

# **Fathers in Prison, Children in School: The Challenge of Participation**

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## Abstract

It is estimated that there are over 200,000 children in the United Kingdom affected by parental imprisonment each year. Research indicates that these separations are likely to have profound consequences for both parent and child; indeed it is now accepted that in most cases, continuing family contact is a major positive force in the process of rehabilitation and in the well-being of the children of prisoners.

There is a growing field of research developing in relation to the families and children of prisoners, highlighting good practice in how schools and other support groups can work with this group to ensure they are full involved in school life. This research however does not consider the extent to which imprisoned fathers are informed about or able to participate in the education of their primary school aged children.

This study seeks to examine the facilities and systems in place to allow fathers to keep abreast of the academic progress of their primary school aged children, to participate in their education and therefore be involved in a crucial part of their development. Semi-structured interviews are carried out with three groups of stakeholders– 5 headteachers of primary schools, 10 mothers of the children of male prisoners and 10 male prisoner fathers. The data from these interviews is then analysed and the key themes identified both within stakeholder groups and between them.

The study reveals that ‘fatherhood’ is developing; and demonstrates that our social expectations of the role and responsibilities of fathers is moving in an increasingly ‘participatory direction’. There is no work which explores the issues surrounding parental participation by imprisoned fathers in the education of their children. Schools demonstrated that whilst they have developed policies directed to meeting the needs of a wide range of pupils and families, children of imprisoned fathers are, with rare exceptions, neglected. Mothers have a pivotal role to play in any policy directed towards imprisoned fathers’ involvement. Whilst realistic in their expectations, they are not unwilling to facilitate participation and they recognise the potential benefits for their children – not least for the legitimacy it can bring to the school experience. Imprisoned fathers were very positive in their attitudes to the prospect of increased levels of involvement.

The study highlights that the barriers to a policy initiative in this field are significant; in addition to the obvious resource implications, the responses of the headteachers interviewed clearly demonstrate considerable hesitation at the prospects of classroom teachers engaging directly (even if remotely) with imprisoned fathers. To have any real prospect of success, the teaching profession would be required to embrace the enterprise and acknowledge its obligations to children whose special needs and indeed rights, have been overlooked.

## Declaration

- I, Helen Veronica Josephine O’Keeffe confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Word count (exclusive of appendices, list of references and bibliography): 80506 words

Signed: *H.V.J O’Keeffe*

Date: 15/6/14

## Acknowledgements

I should like to begin by acknowledging the kindness of Charlie Owen my supervisor, without whose initial enthusiasm and encouragement, my research would never have begun and without whose ongoing guidance and direction I could not have enjoyed the privilege of working at the Thomas Coram Research Unit. Throughout this process he has continued to challenge my thinking and support my development as a novice academic.

My thanks go to all those who have contributed to this study in so many different ways, including the headteachers, but particularly acknowledging the prisoners and their families, without whose input and honest reflections both formally and informally, this study would not have been possible. I am grateful to so many people at the charity, Partners of Prisoners (POPs) who offered a great deal of help and support in arranging interviews with prisoners' families and the prisoners themselves and were always welcoming and remarkably flexible. I would also like to thank HM Prison Service for allowing access to one of their prisons to allow this study to take place.

Finally, I particularly want to thank my husband, Damian O'Keeffe and my parents, Kevin and Winefride Kearns. Their patience and their belief in me and my abilities throughout this process have been unfailing and their constant practical support has made this project a reality.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Chapter 1 Introduction

The central purpose of this study is to explore a number of educational issues which arise from the imprisonment of the fathers of primary school aged children. My points of departure include (1) a widespread acceptance of the claim (reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1999) that children have a right to the engagement of both parents in their upbringing in general and in their education in particular; (2) that a child's chances of education and social achievement are likely to be enhanced by the active involvement/engagement of both parents in that upbringing; and (3) that the educational implications of the separation of fathers by incarceration for this potential enhancement has been largely neglected.

These issues will be pursued in the course of both an analysis of the existing research and by considering the findings from a modest empirical study of the views and aspirations of some key stakeholders in relation to these issues, namely the headteachers of a number of primary schools; the mothers of children whose fathers are serving a prison sentence and imprisoned fathers of primary school aged children.

Before turning to the substance of this work it is necessary to reveal my own perspectives and specifically my views on the importance of a topic which has received relatively little attention from within the educational research community. Later in this chapter I say something of the particular personal experiences which brought these issues to my attention; for present purposes it is important to highlight a growing awareness of the contrast between the claims made for the 'rights of the child' as these are reflected in educational policy, and the reality 'on the ground' for those many children whose prospects are blighted by the interlocking consequences of social, economic and cultural disadvantages, further reinforced by the loss, through imprisonment, of a father. To state my position at the outset, I have concluded that it is reasonable to argue, even on the basis of the limited fieldwork undertaken for this study, that there is a clear

case for seeking to develop a policy agenda directed towards realising the rights of the children of imprisoned fathers to have those fathers engage, to as full an extent as possible, in their education.

Clearly this study resides on the border between the theory, policy and practice of education and the theory policy and practice of an important aspect of the criminal justice system. I acknowledge that the issues which I seek to raise have profound implication that go beyond the traditional limits of educational research and practice. Whilst I shall acknowledge the possible rehabilitative benefits of prisoner fathers' engagement in their children's education, any penal policy issues which my research reveals cannot be addressed in detail in the course of this work.

## **1.2 Context – The Issues**

i) Research indicates that children benefit from parental involvement in their education (DCSF, 2007b; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) and considerable time, effort and resources are devoted to nurturing this involvement (Feiler, 2010). It is similarly argued that the success of prison as a rehabilitative experience can be (but not exclusively) influenced by the extent to which involvement in family life is sustained over the course of a prison sentence (Morris, 1965; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

ii) The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that each child has the right (when it is not detrimental to their health or well-being) to have contact with and engagement of both parents in their well-being and education - a right which is almost certainly engaged by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and domestically the Human Rights Act.

iii) A potentially significant point of contact exists between education policy and penal policy at the interface between imprisoned parents, the schools which their children attend and the experiences of those children and their imprisoned parents.

This study will argue that the primary school aged children of male prisoners have the right to the involvement of their imprisoned father in their education for their personal benefit and well being (while recognising that in a small number of



cases, this will not be safe or appropriate). It will seek to address the following questions:-

- 1. To what extent is there potential for imprisoned fathers to be fully involved in the education of their primary school aged children and if so, should this be encouraged.**
- 2. Is there a potential interface between the education system and criminal justice system in relation to this proposal?**
- 3. What kinds of ideas, norms and beliefs operate in the school education system in relation to parental involvement?**
- 4. What are the implications for educational and penal policy of these findings?**

*In seeking to answer these questions, the perspectives of the following stakeholders are sought:-*

- *Mothers of prisoners' children*
- *Offenders currently serving in a UK prison who have primary school aged children*
- *Headteachers*

### **1.3 My position as a researcher**

Before attempting to develop a conceptual framework for the study, it is necessary to consider my 'personal interests' (Ravitch and Riggan, 2012, p.11) and professional motivations for carrying out this research. Prior to my current role in Higher Education I was employed as a teacher in a primary school in the North West of England. The school was located in a challenging area of a large city where children were regularly experiencing the imprisonment of a parent – predominantly fathers. In some cases this was for relatively short periods (returning to their role intermittently between sentences), in others, the sentences were longer. In these cases the school elected to communicate either with the remaining parent or, when required, Social Services. Post release, a father would return to the family context and attempt the challenging task of re-establishing his identity as a father (Visher, 2011) or be required to do this in a non-resident capacity. Engagement in their child's education post-release was patchy. It was rare they attended parent's evenings, choosing to rely on their partner for this

information. It appeared they had become de-skilled in their role, even if involvement had been minimal prior to imprisonment.

From the perspective of the child, it became evident that worry and excitement were experienced prior to a visit and a sense of disappointment was evident on return. Frustration was an overriding emotion due to the timescale and often adult focussed content of visits. From the perspective of the teacher, this was a challenge. As staff we had received no training in relation to this group of children and we had developed a routine of reverting to communication with the mother upon the imprisonment of a father. The imprisoned father was no longer considered in his own right or in relation to the needs of the child in our care.

This experience was compounded by the imprisonment of a member of my husband's family. While waiting for visits to begin I read the noticeboards in the visitors' centre. On a particular occasion the Storybook Dads scheme (Berry, 2006) was advertised. This led me to some initial research into the scheme and this suggested some alternative ways in which imprisoned fathers could become more involved with their children and particularly in their education.

Both experiences resulted in my decision to examine the research questions posed above. Mason (2002) argues for the importance of every researcher being in a position to 'know where they stand' (p21) in relation to their personal position, interests and motivations. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) support this but add the importance of the researcher knowing and being able to demonstrate 'why it matters' as a topic. (p.3). It is also important to note at this point that although I have a background in Education, I do not approach this research biased towards the school position.

The primary purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to locate the issues and questions identified at the start within the contexts from which they have emerged. The specific objectives are to:-

- Outline the key academic and public policy debates on the general issues surrounding parental participation in children's education, highlighting a

number of conceptual frameworks applied in the course of this study, identifying one which has been particularly influential in shaping its execution.

- Identify a number of implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) for those issues.
- Provide a rationale for the focus of this study of fathers and specifically the imprisoned fathers of primary school aged children.

#### **1.4 The emergence of the children's rights movement and the implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

The rights agenda expanded rapidly from the 1940s onwards - an expansion which was characterised by demands for recognition of a much wider range of rights than would have been conceivable by the giants of the enlightenment.

The movement for the recognition of the rights of children forms a significant part of that expansion. Jane Fortin (2005) argues for the location of that development within the context of the emergence in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of 'childhood' as a distinct status and the consequent erosion of the contention that children are the 'property' of their families, particularly of their fathers. A necessary implication of this traditional position was that public power must not intervene to regulate or direct what are private family relationships.

An attempt to unpick the complex social, economic and political forces and processes which resulted in the emergence of what is now an international children's rights movement would go well beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless it is important to acknowledge the extent to which that movement, finds its most ambitious expression to date in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As with all such documents the Convention represents an attempt to establish, at the level of general principle, those rights which children possess and in so doing to place the responsibility for securing those

rights both on the appropriate public authorities and on those individuals and groups who have care of children.

The extent to which the Convention strikes an appropriate balance between the rights of children and the rights of parents and others, together with the question of whether the rights identified in the Convention should be enforceable in domestic law, remain a topic for research and discussion, for example in CRAE (2008) and Freeman (2002). The objective of these limited observations is to locate the discussion which follows within a children's rights framework.

The UN Convention articles which have a particular bearing on this study of the children of male prisoners are:-

Article 9 (3) 'Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests.'

Article 18 (1) 'Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.'

Article 18 (2) 'For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.'

(United Nations General Assembly, 1989)

These provide an 'ideal' situation where regular contact with both parents is maintained despite separation, parents share their common responsibilities

equally in these circumstances and when required the state will support parents in achieving these ideals. The conventions are challenging for all families affected by separation in whatever form but there are certain circumstances where the principles identified may be even more of a challenge or where certain key questions must be asked.

Reasons for the separation of a child from a parent can be numerous. These include, divorce, long term marital separation, parental work arrangements, the illness of a parent or their financial circumstances. In each of these cases, contact may be restricted but in the majority of cases, the parent has some control over the level of contact available. One group of children for whom this is not possible and whose contact with their parent is very restricted are the children of prisoners. This is a very specific group for whom the above convention articles are central, but for whom, realising these can be particularly challenging (Action for Prisoners Families, 2012; Robertson, 2012).

It is also important to note the implications of Article 9 (3) which includes the phrase 'except if it is contrary to the child's best interests' (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Clearly there are situations when upholding the rights of children to the involvement of their parents has the potential to be problematic. Particularly in circumstances where contact is not in the best interests of the child, where there is for example, a history of violence or abuse against a child (Fetherstone and Peckover, 2007; Harne, 2011; Holden and Barker, 2004), this may not be deemed appropriate.

For the purposes of this study three central issues arise in relation to the children of prisoners; (a) from a children's rights perspective, should children of imprisoned parents be treated as possessing a presumptive right to have their parents' participation in their upbringing and more particularly in their education? (b) to what extent have the responsible public institutions addressed this issue, particularly with regard to the rights of children with imprisoned fathers? (c) does the empirical evidence currently available support the proposition that the participation of imprisoned fathers in the education of their children could and

should be pursued as a legitimate public policy objective in order to provide children with their right to this involvement?

There are aspects of the UNRC which have enjoyed considerable academic and research attention, for example children's right to be heard, their right to participation and their right to safety and security (Clark, 2008; May, 2005; Sinclair 2004). However there are other equally important convention claims, including those highlighted in the articles cited above, which stipulate the right of children to contact with both parents to ensure 'child-rearing' responsibilities can be facilitated, which have been relatively neglected. Education is a key element of this responsibility and the Convention acknowledges the rights of children to their parents' involvement in their 'upbringing and development.' Scott and Codd (2010) for example note (in the context of those parents and children with whom this study is concerned) that:-

'The legal status of prisoners' children is a newly emergent field and there is much scope for greater challenging of the hardships suffered by prisoners' children with reference to the ECHR and other international instruments (Marshall, 2008, p.158)'

It is acknowledged that children who live within disadvantaged backgrounds, are likely to achieve lower educational and social outcomes than those of their advantaged peers (Carpentier, 2007). Scott and Codd (2010) argue that the imprisonment of a parent is 'one more problem' for children who are already experiencing multiple difficulties and social exclusion (Golden, 2005)' (p.148). This group often does not have those advantages which are so influential in securing educational and social success. Parental involvement is widely acknowledged to be a significant factor in a child's successful education (DCSF, 2007b, 2008a; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Harris and Goodall, 2008) although there is little discussion regarding the rights of the child to this input. However, set within the context of the Convention this is a central issue.

Groups highlighted as facing particular challenges in relation to parental involvement include fathers, non-resident fathers, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who are perceived to have a range of often 'complex'

social problems (Feiler, 2010; James, 2010). Jones and Welch (2010) build on this by revealing that those who work with children hold a powerful position in advancing their own values and beliefs relating to parental involvement ahead of the needs of the children with whom they are working. Assumptions are made that parents do not want to be involved or are 'too lazy' to be involved (Page, 2009; Tveit, 2009) and therefore schools do not always make efforts to engage them.

Inter-agency working can be seen as integral to the establishment of the rights of children, particularly in relation to education (DCSF, 2007a). The death of Victoria Climbié in 2000 (Laming, 2003) ensured that practices relating to inter-agency working changed forever both locally and nationally (Tan, 2011). It was established that strong links between all services, coupled with high levels of communication at all levels led to the best support and outcomes for the child. More recent Government documentation including The Children's Plan (2007) and The Common Assessment Framework (2012) have since been implemented in schools and local authorities. While inter-agency communication has developed significantly, it is evident that the rights of the child to the involvement of their parents in education are still not being considered, particularly in relation to parents (fathers) in prison (Morgan et al, 2013; O'Keeffe, 2013). For their rights to be addressed, schools and local authorities would need to be engaging in regular systems of contact with a range of agencies, including the prison service.

Moving to consider the implementation of these rights, evidence exists that indicates the ongoing 'educentric' (CRAE, 2008) approach to addressing the rights of the child is proving difficult for some schools with the message that 'putting schools at the centre of the provision in the delivery of a rights-driven strategy is not without its challenges' (Tan, 2011, p.113). Schools find that there is a blurring of boundaries in roles and responsibilities and changes and developments in the roles of staff can be difficult (Anning, 2005). This however, should not prevent inter-agency working taking place. There are examples of outstanding practice relating to other groups of children including, Gypsy Traveller Communities (DfES, 2003) and children with English as an Additional Language. Inter-agency working to protect the rights of children with a parent in

prison is far patchier (Codd, 2008; Morgan et al. 2013; Scott and Codd, 2010), although there are examples of developing practice:-



## **Gloucester City Council – Example of Developing Practice**

The council currently has:-

- A policy for the education of children with a parent or close relative in prison
- Information for schools on the education of children with a parent or close relative in prison
- A book list for schools to refer to
- Parents and families guide for children with a parent or close relative in prison
- Information leaflets for families

They make the following commitments in relation to their policy:-

Gloucestershire County Council and National Offender Management Services South West (NOMS SW) will work in partnership to improve the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes for children of offenders, encourage engagement of statutory and voluntary agencies and promote integrated working to raise awareness of this group in the community.

- Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Services will ask all schools to identify the designated named person with the responsibility of children with a parent in prison, and young offenders, at the start of each academic year. For pre-school settings, primary phase, special schools, pupil referral centres and alternative provision the head teacher or manager will be presumed to be the named person unless the LA is informed otherwise
  - Gloucestershire County Council will develop and maintain a webpage with the contact details of named LA staff who will provide information, advice and guidance together with associated links to partner agencies and relevant documents for professionals and families on the public website
  - Gloucestershire County Council Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) will promote partnership working with adult services to encourage parents and carers to inform a child's school should a parent be imprisoned subject to information sharing procedures
  - Gloucestershire County Council (CYPS) will promote partnerships with post -16 education providers to support young people with a parent in prison
  - Gloucestershire County Council School Governor Services will promote the identification of a named governor in each school and the implementation of this policy in Gloucestershire Schools
  - Gloucestershire County Council, HMP Gloucester, Castle Gate Family Trust and Gloucestershire Probation will continue to work in partnership to develop support and services for children and young people with a parent in prison locally.  
Castle Gate Family Trust has secure funding for two years and can offer:
    - One to one support for children and young people, around the issue of having a parent or close relative in prison
    - Help to maintain communication and family ties via letter writing, activities and assisted visits to the prison where appropriate
    - Support for parents and signposting to additional specialised support for prisoners families
    - Information for professionals and workshops highlighting consequences of offending for young people and the effects it may have on their family
  - HMP Gloucester will identify a named person to act as a point of reference for enquiries relating to parents who are prisoners in that prison and other prisons
  - Gloucestershire County Council (CYPS) will promote links with prisons outside of the county
  - Agencies that have contributed to this policy will be asked to continue to meet on an annual basis in order to celebrate good practice and review the policy
- (Gloucester County Council 2010)**

'Educentric' (CRAE, 2008) and 'schoolcentric' (Lawson, 2003) approaches present challenges when seeking to consider parental involvement in education. Both assume that education is provided by schools and the definition of parental involvement is to 'support' what is done in school. Concerns are then raised when parents 'fail to execute their prescribed role established by the school.' (Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Parents educate their children in a range of different ways, instilling interests and values (Coleman, 1998; GTC, 2008, Macbeth, 1993). It is also necessary for schools to recognise the variety of families and family circumstances that make up each class and each group of children they work with (Souto-Manning and Swick, 2006), in this study, particularly the children of prisoners. The recommendation of the identification of children of prisoners and the subsequent support they are offered can serve to impact upon them in a negative, rather than positive way. It can lead to 'negative labelling and stigmatisation' (Comfort, 2007; Scott and Codd, 2010) and instances of bullying. This can lead parents to be very cautious about schools knowing their circumstances.

Every Child Matters (DCSF, 2005) sought to address the rights of children and inter-agency working. It is now acknowledged that although a practical and helpful baseline for ensuring children have the right outcomes, it does not focus upon the rights and obligations of children and schools (Henricson and Bainham, 2005). It includes a consideration of the ways in which children's life outcomes can be improved by the five key principles, but does not refer to the rights of children within this.

- being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
- staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect
- enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
- making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
- economic well-being: not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life.

(DCSF, 2003, p.6)

## 1.5 Parental Involvement in Education

It is widely accepted that parental involvement in a child's education can have positive outcomes for children (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011).

'Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups'. (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003, p.4).

### Defining Parental Involvement

Whilst the objective of encouraging parental involvement in education is now acknowledged as a policy objective, this 'consensus' masks a good deal of disagreement as to its precise meaning. As Carpentier and Lall (2005) argue:-

It includes parents coming into schools informally; say for coffee and biscuits, as well as more formally, such as meetings with teachers or taking part in their children's education through classroom participation. In some cases it includes parents' own learning. Improved communication with the school through home-school liaison workers or parental liaison workers also impacts on how children and their parents feel about their school'. (p.4)

This demonstrates how inherently difficult it is to define PIE. Despite its length and depth, this definition does not encompass all elements of PIE. In contrast, the DCSF (2008) claims there are two strands of PIE - involvement in the school life and support of the child at home. Each parent will define this differently (Carpentier and Lall, 2005; Feiler, 2010) and will require different levels of involvement for their individual needs and those of their child.

Desforges and Abouchar (2003) agree with elements of the above, but also include in their definition, additional elements including:-'intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship... and participation in school governance' (p.26)

It is argued, that the definition of parental involvement has become very 'schoolcentric' (Lawson, 2003). However, Tveit (2009) asserts that researchers are now 're-thinking the traditional parental involvement paradigm' (p.289) and moving away from the traditional meaning of home and school based activities highlighted previously. She notes that there has been a failure to recognise the differences in social class and the varying perspectives this can bring on the definition of parental involvement and stresses the moves that researchers are now making towards parents contributing to the overall definition of parental involvement. Parents may be participating, but not necessarily in a way approved of or validated by the school up until now.

### Theoretical Models of PIE

As research and policy have developed, a number of models of PIE have emerged, each building on previous models and offering a variety of perspectives on this concept. Within a study such as this, it is important to reflect on these models and how they have contributed to the overall development of the conceptual model of PIE which is continuing to emerge and develop. It would not be possible to highlight all, given the now wide range of those available, however, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) have identified those which have been most significant in their impact:-

*Satte (1994)* - three dimensional framework of commitment, training and variety

*Lueder (2000)* – 'energy in and energy out' model

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) – four key elements for enhancing PIE – approach, attitudes, atmosphere and actions

*Swap (1993)* – hierarchy of PIE – protective model school to home transmission → curriculum enrichment model partnership → model

*Hornby (2000)* – 8 types of PIE - communication, liaison, education, support, information, collaboration, resources and policy

*Epstein (2001)* – 6 types of PIE – parenting, communication, volunteering, home tutoring, involvement in decision making and collaboration with the community.

(Hornby and Lafaele, 2011)

More thought provoking models of parental involvement have also been introduced however, in examples such as Hanafin and Lynch (2002) who claim there are 2 elements to the model of parental involvement – one strand (which is directed at parents on the periphery) focuses on interventions to improve contact, attainment and home-school links whereas strand 2 is aimed at all parents, which includes membership of school bodies. They argue that elements of parental involvement are aimed at middle class parents, thus excluding those who have very different, but equally important needs.

No single model has found universal acceptance among researchers but there are some similarities between these models and their ideas of best practice. Both DfE reviews and wider research have provided case studies and recommendations relating to good practice and these consider all parents. A number of researchers have begun to consider hard to reach parents (Carpentier and Lall, 2005; Feiler, 2010; Harris and Goodall, 2008).

### Government Approaches to PIE

PIE has been adopted as a central objective by government throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It has underpinned a wide range of policies and guiding principles issued to primary schools (DfES 2004, 2007b; DCSF 2007, 2008).

A number of research reports have been commissioned by successive Governments into all elements of PIE, from seeking parents' views on their own involvement and how involved they would like to be through to models of involvement and how schools can support this.

Peters, Seeds, Goldstein and Coleman (2007) carried out research for the DfES on parents' perspectives of their involvement in elements of their children's education. This included how involved they became in the wider life of the school, how well they felt the school reported to them, how much they felt their child's education was their responsibility and how well the school communicated with them and how regularly. This report compared the results with previous studies in 2004 and 2001 and the data indicated an overall increase in parental

involvement in school life, an understanding of the importance of parental participation and an increase in the numbers of parents engaging in activities with their children.

A further evidence-based report was published in 2011. This again, highlighted the advantages of PIE and reviewed examples of good practice. This document revealed that there were still elements of PIE which had not been adequately researched but identified some key guiding principles which could be accepted as central to any PIE intervention strategy:-

#### 'Planning

Parental engagement must be planned for and embedded in a whole school or service strategy. The planning cycle will include a comprehensive needs analysis; the establishment of mutual priorities; ongoing monitoring and evaluation of interventions; and a public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to a strategic plan.

#### Leadership

Effective leadership of parental engagement is essential to the success of programmes and strategies. A parental engagement programme is often led by a senior leader, although leadership may also be distributed in the context of a programme or cluster of schools and services working to a clear strategic direction.

#### Collaboration and engagement

Parental engagement requires active collaboration with parents and should be pro-active rather than reactive. It should be sensitive to the circumstances of all families, recognise the contributions parents can make, and aim to empower parents.

#### Sustained improvement

A parental engagement strategy should be the subject of ongoing support, monitoring and development. This will include strategic planning which embeds parental engagement in whole-school development plans, sustained support, resourcing and training, community involvement at all levels of management, and a continuous system of evidence based development and review.

(Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011, p.9)

#### Factors affecting parental involvement in education?

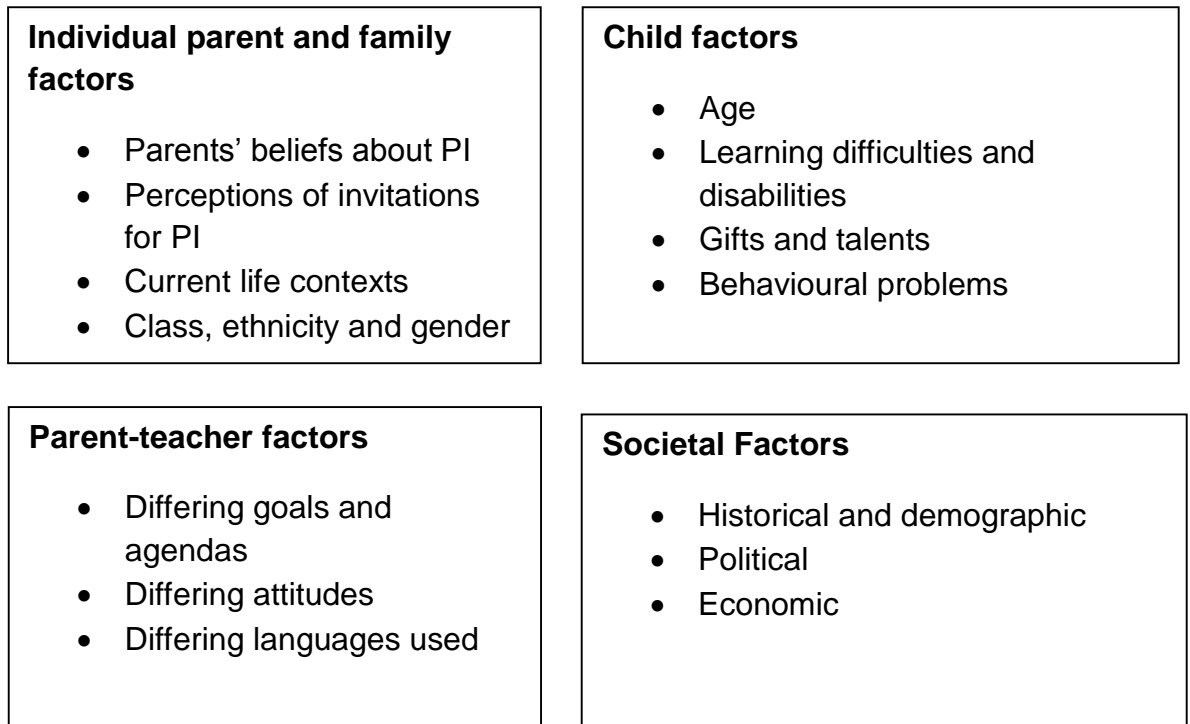
The definition of 'hard to reach' parents (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002; Harris and Goodall, 2009; Hornby and Lafaele, 2011; Tveit, 2009) can be said to be

'inhabiting the fringes of school or society as a whole' (Crozier and Davies, 2007, p.295) from an occupational, financial, gender, cultural or personal education perspective. The PIE models identified earlier do not include reference to this and the impact it can have. Harris and Goodall (2009) believe that certain models of parental engagement can result in a negative impact 'reinforcing existing power divisions' resulting in reduced support for hard to reach parents (p.279). There is an expectation that parents must fit into a particular model, regardless of their needs resulting in schools becoming hard to reach (Crozier and Davies, 2007).

Both the Government and researchers have suggested ways in which schools can focus particularly on involving these groups for example, Carpentier and Lall (2005) DfES (2007), Edwards and Alldred (2000), Hanafin and Lynch (2002) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011). Examples of this have included: - regular home-school communication (although it can also be argued that this does not lead to true involvement (Crozier and Davies, 2007), after school meetings, newsletters, classes for parents to attend and opportunities for parents to join in lessons/activities alongside their children. Successive governments have continued to carry out research to determine particular groups of hard to reach parents and what might work for them (DfES, 2004; DCSF 2007a and b; DCSF 2008b, Goodall and Vorhaus 2011). However, no one system has yet been effective and the research continues to demonstrate the need for schools to respond to individual parents/groups of parents and their needs, rather than pursuing a one size fits all approach, the result being to alienate those who most need the support.

It has also been argued that this can have a potentially negative impact upon the wider parental community. If schools are spending significant amounts of time engaging a small number of hard to reach parents, less time may be spent on the remainder (Harris and Goodall, 2009). However, if schools were targeting the specific needs of parents they knew they had in their school, this would no longer present a challenge. Parents cannot be seen as a homogenous group, including the group classed as 'hard to reach'. Within this group there will be significant sub-sets of parents, each with widely different support and engagement needs. (Crozier and Davies, 2007).

The most detailed model in relation to barriers to parental involvement is shared by Hornby and Lafaele (2011). This model has been adopted for the purposes of this study:-



Model of factors acting as barriers to PIE (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011, p.39).

### Examples of Good Practice

It is now recognised that schools can no longer wait for parents to approach them, they must begin to move towards the local community and support parents through this alternative route (NCLSCS, 2010). Ofsted (2010) highlight the need for schools to work with the local community and through it to improved educational achievement and the feeling of belonging for families. Estyn (2009) showed that:

‘community focussed schools can show how large scale projects can enthuse the community and give pride to the school and its pupils. Parents of pupils at these schools feel strongly that they are part of the school and report that they want to be involved.’ (p4)



Studies and research have shown that there have been varying levels of success in improving PIE (Becta, 2010; Carpentier and Lall, 2005; Cullen et al., 2011; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; NCLSCS, 2010; Ofsted, 2010). NCLSCS (2010) cites an example of employing parent support workers, based in schools, but who work predominantly in the local community, with parents and carers, gaining trust and supporting them in working with schools. Other examples have included, a school café, where parents can meet informally and engage with school staff if needed. This is moving towards a 'hub' model of PIE (Estyn, 2009) where parents feel that the school is at the centre of the community. In addition, Crozier and Davies (2007) suggests that the personality of primary school teachers can have a positive impact on parental involvement. Those who were 'outgoing and friendly' and seen to be reaching out, developed positive parental relationships and showed a level of individual interest in their needs.

The DfE review of provision of PIE (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011) lists projects nationwide addressing this need. These include schemes to improve literacy levels of parents, supporting them engaging with schools, informing them about developments in education and working with local communities.

### PIE for imprisoned fathers

There is an emerging body of literature focusing on the challenges faced by the families of prisoners (Boswell, 2002, Codd, 2008; Comfort, 2008; Condry, 2007; Murray, 2005; O'Keeffe, 2013; Scott and Codd, 2010). Discussion will be developed in Chapter 2; it is enough at present to identify the key themes raised in this literature, these include: - the negative impact upon family life, family relationships, financial concerns, the children of prisoners, the stigma attached to having a partner/parent in prison and overall well-being. In relation to well-being the 2012 Good Childhood Report, highlighted 'children who have experienced recent changes in family structure are twice as likely as other children to be experiencing low well-being' (The Children's Society, 2012, p.20).

When considering involvement of fathers in prison, it is important to consider the definition of 'parent' and 'family' in these circumstances and the complexities of

family life. Scott and Codd (2010) point out that ‘sometimes de facto parenting is more significant than biological parenting, such as when ‘mum’s boyfriend’, for example is more of a day-to-day father than a child’s biological father’ (p.146). Assumptions can no longer be made about a nuclear family and this has implications for approaches to PIE for fathers in prison. For some fathers, there are challenges in the basic building or re-building of relationships with their children following their imprisonment (Walker, 2010) and these relationships must be acknowledged when considering developing a PIE scheme.

The Hornby and Lafaelle’s (2011) model of barriers to PIE identifies ‘current life contexts’ as one barrier under the heading of ‘individual parent and family factors barrier.’ Fathers in prison are experiencing one life context which is currently preventing them from engaging in the education of their children.

**Individual parent and family factors**

- Parents’ beliefs about PI
- Perceptions of invitations for PI
- Current life contexts
- Class, ethnicity and gender

Walker’s (2010) study of offending fathers effectively illustrated the extent to which they valued engagement with their children and specific areas included activities with them, collecting them from school, knowing about their school work. She highlights the importance of fathers and fatherhood. This involvement is also important in allowing fathers to demonstrate their ‘positive intentions’ (Yocum and Nath, 2011) to their family, with the potential for them to demonstrate a commitment to changing in the future.

If this were to happen, it would be necessary for schools to be involved and to understand the circumstances children were facing. A growing body of literature is now beginning to consider the role schools might play in supporting the children of prisoners (APF, 2011; DCSF/MOJ, 2007; Morgan et al., 2011, Morgan et al., 2013, Morrison, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2008; Scott and Codd, 2010) and highlighting the need for more research in this area. It is true that there is more that needs to

be considered in relation to this and it cannot be assumed that school involvement would be necessarily welcomed by all. This study will seek to consider whether fathers in prison could be more involved in the education of their children and whether this would be welcomed by stakeholders.

## **1.6 Rationale for the focus on fathers and specifically fathers in prison**

There can be little doubt that the imprisonment of a parent is likely to have profound consequences for the life chances of a child; however, the decision to limit this study to the possible consequences of imprisoned fathers requires some justification. This is to be found in (i) the increasing recognition of the significance for the wellbeing of children of their fathers' involvement in their lives; (ii) the very substantial gender imbalance of parent child separation as a consequence of parental imprisonment, resulting in far more men being imprisoned than women and (iii) the relative academic neglect of the importance of imprisoned fathers for their children's wellbeing compared to the substantial body of work that has been undertaken on the impact of imprisoned mothers (Burgess and Flynn, 2013; Codd, 2003; Nacro, 2001; Prison Reform Trust, 2000; Sheehan et. al., 2013).

(i) Our understanding of fatherhood has developed in recent decades (Lamb, 2005; Pleck, 2007); these changes will be explored in detail in the course of Chapter 2. At this juncture it will, perhaps, be adequate to draw attention to the growing body of research which seeks to establish an association between children's wellbeing and academic achievement, and the involvement of their fathers in their lives (DCSF, 2007; Seligman, 2011; The Children's Society, 2012). Pleck et al's (1985) tripartite concept of father involvement reflects upon engagement, accessibility and responsibility and it is necessary to consider how these three aspects can be applied to imprisoned fathers. Research findings reveal that where mothers are the sole parental presence, the consequent imbalance has a negative impact upon children's long term outcomes both emotional and academic (DCSF, 2008; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011) and that fathers' involvement adds balance to the life of a child and stability in family relationships (DCSF, 2008). This stability is likely to be lost or undermined when one parent is absent from the family home for an extended period (although in

many circumstances there can still be arrangements for regular contact). This situation is likely to be exacerbated when a parent is absent due to imprisonment. Not least because the opportunities for regular and 'participatory' contact are, to say the least, restricted – if they exist at all when considered within the context of Pleck et al's (1985) tripartite of paternal involvement.

(ii) The imbalance between mothers and fathers serving custodial sentences is striking. Current estimates suggest that there are 150,000 school aged children with an imprisoned father, whilst the number of mothers serving custodial sentences is below 8,000, forming less than 10% of the prison population. Moreover, the length of the custodial sentences imposed on women tends to be shorter than those handed down to men. This reflects both a substantial differential in the nature of the offences of which women are likely to be convicted and the sentencing discretion which the courts will often exercise in circumstances where a women offender has substantial child care responsibilities.

(iii) Significant academic attention has been directed towards mothers in prison for example, Caddle and Crisp (1997), Carlen and Worrall (2004), Codd (2003), Corston (2007), Gelsthorpe and Morris (2002) and NACRO (2001). The most recent Prison Reform Trust statistics document includes a section on prisoners with children, focusing mainly on mothers (Prison Reform Trust, 2010). These findings and others confirm the importance of women's role as the primary carers of their children, but the absence of similar research regarding imprisoned men provides an important justification for pursuing the issues raised in this study

This chapter has outlined the key argument this study is seeking to make in relation to whether imprisoned fathers can be involved in the education of their primary school aged children, the questions it aims to answer and the underlying theories of parental involvement, children's rights and the interface between the systems of education and the criminal justice system. It argues that theories of parental involvement and children's rights are fundamental to the consideration of whether male prisoners can be more involved in the education of their children.

The next chapter will consider the literature underpinning this with a particular focus on: the theories related to the identity of fatherhood, fathers involvement in the education of their children, fathers in prison, the children of prisoners and the role of schools in supporting the children of prisoners.

## Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Chapter 2 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature related to the key themes underpinning the examination of fathers in prison and the children of prisoners. These are:-

- the major theoretical perspectives relating to the concept of fatherhood
- Government policy and wider research relating to fathers' involvement in the education of their children
- the developing body of research relating to fathers in prison
- the growing discussion of and limited evidence in relation to the position of the children of prisoners
- the relatively recent academic discourse surrounding the role of schools in relation to imprisoned fathers and their children.

The chapter will begin with a consideration of the key theoretical approaches to the concept of fatherhood and its development over the last century. It will examine the changing roles fathers have adopted (and have been expected to adopt) over this time and will demonstrate how the political and academic debate highlights the significant role they now play and have the potential to play in the development of their children.

The focus will then narrow to consider policy and research findings relating the role of fathers in the education of their children. Parental involvement at its broadest level has been considered in Chapter 1 and evidence indicates this continues to be a significant area of attention by schools. This chapter will consider how and if this relates to fathers specifically, examining case studies of parental engagement and reviewing existing research, highlighting the attempts

that have been made to encourage greater involvement of fathers and the reasons for this.

The focus will then shift to reflect upon one specific group of fathers – those in prison, with the aim of analysing the growing body of literature produced over the past 25 years and considering how academic and social understanding of the position and roles of imprisoned fathers has developed during this period.

Having considered the three key foci relating to fathers, the chapter will then turn to a review of the growing academic discussion relating to the children of prisoners (with a focus on male prisoners). Work completed solely on prisoners' children and more generally on prisoners' families will be included here as the two are not always separated within research studies.

The final section will examine the embryonic discourse emerging which is considering the role schools have the potential to play in supporting imprisoned fathers and their children more broadly and more specifically in relation to their education.

Given the breadth of this topic, it is possible only to examine the research and literature closely related to the themes listed above, whilst acknowledging the significant field surrounding each of the topics. The majority of the literature used is based upon research and policy from within the United Kingdom, except where there are seminal European and US studies which demand consideration due to their significant contribution to the debate. The decision to adopt this approach was influenced by the varying size and philosophy of those prison systems and the focus of the study relating to children and schools within the UK.

## **2.2 Fatherhood**

The chapter begins with a consideration of the theme of fatherhood at the most general level, exploring, in particular, the perceived development of the role of fathers and thereby exposing the challenges faced by imprisoned fathers in attempting to fulfil these revised roles.

## The changing definition of fatherhood

Within the current policy context, with its emphasis on the importance of 'family' and family values and the publication of The Good Childhood Report (Layard and Dunn, 2009), followed by the updated Well-being report in 2012 (The Children's Society, 2012), the concept of fatherhood has been the subject of much research over the last decade and is considered by Collier (1995) and Featherstone (2009) to have become a significant political target. Both the Government and a number of charities (The Fatherhood Institute, Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and The National Parenting Institute) emphasise the importance of fathers and encourage ongoing examination and redefinition of the concept of fatherhood.

Lewis and Lamb's (2007) review of academic perspectives provides an important starting point for the consideration of fatherhood. This detailed summary reveals some of the problems embedded within much of the research relating to fatherhood. These problems include the prevalence of 'theory-free' research where studies of fatherhood and relationships with children are not placed within specific theoretical frameworks (Lewis and Lamb, 2007). There is a brief reference to fathers in prison and discussion surrounding the developing research profile of this topic. The review brings the discussions relating to the research surrounding fatherhood right up to date and emphasises the shift towards more involved fathering. This has significant implications for my study where currently fathers are not in a position to become involved. They also consider the factors known to influence paternal involvement including cultural, economic, motivational and legal reasons (p.5). The report contributes much towards the establishment of a context for my research study and summarises key academic perspectives.

