nothing. Maybe just a labour job or something. It won't make that much of a difference. They just want us to do this and that...It's supposed to help with parole. But who knows.

There were respondents who recognized that even though there was compulsion involved with prison education, the individual still had a choice. However, if they chose to not follow their correctional plan, the institution would make them sit in their cell all day and perhaps not give them another job. The following two respondents indicated that attending school was only partly their own choice.

4.18) I was basically told that I should come to school. But it's still my choice. I have a choice in everything. If you decided not to come to school would they say anything? I had an option to work or something. But if I didn't come to school or work or nothing then I would have to sit in my cell. So then you don't get paid and you have nothing to do. Right now I'm making \$5 a day.

17.18) In a way I was required to. They never said I can't do nothing else if I don't

do this. There was options there. Like you can do the other programs, whichever. School or do welding. Some of the other programs I couldn't get into because I needed school to get into them. So to get into them I have to do school first. It's still my choice, I could have said no. Well they got a thing they call your case plan and if you follow your case plan they call you a star or something. If you get turned down for parole it's because they consider you a risk. Basically you have to do what they say. Or else they find other ways to get you. You don't necessarily get what you want. I see guys do all their programs, stay out of trouble, stuff like that--they don't get out.

Some respondents also stated their opinion that forcing people was no way to make them learn, and was a very negative aspect to the program.

12.10) Everyone has their own needs. You're not going to do something just because you're forced to do it. You do it because you want to it. If you do something because you want to you're going to put in your whole effort and get more from it. School is something...it can be forced..in here realistically you are governed by the institution. Your will comes secondary in here. So school can be forced. Then it's hard to make the best of it. Well see that's...you will do better you will gain more if it's truly your choice..but if your forced and it's a part of you getting out or a part of your release...like if you don't have it and they won't release you..but after you get out hey that's not what you wanted.

14.10) It (school) can be mandatory if it's on your correctional plan and that's also a negative part cause there is somebody from case management says this is part of your correctional plan...you have to do this! You're being forced to do something and if you're being forced to do something you don't put 100% into it. See then you don't really get anything out of it. If you're forced to do it...If they say you have to take it you don't really have a choice because if you don't...they can take away your pay and they won't give you another job until you complete it. Personally before that act came into the system I had completed all of it except school. And I had started on school anyways so it didn't make a difference. It didn't make a difference to me personally but it does make a difference to other people because I hear them bitching about it.

This approach by the Correctional Service of Canada is in accordance to what has been referred to as the "carrot and stick approach" (Cairns,1988). Individuals are expected to follow a forced plan if they expect any form of early release.

Prisoners are being rewarded and punished with literacy programs. Inmates who sign up and show progress in these programs enhance their chances of early release. Those who do not want to attend school, or who drop out, may discover that the parole boards frown on such behaviour. This carrot and stick approach characterizes the recently announced thrust in literacy education announced by the Canadian Solicitor General (1987) (Cairns, 1988).

Cairns (1988) argues that

the "carrot-and-stick" prison literacy campaign promoted by Solicitor General James Kelleher is doomed to failure, say the hardened men who are the supposed beneficiaries. The "carrot" has its moments. But the "stick" isn't going to budge lifers who landed in jail because they wouldn't follow society's rules.

That this approach still exists is attested to by the following respondent.

1.13) I can't remember what school is like. I have no idea. But I think that the fact that it is in a prison does have some sort of affect on the people. When you want something and there's no way of getting it unless you perform some sort of favour for it, for another person so that they would help you. It's more or less the same thing. If you want parole then you bow down to somebody else. That's all what the school is about. [So then you think the school is affected because it becomes a means for parole?] Yeah. It's a weapon that can be used by the institution. Pressure. [Can you take school without it being used as a weapon for parole?] Yes some people take it for the sake of learning, but a lot of the people are pressured into going to school for

parole purposes. [What about if they didn't want to take school?] Then they would have a difficult time getting parole if they do have a chance at all. So what the pressure? It's too bad that the pressure is put on with the school and parole because then you can't just take school on it's own.

Morin (1981) expressed how choice with the education program was essential, especially within a prison context. "Individuals are left with very little choice and independence in this environment and therefore, education has the means to differ from the rest of the prison" (Ibid.:63). Morin feels that prison education could be less controlling for the individuals in this environment by offering them some choice with respect to the program.

However, feelings of being forced and its effect on learning was also expressed by Merson and Compain (1988:46).

To impose one's values absolutely upon another often entails negating the other's culture and as such is both dangerous and repressive. For this reason we are strongly opposed to the coercive thrust of the CSC 's Literacy Program. One cannot become enlightened through threats and intimidation. Taken to its extreme position, a gun butt may produce the desired response, but it does so out of fear and fosters resentment and rebelliousness- the very attitudes the Solicitor General is attempting to discourage (1988:46).

This respondent reflected on how compulsion can colour an individual's perception of prison programs, including education.

1.22) From time to time classification will come up with this community assessment or I'm not sure what name they have for it. They will come up with this program and they will say these are the programs that you have to take. [That you have to take?]

That you have to take these programs in order to receive any form of pre release program, or parole or mandatory so you have to take these programs. They'll say you have to go to school and you have to go here and here. So then they force you into..when they force you into any program you are going to reject that. So then when you do go to school you don't learn anything. Because you're forced to by them. When I go into the school I know what I'm taking on my own then there is no pressure, because then it's my own decision. So then it's a pressure when you're forced.

When asked who decides which programs are going mandatory and a part of an individual's correctional plan, one respondent stated that the final decision is case management's. This same individual realized that the institution was also trying to meet its own goals.

8.20) Case management. If you disagree with case management it's called TOO BAD! (laughs). If you don't co-operate then they mark that down as you are very uncooperative...They run your life. They make you think you do. They are professionals. They are trained in case management. They are trained not to piss people off. They are trained to do this..they recommend you for this or they recommend you for that..meanwhile they only sit down with you for 15 or 20 minutes at a time, maybe 10 hours in a year. How can they know you? How can they know you just by--go to this program. It doesn't matter if you are serious. They just say you did this program and this program--so you must be reformed. They are trying to meet their own goals.

