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# Education & Training in a Scottish Young Offender Prison. A Document Analysis of Inspectorate Reports

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## Abstract

In recent years, education and training as mechanisms for enabling criminal desistence or rehabilitation have gained prominence. The growth of human rights discourse has undoubtedly contributed to this situation whereby prisoners must be provided with opportunities to flourish and develop skills. Basing itself upon official documents (HMIPS, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2021) written by the Scottish Prison Inspectorate (SPS), this paper contributes, through a discourse analysis of these official public documents, insights into the education and training available in a Scottish young offenders' prison. The four official sources cited illustrate a wider policy literature analysis of this field by the author of the reports published by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). The official sources are contextualised through an academic literature about this penal field of rehabilitative effort. In particular, Gresham Sykes' "pains of imprisonment" concept and Ervine Goffman's critical perspective about asylums draw our attention to the challenges impacting education and training in the prison setting.

Keywords: Prison, learning, engagement, education, training, health.

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### Educação e formação numa prisão escocesa para jovens delinquentes: uma análise documental dos relatórios da inspecção

**Resumo**

Nos últimos anos, a educação e a formação como mecanismos para permitir a desistência ou a reabilitação criminal ganharam proeminência. O crescimento do discurso dos direitos humanos tem sem dúvida contribuído para esta situação em que os prisioneiros devem ter oportunidades de florescer e desenvolver competências. Baseando-se em documentos oficiais (HMIPS, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2021) escritos pela Scottish Prison Inspectorate (SPS) (Inspecção Prisional Escocesa), este artigo contribui, através de uma análise do discurso destes documentos públicos oficiais, para o conhecimento da educação e formação disponíveis numa prisão escocesa para jovens delinquentes. As quatro fontes oficiais citadas ilustram uma análise mais ampla da literatura política neste campo pelo autor dos relatórios publicados pelo Serviço Prisional Escocês (SPS). As fontes oficiais são contextualizadas através de uma literatura académica sobre este campo penal do esforço de reabilitação. Em particular, o conceito de Gresham Sykes de "dores da prisão" e a perspectiva crítica de Ervine Goffman sobre os asilos chamam a nossa atenção para os desafios que afetam a educação e a formação no meio prisional.

Palavras-chave: Prisão, aprendizagem, envolvimento, educação, formação, saúde.

### Educación y formación en una prisión escocesa para jóvenes delincuentes: un análisis documental de los informes de la inspección

**Resumen**

En los últimos años, la educación y la formación como mecanismos para posibilitar la desistencia o la rehabilitación penal han cobrado protagonismo. El crecimiento del discurso de los derechos humanos ha contribuido, sin duda, a esta situación en la que los reclusos deben contar con oportunidades para prosperar y desarrollar habilidades. Basándose en documentos oficiales (HMIPS, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2021) redactados por la Inspección Penitenciaria de Escocia (SPS), este trabajo aporta, a través de un análisis del discurso de estos documentos públicos oficiales, conocimientos sobre la educación y la formación disponibles en una prisión escocesa para jóvenes delincuentes. Las

cuatro fuentes oficiales citadas ilustran un análisis más amplio de la literatura política en este campo por parte del autor de los informes publicados por el Servicio Penitenciario Escocés (SPS). Las fuentes oficiales se contextualizan a través de una literatura académica sobre este campo penal de esfuerzo rehabilitador. En particular, el concepto de Gresham Sykes de "dolores del encarcelamiento" y la perspectiva crítica de Ervine Goffman sobre los asilos llaman nuestra atención sobre los retos que afectan a la educación y la formación en el ámbito penitenciario.

Palabras clave: Prisión, aprendizaje, compromiso, educación, formación, salud.

## INTRODUCTION

It is argued in this paper that the realisation of the SPS vision of empowerment and transforming lives is in severe tension with the inevitable presence of coercive prisoner cultures, as described in the academic literature. Despite custody being legal, structural violence is nevertheless (sometimes) unfairly enacted against prisoners by this arm of the British state (Armstrong, 2020). Structural violence attendant upon incarceration where risk of serious harm is exacerbated by peer culture, isolation from family and the constant surveillance of every inmate including the vulnerable: many young male prisoners are vulnerable in terms of their mental health and addictions.