Pleck, Lamb and Levine's (1985) concept of father involvement is central to any consideration of the changing definition of fatherhood. They propose that there are three components to parental involvement – paternal engagement, accessibility and responsibility.



‘Paternal engagement – direct interaction with the child, in the form of caretaking or play or leisure.

Accessibility – availability to the child

Responsibility – making sure that the child is taken care of and arranging resources for the child’ (Pleck and Masciadrelli, 2004, p. 222)

This tripartite model reflects the move in the literature of fatherhood towards consideration of whether children were receiving enough fathering and the growing consideration of father absence whether that be physical or reflected in a lack of direct contact time with their child. This model has been adjusted over time by the authors who increasingly believe that the construct name of paternal involvement should now be re-termed as ‘positive paternal involvement’ (Pleck, 1997) given that consideration is generally given to activities demonstrating involvement, which are ‘likely to promote development’ (Pleck, 2007). In addition, this more recent review of paternal involvement theory, conceptualises father involvement as:-

‘including not only fathers’ time spent and activities with their children but also other aspects of fathering such as warmth, support, decision making and monitoring.’ (Pleck, 2007, p.197)

Carpenter (2002) argues that new and developing definitions of fatherhood have begun to emerge and Morgan et al. (2009) suggest that there is growing evidence of increasing equality between parents as carers. A number of researchers into fatherhood, notably Lamb (2004), Collier and Sheldon (2008), Featherstone (2009) and Gregory and Milner (2011) agree with the principle that the general debate has moved on in the last twenty years as demonstrated by Collier and Sheldon (2008) who suggest a link to the 1989 Children Act which emphasised the levels of responsibility placed upon mothers and fathers, thus presenting the view that fathers had a ‘significant and positive contribution to make to families, transcending the role of provider and encapsulating an historic shift from rights to responsibilities’ (Featherstone, 2009, p.137). The 1970s saw a change in the tone of the debate surrounding fatherhood as evidenced in Michael Lamb’s (1976) collection, ‘The Role of the Father in Child Development’, As Lamb explained in his 2004 edition, the contributors:-

'made concerted and often explicit efforts to demonstrate that fathers (a) indeed had a role to play in child development (b) were often salient in their children's lives, and (c) affected the course of their children's development, for good as well as for ill.' (Lamb, 2004 p,1).

The original publication in 1976 saw the writers attempting to identify emerging changes in the role of fatherhood, in an era in which fathers continued to be perceived as breadwinners and to occupy traditional roles. Three further editions have reflected continuing developments in the social construction of fatherhood over a thirty year period. In the most recent edition 'the contributors' focus was thus placed on more nuanced issues and concerns' (Lamb, 2004, p.1). Contributions now reflect upon for example, fathers from a range of cultures and gay fathers. The change in the focus of each edition helps to demonstrate the context for this study and to examine the ways in which scholars perceive fatherhood to have developed.

LaRossa (1988) however, contends that changes have been less significant than initially suggested, identifying two elements of fatherhood – the culture (norms, values, beliefs and expectations surrounding fatherhood) and the conduct (what is actually happening and what fathers actually do). He argues that these have not developed at the same speed, with conduct often progressing at a much slower rate than culture. He argues that much of the change in fatherhood has resulted from the changing role of mothers over time (returning to work and pursuing careers) a view supported by Collier and Sheldon (2008). This is the first of several debates within this chapter surrounding the role of mothers and their contribution to our developing definitions of fatherhood.

The history of the father's role and levels of involvement is discussed by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004). They chart and illustrate a gradual change in the role and an increase in involvement. Their proposal of three types of parental involvement - engagement, accessibility and responsibility, has significant implications when considering fathers in prison as it provides a model which assists our understanding of the challenges faced by fathers in this context.

The Fatherhood Institute (Burgess, 2007) produced a report examining 'Active Fatherhood'. It was originally prepared as a response to the Joint Policy Review on Children and Young People (Her Majesty's Treasury/DfES, 2006) but the researchers concluded that the content was relevant to a wider audience. It considers all aspects of fatherhood from fathers' involvement before birth, to the future of fathering. It is not based on any new research, but draws together research which has already been conducted, emphasising the increasing trend in father involvement and citing a range of supporting studies, e.g. Fisher et al. (1999) and Smeaton and Marsh (2006) who argue that there is an overall increase in the levels of fatherhood involvement. The report includes comparative data for the US and Australia and contributes to our understanding of how 'active fatherhood' is emerging in these countries. Whilst limited in depth, documents such as this reveal the importance of some central issues, therefore providing a starting point for further work.

More recently, research has begun to consider 'new' fatherhoods, for example, Gregory and Milner (2011) - an exploration of the social construction of fatherhood in the UK and France. Their focus is on 'two broad rationales for policy and legal intervention' and they identify these to be 'an optimistic perspective on fatherhood' and 'the results from the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its call for men to become more involved in the family' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p.589). The study identifies a new public agenda often called "new fatherhood". There is recognition of the pressures faced by fathers in contemporary society, where they are expected to balance work and family commitments and be prepared to 'renegotiate their gender roles at home' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p589). They identify the enormous changes in our understanding of the role of fathers; importantly, for the purposes of this study, it stresses that the 'new forms of masculine identity, based on new behaviours in the public and private spheres of work and family may be observable in everyday life, they are not (yet?) culturally dominant or even mainstream' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p589). It does however also recognise the role of policymakers in the definition of fatherhood and how policy interventions can gradually impact on social understanding and social reality.

In addition to the texts highlighted in this section of the chapter, there is a growing body of literature relating to groups of fathers requiring particular attention, for example, violent fathers (Harne, 2011), teenage fathers (Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2011) and non-resident fathers (Dunn et al., 2004; Flouri and Malmberg, 2012). It is beyond the scope of this study to consider each of these groups discretely; however, the literature surrounding non-resident fathers offers some helpful insights when considering imprisoned fathers and is worthy of consideration here. For each of these groups, changes to their engagement with their children and their role as fathers will be gradual and McBride and Lutz (2004) remind us that any changes made in how fathers are supported to develop their personal identities must be set within the context of theoretical models relating this e.g. ecological approach, social learning theory model and empowerment, focusing on 'identifying individual needs and attempting to give men a means of overcoming these difficulties independently' (McBride and Lutz, 2004 in Potter et al., 2013, p.25)

### Non-Resident Fathers

The term non-resident fathers is defined as fathers who do not reside in the same household as their children as a consequence of divorce, separation or termination of a relationship with the child's mother (Bradshaw et al., 1999; Dunn et al., 2004).

Bradshaw et al. (1999) point to a 'rapid increase in the prevalence of non-resident fathers and a complete absence of knowledge about their circumstances' (p2). They note the lack of an official register or other means of obtaining this information and define non-resident as most commonly: non-marital births, breakdown of relationships of partners and divorce or separation of married couples. They also explain that, in the past, the category of non-resident fathers would have included hospitalisation, imprisonment or working away from home. Whilst it is true that all these major causes have come to dominate the debate, the traditional explanations remain valid. Thus, there continues to be a substantial number of fathers currently in prison who are, clearly, non-resident, although not considered currently within the definitions of this group. The Prison Reform Trust

(2012a) highlighted there were 85,450 prisoners in England and Wales, who collectively have approximately 200,000 children. For over 90% of these children, the absent parent is a father (Prison Reform Trust, 2012a).

Bradshaw et al's UK based study surveyed 600 non-resident fathers and conducted two in-depth studies (within two sub-samples) based on qualitative interviews. The purpose of the survey was to gain an overall understanding of the lives of non-resident fathers and to learn how as a group they perceived their family life. Some fathers in Bradshaw's study sought to deny their status as non-resident, partly as a consequence of the immediate political context, namely, the development of the Child Support Agency and the associated stigma attached to this. Although the survey provides a helpful overview, the qualitative data from Bradshaw's work provides detailed and illuminating insights into the challenges encountered by non-resident fathers in relation to participation in family life. Further studies have developed the theme of participation and the practical difficulties experienced by non-resident fathers and their children including Kiernan (2006), Lewis et al (2002) and Minton and Pasley (2006). These studies reveal an area for consideration within my own research – the possibility that some prisoners may wish to deny that they are fathers.

Other studies have attempted to address questions surrounding the impact of non-resident fathers on the emotional and physical wellbeing of their children. Although there is no direct reference to imprisoned fathers in these works, the similarities in terms of their situation and experiences are striking. Amato and Gibreth (1999) and Dunn et al. (2004) call for a shift in emphasis from frequency of contact and practical implications, to a focus upon the wellbeing and emotional needs of children. Dunn et al. (2004) in their study of 162 children, examine the quality of their relationships with their non-resident fathers. This is a significant development and raises policy implications for the establishment of support systems. The question of these findings for imprisoned fathers and their children is central to my work. The authors emphasise the importance of avoiding the 'problem of single-reporters' (Dunn et al. 2004) by interviewing the children, and both parents. This is one of a number of studies conducted by Judy Dunn in

relation to the changing nature of families and parent-child relationships including Dunn et al. (2000) and Dunn and Deater-Deckhard (2001).

### The role of mothers

When considering the literature surrounding fatherhood, a review of the role of mothers is also required. In the context of this study, the orientating concept of 'maternal gatekeeping' (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Dunn, 2006) seems particularly appropriate. Allen and Hawkins define this as:

'a collection of beliefs and behaviours that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children' (1999, p.200).

Featherstone (2009) argues that 'women were to blame for not allowing men to care' (p.9) and the quality of marital relationships (Cummings et al., 2004). There are clear implications for the issues surrounding fatherhood and specifically for imprisoned fathers.

Maternal gatekeeping has provided a research framework for studies in the US and in the UK. Allen and Hawkins (1999) in their study of 622 mothers found three dimensions of this approach - mothers' reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters, external validation of a mothering identity and differentiated conceptions of family roles. They found that mothers were influenced by their cultural views of motherhood, feelings of power and their perceptions of their management of the home. Doucet's (2006) research into fathers who considered themselves to be primary caregivers for their children, highlighted that men required mothers to define their fathering for them emphasising that 'Interviews were haunted by the unseen presence of the child's mother' (p.216). Both studies therefore demonstrating the reliance men have on women for the parental role and the potential impact this could have on the identity of fathers trying to establish themselves within this as a role.

Whilst the concept of maternal gatekeeping impacts on both resident and non-resident fathers, it has particular implications for fathers in prison. Arditti et al.

(2005) found within their qualitative US study of 51 imprisoned fathers, that maternal gatekeeping had a profound influence on their experiences of life as imprisoned fathers. As one of a few studies which refers directly to maternal gatekeeping, it offers valuable insights; nevertheless, it is a small-scale work and is located within the US prison system. I know of no published research based on the UK prison system, focusing on the effects of mothers and their role in actively encouraging or preventing imprisoned fathers' involvement with their children. Clarke et al. (2005) refer briefly, in their study of imprisoned fathers' identity, to the perceived links between the quality of 'couple relationships' and the regularity of visits with their children but this is not the focus of their research.

More recent small-scale studies in the US and Israel including Fagan and Barnett (2003), McBride et al. (2005) and Gaunt (2008) continue to reflect on and apply the concept of maternal gatekeeping. These largely repeat arguments which have already been rehearsed and contribute very little that is new to the debate. Moreover, they concentrate on resident and non-resident fathers (defined as those who no longer live with their children due to divorce or separation) but do not address the experiences of more diverse fathering groups.

## **2.3 Fathers' Involvement in the Education of their Children**

### Parental Involvement in Education

The overarching theme of parental involvement is currently a significant focus of attention by schools, LAs and the DfE. There is an insistence of its importance and the benefits it offers to children both in terms of their educational experiences and eventual life chances. It would be useful to consider several examples of parental involvement and the relevant research that has been conducted. There is frequently a discrepancy between school expectations and parental understanding of such involvement; this is despite guidance produced by DfE and its predecessors, GTC, parental support groups and charities which stresses the importance and benefits of parental involvement in children's education.

Increasing interest in this area has been fuelled by Government documents which have emphasised the benefits of parental support (DfES 2004b, 2007, DCSF

2007b, 2008, Owen 2008). The most recent of these, focuses on two key issues relating to involvement, a) in the life of the school and b) supporting the child at home (DCSF, 2008). These documents examine the benefits of parental involvement, including early cognitive and social development, improved behaviour, calm emotional state and a general sense of wellbeing. Little attention is paid to those parents whose involvement may not be helpful and whose influence (without the appropriate support) might be considered damaging to the child's welfare.

Harris and Goodall (2008) examined the role of parents in education at a general level. Their study, focused on 100 secondary schools, draws a distinction between 'involving parents in schooling' and 'engaging parents in learning.' Their findings contend that schools are better able to involve parents in learning, through inviting them into school, supporting them within the community and through community activities.

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) consider parental engagement in education at its broadest level and present a range of case studies of good practice from around the country, outlining the strategies being implemented and their effectiveness. The overall aims of their review were to:

- highlight findings and conclusions from the evidence reviewed
- identify key themes and messages for practitioners and school leaders.

The study provides a useful overview of key developments in relation to parental engagement and offers examples of outstanding practice. It stresses the importance of 'getting parents on board' and the need for family learning to be prioritised within the school context.

Fuller consideration of the theories relating to parental involvement can be found in Chapter 1.

### Involvement of Fathers in the Education of their Children

There has been an emphasis on raising the status of fathers within education, examining their existing involvement and more recently, the involvement they



would welcome (DCSF, 2008). Research continues to suggest that fathers up until this point often felt excluded from the everyday education of their children (DCSF 2007, 2008) and a 'role inadequacy perspective' (Hawkins and Dollahite, 1997) had been adopted along with a belief fathers did not desire involvement as there were other focuses in their lives (Potter, 2012). The green paper, Every Child Matters (2003) green paper signalled the importance of fathers and the need for raising their profile in relation to education. Researchers and the DCSF have been examining the improvement in children's later life when such involvement took place (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004; Goldman, 2005; Lamb, 2005; Marsiglio et al. 2000; Potter and Carpenter 2008).

The more recent thinking from the DfE has been communicated through the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007a) and the 'Think Fathers' campaign (2008). Very recently, it has published documents such as Families in the Foundation Years (DfE/DoH, 2011) which address both parents equally, indicating the rights of both to equal engagement in the development of their child.

The Children's Plan and accompanying support strategies are based upon the principle that:-

'Families are the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable and resilient children. In our consultation, parents made it clear that they would like better and more flexible information and support that reflects the lives they lead. Our Expert Groups emphasised how important it is that parents are involved with policy affecting children and that we need particularly to improve how government and services involve fathers.' (DCSF, 2007a, p.17)

The document contains key references to fathers who are raising their children alone, non-resident fathers and those living in deprived areas. There is no specific mention of how imprisoned fathers might be involved at a level they would welcome. This document promises families additional support and lays particular emphasis upon the needs of 'the most vulnerable families', suggesting that 'parents who, for whatever reason, lack the confidence, motivation or time to get involved with their child's learning and development may need extra specialist help' (DCSF, 2007, p.21). This lays out a vision for the future of education and the importance of raising the extent of parental involvement levels particularly of

fathers; however, it is as yet unclear how this will be achieved and which groups of fathers will be the main focus.

A report commissioned by DCSF 'A Review of how fathers can be better recognised and supported through DCSF policy' (Page and Whitting, 2008) reveals the 'sporadic' good practice amongst Local Authorities relating to fathers' involvement and a widespread absence of understanding its importance among the majority of those responsible for education. It reported that, although there was a clear recognition within 'top level policy documents', of the importance of these issues, that was not reflected at the practice level. Noteworthy is their view that there was 'little detailed recognition of different types of fathers, e.g. minority ethnic fathers, young fathers, lone parents, resident and non-resident fathers (Page and Whitting, 2008, p5). Prisoner fathers could also be considered within this latter category.

Fathers Direct (now The Fatherhood Institute) published a report which it hoped would inform the development of policy and practice in relation to 'active fatherhood' (Burgess, 2007). One chapter examines 'Fathers' roles in child development' and considers the most recent research on the benefits of fathers in the development of their children. A lengthy consideration of education and achievement and the importance of fathers is included. In summarising existing research, Burgess re-emphasises key messages about fathers' involvement including:- the positive impact on children's later educational outcomes, the higher levels of children's self esteem and the likelihood of children being interested in reading (Burgess, 2007). In a follow-up study in 2010 the Institute again reflected upon the impact of fathers on their children's learning and achievement, particularly behaviour in school, the 'quality' of fathering and the effectiveness of interventions.

The National Family and Parenting Institute's survey, conducted between 2003 and 2004, took 'a comprehensive look at fathers' involvement in their school-aged children's learning and education' (Goldman, 2005). Although focused on the age range up to 16, it contains some valuable data relating to the way fathers are perceived and the extent of their involvement in the education of their children.

Barriers discussed include: the timing of events, the targeting of information towards mothers and the belief of fathers that education is not within their role. The first part of the report was based on existing research conducted over the previous seven years. It proceeds to examine the involvement of fathers and how this might be increased, acknowledging that fathers perform their role in different ways, often in difficult circumstances - working long hours, being a single parent and living in areas of disadvantage. Case studies provide exemplars of good practice, including 'The Big Book Share' (Goldman, 2004, p.257) which enables imprisoned fathers to select and read books onto tape for their children. Whilst a helpful model, it is necessarily limited and appears to be separate from the main text so appearing less than a real effort to engage with the issues confronting fathers in prison. The conclusion indicates the ways in which schools could work effectively with fathers, but again without a consideration for individual groups with specific needs.

Flouri and Buchanan (2004) have extended the debate to a consideration of the educational outcomes of children in relation to the involvement of their fathers and mothers at the age of 7 and its impact on educational achievement at the age of 20. Their research employs the National Child Development Study to examine the contributions made by fathers to the educational development of their children. The work is particularly informative as it examines the long-term impact of father involvement, rather than restricting its findings to the short term.

There have been a number of small-scale studies examining localised programmes intended to improve levels of father involvement. They can be divided into those focusing on a specific curriculum area or subject (Morgan et al., 2009; Potter et. al., 2013) and others which examine programmes aimed at involving fathers in education at a more general level (Potter and Carpenter, 2008). Commonalities in research style amongst these studies include small numbers of participants, ethnographic research techniques and, often, generalised conclusions. Whilst necessarily limited, they are helpful in providing insights into the challenges (for example, work commitments, attitudes and social factors) involved in engaging fathers and the potential outcomes in so doing.

The work of researchers such as Carpenter, Morgan and Potter is conducted within the context of increased Government interest in and funding of such programmes in this area in recent years. It seems now to be clearly established and universally agreed that there are long-term benefits to be secured from father involvement (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Flouri and Buchanan, 2004, Flouri and Malmberg, 2012). Fathers' understanding of their role is given significant consideration and the concept of 'fatherhoods' is explored – examining the now diverse ways in which fathers can be involved in families and the importance of education within these 'fatherhoods' (Hobson, 2003; Morgan et al., 2009). The focus now needs to shift to how these findings are then applied to fathers in prison.

Low levels of knowledge among school staff are also raised. They highlight that teachers and support staff are often unaware of how to work with fathers and do not adapt their practices accordingly (Potter and Carpenter, 2008).

## **2.4 Fathers in Prison**

Consideration now narrows to consider a particular group of fathers – those in prison. This literature is central to this study and will examine documents from the UK and the US (as appropriate). A helpful starting point is Morris (1965), a substantial and seminal work which focuses on the wives of 800 male prisoners across the UK, examining the importance of these women in supporting their families after the 'loss' of the father figure and can be identified as the starting point for the ongoing work in this field.

Most of the important work during the following three decades was conducted in the US, often raising, rather than answering questions surrounding the treatment of offenders and their families, for example, Bauhofer (1987), Hairston (1991 and 1998), Nurse (2002). During the same period within the UK, Ditchfield (1994) reviewed the available research evidence to link close family ties during imprisonment with reduction in male in re-offending. It relies heavily on research undertaken in US correctional institutions; the only UK reference is to work undertaken in 1992 by the Oxford Centre for Criminological Research. Ditchfield's

own claims for the link between family ties and recidivism in this document are much more modest than those made by subsequent commentators who have cited his work. It is now often perceived to be the baseline for any research relating family ties to reduction in re-offending, for example Mills (2005) and Codd (2007).

Nurse (2002) studied 258 parolees from within the juvenile justice system across Northern California, using a mixture of questionnaire, participant observation and in-depth interviews. Discussion is varied and searching and resulted in wide-ranging policy implications; these focused on father involvement including the need for structured education programmes, suitable visiting hours for children and the importance of attempting to 'strengthen a father's legal ties to his children' (Nurse 2002). Many of the recommendations appear in similar pieces of research, but Nurse does move thinking in this area to another level by considering the 'coming home' element of fatherhood and the support fathers need to 'try and integrate themselves into their children's lives' (Nurse, 2002, p 72). A theme which is a growing focus for research again currently, for example McMurrin et al. (2008), Visher (2013) and Yocum and Nath (2011)

Writers and researchers in the UK point to the work of Boswell and Wedge (2002) and their study of imprisoned fathers and their children as marking the starting point for increased issues within the United Kingdom. The writers raised concerns about the large numbers of children (125,000 at the time of the study) who were 'sentenced' to separation from their imprisoned parents, almost all of whom were fathers. 181 fathers were interviewed individually across 19 adult prisons and 18 young offender institutions. The conclusion of the report revealed the desirability for focusing on the needs of children of prisoners:

'The research findings suggest that many of the arrangements for child-father contact fall far short of the best examples which we know operate in some prisons, for the minority of prisoners. If all provision for meeting children's contact needs were to be optimised, then the balance would have to shift in the children's favour. Certainly, that has been the expressed desire of the fathers, parents/carers and children endeavouring to maintain their loving familial relationships within and across the prison setting' (Boswell and Wedge, 2002, p.157)

There have been a number of related studies examining the hopes and fears of imprisoned fathers (Earle, 2012; Magaletta and Herbst, 2001; Meek, 2007; McMurrin et al., 2008; Walker, 2008; Walker, 2010b; Meek, 2011). Small-scale studies, conducted in one or two prisons or young offender institutions, often provide a more in-depth focused examination of individuals or groups of prisoners. With this comes the challenge of making 'fuzzy generalisations' based upon limited evidence and thus raising questions about the generalisations which can be made from studies of this size. However, they offer some key data in relation to the specific challenges facing fathers in prison and the interventions being trialled.

Clarke et al (2005) based their study within 3 prisons and set this within an 'ecological' research approach, considering fathering as 'highly fluid and shaped by both interpersonal and environmental influences' (p.222), a conceptual framework developed by Doherty, Kouneski and Erickson (1998). Clarke et al. contend that fathering, even more than mothering, is affected by contextual factors. For example, imprisoned fathers are unable to provide the family with money, stability or physical care. The authors suggest that there is a gradual if slow improvement taking place and there are pockets of good practice where some prisons are beginning to create a 'family preservation ethos.' They emphasise the importance of recognising that there is a range of imprisoned fathers, – some of whom are anxious to play a part in the life of their children, whilst others are not. It is true that the 'framework for responsible or active fathering' does not include the role of prison-based fathers. :-

Parenting Under Pressure (Katz, 2002) explores the thoughts and experiences of imprisoned fathers and their families. He provides insights into the realities of imprisonment and considers the possibility of effective fathering whilst in prison. Prisoner comments relate to basic problems including 'you just aren't there!' and 'you will not be there when your child needs help with their education and homework.' It is unusual to find direct references to the challenges of involvement in education.

Clarke (2005) refers to prisoners as often having an 'unsettled and fragmented identity'. Identity Theory (Rane and McBride 2000) continues to exert an influence on research in this area, but as Dyer (2005) argues it has only been in relation to 'traditional populations' rather than 'exotic populations' such as prisoners (Dyer, 2005, p.207). He examines the 'interruption' in fatherhood caused by imprisonment and presents a convincing theory that

'the unique context of incarceration so affects a man's confirmation of his fatherhood identity as to force a change in the nature of his identity as a father and subsequently a change (even a crisis) in his sense of self' (Dyer, 2005, p.207)

Dyer continues by arguing that imprisoned fathers must then create a new identity of fatherhood based on the 'norms' of manhood (Phillips, 2001) within the prison. He contends that this often results in less rather than more interaction and interest in the lives of their children.

Other works, for example, Rane and McBride (2000) and Clarke et al. (2005) have begun fill this research gap by examining the identity of imprisoned fathers within the wider context of the identity of fatherhood. This involves a consideration of the circumstances which helps a father in prison to feel like a father (what does he need to do or become involved in) and how can this be achieved in a prison environment?

Walker (2010a) examines the role and identity of offending fathers through the lens of a highly specific deficit model with a focus upon generative fathering. She advances the view that 'there is no 'one fatherhood'' (Walker, 2010a) and that fatherhoods are 'diverse and multiple'. She argues the need to bring this group of fathers to the attention of practitioners and researchers so that we can 'recognise their (potential) contribution as parents as well as their context and their crime' (Walker, 2010a, p.1405). The study was conducted with 16 ex-offenders and key themes were identified within the interviews including – engaging and being there, fathering from a distance, facilitating fathering and the generative role that fatherhood within prison can take on. This shows the strength of small studies as it does underline some challenges faced by imprisoned fathers and the impact upon their families.

As the number of prisoners and young offenders has increased, so has the number of incarcerated fathers. Unsurprisingly there has been an expansion of the related literature (Nurse 2001, Meek 2007a and b, 2011). The Children's Society report 'A Good Childhood.' (2009) devotes a whole chapter to young offenders, including those who are in custody. The most recent reference within Barnardo's (2012b) *'Are we nearly there yet, Dad?'* examines the best ways in which to support young fathers through their journey of fatherhood. Once again a chapter is devoted to young fathers in detention, including a discussion of the practical steps required to be in place to support their role as fathers. Discussion within these texts focuses on the specific needs of these offenders. Often aged from sixteen upwards, they have little or no experience of fatherhood before entering prison and need special support in forming and maintaining family ties, in addition to assisting their adult development.

Rod Earle (2012) in his recently published research into young offender fathers at HMYOI Rochester combines the focus on young fathers with a broader discussion of imprisoned fathers, their identities and their prison actions. Whatever this research may add to the wider debate about young offenders, it contributes a very recent and valuable perspective on the identities and roles of fathers in prison. The study is reported through a series of unstructured vignettes which 'convey some of the immediacy of the experiences and emotions encountered in ethnographic fieldwork' (Earle, 2012, p.390). The key foci include parenting classes, prison visits, a particular example of an interview relating to fatherhood and a support group for fathers within the prison. An ethnographic approach has allowed detailed 'thick' data to emerge which contributes rich information to our overall understanding of imprisoned fathers and their need for identity to enable them to develop within their role. Earle maintains that 'for men to change, in prison and out, they need a story that takes them from one sense of themselves to another, and being a father offers a very tempting script' (Pummer 1994 in Earle 2012, p.396). He records prisoners' views on the nature of fatherhood and on the reality of the complicated, distressing relationships they are attempting to maintain and develop while being in prison.



There is little published research into the conditions within prisons which may be conducive to developing the role of imprisoned fathers. Dixey and Woodall (2011) consider the significance of the prison visit for some of the key stakeholders – prisoners, families and prison staff. The study does not consider the perspectives of children who are visiting; however, this is now beginning to be a focus in some studies for example, Ronay (2011) and Morgan et al. (2011). This may be an advantage as it allows the study to be far more focused on the prisoner and the importance of the visit for them. Interviews were conducted with 30 partners of prisoners visiting the prison and a number of prisoners and prison staff. This study is a helpful example of how by engaging with three very different groups of individuals to generate qualitative data, triangulation of this data can be a significant challenge 'leading to widely divergent and contested perspectives' (p.41). The work highlights the challenges which visits offer to those concerned and whilst they have the potential to engage imprisoned fathers in the lives of their children and families, they can also be fraught with stresses, including security breaches, distress for partners and children, anger and anguish for prisoners and high emotional turmoil. They highlight the time consuming nature of visits and the financial implications of travelling long distances, particularly when accompanied by young children. On reaching the prison, anxiety shifts to how children will react to the environment and the staff and to seeing their father.

This has significant implications for this study as visits have the potential to offer an opportunity for a prisoners involvement in the education of their child, however there are a significant number of practical and emotional challenges to overcome in order for this to be a possibility.

In addition, there is a growing body of literature relating to specific initiatives available within prisons to support men in their role and to develop their identity as fathers. This includes projects such as 'Storybook Dads' and the HMP Blanytre House course, both of which encourage the involvement of imprisoned fathers in the education of their children offering the opportunity to familiarise fathers in prison with the complexities of the primary education system (Berry, 2006; Brettingham, 2007; Kemp, 2008). More general guidance is available through parenting classes and both Jarvis et al. (2004) and Meek (2007b) examine the

role of those classes, considering their benefits and challenges. The findings from their informative projects reveal the strength of commitment shown by male prisoners wishing to develop their role and identities as fathers and keen to learn as much as possible. This work also reveals the desirability of developing flexible courses directed towards meeting the needs of participants, in preference to the generic programmes operating in many prisons.

Prison education is often the subject of adverse press comments and The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) (2008) report found that the Offender Learning and Skills Service had 'failed in almost every respect'. Despite criticism, there are number of examples of what can be achieved in prison education, notably the Royal Society of Arts' Prison Learning Network (O'Brien, 2010) and the Open University prison education programme. Although beyond the scope of this study it is important to acknowledge important initiatives in this field.

Although not directly focused on imprisoned fathers 'Out for Good' published by The Prison Reform Trust looks in detail at the data and feedback from prisoners across the country focusing on rehabilitation and the way this might be achieved. A significant part of that work is devoted to family and re-offending in the course of which the role of the prisoner as a father receives particular attention. It is particularly interesting to note that this highlights how prisons can be quite stereotypical in their view of families, sometimes forgetting that those in YOIs may have children for example (p.38). The report highlights the importance of families for the purposes of rehabilitation but also particularly as a focus for prisoners during their imprisonment 'The people who mean the most to the offender give their lives a meaning and direction.' (Prison Reform Trust, 2012, p.39) The report goes on to note that 'Children were mentioned most often in the 'Out for Good' interviews with reference to a personal commitment to stop offending' (Prison Reform Trust, 2012, p.39).

## **2.5 Children of Prisoners**

There is now a growing body of literature surrounding the children and families of prisoners. Key figures, including Helen Codd, Rachel Condry and Megan Comfort and more recently Julia Morgan, have moved the debate forward in drawing attention to the experience of those who continue family life without the presence of a father figure. Areas of focus currently include: - the shame brought upon families (Condry, 2007), difficulties they encounter in their local area, and in particular, children's schools, (Morgan et. al., 2011; O'Keeffe, 2013) the distances between home and prison and the financial and emotional costs involved (Codd, 2008; Scott and Codd, 2010) and very recently some small steps towards the ways in which schools can offer support (O'Keeffe, 2008, Morgan et al. 2013).

There are currently, approximately 200,000 children with an imprisoned parent (Prison Reform Trust, 2012a). This is over three times the number of looked-after children (64,400), and over five times the number of children on the Child Protection Register (36,610) (Prison Reform Trust, 2012a). The Children of Offenders Review (DCSF/MOJ, 2007) was an initial attempt by the Government to link the work done by the DCSF and Ministry of Justice in relation to the children of prisoners. The report aimed to examine current provision and to consider the support needs of the children of offenders. This signalled a significant shift in a policy which just four years earlier had removed mention of prisoners' children from the Every Child Matters White Paper (DCSF, 2004a). The review highlighted the need for identifying children at risk of poor outcomes, but claimed that 'while there is a strong correlation between parental imprisonment and poor child outcomes, research does not prove a causal link' (DCSF/MOJ, 2007, p.6). Despite this claim, it went on to indicate steps that would be taken including:- establishment of the Children and Families Pathway within the prison service, personalising and developing provision already in place for all children and making it work for children of offenders and the development of systems to share robust data between services.

This report does suggest a recognition of the importance of the issue, but, prior to this, DCSF policy documents which sought to address the needs of disadvantaged children failed to identify children of prisoners as a bespoke group

within this category (DfES 2004a, b, c; DfES, 2007). The repeated omission of this group from subsequent documents, following The Children of Offenders Review, should also be noted. Even in the non-governmental sector where the most recent example is The Children's Society report 'A Good Childhood' (Layard and Dunn, 2009) prisoners' children are not treated as a discrete category.

It is possible to relate the growing interest in prisoners' children back to Roger Shaw's 'Children of Imprisoned Fathers' (1987) in which he began to explore the scale of the problems experienced by this group and revealed the numbers affected. The work was conducted in one prison, involving discussions with prisoners and their partners. A useful addition was the collection of information from social workers, chaplains, probation officers and community nurses who were invited to contribute their professional views and provide accounts of their experiences of working with prisoners' children.

Shaw emphasised that before his investigation there had been only minimal consideration of this group with the exception of Pauline Morris's (1965) study and occasional unpublished PhD research. He devotes a significant proportion of his work to a consideration of the role of the school and the teacher, in supporting children. 'Quite often though, the school plays a passive role and does nothing in this respect unless the child actually asks for help. Several teachers justified this on the grounds that a child is entitled to privacy and should not be questioned' (Shaw, 1987, p. 53-54). Current policy however, would emphasise the importance of schools knowing about and being involved in matters affecting the child's wellbeing (DfES 2005, DCSF/MOJ 2007, DCSF 2007).

In 1992, Shaw edited 'Prisoners' Children: What are the issues?' which made available the most recent work of researchers in the criminal justice field relating to prisoners' children. Foci included: separation from parents, the role of the prison service and the role of the school. The book summarised the position of current research but its limited scope did not include detailed discussion of policy implications. As with 'Children of Imprisoned Fathers', it informed more detailed and focused research in the field.

As a result of the work of Morris and Shaw there have been a number of smaller-scale projects which have sought to examine the effects of imprisonment on the children of prisoners and, more widely, on prisoners' families. Often, children have been considered within the broader category of 'families of prisoners', rather than receiving specific and focused attention (Codd, 2008; Condry, 2007; Scott and Codd, 2010; Crewe and Bennett; 2012).

Other researchers have chosen to focus their work on the experiences of children. First to be considered is Gwyneth Boswell (2002) who, as part of a larger project with Peter Wedge, examined the views of children in relation to their imprisoned fathers and placed this within the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children Act (1989). Although only 17 children were interviewed in detail, it provides a powerful insight into the views of the children of prisoners. Boswell concentrated the interviews on five key areas including; visiting prison, their own feelings and, of particular interest to my own study, the effects of having an imprisoned father on life at school. The conclusions refer only briefly to schools, suggesting that they might increase their efforts to prevent bullying of prisoners' children by their peers. My own work seeks to demonstrate that schools have the potential to fulfil a much wider role and could provide opportunities for fathers to engage actively in the school lives of their children. Boswell argues in the opening of her article in relation to the UN Convention 'This states that children should be protected from any form of discrimination or punishment on the basis of their parents' status or activities (Article 2)' and therefore has the right to their father's involvement. The difficulties encountered by the authors in conducting interviews with children and the reluctance of carers to permit interviewing due to the 'sensitivity of the situation' and the varying levels of awareness amongst the children. (Boswell 2002, p16) are pertinent. Similarly, the use of 'warm up' questions at the start of semi-structured interviews would undoubtedly help in putting children at their ease. It may be suggested that this has potential to be beneficial within certain adult interviews.

Joseph Murray's (2007b) study based within a single prison in the south of England, adopted the orientating concept of 'social exclusion', defined by

Burchardt et al. (2002) as 'non-participation of individuals in key activities of the society in which they live' (p.56). Murray presents seven types of social exclusion including 'pre-existing disadvantage, political exclusion and stigma' (2007b). He identifies the damaging effects of each, citing, for example, the stigma children experience when a father is imprisoned and the likely impact on relationships in school and within the local area. This is a recurring theme raised by others such as Codd (2008), Condry (2007) and Scott and Codd (2010).

Murray interviewed 147 male 'new receptions' about their children and responses revealed important messages about the exclusion of this group. Almost three quarters of children were unaware that their father had been admitted to prison and less than one third were expected to visit during his time there. It is unclear why 'new receptions' were chosen. It is likely that interviews with these prisoners (who were often experiencing prison for the first time or were returning after a period of freedom) would result in substantially different responses from those who had served at least part of their sentence. Serving prisoners would be likely to have a different perspective on the issues they and their children encountered in comparison to 'new receptions'. Although this study provides useful insights into the views of fathers and their understanding of their children's problems, it is perhaps open to the criticism that a claim to examine the social exclusion of prisoners and their children could reasonably be expected to provide some direct evidence from the children, whose perceptions may differ from those of their fathers. Murray does however emphasise the need for a new study to calculate the total number of children experiencing parental imprisonment as Shaw's (1987, 1992) twenty year old study is still being cited for this data.

This is one of a number of studies by Murray (this being particularly pertinent to my own work). His focus on prisoners and their children clearly exposes the impact parental imprisonment can have on behaviour, life chances, future criminality and anti-social behaviour (Murray, 2005a, b, 2007a, b, 2008a, b, c, 2012) and so potentially demonstrating the importance of ongoing involvement for a father.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) commissioned a support guide, published as 'Children of prisoners: maintaining family ties' (Lewis, Bates and Murray, 2008). It reviewed the national and international literature pertaining to this group and provided examples of current practice. Subsequently, the Institute produced a range of e-resources to supplement this guide and to assist schools and families in their support of children coping with the imprisonment of a parent. Although the report did not offer any new insights, it highlighted what is possible in terms of support and re-emphasised the need for more research surrounding children of prisoners.

More recently, the Danish Institute of Human Rights reported upon a research project carried out in collaboration with the University of Ulster entitled Children of Imprisoned Parents (2011). The report details the key stages of the criminal justice process and this is presented 'through the eyes of the children affected, their parents, police officers, prison officers and social workers' (Danish Institute of Human Rights, 2011, p2). The work of the Danish Institute is an empirical study grounded in qualitative research methods and conduct with those affected by imprisonment. The findings refer to the challenges faced by children visiting prisons, opportunities for contact with their imprisoned parent and the limited nature of this, the challenges when a father prevents visits (for the sake of himself and his child) and reviews examples of international good practice included 'extended visits' in Italy, child centred visits in Northern Ireland (which it is argued should cater for different age groups) and mother and child units in Norway. The document continually refers back to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, arguing that the decisions made in relation to the children of prisoners must all be centred around the Convention.

In 2011 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child held a day conference which focused on the children of imprisoned parents. The proceedings were summarised by Robertson (2012). Although not a piece of research in its strictest form, this document draws upon 51 written submissions from international charities and organisations and the contributions of 200 delegates working with the children and families of prisoners. Each section of the report identifies 'a general principle to help frame the issue, with more specific recommendations

and examples of potential good practice made throughout the paper' (Robertson, 2012, p.1). As the report explains, this was the first time the UN Committee had considered the issues surrounding the children of prisoners.

The general principles identified help to focus the discussion both at the conference and in the document. Of particular value are the examples of good practice cited from a range of international sources, e.g. the 'roaming project' in Belgium where volunteers take children to visit their imprisoned parent if a member of the family cannot or the introduction of 'Children's Officers' in prisons in Denmark' (Robertson, 2012, p34 and 35). One particularly helpful example for this study can be taken from A 'Bill of Rights for Children of Incarcerated Parents' developed in the US and shared via the Family and Corrections Network Website:-

1. To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent's arrest
2. To be heard when decisions are made about me
3. To be considered when decisions are made about my parent
4. To be well-cared for in my parent's absence
5. To speak with, see and touch my parent
6. To support as I face my parent's incarceration
7. Not be judged, blamed or labelled because my parent is incarcerated
8. To a lifelong relationship with my parent'

(Family and Corrections Network 2012)

It must be noted however that the language of the document tends to be very broad talking about families, involvement, relationship with parents in a very general way.

The key charities offering support and practical guidance to prisoners' families (e.g. Action for Prisoners' Families (APF), Ormiston Children and Families Trust, Prisoners and Families Support Group and The Prison Advice & Care Trust) prioritise prisoners' children within their research. This is disseminated through in-house publications, websites and academic journals. The work they publish is often based upon small-scale studies and in many instances relies on research



conducted by others which they deploy in order to raise awareness of issues they consider to be of critical importance. Salmon (2005), writing on behalf of APF, discussed statistics of children of prisoners (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). On one view, this was a 'missed opportunity' to address the adequacy of services available to support families, particularly children and re-emphasise the idea of the role of children in reducing the re-offending of their fathers.