## PRISON EDUCATION: AN EXTENSION OF THE SYSTEM

The respondents in this study were well aware of the fact that they were incarcerated, even when involved with the prison education program. To the degree that the prison environment entered the school, the individuals were reminded that they were incarcerated, and that their rights and

personal desires were limited. For example, this 48 year old respondent, even though he liked the school, felt that the institution wanted the students to remember that they were incarcerated.

19.11) I like this school. That's the only thing they have here is the school that's good. They should have more native programs. Since most of the inmates are native. Maybe in the school they could offer some native ways. Like they had a program here called "Sacred Tree" and everybody was going to that they liked it. I was going and they cut the program. I don't know for what reason. I guess they don't want us to forget that we're in jail.

Respondents understood that learning was not the only issue at the school. In fact, they acknowledged that the prison staff, including teachers, had control over whether you could take part in the school or not. This was recognized by a 24 year old respondent who had been at the school for one and a half years. In response to a question he said that the teachers could decide whether you could take the program or not (thus making it difficult for the individual to follow their correctional plan).

3.13) If they like you they will keep you in. If they don't like you they will make sure you are out. They will make something up or say this person was doing this or that. It's affected by being in a prison because the teachers have control over who stays and who goes out.

The respondents knew they were in prison and realized that the school was not placed there as a haven for them, although some saw it that way. The subjects realized that a priority for the institution was security, as reflected by the "wasted" funds allocated for that purpose.

9.21) They try to take everything away from cons and it doesn't make sense because you know they are basically fighting a war they can't win. It's just like the streets. Can't win. They are fighting a war they can't win in the sense it doesn't matter how much security...how much money they spend..billions of dollars on security...That's the only thing in here. There was a guy that was doing life and he escaped after they spent that 8 million. That tells me something that security they paid for isn't exactly the best. To top it off all the money they spent in visiting on cameras and all of that...The guys are still getting what they want. Right! The warden, the people that work here they're not getting what they want. Spending a lot of money..about 40-70 thousand per con to stay here. They say they spend their money wisely. It's not wise..it's foolish. They are not going to get what they want. They think by taking our privileges they win, but not really. Whatever what they do to try and control us, we get what we want. So far it's been happening that way. All the money that they spend on stuff..there's still guys that slide through and make it...

This respondent was not "fooled" by the institution. He perceived the institution's main priority as security, but drew from that insight a sense of power for knowing that the institution was not "putting one over on him."

Prison education and control are not necessarily as unlikely or incongruent a combination as they may appear. Both the positive aspects of the program and the control issue were apparent as reflected in the inmates' responses to the research questions. Parole and the education program were tied together through the policy of making the latter a mandatory part of the correctional plan. Also, there was a strong recognition by the respondents that they were incarcerated and that their needs were not a priority for the institution. The individuals also expressed how they felt the presence of the "prison" in the school at times. Nevertheless, many also felt that they had personally gained from the prison education program, which is evident in the following section.

## 5.2) PRISON EDUCATION AS RESISTANCE

In the previous section, the issue of prison education and control was discussed. However, resistance by students may also be an active aspect of a prison education program. As noted in my review of the theories of cultural resistance, there is a literature that supports the idea that individuals are actively involved in their educational environments. In contrast to theories of reproduction, theories of cultural resistance state that individuals bring human agency to their educational endeavour, and develop their own agendas of what they hope to accomplish or gain through this involvement. These agendas may often be individualistic (as appears to be the case with the respondents involved in this research) with little apparent broader societal or ideological content. Also, as Giroux (1983b:285) points out:

Put simply, not all oppositional behaviour has “radical significance,” nor is all oppositional behaviour a clear-cut response to domination. The issue here is that there have been few attempts by educational theorists to understand how subordinate groups embody and express a combination of reactionary and progressive behaviours—behaviours that embody ideologies both underlying the structure of social domination and containing the logic necessary to overcome it (Giroux, 1983b: 285).

As it is most commonly used, the term resistance has a negative connotation. It is used most often to encompass forms of open or blatant resistance to authority. However, it is important to recognize that resistance can also be expressed both in more positive ways (i.e., through self-expressions of being empowered), and in more subtle ways (i.e., through more quiet, yet conscious

choices made not to co-operate with authorities). For the purposes of this research, resistance was defined as a conscious decision of an individual to use education to benefit himself educationally, while at the same time perceiving that he was not doing anything to benefit the institution.

It became evident through the analysis of the data that resistance as defined above does occur in the Stony Mountain prison education program, and manifests itself in two ways: 1) Education as Escape; (2) Education as Self-Benefit.

## EDUCATION AS ESCAPE

The respondents expressed the view that if for no other reason, it was nice to come to the school to get away from the realities of prison life.

13.14) I feel that it's set up in the right way...as it is right now. To me it's a good set up. Well you're given the time to do your work. You're given...just the atmosphere...It feels like you're being taken away from the jail for a few hours when you're in here. It's quiet. Just atmosphere. It's helpful.

11.13) There's waiting lists for guys wanting to come in here. Probably just the environment I guess. When you come in here it's different when you walk in the door. It's better. It's different from out there in here. In here it's relaxed. The stress from the institution doesn't come in here. It's nice to get away from all of that. Once you're here it's different.

There were some respondents that didn't even refer to the school as part of the institution. The school was not looked upon as part of the total prison entity.

3.27) What happens is all up to the inmate. As one group we could change the whole institution. We could say we're not working. They would have to. Somebody would have to do it. You can either go along with this and try to get something out of it or go out back into the institution. I would rather stay in here and do this. It's better than the institution. In the school we could somehow unite. It's not that restricting in here.

10.13) No..It's just like any other school. It's better in here than in the rest of the prison.

12.13) It functions only as a school. This is school. There are no guards in here. The guards stay outside. It doesn't feel like prison. This isn't like prison. Well I mean I am in prison and this is part of the prison (laughs), but it's different than the rest of the prison. School...when you're in school it doesn't feel like you're in prison. You're able to transcend, to surpass, to pass the boundaries of walls when you're in here. So your mind is able to leave the prison. So when you're reading a book your mind...you travel into the book, it becomes like life. You're living in the books. The expression, the thoughts. It's like that's life. The school is different..when you leave the school then you feel you're into the prison again. Back to reality. School is not reality. It's another plane, another place..it's like sitting on the beach and you lay back and dreaming..you're travelling, you're flying...It's a different...when you're in prison..I am in prison..when you're in the ranges, main institution, you have to act behave a certain level of security about yourself..in school you're able to relax. There's very little going on other than school. There's no real problem with anyone coming on you, from the inmates or the guards. It's different than the prison.