The focus of the analysis reported is through a case study of Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution, Polmont (Polmont), a Scottish Young Offender Institution for prisoners aged 16-21 convicted of serious and other crimes judged to merit a custodial sentence[2]. The SPS, founded in 1993, is an executive agency of the Scottish Government tasked with managing prisons. In Scotland, there are 15 prison establishments. The evidence base about the qualities of the prisoner experience include regular surveys by the SPS, annual performance reports against prescribed benchmarks and less formal interventions such as unannounced visits[3]. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) conducts a programme of, typically, annual prison inspection visits. These are part of the UK's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment (quoted in HMIPS, November 2018b).

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2  The paper's author has experience as a teacher in secure care and has undertaken and published qualitative research based on field work visits to Polmont prison.

3  https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publications.aspx

The HMIPS reports studied apply to every prisoner incarcerated in Polmont and other prisons in Scotland convicted of crimes judged by the courts to be serious in nature, often crimes involving the use of violence. Through opportunities found during incarceration, the SPS's ambition is to rehabilitate and therefore ensure the effective re-integration of prisoners back into their communities and into the labour market. The achievability of this noble ambition must be judged against the huge challenge faced by the prison regime to ensure (and improve) the mental health and physical wellbeing of prisoners during periods of imprisonment (HMIPS, 2018b, p. 25); the latter HMIPS inspection report found that the physical and mental health care of the prisoners at Polmont was inadequate. In particular, there was no clinical psychology support for the under 18s and risk assessment of prisoners was problematical; prisoners requiring opiate replacement therapy had to wait for a minimum of ten weeks before it commenced. Methadone was the first line opiate treatment for drug addiction withdrawal. The Scottish Public Health Observatory has documented a prevalence of drug and alcohol disorders across the Scottish prison estate[4]. That reality is also identified in academic research (Luyt, 2007).

The HMIPS inspections access the care and treatment of prisoners across the SPS estate against a pre-defined set of standards[5]. This work is designed to contribute to public confidence in the criminal justice system. HMIPS assimilates its evidence base through data gathering which involves interviews, observations and document analysis. "Purposeful activity" is a term used in the inspection reporting process that designates a range of processes from education and training to more diffuse engagement with resources and opportunities to learn. The design capacity of the case study prison Polmont is 758 young men, most of whom have one of the 607 single cell rooms. Fife College is Polmont's learning provider. That concept of education as learning informs the choice of provision, the deployment of resources and learner pre-requisite potential. This prison curriculum is the outcome of a skills--based orientation to guide the future employability of the young men.  Fife College specialises in a diverse portfolio including work-based qualifications and national qualifications involving core and essential skills[6].

Although the analysis of the SPS term "purposeful activity" is a logical choice in the vein of the paper's contribution to the Journal's special issue, it is important not to overlook the context of the prison as a dangerous and volatile life space that governs the daily routines of young prisoners. So, features of incarceration at Polmont that

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4  https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Publications/Publications.aspx

5  Standards | HMIPS (prisonsinspectoratescotland.gov.uk)

6  https://www.fife.ac.uk/courses/qualifications-explained/developing-skills-for-learning-life-and-work/

undoubtedly impact purposeful activity are acknowledged and, in the commentary, contextualised in terms of the findings of the academic literature. Gresham Sykes (1958/2007) identified the suffering of those confined as being "pains of imprisonment". These "pains" designate five primary deprivations: the deprivation of liberty, the deprivation of goods and services, the deprivation of heterosexual relationships, the deprivation of autonomy, and the deprivation of security. Sykes describes how prisoners are subjected to "a vast body of rules and commands which are designed to control … behaviour in minute detail" (Sykes, 1958/2007, p. 73). Dehumanisation and loss of personal identity are dimensions of the experience of incarceration (Zimbardo, 2016). Ervine Goffman's notion of total institution allows the illumination of the prison's power relationships (Goffman, 1961). Staff classifies prisoners and impose value judgements separating 'them' (prisoners) from 'us' ('normals'). This process is constitutive of dehumanisation and negative othering.