This is a theme pursued in the education context by Frankel (2006). In her Times Educational Supplement article, she examines the policies which schools and teachers could adopt with the appropriate training and guidance and cites Gloucestershire council as an example of good practice. This trend is now growing with councils such as Oxford following suit (Evans, 2009). They provide teachers with reassurance and guidance in working with children of prisoners while emphasising the importance of allowing them to achieve their potential. Frankel goes on to raise the issue of teachers who lack confidence in their abilities to work effectively within this field. Often however, such articles are written in a journalistic style, adopting emotive language. While offering helpful insights they must be approached with caution, with particular regard to the quality of the evidence on which they rely.

Prisoners' charities publish a range of books and resources for children and schools, containing information about the process of imprisonment, prison visiting and contact. The aim of these materials is to lead children to a greater understanding of their situation and to assist them in their efforts to come to terms with this change in their everyday lives. (SCIE 2008) Schools may find these beneficial in their attempts to support prisoners' children (Barnado's, 2013).

In the many books and edited collections available about imprisonment and families of prisoners, children of prisoners are often considered under the general heading of families, for example in Codd (2008), Condry (2007), Crewe and Bennett (2012), Murray (2005b), Scott and Codd (2010). Codd (2008) and Murray (2005b) examine the impact of imprisonment on families and the wider community. Codd (2008) provides an accessible account of the challenges for families and the impact on children. Despite the fact that there is no single chapter

devoted to children, each chapter addresses the impact on children of issues such as financial hardship and stigma and the ways in which families might be supported. Codd (2008) cites the US as an example of a country continually learning about the effect of imprisonment on families and attempts to chart the progress of the UK over the previous decade. Murray (2005) addresses the effect on prisoners' partners as providing a 'context for a more detailed discussion of the effects on prisoners' children' (Murray, 2005, p.443). His writing draws together key research in the field and reveals the need for larger studies to examine the long-term impact of parental imprisonment on children. Research in this field has progressed since this chapter was written and Murray's contribution has been significant (Murray 2005a, b, 2007a, b, 2008a, b, c).

Rachel Condry (2007) examines the effects of imprisonment on the families of serious offenders and considers the stigma they experience. Some of the themes are similar to Codd's but she discusses the consequences for families from a different perspective, in terms of stigma, their attempts to make sense of the offence and touching upon ways families can help themselves. Condry's work is an ethnographic study of the relatives of 32 serious offenders. Children are not the main focus of this research, neither were they interviewed. Nevertheless, in the course of the research, interviewees explored the effects on their children and the difficulties in maintaining a normal life. She sought to establish an important difference between the stigma as it applies to children and adults, emphasising 'secondary stigma' experienced by children as they (unlike the partner) are not seen to be directly responsible for the behaviour of the adult offender. They are therefore described as victims of 'contamination' and 'shame by association' (p 89). Condry suggests that this does not diminish the impact on children of the imprisonment of a parent for a serious offence.

Megan Comfort's seminal work – *Doing Time Together* (2008) focuses on the women visiting their husbands/fiancés/boyfriends at San Quentin State Prison. Although the focus of Comfort's work is on the prisonisation of these women and the way in which they become 'quasi-inmates' there are some valuable glimpses into the impact on the lives of the whole family (including children) that imprisonment of a father can have including; prison visits, financial challenges

and relationship breakdown. Although based in the US, this is a study which is widely referenced in UK, US and European studies of the children and families of prisoners and is considered to be a significant work.

Yocum and Nath (2011) interviewed 17 children and 8 mothers who were anticipating the release of the children's fathers. The participants reflected on their hopes and expectations for the period following release. These research findings confirm that family life does not necessarily 'return to normal' and that 'negotiating feasible family expectations is key to successful child-father re-entry' (Yocum and Nath, 2011, p.286). They helpfully highlight the role of 'positive jail actions' (p.299) in supporting successful transition from imprisonment to family life. This is a concept which will be considered further in relation to the findings within study.

## **2.6 Schools and their role in supporting the children of prisoners**

'One of the biggest challenges in considering the response of schools and teachers to prisoners' children is that there is little published research into the experiences of prisoners' children in school and little identification of good practice in teaching and pastoral care' (Codd, 2008, p.160)

Codd summarises the challenges discussed in this section of Chapter 2.

Morrison (2011) makes similar points in her Times Educational Supplement article when she considers the potential role of schools and reflects upon existing good practice.

The body of literature which explores the relationship between prisoners' children and their schools tends to focus on the steps schools can (and sometimes do) take to support them in the school setting (Barnado's, 2013; Morgan et al. 2011, Morgan et al. 2013; O'Keeffe 2008; Scott and Codd, 2010). Strategies include, promoting the fact that they do support the families of prisoners, staff development for all staff in relation to this, the development of an open and trustworthy ethos in the school, flexibility for families to visit prisons in school time and linking closely with charities and organisations who can provide additional

resources. Also examined are specific strategies which would involve the employment of specialist human resources (Edwards, 2009) when appropriate.

During the period of my own research, there has been an expansion of interest in the topic of school support for children with a family member in prison, but not specifically fathers. There now exists a small number of studies which seek to address these issues and the major charities have produced advice and guidance for the use of families and schools (Barnado's, 2013, Morgan, 2013, Roberts, 2012).

Plymouth University conducted a piece of research focusing on the support provided in schools for the children of male prisoners (Morgan et al. 2011, Morgan et al. 2013). It addressed the issue from the perspective of the rights of the child with a focus on identifying good practice, establishing existing provision and how this could be enhanced. Headteachers, mothers, children and additional stakeholders in one Local Authority area were interviewed by telephone or in person. The analysis carried out by the interview team identified themes including initial effects of imprisonment on children, informing the school, the sharing of information between services, support offered in schools and access to training. They found that children of prisoners were still a 'hidden population' (Morgan et al. 2011) for whom there was no consistency within schools and where there were few established communication systems between schools and other public and voluntary agencies. This study concluded with a recommendation for the appointment of a key person within schools to be responsible for the wellbeing of children of prisoners. They emphasised the importance of a child-centred approach but again do not refer to moving beyond the support and welfare stance, to consider engagement and involvement in education.

The most recent piece of research came from the agreed outcomes of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of Discussion, 2011. This examined the role of schools in supporting the children and families of prisoners and was conducted by Sarah Roberts in the US and Australia for the charity Inside Out (Roberts, 2012). The UN Committee stated that:

**Guiding principle:** Schools provide a major opportunity to support children of incarcerated parents and to help meet their needs.

**Recommendation:** Guidance should be prepared and training provided so that teachers and other adults in schools are aware of the particular needs of children of incarcerated parents and can appropriately support such children in their performance, attendance and behaviour' (Robertson, 2012, p.2)

Roberts responded to this by completing this study as part of an 8 week Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship Award. The report examines the relationship between the children of prisoners and their schools and cites case studies of good practice both from the US and Australia. Examples of good practice include in-school counselling and mentoring, means of facilitating communication between prisoners and their child's teachers. The report is predicated upon an assumption that the most effective approach to promote prisoners' involvement in the education of their children is through contact with their school. A number of examples of innovative practice in both Australia and the US are explored but there are not references to UK based work. A section of the report focuses on engaging prisoners in more practical school-based work with their children through the introduction of homework clubs and contains one example of such practice but again this is limited. Whilst this latter point does not figure prominently within the report, it is likely to be of major significance in any future policy developments.

A number of national prisoner charities have produced guidelines to assist schools in their support of children of prisoners. It is perhaps instructive to note that none of the headteachers interviewed for my own study were aware of such material.

Barnado's, although a children's charity with a broad remit, is currently developing a range of research-based guidance relating to the support of the children and families of prisoners. The most recent of these is a guide for schools to develop good practice (Barnado's, 2013). This offers schools a series of practical steps, based within some research. The strategies offered are often very school centred and based around working with the remaining parent and the child to cope with their circumstances e.g. provide a punch bag for the child to release their

frustration, ensure there is a key point of contact for them and discuss with the remaining parent how they would like the situation to be approached with them and their child. Reference is made to keeping the imprisoned parent informed but does not suggest anything further than this. This is a definite step forward from previous practice but is presented as information for rather than engagement with an imprisoned parent.

In addition to this, guidance now exists for practitioners working with children under five (Barnado's 2012a). The document is designed to support staff in children's centres to enable them to work effectively with the families and children of prisoners and to ensure that centres 'target resources effectively towards the most vulnerable' (Barnado's 2012a). It contains guidance on developing an inclusive ethos within the current political and criminal justice context and a helpful checklist to assist centres in establishing good practice.

Once again the approach adopted by Barnado's in this document is understandably, a practical one in that they address the needs of parents and children 'outside'. They do not explore questions surrounding the possible involvement of imprisoned fathers in the education of their children. Barnado's commitment is effectively summarised as

'families affected by imprisonment may face isolation as a result of breakdown of community and wider family relationships, housing transience and stigmatisation' (Barnado's, 2012, p.23)

Ormiston Children and Families Trust published a very similar guide in 2007, focusing across the whole school age range. It offers clear step-by-step guidance to schools which have yet to consider working with children of imprisoned parents. The guide refers only briefly to the desirability of schools providing information to prisoners.

Action for Prisoners' Families (2011) has also produced a short guide for schools, outlining support available to them. The Social Care Institute for Excellence has published Resource Guide 11: Children of Prisoners – Maintaining Family Ties, the objective of which was to 'make recommendations and provide contact details and resources to those working in this field' (O'Keeffe 2008). It was considered to be a key resource for schools and was distilled in SENCO Update, distributed

to every school in the UK, again with a series of coping mechanisms for the children of prisoners and the support schools could offer in relation to this.

This chapter has reviewed the key literature underpinning this study with a particular focus on: the theories related to the identify of fatherhood, fathers' involvement in the education of their children, fathers in prison, the children of prisoners and the role of schools in supporting the children of prisoners. It has established the current debates surrounding these topics and located this study within these.

Chapter 3 will now turn to consider the methodological considerations, methods used and ethical concerns relating to this study. It will discuss the unique methodological issues surrounding qualitative research approaches within prison environments and reflect upon how semi-structured interviews could be employed most effectively in these circumstances. It will then move to provide a plan of the approaches used to carry out the research and the key ethical questions which were addressed prior to the commencement of the project.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology, Methods and Ethical Considerations**

### **3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3**

Having reviewed and analysed, in chapter 2, the current state of research to the extent that this provides the context and starting point for the present study, I turn now to the issues of (1) methodology (2) research methods and (3) the ethical issues which arise in the course of fieldwork of the type undertaken and particularly fieldwork conducted within prisons.

To restate the research questions;-

- 1. To what extent is there potential for imprisoned fathers to be substantially engaged in the education of their primary school aged children and if so to what extent should this be encouraged.**
- 2. Is there a potential interface between the education system and criminal justice system in relation to this proposal?**
- 3. What kinds of ideas, norms and beliefs operate in the school education system in relation to parental involvement?**
- 4. What are the implications for educational and penal policy of the findings of this study?**

*In seeking to answer these questions, the perspectives of the following stakeholders have been sought*

- Mothers of prisoners' children*
- Headteachers*



- *Offenders currently serving in a UK prison who have primary school aged children*

The study adopted semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. The three key stakeholder groups (primary school headteachers, mothers of children of prisoners and imprisoned fathers) were all interviewed using this method.

It is important to re-emphasise at this point that children's perspectives were not a focus in this study. The voice of children is crucial where the outcomes of a study may have an impact upon them (Nairn and Clarke 2012; Phelan and Kinsella, 2013). There were two reasons for their omission in this case. The first related to the quantity and depth of the data that would be taken from children would be so significant that it would be beyond the scope and size of this study. It would require a separate, independent project.

Secondly Kofi Annan in Nairn and Clarke (2012) contends that 'There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected [and] that their welfare is protected' (p.177). It would be ethically inappropriate to present the concept of strengthened father involvement in their education as a real possibility without first establishing whether there would be a positive response from other key stakeholders in this process.

The chapter will begin by seeking to justify the semi-structured interview method, including its strengths and weaknesses as the main data collection tool. Topics will include the role of the gatekeeper (particularly in a criminal justice context), the concept of trust, gender relations, power relations and the response to sensitive issues.

The second part of the chapter will outline the practical arrangements involved in establishing the programme of interviews including arrangements, challenges and sampling the data. It will conclude with a discussion of some key ethical issues encountered in the course of the research.

There is a weighting towards a longer discussion of the unique 'methodological terrain' within a prison context (Schlosser, 2008, p.1501) in this chapter. Clarke et al. (2005) remind us that 'researching in prison contexts is time-consuming and unforeseen events (e.g. security related withdrawal, prisoner transfer or release) can overtake prearranged fieldwork or interview schedules' (p.224). Research in prisons is inherently more complicated and thus warrants additional analysis.

## **3.2 Methodology**

### Semi-structured interviews

The adoption of the semi-structured interview method, which falls somewhere between structured and narrative, requires some justification.

'interviewing can be an exciting way of doing strong and valuable research. The unfolding of stories and new insights can be rewarding for both parties in the interview interaction' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.15)

Semi-structured interviews 'seek to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.27). They do not follow a strict set of questions but they are not completely open as would be an ordinary conversation. A semi-structured interview can be said to 'come close to an everyday conversation ... but with an interview guide which focuses on certain themes' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.27). This method allows interviewees the opportunity to tell their story their own way, rather than being presented with a list of precise, impersonal and sometimes confusing questions, in circumstances where literacy levels are likely to be low and comprehension a challenge. The free-flowing nature of narrative can allow them to tell their story in a more flexible way, without feeling as threatened. Noaks and Wincup (2004) emphasise the importance of interviews being 'conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of the interviewee while at the same time meeting the research requirements' (p78). Each semi-structured interview went beyond short focused questions eliciting basic answers and as Schlosser (2008) believes, this 'can provide data just as rich as that from any other methodological enterprise' (p.1513). As Byrne (2003) explains, 'narratives have long been of interest in accessing individuals'

subjectivity, experience and reflections of the past' (p.31). Answers can spontaneously take the form of a story, narrative or one episode (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) when interviewees are being asked relate their particular situation.

Applying the semi-structured interview method to research with prisoners is not without its risks. The demands upon prisoners of providing a narrative account of their own experiences may be difficult for some individuals as a consequence of the social and psychological impact of the regime and perhaps the natural tendency to re-interpret the past in a favourable light (Schlosser, 2008; Semmens, 2011). The truth, compared to what they have been told, or expected to believe can be difficult to disentangle. Schlosser (2008) claims that 'inmates internalise an institutional rhetoric that diverges from what they may actually have experienced' (p.1514), therefore it was essential to reassure each interviewee about my role, external to the institution, respond to answers given and in some cases to probe more deeply to ensure as far as possible, answers were personal to the prisoner and were as honest as possible.

Seale (1998) refers to:-

**'Interview-data-as-resource:** the interview data collected are seen as (more or less) reflecting the interviewees' reality outside the interview.

**Interview-data-as-topic:** the interview data collected are seen as (more or less) reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and interviewer'  
(cited in Rapley, 2001, p.304)

This clear distinction highlights the issue surrounding the nature of the data collected through the process of semi-structured interviews. To a certain extent, it has to be taken that the information provided by each participant at the interview reflects a version of their 'reality' outside the interview. However, through a more in-depth conversation (maybe for the first time) about this sensitive topic, they may re-assess the position they are currently in or come to an alternative perspective thus causing interviewer and interviewee to be co-constructors of knowledge. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that during these conversations 'the journey may not only lead to new knowledge; the traveller might change as

well. The journey might instigate a process of reflection that leads the traveller to new ways of self-understanding' (p.49).

### The Role of the Gatekeeper in semi-structured interviews

It is generally acknowledged among researchers (Emmel et al., 2007; Malone, 2003; Noakes and Wincup, 2004; Wiles, 2007) that there are many situations where it is necessary to negotiate access through gatekeepers during the course of the research. However, this is often given little attention within academic texts (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) focussing on methods, presenting it as 'relatively unproblematic' (Miller and Bell, 2002). My own study required negotiation with a range of gatekeepers in order to access each group of participants:-

#### *Headteachers*

- ✓ The headteachers provided their own gatekeeping systems both prior to and during the interviews (Wanat, 2008)

#### *Prisoners*

- ✓ The National Offender Management Service (NOMs) to seek permission to conduct research within HM Prison Service.
- ✓ The Governor of the prison selected for this study.  
(Clarke et al. 2005: Noaks and Wincup, 2004)

#### *Partners of Prisoners*

- ✓ Charity working with Partners of Prisoners.
- ✓ The mothers themselves.

Within two of the three groups it was necessary to use gate-keepers to access 'those who were less powerful' (Miller and Bell, 2002). This required careful consideration to ensure that participants were not placed in a position where they were less able to resist 'voluntary participation' (Miller and Bell, 2002). However, despite careful planning and communication with the prison and the charity, I could not be confident about the selection procedures (detailed discussion of this

can be found later in this chapter). I ensured however that all participants, prior to interview, completed and signed a form which demonstrated their understanding of and their consent to participation. In the Ethics section of this chapter, I seek to address the difficulties and limitations of this selection procedure.

The selection of 'suitable' interviewees must also be considered in relation to the role of the gatekeeper. In research situations where a gatekeeper is involved, it is rarely possible for the researcher to select the participants. A gatekeeper will make decisions about who will be selected and may make particular decisions in order to protect or promote their own institution or organisation (Wanat, 2008).

Even in the absence of an obvious gatekeeper, there were no guarantees of full participation. Headteachers were able to make individual decisions about the level of detail they would provide and whether they would honour their initial agreement to participate. All headteachers initially approached agreed to participate but as interview dates drew nearer 'resistance tactics' (Wanat, 2008, p.203) were deployed. These included tactics such as: passing responsibility, requesting information and forgetting (Wanat, 2008). In addition, time featured as a significant factor. For example, interview dates would be arranged and on the day prior to the scheduled interview, the school secretary would communicate the headteacher's apologies and explain that the meeting was no longer possible due to a 'school emergency'. A further agreed date would be abandoned for similar reasons, an example of what Wanat (2008) describes as a recognisable 'resistance tactic' (Wanat, 2008, p.203).

Wanat (2008) highlights that the terms 'access' and 'co-operation' in interviews are used interchangeably in methodology texts but they are very distinct processes. Even when access had been secured, co-operation was far more difficult to gain in the interviews with headteachers. Those headteachers known to me through my professional role, were more likely to keep to the interview dates set and to participate with the interview process. Although I have no evidence for this, it would appear that they understood the nature of the project and acknowledged my research objectives (Adler and Adler, 2002). It is possible

that the headteachers who were unknown to me, perceived my research as a threat or as a possible potential criticism of their current provision. These headteachers deployed a range of 'resistance tactics' without openly refusing to participate, seeking to avoid any suspicion of an ulterior motive.

'If gatekeepers thought a project would benefit them, they would be more likely co-operate. They were less likely to participate if they felt threatened personally or thought their jobs were threatened' (Wanat, 2008, p.201).

In other stakeholder groups where formal gatekeepers were involved, it was possible to identify different layers of gatekeeping ranging from official approval at the highest level of an organisation, to intermediate gatekeepers who possessed some levels of authority and a specific knowledge of the potential participants (Wanat, 2008). This hierarchy was most clearly illustrated within HM Prison Service and National Offender Management Service (NOMs).

Issues relating to gatekeeping are particularly significant when considering the criminal justice system (Bosworth, 2005; King, 2000; Liebling, 1999; Schlosser, 2008). Access to individual prisoners for in-depth semi-structured interviews, requires the navigation of the 'layers' of gatekeeping as highlighted by Wanat (2008). All applications to NOMs to undertake research within prisons is formal, lengthy and relatively complex. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that there is a certain reluctance to permit 'outside' and 'non-commissioned' research to be conducted. Even when approval at the highest level has been granted, there can be no guaranteed access to potential participants. Schlosser (2008) notes the value of pre-existing relationships in accelerating navigation of the gatekeeping process. Without the advantages of existing contacts with the Prison Service, it became necessary to ensure that I conformed to its procedural requirements at each stage. Goode (2000) reminds researchers of the value of forging 'connections' with gatekeepers; for this study I sought to do so at what can be described as the intermediate level – a prison governor as described in Chapter 4.

Emmel et al. (2007) argue that for the researcher to fully understand the role of the gatekeeper (particularly in relation to socially excluded groups) it is necessary to move beyond the definition of gatekeepers as those who 'facilitate or impede

research' to considering the relationships between gatekeepers and possible participants and the likely impact on participant responses (p.5) This is particularly true in the case of prisoners where whose reputation is central to their progress towards release. Potential participants are more likely to say yes (Miller and Bell, 2002) to taking part in order to protect their reputation and to please the powerful gatekeeper. Emmel et al. (2007) stresses the importance of the researcher recognising 'the trustful and distrustful relationships between gatekeepers and socially excluded participants' (p.5). This is clearly an issue of considerable significance. On the other hand, there can be substantial benefit from a strong and trusting relationship between gatekeepers and participants, for example, the relationship between prisoners and the charity working to support them.

#### The concept of trust in semi-structured interviews

'Trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make' (Gleshne and Peshkin, 1992, p.87)

The nature of the relationship and the trust between researcher and researched is regularly at the heart of discussions relating to research methods (Emmel et al., 2007; Guillemin and Heggen, 2009; Shaw, 2008,).

'The great variety of expectations that can be involved imply that the content of trust is extremely variable. Speaking about trust, we must always specify: trust to do what? Absolute trust is a rarity' (Sztompka, 1999, p. 55)

Sztompka (1999) argues that there are many layers of trust within Fukuyama's (1995) 'radius of trust' but that it is 'ultimately people that we ultimately endow with trust' (p41). Within the boundary of interpersonal trust and social trust there is the trust of particular social categories or groups. It could be considered that researchers occupy this category as a group which may or may not be trusted. This is often a category laden with 'stereotypes and prejudices' (Sztompka, 1999, p42). Headteachers are likely to hold certain prejudices relating to researchers and prisoners may make links between researchers and the role of authority, considering them to be 'on the same side' and potentially 'distrusting the intentions and meanings of academic research' (Adler and Adler, 2002).

Trust relating to the research relationship appears in many forms including respect for the interviewer, coming from similar backgrounds, credibility, empathy on the part of the researcher, useful knowledge possessed by the researcher, or providing assistance when required (Bridges 2001, Emmel et al. 2007, Sixsmith et al. 2003). It is instructive to note how much researchers ask of participants in such research. Guillemin and Heggan (2009) emphasise that

‘The challenge (and paradox) of the researcher-participant relationship is that in much of qualitative research, with the exception of ethnographic research of longer duration, this is often the first and last time that a researcher and participant may meet face to face. Yet we still expect participants to make exceptions from their normal social roles and allow the researcher entrée into their inner zone and reveal their deepest private thoughts’ (p. 293).

The point is particularly important within forms of narrative research where participants are offering what is often a version of their life story, or at least significant sections of it. The value of ethical mindfulness (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004) is clear. During my research it was important for me to retain awareness of moments within interviews that I considered to be ethically significant and the consequent requirement for me to respond appropriately. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) refer to four features of these situations as: - 1) identifying the importance of such moments 2) understanding that sometimes there can be feelings of uncertainty or ‘disquiet’ in research 3) being able to explain what is ethically important in your research and 4) being reflexive in one’s research, reviewing one’s actions and their possible impact on the validity of the data collected (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

### Trust within a criminal justice context

Questions of trust are particularly challenging for research conducted in prisons. The research field is characterised by, the sensitivity of the location (Cohen et al, 2007). Subjects who are from a socially-excluded group access to which is managed by a public authority (Emmel et al (2007) and by factors which are likely, on occasion, to render ‘consent’ fragile (Shaw 2008). In the prison setting my credibility was limited. I had never experienced imprisonment and I brought no inside knowledge to the interviews (Boswell et al 2005; Bridges 2001).



I felt that it was necessary to acknowledge this to the interviewees, explaining the importance I placed on the information were providing and the value of the insights they offered. They were helping me to understand and therefore to share their stories and setting those stories in an appropriate and meaningful context. Liebling (1999) believes that it is only through the emotion and often volatility of the interview process that the interviewer actually begins to 'understand' the situation they are seeking to research. In addition, Bridges (2001) considers that:-

'it is in talking to each other, participating in a shared language, that we construct the conceptual apparatus that allows us to understand our own situation in relation to others – and this is a construction which involves understanding differences as well as similarities' (Bridges, 2001, p.373).

My hope was that, from their explanations and discussions, participants would begin to understand their own positions, through interactions with an outsider and perhaps benefit from the opportunity to discuss a topic often given very little attention.

One dimension of establishing trust is the complex nature of the power relations between the interviewer and the prisoner (Smyth and Williamson, 2004). Without clear, early explanation, the prisoners were likely to feel that my presence was 'official' and my allegiance was to the HM Prison Service and management. It was necessary to explain that my commitment was exclusively to my own research questions rather than to anyone else (including participants and management) and carrying this out in a fair and ethical way (King 2000). My hope was that these assurances would allay their fears and present them with an opportunity to 'share their story'.

#### Influences on successful data collection during the interview process

I turn now to a discussion of the key elements which had a 'significant influence on the data collection process' (Broom, 2009).

### *Interviewer questions and talk*

The manner in which the interviewer engages with the interview process is an important element within this study and is emphasised by Rapley (2001) and Broom (2009) as having a potentially significant impact on the way data is collected and subsequently analysed.

Within the context of a semi-structured interview, it is important, given strict time limits to gain as much information as possible, but in an appropriate manner. Price's (2002) 'laddered questions' methodology, provides a helpful way of conducting interviews, which aims to reduce the level of superficiality in answers, often encountered in interviews with a minimum of guidance. Price describes the principles behind this as:-

'we learn to arrange our questions in an order that starts with the least invasive and proceeds to deeper matters if the other signals their readiness' (p.276)

Given the potentially sensitive nature of my own research, this technique offers the researcher the opportunity to move to deeper level of questioning, only when deemed to be appropriate and when the respondent shows signs of being ready for this. This is likely to result in more detailed, focussed responses. Price identifies 3 levels of enquiry:-

*Questions about action* – allowing the interviewer to set the scene.

*Questions about knowledge* – these involve questions about what the interviewee knows and thinks.

*Questions about philosophy (feelings/values/beliefs)* – the most invasive of the three levels asking how the interviewee feels about a specific issue

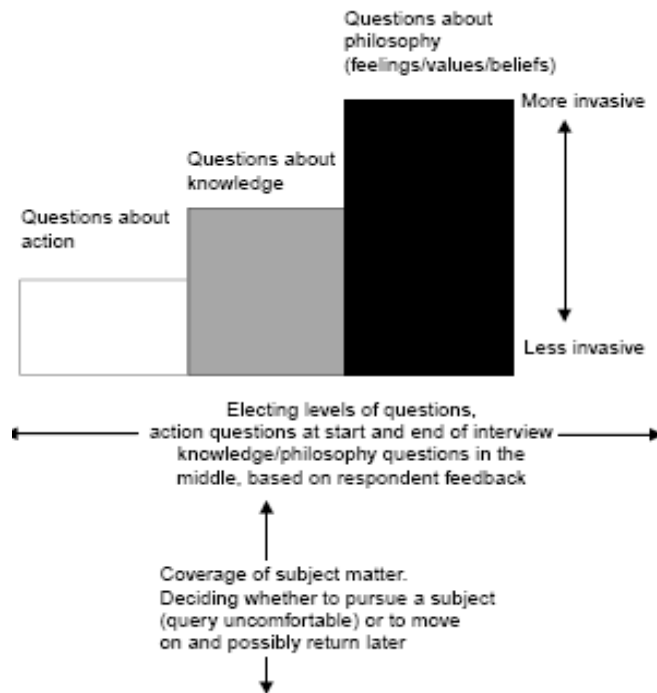


Figure 1 from Price (2002) p. 277

This approach was adopted across all interviews. In addition to the more supportive and graduated structure it provided, there are also potential benefits in relation to the literacy and comprehension challenges faced by some prisoners and noted by Meek (2007b). Beginning with basic questions about action and moving through the inquiry levels at a more graduated pace, allowed me to make a judgment about levels of comprehension and ability to respond. As Price (2002) notes, this sometimes necessitated 'new lines of inquiry' (p.297) but ensured that participants did not feel overwhelmed or embarrassed if they were unsure of the meaning of a question.

Whilst considering the role of the interviewer, it is important to note that the role does not conclude with the questions they ask. Research is now beginning to include discussion of the responses and interactions provided by the interviewer throughout the interview process. Rapley (2001) argues that it is the interviewee *and* the interviewer who produce the final data in semi-structured and open ended interview situations. He claims that:-

'Interviewers may choose to locally produce themselves through their talk and other actions as 'passive' (facilitative and neutral) or, following feminist (Oakley, 1981) and emotionalist (Douglas, 1985) critiques of interviewing, more active, co-operative and self-disclosing' (p316)

It is important to remember that the results of each interview relied upon the 'local interactional context' (Rapley, 2001) and was only one possible version. If I had responded in different ways, or paused or encouraged at different points, the data may have been different. Rapley (2001) emphasises the importance of noting carefully, in any analysis of interview data, the questions/comments/actions which prompted the talk and any follow up comment from the interviewer. This is a helpful way of demonstrating the role the interviewer has played in co-constructing the interview data in an 'interactional performance' (Broom et al. 2009) and to reveal that interviews can no longer be viewed through a positivist viewpoint where existing knowledge is simply gathered from the participants.

#### *Gender relations within the interview process*

- Women interviewing men

Interviews in any format can be perceived as threatening for participants as they are asked to 'give up some control and risk having one's public persona stripped away' (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001, p.91). The role of gender has become a focus of research, for example, Arendell (1997), Gronnerod (2004), Pini (2005). This is a particularly important element to consider in the prison based interviews given that the other interview groups were female. As a woman entering a male dominated environment, the dynamics would potentially be very different, particularly as prisons reflect a dominant masculine culture.

Gender is part of all aspects of life and in an interview context there is a 'process of performance and impression management; processes where interviewers and interviewees seek commonalities and differences, as well as enacting socio-cultural expectations regarding such things as 'femininity', 'manliness' and 'professionalism'(Oakley, 1998, p.25). Pini (2005) argues that men (and women) are 'engaged in an ongoing process of creating and recreating gender identities' (p.202). Certain contexts are 'traditionally highly gendered in nature' (Broom, 2009) and particularly so in a criminal justice context where certain behaviours

and images of masculinity are expected of prisoners (Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001). This expectation derives from other prisoners, but also, to a certain extent from staff members. This potentially could result in the concept of an interview with a young woman, who has little experience of the prison system leading to hostility or a stereotypical view that a woman's role is to 'listen' (Winchester, 1996 in Pini, 2005). The potential points of connection between us were not immediately obvious. It was likely that some of the men may have said certain things or avoided making particular points depending on the gender of the interviewer as highlighted by Arendell (1997) and Pini (2005).

Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) highlight that an 'interview situation is both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened' (p.91). They focus on methods interviewers can use to narrow the gender gap and reduce the threat felt by male interviewees when working with female interviewers. These are categorised into: the struggle for control, non-disclosure of emotions, exaggerating rationality, autonomy and control and bonding ploys. Clearly, it was important to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable so they were more likely to provide detailed and insightful responses leading to a range of data for analysis. However, there will always be a limit to how many of these suggestions could be realistic or appropriate in a prison context given the timescale and there must be some understanding when interpreting the data, that gender will have had an impact on the responses, although it will not be possible to judge to what extent this is the case.

Lohan (2000) developed this by highlighting that men felt women to be more interested in 'female' topics e.g. personal issues and family life and felt it more appropriate and in some cases easier to discuss these with a female rather than male interviewer (Horn, 1997). My gender could also be seen as a 'resource' (Broom, 2009) in encouraging participants to share the detail of their level of involvement in the education and life of their primary school aged children. Schlosser (2008) highlights the importance of allowing prisoners the time and reflexive opportunity to do this (Copes et. al, 2013). This was made possible by

using Price's (2002) 'laddered questions' approach, building up to more sensitive questions, allowing us to build a working relationship.

- Women interviewing women

Approximately 40% of my interviews were with men, and a significant proportion (60%) were with women. The dynamics within all female interviews can potentially offer very different challenges in comparison to all male interviews. It is acknowledged that women are often more enthusiastic about talking to women researchers (Finch, 1984) and are more willing to share their stories with them. However, in this case, my focus was on two very different groups of women and any generalisations portrayed in the literature relating to interviewing women must be seen within the context of this study.

The headteachers possessed a degree of confidence in their role, accustomed to interviews and meetings of this nature and could therefore be potentially described as 'elites' (Kezar, 2003; Obendahl and Shaw, 2002; Reinharz and Chase, 2002; Roulston, 2010) defined as having 'more knowledge, money and status and assuming a higher position than others in the population' (Obendahl and Shaw, 2002, p 299). One of the most notable difficulties related to semi-structured interviews with elites is the very practical question of access. It is argued that access to elites is more challenging as this is often controlled by an assistant or secretary (Obendahl and Shaw, 2002). Although it could be argued that headteachers are not strictly elites, in relation to the communities they work in and the families and children of prisoners, they can be perceived within this category. In addition, the headteachers were far more guarded in their responses, keen to protect themselves and their schools and despite Finch's (1984) argument that 'the friendly female interviewer, walking into this situation with time to listen and guarantees of confidentiality, not surprisingly finds it easy to get women to talk' (Finch, 1984, p.75), this was not the case in this instance with either vague or over positive answers.

The experience was very different in the case of the partners of prisoners:

'Interviewing...may turn out to be an extraordinary experience for some women interviewees. This is because some women still feel powerless, without much to say' (Reinharz and Chase, 2002 p 225)

It is argued that as a female interviewer, it is necessary to understand the 'possibly radical impact that this may have on her and her own understanding and development of her thoughts' (Reinharz and Chase, 2002, p.225). This may certainly be true; however I would argue that this does not just relate to women. A number of groups in society could potentially relate to this, particularly prisoners who often believe that their opinions do not count and an opportunity afforded in interviews such as this, have the potential to modify this view.

Reinharz and Chase (2002) argue that under these circumstances it is possible for the researcher to attempt to develop 'intense bonding' and in some cases try to help the interviewee. It is clear that this can be both patronising and inappropriate both from a professional and ethical point of view. They believe this is more of a danger when women are interviewing women and offer the view that women should develop a 'rapport' (Oakley, 1981; Reinhartz and Chase, 2002) with the women they are interviewing, examining their own 'interview interactions' (Roulston, 2010, p.27), for the purposes of the smooth running of the interview but that this should be the only relationship developed, thus avoiding 'sisterly bonds'. It could be argued though that not even 'rapport' and 'shared womanhood' can bridge the differences of social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on' (Duncomb and Jessop, 2002, p.62) and this was a significant consideration within my interviews with the mothers.

'It is not simply an issue concerning the goal of the interview but also of the dynamics between the interview pair, because interview is a social encounter (Ribbens 1989), interpersonal situation (Milwertz 1997) and interactive process (Edwards 1993).  
(Tang, 2002, p.719)

#### *The context of the interview and the power of the interviewer/interviewee*

The literature offers an alternative perspective in relation to the context of the interview and the power of the interviewer/interviewee. Elwood and Martin (2001) emphasise the pre-existing link between the two, believing in the impact of the

context on the power relations in an interview through the conceptual framework of 'micro-geographies'.

The context of the interview is not always considered in published research, particularly in relation to power relations (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), however this was a particularly important consideration in relation to the prisoners. The context of the interview was dictated by HM Prison Service and was a familiar context for the prisoners. This could put the participants at their ease, as 'the effects of prisonisation ... are likely to lead to major changes in the way the inmate views himself and his surroundings' (Schlosser, 2008, p.1511), however, Elwood and Martin (2001) argue that 'participants might feel uncomfortable speaking freely about some issues in places where they may be overheard' (p.651).

The interview context could also be viewed as their home and so own knowledge of the context and therefore have power over the 'outside expert' (Elwood and Martin, 2001) who has little practical knowledge of prison life, who isn't a parent, has never been imprisoned and whose 'expert' power may now be contextually weakened (Gilbert 1994). This raises some important questions as it could be argued that assertion of power begins as soon as the researcher arrives and is seen accompanied by a member of staff, confirming the 'researcher's presence is that of an outsider with power' (Schlosser, 2008, p.1512).

Kvale (2006) argues that qualitative interviews in the past had been viewed in feminist circles as 'caring and liberating' and carried out on an equal level between the interviewer and interviewee. He however, raises the current concern of power in interview contexts, stating that 'relationships of empathy and trust may serve as social lubricants to elicit unguarded confidences (Kvale, 2006, p.482) where the interviewer has the power to gain from the exchange. Kvale (2006) along with Briggs (2002), Gubrium and Holstein (2002) and Scheurich (1995) emphasise that the concept of interview as dialogue, and moreover equal dialogue can no longer be taken as an absolute. Questions surrounding the 'power asymmetries' of interviewing are beginning to arise, after being neglected within qualitative research writing. The importance of acknowledging the 'complex power dynamics' within one's research is offered by Kvale (2006, p.485)



as a key way of ensuring the validity of the knowledge constructed within a qualitative interview context.

It cannot however be argued that the interviewee has no power in this dialogue. Scheurich (1997) emphasises the power of the interviewee in the process of what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) refer to as 'construction of meaning' during semi-structured interviews:-

`I find that interviewees carve out a space of their own, that they can often control part of the interview, that they push against or resist my goals, my intentions, my questions, my meanings. In other words, interviewees are not passive subjects; they are active participants in the interview (p.71)

Scheurich (1997) develops this further claiming within his 'dominance, resistance and chaos-freedom theory' that:

'look at the interview and conclude that there is dominance of the interviewee by the researcher, resistance of the interviewee to research dominance, and chaos-freedom enacted by both the interviewer and the interviewee. Within this chaos/freedom, there are speech enactments which cannot be encapsulated or captured by the dominance of the researcher or the resistance of the interviewee' (p.72)

Scheurich believes that this chaos/freedom element within an interview can allow both interviewer and interviewee to be completely free of dominance or resistance e.g. the interviewer or interviewee doing or saying something which has nothing to do with the research focus.

Mills (2001) returns to the concept of power by adding that interviewees go beyond simply sharing their knowledge and experiences, to 'organising' the meaning they wish to convey to the listener (p.297) and the level of response they offer (Price, 2002) once again highlighting the potential power they can hold in an interview situation. Mills believes that 'the respondents have the power of agreeing to the process, the power of disclosure, and the power of topic choice' (2001, p.297). Kvale (2006) refers to this as 'counter control' where interviewees may choose not to answer the question, talk about something different or in some cases, tell the interviewer what they think the interviewer wants to hear from them. I think this final point is particularly crucial in the interviews with the prisoners and headteachers, where there were concerns surrounding institutional pressure.

### Addressing sensitive issues within interviews

'During the process of inviting individuals to engage in a reflexive project, the researcher may become the catalyst for revisiting very private and/or unhappy experiences' (Birch and Miller, 2000, p.58)

Qualitative interviews involve long and detailed discussion with individuals on a one to one basis. Occasionally this results in a focus on traumatic or difficult topics for the interviewee, and is particularly the case here. Lack of family contact and the opportunity to discuss this could lead to a release of emotions, given the masculine context they have existed in. Although the study was not designed with therapeutic interviews in mind and the format did not lend itself to this, participants did choose to use the opportunity to express their emotions. The potential for exploitation within this emotive context is therefore in need of consideration.

Kvale (2006) states that

'a quasi-therapeutic interviewer role, building an emotional rapport and therapeutic knowledge of defense mechanisms can, as expressed by therapist Jette Fog(2004), serve as a 'Trojan horse' to get behind defense walls of the interview subjects, laying their private lives open and disclosing information to a stranger, which they may later regret' (p482)

It is tempting as a researcher to benefit from the relationship you have sought to build during the interview, particularly given the evidence that suggests men feel more comfortable discussing personal issues with women. It can almost be seen as faking friendship and building trust to gain the required information for the project. From an ethical perspective I ensured that this was not the case in the interviews I carried out.

### **3.3 Methods**

#### Recording and Transcribing the Interviews

The nature of my research required a decision about either transcribing the 'mountains of words' (Johnson et al., 2010) from my interviews or creating researcher notes (McLellan et al., 2003). It was decided that full transcription was required to ensure all answers were fully captured for subsequent analysis.