The escape for the individual can be more than a physical escape. This student was able to escape mentally from the "realities" of prison when he was in the school. This was not as easily done in other parts of the institution. Other respondents echoed this theme.

3.14) I try not to get feelings mixed up with what I'm doing here. Usually I'm happy with my work. Every now and then we get into good discussions and can get the creative thoughts going. It's something to do here during the day. I never really thought about my own feelings, but I guess the freedom. The open freedom. As long as you can't see them. The freedom compared to the rest of the institution. When you are in the school you can move around freely. It's a real good escape.

For some of the respondents the school was an "escape" not only from the prison environment but also from having to engage in any hard labour or any "real" work.

2.14) It's the best they have I suppose. In here. It's the best program they have. It's not really work. Why's that? You just show up. You read some books. Ah learn how to read and write. Learn all about your math. Whatever it is you're learning, you're still learning. Learning is the natural process of the human species. You don't really do anything. You just sit back and learn and get paid for it. Any where else you go, in the metal shop, you're slaving away and getting 5 bucks. For the same pay you could be sitting on your butt, doing nothing, but learning. So I like it here very much (laughs).

A number of the students recognized the school's advantageous position with respect to security and the correctional staff. Eighteen of the 20 respondents reported that the correctional officers never came to the school except to get the attendance.

17.13) It doesn't really feel like prison while I am in school. Cause there's no guards. The teachers are okay to talk to. They treat us like people. They don't power trip with us.

6.23) I don't really think about that. It doesn't. It doesn't feel like that at all. You don't see any guards or anything. It feels pretty normal in here. Out there, yeah, it feels like jail, but not in here.

17.23) No. The rest of the institution you can't get away from it. You'll see bars. You'll see guards. Plus 50, 60 guys in green. In the school it's pretty normal. You can wear what you want. You got to sneak it in. Once you're in the school it doesn't matter. They don't say nothing. Once you're here, who cares. That way the school is good. You can be yourself.

This 23 year old student had been at the school at Stony Mountain for four years, and

appreciated that the school environment was different from other programs.

2.23) Because there are no bars. Ah well there's the greater prison around the school. So with the school you are still in a prison. I'm too busy learning to consider it. There's a bunch of teachers running around. There's no guards around. It doesn't much feel like a prison. But you are aware that you are in a prison. The others programs aren't like this.

One respondent noted that there was less control over the school. As long as CSC was able to appear as doing some good, no one was involved in keeping an eye on the school.

3.10) Actually school is the best program in the institution. There's control. I don't know how much control they have over the school. Here's there's no control. There's nobody watching to see what they are actually accomplishing. There's nobody checking up. They're happy to see the newspapers publishing all the things that they are doing. They are doing and they are not doing. They give the show.

This same respondent, while recognizing CSC's need to "give the show", also felt that the school was a positive part of the institution.

But then there are also good things with the school. It's the only program with the real option. I just like to stand from the sidelines and enjoy everything.

## EDUCATION AS SELF-BENEFIT

A recurring theme that appeared in this study, was the individuals' determination to derive

personal benefit from the prison education programs. While some students were also concerned that their involvement in the prison programs should not benefit the Correctional Service of Canada or society, they were insistent that their involvement should benefit them personally. Even when the school was part of their correctional plan, personal benefit was still very important and the key factor which made the prison education program acceptable to the inmates.

Even though there was no consensus on how they would benefit, the respondents agreed that they participated in the program only because of some perceived personal benefit. The respondents made conscious decisions as to how they were going to benefit from the prison education program, and then saw that benefit as one of the more important factors for their involvement.

13.12) I can speak up for myself now. I can use that to be able to understand my rights and all that.

7.10) With the school the guys need to do something for themselves. They need to realize that they have rights for themselves. Even in here if you don't know you could lose your rights. You could sign things without knowing what it says. School puts more in the head and you think more better than you used to. Before you didn't go to school. Before you would always just get drunk and high. You would never think that you could have a future.

9.10) School is important for in here. Sometimes finance screws up things with your pay. Guys get mad because they think they are owed money or something. They control your pay. How much you get paid. Depending on how you work actually...they are the ones that figure out your pay and that. If they screw it up, then you take it on. Sometimes if one guy asks the school why he's only getting paid so much, the school will find out again to make sure. They try their best. But a guy needs to look out for himself, school sometimes helps him with that. School may be the thing that helps him out.

13.8) To me it's important cause it makes me cope better with a lot of things. Especially for people that talk to me from the other side. On the other side it would be case management, guards and you know. If I don't understand things now I'll say I don't understand, could you be more specific? Before I wouldn't. It kind of lifts me

up to be more vocal and in my own way. I can control my life in here. It makes me more assertive. Whereas before I was a passive person.

For those individuals for whom education was a part of their correctional plan, education was not necessarily looked upon as being a negative part of the plan. Individuals could attain parole, and also personally benefit with school.

14.18) I ended up coming to prison so I figured I might as well continue what I had planned. They said it was part of my correctional plan but I made up my mind before that time. I had already made the decision to come to school. It was my decision. [So it was your choice?] Yeah well at first I could have said no. I could have said that I already had my grade 12. They would have believed me cause there was no way for them to check cause I'm from Ontario. That and they only have a partial record of me. There's a partial record in Alberta (laughs). I have a partial record of the military when I was in school. But the one in the military they can not get without my release form and I will not give it to them. Cause then they would end up with my whole file (laughs). I could have told them I have grade 12 and they wouldn't have said anything..It wouldn't then have become part of my plan. Correctional plans are mandatory as well. I wanted school as part of my plan because I wanted to do school anyway. I told them I wanted to go to school and finish my grade 12. It's an easy part of my plan.

18.18) It was my choice. I could have said forget school and stayed up in the culture centre. So it's..you got..that's why a lot of guys take a lot of programs. This is what you got to do. If you want to get out. They play the game. They take the programs. But then you can't blame the guys..they want to get out and it's their ticket out. They're there because they have to be there. As long as they get the attendance they're alright. But if parole is all they want... It's got to be something that you're ready to do. If you're not ready to do, if you're not ready to take the program. That's what I did with school. I knew I was ready. I wanted to get into school before I changed my mind. I put it on my correctional plan.