Polmont is the largest Young Offender Institution in Scotland. The prison demography is among the most excluded in all societies. The mental or intellectual capacities of the prisoners are defined as "limited", a judgement which may perpetuate cycles of under-achievement and low self-esteem. Polmont's induction programme is comprised of teaching sessions lasting 20 minutes in recognition of the SPS's judgement that young people's ability to focus is limited (HMIPS, 2018a, p. 6). That official discourse is questionable in its projection of stigma onto these prisoners judged in deficit terms: the shortcomings of its provision and pedagogic methodologies are factors that might contribute to the young men's limited attention span. There are however serious language and communications difficulties among juvenile offenders (Bryan et al., 2007). A significant number of prisoners are judged to be a suicide risk which the Inspectorate's report describes as putting staff under "enormous pressure" (HMPIS, 2018a, p. 14). Bullying is a further risk that staff recognises as being prompted by 'difference': "The prison takes particular care of prisoners whose appearance, behaviour, background or circumstances leave them at a heightened risk of harm or abuse from others" (HMPIS, 2018a, p. 17). A limited number of prisoners commit arson after hoarding material and ignitions to start cell fires.

In 2014 the SPS published its "Vision for Young People in Custody" (Scottish Prison Service, 2014) which was designed to "use the time a young person spends in custody to enable them to prepare for a positive future" (HMIPS, 2016, p. 2). That future is trapped between the prison culture described in this paper and the damage wrought on the self by histories of offending prior to incarceration. The pessimism was clear:

> A future where respect, trust and self-determination are at the core of what the young men need to learn and display in order to become

> valued and contributing citizens. It was difficult to see how the individual could best use their time in custody if they were not able to practice what they have learnt contemporaneously to that learning. In order to practice and demonstrate these skills before being liberated, surely, they needed to be allowed to utilise them whilst within the safer environment of the prison. At present there were very limited opportunities for them to do so. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 15)

Despite educative, training and health challenges, teaching and training opportunities are encouraged. The SPS literature includes a *Polmont Prospectus* suggestive of the prison being a form of further education provision (HMPIS, 2021). This type of positive aspirational re-branding of the prison estate is incongruous with the findings of academic studies of imprisonment.

In June 2019, *The Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act* raised responsibility from age eight to age 12. Children who offend in Scotland can now be effectively imprisoned from the age of eight in 'secure care' where they are supervised and not permitted to leave the premises without supervision. Once aged 16 they are eligible for imprisonment in a high security estate young offenders' prison such as Polmont[7]. According to the Scottish Government's 2020 report the concept of secure care means:

> Secure accommodation is a form of residential care that restricts the freedom of children under the age of 18. It is for the small number of children who may be a significant risk to themselves, or others in the community. Their needs and risks can only be managed in secure care's controlled settings. Secure care aims to provide intensive support and safe boundaries to help these highly vulnerable children re-engage and move forward positively in their communities.

There is a secure accommodation network in the West Coast of Scotland and one centre in Edinburgh[8]. Those in this accommodation are deemed amongst the most vulnerable members in society (Gallard et al., 2019; Moodie, 2015). The high levels of prisoner re-offending coupled with the aim of offender rehabilitation highlights education's importance as a mechanism for changing lives through providing positive futures. Incorporating a public profile for education and training is arguably a political tactic to shift the image of imprisonment away from the idea of punishment through social death. The motto of the Scottish Prison Service is championed in upper case letters as "UNLOCKING POTENTIAL – TRANSFORMING LIVES", a mantra suited to the classical meanings of the role of education.

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7  https://www.gov.scot/policies/youth-justice/secure-care/; https://www.gov.scot/publications/secure-care-pathway-standards-scotland/

8  https://www.sanscotland.org/; https://www.cycj.org.uk/what-we-do/secure-care/

The methodology that generated the sources for this paper did not entail going inside the prison estate or interviewing employees of the SPS. Whilst that approach is worthwhile and valid, it is extremely time consuming to gain research access to these forms of data, a fact that is yet more difficult as a result of government restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. More readily, accessible data about the prison was gained through the use of the SPS's published documents which do not require ethical or other approvals to utilise as these are already in the public domain and, as far as the researcher could determine, had not previously been subjected to research-led analysis. Rapley (2018) identifies discourse analysis in terms of language as performative and functional, productive of a version of the world and emerging from social constructivism (Burr, 2015). McCulloch (2004) argues that to understand documents is to "read between the lines of our material world" (p. 1). As an addition to the document analysis data generation methodology, two requests were submitted to the SPS under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2000 (FOI)[9]. These two FOI requests aimed to gather more nuanced data about the education and other learning opportunities for young prisoners in Polmont. These data are reported later in tandem with the analysis of the official reports cited in the paper's introduction.