It swiftly became evident, that it would be unnecessary to record every detail e.g. physical responses of the interviewee, facial expressions, asides. My interests were in the interviewee's experiences and their views on a particular proposition.

McLellan et al. support this, arguing that 'it may not be necessary to transcribe an entire interview' (2003, p.66), highlighting that selected elements may be sufficient if they relate closely to the research question and theoretical models. This however, felt unsatisfactory in the light of my research. The level of transcription needed to fall between verbatim transcripts and McLellan et al.'s somewhat limited approach, but maintaining the belief that 'what to include should always be driven by the research question that an analysis attempts to answer' (McLellan et al. 2003, p.67). From these reflections and my reading, it was evident that my transcriptions needed to be detailed, including the words and phrases directly as spoken by the interviewee, but not facial expressions and physical responses.

When possible, a digital recorder was used. This was to ensure all speech was captured in full (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). All headteachers consented to their words being recorded, however, within the prison and the visitors' centre; regulations prevented me from recording the interviews. No recording equipment could be taken into the prison environment and this was made very clear at the beginning of the process. This is supported by the findings other researchers including King and Wincup (2011), Noaks and Wincup (2004) and Schlosser (2008). As a result of this it was necessary to capture detailed notes and ensure each interview was written up within 24 hours to ensure, as Davies (2011) reminds us that I 'remained faithful to each interviewee' (p.174). Notes included key words, phrases and sentences but this process did have some impact on my ability to listen and probe further as required within each interview (Davies, 2011; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and will have limited the detail of what was sometimes noted (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

In relation to the transcription of this data, it is widely acknowledged by researchers such as Cohen et al. (2009) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) that large research studies will often employ research assistants or secretaries to

transcribe large numbers of interviews. I ensured however that given the scale of this study, I was the only person who analysed the data. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that this allows the person transcribing to begin the process of analysis as transcription is occurring; this was certainly the case in this study and presented me with an important opportunity to own the data and engage deeply with the data, immediately.

The chapter now moves to outlining the methods employed and the practical considerations in relation to the groups identified for this study - Primary school headteachers, mothers of children of prisoners and imprisoned fathers. The section will begin with a consideration of the implications from three preliminary pilot interviews with headteachers. This will be followed by a detailed description of the headteacher, mother and prisoner interviews. The themes of access and acceptance, sampling and recording of the interviews will be used in relation to each interview group

### Pilot Interviews

The data collection element of the study commenced with informal, exploratory interviews (Oppenheim, 1992) with three headteachers. These were implemented to inform the questions for and timing of the semi-structured interviews. The overall aim of these early interviews was 'ideas collection' (Oppenheim, 1992, p.56) with the specific focus to:-

- gather information on what support mechanisms were already in place in school for children with a parent in prison
- gather views on possible future support and their vision of this
- inform and develop the questions that would be used in the following semi structured interviews for each stakeholder group.

The three headteachers were all women from schools in the North West of England. They were selected on the basis of personal contacts and local knowledge, as a cross-section of schools within the area. **School A** was in a deprived area of Liverpool, having a number of children with a parent in prison and a high proportion of children in receipt of free school meals (a regularly used

indicator of deprivation). **School B** was located on the border between Merseyside and Lancashire - a mixed local area with some prosperity but with other less prosperous areas. This school had a smaller number of children receiving free school meals, but still a significant number. **School C** was located in an affluent area of Cheshire, with a very low number of free school meals.

I selected four key themes for discussion, but, given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, these acted as a guide only and a range of topics were pursued. These themes were chosen, based upon the need to probe each headteacher's knowledge and understanding of the children in their school and their needs, the provision they offered and the possible provision they felt would be realistic in the future. The four themes were:-

- their current knowledge of the children in their school (i.e. were there any children who had a father in prison)
- current systems in place within the school to support children with a parent in prison
- how the school currently communicates with parents who are in prison
- their views on potential initiatives which might enable direct participation of parents in prison

All headteachers were assured anonymity. I maintained sole access to the information provided. Two of the three headteachers were surprised at being approached about this issue, whereas the third headteacher welcomed the opportunity to engage in this, feeling that this was an often neglected area. Responses were grouped into the four identified themes and reported under each heading. Each theme was explored in detail but each participant expanded on their answers and on certain occasions some found answering difficult, citing limited knowledge. This information was noted and provided useful baseline feedback on the levels of knowledge in some schools surrounding the children of prisoners.

Each offered varying perspectives on the knowledge of schools about the children of prisoners, thus informing some questions within the study itself. For example, the headteacher from School A raised the levels of parental involvement before prison (i.e. some children lived with the father, others lived with the mother and saw the father for contact and others were looked after children). This resulted in the inclusion of a question for prisoners and mothers about involvement prior to imprisonment in the life and education of the child. Another headteacher indicated that it was unnecessary to keep imprisoned fathers informed, given their choice to no longer be involved in the life of their child. This prompted the inclusion of a question relating to current levels of school communication with imprisoned fathers, across all three interview groups.

Headteachers were the first interviews carried out, given my ability to access these quickly. This afforded me the opportunity to spend more time establishing links within the prison service and research community (see 'Access and Acceptance' for further details).

### Interviews with Headteachers

#### *Access and Acceptance*

It is necessary, before examining the arrangements for carrying out each group of interviews, to consider 'access and acceptance' (Cohen et al. 2007) in relation to each interview group and how their participation was secured. No researcher has the right of access to any institution, particularly when that institution works with potentially vulnerable individuals, for example prisoners or children. Cohen et al. (2007) argue for the need to establish one's credentials as a professional and a researcher.

My role within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) resulted in strong contacts within the world of education and access to a large number of primary schools very quickly. I was already recognised as a member of the education community and ensured that my employer was aware I was approaching each of them.

### *Sampling*

Opportunity sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) was chosen as the key sampling strategy for the school based interviews, defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) as 'choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained' (p. 113-114). A letter (Appendix 2) was sent to 15 headteachers in the local area outlining the research request and including a summary of the project. The letter included the key ethical considerations of anonymity and the right to withdraw. Each headteacher was asked to contact me directly by email if they wished to express an interest. This prevented any pressure being placed on individuals and if they did not respond, they were not approached again.

Ten headteachers responded positively to the request for involvement and from these five were finally able to take part. In some cases it was not possible to find a mutually convenient time to meet and in others, headteachers withdrew their interest. Each headteacher provided informed consent prior to their interview in writing, agreeing to participate in the study, recognising that their responses would be anonymous and they had the opportunity to withdraw at any point.

### *The Interviews*

Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately 1 hour and was recorded on a digital recorder for subsequent transcription and analysis. A set of baseline questions (Appendix 3) were developed but additional questions were included, prompted by specific responses.

Each interview took place in the headteacher's office. On some occasions, the headteacher took the opportunity to show me around the school and highlight particular children or work they were particularly proud of. All interviews took place during the working school day.

## Interviews with the mothers of children of prisoners

### *Access and Acceptance*

Moving to the mothers and the prisoners, it was necessary to build a network of contacts. This included attendance at a number of conferences both within the North West and nationally, focussed upon the children of prisoners. Through these and my own reading I became aware of significant researchers and key figures within charities or research teams with an interest in this field. In some cases I emailed people to introduce myself and to introduce my study to them. In other cases I asked to meet them directly. For example, I met with the Deputy Director of Action for Prisoners Families and as part of this meeting, was offered the support of her North West based colleague. He contacted known prison charities across the North West. Partners of Prisoners (POPs) agreed to support the research and put me in contact with the person in charge of the POPs visitors' centre at a prison in the North West of England. The Visitor's Centre is independent of the prison and is managed by the charity, providing support, refreshments, lockers and a welcoming environment for friends and families visiting the prison.

The visitors centre was a wooden building but fully heated and volunteers worked very hard to ensure all visitors felt welcome, offering a tea bar, magazines and colourful displays for visitors to look at. The volunteers chatted to visitors and offered a room for accompanying children to play in. It was evident that in some cases, they had known many of the women for a long period of time. Some women had brought their children with them and the staff entertained the children for them, however the children did sometimes return to interrupt the interview. In one case the little girl was keen to tell me her experiences of visiting her Dad, what she enjoyed and didn't and how her school helped her.

Following several preparation meetings, it was agreed that the following arrangements would be in place:-

- I would position myself within the visitors centre on a number of Wednesdays (as there were 2 sets of visits on a Wednesday in the afternoon and evening).



- As each visitor registered at the office, they would be asked by the volunteer if they had any primary school aged children and if so, would they be willing to participate in my research.
- If they were willing, they would be introduced to me and I would outline the research to them in detail ensuring they understood the process of informed consent.
- The interview would then be carried out in a designated area of the visitors' centre and would last between 30 and 45 minutes. Although an open plan area, responses could not be overheard in this area given the general noise level of the room. This was made clear to each participant.

Wednesday afternoon was chosen for purely practical reasons, offering the opportunity to complete 2 sets of interviews in a given day. Prison visitors often arrive a long time prior to the start of visits to allow time for security checks and also due to the infrequency of public transport in the area.

### *Sampling*

Opportunity sampling (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) was again chosen as the key sampling strategy for the interviews with the mothers. Each visitor who attended the centre was approached and only women who had a child under the age of 11 and who agreed to participate were invited to take part in the study.

### *The interviews*

The majority of those asked were willing to participate, saying they were happy to chat to someone rather than sitting on their own. The interviews were carried out in the 3 weeks before Christmas, a particularly emotional time for all visitors and particularly those with children. It must be noted at this point that the emotion of this time of year cannot be ignored when considering the interview environment. Liebling (2002) emphasises that there is often an 'absence of pain or emotion' from qualitative research in criminal justice environments (p149). This was not the case in this study. The emotion in the room on each occasion was palpable; however the positivity (both real and generated by staff) clearly did

have an impact upon visitors from their time of arrival. Each mother referred to Christmas, both in positive and negative terms – looking forward to visiting and the success they had had in gaining visiting orders for key Christmas dates. For others, the worries about money and practicalities of the season were all encompassing and were raised both in the formal interviews and informally when chatting in the waiting room.

Ten formal interviews were carried out across a number of afternoons and evenings, however in addition to this, a number of women chatted to me informally as I sat in the waiting room. Some had older children or no children at all, but were keen to share their stories with me. They felt able to approach me and were comfortable with my presence once news spread of why I was there and what my role was in that setting. This assisted in my ability to gain an understanding of the broader context of the centre and the women visiting.

I was conscious of how I may have appeared to the women attending the prison for visits. Research has argued the advantages and disadvantages of women interviewing women (Reinharz and Chase, 2002; Riessman, 1987). This has highlighted that 'women share a subordinate position in society, therefore they are 'almost always enthusiastic about talking to a woman researcher' (Finch, 1984, p.72 in Tang, 2002, p.704). However, if the 'social characteristics' (Ribbens, 1989, p579) of the interviewer and interviewee are perceived to be very different, this can have an impact upon the answers and the interview dynamics. It cannot be argued that I did not have some power in this process and that the location of the interviews, although helpful as this was familiar territory for each visitor, did not entirely 'rid the research situation of hierarchy' (Oakley, 1998, p.713).

### Interviews with Prisoners

There is a growing body of literature focussed upon the 'intense, risk-laden, emotionally fraught environment' (Liebling, 1999, p.163) of prisons and the challenges faced by those who choose to carry out research within this 'methodological terrain' (Schlosser, 2008, p.1501). This is particularly true in

relation to the novice researcher for whom 'it is a difficult world to enter before one even arrives at the prison gates' (Davies, 2011, p.164). In these circumstances, it is necessary to be 'innovative and persistent' (Schlosser, 2008, p.1501) when making arrangements to carry out prison based research. The discussion outlined below will summarise the approach to applying for permission and the subsequent reality of negotiating access with an individual prison once the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) permission had been agreed. However, it must be noted that King and Liebling (2008) highlight the potential issues reduce significantly when considering PhD studies as they are seen to be limited in scope, take a long time to complete and unwelcome findings may be easier to dismiss' (p.436). In addition they note that applications which focus on 'self- contained emerging areas of policy where policy divisions have not yet been able to find a place' (p.436) are likely to be viewed more favourably.

#### *Access and Acceptance*

The process of making contacts within this research community and the prison service was slow, time-consuming and at times frustrating. However, Denscombe (1998) highlights the importance of this process, emphasising that gaining access should be a 'relationship' rather than a one off event. It appeared that what would initially be fruitful lines of enquiry would result in no leads whereas other avenues, initially appearing to be of limited value, proved very helpful. The order the interviews were carried out indicates the level of difficulty I had in securing them, resulting in the prisoners being the final group. Only by developing very strong links within the prison visitors centre, was I then able to gain access to the prison via the governor – referred to by Davies et al. (2011) as 'a foot in the door' (p.164). A 'cold call' application would have been far slower, and less positively received (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Although I was not aware of this at the outset of my work with the centre, developing strong, trusting relationships with the staff in the visitors centre was crucial within the process of gaining access. They were in a position to recommend me to the governor as a suitable applicant with a clear research focus as I had already carried out interviews in the prison visitors centre; staff in the centre were acting as 'gatekeepers to the gatekeepers' (Noaks and Wincup, 2004, p.58).

The role of the gatekeeper when applying to carry out research within a prison context was even more significant. In the case of the HM Prison Service, there are two levels of 'formal gatekeepers' (Emmel et. al., 2007). The initial being the permission required to enter HMP institutions and the second, gaining access to a particular prison and providing information to the prisoners in order to be able to gain their consent (discussion of this second element is located later in this chapter). In order to gain permission to carry out research within the prison service, a lengthy research application form was completed. As I was proposing to conduct research in one region of the country, this application was sent directly to the Area Psychologist for consideration, in line with the rules provided by the Prison Service at the time.

One region of the country was selected for the visits for purely practical reasons. It was important to have flexible and relatively local access to the prison, to enable me to be as flexible as possible within the arrangements offered. The number of prisoners had to be realistic and achievable in the available time and based on other prison based pieces of research the figure of 10 was decided upon. To include any more than this potentially could have stretched the good will of the prison too far, particularly given that 'prior agreement in principle can be undermined right up to the last moment by local tensions' (King and Liebling, 2008, p.436).

The Area Psychologist was the initial level of gatekeeping, followed directly by the governor of the prison. At that time, this seemed a daunting prospect, as the application required a significant level of detail relating to the proposed study. This included:-

- *the length of time I would need to spend in the prison:-*

Approximately 1½ hours per interview

2 interviews per day

10 prisoners = 5 days

5 days in total

- *how many prisoners would need to be involved:-*  
10 prisoners
- *the impact on staff within the prison.*

I needed somewhere I could carry out the interviews on a one to one basis with each prisoner. This would have implications for staff time if a member of staff also needed to be present in the room. It is clear how important it was to provide the most detailed information possible and to be aware of the impact the research would have on staff time and on the routines of certain areas of the prison (Noaks and Wincup 2004).

Initially I asked that staff distribute the consent forms (Appendix) to prisoners known to have children of primary school age, collect them back in and return them to me (I provided a stamped addressed envelope for the entire set of forms to be returned in). In reality, distributing written consent forms in advance had limited success due to the literacy levels of the prisoners and their unfamiliarity with me. Snowball sampling (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006) proved to be more successful however as the prisoners who became involved early on in the interview cycle were able to seek friends and acquaintances on their prison wing to be involved. They were in a position to re-assure them that I was independent and not part of the prison regime and they were already aware of their family circumstances.

From this point there were then questions relating to the structure of the study, my reasons for completing the research and how I planned to keep the prison service informed about the outcome of my findings. In addition to this it was necessary to submit a copy of the prompt questions (Appendix3) I hoped to use.

The information leaflet (Appendix 2) (which included a section for the prisoners to sign) outlined the project and the requirements of the potential participants. The levels of literacy of the prisoners were an important consideration when formulating this document as this can vary considerably (Meek, 2007b). Wiles et

al. (2007) highlight the concern regarding how much information to make available to potential participants in an attempt to avoid overwhelming them with unnecessary information, whilst ensuring they are sufficiently informed. It was important to present the information on one side of an A4 sheet (large enough to attract attention, but without dense text). My aim was to attract their attention with the word 'DADS' at the top and then several questions:-

-Do you have a son/daughter who goes to Primary School?

-Are they aged between 5 and 11 years?

-Would you like to know more about what your child is doing in school?

-Would you like to help out with their education and be able to talk to them more about school?

(Appendix 2)

It was hoped that these questions would then support potential participants in deciding whether to engage with the study.

When formulating the leaflet, it was important to consider whether the content, layout, structure and level of language were appropriate, to ensure all potential interviewees could access it equally (Schlosser, 2008). Wiles et al. (2007) highlight the importance of ensuring that the document does not look too official, thus causing unnecessary anxiety when distributed.

Another challenge related to the gatekeepers, in the second element of their role (I include prison officers and staff within this) was the necessity for the officers or possibly members of the education team to distribute the information leaflets and to allow the prisoners time and support to complete them effectively. They had the potential to exercise complete control over who was offered the opportunity to participate in the study (Bosworth et al., 2005; Mauthner et al. 2002) and were able to prevent certain members of the prison community from engaging in the research if it was felt they were inappropriate. I would therefore have had no control over the process of selection. I initially selected the education team as one way of distributing the leaflets as it is likely they would have more time to

support prisoners in completing the form. However, not all prisoners would attend education and therefore some could potentially be excluded from the process. Therefore, once I became familiar with the prison and each of the wings, I had relatively free access to the wings and met informally with a number of other prisoners who had not initially been selected by staff to take part in the study, but who were fathers and were keen to tell their stories. This was where snowball sampling became effective.

It is important at this point to note the significance in this study of Denscombe's (2002) observation that gaining access 'is not necessarily a one off thing' and renegotiation can sometimes be required when new or alternative access is necessary (Denscombe, 2002 p. 72). Due to the somewhat sporadic nature of the days I was available to carry out my interviews, negotiation was constantly required with the prison to establish appropriate times and locations for interviews and I tried to be as flexible as possible to fit in with prison routines

Once approval had been received from HM Prison Service, arrangements for timings of prison visits were made directly with the prison, via the Prison Visitors Centre. This is an example of 'innovative' practice in relation to this (Schlosser, 2008). Making arrangements directly with the prison had become a challenge and was taking a long time. As a result of this, I sought the support of the staff at the POPs Prison Visitors Centre. They agreed to become the key point of contact for the prison and negotiation was carried out with the governor with responsibility for prisoner welfare. This proved far more successful and she organised a visitor's pass on each occasion and ensured that I was on the list of visiting professionals.

### *Sampling*

Snowball sampling was used for the 10 prisoners, defined by Robson (2002) as when 'the researcher identifies one or more individuals from the population of interest. After they have been interviewed they are used as informants to identify other members of the population' (p.265). Although a strategy of sharing the introductory information leaflet with all prisoners was originally planned, word of mouth and prisoners' contacts with each resulted in higher participation rates; an

approach which has been successful in other studies of hard to reach populations, for example Sadler et al. (2010).

The prison selected for this study, was chosen for pragmatic reasons linked to location. It was a prison close enough to where I worked to be accessible on a regular basis for each interview and enabled flexibility when this was required as a result of last minute changes in arrangements made by the prison. I do not expect biased information from this prison and there is nothing to indicate that this would be the case.

### *The Interviews*

I was required to provide the prison with my full name, address and National Insurance Number prior to each visit and to bring my passport along to show on each visit. Interview visits always took place outside visiting hours. I was keen to ensure that my research did not have a negative impact upon any prisoner or the time set aside for visits from their friends and families. On one particular occasion, a prisoner I was due to interview, I discovered once I arrived on the wing, had gone home on overnight home leave. The nature of the prison environment results in last minute changes and developments leading to a need for significant flexibility on the part of the researcher.

The timing of arrangements did change on certain occasions due to staffing levels, security concerns or occasionally, due to my own work commitments as highlighted by King and Liebling (2008). For example, on one particular occasion my plans were changed significantly at the request of the prison due to a riot that had taken place on one wing several days earlier. This had impacted significantly upon the routines and staffing within the prison and the management of the prison needed to prioritise the welfare of prisoners and staff, rather than my research.

The most challenging element of arranging the visits was the apparent speed and consistency of communication between areas and departments of the prison. Although a visit may have been arranged for me by the governor, the main entrance and security staff at the gate may have been aware of it, the staff on a



particular wing may have had no knowledge of it at all. This then required a second level of explanation and negotiation from the member of staff from POPs.

Following the establishment of arrangements, I was allocated particular prisoners to interview, one wing at a time. As the prison is spread across a large site and each wing is a building in itself, I approached each wing separately. Timing and practical considerations then became important. I always carried out interviews in the morning (as visiting took place in the afternoon and early evenings on some days) and this had an impact on staffing.

A significant number of prisoners were either involved in education or worked in an area of the prison; therefore the first practical implication was locating each prisoner for their interview. I began by reporting to the wing related to my list of prisoners. An officer would then let me know whether the prisoner was still on the wing or had gone to another area of the prison for work or education. On most occasions the officers were not expecting me so had not been instructed to keep particular prisoners back on the wing. Locating the prisoner then became necessary, either in the education block, the kitchen or the laundry. On a small number of occasions, often by chance, the prisoner would still be on the wing (in one case this was because he was awaiting gym induction and in another case, because he wasn't currently employed). Following this it was necessary to remind them of the study, reinforce the fact that they could withdraw at any point and share ethical information with them.

Interviews took place wherever the prisoner was located at the point of contact, including accompanying background noise and events (Davies, 2011). It was not possible to re-locate the prisoner to another part of the prison to carry out the interview due to time restrictions and security implications. Some interviews therefore took place on the wings themselves, on the ground floor open areas overlooked by the cells, others took place in the office of the kitchens, the office of the education wing or in one case in the visitor's room. No-one stood nearby or attempted to listen to what was being said. The interviews were not intentionally disturbed by other prisoners or prison officers and in each case, privacy was respected. I cannot be certain however that this did not have an impact upon the responses prisoners gave as exemplified by Noaks and Wincup

(2004). In the interviews carried out on the wings, background noise was an issue and did cause something of a distraction (for me rather than the prisoners). During several interviews on one wing, a prisoner was locked into his cell due to his behaviour and was incessantly banging on the door, seeking to be unlocked. This was persistent throughout the interviews. The prisoners themselves found my initial distraction by these quite amusing, sharing comments such as *'you get used to it'* or *'there's always someone pissed off about something and making a row'*.

Initially, in my planning, I had envisaged interviewing prisoners in an office or room within the prison, being observed by a prison officer. This however was not the case and clearly the reality of the staff resource required to do this would be unreasonable and impractical. It was evident that I was far safer given the proximity of wing prison officers and it was far more efficient for me to have free access to each wing under the guidance of the prison officers and other prisoners but this could potentially impact negatively on prisoners' responses.

Some prisoners were very keen to use this as a therapeutic opportunity to talk about their circumstances, family life and relationships (Schlosser, 2008). Others provided far briefer answers. It appeared this was either due to having little to say or few examples to give or because it was distressing subject for them and one they did not wish to discuss or engage in. The interviews were semi-structured in approach and it was pleasing to see very quickly after the first interview, that this was an appropriate format to adopt. The skill of the interviewer however is fundamental in this semi-structured grounded approach and it is vital for the interviewer to 'encourage a natural narrative along restricted topics using the semi-structured interview schedule in order to introduce the topics' (Davies et al., 2011, p170). This skill developed over the interview period and it was evident that the earlier interviews were not as effective at this, where answers were shorter and less relaxed.

It was necessary to consider how I dressed for the interviews and how I presented myself. It was important to appear confident in this environment. I ensured that I did not look overdressed for the environment and chose on each occasion to

wear trousers rather than a skirt, aware that overformal dress could present an additional barrier in the interview process.

The men had not met me before but on each occasion I was accompanied by the POPs visitor centre manager who knew the majority of prisoners and their families and this supported the view that I could be trusted. I feel this would have been very different if I had been accompanied by a 'figure of authority' and my presence may have been seen as an 'outsider with power'. (Schollosser, 2008, p.1512). I made immediate eye contact with each prisoner, shook their hand, introduced myself and thanked them for taking the time out to talk to me. I was keen for them not to feel used for the information they held. We engaged in some informal chat before and after (and sometimes during) each interview. Some men wanted to share their stories of their families. One interviewee was particularly excited as his daughter had just secured a place at a ballet school in London. He had mixed emotions on this occasion as he was very proud of his daughter but also deeply concerned about both losing contact with her and that she would potentially be ashamed of him and his imprisonment.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

Before moving to consider the data gathered it is necessary to examine the ethical implications for this study. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines were used to inform ethics of this study, however, an additional level of guidance was required from HM Prison Service.

All research within prisons in the United Kingdom must be based within a sound knowledge of HM Prison Service and demonstrate a clear understanding of their guiding principles to ensure the safety and security of all those taking part; a significant level of detail is therefore required. At the time of my application HM Prison Service implemented its' own research guidelines. However, with the introduction of NOMs, applications for permission to carry out research in the criminal justice system are now processed by NOMs (<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/noms>). The research was also approved within the Institute of Education Ethics Committee.

There are a small number of books and journal articles reflecting on researching within prisons (Bosworth, 2005; Davies et al. 2011; Liebling, 1999; Liebling and King, 2008; Noaks et al. 2004) but this often forms only one part of a larger work on research in criminology. In addition there are some small-scale research projects, for example, Boswell and Wedge (2002), Clarke et al. (2005), Earle (2012), Jarvis et al. (2004), McMurrin et al. (2008), Meek (2007a and b), Walker, 2005, 2010a, b) and which, when read together, provide some insight into the key areas for consideration. It is important however to note that often this element is removed or significantly reduced prior to publication in journals or book chapters due to word length or the prioritisation of other content. The most common topic is written informed consent (Clarke et al. 2005; Jarvis et al. 2004; McMurrin et al. 2008) with the authors emphasising the importance of gaining from prisoners. Two highlighted the need for consideration of the guiding ethical principles for their academic institutions (Clarke et al. 2005, Meek 2007a) and one made reference to the possible literacy difficulties that may be faced by prisoners (Meek, 2007b) when agreeing to engage in any project.

‘because of the close personal interaction in qualitative interviews, and the potentially powerful knowledge produced, ethics becomes as important as methodology in interview research’ (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005, p.497).

Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2005) generalised discussion surrounding interviews provides informative guidance relating to the sensitive nature of this research method. However given the nature and necessarily sensitive location (Cohen et al., 2007) of elements of this study, ethical considerations need to be addressed to ensure that ‘no harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research.’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Oppenheim, 1992). It has been argued that ‘the sum of the potential benefits to a participant and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to the participant...and the larger group they represent’ (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009 p.73) As there are a number of ethical elements to consider, these will now be separated out and considered individually.

### Anonymity

All participants who provided informed consent had to be protected from any possibility that their identity could be revealed either in the course of the research or otherwise (BERA 2004). However, anonymity could only be absolutely guaranteed if there had been no face to face contact with the researcher. Once I had met the interviewees, the information they were providing could no longer be said to be anonymous to me (Cohen et al. 2007). It therefore became a case of offering confidentiality on my part and anonymity when presenting the information to the academic community.

A rigorous system for anonymising was implemented from the outset and reviewed throughout the work and at the conclusion of the fieldwork. Headteachers were allocated a letter; mothers and prisoner participants were allocated a number for the purpose of my recording. I held (and was the only one able to access) the original records from which numbers could be linked with the real identities, thus using procedures which I hoped would prevent incidence of betrayal (Cohen et al 2007). Shaw (2008) highlights that the risk of betrayal is always higher in qualitative research due to the 'emphasis on the details of how people live their lives' (Shaw, 2008, p.409) and therefore it would be possible to further disadvantage those involved.

A small amount of personal data, in addition to the qualitative material was necessarily collected in the course of the work for example, in the case of the prisoners, number and age of children and length of current sentence. Again, I restricted access to this information to myself only as emphasised by Cooper and Schindler (2001) and ensured that only crude reporting categories were used, providing, for example, only age of child, not year of birth and ensuring this was collected and recorded in a general way rather than linking it to specific names (in the form of a tally) (Cohen et al. 2007). Overall, I took 'reasonable precautions' (Robson, 2002) to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

### Informed consent

Although informed consent is a central consideration whenever ethical deliberation is required, research with vulnerable groups such as prisoners, calls

for particularly close attention to be paid to informed consent (Davies et al. 2011; Mauthner et. al. 2002; Robson, 2002) ensuring that as far as possible, measures are implemented to ensure that consent is informed, remembering that that it is 'incumbent upon the researcher to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to the participants the questions of what, who, why and how' (Davies, 2011, p.166).

One definition of the term 'informed consent' is cited by Cohen et al. (2007) who refer to Diener and Crandall's (1978) four elements of informed consent as 'competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension' (Cohen et al. 2007,p.52). It was essential that all potential participants were aware of and understood, the study. A letter was sent to the headteachers and a leaflet detailing the project and outlining the information that prisoners were asked to provide during interviews, was distributed and those willing to participate were asked to sign to demonstrate their informed consent.

Although these practical steps were important and went some way to helping participants to understand their role in the study, 'the inductive, emergent nature of qualitative design precludes researchers being able to predict where the study will take them' (Malone, 2003 p.800). This raises the questions surrounding how fully informed participants can be as highlighted by Ruane (2005), Mauthner et al. (2002) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Potential participants often want as much information as possible but this level of detail cannot always be provided (particularly I feel, with semi-structured interviews) as the nature of the discussion is partly led by the interviewee (Wiles et al. 2007). I felt that the potential participants could not fully know what they were consenting to (Mauthner et al. 2002) and were still not fully aware of the potentially distressing topics they would be asked to talk about. They were unaware of the emotional impact of this or how they might react to questions relating to their family and identity as a father (Arksey and Knight 1999, Malone, 2003). However, Wiles et al. (2007) point out that some interviewees found it patronising to be told the interview questions may cause distress, knowing that discussions of this nature would upset them. In the light of this debate, it was therefore important to continually renegotiate informed consent as the interviews proceeded to ensure that participants understood their

right to refuse certain questions or to step away from the process if they were found to be too distressing or inappropriate (Arksey and Knight, 1999).

Robson (2002) raises the debate surrounding advanced knowledge of the discussion topic. He argues that providing advanced notice of the topics to be discussed, allows participants time to consider their responses or alter them accordingly and this could significantly affect the reliability of the data collected. It is true that within the power relationship between the researcher and researched, the interviewee has the power to respond in any way they wish, whether it be to tell the truth, to provide answers they think the interviewer wants to hear or to intentionally deceive and their 'accounts can be riddled with special pleading, selective memory, careless error, self-centredness, myopia, prejudice and a good deal more' (Bridges, 2001, p.373). However, as a researcher I could not deliberately hide my intended topics for discussion (Robson, 2002). Participants had a right to know the type of questions they would be asked. Without provision of such information, many potential interviewees may have elected to withdraw in the early stages of the process.

A signature is often the most common way of researchers gaining consent and they must sign it to say they are personally willing to participate (BERA 2004, Denzin and Lincoln 2008, Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). This is also a method for participants to demonstrate comprehension of what they have been asked. However, Wiles et al. (2007) draw attention to the debate surrounding signing a document to provide consent. Requests to sign a document can be perceived to be very threatening and could have inhibited some potential participants (Wiles et al. 2007) and my relationship with them (Mauthner et al. 2002). Coomber (2002) adds that signatures can also compromise confidentiality and anonymity where protection of participants is a requirement (particularly in relation to criminal acts). Again participants may be concerned that the signed document could be traced back to them and potentially used against them in the future. However, I elected to include a section for the prisoner to sign if they were prepared to take part in the process. This was driven mainly by practical reasons. As I was unable to be present at the time of the initial leaflet distribution I could not find another effective way of recording likely participants. I did not feel it

appropriate to ask prison staff to use their time creating additional lists. It also meant I had a record of who had agreed to participate, should any queries or concerns be raised later in the process.

### Institutional pressure

Institutional pressure can be closely linked to informed consent. This is particularly true in 'situations of external control where consent becomes fragile' (Shaw, 2008, p.405). Prisoners are particularly vulnerable to institutional pressures both real and perceived. A possible consequence was that some may have volunteered to participate in the hope of some benefit to them. Conversely, others may have decided not to take part, fearing that what they disclosed in interviews would be shared with those in authority. The final category relates to those who did participate but felt they needed to be guarded in their responses for fear of recrimination at a later stage.

These issues were addressed in the clearest possible terms in the content of the introductory material which was provided to possible participants. This stressed that agreement or refusal would not impact in a positive or negative way on the sentence or on any other aspect of their prison or rehabilitative experience. Both at the initial stage of the selection process and at the beginning of the interviews, participants were reminded that they were still able to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable or unhappy to continue and that there would be no negative consequences relating to this decision (BERA, 2004).

### Feedback

'How can we give back to them the knowledge they gave us?' (Shaw, 2008, p408)

Feedback will be provided, in written or oral format to participants at the end of the project via POPs to ensure they are aware of the outcomes of this research and the potential next steps. It may also be possible to disseminate this information via the prison newsletter.

This chapter has reflected upon the key methods used within this study and the ways in which these were approached. The next section of the thesis will now



consider the data that was collected using these methods, analyse the themes emerging from this and discuss these findings.

## **Chapter 4            Data Analysis**

### **4.1 Chapter 4 Introduction**

This chapter will begin by reviewing the process which was used to collect and analyse the data for this study, followed by a rationale for the analysis decisions which were made.

'What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (Geertz, 1973, p.9)

The following groups were interviewed:-

5 headteachers

10 mothers of the children of male prisoners

10 imprisoned fathers

### **Characteristics of Sample Interviewees**

Interviewee	Age	Marital Status	Length of prisoner's sentence	Fatherhood status	Residency prior to imprisonment
Mum 1	27	Married	2 years	3 children 1 child from previous marriage	Full time residence with family

Mum 2	48	Married	15 years	1 child together 2 children from his marriage 1 from her marriage	Full time residence with family
Mum 3	32	Married	10 years	3 children together 2 children from his previous marriage	Full time residence with family
Mum 4	29	Married	3 years	3 children	Full time residence with family
Mum 5	36	living together	4 years	2 children together 1 child from previous relationship	Full time residence with family
Mum 6	29	married	5 years	2 children together	Full time residence with family
Mum 7	34	Living together	8 years	3 children together 1 from his previous relationship	Full time residence with family
Mum 8	36	Married	2 years	3 children from his previous relationship	Full time residence with family
Mum 9	25	Living together	3 years	1 child together	Full time residence with family
Mum 10	68	Grandma – looking after children. Mother not present	6 years	3 children	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 1	41	Living apart	8 years	2 children together	Non-resident
Prisoner 2	32	Married	3 years	1 child together	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 3	37	Married	7 years	1 child together	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 4	26	Living apart	6 years	2 children together	Non-resident
Prisoner 5	21	Living apart	8 years	1 child together	Non-resident
Prisoner 6	46	Living together but away a lot	6 years	1 child together	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 7	33	Married	8 years	4 children	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 8	42	Married	life	3 children	Full time residence with children
Prisoner 9	24	Married	9 years	4 children	Non-resident

Prisoner 10	29	Living together	6 years	2 children	Full time residence with children
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Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and involved a semi-structured interview approach (see Chapter 3 for full details of the interview process). Where recording was permitted and participants provided their consent, a recording of the interview was taken, to ensure accurate transcription could take place. Where this was not permitted (in the prison and the visitors centre), detailed notes were taken at the time of the interview and the interview was transcribed immediately after, to enhance accuracy. It is worth noting however, that these delayed transcriptions may not contain the level of detail of those from recordings.

From each transcription, a process of initial coding took place, where themes were identified within each interview. A code was written next to the appropriate section within the transcription. Once the initial coding process was complete, a set of analytical memos (Saldaña, 2009) were created, based upon the identified themes within each interview. At the point at which a group of interviews were complete (e.g. five school interviews), it was then possible to create a set of analytical memos for that group. This involved study of the codes identified in each interview and beginning to identify significant themes emerging across all interviews. Themes which only occurred in one (or sometimes 2) interviews, were analysed but then discounted unless they were deemed to have a significant impact upon the findings of the study. This process was repeated across each group of interviews.

Once all groups of interviews had been analysed individually, a process of identifying the codes and themes across all groups began, leading to the key findings and recommendations of the study.

#### **4.2 Analysis of the Data**

'Raw data can be very interesting to look at, yet they do not help the reader to understand the social world under scrutiny, and the way the participants view it, unless such data have been systematically analysed to illuminate an existent situation' (Basit, 2003, p.144)

Although this chapter has been divided into collection of and analysis of the data, for ease of reading, it should be acknowledged that there has been an 'interweaving of data collection and data analysis' (Liamputtong, 2009, p.133) from the start of the analytical process. The data analysis has informed the collection of data and vice versa (Liamputtong, 2009; Schiellerup, 2008). The three pilot headteacher interviews led to review and development of the questions asked in subsequent interviews and although informally, this process continued throughout the collection and analysis period. This included when I was not 'at work' and I was able to reflect on and analyse my data during conversations with a range of colleagues and those working in the field of criminal justice. This has continued to contribute to the 'meaning making process' (Liamputtong, 2009, p.135).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) outline the analysis process I have used, very succinctly:-

' For some authors, analysis refers primarily to the tasks of coding, indexing, sorting, retrieving or otherwise manipulating data....From such a perspective, the task of analysis can be conceived primarily in terms of data handling. Whether it is done by hand or by computer software, data at this level is relatively independent of speculation and interpretation...For others in the field, analysis refers primarily to the imaginative work of interpretation, and the more procedural, categorising tasks are relegated to the preliminary work of ordering and sorting the data' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.6 in Noaks and Wincup, 2004).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) highlight the central analytical approach I have taken throughout this study. I have ensured that interpretation of data has taken place on an ongoing basis throughout the analysis, ensuring that data, analysis and discussion go hand in hand at all times, leading to what it is hoped is a free-flowing, focussed analysis and discussion of each group of interviews and the overall findings. The principle highlighted by Basit (2003) at the start of this section has assisted in guiding my decisions. I have selected the approach of:-

- (1) initially coding my data,
- (2) identifying links between these codes, reflecting on these via the process of analytical memos (Saldaña 2009)
- (3) engaging in thematic analysis (Liamputtong 2009)

(1) Coding is not just 'counting' but 're-ordering and identifying data' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.29). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) highlight that codes can be formulated in a range of ways, including: the interests of the researcher, code lists created prior to coding taking place (from conceptual framework or from reading) or from the research questions. I have taken my coding from each of these; however, the main foci have been based on my reading and my research questions. It would however, be impossible to ignore the role my personal interests as a researcher have played within this coding exercise. Some codes have been drawn up as a result of my wider educational interests (e.g. from my personal role as a former primary school teacher). In addition to this I have also approached the development of the codes from the 'what strikes me?' perspective (Liamputong, 2009, p.134). Through this, it was possible to identify unexpected elements from the data. Codes can be seen as 'pathways through the data' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.31) and in this study were organic, changing and developing as the study progressed.

'Coding is much more than simply giving categories to data; it is also about conceptualising the data, raising questions, providing provisional answers about relationships among and within the data' (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.31)

(2). The aim was to use analytical memos for identification of links within and between the codes. They were used to support analysis of and deeper, more critical engagement, with the data. Coding alone would not allow this to happen and could potentially result in 'data reduction' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.94).

It was essential to look beyond the obvious, eliciting what the data was saying, not taking the data at face value (asking questions of the data) and using it to make some tentative suggestions in relation to my conceptual framework (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

I took my approach to the use of analytical memos from Saldaña (2009), although the origins of these memos can be found in the Grounded Theory approaches of Glaser (1978). Saldaña advocates the use of memos in a range of ways:-

- How you personally relate to the participants and/or the phenomenon
- Your study's research questions

- Your code choices and their operational definitions
- The emergent patterns, categories, themes and concepts
- The possible networks (links, connections, overlaps, flows) among the codes
- An emergent or related existent theory
- Any problems with the study
- Any personal or ethical dilemmas with the study
- Future directions for the study
- The analytic memos generated thus far
- The final report for the study'

(Saldaña, 2009, p.40)

The ones listed below were most pertinent to the study and helped in the construction of the memos for each code. I have elected to focus upon memos relating to:-

- The study's research questions
- An emergent or related existent theory
- Code choices and their operational definitions
- Emergent patterns, categories, themes and concepts

These have been clearly identified in each memo and demonstrate the links to my original coding decisions, under two headings – code definition and context and question.