5.19) It will make things a lot easier for me for one thing. It will make a big difference I think. In my eyes anyways. If I wasn't in school I may not have what I need to prove to these people that I've changed. I don't see how I could do that without school. That's not the only reason I'm here. Like I said before I'm doing work right now but I won't be going up for parole. It's there pretty much for myself.

But if I need it to go for parole I have it there. It really helps.

12.15) That it's school. It gives me the benefits. In school I can try to better myself. But then again the word better does not necessarily relate, because to say better means that...what I was before was not good. I still view the abilities I had before as what I was and it's been quite good. It gives more knowledge. It gives me knowledge. The ability to learn more.

For some students, parole was perceived as an added bonus to the benefits of the educational program, in terms of enabling them to have more opportunities in society when released.

13.19) To my parole...yeah they recognize school as a motivation factor. Self motivation you could say. Because they have the reports and all that how we do in school. It shows the person may be sincere. What they look for is people that are sincere. And but personally I don't do this for the parole board or my parole. I do it for myself. To try and better my life. To be more positive and to basically look at myself and go to places I've never been before. If they want to give me parole for doing all those things for myself then let them. It helps me.

12.14) A way to change my destiny...well destiny cannot be changed..so it's a way to change my path. Give me a different perspective. Gives me more of ability to chose a role rather than just float and take what's given my way.

12.24) It gives me more of an understanding of how the financial world looks. How to better manage myself financially. School gives me the ability to function within a ceratin class of society successfully. I know what point I will be entering society at..And how I will have to function at that level. Well you enter society at a certain point, knowing that there's a level where I can enter..the bottom or the top..I'm entering at the middle..If I didn't have some education I would go to the bottom. This way I only have to work from the middle to the top. Education will get me to the middle, then what I do with it is up to me after that. You can move down, or you can move up.

The following respondent indicated that he put education in his correctional plan because case

management did not have access to any of his records. He described how school was a good program through which he could benefit and "get out." He had made the conscious decision to take part in school at Stony Mountain.

14.19) Now for example I'm taking my school and the parole board will look at that..."Oh he's taking his school. Improving himself." It gives me that much better of a chance of getting out. Now if I didn't take the school they would say "Oh he's doing nothing for himself, to improve himself. We ain't going to touch him." It's kinda fair, but in the other sense it isn't... But for me it will make a difference with my parole. That I know. I want parole so why not do something to get parole but also do something for me. Like I said I put it into my plan or they didn't have access to my records..It's a good program which you can get out but still benefit.

For this respondent the promise of parole was outweighed by the perceived benefits of remaining in prison, and continuing his education.

15.19) I could have been out. I waived my parole by one year. I'm not doing this for anyone. I'm doing this for myself. I want my education and that's the way I think. That's what's best for me. Nobody's forcing me. I want to finish this first.

3.27) It's easy to get parole. You just stay free of everything. You just play the game. In the door, out the door. You're fine. You can even get some good things out of being in here, but that's up to the individual.

One respondent was able to manipulate the system so he could benefit from two correctional institutions at the same time.

12.16) You don't get paid for cell studies. If you're doing..if you pass the GED and do correspondence and pass that level off grade 12, everything else you do is at your cost. You would have to work and pay for that and study after that. It's all economics. But I kind of found a way around it...I came from another institution where I started my correspondence so they're paying for my course. And I also get paid for coming here.

The school had an advantageous position from the respondents' perspective because of its access and relevance to the outside world. Students were motivated to be involved with the school because it was easier in the school environment to apply for educational opportunities they were planning to follow on the street. Being involved with the school provided a link to the outside world that was not otherwise attainable.

12.25) Give me the paperwork. It's needed. If you want to apply for school..the teachers will get you the paperwork for funding, applying...it helps to not have to spend your time going after all the applications.

The personal benefit factor was emphasized in all the interviews. The individuals always returned to the importance of their personal satisfaction. There was a conscious recognition of which means they could benefit.

9.14) I like it. It takes half the day away from that your time--out! It gets you more time and space to move around. To keep your head off doing time. A lot of the work I take home with me because I like to stay up at night and watch tv and do homework. I just like it. It basically takes a lot of the time off. Saves you time and trouble. It really helps. There just has to be something that you can use in here to get your time done and benefit too.

There were respondents that actually gave up "freedom" or a less controlling environment to remain at the school at Stony Mountain penitentiary. These students had made the conscious decision that they could benefit personally from this particular school and chose to remain incarcerated, even

when they had the option to leave. For example, one respondent had the opportunity to be moved to Rockwood correctional facility, which is a less security intensive environment, but refused on the basis that finishing his school was more important.

6.8) Right now it's the most important part of my life. I would rather stay in school here and take the opportunity than go to Rockwood. [You mean you had the option to go to Rockwood?] Yeah. I decided to stay here. The school was the reason I stayed here. If I stayed in here I could finish school before I got out, whereas in Rockwood they don't have a full school in there. In here school is like a regular work day. If I want a career I have to start somewhere. I have the time so I better use it now.

Another student waived his parole three times because he felt he could accomplish his educational goals easier while at Stony Mountain.

19.26) By coming into Stony Mountain I thought about school. I never used to think of school. I never used to like school. Now it's good. I am glad to have my education. That's why I waived my parole. I waived three times since I've been here. I wanted to finish my courses. I wanted to finish school. Now if I got out I won't be able to start at Thunder Bay until next September. And there's no jobs, I know that. That's why I want to do most of my courses in here. By the time I get to Thunder Bay I would have done a few courses. And also when I get out I won't have to wait long to get right into school.

Another respondent went as far as to state that he actually returned to Stony Mountain because of the education program. He found that when he was released on parole he could not concentrate on his educational goals, so he had his parole revoked in order to return to Stony Mountain.

5.10) For me it's the education. Without it I wouldn't even be here. [What do you

mean?] Well the reason I'm back here is I wanted to get back to what I wanted. This school is part of the reason why I'm back to Stony Mountain. I came back to Stony Mountain so I could finish school. Cause out there I wasn't getting anywhere. I was way off. I couldn't get the things done that I wanted or needed to do. In here I can do what I need to do. If I didn't have this opportunity I wouldn't be able to get the things I want. In a way I wanted to come back here. I was out for 6 months and I wasn't able to get done the things I wanted to get done. Out there you can't focus. There's always the threat of coming back in here through parole. It doesn't allow you to focus or really start anything. Now I can focus on school. I was always wondering maybe tomorrow they will find a reason to send me back. This way I don't have to worry. In a way it's easier to go to school in here because I don't have to wonder. I can just concentrate on school. There's no disturbances or interferences.