## POLMONT PRISON

It is estimated that around 80% of the young men in Polmont have reported being excluded by their secondary and primary schools, sometimes both; most have negative experiences of their education in Scotland (Gough & Lightowler, 2019; Smith et al, 2014). Furthermore, 34% have spent at least some part of their childhood in the local authority care system. Exclusion and the trauma they embody have implications for their readiness to learn. Situated near Falkirk in central Scotland, Polmont prison opened as a Borstal in 1911, being designed to hold in secure custody up to 712 prisoners serving an average of two to four years, although some have a life tariff for the crime of murder[10]. Identification documents are required by family or friends wishing to visit prisoners. In order to proceed to the dedicated visiting area, they pass through a metal detector and undergo a rub down search of their person. Dog Units are operational, tasked to detect anyone transporting illegal substances. Prisons are paradoxically a "lawless space" governed by Prison Rules internal to this type of establishment that are invoked by the policing undertaken by prison staff, but

9  https://www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request
10  https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Prisons/Polmont/HMP-YOI-Polmont.aspx

disrupted routinely by the peer groupings fostered by the meaning inmates construct about prison regimes (Clemmer, 1940; Scottish Prison Service, 2021; Ugelvic et al., 2014). Prisoners construct their own scripts about the prison and prison life; their agency is illustrated by decisions around 'enemies' and a propensity to spend long periods of time inside their cells, refusing to engage with the official curriculum of the prison. Penal oppression runs counter to educational narratives (Johnson & Toch, 1982; Longazel et al., 2016). A dark social reality influences participation in education:

Issues with young men electing not to participate, double booking of activities, young men refusing to attend classes even after they had booked a place on them and concerns about the presence of enemies in the education area could mean that attendance was low and erratic. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 19)

Mundane but nevertheless serious challenges to engage in "purposeful activities" are highlighted by the Governor's observation that: "the biggest challenge for her staff and management team, the fact the young men were difficult to engage with, especially in the morning, as they liked their bed and were difficult to motivate first thing" (HMIPS, 2016, p. 21). Her analysis under-recognises the de-motivation that couples with the coerciveness of incarceration and the mood lowering aesthetics of the clinical, highly routinised social environment waiting for them outside of their beds. Disciplinary issues are intensified in prison given that it is already a place of punishment. More persistent challenges that counter capacity to engage effectively with education lie in the widely researched area of prisoners' mental health.

Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD) is a clinical emotional dysre-gulation disorder which is disruptive of engagement in educational activities. This disorder is prevalent among young adult prisoners where it presents among 20%-30% of the prison population (Asherson et al., 2019). Gordon et al. (2012) report violent breaches of prison discipline in Scottish young offenders' institutions are associated with ADHD symptoms: inattentiveness and hyperactive and/or impulsive behaviours. The critical incidents such offenders were likely to be involved with included verbal and physical aggression, damage to property, self-injury and arson. Gordon et al. (2012) conclude that "ADHD represents one mental health condition that should not be ignored in the prison population, as identifying and addressing the symptoms of ADHD among young offenders will provide the best opportunity to enable them to lead a healthy life, reduce recidivism" (p. 347). Bird et al. (1993) found that 17% of young men in Polmont admitted misuse of intravenous drugs, with 25% of that group injecting whilst in prison; a few admitted having anal intercourse in prison. Such behaviours risk spreading HIV and other infections. That few young men took up opportunities for daily exercise in the fresh air and sunshine outdoors, preferring to stay inside in their individual cells, suggests an abiding fear of peers (HMIPS,

2016, p. 15). The locked cell doors described in these HMIPS (2016) reports arguably symbolise a personal safety coping strategy in an environment with elevated risk (p. 16). A large proportion of Scotland's young male offenders were convicted of violent assaults or when involved in street assaults used bottles, knives and body parts (feet and fists) as weapons (Forsyth et al., 2010; Holligan, 2015).