Each code within the interviews was analysed in the form of an analytic memo and these became 'substantive "think pieces"' (Saldaña, 2009, p.39). The memos became 'additional codes' (Saldaña, 2009, p.41) which prompted further reflection. This had an impact at the subsequent level of coding when themes from different groups of interviews were compared and analysed.

During the early stages of data collection, I decided to use manual coding of my data. I recognised the importance of close engagement with the data once it had been collected and considered both the handwritten, manual coding and analysis and the use of NVivo. The decision was taken for two reasons. Firstly, given the relatively small number of interviews within each group, this research did not warrant use of an electronic package. Secondly, even software packages require coding and analysis (Basit, 2003). The manual analysis allows full and deep engagement with the sensitive data available. Visiting and re-visiting the data during manual analysis presented me with the opportunity to code and sometimes re-code as necessary. Connections and themes were identified although not

originally obvious and from the 'pool of concepts' (Basit, 2003) developed prior to the coding process.

(3) The process of thematic analysis was the final stage in the process leading to a thematic map (Liamputtong, 2009) of developing themes and the links between them. It was necessary to include this third level of analysis due to the range of interviews carried out. As there were three interview groups, identification of key themes emerging from across the groups was central to successful analysis.

In the same way that codes were generated from a range of sources and my own personal interests, it must be recognised that the identified themes have also been developed in a similar way, as Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) remind us that:-

'patterns, themes and categories do not emerge on their own. They are driven by what the enquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets what the data are telling her or him...in short, rather than being an objectivist application of analysis procedures, the process is highly reflexive' (p.77)

The remainder of the chapter will now focus on the presentation and analysis of the data collected from each group of stakeholders. Each group of interviews will be presented in the following order:-

- A table showing the codes applied to that particular group of interviews.
- Each code is then presented and discussed individually with a focus on – the definition of the code, how it relates to the wider research context within the field and its' links to the central research questions for this study.
- Significant quotations taken directly from each interview are weaved throughout. The majority of these are presented at the start of each code, in order to exemplify the code and to contribute to overall understanding of it.

These have been presented in the following order – interviews with headteachers, interviews with mothers, interviews with prisoners. This ensures that each group of interviews builds up to the interviews with the imprisoned fathers. Each group

provides a very particular perspective on the focus of this study, however the fathers are central to this and it is necessary to consider their responses within the context of the full range of feedback. Chapter 5 will then present an overall discussion of the findings across each interview group and an analysis of the key themes collectively.

### 4.3 Interviews with Primary School Headteachers

<b>1</b> School not informed	<b>2</b> Behaviours	<b>3</b> Community	<b>4</b> Guidance/ Training	<b>5</b> Invisible Child	<b>6</b> Cover Stories
<b>7</b> Reputation of the family and school	<b>8</b> Relationship with family	<b>9</b> Engaging with fathers on visits	<b>10</b> Reluctance		

#### Code 1: School Not Informed

##### *Code Definition*

Defined as schools not being informed about the imprisonment of a child's father. Each headteacher indicated a lack of any knowledge of the number of children with an imprisoned father. They felt that it was important to have this information, and that they should have been informed. It could however be argued that this has the potential to present some challenges for the mothers of these children, who may not wish schools to know or may feel uncomfortable in telling them (Morgan et al., 2011).

*'If a child has a parent in prison, this is particularly difficult as we often don't get told, or we find out by accident, rather than through formal routes' (Headteacher A (HTA))*

*'It's just pot luck if we get told or not. We are always telling parents that it is important to tell the school about any changes in a child's personal circumstances*



*that might have an effect on school life – sometimes they do but often they don't*  
(HTA)

*'Often however, we are working in the dark, or working with just bits of information gleaned from the children or a parent possibly. (HTA)*

*'Never, and I find that quite horrific' (HTB)*

*'No one tells you so you don't ask' (HTB)*

*'So we're reliant on hearsay, someone living up the road – which is rubbish isn't it... We need to know because we need to put support in' (HTB)*

*'I feel we have the right to know. If I withheld that information from somebody...if I know something and I don't tell health or social services, I get hauled over the coals by them. (HTB)*

*'We've never heard anything from social services. It is the family who we have eventually heard from. Social Services don't get involved much around here That's part of the problem I think – they don't tell us and the parents are too embarrassed to say anything' (HTD)*

*'It shouldn't be me waiting for the family to tell me – there should be a system in place where it happens automatically. There could be other children that we don't know about – and the families round here would never want us to know' (HTD)*

*'So – that's the 3 I know about – there have been others in the past – bet there are probably others no that we don't know about because Mum or family are too afraid to tell us' (HTE).*

HTA highlighted challenges she faced in gaining information required from parents. This seemed particularly evident in relation to the children of prisoners. They were not informed when a father was imprisoned:- *'I don't have an exact figure as I know the ones I have been made aware of, but I'm pretty sure that there will be other ones too who we haven't been told about.'* (HTA). HTB referred to this as part of almost every response she provided. HTC appeared to be more relaxed, indicating she often did find out and, in most cases, felt confident in the relationship she had with parents. She was however unable to provide an exact number of the children affected. School D on the other hand appeared to have a very specific reason for referring to lack of information, due to a focus on the progress and academic achievement of the child.

### *Context and Question*

Research relating to parental involvement in education (PIE) frequently refers to the importance of strong lines of communication (Epstein, 2001; Goodall and

Vorhaus, 2011; Hornby, 2000) between parent and school. The interviews indicated that often was not the case when considering children of prisoners. To support this claim, the headteachers were unable to provide an accurate figure and were very reliant on the child or parent informing them. There was no evidence of robust tracking and monitoring systems to support them.

HTB emphasised this. It was evident from HTB's answers that she saw this as a central issue, highlighting that it is hard to support children without this knowledge. '*It's rubbish*' is a term she used several times to describe the current position regarding this communication.

This code links closely to the theories surrounding parental involvement. Communication, collaboration and liaison are central to PIE theories and models, for example, Epstein (2001), Hornby (2000) and Swapp (1993). HTD however held a traditional view of parental involvement and communication is evidently at the centre of this. Tveit (2009) asserts that researchers are now 're-thinking the traditional parental involvement paradigm' (p.289). HTD was unable to recognise why the mother may be unable to carry out her duty by informing the school.

Disclosing this information has the potential to be very distressing for a child, HTA referred to the potential benefits of a Learning Mentor and how they may have a role to play, if the funding resources were available. The interview at School A indicated how unlikely it is that the mother will be willing to inform the school amid concerns about her family's reputation. This interpretation was affirmed by the interviews with the mothers.

Lack of clear information emerged as a core issue in relation to the school based element of this research, with schools feeling powerless to help.

HTD was the exception, unwilling to comment upon the importance of the father's involvement and the right of the child to this. He was surprised when it was suggested, not recognising that 'parents may be participating or may wish to participate, but not necessarily in a way approved of or validated by the school' (Tveit, 2009, p. 290). Vincent (2012) believes 'there are likely to be some parents for whom daily survival will consume all of their time, their energy, leaving little

space for interacting with the school, something which needs to be recognised and not condemned' (p.28).

## Code 2: Behaviours

### *Code Definition*

This is defined as the behaviours displayed by children following the imprisonment of a parent.

*Sometimes the child will give us a clue – e.g. my dad has gone away, or that their mum is sad, they may display some different behaviours (but this could be down to lots of things) or they might start to have odd days off to go and visit (and be very unsettled when they get back' (HTA)*

*'We were having lots of trouble with the eldest boy because dad had all of a sudden come back from prison and his behaviour went completely. He became his dad...[When his dad was in prison] he had a male teacher in Year 5 and he did well in terms of behaviour...and engagement and respect for others. He didn't try to be the guy on the playground and he started to develop friendships. But roundabout Christmas last year Dad came down the path. Honestly, it was like a switch' (HTB)*

*'They were weepy but because of our school, they know they can speak to any adult' (HTC)*

*'We know when they are acting out of character and we are able to provide the support that they need' (HTC)*

*Yes, it could be that they are withdrawn or weepy...or falling out with their friends. Extra sensitive and not really concentrating on their work' (HTC)*

*'In this particular case, the child's absences was what triggered for us that there was something wrong. Poor boy – even when he did return to school, he became very withdrawn and wouldn't speak to people.' (HTD)*

*'He lost all enjoyment of school and became a different child' (HTD)*

*'We'd know anyway though, as his behaviour, which is a nightmare anyway, gets visibly worse when Dad goes back in' (HTE)*

*'Behaviour always changes to a certain extent. That varies massively though from child to child. For my child in Reception he just gets really teary when he is tired and says he misses his Dad...the child in Year 4 – his behaviour is seriously challenging all the time...the boy in Year 6 – he's been the least extreme of them all. This has surprised me to be honest, given the nature of his Dad's crime. I'd have thought he'd have been quite traumatised by the raid, but he has actually settled since that happened' (HTE).*

There is a strong indication from the headteacher interviews that children's behaviour may alter as a result of this significant change in their personal circumstances. It must also be noted that this change can be positive in some cases. Headteachers indicated that the marked change in behaviour facilitates early identification.

### *Context and Question*

I had not originally considered this when examining how schools were informed. I had considered the mother, through social services or through the child informing the school themselves (DCSF/MOJ, 2007). Behaviour manifested itself in very different ways in each interview, but was consistently referred to in all.

Studies relating to the families of prisoners highlight the impact of imprisonment on the families and children of prisoners. Often this is considered in relation to families of prisoners as a homogenous group, for example Codd (2008), Condry, (2007), Crewe and Bennett (2012) and Scott and Codd (2010) rather than on children (and particularly their school life). There is now a piece of children's literature – *Poppy's Hero* by Rachel Billington (2012) - focussing on this issue from the perspective of the child and the feelings that this can generate for children and more recently, Morgan et al. (2013) and Barnardo's (2013) have also begun to examine this.

HTB offered an alternative perspective indicating that the impact can still be uncharacteristic for the child while remaining positive, demonstrating how imprisonment can improve the behaviour and well-being of the child. HTE confirmed this providing an example of a child displaying more stable behaviour when his father was in prison. HTE believed that the changes in behaviour were helpful for the school, but this must be set within the context of those changes in behaviour indicating a significant level of distress.

Children of male prisoners are displaying very varied school behaviours once their father is imprisoned and there appears to be no consistency in how those behaviours manifest themselves. Condry (2012) warns against taking an 'oversimplified and one-sided view of the impact of prisons on the lives of prisoners' families' noting that in some cases, prison can provided a 'breathing

space' for families (p.77). However in other cases, the loss is felt deeply by children. In the case of School C, this manifests itself in a more emotional response, with some occasional examples of aggression towards peers, whereas in School A and B behaviour did deteriorate.

### Code 3: Community

#### *Code Definition*

This is defined as the people around the family – those in the school community and local area who may have knowledge of the family and their perceptions of them.

*'My TA (Teaching Assistant) lives in the road the family live in and she just happened to inform me. Just this morning Mrs A came to me and said this is from the police, just saying keep an eye out blah blah' (HTB)*

*'It was, it was all over the local papers' (HTC)*

*'We've got a home-school-parish co-ordinator – she visits at home. She is the life of the parish – she lives in the parish at the heart of the community' (HTC)*

*It's because it's not unusual in this area, so if there isn't the shock factor in the community and we're not shocked are we?' (HTC)*

*'It is a relatively small community where people socialise together and sail together and play golf together and so this is not something a family would be willing to admit to' (HTD)*

*'The parents here (mums particularly) at the school gate, do talk' (HTD)*

Within Interview A, the term community referred to the wider community context of the family. Often they were perceived as making a judgement about the family and stigmatising the mother and the child

HTB exemplified the way in which 'community' as a code, also related to the potential role of the community in the lives of the children of prisoners. She demonstrated her discovery of parental incarceration through the local community and the contacts staff had within it.

HTC presented a final definition of community demonstrating the positive impact of the community and the acceptance and support that can be offered.

### *Context and Question*

Mothers of the children of prisoners are aware of the perception of themselves within the local community, perceiving that they are guilty by association as mothers but Condry (2007) highlights that we must not forget the 'secondary stigma' faced by children in relation to this - they are therefore victims of 'contamination' and 'shame by association' (p89).

The local school is at the heart of many communities and therefore employs a large number of staff from the local area, who have the ability to act as the eyes and ears of the school. However, this can also contribute to families employing cover stories and other strategies to preserve their reputation in this context.

HTC offered an alternative perspective on the role of the community - emphasising the supportive role of the school at the centre of the community *'It's because it's not unusual in this area, so if there isn't the shock factor in the community and we're not shocked are we? (HTC)*. It is therefore evident that the community has the potential to be helpful in identifying families affected by imprisonment. The practical challenges in relation to this are the codes 'cover stories' and 'reputation' and the lengths some families may go to in seeking to preserve their reputation.

The reluctance of the mother in School D to share her personal family circumstances, due to her status within the community, had a significant impact upon the child. Communities therefore can have a very important role to play in supporting a family and informing the school of their concerns, but they can also play an alternative role potentially damaging a family's chances of support.

### Code 4: Guidance and Training

#### *Code Definition*

This can be defined as staff development and practical support for all schools engaged with the children and families of prisoners.

*'We are always very keen to speak to people who have specialist knowledge in all areas linked to our children's needs. This is an area none of us are experts in...I wonder if there is anything? I suppose some staff training might be helpful*

*for all staff, as no-one knows for sure if they have a child or not and it would then be helpful in the future'. (HTA)*

*'I'm not sure that anyone in a school establishment has got those skills to do that...it was frustrating as we don't have the skills to do it, but there must be people out there who can enable that to happen' (HTB)*

*'Guidelines, definitely. Because, you know, if it's a new teacher coming maybe, like an NQT or a recently qualified teacher, or a teacher who has never experienced anything like that before. I think guidelines would be really helpful' (HTC)*

*'We do want to help though – we aren't always as equipped to help as much as we should be' (HTD)*

*'We haven't had any training so don't really know what to say and do. Maybe we could have approached some outside agencies for some help' (HTD)*

*'I think there needs to be a policy from the Local Authority about this – we have one for everything else so we should have something about this. It is a need like Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D) or a health issue, but it's silent and hidden. We can't see it so might not know about it and then we can't help. What about some training for us as a staff too – or at least for my Deputy Head/Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) so she could support children and maybe their families. It's difficult though because we have very few children in this situation and I don't want to put too many resources into it if we don't need to' (HTD)*

*'We aren't experts, but we want to do all we can to help these children – surely that's what we are here for' (HTE)*

*'There almost needs to be a special programme for them – we have them for children who have a parent who has died, those with educational needs and those with behavioural problems, but nothing for this group. It's not something you can see or hear in a child' (HTE)*

*'I'd like some training – is there any we could tap in to? Talking about this has made me see we aren't doing anything structured and maybe we should be?' (HTE)*

Schools and Local Authorities (LA) argue that staff training is a fundamental part of their roles in working with the children of prisoners and potentially facilitating father engagement in education. Continuing Professional Development is central to the role of all teachers: therefore it is unsurprising that the importance of guidance and training was highlighted in all interviews.

### *Context and Question*

Significant cuts within Local Authorities are resulting in severe reductions in training offered centrally through LAs. In some LAs this has been removed

completely. Where this is the case, schools are now adopting innovative strategies (Smith, 2012). This includes the development of clusters of primary schools who purchase external training.

For HTA, training was crucial. HTB did not raise this as a concern until much later in the interview, but did highlight the importance of training. She discussed it in relation to supporting children with a range of social and emotional needs, not just the children of prisoners.

*...and I do feel it's important that children like that who are seen to be swimming along and everything's fine, have that opportunity to offload. I'm not sure that anyone in a school establishment has got those skills to do that. (HTB)*

HTD highlighted the lack of systematic training for schools in this area. However he focussed more on the fact that schools shouldn't be expected to handle this by themselves - *'I think there is a lot of things here, that are potentially put on the school to have to do – more pressure for us to support families'* (HTD)

HTB raised the question about whether it should be schools that provide the more fundamental emotional support for the children of prisoners. She argued for significant training for the implementation of this. An example of potential training would be APF's *Hidden Sentence Training*. The learning outcomes of this training claim to help participants to:-

- Be aware of the context of the current criminal justice system and the offender's journey
- Explore the impact of imprisonment on family members and society
- Recognise specific issues for children with a family member in prison which may present barriers to them achieving the ECM outcomes
- Identify the support needs of the family and how these can be met by statutory/voluntary provision and resources
- Reflect on how the insight gained will affect practice.

(APF, 2011)



This training focuses upon children, however, but does not provide specialist counselling or support training. HTB highlighted that children often respond negatively if school staff attempt to take on this counselling role noting that *'children are very clever, they see lines...the barriers come down, it is very frustrating'* (HTB).

HTC requested a policy or set of guidelines for working with the children of prisoners (as echoed by HTD). They highlighted the potential benefits of this for anyone unfamiliar with this group (e.g. Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs)). As part of my own role I believe it is crucial that trainee teachers are introduced to the issues surrounding the children of prisoners. However, a policy and set of guidelines would be beneficial beyond this group, providing a consistency of policy and approach to the children of prisoners in all schools to prevent the current variability of practice (Morgan et al., 2011).

HTD stated the need for the LA or other agencies to be involved; however this is increasingly unlikely. He also indicated that charities could be involved. This was the first school to really consider the role of charities in working with schools:

*'non-governmental organisations provide invaluable help to prisoners and their families throughout the experience of imprisonment... often they provide a link between the prison and the outside which otherwise would be underdeveloped or non-existent'* (The Danish Institute of Human Rights, 2011, p.22)

but this provision would need to be implemented in a systematic way.

#### Code 5: Invisible child

##### *Code Definition*

This is a term used by Headteacher B (HTB) to describe the children of prisoners.

*'It worries me we don't know what we don't know. This is the invisible child I think, definitely – the only group'* (HTB)

*'Looking at the most recent Ofsted guidance of tracking groups of children you've got transgender, ethnicity, traveller children but not children of prisoners. It's massive. They aren't featuring in the documentation from the DfE I receive'* (HTB)

*'This is the hardest group to prove – the quietest group. Who gives them a voice? They aren't allowed are they?'* (HTB)

*'It's a need, like SEN or a health issue, but it's silent and hidden' (HTD)*

She highlighted them as the hidden group in a school context. It is evident schools are not aware of this group and all headteachers have highlighted this – but only schools B and D refer to the concept of children being 'invisible'.

### *Context and Question*

There is the potential for 'invisible' to be defined in two ways. HTB referred to invisible in relation the school context where there may be limited information about a child's situation (Boswell, 2002; Codd, 2008; Codd, 2010).

However, there is potentially a second way of considering this. There is the likelihood that a child may also be almost invisible to their father in prison. Some may see their child on visits, but in reality may actually know little about their current life.

Visits are often uncomfortable settings for children and their parents, if they go at all (APF, 2008; Boswell, 2002; Codd, 2010; Condry, 2012) and may cause children to share very little about themselves (Danish Institute of Human Rights, 2011). Might the father knowing in advance about life in school and what the child is doing, help this? Might bringing books and resources from school also be useful here?

### Code 6: Cover stories

#### *Code Definition*

This term can be defined as mothers using stories/fictitious excuses to explain their partner's absence, both to the school and those within the local community.

*I know of another one who supposedly went abroad and all of a sudden came back from working in Spain – with no tan! No one tells you so you can't ask. It's guess work. I'm still not 100% sure about the one who's been in Spain' (HTB)*

*'The other girl, different kettle of fish. Domestic violence is involved as well. I know that because she told us and when Dad was away she said he was away because they were split up, didn't actually say he was in prison' (HTB).*

*'Yes, well it like the Nan, who said they were at Columendy' (HTC)*

*'He's been told that Daddy has got a job far away and will be away for a long time (he's in for 2 years). (HTE)*

*'The little boy in Reception – Mum came and told me. She turned up at the end of the day...she was petrified and told me not to tell anyone. She was telling everyone the same story she'd told her son and wanted me to go along with it' (HTE)*

#### *Context and Question*

Headteachers identified this in most interviews. This seems to be a way for the parents to preserve their reputation and maintain the children's peer relationships without the stigma of a parent in prison. This can be seen particularly in the context of School D. However, in seeking to preserve their reputation and their child's experiences at school, they are potentially depriving their child of their entitlement to support and the involvement of their father. It is often the case that 'parents and carers who have to explain to the child what happened to their other parent often find it difficult to decide how much to say to their children and when.' (The Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2011, p9). Lack of awareness of a child's circumstances within the school could impact significantly on the support offered to families in this position.

School C however, offered a different model where parents appeared willing to share these issues directly with the school. The only featured cover story was the twin's Grandma who did not wish to share her grandchildren's personal circumstances with the school. This may have been because she lived outside the area and wished to protect her family. This may also have links to the theme of acceptance if the community as a whole are not seen to make judgements in this situation but recognise this as part of community life.

#### Code 7: Reputation of the family and school

##### *Code Definition*

This code can be defined as the concerns that families of prisoners have in relation to their own reputation.

*'The one that is in Spain I think it is reputation because they had money this family and the little boy came from a private provider'...so with her I think it is reputation' (HTB)*

*'It's different to almost everything else. So there is even more of a stigma and impacts upon them telling us because we are in the area' (HTB)*

*'Mum, we found, later on was keeping him home with her as she was distraught herself and didn't want to be left on her own. Also though, I think she didn't want to come into school and face the embarrassment. She said as much when we eventually did get hold of her' (HTD)*

*'Absolutely – round here particularly! It's all about reputation and being seen to be a 'good parent' – your child having everything they need – love and attention and all those things to be the 'perfect family' (HTD)*

This was highlighted initially by HTB and this may be partly due (as HTB reflects) because of the school context and the relatively aspirant parental population. This was raised again in the School D interview and to a certain extent in School E.

However, surprisingly, this code extends beyond the reputation of the family to the concerns of schools in relation to this. In this study, this only relates to School D. Therefore care must be taken when using it, as it cannot be applied more commonly across other interviews. This code was created as a result of HTD's regular referral to the academic achievement of the child suffering as a result of parental imprisonment and his concern about the impact upon school standards.

*'Poor boy couldn't come to school and missed work' (HTD)*

*'I could have given him extra homework to keep up with his work while he was off visiting his Dad' (HTD)*

*'It has a massive impact on attendance and on their work' (HTD)*

#### *Context and Question*

It is also possible to consider this in relation to the reputation of the child with their peers. It is worth noting here that children often do not make judgements on reputation by themselves. Children tend to transcend social and cultural differences and will see each other as they are at school. It is helpful to note here, HTB's reflection that parental views will often be shared with their children e.g. 'don't play with him' or 'he's not like us.'

A number of studies refer to the stigma of having a parent in prison (Condry, 2007) and the challenges children face from their peers including bullying and verbal and physical abuse (Boswell, 2002; Murray, 2007). Murray re-emphasises this in his most recent research relating to the long term impact this may have on children's life chances (Murray and Pardini, 2012).

Discussion to this point has focussed on the reputation of the child with their peers and the reputation of the parent within the community. In Interview D it is clear that it is both and this is a very extreme form of this. The mother is reluctant for her or her son to be seen in public, so important is the reputation of the family in the local community. The child is afraid to speak or play with his peers, fearful that he may say something which later reveals the truth and that this information becomes public. The pressure on children in this position can be immense.

The schools perceive that the overriding concerns of mothers relates to their relationships with them. Trust is a key facet of building strong working relationships with parents in schools (Estyn, 2009; NCLSCS, 2010). Organisations and forward thinking schools are beginning to pilot schemes for building this trust (Chapter 1 provides further examples of these). There is a clear link to resources here too (another emerging theme within this group of interviews).

Schools approach their role in a variety of ways. Some have their pastoral responsibilities at the heart of teaching and learning, others see academic achievement as central to their role. Some schools achieve a balance of the two, allowing children to develop in a holistic manner. School D has a significant focus on achievement. This pressure in relation to achievement may link partly to the parent body who will expect certain levels of achievement from their offspring.

Harris and Goodall (2009) believe that certain models of parental engagement can result in a negative impact 'reinforcing existing power divisions' resulting in lesser support for hard to reach parents (p.279). There is an expectation that parents must fit into a particular model, regardless of their needs resulting in schools becoming hard to reach (Crozier and Davies, 2007). This is particularly the case in School D where the model is parents supporting their children in achieving through attendance at school and ensuring children complete their work appropriately.

This code has some potential dangers. If parents don't feel able to trust the school (in order to preserve their reputation) this will prevent their child from receiving what they need. There are some significant implications for schools here in relation to building strong and trusting relationships with their parents to ensure

the free-flow of vital information, so parents know that confidentiality will be respected.

In School D both the code and the interview indicate an apparent mind-set not to be in a position to support children with these very specific needs. They were keen to preserve their reputation as a top performing school both academically and with parents. 'Reputation of the School' had not been a code which I had considered prior to this interview. I was surprised to see a school so focussed on itself and the achievement of all its pupils academically. The pastoral needs of the children did not seem to feature as centrally. This has significant implications for this research as it indicates that some schools may look at the children of prisoners very differently, as a group preventing the school from succeeding. A school such as this would, however, see the potential benefits of involving a father in prison in the education of his child, but their motives for this would vary significantly from other schools.

#### Code 8: Relationship with family

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the relationship between the school and the mother or other members of the remaining family, their perceptions of each other within this relationship and the role of trust in this, given the prominence of this term in their responses.

*'Some find it very difficult to trust anyone, especially school' (HTA)*

*DHT: But I'd say most people do trust us.*

*HT: When things like that have happened, or when they have been in court, they'll come and tell us. I've been here a long time as has X.*

*DHT: They know the children are looked after here and it's family here and that we'll protect them and they are secure.*

*HT: The trust is really important – they know we don't judge them. They get into lots of messes around here don't they?*

*DHT: There's allsorts going on! They'll come in and tell you. It might not be in the most appropriate language, but they'll tell you.*

*HT: They want the best for their children and they know they'll be secure here, even though it may be chaotic for them out of school.*

*(HTC and DHTC)*

*'I want to phone mum up and say 'do you want to come and have a chat?' 'is there anything I can do to help?' You want to but then you think no, because I've got to keep that relationship with her for the sake of the children. If I say the wrong thing, she could turn around and say, what the heck's it got to do with you, go and fuck off, because she would do this lady' (HTB)*

*'There's a trust on a day to day basis. You break that and you've had it. That is potentially a difficulty' (HTB)*

*'So Mum came in to see me, really distressed, to say that she'd got herself into a bit of trouble' (HTC)*

*'The little boy in Reception – Mum came in and told me. She turned up at the end of the day and asked if she could talk to me – she was petrified and told me not to tell anyone' (HTD)*

*'I suppose they think we are going to judge them as a school – we wouldn't but I don't think they feel able to trust us that much – with something so personal' (HTD)*

*Context and Question*

Trust was raised repeatedly in the answers given. HTB highlighted the need to maintain the trust of the remaining parent or you have *'had it.'* HTE added that she recognised how difficult some parents found it to trust anyone outside the family home, a group often known as 'the service resistant' (Feiler, 2010). Already known to social services, they have been approached by service providers on a number of occasions with offers of support but are suspicious of these. Schools are viewed in a similar way.

Given the importance of this as a concept, consideration must be given to the centrality of trust to the success of this. The mother would need to trust the school, maintaining a very strong working relationship with them in order to a) inform them that the father was in prison b) trust them to support the child appropriately c) trust them to work with the prison, father and child in establishing the father's role in education.

HTC continually emphasised the importance of the relationship with the family, from the perspective of the wellbeing of the children. This was particularly significant in this school given their belief that through strong family links self-identification was more likely.

Vincent (2012) argues that schools should:

'...position all parents not as problems, or passive recipients of school advice, but as key sources of knowledge and understanding of the child. Developing a closer home-school relationship, acknowledges that the child is part of a family and a local community as well as a pupil, and that their performance as a pupil is affected by their life outside the classroom' (p. 28)

#### Code 9: Engaging fathers during visits

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the school perspectives and responses in relation to involving imprisoned fathers in the education of their children during visits to prison.

*'This might be useful, but some dads aren't involved anyway, long before they go to prison! We see far fewer dads rather than mums for most of the year. If they are involved then, yes keeping them involved might make it more stable for them. I'm not sure how that would work though – there are some practical issues there. We have the same problems if mums and dads are separated and divorced. We don't know how dads get the information' (HTA)*

*'I think anything that provides children with some continuity is a good thing. The problem would be if the father hadn't been involved before. He might not want to be involved again and if he didn't do it regularly, he might disappoint the child. Mmm. Would need to think about how this might work. I can see the advantages (in an ideal world) but can also see the problems, especially if mums don't want it' (HTA)*

*'Thinking it through, it should be exactly the same as for our absent parents we have. Usually for our children, families who have split up. We write them a termly report, so that should be, shouldn't it. Some children will visit but some won't. We should be providing Dad with the opportunity to know what is happening in the school life of his child. The child has the right to have him involved' (HTB)*

*'If it's from the child's perspective, it has to be the right of the child to have that information given. The only time it's difficult is – you have to understand the relationship with the person not in prison. You as a school have to protect that relationship between them and school and that's where I've found the difficulty – in relation to the absent parent. Sometimes the remaining parent doesn't understand that the absent parent has a right to this or the child has the right to this' (HTB)*

*'Well...it sounds strange – but they make a card and either they take it to Dad or Mum takes it when she visits. I think it would be a good idea though – I think they've got parental rights as well. We would send a report anyway. As long as mother doesn't say 'I don't want him to have anything to do with the children'. If*



*there's a breakdown in the relationship. For example, I've got a parent who says 'I don't want him anywhere near her.'* (HTC)

*'Oh yes...that would be really good. I think that would be a brilliant idea – I've never thought of that...I suppose the child has the right to Dad being involved'* (HTC)

*'Oh, I see what you mean. Yes – we could certainly prepare things for them to take – they could share all sorts of things they had been doing – activities, reading book and exercise books. If they went to visit quite a lot, I can see that that might be really good actually. We could even send like a summary of what they had been doing in school (like we do to our parents every week - what the topics are and what they will be doing'* (HTD)

*'Well, I suppose we could send a copy of the school report to him – like we send copies of reports to both parents if they are divorced'* (HTD)

*'I think that would be really good – although I'm not sure I can quite imagine what that might look like. Surely that would be really difficult because of the restrictions in prisons – although I'm probably really out of data with all of this now'* (HTE)

*'Oh definitely – what a lovely idea! We could put together all sorts of things for them to show – they could also do some activities with their Dad when they were there, couldn't they? I'd really support that and I know the staff would too. What about for my little boy in Reception though who doesn't know his Dad is in prison. How would that work?'* (HTE)

#### *Context and Question*

Key messages from the DCSF are communicated through the Children's Plan (2007) and the 'Think Fathers' campaign (2008). The Children's Plan and accompanying support strategies are based upon the principle that:-

*'Families are the bedrock of society and the place for nurturing happy, capable and resilient children. In our consultation, parents made it clear that they would like better and more flexible information and support that reflects the lives they lead. Our Expert Groups emphasised how important it is that parents are involved with policy affecting children and that we need particularly to improve how government and services involve fathers.'* (DCSF, 2007, p.17)

Throughout the document there are key references to fathers who are raising their children alone, are non-resident fathers, those who live in deprived areas, or come from challenging backgrounds. However, there is no mention of how fathers in prison could be involved. This document promises families additional support and lays a particular emphasis upon the needs of 'the most vulnerable families', suggesting that 'parents who, for whatever reason, lack the confidence, motivation or time to get involved with their child's learning and development may

need extra specialist help' (DCSF, 2007, P21). This lays out a vision for the future and the importance of raising the involvement of parents, particularly fathers.

It is crucial to understand the perspective of all relevant stakeholders in relation to the potential for engaging fathers on visits. From the perspective of the schools, this appears to have been very well received. All schools reported that they could see how helpful this would be and how willing they would be to prepare resources to allow this to happen. Responses included:-

*'Absolutely. It is a point of communication – a starting point for the child – fortnightly. There has got to be a starting point of dialogue. Children can say 'nothing' if there is nothing to talk about. It is easy to do that – we could create appropriate packs for them to take.'* (HTB)

*HT: Oh yes...That would be really good. I think that would be a brilliant idea – I've never thought of that.*

*DHT: Yes – that would mean Dad's still involved in their education, even though he isn't living with them.*

*HT: I suppose the child has the right to Dad being involved.*

*(HTC)*

*Oh, I see what you mean. Yes – we could certainly prepare things for them to take – they could share all sorts of things they had been doing – activities, reading book and exercise books. If they went to visit quite a lot, I can see that that might be really good actually. We could even send like a summary of what they had been doing in school (like we do to our parents every week – what the topics are and what they will be doing). (HTD)*

Headteachers felt that this was acceptable and that they would be willing to do this as this did not involve speaking with the imprisoned father directly. Concerns were raised when contact via telephone was mentioned. Some felt teachers would not feel comfortable doing this; others however said it would depend on the crime.

#### Code 10: Reluctance

##### *Code Definition*

This can be defined as the reluctance of headteachers to implement the suggestions relating to the engagement of fathers in prison.

*'I think some teachers might find this difficult, to say the least. Anything like that would need a lot of training and guidance before it became the norm' (HTA)*

*'I don't want to sound too negative as I can see the positives, but things that spring to mind are:-*

*Dads not wanting it*

*Mums being annoyed that we had made contact*

*The extra time it would take us*

*I think we would need lots more training in this before we could do anything like this' (HTA)*

*I would ask them to do it and expect them to do it as part of their job. I'd be disappointed if anyone refused, I'd have to say sorry, but it actually says in your contract that your report to parents and it is a legal requirement. It doesn't say we report to parents who happen to live under the same roof as the child, so no, I would like to think that every teacher would do what they are required to do. Whether they think deep down it is the right thing to do is not the question' (HTB)*

*'No concerns about sending the work etc to the prison or sending a report. I'm just not sure how well the phoning would down with some of my staff. I think they might be concerned about having that kind of contact. I don't know – I could be wrong. I think it might depend on the crime to a certain extent maybe?' (HTD)*

*'We could do written school reports I suppose (if he could read them) and send them to the prison. The phone might take a little bit for teachers to get used to – but it does make sense in some ways' (HTE)*

Interview A refers to the reluctance of HTA and more importantly, the perceived reluctance of the teachers who would be required to implement these approaches. This reluctance manifested itself differently in Interview D and E, where it was coded as 'staff concerns'; however 'reluctance' as a code encapsulates all feedback relating to this.

### *Context and Question*

Schools are regularly required to introduce new initiatives; it often seems, at the 'whim' of a new government. This leads to reluctance in adopting new policies which they view as short lived or which will not have any long term positive outcomes. This demonstrates how important it would be to help schools understand the importance of the needs of this group of children

Although the teachers had not been approached in relation to this, HTA was very confident that all would be willing to engage in communication with prisoners via

formal reports and documents, but would be less willing to engage in potential communication via telephone. Purely written communication has the potential to present some challenges for the literacy of some prisoners. Oral communication (whether via CD or telephone) could be very helpful in allowing them to engage in the education of their children. Codd (2010) highlights how few examples of good practice there are in relation to schools working with children of prisoners, although there has been a recent growth in the support materials available to schools, for example: Barnardo's (2013), Morgan et al. (2013), O'Keeffe (2008). There are however, no UK examples of schools engaged in working to involve imprisoned fathers in the education of their children directly. HMP and YOI Parc is leading a range of initiatives within the Invisible Walls Accord:-

The Invisible Walls Accord is part of the BIG Lottery Funded project Invisible Walls Wales, which is a four year challenge to work intensively, and in partnership across sectors, with prisoners, their partners, family and children, all together, during custody and after release, to reduce reoffending, reduce intergenerational offending, and promote better outcomes for children and community inclusion. The Invisible Walls Accord has the specific aim of each school actively participating in a process which will offer support and guidance to pupils who have a parent or close relative in prison. (The Invisible Walls Accord introduction letter to headteachers – July 2013).

The prison runs a range of innovative projects under the banner of 'Parc Supporting Families' (PSF) and is now leading an innovative project to encourage some levels of involvement for imprisoned fathers. This is however driven by the prison, although it is evident they are keen involve schools far more closely.

### **'LEARNING TOGETHER CLUB (Prisoner & Child/Children)**

#### **Rolling Monthly Course**

**1 Evening a Month (Normally 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of each Month, includes buffet)**

**Criteria: Children aged 2 to 15 years**

**Exclusions: Domestic Violence, Sex offenders, Anyone with CPA issues**

The Learning Together Club (LTC) is an innovative project that gives fathers a chance to spend quality time with their children, aged 2-15years old, and maintain relationships that develop the family unit. All children attend a visit with their fathers without their mothers/carers on one evening per month, enabling children and fathers to interact. The children bring in work from school to show their

fathers and work together. Parc provides educational resources for all curriculum and key stages for children who forget to bring anything. Originally the LTC was aimed at fathers and their children, but that developed to include the wider family unit including grandchildren and younger siblings.

The LTC has developed over the last couple of years as a result of the passion, determination and commitment of the staff and volunteers involved who firmly believe in what they do.' (HMP and YOI Parc, 2013)

It was recognised prior to commencing the interviews, that the concept of potential discussions/engagement with imprisoned fathers may be an issue for some teachers. Currently it is not something they have considered and therefore feels alien and potentially threatening. Appropriate training and support could counter this very effectively and allow them to see the potential benefits both to the prisoner, but more importantly, to the child. Examples in relation to this can be found in Australia and the US (Roberts, 2012).

#### 4.4 Interviews with Mothers of Prisoners' Children

<b>1</b> Personal Sacrifice	<b>2</b> Missing School	<b>3</b> Children visiting	<b>4</b> Reputation	<b>5</b> Family Unity	<b>6</b> Pre-prison involvement
<b>7</b> Informing school/ need for school to know	<b>8</b> School Response	<b>9</b> Staff Training	<b>10</b> Personal Education of Prisoner	<b>11</b> Engaging Fathers	

##### Code 1: Personal Sacrifice

##### *Code Definition*

Personal sacrifice within this context was defined by the mothers in two ways - broader family sacrifice in terms of relationships and secondly specific sacrifices e.g. financial or personal aims/ambitions. Although not a central focus of the study, it offers an insight into the perspectives of this group of stakeholders. This

related to their personal sacrifice as mothers/ partners/ ex-partners of imprisoned fathers. For example:-

*My ex-husband also won't have anything to do with me now and my eldest son isn't allowed to tell his Dad that he comes to visit my husband in prison. WE have to keep it a big secret' (Mum 2)*

*'They better had let him out – I was doing an Access course which I finished and was about to start on a midwifery course when he went into prison and then everything stopped for me. I couldn't register on the course and couldn't do nothing as I was stuck dropping the kids off at school and picking them up every day. There was no way that I could have done the course too (Mum 1)*

*'Things had been getting pretty bad for a long time but we stuck together for the kids' (Mum 7)*

Finance was the most common concern, with the women highlighting the financial challenges of visiting:-

*'Some months I'm better off than others, so we might come a couple of times, sometimes we don't come at all because I have to decide whether we eat or come here' (Mum 3)*

*'Yes, we visit as often as we can. This can be really difficult as I don't drive and we don't have a car. I spend all of my time trying to find the best way to get to the prisons and he's been moved around so much, which is really difficult' (Mum 2)*

*'The big thing is it costs so much to get here – but it's worth it' (Mum 4)*

*'Sometimes it is longer, it depends if I've got any money - it cost a lot to get here – we come from Birmingham so the train and all the others things are expensive (Mum 5)*

*'I can't afford to come all the time – there are too many of us and it costs a lot – just to get here, never mind the food they want and stuff they need when we are out and about' (Mum 7)*

*'I can't afford to bring them all every week' (Mum 10)*

### *Context and Question*

The role occupied by this group of women has been referred to as 'temporary single parenthood' (Lowenstein, 1986) where all decisions and sacrifices are being made by one person Sacrifice relating to finance was a particular focus in relation to travel to the prison and the financial implications of this (Brooks-Gordon and Bainham, 2004; Ormiston, 2007). However Smith et al. (2007)

examine the financial implications of imprisonment more broadly and Scott and Codd (2010) reflect that the impact can 'operate in subtle and sometimes invisible ways' (p.147) arguing that 'women deprive themselves not only of luxuries but sometimes of basic items such as food in order to support their imprisoned men' (p.158).

Although not questioned directly about this, some mothers visited for the benefit of their children rather than themselves, others however recognised the personal value of this. The need to provide some form of 'family unity' appeared to be important to the women coupled with and a desire for the children to feel that they still had a father. If this is of importance to them and are willing to engage in such sacrifices to allow this to happen, this may offer an indication of the possibilities for activates which would potentially strengthen this 'family unity' further.