Although respondents said education was an important part of their lives, they also recognized their unique life experiences offered something of value that many other people on the outside might not have. Resistance was reflected in the fact that these individuals drew strength from their prison experience, despite its difficulties.

8.9) I want to do everything. I want to take a course. I want to become something. I was always doing some kind of labouring. I can do it and the only thing that could stop me is my criminal record. But I'll just be more selective in my jobs or careers I do take. Because in today's world we're starting to see that people that have been through hell in their lives become good counsellors. Because they've been there and it's not only that they are good counsellors and help the other people they're still helping themselves and helping themselves is a lifelong process. People that have been there are the ones that really only know what it's like. Maybe I could come back and work at an institution. I would come back here in a minute. Why I'm in here and all that stuff, what I've been through I would love to be able to go to school and keep at it. Keep on it and take the opportunity to do something for myself and others.

The respondents recognized that meeting their perceived needs was not necessarily a priority for the institution. They realized however that the school may be the one thing that gives them power

in their lives. This student was insightful with his perceptions of power in society.

12.8) Like in jail the ones that got the power never see the inside the walls of a jail, the ones without the power or the knowledge are sent here. So it's got to change. Society teaches us to be this way then they punish for following it. Society teaches...most kids get socialized through what they see. They teach you that things are important and that when you think you have enough it's not enough. You have to want more. More and more. It's the capitalist way. You're not happy until you have enough. They teach you that the more you have the more happier you will be. And they teach you that it doesn't matter what you do to get it. As long as you get it. But if you get caught then you need the power. If you have power...if you have power you can have anybody or anything. That's the system. That's what it goes by...the only rule is power. Knowledge can mean power. But you got to know what to do with it.

This student was very aware of the dynamics of power. In fact, he recognized the school as being the only means of attaining power in society. His involvement with school, though initially "mandatory," had become a means to attain "power."

The students in this study did not demonstrate any false hopes with regard to their present situation. There was a belief that attaining education while they were incarcerated might prove beneficial in the long run. This same student viewed "knowledge" as access to power while incarcerated.

12.27) School gives the opportunity to gain knowledge. It's the only means I have in here to gain power. The circumstances that surround me now because I'm in here. It's necessary for me to do what I can while I'm in here. Being here gives me the chance to do some of the things I need to do for my education. Being in jail, being in jail there's common knowledge that it's forced. There's rules. You know if you're strong...you win. Being by yourself, you get taken out, so you have a group. So you belong to something. You belong to some place. Some group of people. Then you are capable to stand your own ground. You then can adapt your own philosophies,

your own thinking. When you're in the prison it's prison. When you're in the school it's the school. It's different. You can enjoy in here. You're mind is free in here. So you can enjoy.

This student was very insightful with his discussion of "power and knowledge." His perceptions echo the work of Foucault (1980), who stated, "it is impossible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (p.52).

The students recognized that prison education programs are intended to "reform" them, but as one respondent stated the school was something that society owed them. He saw school as independent from the whole correctional process, as indicated in the discussion below:

12.27) The reality is that you're in here and you have criminal charges..now you got to do what you can to make the reality work for you. In jail you got the chance to find another avenue. Some way to do with your mind. Society doesn't realize that by putting us in here that we may not be "corrected" to their liking...we may come out worse. They don't only punish us they want to make sure that they crucify us. School can be one of the programs in here for the guys that they feel that they are getting something back from society while they are in here. It's a release. You can have hope. There's something worth living for. There's something worth getting up for. School is ours. There's got to be a reason why you came to prison.

It was apparent that a number of students did not easily accept what they were told. They asked questions and, when not taken seriously, questioned the reaction by the staff. The students felt that an important part of learning was being able to question what they were learning, and challenge their teachers. For example:

14.16) You don't get a chance to understand. You can do it right all you want and they'll say you're doing it right that's all you need to know. But you don't know why

you're doing it. What these methods are used for or anything like that. And that makes it awfully confusing for a person who may be able to do a question but doesn't know how this kind of work is going to benefit him or how anything like this will be beneficial to him. I don't only want to know what I'm supposed to learn I also want to why I'm learning this. Them telling me it's important to know isn't good enough...I want to know why. I'm a person..I'm probably a lot more mature than when I first came in..I'm a person who wants to LEARN!!! now...and the learning process is asking these questions. Now what these things are for...how these things are done. Questions like that. That's the only way you will learn properly.

Some of the respondents stated that they were involved with the prison education at Stony Mountain because it benefited them but, more importantly, their participation in the prison education program did not offer a means for CSC to benefit. As mentioned earlier, the respondents' determination to deny the CSC any benefit from their participation in the educational program, was an important corollary to their determination to derive self-benefit. (Part of the following quote also appeared earlier).

12.10) When you say program..the programs in here are different. School is independent--not for CSC--CSC don't benefit...School isn't a program, it isn't work...it's just school. Programs are like when they are programming you to think different. They are trying to change you. That's the difference between school and programs. School is an independent thing. Programs are them are trying to get us to change. School is independent. It's your choice as to what you want to do. For us it's a different way of living. Programs teach you a different way of thinking to what they figure your problems are. Cognitive skills are pretty interesting. School is completely different. Cause it's independent. Because it's like what you want. It's not a requirement. It's a choice. It's always up to the individual. It's a choice. This is not a must. We choose. They can put it as part of your correctional plan. They say that they want the majority of inmates coming out with at least a grade 10 level of education. When they leave. But that's still like way below the requirements of today's society. In today's society to be productive you would need at least a community college. That would be the bare minimum. High school is no longer the requirement. So we're still at a deficit. The programs can all benefit the guys. But the main difference with programs is that they try to change you...school is yours...it's our

choice. It depends what the guys wants to get from it. What his agenda is. Everyone has their own needs. You're not going to do something just because you're forced to do it. You do it because you want to it. If you do something because you want to you're going to put in your whole effort and get more from it. School is something...it can be forced..in here realistically you are governed by the institution. Your will comes secondary in here. So school can be forced. Then it's hard to make the best of it. Well see that's...you will do better you will gain more if's it's truly your choice..but if you're forced and it's a part of you getting out or a part of your release...like if you don't have it and they won't release you...but after you get out hey that's not what you wanted. But even the guys that are forced I guess could be using for their own reasons...if they know it will help them to get out. But you got to do your own thing. I decided to do it to extend my own education. To better myself to go forward. My livelihood.