Innovative programmes such as therapeutic orientated Dog Training Programmes guided by experts from a university outside was warmly received by prisoners, indicating purposes that embrace forming non-human ties and physicality can foster their psychological healing, empathy and self-discipline (Leonardi et al., 2017). On the other hand, the positive appraisal of that animal training initiative may suggest the prison curriculum needs to reform in order to offer a more holistic experience that engages all the prisoner's senses and gives a sense of person achievement. During 2010, an arts intervention led by practitioners who visited Polmont and adult prisons in Scotland called *Inspiring Change* found that it stimulated their engagement with learning, improved literacy and, the authors argued, supported rehabilitation. Prisoners appreciated being treated as artists, rather than prisoners, and making friendships with other prisoners. The research evaluators of *Inspiring Change* commented: "One of the most striking observations to come out of the data is the ability of prisoners to embrace challenges and grow from learning experiences through engaging with the arts" (Anderson, 2015, p. 381). Social spaces for the growth of new personae that displace inmate identities, and where secure custody and officer surveillance are less immediate, are, as these two external initiatives illustrate, contexts for the delivery of new skills and therapeutically meaningful learning that inspired subsequent engagement with education in art and music (Anderson & Overy, 2010).

The more usual training provision available in Polmont, however, reinforces the class position of the young men and affirms their 'place' in the hierarchy of society (see McGrew, 2008; Phillips & Earle, 2010). The employability, work-based focus on skilled and manual trades typifies Polmont's curriculum. The viability or realism of the SPS mantra of unlocking potential and transforming lives confronts the realities of incarceration for young men who inevitably also import behavioural and health issues into the prison. Prisoners notoriously self-exile in cells, symbolising a demise of everyday life meaning and a form of coping strategy (Kotova, 2019). On the other hand, exile may freeze out the prison setting allowing their imagination to re-create lives and memories of romantic attachments outside. Some prisoners enact symbolic resistance whereby, through masculinized narratives of imported violent revenge, they harness imagined agency against responsible state agents (Ugelvic et al., 2014). The labelling of cells with numbers and the near identical clothing of inmates removes

distinctiveness and the sense of ownership, but domestication of individual cells in the form of personal items on display such as images and posters help to counter the impersonal institutionalising parameters of their built environment designed to ensure security and prevent escape. Personalisation undoubtedly reassures these young men emotionally, giving a connectedness with identities, attachments and memories developed outside in communities and at home prior to incarceration in this high security cosmos. Ervine Goffman's (1961) seminal text *Asylums* describes 'total institutions' as impermeable to social discourse with the outside, where processes of humiliation are accompanied by catastrophic losses of role and identity (Gambino, 2013; Shalin, 2014). The 'key fact' of a total institution, Goffman argued, was the bureaucratic management of those subject to legal authority. Uniformity of routines, clothing, eating arrangements and daily routines are practices that can neutralise prisoner difference and so inhibit the emergence of status hierarchies. However, danger remains inside as the young prisoners can arrive in the midst of conflicts outside the prison which are imported into the prison and, when identified, officially classified as 'enemy lists'. Being perceived as 'different' was also a trigger for bullying by other prisoners:

> One staff member felt that there was a culture of bullying amongst the young men but that it was not getting picked up – the bullying was mostly through ostracising those who were 'different'. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 31)

One young man the author spoke to when undertaking research inside the prison some years earlier had received a life sentence for the murder of another teenage boy at a party in his family home. This house party had been crowded with friends and strangers, and cannabis was circulating along with alcohol. In Polmont he described deliberately "keeping his head down" to avoid unwanted attention and challenge. On the prison landings and in the gym he restricted his interactions to a small group of peers whom he trusted. He felt that his reputation as a fighter and the status of his sentence would attract the attention of others seeking to prove themselves among peers. His "difference" is an example of a source of peer-to-peer victimisation. Prison society has an emotional geography and demands adaptation (Crewe, 2009). Prisons are clearly not, despite Goffman's (1961) argument, total institutions, although role performance and coercive control are apparent in Polmont and other prisons. Ellis (2021) argues, contrary to Goffman (1961, p. xiii), that prisons are porous institutions whereby outside resources, for example, in the form of visitors and news through telephone contacts infiltrate and colour the lives of prisoners. In this nevertheless enforced culture of rule governed socialising what does the official

term "fit-for-purpose" mean in discursive and practical terms, in the context of a putative educative policy?