#### Code 2: Missing School

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as children regularly missing half a day or a day of school to visit their father. Some responses related to their own personal concerns about the welfare and education of their children, others related to feedback received from the school when they informed them.

*'I think it is going to depend on what visits I can book and there's the whole missing school thing too – particularly for my daughter in Year 6. This is a really important year for her' (Mum 6)*

*'Yes, they come with me every week – so they miss a day of school every week to come. I think they need that – they need to see him' (Mum 4)*

*'They clearly aren't keen about my son missing school to come on these visits. They never say anything but a lot of huffing and puffing goes on when I go in to let them know he'll be coming out for the day – that doesn't actually make me feel any better strangely enough' (Mum 2)*

*'I have to keep taking them out of school and then they miss stuff, which isn't great – I don't want them to miss out' (Mum1)*

*I told her I'd be taking the kids out to visit their Dad and she said ok – but the head would be worried about attendance. Like that's top of my list at the moment!' (Mum 3)*

*'I don't want them coming out of school to visit. Why should they lose out on school to come and visit him? It's his fault anyway' (Mum 5)*

This is evidently a concern for some mothers, anxious about the impact upon the education of their children, but for others, concerns relate more closely to the attendance issues raised by the school. It was interesting to note that this concern applied to some prisoners too, disliking their children missing school to visit them. One mother highlighted that:-

*'It's dead hard to get visiting at the weekend, everyone wants it, but he doesn't want the kids missing schools, so won't let us come in the week (Mum 8).*

One mother wished to find a solution to the problem of missing school so rotated her children's visits

*'I don't bring them all together very often – birthdays and Christmas and if there is a particular reason... and anyway they'd miss too much school' (Mum 10)*

Once again, this has implications for this study.

#### *Context and Question*

'A parent in prison is still a parent and can play an important role in supporting their children's education, even from behind bars'... and in order for any relationship with a child to be truly meaningful it must include his or her school life' (Roberts, 2012, p.7)

Clarke et al. (2005), Codd, (2008), Yocum and Nath (2011) and the interviews carried out for this study reinforce the generally accepted view of the importance of visits for children in maintaining strong links with their imprisoned father. This has implications for schools, including the requirement for bespoke interventions to facilitate children attending visits. Feiler (2010) argues that schools cannot implement an 'off the shelf' approach to collaboration with particular parent groups' (p.139).

Boswell and Wedge (2002) believe that 'inmates feel they will have more to offer as fathers if they are afforded better access to education and training' (p.149). Part of that education must relate to their own children's education so they can become more familiar with their progress and can engage in this within the prison visit context (HMP and YOI Parc (2013) is an example of good practice of this in the UK).

Roberts (2012) examined schemes and interventions in Australia and the USA to support schools' engagement with imprisoned parents and highlighted charities



and local justice departments working together to enable scheduled phone calls between prisoners and headteachers or prisoners and classteachers, video conferencing between school staff and a prisoner, homework clubs in prisons and the sending of reports to the prison. One Mum in Roberts' study reported that:-

'John (husband) was always the educational one, the smarter one, who helped them with their homework. A report from the school (to their dad) would've been good for the boys. I think my son wouldn't be in [prison] now if his dad had been involved in his schooling. I wasn't coping on my own at home. If my boys had had someone at school to talk to about their dad being in prison it would've been really good' Mother, Hakea Prison, Perth WA (Roberts, 2012).

It is evident (as in the UK) that there are pockets of outstanding practice in both the USA and Australia with strong co-operation between schools, prisons and charities and in a more structured way than in the UK. Close examination of this study indicates that it is also necessary to consider how school can almost continue when a child visits their father in prison. How can this vital contact be developed into a regular 'educational experience' for both father and child? Despite the need to miss school, how can this be transformed into a positive approach as opposed to a disadvantage for the child and the school? The theme of the children of prisoners' absence from school links closely to overall question for this study. The role of visits in engaging fathers in the education of their children is central here and offers some potential scope for children to complete school work while visiting their father (extending the concept of homework clubs, which are gradually being introduced in selected prisons).

### Code 3: Children Visiting/Not Visiting

#### *Code Definition*

This code captures whether a child is permitted to visit their imprisoned father. Only 2 mothers did not bring their children to visit – one was through the choice of the mother and one, the imprisoned father. They both indicated that they would be open to changing this as the children grew older or if they felt there could be a specific benefit from it.

*'His dad doesn't want him to come. He doesn't want to let him see him in here, like this. He wants him to think he is working away' (Mum 9)*

*'No, they don't come here and they don't know he's in here. I don't want them coming to a place like this' (Mum 5)*

It is interesting to note that the decision for not allowing children to visit or not informing them of their father's imprisonment rests with either the mother or the father. One appears to make a very decisive judgement and the other adheres to this.

One mother had no desire to see her partner herself but said *'I couldn't not bring them – they'd never forgive me! It's really the only reason we come – I do it for the kids not for him' (Mum 7)*. Another mother (whose partner had recently been imprisoned) shared *'I think I will bring them though. I can't stop them seeing their Dad – that would just make it all worse' (Mum 6)*.

The most common response in relation to visiting was, a desire to visit as often as possible:-

*'I do what I can. I would never not bring them on purpose. It's all or none' (Mum 3)*.

*'Yes, we visit as often as we can. This can be really difficult as I don't drive and we don't have a car' (Mum 2)*

*'Well – you can see I've brought them today' (Mum 1)*

*'I come every three weeks or so, whenever I can' (Mum 9)*

*'I come every week – he's my son and I don't want to leave him on his own with this' (Mum 10)*

### *Context and Question*

The process of prison visiting and to some extent, the process of children visiting prisons has received some attention to date (Codd, 2008, Dixey and Woodall, 2012; Ronay, 2011) and this continues to grow. The importance of prison visits continues to be considered and the general consensus is that in the majority of cases, prison visiting is positive – particularly for prisoners, but also their families.

*'A number of claims have been made regarding the importance of prison visits, firstly simply from a humanitarian perspective, enabling family members to see each other, but also in policy terms regarding successful rehabilitation and reintegration into society' (Dixey and Woodall, 2012, p.29)*

In the majority of cases, this was supported by the partners I interviewed. Visits can be positive experiences for all concerned but this can 'depend on the nature of the (family) relationships and of the crime' (Dixey and Woodall, 2012).

The two mothers who did not bring their children cited the prison environment as the reason for this. For children, visiting can be a frightening experience (Codd, 2008), with a lot of time spent travelling, waiting, being searched and then not being able to see their parent in the way they would like to. In certain prisons, visitors are treated as 'unwelcomed guests to be barely tolerated and, more often, as intruders' (Seymour and Hairston, 2001 p.157). One researcher has attempted to describe what a child is faced with as they enter the prison including entering 'through a narrow door in the heavy stone façade of the building and then going through a lengthy security process' followed by being 'escorted through nearly a dozen heavily secure metal gates' and then being 'physically searched and a sniffer dog may well be present' (Ronay, 2011, p.192) This code has clear significance to the overall focus of this research. If it transpires that some children are not permitted to visit their imprisoned father this would necessitate alternative strategies to ensure the fathers involvement.

Visiting conditions for children vary between prisons. In some, the facilities provided include a play area well stocked with toys and games, staffed by a prison charity, for others there are some toys but these are limited, in others there is nothing at all and it is for the imprisoned parent and visitors to entertain their children. This can lead to a range of experiences for children when visiting and a difference in the quality of contact they have with their imprisoned father. Codd (2008) highlights the growing popularity of 'family days' with a range of activities being offered from crafts, to table tennis to book activities. Again, sessions such as this can allow on-going contact to take place more easily and informally where activities are similar (or even better) than those that would be taking place in the home environment.

Women play a 'critical role in facilitating parenting relationships' for prisoners (Walker, 2010, p.1410). A child's visit their imprisoned father must be facilitated by their mother or another member of their extended family, thus relying on those who in reality may not be able to facilitate this. It cannot therefore be assumed

that all children with an imprisoned father will be visiting them, therefore other more creative means of engagement must also be considered that do not rest solely on the visit.

#### Code 4: Reputation

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the reputation of the prisoner and family in the community and child's school. Reference was made to embarrassment and shame in relation to this.

*'I had to tell them that his dad was in prison and would be for a long time – a great impression they go of our family!' (Mum 2)*

*'They didn't know me very well so I did feel a bit odd going in and telling them really personal stuff' (Mum 1)*

*'I left it a few days – until I could face it and then I asked the teacher of my oldest boy if I could have a word at the end of the day. I couldn't face the head' (Mum 3)*

*'I had to go in and tell them – that was really embarrassing' (Mum 5)*

*'To be honest, I put it off as I didn't know what to say or how to say it' (Mum 6)*

In some cases, this did not prevent discussion of their situation, but in other cases, the shame resulted in a delay in sharing of this information, sometimes resulting in others informing the school on their behalf. This corresponds to what was reported by the headteachers.

In one case, it was the imprisoned father who was most concerned about the reputation of his family within the community

*'Next time I went to visit, I told him what I was thinking and he went mad– don't you be fucking telling anyone our fucking business. Why should the school know, looking down their noses at you' (Mum 9)*

However, it is also interesting to note that the same father was also worried about his reputation with his child

*'His dad doesn't want him to come. He doesn't want him to see him like this' (Mum 9)*

### *Context and Question*

Each interview highlighted fears relating to reputation, borne out by a range of research which refers to the stigma of parental imprisonment and the challenges children face including bullying, verbal and physical abuse (Boswell, 2002; Condry, 2007; Condry, 2012; Murray, 2007). Murray supports this in his most recent research examining the long term impact on children's life chances (Murray and Pardini, 2012). It was evident in each interview that the partners of male prisoners are aware of their family within the local community. They perceive that they are 'guilty by association' as mothers but Condry (2007) highlights that we must not forget the 'secondary stigma' faced by children in relation to this - they are therefore victims of 'contamination' and 'shame by association' (p.89).

The implications from these findings are that if parents don't feel comfortable enough to trust the school, they are not in a position to act on this information. This highlights the importance of building strong, trusting relationships with parents to ensure the free-flow of information. In seeking to preserve their reputation and their child's experiences at school, mothers are potentially depriving their child of their entitlement to support and the possible involvement of their father.

The theme of reputation has been central to both sets of interviews (with headteachers and with mothers). The headteachers believed that preserving their reputation within the community was the key motivation for not sharing this information. The mothers indicated it was reputation, but not within the community, but rather the school itself. They did not feel comfortable approaching the school – phrases such as *'school have never made me feel bad'* (Mum 4) demonstrates what a supportive school can be like. However, the majority of examples offered an alternative perspective.

*'Ringing me up and making me feel like I was the guilty one and that we should all be ashamed...I didn't want to go near the place'* (Mum 7)

*'I felt like I'd been naughty sitting outside her office waiting to see her'* (Mum 6)

*'You could see them thinking what scum we must be'* (Mum 5)

*'We don't live in that kind of area and it came as a bit of a shock to their system!'  
(Mum 2)*

For some, it relates to broader community reputation, for others, reputation with the school and for a third group (and the largest in this group of interviews) it relates to the culture within the school. The data indicates the need for a culture of trust within a school, where parents feel safe in discussing issues relating to imprisonment.

'A school community, must therefore first and foremost be concerned with ensuring that all staff members are trained and have an understanding of the trauma and stigma experienced by these children so that they can support families in an appropriate and helpful way and so that carers have a fundamental trust in the school which enables them to share the information in the first place' (Roberts, 2012, p. 5).

#### Code 5: Family Unity

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as a mother's need to keep families together, despite the shadow of imprisonment – either for the sake of the family or particularly, and more frequently, for the sake of the children.

*'It is worth it though as they get to see him and he knows they are thinking about him and they want to see him. He feels loved and cared for' (Mum 2)*

*'I suppose that's a good thing – some kids don't have a dad, some their mum and dad aren't together any more (Mum 4)*

*'I need to keep us together as a family so this is the only way I know how to do it' (Mum 4)*

*'I think I will bring them though. I can't stop them from seeing their Dad – that would just make it all worse' (Mum 6)*

*'It's the only reason we come – I do it for the kids not for him...what kind of mother would I be?' (Mum 7)*

The reasons outlined for preserving and protecting family unity are different for each interviewee and show the diverse motives for families visiting prisoners. For some mothers, their children are their only motivation. For others, the need to

preserve the family unit is fundamental and argue this acts as the key to future success for the family as a whole.

For one mother (who is the grandmother of the children), her motivations are twofold. She is attempting to maintain family unity by keeping the children within the family and looking after them herself whilst also preserving the unity between herself and her son during his sentence:-

*'I'm his mother and they are living with me until he's released. I come myself every week – he's my son and I don't want to leave him on his own with this' (Mum 10)*

#### *Context and Question*

'little quantitative research has considered how incarceration shapes family functioning' (Turney, Schnittker and Wildeman, 2012, p.1150)

It is acknowledged that imprisonment of a parent has a significant impact upon the structure and 'functioning' of a family (Codd, 2008; Katz, 2002; Turney, Schnittker and Wildeman, 2012) and the women interviewed would appear to be attempting to maintain the 'functioning' of their families. Scott and Codd (2010) develop this further by challenging the definition 'prisoner's family', which has previously been linked to the 'nuclear family' where father is in prison and mother visits.

'De facto parenting is more significant than biological parenting, such as when 'mum's boyfriend' for example is more of a day-to-day father than a child's biological father...prisoners have multiple significant relationships across a web of connections and while family forms part of this, other relationships may be equally or more important' (Scott and Codd, 2010 p.146).

Although the majority of those interviewed for this study were wives visiting husbands, there was one grandmother and several partners who were not married or were stepfathers to the children in their care. Walker (2010a) argues that prisoners are 'constantly forming and re-forming relationships with their children, partners, parents and friends' (p.1408) and visits are a fundamental part of this being able to happen. Without the on-going support of visits and family even intermittent fathering would not be a possibility.

Yocum and Nath (2011) contend that the 'jail actions' of prisoners can also contribute to or significantly damage family unity. Prisoners may need to develop

skills in ‘ active listening, feeling and conveying empathy...conscious of non-verbal cues’ (Yocum and Nath, 2011 p.299) to encourage family unity to survive or to develop it for the first time. Skills in how to hold and engage in important conversations quickly by phone or in person are also important, given the limited time available to prisoners in respect of this. It is important that time on visits and on the telephone is not wasted so that prisoners can be involved as much as possible in the lives of their families and the education of their children.

Although not immediately obvious, the need for family unity is a theme which requires some consideration in relation to the overall research question. The motivation for family unity encourages the mothers to bring their children to visit and thus provides a potential opportunity to strengthen unity both during visits but also on a more regular basis through the fathers’ involvement.

#### Code 6: Pre-prison involvement and educational involvement

##### *Code Definition*

This code examines the involvement of the prisoners in the lives and education of their children prior to imprisonment. This is necessary in order to gain a rounded picture of the potential for imprisoned fathers’ involvement in the education of their child.

The responses to this question were varied, ranging from significant levels of involvement, to little or no involvement at all, paying lip service to the role.

*‘he was their Dad. He did all the things Dads do... we all did things together as a family before’ (Mum 6)*

*‘He did lots of stuff with them – was a good thing actually as it meant it kept us away from each other a lot’ (Mum 7)*

*‘yes, he was a full time Dad with them’ (Mum 1)*

*‘When he was there, he did loads with the kids’ (Mum 5)*

*‘Oh yes, he was a good dad – despite the fact he had a mad wife who did nothing and expected him to do everything in the house and do a job’ (Mum 10)*

When the focus of the interview then shifted to the prisoners’ involvement in their children’s education, answers demonstrated a lack of confidence and a slight



uncertainty about what this might look like for a father. Some responses interpreted 'involvement' as taking the children to school, while others felt this related to doing homework and attending parents' evenings.

*'He took them to school and came to meet the teacher, if he was around and not off doing things he shouldn't be doing. He never did the homework though or the hard stuff' (Mum 5)*

*'He was always the one they went to with the 'hard' homework, especially the one in Year 6' (Mum 6)*

*'He'd ask him about his day and what he'd been doing. Sometimes he'd take him to school or pick him up' (Mum 4)*

*'He always went onto the playground and he went into school and talked to the teachers if there was a problem (Mum 1)*

*'He wasn't at school when he went to prison. He helped me choose which school we wanted to send him to but left me to go and make the arrangements' (Mum 9)*

This highlights that there needs to be a clear definition as a result of this study of what is meant by the term 'involvement in education' in the case of imprisoned fathers and this will be central to any recommendations.

### *Context and Question*

Definitions of 'involvement', particularly in education and the understanding of the term, varied significantly within the interviews. The mother's responses focussed almost entirely on engagement and availability (Pleck, 1985) and the challenges they faced even prior to imprisonment in relation to these aspects. Interestingly, little focus was given to responsibility, either directly or indirectly. This tension is also visible within the research community, however, it is widely agreed despite this that parental involvement in a child's education can have positive outcomes for children (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011)

'Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups'. (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

It is evident however that the mothers interviewed interpreted the term 'involvement in education' pre-prison in a range of different ways, from collecting a child from school to supporting them with school activities and involvement in the life of the school.

Broader involvement in the life of the child pre-prison is also considered in their answers. This is something has been the subject of significant academic discourse over a number of years. The development of the father's role and levels of involvement is discussed by Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda (2004) in their chapter relating to the nature of father involvement. They chart and illustrate a gradual increase in involvement over a number of years, presenting three types of parental involvement (engagement, accessibility and responsibility – Pleck et al, 1985). However, this gradual increase is not reflected in the interviews for this study. For example, there is little mention of responsibility in any of the responses, beyond a couple of fathers holding responsibilities relating to school arrangements.

It is necessary to seek to understand some of the reasons why there is a lack of understanding amongst prisoners, pre-imprisonment, about how to be involved in their child's life. It may be that some have not experienced a family model to refer to within their own childhood. Data suggests that 24% of prisoners have lived in foster care or in an institution as a child growing up – this includes both long and short term periods in care with well under 50% having lived with both natural parents (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth, 2012). Examining the prior involvement of these individuals has highlighted that a significant proportion had some involvement in the lives of their children (being a 'Dad' – playing football, games and watching TV with them) but very little (and often no) involvement in their education. If the option of a greater level of involvement was offered to these fathers, the likelihood of them responding in a positive way to this, must be in question. It was necessary to ensure that each imprisoned father interviewed was asked about their pre-prison involvement in education and whether they would welcome further involvement while in prison.

It is argued that imprisonment is an opportunity for each individual to develop new skills and imprisoned fathers are aware that strong family contact can impact upon their own chances of successful release. Barnardo's (2012) highlight that 'young offenders are more likely to engage in parenting programmes while in prison than following release' (p.26). Therefore, an approach such as heightened involvement would allow imprisoned fathers to begin to move towards a greater level of involvement in their child's life, even if this had not been a possibility prior to imprisonment. It is argued that 'fathering is central to some men's positive transition from prisoner to family life' (Walker, 2010 p.1405) and Yocum and Nath (2011) discovered that 'all 25 mothers and children desired fathers to be involved with the children after release' (p.292). However, in order for this to be a possibility, education for prisoners would be central. Prisoners would need the basic skills in reading and writing to allow them to feel comfortable in working alongside their children (something which some partners indicated had previously been an issue) and would need to have a developing understanding of the structure of the education system (e.g. Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and what children might be studying/reading within these age groups). This may assist male prisoners in moving away from the 'intermittent fathering' (Walker 2010 p.1409) they are currently engaged in.

#### Code 7: Informing School/Need for school to know

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as whether mothers informed schools of the father's imprisonment and the process they chose to use. In addition there is consideration of whether they felt it was important for the school to know.

This theme was discussed in detail by each mother. It was evident they had reflected on this carefully on the imprisonment of the child's partner. All indicated that the school had been informed eventually although the means by which this was done varied.

*'Oh yes, I went and told the headteacher as soon as it happened' (Mum 4)*

*'Yes, they do know – that's because I told them. I'd thought I better had before someone else did – you know how people talk' (Mum 2)*

*'Yes, I told them, but I've made sure they don't tell the kids. I don't want the kids to know' (Mum 5)*

*'I told them – they needed to know. I just had to go into school and tell them how it was, no point lying. It doesn't help. (Mum 1)*

Some waited a while, or in some cases were forced into a position of telling the school following comments made by their children or friends:-

*'To be honest, I put it off as I didn't know what to say or how to say it. I got up on Monday this week and thought 'get a grip' and made an appointment to see the head teacher. I felt like I'd been naughty sitting outside her office waiting to see her' (Mum 6)*

*'I told the school eventually. I didn't to begin with – that was a stupid move anyway because of course the kids told the teacher straight away the following day that the Police had come and taken Dad away – there's me turning up at school pretending everything's normal and the kids come bouncing out telling me they'd been telling everyone. I gave them hell – but it wasn't their fault – how are they meant to keep something like that quiet?' (Mum 3)*

*'They found out from some busy body friend of mine who was worried about me and the kids and though she'd go into school and tell them 'just so they know'. Very helpful I'm sure – left me looking like a right moron. I suppose I was going to tell them eventually but hadn't managed to get round to it yet – then she sticks her beak in' (Mum 7)*

The mothers shared a common reason for their need to inform the school - the importance of school in the life of their child. There was a perception that there negative consequences could result from the school not holding this information. It was evidently a challenge for some to tell the school due to their concerns linked to reputation (code 4) and the school response (code 12).

*'Definitely – how are they supposed to help the kids if they don't know – they are shooting in the dark. I wouldn't have got half the help I've got if the school didn't know' (Mum 1)*

*'Well, I told them because if they hadn't known and then I'd got stuck somewhere here and couldn't pick them up' (Mum 5)*

*'I understand that they have to know because they are caring for the children for lots of hours in the day and sometimes see more of them than I do, so they need to know what's going on in a child's life – otherwise how can they help them' (Mum 2)*

*'I totally think they should know. It helps them to understand what's going on for the kids and for me. It means I don't have to keep making up stories.'* (Mum 4)

*'That's why I went in to tell them – they need to know this kind of thing. It's a big thing happening in a child's life this – they need to know what's going on'* (Mum 6)

*'Call me old fashioned, but yes I do. These kids have lost their mum and their dad in a very short space of time'* (Mum 10)

### *Context and Question*

Both the interviews with headteachers and the mothers, support the notion that the role of the school in the lives of the children and families of prisoners is only beginning to develop as a focus for advice from charities (Barnardo's, 2013; Families Outside, 2012; Ormiston, 2007) and as a potential focus for research (Morgan et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2013; Scott and Codd, 2010; Roberts, 2012). Within their guidance to Sure Start Children's Centres, Barnardo's (2012) indicate that:-

*'we are clear to the local community that we welcome and work with this group of children and families (for instance, publicising through posters and newsletters) (p.28)*

Thus ensuring that members of the community are aware they can approach the Children's Centres if they have a partner/parent in prison. Schools currently do not have a unified approach such as this and the imprisonment of a parent continues to be a taboo. The importance of developing a relationship between the school/teacher and family/child is crucial in the sharing of key information (Morgan et al., 2011).

It is evident that the mothers are willing (and in fact see the importance of) informing the school that the father of their child is in prison. Their motivation for this appears to be for far more practical reasons than the focus of this study (i.e. the emotional well-being of the child and if they should be delayed visiting the prison) but it does indicate that mothers are willing (although sometimes reluctantly) to furnish the school with this information, in order to facilitate a smooth transition for their children.

This has the potential to provide schools with an opportunity to identify this group and to begin to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the parents. Clearly this

would need to be set within a broader supportive context where a mother felt comfortable enough to engage in this. Some indicated a willingness to inform the school but did not wish for any further engagement, whilst others felt the school could have done more to support them as an individual and their child.

### Code 8: School Response

#### *Code Definition*

This is defined as the immediate response of the school to the imprisonment of a father, followed by their longer term response in developing a working relationship with the mother/guardian and the child. From the responses received, it was clear that some schools responded immediately, offering support and practical assistance, whereas others made the mother feel uncomfortable:-

*'She was absolutely fantastic about it. She asked what they could do...that made me feel so much better about things' (Mum 4)*

*'We had a chat and she was nice enough about it. Didn't really seem to know much but said to let her know about if there was anything she could do' (Mum 3)*

*'Nursery and school have both actually been really good' (Mum 1)*

*'You could see them thinking what scum we must be.' 'They smiled at me and were very nice to me but I knew what they were thinking' (Mum 5)*

*'Trouble is, the school didn't seem to know much about people with dads in prison and so didn't know what to do when I told them about it. I think it was the last thing they expected' (Mum 2)*

*'We live in a really nice area and the head looked very shocked when I told her – then she quickly changed her expression realising I could see what she was thinking and then she was lovely...then she started firing questions at me – how much school will they miss if they visit, what will I do to make ends meet...'* (Mum 6)

*'she didn't seem to understand what I was telling her. She almost wasn't sure why I was telling her this – like it wasn't really anything to do with her' (Mum 10)*

The responses had an impact upon each woman, both positively and negatively. Some felt alienated by the response while others felt welcomed and offered what they felt was useful support.

The same variety of response was evident in the longer term provision offered by each school, including:-

*'They never speak to me about it and have never asked me how I'd like it to be handled' (Mum 2)*

*'My little girl wasn't at Nursery when he came in here and when it was time to go, she was only supposed to get half a place which meant I had to look after her on my own the rest of the time. The Nursery knew though about her Dad and our situation and they offered her a full time place instead to help me out' (Mum 1)*

*'They never mention it – it's like it hasn't happened' (Mum 3)*

*'They are really good now and the teachers come to me and ask if it is ok for them to send things to him in here. They send work and reports so he can see what they are doing – they also email in pictures of things in school. It's great – they couldn't do more. When they make cards in school for things like Christmas or Easter they always let our kids make two. They make one for me and then send one into here for their Dad...they don't make a big thing about it' (Mum 4)*

*'It would be nice if the school did support them – maybe they do but I don't see it. They just get treated the same – but they do get asked some stupid questions when they have been off visiting – where have you been? What were you up to yesterday...they could actually care, that would be a start' (Mum 7)*

Some schools had a response in place and were accustomed to responding in a particular way. Others were caught off guard and were challenged in relation to how to approach this in a sensitive way.

### *Context and Question*

It is evident from these responses (and from those of the schools) that they have received limited training in how to approach and support the families of prisoners. A number of charities have begun to make guidance available for schools on this topic (Action for Prisoners Families, 2011; Families Outside, 2012; Ormiston, 2007) and Action for Prisoners Families offer training for all adults involved in working with this group (Hidden Sentence Training). Responding to the news of imprisonment is a central element of this guidance and includes:

*'Be aware of the issues facing prisoners' families  
Listen – be non-judgemental and don't ask about the crime  
Whole school approach'  
(Action for Prisoners Families, 2011)*

This document provides some key headlines for schools to work within. However, these are very short and lack the detail of how to carry these out in practical terms. School staff are not always able to spend time reading large amounts of information, but they would prefer to have all the guidance on one place, rather

than working through a series of links (this is particularly in Primary Schools where technology is not used in the same way). Barnardo's (2013) have begun to address this within their latest publication '*Children affected by the imprisonment of a family member: A handbook for schools developing good practice.*' where detailed guidance is provided on each stage of the process, from the first point of imprisonment. The guidance is detailed and considers all aspects of supporting children and families within the school context. It does not however go beyond this.

How schools respond to families of prisoners is central to this study. From the data collected, how a school responds immediately to the mother can impact upon whether a relationship of trust is developed or whether the mother is alienated and unwilling to engage further. If a relationship of trust can be developed, this provides the appropriate context within which to examine how the father can become more involved in the education of the child/ren.

#### Code 9: Staff Training

##### *Code Definition*

This can be defined as training for all staff working in schools, whether they have previously worked with the families of prisoners or not. This code was referred to both implicitly and explicitly in the interview data and was a theme throughout. Responses included concerns about the language used by staff, the looks given and the lack of knowledge and understanding. Only Mum 4 was satisfied with the support she had been receiving:-

*'Didn't really seem to know much'*

*'I told her I'd be taking the kids out to visit their Dad and she said ok – but the head would be worried out attendance. Like that's top of my list at the moment!'*

*'I suppose they should also know so they can help me – not that they do much of that really'*

*'They never checked with me how I wanted to deal with this situation – they just left me to get on with it and just ignored it basically'*

*(Mum 3)*



*'Maybe they don't know what to do – or don't understand' (Mum 1)*

*'Trouble is, the school didn't seem to know much about people with dads in prison and so didn't know what to do when I told them about it.'*

*'They never speak to me about it and have never asked me how I'd like it to be handled'*

*'But why don't they ask me my view – surely it's important that I'm asked how I'd like it to be handled with my child? I do think though, as I have said before that they don't know what to do – it's not something they have come across before'*

*(Mum 2)*

*'They shouldn't just do a one size fits all thing – like children with any individual need or any problem – you can't do one thing with all of them. It just doesn't work like that' (Mum 6)*

### *Context and Question*

There is currently little research focussing on how schools are responding to the children of prisoners. Studies such as Morgan (2013) and Roberts (2012) are beginning to address this and are considering the impact schools can have on the lives of the families of prisoners. This however is in the early stages of development. The literature relating to imprisoned fathers and families of prisoners however, can offer some helpful ways forward. Condry (2012) argues that 'Prisoners' families are drawn within the reach of the criminal justice system and must manage a range of difficulties, yet their needs are demonstrably absent from the focus of criminal justice' (p.73) and I would argue, also from the focus of the education system. We are reminded that 'no statutory agency has responsibility for the needs of prisoners' families' (Condry, 2012, p.73). This offers a range of challenges for schools, with no particular agency offering them guidance and support as there would be with other groups of children within their care. Schools are seen to be *'shooting in the dark'* (Mum 1).

Morgan et al. (2011) believe this then leads to the 'frustration felt by families, as they try to keep their domestic unit intact, maintain their relationships and the emotional well-being of all members, with the lack of comprehensive, sensitive, permanent supportive services (p.22). Without this support, schools offer ad hoc

responses to the challenges they face, sometimes with success (in the case of Mum 4) but more often than not, with little success as highlighted within the remaining data collected.

Action for Prisoners' Families (in their response to the MOJ Breaking the Cycle consultation) emphasised the importance of:-

- Training available for children's and adults' services to raise awareness of the issues facing prisoners and offenders families so that they can take their needs into account even when they are unaware of which individuals are affected
- Destigmatising prisoners' and offenders' families by normalising the discussion of issues affecting them or making open offers of help at schools, children's and health centres

(APF, 2011)

The second recommendation here is central to the question being considered – the more 'normal' things that children of prisoners can do and engage in and the more strategies that can be put in place that gradually become the 'norm' the more empowered and well supported the families of prisoners will begin to feel within the educational environment.

An example of potential training would be APF's new support for schools and those working with the children of prisoners through their *Hidden Sentence Training*. The learning outcomes of this training claim to help participants to:-

- Be aware of the context of the current criminal justice system and the offender's journey
- Explore the impact of imprisonment on family members and society
- Recognise specific issues for children with a family member in prison which may present barriers to them achieving the ECM outcomes
- Identify the support needs of the family and how these can be met by statutory/voluntary provision and resources
- Reflect on how the insight gained will affect practice.

(APF, 2011)

A policy or set of guidelines for working with the children of prisoners for each school would be very helpful (this was supported by the headteachers themselves). A policy and set of guidelines wouldn't only be useful for these groups of teachers – but for all, so that there was a consistency of policy and approach to the children of prisoners in all schools as practice clearly varies considerably (Barnardo's, 2013; Morgan et al., 2011). Until these requirements are in place across a school, there will be little opportunity for development of the support provision to consider engagement of an imprisoned parent, which is a more sophisticated level of support.

#### Code 10: Personal Education of Prisoner

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the education of the prisoner prior to imprisonment. Although evident less frequently in the data, it highlights an important theme for consideration. This was not a topic of any question, however, when asked about the father's engagement in the education of their child prior to imprisonment, a small number of mothers referred directly to his educational background to emphasise their point.

Mum 3 provided her own personal perspective on the educational background of her partner: *'Don't think he really liked asking them about school – don't know, he somehow didn't seem to feel comfortable about it. Like he was scared of it or didn't know what to ask'* (Mum 3). Although not referring directly to the educational background of her partner, she does hint at the challenges he faces in relation to his own personal education and the impact of this on his engagement with his children.

Mum 5 was far more overt in her discussion of this and highlighted *'He never did the homework though or the hard stuff – don't think he really knew how to do it himself. He hated school so that put him off I think. He's actually doing a course in here at the moment about how to read and write so that might be good for him'* (Mum 5).

Mum 7 recounted a different response by her partner to education:-

*'..he pretended he was, but actually he hated school himself as a kid and could never see the point of all the stuff the kids were doing. To this day he doesn't know why our 'x' is at college – why would he want to do that? Waste of time – go get a proper job. He always took the mick out of the kids when they were doing their homework – oh look you lot being swots again, he'd say. He meant it ok but they were never sure if he was serious or not. I've always wanted them to do well but it's hard when you are pushing against that all the time. X sometimes stayed at school to do his work so his Dad doesn't see him doing it – he didn't want him making fun of him. The others used to do it when he was out. He never asks them about school and they never tell him anything – even if they've done something they are dead proud of – they never admit it to him' (Mum 7)*

It is interesting to note in all cases that education has not been discussed between the couples and each father was keen to hide his concerns (in one case by responding very negatively to the success of his own children).

#### *Context and Question*

The personal background and education of prisoners has received some research attention and a significant amount of time has been spent considering the future chances of those who offend and the future criminality of their own children (Murray et al., 2007a).

Recent data indicates that prisoners' relationships with their own schools were mixed and often negative. This links closely to the findings of these interviews. 59% of prisoners report that they regularly played truant from school. 63% reported having been temporarily excluded from school and 42% permanently excluded (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth, 2012, p.14). 19% of prisoners had completed school by the age of 14, 49% by the age of 15, 85% by 16 and 95% by 18. (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth, 2012, p.14)

Both sets of data highlight an uneasy relationship with the education system for the majority of male prisoners. This would support the direct references mothers made to the challenges they faced with fathers unwilling or unable to engage in the education of their children prior to imprisonment.

This finding is particularly significant to the broader study. The potential reluctance of some prisoners to be involved in the education of their children, due

to their own personal experiences of education, has a significant bearing on the success of a proposal such as this. Mum 5 however argues that this *'might make him do something'* (Mum 5) but it could also serve to alienate some fathers (e.g. the example offered by Mum 7). It was necessary to approach the perspectives of the mothers with caution, as their reflections were supposition. It was important to examine the views of the prisoners in relation to this proposal. Were this the case, there would be significant implications for prisoner education, as it would be necessary for some prisoners to engage in some personal education before they would be potentially willing and able to participate in their children's education.

### Code 11: Engaging Fathers

#### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the data provided by the mothers in relation to whether they would welcome the imprisoned father's direct involvement in the education of their children.

This produced a range of responses. Very quickly, it became evident that this wasn't something they had ever considered as an option and it must be noted that answers were not universally positive. Answers were on the hoof rather than reflected upon at length (given the nature of the interviews), but they did highlight some strategies which they considered would be helpful.

*'It would be good to be offered some possibilities – like what they (school) could offer me – rather than me having to think up ideas. I like the idea of things being sent to Dad – he's always done so much in their lives – I'd like him still to be involved'* (Mum 6)

*'Ha ha! Him? He never did anything with them before he went in, so I doubt it would change in here! I suppose it would give them something to talk about when they came in to visit – they just go off and play'* (Mum 7)

*'I wouldn't because the kids don't know he's here and don't come and visit, so it wouldn't be much use anyway. I suppose he could know how they were getting on though'* (Mum 5)

*'I suppose, if they had their school book or reading diary or a piece of homework they were doing, they could bring it in to show. The thing is he never asks – but if they brought something he might have to talk to them about it – that might be good actually'* (Mum 3)

*'They don't talk about school when they come in here. He always ask, but they just say 'nothing much' or 'it's ok' and they go and play. He doesn't know what to ask them as he isn't keeping up with what they are doing' (Mum 1)*

*'He wants to keep up with what the kids are doing and he tried so hard to do that – remember things that are happening in school and ringing up and asking about them' (Mum 10)*

### *Context and Question*

Research continues to suggest that fathers have limited involvement and often feel excluded from the everyday education of their children (DCSF 2007, 2008). The Every Child Matters (2003) green paper highlighted the importance of fathers and the need for raising their profile in relation to education. Since then, researchers and the DCSF have been examining the improvement in children's later life when their fathers were involved in their education (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004; Lamb, 2005; Potter and Carpenter 2008).

Walker (2010) also highlights in her small scale study of ex-offenders, that when asked *'fathering was about being engaged and developing meaningful, caring relationships with their children: providing emotional and material support'* while other interviewees felt it was about *'being interested in and supporting their children'* (Walker, 2010 p.1414). She also highlights the 'intermittent' nature of fathering from prison.

There are two very clear outcomes from the response received which have significant implications for the research question. The first relates to the clear message that although this would be broadly welcomed from the perspective of the partners (although what the reality of this would look like was very unclear), there were concerns from those whose partners hadn't historically been involved in the education of their children before. Even when this was the case though, they could see the potential benefit of this as Mum 3 indicated *'that might be good actually'*.

The second outcome relates to the mothers' perspectives on the role of the school in any such proposed scheme. There was an overwhelming view that this

is not something schools currently offer and that it is unlikely they have the knowledge to be able to offer this.

*‘She didn’t mention any of those to me though – maybe my school don’t do those kind of things?’ (Mum 6)*

*‘Isn’t really something I’d ever thought of – not sure the school’d know what to do with that. Might be good for them though. No-body has ever asked me about anything like that at the school’ (Mum 7)*

*I like the idea – I hadn’t thought of it actually and certainly don’t think the school have!’ (Mum 1)*

It would be necessary for partners and prisoners to be convinced that schools had the skills, contacts and wherewithal to make this a success as this would have the potential to prevent prisoners being ‘estranged from children and ‘missing out’ on years of their childhood’ (Condry, 2012, p75). As a strategy, this would require appropriately tailored support for the children of prisoners rather than alternative approaches being adapted in an attempt to make them fit the needs of this group (Morgan et al., 2011)

However, this should not detract from the ultimate aim that ‘it must be recognised that the significance of strong family ties goes beyond traditional assumptions restricted to visits, letters and supply of external goods’ (Scott and Codd, 2010 p. 146)

<b>1</b> Pre-prison involvement	<b>2</b> Pre-prison involvement in education/ Definition of educational involvement	<b>3</b> Current involvement in education	<b>4</b> Identity as a father	<b>5</b> Children visiting/ Visiting routines	<b>6</b> Motivating factors
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>		

Perceived relationship with children	Personal Education of Prisoner	Perception of schools	Vision of involvement		
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#### 4.5 Interviews with Fathers in prison

##### Code 1: Pre-prison involvement

###### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the levels of involvement of each prisoner in the broader life of his child/children before entering prison (excluding involvement in their education).

The data demonstrates a range of levels of pre-prison involvement. For some, involvement ranged from getting them dressed for school in the morning, to putting them to bed at night. For others, they were limited by working away or working long hours.

*'We did everything together. There was only the three of us, so we did all the stuff families do together. We played together, went shopping, watched telly, she played with her little friend next door and we went on holidays' (Prisoner 2)*

*'Totally involved (even though he was only small). I was a proper Dad and was dead hands-on. We did everything together as a family, as you do. We still do stuff as a family now' (Prisoner 3)*

*'I did everything before – played with them, took them places, drove them around, did what I was meant to do and what my wife told me to do' (Prisoner 7)*

*With four kids I had to be involved in everything. She worked and I didn't so I did everything with them really. I couldn't get a job as I'd been in here before and no-one wanted me. We got stuck for money – so I'm back in here again. I did their food and washed their stuff and we played and watched telly together. I did more than she did – but then she was working. (Prisoner 9)*

For others, involvement pre-prison was sporadic and patchy, often, relying on permission from the mother carer of the children if they were no longer living with them.

*'I saw them at weekends and stuff. I saw them whenever I could and whenever she'd let me. I'd go round at weekends and sometimes I'd take them out – we'd*



*go to McDonalds or to the park – not much though – I couldn't afford to do much' (Prisoner 1).*

*'To be honest, not as involved as I'd have liked. I lived at home with him but I was always out or away doing stuff, so I wasn't there as much as I should have been' (Prisoner 6)*

*It's hard to remember that far back – it seems such a long time ago. I tried to do the right thing and be their Dad as much as I could. We did footy together and played games and watched the telly and things. The youngest lad was only just born when I went into prison so really he's only ever really known me in here. (Prisoner 8)*

Some, in discussing pre-prison involvement highlighted how much they now felt they were missing out on being involved in the overall daily life of their child.