Respondents' unwillingness to participate in programs that were seen to benefit the Correctional Service of Canada was further demonstrated by their attitudes toward CORECAN<sup>5</sup>. A number of them were happy to be involved with the school, as long as it did not mean working for CORECAN, which generates income for the prison as a result of the inmates' labour.

8.18) It was my choice to be here. It was up to me. Well I don't know if it was only my choice in the matter because a lot of guys want to come to school but they have never got in. They threw them some place else. This place, this prison they need people to work in CORECAN. It's money making. They need people to do that because it's money making. They make a lot of money off the guys here. Which I question...to me this is a big business. They say \$65,000 a year to keep these inmates in jail here for a year. How much they make off of us by us working in here--in these jobs out here, in CORECAN and the factories and stuff. The guys only get \$5 a day, meanwhile the products they are making go out to the furniture stores, the big manufacturers and then to smaller stores and then we're talking about big dollars. There's no way I would work for them. At least in here I know I ain't.

7.27) That's the way society wants us to be. That some of us people should be in

<sup>5</sup> CORECAN is an abbreviation for Corrections Canada. CORECAN is a work program at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. This work program is basically hard labour where the inmates' labour generates income for the institution.

jail. Some people in society want to keep us this way. They don't really want us to have a chance. With school or anything. Sometimes these programs aren't for us. I think people say to rehabilitate ourselves but you know they do it for them too. Like with CORECAN they make us work and pay us almost nothing but they make lot's of money off of us. That's why I won't work there. But in here I can come in and learn and it makes me think about things. I can now think about the big picture. I can read. Think about bigger things. About laws. What they're all about. By coming in here I got a chance to learn. Where else am I going to get this. When I came here I learned a lot that I can do something for myself. That I don't have to always take it.

9.22) It beats sitting in your cell doing nothing. The guys that work for CORECAN get 80 cents an hour extra. But who wants to slave for them. At least with the school you know it's for us.

14.27) So I'm using them. I'm using the system. I'm using the system to benefit myself. That's what the system is here for. The system is put here for you to benefit yourself. Most people don't realize that. Like everything put here in a way is put here for you to benefit yourself. Except CORECAN...CORECAN is put here to benefit themselves. Because that's slave labour. We get paid shit and they make all the money. Let's put it this way..I worked in the metal shop for years..\$6.90 top wage a day...A day...and I make security doors. I weld security doors. They were selling those security doors for over \$2000 a piece. That's for one unit. I can use the school to benefit me. Also in the vocational welding...you can get your first year, second year tickets..but you have to pay for some of that. But of the final ticket..the final licence you have to pay for it. But you can gain out of the school without really having to do anything. Plus I'm following my correctional plan, working towards parole and getting my education...if I need help on my work they're here. Also then you know you ain't doing slave labour work. And I know they're not making anything off of me.

A few of the respondents felt that no matter what an individual did while they were incarcerated, their release was in the hands of the system. They were not convinced by the fact that following their correctional plan guaranteed release. They understood that CSC was determined to look good in the eyes of society and focus problems on the incarcerated. One respondent felt that it was important to keep having individuals returning to the system because it kept people employed.

8.19) Well I don't think it has any difference...it's a big monopoly game the way the government plays it. The let people out that they know are coming back. On parole. The guys they don't think are going to come back they don't give them parole. It's proven over and over and over again. Because it's big business. And they like to recycle it. And there's lots of jobs for everybody. And for me..I don't think because I'm in for violence actually I'm not even going to worry about parole. Because if they keep me back well then that's just going to educate me even better. You know. You can become a better educated criminal or you can become a better educated person. They always let the guys that are coming back out. Why they do that is so that the public will scream oh look at this guy you let him out on parole and he did this...give him more time. Give him more time. He's all messed up. Because they are so many problems in society that it keeps us away from the real focus. Where the real problems lie, with the government. They have all these millions of eyes not on them that's all the better. It's a way to have people be focused on the criminals rather than the government or other society issues.

This same respondent was determined to make a success of his life and use what he had learned to benefit him rather than CSC. It should also be noted that this is the individual, referred to earlier, who was sent to a "slow learner" program because he had been labelled as incapable of learning.

But the government itself is a monopoly game. I'm not going to play the game any more. These are my goals. I'm not going by their rules. Regardless of how the government sets rules...my goal is to get better educated and help other people and be paid for it. I still got to pay for things...

Another respondent knew that he would never be allowed parole because he would not accept guilt. He was not going to be taken in by the needs of the system. This individual, by denying his guilt, would not be granted parole, yet he was still taking part in the education program while at Stony Mountain. He was not willing to meet anyone's needs but his own.

12.19) None. 'Cause I've been denied for parole. I can go up again but I will be denied again. Because I do not believe that what I was doing and why I am in here...I do not accept the fact, or believe that what I was morally incorrect. Guilty as in whose eyes...what's right for you does not necessarily mean that it's right for me. In society as a whole they tend to put a value on things..to decide what would best benefit them. What I means is what falls in the category is what the masses...what the politicians find as politically correct..or to boost their political agenda at that time. So I got held with it...It doesn't matter to me. Parole doesn't matter to me. I won't take something to meet their needs...I don't need parole.

There was also an understanding that the correctional system is there to punish individuals, and therefore the subjects of this study were not going to be taken in by the idea that the school was there simply to benefit the individual.

1.26) One of the things I'm working on is changing the ideas about the system because the system is there to punish. The justice system is there to punish. The concept is punish, punish, punish. And then they bring in these programs and they say these programs are to benefit the people, but in reality the programs will never benefit the people because they are forced on the people. If you are teaching someone you have to teach them in a way that they would want to learn. That they are comfortable doing to learn, but when we are shoved into it and told hey we are forced fed. We've been force fed our whole lives...the school systems, society systems are force feeding. The government is force feeding. The government force feeds.