## FIT-FOR-PURPOSE LEARNING

In April 2016, HMIPS published a longitudinal inspection that tracked progress made over the previous four years. "Fit-for-purpose" areas had received investment for "learning and development" which inspectors described as offering the young men "real opportunities for change" (p. 3). The discursive field of the terminology 'fit-for-purpose' is decidedly masculine and militaristic. That framing constructs the educative cosmos inside the prison as a masculine enterprise that prescribes from the outside what is to count as valid in its curriculum and is therefore a form of coercive control. Major challenges were identified under the rubric prisoner "engagement" and "the tension between security/control and care/learning" (HMIPS, 2016, p. 2). Many young men in the SPS inspection documents are described as unengaged and found locked in their cells, for much of the day. Some cells have no furniture and the bed mattress is described as lying directly on the cell floor. Self-harming, an indicator of anxiety or depressive mood, characterises the prison life of Polmont's inmates. 'Safer cells', the SPS term, isolate disruptive prisoners in conditions that are apparently intended to reduce opportunity for death by suicide. On the other hand, such solitary confinement is punitive and can escalate harm. The next extract illustrates the critical stance of the inspectorate about challenges in the prison culture of Polmont:

> Developing a culture where young men take responsibility for making constructive decisions about their lives requires encouragement and a level of trust in relationships. Such a culture is potentially undermined if the young men are afforded limited opportunity to exercise such responsibility. We found a widespread belief among staff at all levels throughout HMYOI Polmont that the young men could not be trusted to behave responsibly. This led to a mind-set that high levels of control needed to be exercised over them. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 3)

Discourses of enlightened agency, social capital and staff-prisoner relations are projected to highlight prison officers as blameworthy. In fact, the belief system of the staff may be justified. Histories of exclusion typify the origins of dysfunctional social behaviours in the prisoner demography, and the inspectorate overlook organisation priorities to prevent bullying and assaults. The mix of narratives in the micro-politics of inspections creates a further social construction of challenges around training and education. 'Enemy lists' and 'keep separate' lists are features of prison security gover-

nance, containing the names of young men separated into different prison blocks for their own protection. Sections of this report allude to "serious incidences of violence" and bullying within the prison that undermined personal safety (HMIPS, 2016, p. 7). Despite recognising a culture of risk and danger, the inspectorate recommended a loosening of control over the space for the exercise of agency:

> We noted that an apparent overemphasis on security had an adverse impact on decisions about recreation, time in the fresh air and communal dining, all of which were restricted by a fear or expectation that too many young men together would result in disorder or assaults. (p. 3)

No recognition is articulated by inspectors that the prison experience per se is fundamentally incompatible with conditions required for educational flourishing. Projects that were impactful at Polmont were led by external professionals in the arts and animal training who would not have felt obligated, as officers legally are, to ensure safe custody and limit risk (see above). Educational influence was imputed to the prison officers who were expected to be mentors and role models for these young men. Since 2012, SPS policy has been described as "redefining the institution as a learning environment", but in the 2016 HMIPS inspection it was concluded that this policy "to take advantage of education and training was still very much a work in progress" (p. 17). This inspection seeks to normalise education practice by drawing upon mainstream Scottish education's national curriculum, known as the Curriculum for Excellence, which the SPS adapted for "young people in custody". The findings of criminal desistence literature and the national policy called Developing the Workforce combined to shape the prison curriculum in terms of training and education. Other sources of influence indicate skills development was prioritised. That discourse explains the contracting of a local further education (FE) college, Fife College, which deliver the most education programmes.

The FE sector's specialism, however, is in training and skill development. Education discourse is constructed by the SPS in terms of inculcating employability skills and capacities. Despite that emphasis of vocational training, wider opportunities are sought to create "a good balance between academic, vocational and personal development courses" as well as the inputs of a third sector charity, Barnardos, which "delivered youth work programmes" (HMIPS, 2016, p. 17). Certification in specific practical work areas was through "work parties" that included cleaning, laundering and catering". The young men were being encouraged to accommodate themselves into the working-class employment field that would be familiar to them and their families. Wider discourses of human cultivation extended to episodic campaigning opportunities:

> ...very successful projects which had extended young men's understanding of political and social issues and involved them in creative responses to them. These included Holocaust Day, International Women's Day and the Scottish Independence Referendum. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 18)