*'I did that all before I messed it all up and now I'm here and we can't do stuff with her anymore, well not properly anyway' (Prisoner 2)*

They reflected upon this from their own perspective and how it impacted upon their own well-being and sense of involvement, but did not consider the impact this may be having upon their children

#### *Context and Question*

The data indicated the fathers had views on how they should have been involved, but the reality of what they described (with the occasional exception) was actually limited to fun games (e.g. McDonalds (Prisoner 1), football and TV (Prisoner 8)) and activities to entertain the children. This is supported by LaRossa's (1988) culture and conduct of fatherhood. Here there is clear evidence that the conduct has developed more slowly than the culture.

It was evident that some fathers felt they were not as involved as they would have liked and felt under pressure to do more (both from the mother of their child but also because 'that was what was expected of Dads). This can be associated with the continuing growth of 'new' fatherhoods (Gregory and Milner, 2011). The focus is on 'two broad rationales for policy and legal intervention' and they identify these to be 'an optimistic perspective on fatherhood' and 'the results from the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its call for men to become more involved in the family' (Gregory and Milner, 2011, p.589). The study argues that there is a new 'public agenda often called "new fatherhood" and they argue this is evident in real changes in the behaviour of fathers in these two countries. The new order

of expectations in relation to fatherhood places significant pressures on fathers as society adopts these expectations, even in everyday life and before we even begin to consider the impact of this for imprisoned fathers.

For the final (and largest) group, they were involved as and when their personal arrangements allowed this to happen. It is unusual following a separation for fathers to gain custody of their children (Dunn, 2004). This then results in often limited access in the evening or at weekends. This resulted in sporadic involvement, often in superficial 'entertaining' ways, for example trips to the cinema, McDonald's, the park or other more extravagant destinations in an attempt to show their love to their child. This is in stark contrast to the accepted view of 'the significance of warmth and affectionate closeness, support, involvement, monitoring and authoritative parenting' (Dunn, 2004, p.661) that are central to both resident and non-resident relationships.

Research continues to highlight the importance of regular and consistent contact between non-resident fathers and their children (in normal circumstances) to ensure the well-being of the relationship but also for the long term emotional well-being of the child (Dunn et al., 2004).

It is important to identify levels of involvement pre-prison to be able to establish if a relationship with their child is already in existence or whether anything developed within the prison context would be something new. The nature of pre-prison involvement is also an important consideration as this defines how prisoners understand involvement with their children and will be the benchmark against which they will measure any involvement whilst in custody.

#### Code 2: Pre-prison involvement in education/Definition of educational involvement

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as the extent to which this group of fathers were involved in the education of their children prior to imprisonment and their understanding of the term educational involvement.

The responses relating to pre-prison involvement in education can be divided into three groups – those actively involved in their child’s education, those who had some level of involvement, (often at quite a superficial level) and those whose children were yet to begin school.

Two themes quickly became apparent within the data:- (1) the levels of involvement varied significantly between each father and (2) their understanding of what constituted involvement in education was not consistent and often at odds with the theories relating to ‘parental involvement in education’ (PIE).

Those actively involved referred to a range of activities including homework, attending parents’ evenings and other events at the school or being the main person to transport them to and from school.

*‘I was a proper hands-on Dad. I took them to school and picked them up. I did homework and saw the teacher. I was always the one that spoke to the teacher’ (Prisoner 7)*

*I took them to school and brought them home and gave them their tea. I did any homework there was and mostly I went to parents’ evenings and plays and stuff as she was always working. (Prisoner 9)*

Those who had some level of involvement would carry out tasks such as taking their child to school, asking them about their day or if needed, going to parents evenings. This was often heavily reliant on what the mother would allow or gave them access to:-

*‘she did all that – went to school and picked them up and took them. She did all the talking to the teachers – wouldn’t let me near the place. Think she was embarrassed really – probably even more now though!’ (Prisoner 1)*

*‘I went to plays and concerts and parents evenings and looked at school reports and that kind of thing. I took her dancing too’ (Prisoner 4)*

*‘I went to the plays and parents evenings – I was always there for those kind of things. I took him home some days and picked him up some days’ (Prisoner 5)*

*‘Didn’t do much in terms of homework and that kind of stuff’ (Prisoner 6)*

For the third group, they had not experienced their child in school prior to imprisonment, so this was their first experience of this. It was particularly challenging for them to understand, learn about and navigate the education system that their child/children now inhabited.

*'She wasn't at school when I came in here so there wasn't anything to do about her education' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I couldn't be because he was too young. I would have been it if I'd been able to' (Prisoner 3)*

*Well I wasn't before because he had only just been born. I did what I could with the other two but they hated school and they were from my other wife and she made them hate me eventually so they didn't ever talk about school or show me anything because she made them believe I didn't really give a toss. (Prisoner 8)*

Although there was no specific question asking the prisoners to define what they understood involvement in education to be, there were five questions which gave them an opportunity to show their understanding of this concept:-

- *Before you were sentenced, how involved were you in your children's education?*
- *How involved are you now?*
- *Would you welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the education of your children? Why?*
- *Assuming this, what form would you like this involvement to take?*
- *Do you feel it is important for you to know what is happening in the education of your child and your child's progress while you are in prison?*

Through their responses to these questions it is possible to identify a broad range of definitions of what this term meant for them.

Some fathers had very strong views about when involvement should begin

*'She wasn't at school when I came in so there wasn't anything to do about her education' (Prisoner 2).*

*'I couldn't be because he was too young' (Prisoner 3)*

*'Well I wasn't before because he had only just been born.' (Prisoner 8)*

These fathers linked education with school (as many prisoners did) and did not recognise that a child's education could begin long before they formally began school.

Other fathers demonstrated particular understanding of involvement in education:-

*'I just wanted to be there (on her first day). I remember we used to talk about when she went to school and how great it would be – then I wasn't even there. I rang her that night so she could tell me how it went, but we only had a quick call as there was a queue for the phone. She said she'd seen the pictures she'd been*

*drawing and the books that she was reading and told me she had some work on the wall at school. I was gutted' (Prisoner 2)*

Within this group, a number defined involvement in terms of contact with the school and particularly the teacher. To them, this signified a heightened level of involvement pre-prison.

*'I was always the one that spoke to the teacher' (Prisoner 7)*

*'I always had to go in if he got himself into trouble' (Prisoner 5)*

*'I went to plays and concerts and parents evenings' (Prisoner 4)*

### *Context and Question*

It is widely argued that parental involvement in a child's education can have positive outcomes for children (Epstein 2001, Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Goodall and Vorhaus 2011)

'Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups'. (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p.4).

All PIE models point to the importance of communication with schools, partnerships between schools and parents and the broader community. (Epstein, 2001; Hornby and Lafaele 2011; Swap, 1993). However, these models are very much written with a focus on supporting schools in engaging with parents (and hard to reach groups of parents) but give little attention to what parents define as involvement. Limited research has been carried out in this area but it is clear from the data within this study that they have limited understanding of the term and their role within it. Despite the wide range of documents and research advising schools how to engage parents more fully, this is not matched by practical support and guidance for parents in understanding what involvement might actually look like.

The data highlighted varied levels of involvement in education, but little about the reasons for this. The National Family and Parenting Institute's survey took 'a

comprehensive look at fathers' involvement in their school-aged children's learning and education' (Goldman, 2004) is a useful starting point for consideration of these. Although not purely focused on the primary age range, this report highlights some valuable data relating to the way fathers are perceived and are involved in the education of their children. Barriers discussed include: the timing of events, the targeting of information towards mothers and the belief of fathers that education is not within their role. The first part of the report was based on existing research conducted over the previous seven years. The report aims to examine the involvement of fathers and how this might be increased. It acknowledges that fathers perform their role in different ways, often in difficult circumstances - working long hours, being a single parent and those living in disadvantaged areas.

In terms of defining involvement in education, the fathers demonstrated a range of levels of understanding of the term and thus, many struggled to explain how they would like to be more involved as they were unclear about their definition of the term. It was necessary to present them with some possible scenarios and examples of what they could be offered, in order for them to be in a position to indicate whether it would be something they would find helpful.

### Code 3: Current Involvement in Education

#### *Code Definition*

This is defined as how involved each imprisoned father was in the education of their child. Some had limited involvement due to imprisonment, others due to the maternal gatekeeping carried out by their partner/ex-partner, some received 'third hand' information through grandparents or other visitors and a very small number had more involvement than prior to imprisonment.

As expected, some had less involvement due to current context and available visiting possibilities.

*'Well...I'm not involved at all now am I? I only know if she remembers to tell me – the little one doesn't tell me stuff – she's too little...What do I know in here?' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I do what I can, which isn't that much being in here'*

It was evident in a number of interviews that maternal gatekeeping was taking place in relation to this and it was the mother 'who plays a central interface-moderating role, since her presence is needed to accompany children on prison visits' (Clarke et al., 2005, p.222). Partners and family members were central to 'facilitating parenting relationships on behalf of their sons and brothers' (Walker, 2010a, p.1410). A number of the men had limited or controlled access to their child's education via the mother through telephone calls or visits and were reliant on time frames, memory and the elements that the mother chose to share with them. The prisoners were very aware of this as a significant issue and potential barrier to their involvement.

*'She tells me what she can but there's loads to talk about when she comes to visit and it can't always be about school' (Prisoner 3)*

*'I only know if she remembers to tell me' (Prisoner 2)*

*'It's really hard now as I only get third hand information about how they are doing. My ex-wife doesn't come to visit...we talk sometimes on the phone if we have to, about the kids but it is always short and she just says they are fine or that the parents evenings were fine...My Dad brings them so anything I hear about school he tells me but I don't get the whole story. He doesn't remember a lot of things' (Prisoner 4)*

*'This can be a bit of a problem to be honest. Bless her, me Mum brings him in to visit me...My Mum tells me bits and pieces that she hears and knows about but it's kind of third hand by the time it gets to me – not great really' (Prisoner 5)*

*'The only things I get about how he's doing at school is from his mother and I'm not happy about that. I don't think she tells me the whole story most of the time – how can I trust her – she just tells me what she thinks I want to hear. That's no good though, I need to know how he's doing' (Prisoner 6)*

*My missus tells me a bit of stuff about school, but she never really liked school much herself so doesn't say much – just says he's fine and tells me he's not in any trouble. (Prisoner 8)*

It became evident from the data, that in addition to the mothers appearing to share limited information with the father, children were often unwilling to discuss their school experiences either on the telephone or in person. They highlighted

the additional challenges for them of eliciting information from their child in a limited time frame (e.g. during visits or on the telephone) and often received shrugs, 'don't know' or an unwillingness to sit and talk. Some shared their concern that this was due to a lack of anything practical to do with their child while talking. It appeared to the fathers that their children felt less comfortable engaging in personal dialogue in the formal surroundings of the visitor hall with no activities to engage in.

*'They don't talk about school and don't like me asking about it either – they say there isn't anything to say and they haven't got anything to show me. They get bored on the visits' (Prisoner 7)*

*'they didn't ever talk about school or show me anything because she made them believe I didn't really give a toss.' (Prisoner 8)*

*'Not at all really. Sometimes they tell me what they've been doing but not much. They don't talk about it when they come in here' (Prisoner 9)*

*'they don't like talking about school and it's boring for them sitting talking to me...there's nothing for us to do together' (Prisoner 4)*

*'He won't talk about school when he comes...I really have to push him and he never says much' (Prisoner 3)*

One however, surprisingly, had more involvement than prior to imprisonment:-

*'Funny actually – I probably see her and the kids more now than I did before. She's got better with me over the last 12 months and she's more up for seeing me and bringing the kids. They talk a bit about school and she tries and gets them to tell me about it – you know what kids are like though – they don't know what to say so they just say it's ok' (Prisoner 1)*

### *Context and Question*

There is a small but gradually growing body of research relating to engaging imprisoned fathers in the education of their children, for example Morgan et al. (2013). To date, this includes investigations of what is already taking place and identifying examples of good practice nationally and internationally. This includes examples of teacher/prisoner contact, homework clubs in prisons, reports and other communication being sent to prisons via email (Morgan et al., 2011; Roberts, 2012). However, these do not include a consideration of what would be welcomed by those involved. This is evident in the responses of some participants, but it is not the central focus. There appears not to be any research in this area within the UK which involves specific questioning of prisoners about



their current levels of involvement in the education of their children and if/ how they would welcome being more involved.

Some fathers (particularly Prisoner 2) indicated that they had higher levels of involvement in the education of their child now, than they did prior to imprisonment. They provided examples of how the relationship with their partner and child had already broken down prior to imprisonment and access to their child was patchy at best. Imprisonment had provided more regular access and communication and had enabled them to begin to re-establish a rounded relationship with their child and engaged in their education at some level.

The most interesting of the fathers' responses however were those who although currently having some or little involvement, showed that the conditions were there, with the right support for them to be in a position to have increased involvement from their pre-prison circumstances. This included regular visiting from the mother of their children and the children themselves and having a strong vision for involvement. This would be a group of fathers potentially open and willing to engage in such an initiative and who would be in a practical position to benefit from this. The challenge for this group of fathers would be the practical issues raised by the mothers including the financial implications of regular visiting and the practical challenges of removing their child from school and travelling to the prison.

It is evident that lack of current involvement is impacted upon by key factors: - lack of family support and visits, personal experience of education, lack of communication from the child's school and lack of opportunity to engage if visits are taking place.

Three key barriers presented themselves within the data as barriers to their involvement as prisoners. One was the role of the gatekeeper adopted by the mothers and the lack of information received from them, the second related the fact that visiting conditions were not conducive to discussion with their children about school – children were often unwilling to engage in this due to the formal circumstances and the lack of resources for use to stimulate such discussion, the third was the lack of information offered to them as fathers, by the school (see code 9).

#### Code 4: Identity as a Father

##### *Code Definition*

In this study, this is being defined as the challenges imprisoned fathers are experiencing in maintaining their identities as fathers in a prison environment.

Most wanted to show what they felt they were missing and the impact this had on their personal identity as a father:-

*'I'll have missed loads – first day at school and the work she's been doing and the little friends she has and parties she goes to' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I'm his Dad so surely I should know what is happening to him and how he is getting on...I'd feel more like his Dad' (Prisoner 3)*

*'Seeing them makes such a difference to me. I feel like I'm a useful Dad again rather than just someone on the other end of the phone' (Prisoner 7)*

*'I need to know what he's doing and I need to be able to help him and do what Dads do.' (Prisoner 8)*

The majority were very keen to demonstrate an enthusiasm for maintaining or enhancing their identity as a father, both in their own eyes and more importantly in the eyes of their family and children:-

*'I'm trying to show them that I can be a good dad – that they can trust me as a dad' (Prisoner 1)*

*'I just want to be her Dad and do all the stuff Dads do' (Prisoner 2)*

*'Seeing her reminds me that I must be good – I want to get out and be with her and be a proper Dad' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I don't know what I'd do without my mum – I need to see him, it's really important for me to be part of his life, especially as I'm not with his mum anymore...It's really important for me – I'm his Dad'(Prisoner 5)*

*'Although I don't see him, I am his Dad and I want to try and be the best Dad I can for him' (Prisoner 6)*

*'It's very important. I need to feel like a Dad and they need to see me being their Dad. They have the right to that – I am still their Dad'. (Prisoner 9)*

Some prisoners, in addition also emphasised that their identity was impacted upon by how they are treated and whether their role as a father is recognised:-

*'someone could actually start treating me like a Dad – that actually I have a right to know about them and how they are doing' (Prisoner 1)*

### *Context and Question*

The concept of fatherhood identity has been considered in a range of research (Doherty et al., 1998; McBride et al., 2005; Rane and McBride, 2000) and more recently the role of imprisonment and the impact of this on the emphasis on their has come into sharp focus for researchers. This has been considered through a number of small scale studies examining the fathering identities of prisoners of all ages (Clarke et al., 2005; Dyer, 2005; Meek, 2011; Walker, 2010a).

Key themes have emerged from these studies outlining the challenges faced by all non-resident (and particularly imprisoned) fathers who are apart from their children for an 'indeterminate period, out of their control' (Clarke et al., 2005, p.222). Fatherhood was seen as being fragmented (Clarke et al., 2005) during imprisonment and fathering took place beyond the walls of the prison, post release, rather than in prison (Clarke et al., 2005). Meek (2011) argued that fathers were using prison to prepare for the role of fatherhood at the end of their sentence rather than recognising their identity as fathers in prison.

Fatherhood identity cannot be defined in general terms when considering imprisoned fathers. It must be noted that 'what barriers an incarcerated father experiences depend on what activities the father find meaningful to his identity' (Dyer, 2005, p.209). This varied significantly from father to father. If education formed part of this for a father, then the lack of involvement would have an impact upon his identity.

The data collected for this study identified a range of barriers to identity, some of which related to knowledge and understanding of their children's lives more broadly, whilst others related to their education, for example - *'I'll have missed loads – first day at school and the work she's been doing and the little friends she has and parties she goes to' (Prisoner 2)*.

It was evident from the data that the role of the family in developing the imprisoned father's parenting identity was crucial. For them to engage in a new 'fatherhood identity standard' (Dyer, 2005 p.215) the assistance of the family is

important. However, it could be argued that it is not just this group who need to offer support. Moving on from this it could be argued that both the criminal justice system and the education system (in this case, Primary schools) also need to offer their support to create a new fatherhood identity for imprisoned fathers allowing them to find new ways to 'enact those roles' (Dyer, 2005 p.215).

#### Code 5: Children Visiting/Visiting Routines

##### *Code Definition*

This code was also generated from the data in relation to the mothers. This is defined as children visiting their imprisoned father. This relates to whether they do visit, who makes this decision and the fathers' feelings about their child visiting and the family routines which are re-enacted during prison visiting times.

For some fathers, their children's visiting was very significant and was seen as the catalyst for maintaining strong relationships with their children.

*'Yes, she always brings the kids with her... I love seeing the kids – makes life worth living' (Prisoner 1)* but equally, this prisoner also feels that bringing the children is almost a cover for the mother *'she never just comes on her own – think she's a bit afraid of coming by herself' (Prisoner 1)*.

*'She comes with her mum every couple of weeks – when they can afford to come...I love seeing her so much. I love her smell and giving her a big hug' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I don't know what I'd do without my mum – I need to see him, it's really important for me to be part of his life, especially as I'm not with his mum anymore' (Prisoner 5)*

*'I love seeing the kids...seeing them makes such a difference to me...talking to them on the phone is good but it isn't the same as seeing them' (Prisoner 7)*

*'we need time together as a proper family – it's the only chance we get and I'm not coming out any time soon' (Prisoner 8)*

*'I so love seeing them – it doesn't matter which one, I love them all and I'm a really proud Dad when they come in the visiting hall and look smart and they are always pleased to see me' (Prisoner 9)*

The majority of prisoners highlighted the positive aspects of their children's visits but some also noted the personal distress these caused:-

*'the kids go off and play when they are here though so I don't always see them very much. I wish we could do stuff together but they go off so we don't. The bit I hate is when they have to go – they just get up and leave and sometimes forget to say bye if they are in a hurry as they get rushed out. That feeling when they go...we just sit there and watch until everyone has gone – before we go back to the cells. I really hate it' (Prisoner 1)*

*'she gets dead upset sitting around waiting and then they search her and look in her little mouth and pat her down...she just wants to run off and play...'(Prisoner 2)*

*'it's boring for them sitting talking to me – they want to do and buy sweets or play in the area. There's nothing for us to do together' (Prisoner 4)*

*'I hate it in visiting though as he doesn't always like to talk about stuff. He gets bored and then wants to go – that kills me as I just want to stay and talk to him forever' (Prisoner 5)*

*'I hate it so much when they leave – I never feel I see them enough and then I don't see them again for a bit' (Prisoner 9)*

Although there is one very clear prison visiting system within the prison itself in relation to policy and procedure, the visiting routines of a prisoner and his family vary significantly and highlight the complications of maintaining some form of family life during their period of imprisonment. It is evident that each family approaches visits differently including, who visits and how the time is spent during visits.

*'My Dad (their granddad) brings them...she won't come' (Prisoner 4)*

*'Bless her, me Mum brings him in to visit me. My ex won't come in' (Prisoner 5)*

*'I don't see the older one since I came up here. The ex says it's too far to bring them and she says when they are old enough they can make up their own mind...my missus brings our one. He comes every week – usually on a Wednesday' (Prisoner 8)*

*'Yes, she brings them in – but not all together. Often just one or two come in with her at once...she comes every week and brings different ones each time' (Prisoner 9)*

#### *Context and Question*

Previous data in relation to visits has considered them from the perspective of the child; however, it is also important to view the visit from the perspective of the prisoner and whether this is viewed as an important opportunity for the maintenance of effective relationships with their children. Much of the research

focussed upon prison visits relates to the impact this can have on the reduction in recidivism (Bales and Mears, 2008; Light and Campbell, 2006), some relates to the impact on the wellbeing of the child (Johnston, 1995) but there is nothing relating to how this can provide an opportunity for an imprisoned father to engage in the education of his children.

The data for this study shows that, on the whole, prisoners were very positive about having the opportunity to see their children and would have welcomed even more of this contact. Dixey and Woodall (2012) support this, arguing that 'some prisoners suggested that visits, in some way, contributed to temporarily re-establishing their role as a son or husband' or 'allowing them momentarily to restore their role as a parent figure' (p.37).

However, the data here moved beyond the findings of Dixey and Woodall (2012), demonstrating that although the prisoners welcomed the contact, it was sometimes challenging to take on the role of 'parent figure' when the children wished to play in the play area or had little to say to their father about their life, friends and school work. With nothing structured to engage in, it was felt the visiting context was awkward for all involved, leaving Dad feeling disappointed and empty at the end of a visit.

Codd (2008) highlights the rise in innovative visiting practices including family visit days and The Sunday Brunch Scheme at HMP Altcourse (p.154-155) ITV 1 (February 2013) provided an excellent example of this within their programme focusing on Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution (HMYOI) Aylesbury and BBC 3 (March 2013) followed this with a focus on imprisoned fathers and the initiatives currently being used in some prisons. They focussed on the positive feedback family visits received from the prisoners themselves and the importance of that physical contact with their child. They also argued for the opportunities to engage the children in activities, rather than the stark face to face contact of a routine visit where engagement is limited and there is 'so much emotional work to do in so little time'. (Earle, 2012, p.392)

It is important to note at this point however that some prisoners are unable to receive visits from their family due to the distance from their family home, the gatekeeping role of the mother, or quite often, the refusal of the prisoner to allow

their child to see them in prison. Dixey and Woodall (2012) highlight that ‘many men felt uncomfortable at the prospect of their children seeing them in daunting and unfamiliar circumstances’ (p.38).

Visits and particularly children visiting are central concepts in relation to this research question. The perspectives of all stakeholders are of importance in relation to this theme, but those of the imprisoned fathers are particularly important. The prisoners viewed visits as central to maintaining their relationship (however uncomfortable or inadequate they may seem) and were seeking more active and engaged visits where there were more opportunities for full engagement, leading to a less disjointed experience for all.

Visits can be one way of providing fathers with a level of engagement in the education of his child, although it must be noted, this cannot be the only way and for those prisoners choosing to serve ‘hard time’ or who are placed at a long distance from their family home alternative approaches would need to be considered. However, both schools and the criminal justice system would need to be facilitating such contact. For schools, this would include providing activities/books/ games for children to use during visits with their father and it would require HM Prison Service to be in a position to allow such resources to be brought into the prison or based there, as happens for example at the Learning Together Club at HMP and YOI Parc (2013) (as described earlier). Given the security challenges around this, it may be necessary to consider schools in a local area working alongside their local prison to provide packs of resources which could be age appropriate and already security checked and in the prison for use during visits.

#### Code 6: Motivating Factors

##### *Code Definition*

This code is defined as those factors which motivate an imprisoned father to want to return to his family as quickly as possible and to prevent re-offending.

The majority of fathers discussed the factors that motivated them on a day to day basis within the challenges of the prison environment. Motivation was referred to in terms of ‘keeping them going’, knowing that there was something better at the

end of their sentence and wanting to show their partner/children/family that they could be a good husband/partner/son/father.

*'I love seeing the kids – makes life in here worth living – seeing them and knowing that I can do something better for them when I get out. They keep me going on the bad days' (Prisoner 1)*

*'The kids keep me going, so anything that helps me know about them is a good' (Prisoner 1)*

*'I love her smell and giving her a big hug – she just wants to run off and play though. It makes me want to try. I think I do feel better when I see her and I look forward to it so much. Seeing her reminds me that I must be good – I want to get out and be with her and be a proper dad' (Prisoner 2)*

*'It's all I want really – if I can stay straight for him then I've got the best chance of getting out of here eventually (Prisoner 6)*

*'I love seeing the kids – it's why I am in here working in the kitchens and trying to behave myself so I don't cock it up and end up being away from them even longer' (Prisoner 7)*

*'I want to get out and be a proper Dad and doing that in here would be really good. I go to the prison library when I can and look at the books and try and get to know more stuff' (Prisoner 9)*

It is interesting to note that the majority of prisoners made a connection between seeing and engaging with their children and staying on the straight and narrow, highlighting the importance of contact with their children to ensure their own success as a prisoner in terms of rehabilitation and establishing a more successful future for themselves and their families.

### *Context and Question*

There is a growing body of small scale research studies carried out in the UK with a focus upon the views of prisoners and ex-offenders in relation to their roles as fathers and their particular needs within this role, for example, McMurren et al., (2008), Walker (2010a and b), Meek (2011), Dixey and Woodall (2011) and Earle (2012). These have highlighted a number of key factors which are important for imprisoned fathers. Personal goals (McMurren et al., 2008) are seen to be central to this giving 'purpose, structure and meaning to a person's life' (p.268). Being a 'better' father or developing their role as a father was also central goal for many of the men in these pieces of research (McMurren et al., 2008; Dixey and Woodall, 2011; Earle 2012) supporting the evidence collected within this study .



For some fathers this can be done through, attending parenting classes (Meek, 2011, Meek, 2007b, Earle, 2012), for others, engaging in family days and visits was equally important (Walker 2010a, Dixey and Woodall, 2011, Earle 2012). For others, knowledge of the workings of day to day family life and specifically in relation to their children was crucial (McMurran et al., 2008; Walker, 2010a).

The factors motivating imprisoned fathers were often part of a broader motivation which was to show their 'positive intentions to family members' (Yocum and Nath, 2011, p299) through their 'positive jail actions' (Yocum and Nath, 2011, p.299). The interviewees were keen to show their commitment to 'going straight' and living different lives on release.

Walker (2010a) highlights the 'generative' nature of fathering from prison through a particular model. This model supports the findings of the interviews in the following ways:-

feeling generative → being generative → tools of generativity

(1)

(2)

(3)

(1) The importance of partners and children in 'keeping prisoners going' during their imprisonment offering the view that 'it was critical to their well-being and mental health' (Walker, 2010a, p.1413). The majority of prisoners interviewed for this study commented on the importance of this (particularly in relation to their children)

(2) She argues that 'adopting a fathering role and identity appeared to provide some meaning and purpose for many of these fathers' (Walker, 2010a, p.1413) This caused them to be generative through the position they held within the family. This was confirmed by those interviewed – particularly in phrases such as '*I'd feel more like his Dad*' (Prisoner 3) and '*I feel like I'm a useful Dad again*' (Prisoner 7)

(3) Walker recognises the challenges fathers face in developing their 'tools' but wanted to be there for their children and show that they could support their children and that they knew how to be fathers.

A number of interviewees also highlighted how being a father encouraged them to have a clear focus and goal - to ensure they did not re-offend either while serving their sentence or on release. They had something very motivating to aim for. Although reduction in recidivism is not the focus of this study, this is still worthy of note at this point and would certainly benefit from further research focus.

#### Code 7: Perceived relationship with children

##### *Code definition*

Through their answers, the prisoners' perceptions of their current relationships with their children were demonstrated. Some responses referred directly to concerns about current relationships with children:-

*'I don't feel I know much about them, even though I see them – they don't say a lot, they don't find it easy coming and they don't like it so they just behave badly' (Prisoner 1)*

*'I'm really scared she'll just see me as some kind of visitor, not her Dad' (Prisoner 2)*

*'He isn't interested. I want to show him I care and want to know how he's doing' (Prisoner 3)*

*'He doesn't tell me much – he drops the odd bit in sometimes if he's got something good to tell me or if something is really bothering him, but other than that, it's hard to get much from him' (Prisoner 5)*

*'He's always in trouble and the other week he got kicked out of school for a week for what he'd done. That's all because I'm not there. I'd sort him out...spend all my time on the phone kicking him for giving his mother bother and for not doing what he's told... he doesn't like talking to me on the phone as it probably means he's done something wrong and I'm cross with him for something. That's a bad thing and I'm sorry for that' (Prisoner 6)*

*'I know loads of stuff I could share with him. I think though, he doesn't reckon I know anything in here – otherwise why would I be spending my life in prison' (Prisoner 8)*

Others referred to how they could improve their relationships with their children and how involvement in education could potentially have an impact upon this. They shared concerns that without this, there was the danger they would lose contact or any form of relationship with their children.

*'They might get on better with me if we had stuff to talk about. It's dead awkward when they come to visit. It would be good if there was stuff we could do together so are more like a family' (Prisoner 1)*

*'That would help me talk to him on the phone and I might actually be able to say something good him rather than just kicking him all the time which is all I get to do at the moment' (Prisoner 6)*

*'Then I could do stuff with him. We could talk about it on the phone. If that doesn't happen I think I'll lose him when he goes to his new school – he'll make different friends and he'll be embarrassed about me' (Prisoner 8)*

### *Context and Question*

Much of the research carried out with prisoners and their experiences as fathers focuses upon how they attempt to maintain their relationships with their children through visits, telephone calls and letters (Walker 2010b, Meek 2011). Earle (2012) moves beyond this to consider the perception prisoners have of their relationships with their children and the distress that this can cause - 'I'm just the sweetie man in a big bright orange bib. That's all I am mate' (Earle, 2012, p.393). This is a very emotive topic for imprisoned fathers, some of whom believe they have little or no constructive, loving relationship with their children (for the reasons already demonstrated in the earlier data for this study). Earle (2012) goes on to discuss the fact that this is at odds with the 'by the book fathering' (Earle, 2012, p.393) that is offered in fathering classes.

In their responses a number of fathers made close links between the theme of their perceived relationship with their children and their potential involvement in the education of their children. They were very clear about their belief that the more involved they could be in the lives of their children, the stronger their relationship with their child would be. Close links were made between knowledge and the ability to have quality telephone conversations and quality time during visiting.

Some fathers however, believed they only have a relationship with their child based on discipline and telephone conversations related to threats and encouragement based on behaviour at home and in school. Others felt they had little to talk to their children about and visits were a particular challenge in relation to this. The lack of any form of engaging activity for fathers and their children during visits was a continued source of frustration for fathers. They highlighted

the lack of opportunity to engage with their child or 'preserve family bonds' (Dixey and Woodall, 2011) as they often got bored and went to the snack bar or to play in the supervised play area. Some fathers felt that educational activities combined with knowledge of their child's progress and education had the potential to improve this situation.

It is therefore possible that heightened level of involvement and knowledge may have a significant impact upon the quality of relationships a child has with their father in an on-going way, but also may have the potential to improve the quality of the visit if conditions were possible for this.

#### Code 8: Personal Education of Prisoner

##### *Code definition*

A small number of prisoners interviewed referred to their own personal educational backgrounds and the impact this had or may potentially have on their current and future involvement in the education of their children.

Comparatively few fathers referred to this in relation to the number of mothers who highlighted the educational issues and backgrounds of their partners/ex-partners in prison. This may be linked to personal pride or an unwillingness to recognise personal challenges in relation to education.

*'Someone could also help me to read the stuff, so I could help them more. I can't read and I keep missing out on courses and stuff in here' (Prisoner 1)*

*'He's 11 and he's just like me now. He's always in trouble and the other week he got kicked out of school for a week for what he'd done' (Prisoner 6)*

*Didn't do much in terms of homework and that kind of stuff – not that good at that kind of thing myself so I couldn't really help him very much (Prisoner 6)*

*'I go to the Prison Library when I can and look at the books and try and get to know more stuff (Prisoner 9)*

##### *Context and Question*

Interview data from the mothers and the prisoners themselves highlighted the challenges they had faced in relation to their personal education. Recent government data indicates that prisoners' relationships with their own schools

were mixed and often negative (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012), supporting the findings of this study.

However, a growing body of research has now begun to examine the education of prisoners within a prison context (Crowley, 2012; Earle 2012, Meek 2007b, O'Brien 2010) considering the quality of this. Much of this research relates to the practical implementation of these educational approaches and the challenges faced within this context. It highlights the importance of these skills in preventing or reducing re-offending post-release and the potential for structured activity during imprisonment. These can be divided into broader skills based classes relating to reading, writing and numeracy and those relating to the role of the parent. There is a clear divide between what is learned within the skills based classes and those within parenting classes. Parenting classes focus upon skills such as general childcare, general parenting role, relationship with child, health and safety (Meek 2007b) and broader skills based courses focus on the literacy and numeracy skills required for life outside prison. It however could be argued that literacy and numeracy skills should be central to parenting classes within prisons too. For fathers to be able to engage in the educational life of their child, which I would argue is central to the 'general parenting role' (Meek, 2007b), they need to have the basic literacy and numeracy skills to allow them to do this.

Earle (2012) emphasises the 'display of masculine competency' (p.391) he noted within his ethnographic study's observations of a parenting class. He highlighted that 'one [prisoner] in particular seems to have swallowed a parenting handbook and likes to tell how it should be done' (Earle, 2012, p.391). This indicates there may be a belief amongst prisoner fathers that they have a clear understanding of the role of the father in terms of caring for their child – behaviour, routines, eating, caring, but where does their knowledge of education and the education system their child is currently occupying, fit into this? Currently, this is viewed as a separate set of skills within prison education procedures, rather than central to the role of the parent, despite the fact that 'where once the state might have been concerned to have the prison make men fit for work, it now also wants to make them fit for family life.' (Earle, 2012, p.395).

The data from the mothers had previously identified the potential reluctance of prisoners to engage in the education of their children due to their personal relationship with the education system. However, the prisoners responded in a very different way in mentioning their own personal education. When it was mentioned it related to a plea for help with this to enable a stronger level of engagement to take place, rather than a reluctance to engage, as presented by some mothers.

It must be noted however that this was only one group of prisoners in one prison. Clearly the age and willingness of prisoners is a significant factor which will impact upon enthusiasm for this. This highlights the importance of prison education both for the long term success of a prisoner post-release but also in relation to the potential it has to support prisoners in engaging with their children's education and therefore improving the quality of their relationship with them.

#### Code 9: Perception of Schools

##### *Code definition*

During the questions relating to their current involvement in their child's education and their vision for future involvement, the prisoners openly shared their perceptions of the schools their children attend, their feelings relating to the treatment of their child and their view of them as a father.

*...but there's no way a school would do that for me. They were bad enough with her and the kids when I came in here. They are all ashamed of me – the school aren't gonna be interested in telling me about what they are doing' (Prisoner 1)*

*'Huh! Are you serious? That would be great – but why would they bother with me? They can talk to her mum so why would they tell me anything? They'd expect her to pass stuff on – she does, but it isn't the same' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I think there is much more that school could do' (Prisoner 3)*

*'School don't do anything like that, they don't tell me anything – It's like I don't exist and because I'm in here they assume I just don't care and so don't need to know' (Prisoner 5)*

*'the school should be doing more to help me' (Prisoner 6)*

*'It must seem odd for the school now that I'm not there – not that they are trying to keep in touch with me though, are they? (Prisoner 7)*

*'I don't think the school really know that I exist. They think I've gone away to here and therefore I'm not important anymore and not really their Dad. I think she has had real problems with them' (Prisoner 7)*

*'I don't know the teachers and I think they think I don't really exist – he probably talks about me but I'm probably not very real to them am I? Some horrible bloke who has done something so awful that he's got to spend his life in prison' (Prisoner 8)*

*'Because I'm not there, they don't think I need to know – maybe they think I'm not bothered' (Prisoner 9)*

#### *Context and Question*

The prisoners were almost unanimous in their negative feedback relating to their children's schools. They argued that schools do not understand what it is like and lack the necessary knowledge and skill base. Prisoner 6 summarised this *'I think anything that would help schools know what it is like for Dads and kids would be really good. The more they know, the more they could help.'* Others however, were far more hostile to schools, viewing them as judgemental institutions filled with staff who have very set views about prison and imprisoned fathers.

A number of previous UK studies focussing on fathers in prison and the children of prisoners (Clarke et al., 2005, McMurrin et al., 2008, Morgan et al., 2011, Earle, 2012) have not been able to include the perspectives of imprisoned fathers in relation to schools and their potential roles.

Roberts (2012) does however begin a consideration this from an international perspective (Australia and USA) and highlights that 'a parent in prison is still a parent and can play an important role in supporting their child's education, even from behind bars' (p.7). Roberts provides examples of good practice and offers prisoner perspectives on the success of these (including video conferencing and telephone conversations with teachers). However, she does not seek the perspectives of prisoners in relation to schools. The perceptions of imprisoned fathers of the schools their children attend give an important insight into the current relationships between schools and prisoners when considered alongside the data from the mothers and the headteachers.

The data suggests that schools are not currently demonstrating an interest in supporting the families of prisoners and prisoners themselves. There are

evidently small examples of good practice to refer to (Barnardo's, 2013), and in these cases close links are made between the child, the school, the mother and the prisoner and the mother feels comfortable within the school environment. It could be argued that the role of the school is twofold – what they do within the school environment itself in terms of ethos to welcome and support the children and families of prisoners and secondly, how they then ensure that children and teachers can engage fully and meaningfully with imprisoned fathers about the educational development of their children – both from a distance and on prison visits.

#### Code 10: Vision of involvement

##### *Code definition*

Prisoners were asked very specifically about their vision of involvement through a series of questions:-

- Would you welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the education of your child?
- What form would you like this involvement to take?
- Do you feel that it is important for you to know what is happening in the education of your child and your child's progress while you are in prison?
- Do you think there is anything else that schools or the Prison Service could do to help you know how your child is doing?

The answers to these questions combined to outline a very powerful vision of involvement for each prisoner. The majority of prisoners were very decisive about what they would like and already had a very clear vision for how they would like to be involved in the education of their children. It is interesting to note that in some cases, they were able to articulate this vision well before they were asked these questions. Some began to discuss this as soon as they were asked more generally about their current involvement in the life of their child and the contact they have.

Most prisoners interviewed were able to articulate what they would like and had clearly considered this before:-



*'I'd like to do some stuff with her. I'd like to do pictures and look at books and do cutting and sticking and all the things she does at school. There is some stuff for her to do in here, but it's just stuff to play with. They do special visits days but not very often. Then some Dads get to see their kids for longer and do face painting and games and stuff. I haven't had that yet but apparently I can soon' (Prisoner 2)*

*'I'd like to get a school report and see what progress he is making...we can do email now and it would be great if school could send stuff to me here. It all comes down email so they wouldn't have to bring anything in, which would stop them worrying about security. I would like stuff to be brought in through like books and things so I could see his reading books' (Prisoner 3)*

*'The first thing I'd like is to know how they are both doing – they don't tell me so I need to know somehow. I want to know if they are doing well and if they need help with things. Basically I want to see their school report and find out how their work is doing. I want to see their reading book too and do things with them (Prisoner 4)*

*'School could send me things, so I know what's happening to them – updates and maybe their report or a school photo or some bits of work they have done. I could keep up with it then and we could talk about it on the phone or when they come to visit' (Prisoner 4)*

*'Also, if he's stuck, I know a lot about lots of things and I should be able to help him and I could – if he could bring his work in or if I could talk to him more about it...I'd love to be able to do stuff with him when he comes to visit like activities and reading his book and looking at his work and talking about school.' (Prisoner 5)*

*'The best thing for me would be to have some contact with the school. I want to hear from them myself rather than through her – she doesn't tell me anything anyway really. I want to get some reports and know what's going on with him at school – that would be great...could the prison and the school get things to me like pictures and emails and reports and work then then I'd know some stuff and be part of it' (Prisoner 6)*

*'Anything would be good – know what they are doing at school and where they are up to. School report would be great...I want to be able to talk to them on the phone and say I know how well they have done and their teacher has been telling me how hard they have been trying*

*I'd like to be able to talk to the teacher or the school and maybe they could send me things – work and their reports. I'd like to be able to do things with them when they come in like read a book with them or do some homework – that would be great. Anything really would be better than nothing' (Prisoner 7)*

*'I really want to do more – she doesn't like helping him with school stuff but I bet there is loads I could do. I need to know what he's doing and I need to be able to help him out and do what Dads do. We can't wait for me to come out – he'll be grown up by then – I need to do it now.*

*Anything I can get to be honest, would be good...what I really need is to see his work and be able to talk to him about it and do work with him – we need to have an ongoing schoolwork thing where I am part of that and school work is what I do...a report would be good and seeing some of his work would be nice. If they could send in what he's doing or he could bring in his homework that would be great – then I could do stuff with him. We could talk about it on the phone too' (Prisoner 8)*

*'I don't think I mind really. I want to know about the books they are reading and if they are good at it. I haven't seen a school report since I was in here' (Prisoner 9)*

For a small number, this was clearly a new concept for them and further reflection time was required.