The respondents from this study recognized the constraints that exist in the correctional system, as well as in society. However, working within their realm of choices they were often able to manipulate these constraints in order meet their own defined needs, at least in part. The essence of resistance can be seen in the comment of one student,

15.16) That's the problem with this situation. The teachers don't have any control. We're prisoners. We're not children! (laughs). So no one can tell us what to do. That's why we

are in prison. We don't listen. Do what we want to do!

Resistance exists within the context of the prison education program at Stony Mountain penitentiary. Demonstrating the existence of resistance was, in essence, simply a matter of giving a voice to the prisoners in the program, so as to learn how they made the program work for them. By so doing, they perceived benefits which would enable them to function better, either in prison or in society.

## Chapter 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this research was on the individual's perception of prison education. From my review of the literature, it is evident that varying views exist with respect to the value and purpose of prison education. However, it is also evident from the present study that the individuals involved with the programs have their own views, which must also be considered.

A qualitative methodological approach was used for this research to allow for an understanding of student perceptions of the prison education program at Stony Mountain Penitentiary, a Canadian federal correctional institution.

The respondents of this study displayed in their perceptions feelings of a positive nature, control, and resistance. In essence, this study reflected all three areas in the literature previously reviewed. School was favoured because the students were able to attain some positive benefits from being involved, including higher self-esteem and increased learning. For many of the students this was their first positive educational experience. The issue of control was also recognized by the students. This was especially apparent in the relationship of education to parole. However, theories of cultural resistance are important in directing attention to the thinking and rational decision-making of individuals. As previously discussed, these theories recognize the dynamics of "reproduction"

within the educational system, yet also focus attention on the "critical notion of human agency." Cultural resistance theories focus on individuals and the ways they interact with their educational environment, in the form of "resistance," to meet their own goals.

The individuals in this research were actively involved in their prison education program. This became apparent even when the correctional plans and mandatory attendance were discussed. The individuals were able to take this "negative" situation and make it "work for them." There was no denying the fact that prison education programs can be forced on inmates--the control element--and many of the respondents stated how this reflected negatively on the school. However, even with this in mind, the students nonetheless felt that participating in prison education to attain parole had a positive aspect, in that they were still able to derive "self-benefit" through this process.

The respondents faced a variety of difficulties, including that of being incarcerated (physically controlled). Due to the nature of this environment, the students had different interests which they tried to advance through the prison education program. They were well aware that they were incarcerated and at the "mercy" of the institution. However, they were also aware that they could manipulate their situation to "work" for them.

A number of the students did not have any "formal" education and some aboriginal respondents had spent most of their lives on reserves, yet they clearly articulated how through the prison education program they were able to use the system to work for them. Perhaps, at this point social control theorists would argue that the individuals are not truly benefiting and that, in a sense they were still being controlled. My findings suggest, however, that while respondents understood that they were controlled through incarceration, security, uniforms, mandatory education, "line-ups", "searches", visitation rights, and parole, they nevertheless were able to achieve personal benefit. The

students of this study demonstrated resistance to the institution's efforts to control them, and made efforts to deny benefits to the institution.

Perhaps the perceptions demonstrated by the students at Stony Mountain can be appropriately summarized with excerpts from the 1994 Valedictory address at the June graduation. The Valedictorian was in his 60s. He had begun school at Stony Mountain at the basic level, and was now receiving his high school diploma. Other inmates stated he was an inspiration to his fellow students. I never had the opportunity to interview the Valedictorian, but he gave me a copy of his address.

Perseverance is the key to success. Perseverance means constant and long continued effort in spite of difficulties and opposition of any kind.

For a lot of us that opposition is magnified by the difficulties that are set in front of us. But these obstacles that stand in our way, have not only made us strong; but they have also given us the courage to keep on going despite all these negative images.

This graduation is the turning point in our lives. We worked hard for it and deserve it. Deep down everyone of us has this desire to get a high school diploma and we have been willing to make a few sacrifices in order to get that goal.

And education is only a important tool to be used effectively and you get only - what you put into it. That fact that we've stuck to it this far shows that we are capable of handling that responsibility.

Not only for ourselves - But for our families as well.

When we look back, we see despair, frustration and no future, and when you have no future, there is usually very little hope for anything else. This day has brought that turning point in our lives, and I for one would like to congratulate each and everyone of you.

Our Elders tell us that we are the new warriors and as warriors it is up to each of us to try our very best in whatever we do. And to test the water beyond our comfort zone. And we must always look for different ways to adapt the teachings of yesterday - today.

But we can never forget - must never forget where we've been... and where we wish

to go. And it is with this in mind, that I encourage you all to look beyond that comfort zone and to continue to "ENDEAVOUR TO PERSEVERE."

Thank you all very much for sharing this day with us...

Resistance, control and humanitarianism all exist within the context of the prison education program at Stony Mountain. Perceptions of the students were not black and white, as there were mixed feelings about the institution and the program. The students' perceptions were able to support the viewpoints of the humanitarianists, social controlists and supporters of the theories of cultural resistance. These perceptions did not favour one viewpoint over the other, however this study was able to document the existence of resistance more clearly and persuasively than in studies previously reviewed. All in all, whether their statements support one theory or another, these students offered valuable insight with their perceptions of prison education at Stony Mountain federal penitentiary.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The first limitation concerns my sample. Since the location of the study was at a federal correctional institution, there was very little freedom in having access to potential respondents. I was given consent to conduct my interviewing at the prison school. However, I did not have access to students that had completed the program at Stony Mountain and, therefore, would have had time to reflect on their involvement with the program. Also, the findings of the study may have been limited by the sample size. A larger sample size would have been beneficial. Although the data were informative, a larger sample probably would have offered even further insight because each of the respondents was unique and carried a great deal of experience. Finally, the nature of the sampling

was not random, thus allowing for some bias. Twenty percent of the respondents were obtained by the “snowball method”, and the students’ referrals may have entered a bias into the study.

The second limitation concerns the qualitative methodology used. The researcher was only able to conduct one time-limited interview per respondent. Ideally, second interviews with the respondents would have been desirable, in order to confirm consistency in responses. The time limit placed on the interviews was also limited since inmates at Stony Mountain spend only a certain number of hours during the day at the school and interviews had to follow this restricted schedule.