There is a sense here of a discourse of social inclusion and enlightened incarceration in the tone and references of this HMIPS (2016) generalisation which offers no evaluation of impact attribution, tempting the conclusion that the authors are endeavouring to convey to their readership the normalisation of prison existence. Elsewhere, the inspectorate commented that "young people were also encouraged to write and illustrate storybooks and compose personalised nursery rhymes for their children. This had improved literacy" (HMIPS, 2018a, p. 18). That supportive analysis arguably reaffirms a positive conception of the prison to official and other stakeholders desirous of reassurance that prison is not a dark and violent place. The granularity of education and training is triumphal zed in terms of job relevance, and "personal training":

> Vocational courses were relevant to the workplace and focused mainly on the construction industries, such as joinery, brickwork, plumbing and painting and decorating. There were also introductory courses in engineering and forklift truck driving. Imaginative courses in bicycle renewal and in dog rescue and training were also on offer with both including a strong element of personal development training. (HMIPS, 2016, p. 18)

Class reproduction through prison's educational mode of pragmatic cultivation occupies these custodial social places. The research methodology sought to gain additional information about the mental lives of the prisoners and how, besides training, if they experienced intellectual opportunities.

## INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL LEARNING

Recreation in prisons has included gambling, seen as offering psychosocial benefits and a means for alleviating boredom, gaining excitement and a venue to socialise (Williams & Liz Hinton, 2006). In UK prisons there is the Prison Radio Association introducing wider social values (Bedford, 2018). Jewkes et al. (2020) draw attention to the concept of 'health prisons' demonstrating that therapeutic landscapes require prisoners to have access to waterscapes and colour. In Canadian prisons access to sport and physical cultures offer recreation and relief through competition (Norman, 2018). Taking this body of literature as representing a welfarist as opposed to retri-

butive approach to rehabilitation highlights the role of non-programmatic forms of educative training influence (Smith, 2013).

In this vein the author made several Freedom of Information requests (FOI) to SPS on 24th April 2021, asking for data about the selection of books by the young men and utilisation of the prison's library. In response, the Library was identified as "well used". A centralised data base was not kept about library borrowings, making reading trend data unavailable (SPS 20th May 2021 FOI HQ21019). Opportunities had arisen while the author was visiting Polmont over several weeks on a British Academy funded project to speak informally to young men on the landings outside their cells. Those 'ethnographic encounters' revealed that non-fiction books were regularly sent into the prison by friends and family. Books about gangs and crime were popular and were not censored despite Scottish gang literature not being stocked in the prison library as a matter of policy. To probe further into this area of leisure and social interest a second FOI request was submitted to the SPS on 26th April 2021 (HQ21019). That request interrogated more directly prisoner reading preferences: the result of this FOI illuminated the reading culture inside to a fuller extent. The account of library usage and choices of books went as follows:

> All True Crime books are well read, we as a library do not stock any true crime books that we feel glorify local gang violence, so we have no books on Scottish gang violence. For the young people in our care the most popular authors would be:
>
> Lee Dashner – Maze Runner Series
> Rick Riordan – All Books
> Cassandra Clare – City of Bones Series
> P.C. & Kristin Cast – House of Night Series
> Joe Abercrombie – All books
> Oliver Bowden – Assassins Creed Series
> Robin Hobb – All Series
> Sarah J. Mass – All Series

This canon of books is popular with young men throughout society, indicating these prisoners continued inclusion with peer interest and teenage culture. Immersion in reading matter is perhaps indicative as a search for meaning (Vanhooren et al., 2018). While gangs in Scotland is not a permitted subject, other library resources do cover criminality. 'True Crime' texts are very popular, as is teen fiction, especially the Sword and Sorcery and Earth Science Fiction books. The *Assassins Creed* series engages with violence, murder and revenge associated with the video game cosmos.

The circulation of certain themes demonstrates a liberal attitude to a criminogenic cultural capital.