The third limitation is that these findings cannot be generalized to other Canadian federal correctional institutions. The findings demonstrate how the respondents of this study perceived the program, yet these perceptions may differ for other inmates in Stony Mountain, as well as other institutions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As my review of existing studies focusing on students’ perceptions demonstrated, very little research has been done in this area. This research has drawn attention to the individual. It is imperative that future research in the area of prison education takes into consideration the individual, as this research has demonstrated that adherence to a single theoretical perspective regarding the role of prison education may not reflect the perception of the students.

This research was able to document that control, humanitarian and resistance perceptions all exist in the prison education environment at Stony Mountain. The purpose of this study was not to

test the truth/falsity of these theoretical perspectives, but rather to give the students a voice in assessing which of these perspectives is most appropriate.

A future study should look at more than one institution in Canada's federal correctional system to get a greater sense of consistency between perceptions of inmate/students across the country affected by similar federal policies.

It would also be interesting to see if the needs and perceptions of students, educators, and correctional administrators coincide, and if prison education is able to meet all these needs simultaneously.

As noted above, the presence of resistance was perhaps more clearly demonstrated in this study than has been the case in previous studies. This finding deserves further research, including a consideration of the variety of forms that resistance may take.

Finally, there is a need to see if individuals can take the benefits they derive from prison education and successfully apply them after release.

## Appendix I

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**The purpose of my questions is to try and get an understanding of how the guys taking the school program here at Stony Mountain feel about this program. I think it's important that your feelings about the this program are heard.**

#### **Part 1) Questions Designed to Obtain Demographic Information:**

First I would like to get some background information about you... (to know a little about you...)

What is your name?

How old are you?

Do you speak another language? Which one(s)?

How long have you been at ST?

When do you go up for parole?

What grade are you in? What are you taking here?

What grade did you complete on the street?

Are you going to apply for parole?

Did you take a test for the school when you first got here?

#### **Part 2) Questions Designed to Obtain Information On Length and Nature of Involvement in the School Program:**

I would also like some general information about the program and your past experiences with school...

1) How long have you been at school at ST?

2) After applying how long did you have to wait to get into school?

3) Have you ever taken school in another institution? Which one? Which do you like better? Why?

4) Do you think corrections should have a school in here? Why?

Probe: Do you think that the school should be a part of ST?

5) Tell me what school is like in here?

Probe: How difficult would you say school is in here?

Probe: What do you think of the way they teach in here?

Probe: Where can you find study places in here? What is it like studying in here?

- 6) Why are you taking school here at ST?
- 7) How is school in here different than school on the street?
- 8) How important is this school for you?
- 9) What are you learning in here? How helpful do you think it will be for you?

**Part 3) Questions Designed to Get an Understanding of Student Perceptions About the Prison Education Program at Stony Mountain:**

**3a) General Perceptions** (Questions designed to get a general feeling about the school from the inmates).

People feel differently about school. Some experiences are good, some are not. I would like to learn how you feel...

- 10) Which programs in the school seem to help the inmates the most?  
Probe: There are a number of programs at ST, which ones do you think are the most important for the guys here?
- 11) Are there any programs in the school which you feel they should have, but they don't have?
- 12) How is school in here going to help you?  
Probe: Is the school able to help you get the things you want?
- 13) How is the school affected by being in a prison?

**3b) Perceptions: Positive/Negative**

Staying in line with your own personal feelings I have some questions relating to positive or negative feelings you may have about the school and learning in here...

- 14) How do you feel about this school? Why?
- 15) What do you like about it? Why that?  
Probe: What's your favourite part of the school?
- 16) What don't you like about the school?

**3c) Perceptions: Control/Choice**

The next set of questions are to get an understanding of how much of a choice you feel you have in deciding to go to school here...

- 17) If you only had to take one program while you were here at ST which one would it be? Why?

18) You mentioned you are studying...Did you choose to study this or were you required to?

Probe: Was it your decision to take school at ST?

Probe: Did you have a choice about enrolling in the school program?

19) What kind of a difference to your parole do you think school will make?

20) Who decides which programs are going to be a part of parole?

21) Do the guards have anything to do with the school?

Probe: Do the guards ever get in the way?

22) Do you feel pushed into taking school here at ST?

Probe: Is there pressure for you guys to take school?

23) Do you feel like you are in a jail when you are in the school?

### **3d) Perceptions: Future/Plans/Interests**

My final set of questions are aimed at trying to get an understanding of what your future plans may be...I would like to know if school will help with those plans and how...

24) What are you going to do when you get back on the street?

Probe: What are your plans when you are released?

Probe: Will school help you with these plans? How?

25) How will going to school in here, help you on the street?

26) If you were on the street right now...would you be in school? What kind of school?

Probe: What kind of school would you want to go to or find useful?

Probe: What would education look like? How would you want it to be?

### **4) Other Comments**

27) Do you have any other comments? What else would like to add? What questions do you want to ask of me?

Appendix 2

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

I agree to voluntarily participate in an interview for the study on prison education being conducted by Rose S. for her M.A. degree in Sociology.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded. However, I will not be identified on the tapes. I understand that I will be interviewed in private with Rose S. at Stony Mountain Penitentiary.

I understand that the information will be confidential and that only Rose S. will know my identity.

I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate and that I may withdraw at any time. I also understand that I may refrain from answering any questions I want at any time.

I understand that a copy of the findings will be available for me if I wish.

I understand the purpose of this research and voluntarily consent to participate under these stated conditions.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

This research project has been approved by the Department of Sociology Ethical Review Committee. Any complaint regarding a procedure may be forwarded to the Head of the Department of Sociology (474-9260) for referral to the Ethical Review Committee.

Rose S.  
Advisor: Dr. Russell Smandych  
474-6446  
Department of Sociology  
University of Manitoba

Appendix 3

**SUMMARY TABLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON STUDY RESPONDENTS**

	RANGE	MEAN
AGE	20 YEARS - 48 YEARS	29 YEARS
LENGTH OF TIME AT STONY*	8.5 MONTHS - 5 YEARS	2.7 YEARS
LENGTH OF TIME AS STUDENT AT STONY	1 MONTH - 4 YEARS	2.4 YEARS
STUDENTS' REPORT OF GRADE ACHIEVED OUTSIDE PRISON	0 - GRADE 12	GRADE 7
STUDENTS' CURRENT GRADE LEVEL AT STONY	GRADE 1 - GRADE 12**	GRADE 9

\* Five of the respondents are serving life sentences.

\*\* One respondent is not included in this category because he was enrolled in a Business Administration course and he had completed his grade 12.

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