In 2018 the Inspectors' report found that:

> Overall prisoners were well served by the library facilities within the prison. The library was located within the Learning Centre and provided a welcoming environment for prisoners to browse and borrow items. Most prisoners had regular access to the well-stocked library that had a wide range of suitable resources. (HMIPS, 2018a, p. 20)

Research visits inside during earlier studies about Polmont by the author found the young men spent a lot of time watching television in their cells. The habit was to watch into the early hours of the morning so as to cloud out the time of the next day inside. Inspection reports describing limited engagement overlooked patterns of coping through TV and sleep strategies. Prisons engender high degrees of psychological discomfort; suicides in prison are linked with maladaptive coping strategies (Reed et al., 2009). The leisure-based coping strategy could reflect the system's acceptance of de-stress patterns. Sleeping seemed to be a problem-focussed strategy. During the 2017 inspection the Inspectors were accompanied by an expert visitor, criminologist Professor McAra, University of Edinburgh, who remarked that

> many of the young men appeared to sleep during the morning because they had been watching television all night. I was informed that it was impossible to turn off the television without disabling the whole hall: a design flaw not conducive to maximum usage of learning environment. (HMIPS, 2018a, p. 28)

## DISCUSSION

The fostering of trust and compassion cannot be separated from receptivity of young prisoners to education and training, they need to feel connection and belonging (Gallard et al., 2019, p. xi). We saw little in the inspection reports about social and emotional pedagogies of working to facilitate receptive mindsets. The education in this secure setting was orientated away from trauma resolution and therapeutic learning. Instead, it appears driven by a punishment paradigm of containment and tight control. Despite the efforts of the policy and provision on their liberation from prison, many registered as homeless and signed on for welfare support; a few were deemed, whilst in the prison, medically unfit for work outside in the HMIPS source reports. Successful community re-integration was difficult despite the institution's

educational model of care being called a learning environment. Professor McAra reiterated the theme of "enemies" as one of Polmont's challenges:

> A further inhibitor to maximum usage of learning opportunities, was "enemy" management. All staff made efforts to keep recorded enemies apart from each other. Enemy management meant that the young men were often not permitted to take part in work parties or other activities at short notice. Staff admitted that this was not always explained to the young men. A concern was that the enemy lists were not always up-to-date - with some so-called enemies now part of friendship networks and some potential enemies not formally identified. (HMIPS, 2018a, p. 28)

It is therefore unsurprising that on typical days 30%-50% of training spaces are not utilised by the Polmont young men. On the other hand, waiting lists for classes result in prisoners waiting months.

During the pandemic, prisoners' access to fresh air was reduced from 60 minutes to 30 minutes. Recreation was restricted to 45 minutes a day with activities including pool, table-tennis, X-Box, board games, quizzes and bingo. Boredom was noted by HMIPS especially among those "locked up for longer periods of time" (HMPIS, 2021, p. 17); they had access to jigsaws, puzzles, Lego, sketching pads, colouring-in-books and making kits. Access was provided to books, DVDs, CDs and games consoles. Against this context the 2020 HMIPS report is less than compelling:

> The prison assists prisoners to use their time purposefully and cons-tructively and provides a broad range of activities, opportunities and services based on the profile of needs of the prisoner population. Prisoners are supported to maintain positive relationships with family and friends in the community. Prisoners have the opportunity to participate in recreational, sporting, religious, and cultural activities. Prisoners' sentences are managed appropriately to prepare them for returning to their community. (HMPIS, 2021, p. 19)

Twenty-five prisoners were engaging in a radio show called 'The Juke Box' through email and telephone. Podcasts called Impact Arts are presented through the Media Centre. Digital learning is delivered through the Prison's television and radio station:

> a wide genre of topics including maths quizzes, British Sign Language, and health and wellbeing. They had also issued focus group forms and held focus groups with prisoners to identify what learning they would like to receive. In addition, they were creating a number of DVDs to be placed on the halls covering a wide range of subjects. (HMPIS, 2021, p. 21)

The term 'learning' is the typical discourse utilised over education to characterise the nature of the provision: prison 'work sheds' provide 'embedded learning'. Trades and practical skills were taught in the Work Sheds: "the Engineer, Bike, Painters, Plumbers, Bricklaying, and Paws for Progress Work Sheds were open, and prisoners were attending in small pods. The cook and garden work parties were also running. All residential areas had some prisoners attending activities or engaged in work" (HMIPS, 2021, p. 21). SPS ran "offender management programmes" premised on the philosophy of reducing reoffending. In conclusion, education and training in Polmont must be conceptualised in ways that account for a prisoner's readiness to learn, the violence inhering in the environment and pressures on the system to return prisoners to society who are employable and who do not reoffend. Political and public safety accountability within a criminal justice system undoubtedly colour the norms that lie behind the inspection reports which have an inevitable bias that constructs the secret world of the prison as palatable for a wider public.

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