*'I don't know really- can't go anywhere from here can I? Anything that helps me keep in touch with them and know what is going on in their lives has got to be a good thing hasn't it? It would be nice to see stuff from school, pictures and stuff they have done or a book they've got or something. (Prisoner 1)*

#### *Context and Question*

There is no research focussing directly on fathers' views on involvement in the education of their children and whether they would welcome this. A developing body of research is now beginning to consider the role of schools in supporting the families of prisoners (Codd, 2008; Morgan et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2013; Roberts, 2012). The majority of this has so far examined the perspectives of schools and prisoners' families and how schools could improve the support they offer (occasionally including the views of prisoners).

The focus has not been directly upon how imprisoned fathers can become more involved and in the case of Roberts (2012) where this is considered, the focus is upon how fathers can be kept informed and the forms this can take, rather than how they can be fully involved and their 'vision' for this involvement.

Given the lack of existing research literature focussing on involving imprisoned fathers in the education of their children, it was surprising to note the clear vision of many of the fathers interviewed. Their perspective related very closely to their own role and identity as a father and much prison based research has focussed upon this, highlighting the strong need of imprisoned fathers to re-claim their identity as a father (Clarke et al., 2005; Earle 2012) or their 'parenting possible selves' (Meek, 2007). The fathers did not reflect upon the impact this may have

on their child or their educational development (DCSF 2008a). This is at odds with the overwhelming need demonstrated in the data to know how their child was doing and their progress both socially and academically.

The majority of prisoners indicated that anything would be better than the current position for them. They discussed ideals but also recognised the reality that they were unlikely to benefit from everything suggested but would welcome any improvement. The range of definitions of parental involvement in education (Hanafin and Lynch 2002, Desforges and Abouchar 2003, Harris and Goodall 2008) demonstrate the on-going research debate in this field and the opinions of schools (Epstein 2001, Crozier and Davies 2007, Tveit 2009) highlight how mixed the definitions remain. Prisoners touched upon some of these definitions in their discussions with me, including knowing about progress (Power and Clark, 2000), knowing about curriculum coverage and some went as far as actual involvement in work, but this request was not unanimous.

For most, involvement was about 'knowing' and being kept informed of their child's progress and development. In some cases, this included knowing what they were doing as well. Several fathers felt if they knew what children were studying, they could engage in discussion about these topics and even help them. These fathers were very keen to demonstrate their own knowledge to their children, going against the on-going discussion that fathers are often 'secondary parents' who are less involved in the everyday activities and lives of their children (Wall and Arnold, 2007).

The final group of fathers wanted significantly more than just knowledge about the education of their child. They offered a different definition of involvement in education and viewed 'hands-on' activity as central to this. They provided examples of prison homework clubs and identified the potential power of visiting time if both schools and the prison service could identify ways of facilitating such involvement. They reported the challenges of visits with no practical activities to engage in, feeling children were less willing to discuss school and their lives when sitting face to face in a formal, visiting environment. They represented a very clear vision of how visiting time could look and how it could be most effectively used to facilitate their involvement.

This code is at the heart of this study and reflects on the vision presented by imprisoned fathers. It is interesting to note at this point that no father responded to indicate that they did not wish to have some involvement in their child's education. It is clear that this cannot be seen to be representative of the prison population as a whole. This was one group of prisoners in one North West Category C prison who had volunteered to be involved in the study. It can therefore be argued that men who will willingly put themselves forward for such a study are more likely to be active parents.

It is also noteworthy that the men presented a very confident image of their role as a father, highlighting their skill in this field, emphasised through phrases such as *'she doesn't like helping him with school stuff but I bet there is loads I could do'* (Prisoner 8) or *'If he's stuck, I know a lot about lots of things and I should be able to help him and I could'* (Prisoner 5). Earle (2012) reflects upon how the men he spoke to were 'keen to demonstrate their competency in the craft of parenthood' (p.391). This was very evident within my interviews where the men discussed how they had to take control of their children in terms of behaviour, from a distance (via telephone or during visits) and in the same way, they indicated that if provided with the opportunity they would do a lot more in relation to the education of their children. Each prisoner could immediately outline a vision of involvement within their own particular family context. All had clearly considered this previously but this was their first experience of articulating their evident frustration. They all indicated they would welcome 'any' level of involvement, rather than a further level of involvement. No-one indicated that they currently engaged in any meaningful elements of the already complex definition of involvement. (Carpentier and Lall, 2005).

It could be argued that prisoner's motivations for this were centred purely upon their own role and well-being within it and therefore this has an impact upon the study. However, the key to this study is a willingness on the part of the imprisoned father to be involved, not their motivations for this.

Chapter 4 has considered the data collected from the three groups of stakeholder interviews and has presented the codes for each group, with supporting initial

analysis in relation to the current research context and the overall questions this study is seeking to address.

Chapter 5 will now engage in a discussion of the overall themes taken from the data and their contribution to the questions raised at the opening of this study.

## **Chapter 5 A Vision of Involvement**

### **5.1 The journey leading to a vision of involvement for imprisoned fathers in the education of their primary school aged children**

Chapter 5 will be presented as a journey leading to a possible vision of involvement for imprisoned fathers in the education of their children as described and defined by all stakeholders in order to answer the key questions posed at the beginning of this study.

The 'journey' will begin with the pre-prison involvement of the father in the life of his child and will move to then consider their involvement specifically in the education of their child prior to prison. Current research looks in detail at the experiences of prisoners and in some cases their partners during imprisonment (Clarke et al., 2005; Dixey and Woodall, 2012; McMurrin et al., 2008; Walker, 2010 a, b) and post release (Codd, 2008; Yocum and Nath, 2012) but does not reflect on pre-prison engagement and the importance of this when addressing the potential for prison involvement.

The journey will then move to imprisonment, beginning with the current relationship with children while serving a sentence and establishing the contact

that now exists and the factors influencing this. Next, current involvement in the education of the children is reviewed and the journey concludes with the 'vision of involvement' for the three groups of stakeholders as defined within the data. The findings from the three groups of stakeholders will be scrutinised on each part of the journey, however direct quotations will be kept to a minimum given their detailed presentation in Chapter 5.

## **5.2 Pre-prison involvement in a child's life and education**

A wide-ranging definition existed amongst the mothers and prisoners of what constituted involvement in a child's life pre-prison and it was evident that this, in part, depended upon the structure of the family unit. This contradicts the current and longstanding 'myth of the nuclear family' despite the 'well established empirical reality of the diversity of family form' (Earle, 2012, p.395). Families exist in varied forms and the nuclear family. '2.4 children' is now only one of a range of possible family structures. Codd (2008) argues that 'most prisoners do not exist in a vacuum' (p.1). Prisoners' families were structured in a variety of ways and although not a specific focus of the questioning, the variation was apparent in most responses. Traditional family units (a mother and a father married) were represented but as Scott and Codd (2010) contend - 'prisoners have multiple significant relationships across a web of connections and while family forms part of this, other relationships may be equally or more important' (p146). Some fathers were in new relationships and were engaged in complex negotiations with ex-partners surrounding access. Others were single parents, reliant on their own parent or ex-partner for access to their children. In one case, the family structure was the prisoner, his mother and his children with his mother acting as the sole carer for the children during his imprisonment.

In all but two cases, the composition of the family unit had remained unchanged following imprisonment. This is in contrast to the view presented by Codd (2008) that 'approximately one in five prisoners who are married when they enter prison divorce or separate during their sentence' (p.49) and Condry (2012) who notes that imprisonment can have a significant impact on relationships which are already facing difficulties.

In those two cases, the partner had chosen to leave the relationship post imprisonment, but in the majority of cases, complex family units existed prior to imprisonment and this had led to negotiations becoming increasingly challenging. Headteachers reported an awareness of these circumstances, only if their staff had developed strong, working and trusting relationships with the parents in their schools. HTC highlighted *'the trust is really important – they know we don't judge them. They get into a lot of messes around here don't they?'*

Pre-prison involvement in some cases was presented as a positive experience but was often limited in scope. It was defined by engagement in all aspects of the child's life including social activities, household tasks and day to day living activities and was most prevalent when parents lived together. Both mothers and prisoners used the term 'good Dad' to describe their role pre-prison, reflecting the fatherhood discourse relating to 'good' and 'bad' fathers (Walker, 2010a). The prisoners however, described their involvement in far more glowing terms, outlining outstanding practice and were keen to demonstrate the central role they had played prior to imprisonment. This reflects the findings of Earle (2012) that imprisoned fathers were 'keen to demonstrate their competency in the craft of parenthood' (p.391). Mothers, although still positive, were more cautious about labelling the levels of involvement as outstanding and in some cases were outwardly critical – *'he never took them to school or picked them up. He was usually in bed in the morning' (Mum 3)*. They reported that Dads often 'did what they could' but only when they weren't working or in some cases involved in criminal activity. They recognised this often limited level of involvement included visits to McDonalds, playing football or entertaining their children. Prisoners viewed this far more positively seeing this as being a 'good Dad' but demonstrating their failure to recognise the daily practical activities mothers were engaged with in caring for their child/children.

In other cases, pre-prison involvement of any nature was hampered due to family separation caused by divorce or substantial animosity between parents. Some prisoners were offered limited access to their children prior to imprisonment, mainly at weekends, or via the gatekeeping of the mother (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Fagan and Barnett, 2003). HTB brought the challenges of pre-prison involvement into stark focus when she described the improvement of a child in

her school once his father had been imprisoned. Her explanation of the negative influence that pre-prison involvement had in this circumstance prompts us not to assume that pre-prison involvement has always been positive for the mother, prisoner, child (Scott and Codd, 2010) and I would argue, for the school.

Some prisoners had evidently established their role as a father very effectively prior to imprisonment both in terms of their home life and in their relationship with their child's school. For others, this role was far less defined and activities were far more spontaneous. Involvement and engagement was therefore patchy and knowledge of their children was somewhat limited to what could be gleaned during intermittent access. Clarke et al.'s (2005) data endorses this, indicating that the majority of prisoners in their study had never lived with their children prior to imprisonment.

Definitions of involvement in education were mixed. Headteachers made very little reference to pre-prison involvement of fathers, suggesting they did not recognise this as a particularly important element of this discussion. They referred more broadly to the challenges particular families faced prior to the imprisonment of their father, but did not refer to his involvement in the education process. This in itself is revealing, providing an indication of the level of value schools continue to place on the role of the father, despite the increased government and research focus upon this (DCSF, 2008; Flouri 2005; Goldman, 2004; The Fatherhood Institute, 2010).

Prisoners were far more realistic in their assessment of pre-prison involvement in education than they had been when reflecting on their involvement in their child's life more generally. The confidence was no longer evident and responses highlighted their limited involvement depending upon their personal family circumstances. Some argued they did what they could '*I went to the plays and parents evenings – I was always there for those kind of things. I took him home some days and picked him up some days*' (Prisoner 5) whereas others admitted even this was a challenge '*Didn't do much in terms of homework and that kind of stuff*' (Prisoner 6). Although clearly confident in their pre-prison actions as fathers, this confidence did not extend to their role as educators of their children. The majority of responses focussed upon involvement from a practical perspective –



travel, parents' evenings, plays and reading of reports rather than the day to day involvement in homework, revising for tests, reading with their child or helping them prepare projects. Mothers (although not from the same families), were more optimistic when reflecting upon this, some indicating strong levels of involvement - *'He was always the one they went to with the 'hard' homework, especially the one in Year 6' (Mum 6)* and even those who were less positive could identify examples of some engagement, however basic - *'He'd ask him about his day and what he'd been doing. Sometimes he'd take him to school or pick him up' (Mum 4)*.

Pre-prison involvement can therefore be said to be patchy at best and pre-prison involvement in education varies dramatically. It is clear however that pre-prison involvement in education relies on support from the school to engage fathers consistently in education and the life of the school. In addition, where a family is separated, opportunities need to be provided by the mother for regular access to the children other than at weekends – so school engagement is a possibility. Where this has not been the case, fathers' definition and understanding of educational involvement is limited and this must be recognised when considering their preparedness for involvement within the criminal justice context. Pre-conceptions relating to what involvement in education has looked like for them will be influenced significantly by their own personal education (Murray 2007b, Bennett 2012, Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth 2012). For some, the age of their child also prevented pre-prison educational involvement, so this would be their first attempt at this within their role.

### **5.3 Contact with child during imprisonment**

For many prisoners and their families, contact was critical to their 'family unity' and in the case of prisoners, was a vital motivating factor in their day to day existence and focus upon the future. In the majority of cases, contact was via telephone, visits (these ranged from every week, to infrequently) and in some cases letters, email a prisoner and letters (although this was rare). A small number of prisoners refused to have visits from their children and one mother and one prisoner emphasised that all contact was carried out via telephone. These

prisoners were not willing to allow their children to see them in prison and in one case, the children were not aware of the imprisonment of their father.

My data indicated that stakeholders recognised the potential importance of visits and this was consistent with other research in this field, for example Dixey and Woodall, 2011; McMurrin et al., 2008; Walker, 2010a,b). Mothers and prisoners particularly, however, were concerned about the impact upon their children's education each time they missed school. Views varied from '*Yes, they come with me every week – so they miss a day of school every week to come. I think they need that – they need to see him*' (Mum 4) to '*They always come at the weekend though because I don't want him missing any school*' (Prisoner 3). It is interesting to note that although both mothers and prisoners raised their concerns about how schools responded to their child's absence, this was not a prominent issue highlighted by headteachers. It may be that the way schools are representing their concerns about attendance and how they are responding to families, requires some review (Morgan et al., 2011).

Management of behaviour was perceived by a number of prisoners to be a key interaction between themselves and their child and this was supported by some of the mothers, although far less frequently (e.g. '*...they need to see him. If they don't they'll start to get naughty*' (Mum 4)). The men understood themselves to be the keeper of the behaviour strategies and the manager of their children's behaviour. Phrases such as '*[I] spend all my time on the phone kicking him for giving his mother bother and for not doing what he's been told*' (Prisoner 6) were often used. They were keen to ensure their children were behaving appropriately and clearly felt that they still had some control over this element of the family relationships. It could be argued that this was part of their ongoing preparation for release (Meek 2011) and central to their definition or re-definition of themselves as fathers, a role which 'provides men...with a powerful narrative for change' (Earle, 2012, p396).

For prisoners, motivation was a key factor in maintaining regular contact with their children. '*The kids keep me going*' and '*makes life in here worth living*' (Prisoner 1) were common to much of the data. For the mothers however, regular contact was far more focussed on the rights of the child to have contact with their father

and some even indicated that they only visited for the sake of the children and would not come alone – *'It's really the only reason we come – I do it for the kids not for him (Mum 7)* This is confirmed by one prisoner *'she never just comes on her own – think she's a bit afraid of coming by herself' (Prisoner 1)*. For others, their focus was upon the maintenance of family unity for themselves and their children. No mother indicated the importance of contact for the sake of the father.

Visiting itself, identified as a key point of regular contact (for the majority of prisoners interviewed) between a child and their imprisoned father, was however clearly a distressing experience for all concerned. Mothers spent little time discussing the routines of visiting and when they did (both in their interviews and also, via my observations in the visitors centre) they were very matter of fact about it. It was an accepted process for allowing them access to the imprisoned father. For them, personal sacrifice was their concern. This mostly (although not solely) related to finance (Dixey and Woodall, 2011; Walker, 2010a, b) and the weekly/fortnightly decisions they had to make about visiting and in some extreme cases decisions came down to whether *'we eat or come here' (Mum 3)*. This does not entirely match the findings of other studies, showing the emotional challenges partners/family members face when visiting, describing female visitors *'frequently crying days prior to and after contact with their close relative'* (Dixey and Woodall, 2011, p.36).

In contrast, for the prisoners, visits were far more emotional occasions, bitter sweet and resulting in mixed emotions. Some disliked seeing their children exposed to the routines of searching and waiting. One said *'she gets dead upset sitting around waiting and then they search her and look in her little mouth and pat her down' (Prisoner 2)*. Phrases such as *'I felt shit', 'gutted', 'I love seeing them' and 'it's really hard'*, sum up the cocktail of emotions brought about by visiting from the perspective of the prisoner. Although they could not operate without them, they recognised how short the time was they could share with their children and the *'see-saw effect of meeting and parting with them'* (Boswell and Wedge, 2002, p.109). The visiting hall was perceived as an artificial environment in which to conduct an on-going relationship. One of the key concerns was the lack of activities to enable real life engagement with their children. Many lamented the fact that children would *'run off and play' (Prisoner 2)* or *'wander off to the*

*play area or to get some chocolate or a drink from the tea bar' (Prisoner 3)* and were bored during these times. There was evidently a lack of stimulus for children and their parents on a visit, which is supported by the findings of Clarke et al. (2005) and Codd (2008). Mothers noted that visits for them were often an opportunity to resolve financial and practical issues which could not be done over the telephone and the combination of these two elements appears to result in children being side-lined within the visit process, despite the prisoners' assertions that visits and seeing their children 'kept them going'. As a result of this there were regular reports of disappointment following a visit – *'I feel awful when she has gone' (Prisoner 2)* which felt unfulfilling and lacking any structured or engaging contact with their child. This reflects some of Comfort's (2007) findings relating to 'the prison as a domestic satellite' which becomes an 'alternative site for the performance of 'private life'' activities (p.103) but this appears not to extend to child related activities within my study.

It is evident that prisoners' and mothers' views of visits are somewhat at odds in one respect but in another, they are unified in the anxiety it causes each of them. A more structured view of how to use visit time would be helpful here, with some guidance offered on the best ways to allow for all parties' needs to be met during the visit. Prisoners offered a number of ideas about how this could be improved including opportunities for children's activities to take place at visiting tables, rather than in a separate area of the visiting hall. As visits are evidently so precious and time is limited (and the frequency dependent on finance) it is essential the best use is made of these time periods for all concerned. It is evident that children will not sit and engage in conversation with their father without activities to do together in an informal manner.

#### **5.4 Current involvement in education of child**

Few positive responses were given to the questions relating to current levels of prisoner involvement. The tone of the responses however is worthy of note. Some prisoners responded in a tone of acceptance – *'I do what I can, which isn't that much being in here' (Prisoner 2)* whereas others responded more angrily: *'Well...I'm not involved at all now, am I? I only know if she remembers to tell me – the little one doesn't tell me stuff – she's too little...What do I know in here?'*

(Prisoner 2). Conversely, mothers and schools indicated that this had not been something they had previously considered. Mothers felt in a position to discuss pre-prison involvement in education, but current involvement was limited. A small number reported that they informed the prisoner of their child's progress on the telephone or via visits (this was corroborated by the prisoners and headteachers) and one mother could provide an example of how a school was working closely with her to keep the father fully informed of the child's achievements. School responses reflected the limited research about their role in the lives of families of prisoners as flagged by Codd (2008) and Scott and Codd (2010) although Morgan et al. (2011 and 2013) and Roberts (2012) are working to address this. Headteachers reported no knowledge in this area and were not working with families to ensure the involvement of imprisoned fathers. In some cases, this was due to a belief that if fathers weren't involved before imprisonment, there was little point in attempting to engage them at a distance - *'This might be useful, but some dads aren't involved anyway, long before they go into prison!'* (HTA). For others, this was their first consideration of this and responses were mixed, some professed an openness to it as a concept - *'Thinking it through, it should be exactly the same as for our absent parents we have'* (HTB) whereas others were more sceptical, claiming it wasn't something within their gift - *'Mmmm – that's an interesting thought isn't it. We can't do much to help the father from here, so he is more involved.'*(School D). With such mixed responses to these questions (particularly reflecting a particular set of belief systems within school contexts), it is clear to see that educational involvement is an area which lacks a coherent approach either in schools, families or within the criminal justice system (APF, 2011; Morgan et al. 2011; Roberts, 2012). Prisoners offered the clearest views about what they currently experience and what their future desires would be in relation to this. These will be considered in the next section.

It is evident there are a number of barriers preventing imprisoned fathers engaging in the education of their child in order to provide them with a stable, consistent education and to ensure their right to the involvement of both parents in their life.

Issues relating to the sharing of information were central to this. Communication was at the heart of each interview, although the detail of this varied significantly.

Schools highlighted that they were often unaware of the imprisonment of a father due to a mothers' concerns relating to reputation within the community and school (Codd, 2008; Morgan et al., 2011). Cover stories about holidays and working abroad were sometimes utilised, leading to challenges for schools in maintaining accurate information relating to the children in their care. School data indicated that it was mothers who generated cover stories and were keen to preserve the family reputation, as reflected in the findings of Clarke et al. (2005). However it is evident that prisoners sometimes instigated such stories too – *'he went mad – don't you be fucking telling anyone our fucking business. Why should the school know – looking down their noses at you'* (Mum 9) and in many cases decisions were made jointly between prisoner and mother.

Reputation was at the heart of these cover story decisions as maintained by Boswell (2002), Codd (2008), Condry (2007), and Scott and Codd (2010). Prisoners were as concerned about their reputations as mothers were, which is somewhat surprising given their physical distance from the situation. For prisoners, one of their most significant concerns was their reputation with the school which linked closely to their identity as a father. They feared schools had given up on them as fathers. Worries such as *'they assume I just don't care and so don't need to know'* (Prisoner 5) were regularly shared. To a certain extent this is borne out by the headteachers who indicated they had not considered engaging with imprisoned fathers at all. They considered them beyond the realms of their jurisdiction.

Headteachers argued that cover stories were generated by mothers to protect their reputation within the community, as confirmed by Scott and Codd (2010). However mothers demonstrated that their concerns lay with their reputation within the school and the school's potential response. The responses of schools reported by both prisoners and mothers highlighted an overwhelming deficiency in their knowledge and understanding of their situation (as reported by Morgan et al. (2011) and Roberts (2012)), ranging from ignoring the fact that any differences were evident, to making a mother feel like a 'naughty child' sitting outside the headteacher's office. Despite this, mothers did still recognise the importance of sharing this information with the school, primarily for the welfare of the child, rather than for any possible educational reasons. Unless the ethos of schools

becomes more relevant and supportive (as emphasised by Ormiston (2007), APF (2011) and Barnardo's (2013)) to the families of prisoners, communication will continue to be an issue for all stakeholders and will result in a situation where fathers are unable to engage in the education of their children due to ignorance, fear and suspicion on all sides.

Schools' lack of staff training, skills and knowledge of prisoners and their families can be identified as a second barrier to prisoner's current levels of engagement in the education of their children. All prisoners, the majority of mothers and schools themselves, reported a widespread lack of any focussed staff training relating to the children of prisoners, prisoners themselves and their families. Although APF now offer Hidden Sentence Training, they report that charities and prisoner organisations take up this training, but only a handful of schools nationwide have engaged with this. Headteachers admitted to having no knowledge or skills in this field, including holding accurate data on the number of children of prisoners in their schools and how best to support them. Mothers and prisoners reported school's responses to their situation to be mixed at best. Unless schools can develop a policy where they can show all families that their school is 'a place where families affected by imprisonment are welcomed... [and] a general culture whereby the children and families of offenders are not seen as guilty of offending by association.' (Barnardo's, 2012a) families will not disclose their current positions and children of prisoners will remain 'invisible' to the education systems in place to support them. For one family, support and practical engagement with the imprisoned father was outstanding, however for the remaining families they described feeling like they didn't exist (Prisoner 7) or that they were treated as though they had been naughty themselves (Mum 6). Prisoners had very strong views about the responses of schools and their apparent unwillingness to offer support and in their eyes, more importantly, to engage with them as fathers (and to recognise their role as this). It is possible however, to question the motives of the prisoners here. It appears they are keen, as fathers, to maintain and develop their own identity for the sake of themselves, their reputation within the prison and to support their motivation of 'going straight' on release as argued by Clarke et al. (2005), Earle (2012), Walker (2010a, b). However, the focus of this study relates to the rights of the children to have this

engagement, rather than consideration of the benefits this might have for the imprisoned father.

Maternal gatekeeping was presented as a third barrier to engagement. The term gatekeeping is often associated with pre-meditated actions (Allen and Hawkins, 1999) and it cannot be argued these were always evident within the responses received. However, despite this, involvement for fathers was clearly heavily reliant on mothers being willing and/or able to facilitate some (however basic) involvement. The data demonstrated that mothers talked about education with the father if the opportunity arose but admitted that their first priority in visiting time was practical discussions relating to finance, employment or future plans. The welfare and education of their child was often quite low down the priorities given the limited time frame. Prisoners endorsed this, presenting themselves as being at the mercy of information which was passed on 'second hand' from the mother or the accompanying adult both during visits - *My Mum tells me bits and pieces that she hears and knows about but it's kind of third hand by the time it gets to me – not great really* (Prisoner 5) and on the telephone – *'if I ring, she doesn't want to talk to me...she hasn't got anything to say.'* (Prisoner 4) whilst also recognising the limited opportunities for discussion of this nature during visits. It appeared that on a small number of occasions, maternal gatekeeping related to complex relationships between prisoners and their ex-partners and then mediation via a third party was required. This resulted in messages being lost or altered in translation. Maternal gatekeeping, it could be argued, was encouraged by schools and seen to be the key method of engagement with fathers. This reflects the on-going view in fatherhood discourse, that despite the introduction of new fatherhoods, fathers are presented as 'part time, secondary, less competent parents with fewer parenting responsibilities ... than mothers' (Wall, 2007, p.511). Schools demonstrated their belief that this was the case. They relied almost entirely on mothers for the transmission of information to fathers. It is important to note that while progress information is central, it is only one element of involvement in education. However, prisoners defined this as being at the heart of this involvement. This may in part be due to a lack of awareness of any other possibilities.



The fourth significant barrier was referred to predominantly by prisoners and incidentally by mothers. The structure and organisation of visiting opportunities was perceived as currently preventing high levels of engagement in education. The nature and structure of visits are a growing focus for research (Clarke et al., 2005; Walker, 2010a, 2010b; Dixey and Woodall, 2011), however, there are no studies linked to the impact this can have on involvement in education. Prisoners outlined their concerns about visits, in two parts – the environment itself (e.g. sitting formally at a table, unable to move about) and the lack of structured activities (for them to engage with as a family). It became evident that the structured nature of the visiting hall was hampering children from participating in conversation about their life and particularly their school life. Children very quickly became bored and sought entertainment at the tea bar or in the play area or, more importantly, had no stimulus to support conversation. It was challenging for children to be able to talk ‘off the cuff’ about school. Responses to the question ‘How was school today?’ will often elicit ‘fine’ at the best of times in the home environment and it is only when engaged in homework or in bedtime routines that children will open up and share honest information with their parent. The Visiting Hall environment therefore is unlikely to prompt such honest reflections, leaving fathers frustrated – *‘they don’t talk about school and they don’t like me asking about it – they say there isn’t anything to say and they haven’t got anything to show me’ (Prisoner 7)*. It must be noted that the likelihood is this is a frustrating experience for children too who get easily bored and feel angry that they are unable to talk freely to their Dad without other people around.

The lack of purposeful activities available at visiting time requires some further attention. This was a surprising outcome of the interviews as it had not been evident in prisoner responses in other studies. The concept of boredom for children during visits was apparent (Clarke et al. 2005 and Dixey and Woodall, 2011) and the need for visiting to become more ‘family friendly’ (Dixey and Woodall, 2011, p.42) but this is the first reference to a request for structured activities during visits. During triangulation of the data it was only the prisoners who had considered this as a helpful strategy and who suggested it. The motives for the suggestion related either to the question about involvement in education or to the ability to engage in more relaxed conversation when able to be part of

some activities. Some made reference to family visits (Codd, 2008) directly having either participated in them or having observed them taking place. Prisoner 4 captured this very well when we said '*it's boring for them sitting talking to me – they want to do and buy sweets or play in the area. There's nothing for us to do together.*' It is accepted that prison visiting can be a 'cocktail of mixed emotions' (Dixey and Woodall, 2011, p41) and can bring financial and personal challenges (Clarke et al., 2005), however, they can be central to the maintenance of family relationships, the hope of prisoners and can offer the opportunity for children to see and engage with their fathers. It is this that prisoners feel challenges them the most. There were clearly feelings of disappointment during a visit, where so much had been expected, but so little could actually be realised. Conversation was limited and boredom was regularly reported as an issue for children. They argued that activities for them and their children could make a significant difference to this. Although practical suggestions were limited they referred to education resources as a possibility but this could be broadened to colouring activities, board games or any activity which could be done as a family. It is likely that this would be challenged by some mothers who reported that time was limited enough already and there was much they needed to communicate to the father of their child. However, if visiting is to be a quality experience for children and provide them with engagement opportunity then enhancement of this is needed. It is important to recognise the challenges this suggestion poses for prisons in relation to staffing, security and space (Codd, 2008) with limited resources available and with a priority of security for all during and after the visit. This can however result in 'the extension of the convict body to the visitor body' (Comfort, 1997, p.60) limiting the rights of children to access and more importantly engagement with their fathers.

The fifth barrier, although referred to relatively infrequently, was the prisoners' personal education. Both mothers and prisoners referred to this in relation to pre-prison involvement, citing examples of engagement or lack of it and linking this to levels of education. It is interesting to note that few prisoners made the link between their personal education and current levels of engagement in the education of their child – presenting a very positive image of what they could do if given the chance. This confidence was also reflected in Earle's (2012)

ethnographic study. References to helping with homework and school work were commonplace, but statistics indicate the educational challenges many prisoners face.

'Fifty-nine per cent of prisoners reported regularly playing truant .... Sixty-three per cent reported having been temporarily excluded from school, and 42% permanently excluded... In 2005/06 in England, the proportion of school pupils permanently excluded from school was less than one per cent (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008)' (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth, 2012, p.14).

Although not conclusive, this does highlight the problematic relationship many prisoners have had with the education system. They are clearly keen to show their willingness to support their children and engage in their education, but were not confident in discussing their own personal educational needs with me to enable this to happen.

### **5.5 Vision of future involvement in education**

The final point on this journey is the vision for involvement in the future. All stakeholders were asked to share their vision for this and their responses were triangulated. Schools were limited in what they could offer as the data indicated they had not reflected upon this before. Mothers were able to offer some perspectives upon this although for some, it had not been a consideration in the past. Prisoners had the clearest vision and could articulate their views, having evidently reflected on this previously, at some length.

There were some common requests which can be divided into those which can be implemented from a distance and those which would benefit from face to face contact (e.g. on visit days or family days). Those at a distance included access to a school report, the opportunity to engage with the teacher, to see some work completed by the child and to see class/school newsletters. Those requiring some face to face engagement included seeing reading books, reading with their child, completing work together and having the opportunity to discuss school in a 'school focussed context'.

The most commonly requested interventions related to communication. Both mothers and imprisoned fathers reported the potential value of direct communication (as argued by Power and Clark (2000)) with the prisoner to

update him on the progress of his child. Mothers believed reports would be helpful in doing this and supported feelings of involvement. Prisoners reported their frustration at receiving 'second or third hand information' about the wellbeing and academic progress of their child via visiting relatives or their partner. Reports were central for them too, but others went to the next level of this feeling that a conversation with the teacher would also be welcomed, via telephone or Skype, a concept which has been trialled in both Australia and the US (Roberts, 2012).

Some mothers and a significant number of fathers shared their views on the potential merits of engagement with their children during visits. For these fathers, this was central to successful engagement. They argued that formal, face to face visit time did not facilitate positive engagement experiences. Both mothers and fathers indicated the potential benefits of children bringing school work, books or achievements with them to share with their father and one prisoner reported that prison email could play an important role, if security were an issue during visits. Knowledge was seen to be the way to facilitate successful discussion with their child in relation to school. A far smaller proportion of mothers offered this as an option. This may be due to a number of factors, the most obvious factor appeared to be their concern about losing important time with their partner *'but we have loads to talk about when I come, bills and the house and my job and the kids'* (Mum 8). For mothers, the introduction of school work into visit times, could be viewed as a significant threat to what has already been identified as emotionally charged and crowded visiting time as reported by Boswell and Wedge (2002) and Comfort (2007). In addition, complex and challenging relationships between some mothers and fathers were evident in interviews and the need to take a child along to visit their father and engage in school work, would prove an unwelcome task for some mothers interviewed.

For prisoners their enthusiasm for practical activities and hands on engagement, was far more whole hearted. There were a number of reasons for this. The first related to the perceived opportunity to build sometimes dwindling relationships with their children (Boswell and Wedge, 2002) with potential for it to impact upon the long term development of these relationships. Secondly, levels of engagement such as this have the potential to be seen as strong 'jail actions' (Yocum and Nath, 2011) demonstrating commitment to both the child and

partner, with prisoners 'motivated to improve the way they conduct family roles, specifically fathering' (Klein et al, 2002). Prisoners noted the importance of visits and engaging with their children as key 'motivating' factors for their own aim in 'going straight'. Thirdly, recent research has begun to indicate that imprisoned fathers have varying views of their own skills as parents (Clarke et al., 2005; Meek, 2007, 2011), including some very high expectations of their own abilities (Earle, 2012) leading to a belief that they already have the necessary skills and attributes to improve the development of their child, through phrases such as '*I know loads of stuff I could share with him*' (Prisoner 8) and '*If he's stuck, I know a lot about lots of things and I should be able to help him and I could*' (Prisoner 5).

The discussion of PIE in Chapter 1 requires some further reflection here as a result of the findings from each group of interviews, and very specifically in relation to the children of imprisoned fathers. Particular focus must turn to the responses of the schools in relation to this.

Headteachers found this the most challenging question to answer. There were two types of responses. The first related to the children of prisoners themselves – they indicated that they felt they should have more knowledge of their needs than they did and that staff training was at the heart of this. The second however related to the potential need for an increased level of involvement for imprisoned fathers. All reported that this was not a series of interventions they had considered. Headteacher B noted that there were potential similarities in approach to how the school worked with separated parents. However, this was a lone voice in the responses from schools. The majority responded negatively to this question (although were keen not to appear so – '*I don't want to appear too negative as I can see the positives...*' (HTA)). Concerns included: the financial implications for the school, the response of the staff to such suggestions, the time scales involved and the overall time commitment that would be required. Staff training continued to be at the heart of many of their concerns, noting that they would not know how to approach this without that support. It is interesting to note that although all responded to an earlier question indicating their willingness to engage fully in any staff training available, they could not make the link to how

this could potentially then allow them to support educational engagement for imprisoned fathers.

It is possible to add another reason here however – that schools continue to demonstrate a very narrow view of PIE:-

‘the focus of teachers is on PI in the areas of homework, providing a nurturing environment, raising money, as well as attending school events and parent-teacher meetings’ (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011, p.45)

and there is a continuing belief amongst some teachers that the issues and problems faced by some parents means they are ‘less able’ and should be excluded from any form of engagement (Hornby, 2000; Feiler, 2010). Headteachers indicated that they viewed imprisoned fathers as being separated from school and educational life and almost ‘external’ to the process. One headteacher epitomised this view - *‘This might be useful, but some dads aren’t involved anyway, long before they go into prison! We see far fewer dads rather than mums for most of the year’* (HTA). However it continues to be argued that prison can be a time for prisoners to develop and improve their relationships with their families and ‘improve the way they conduct family roles’ (Klein et al., 2002). Schools who continue to believe that all imprisoned fathers are ‘service resistant’ (Feiler, 2010) will continue to prevent children from their right to the involvement of both parents in their life and education.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) note that both ‘teachers and parents each bring ... attitudes that are deeply rooted within their own historical, economic, educational, ethnic, class and gendered experiences’ (p.45) and this has the potential to impact significantly on the experiences of the children of prisoners.

## **5.6 The Questions**

At this point it is helpful to pause and re-visit the proposition and key questions which have driven this study. The primary objective can be formulated as a statement, followed by a series of questions:-

Proposition:

i) Research indicates that children benefit from parental involvement in their education (DCSF, 2007b; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Harris and Goodall, 2008;

Hornby and Lafaele, 2011) and considerable time, effort and resources are devoted to nurturing this involvement (Feiler, 2010). It is similarly argued that the success of prison as a rehabilitative experience can be (but not exclusively) influenced by the extent to which involvement in family life is sustained over the course of a prison sentence (Morris, 1965; Social Exclusion Unit, 2002).

ii) The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that each child has the right (when it is not detrimental to their health or well-being) to both contact with and engagement of both parents in their well-being and education - a right which is almost certainly engaged by the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and domestically the Human Rights Act.

iii) A potentially significant point of contact exists between education policy and penal policy at the interface between imprisoned parents, the schools which their children attend and the experiences of those children and their imprisoned parents.

- 1. To what extent is there potential for imprisoned fathers to be substantially engaged in the education of their primary school aged children and if so to what extent should this be encouraged.**
- 2. Is there a potential interface between the education system and criminal justice system in relation to this proposal?**
- 3. What kinds of ideas, norms and beliefs operate in the school education system in relation to parental involvement?**
- 4. What are the implications for educational and penal policy of the findings of this study?**

This chapter has considered the journey of involvement for imprisoned fathers from pre-prison through to their ambitions for future involvement, based upon the data collected from the three groups of semi-structured interviews. The data and subsequent discussion in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 have demonstrated the potential for imprisoned fathers to be involved in their child's education. This has however, demonstrated the need for a connection to be made between the criminal justice system and the education system for such a policy to be made possible. The connection would demand a coherent approach between the two

and would necessitate support from another member of the child's family (in many case, the mother) to facilitate this. The somewhat mixed (and often negative) view of parental involvement evident within the school data both more broadly but particularly in relation to the children of prisoners could present some challenges to involvement and would require a range of interventions (e.g. staff development, growth of a whole school ethos) to implement a change in ideas and beliefs in relation to this.

For an approach such as this to be successful, development of a set of joint guidelines and strategies would need required between the educational and criminal justice systems. Full implications of this and next steps will be considered in the next Chapter.



## **Chapter 6            Conclusions, Implications and Next Steps**

### **6.1     Introduction**

This study is an attempt to contribute to our understanding of the present and possible future role of the imprisoned fathers of primary school aged children in the education of those children. In the light both of the changing roles of 'fatherhood' in contemporary society and the rights of children to have the engagement of their parents in their lives and specifically in their education, this would seem to have been a relatively neglected topic. The foundation premises of this work are that:-

1. parental involvement in a child's education is likely to enhance that child's prospects of social and educational success and overall wellbeing;
2. children have a right (whenever, practicable and safe) to have both parents actively involved in their formal education; that the state has a commensurate responsibility to address and, at a minimum, reduce any barriers that may inhibit that involvement and, arguably, that the state has a duty to seek to develop policies directed towards enhancing it;
3. on the understanding that there is a substantial 'distance' between the aspiration and reality of 'involvement' for the children of prisoners, there is a potential interface between education and penal policy. Any positive policy initiatives in this field will require an evidence base and that, consequently, research effort will need to be directed toward the present situation including the views of the major stakeholders;

In this final chapter I attempt to draw together the strands which have emerged from my fieldwork. Whilst acknowledging their limitations (not least the limitations of scale) I argue that there is a policy imperative for change - including innovation to move in the direction of securing, for the children of imprisoned fathers, their right to parental involvement in their education. The chapter will begin by re-visiting the key themes highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2 (Fatherhood, parental

involvement in education, fathers in prison, children of prisoners and schools and their role in supporting the children of prisoners) and identifying how this study claims to make an original contribution to knowledge and understanding within each of these. Secondly, there will be a consideration of the policy implications resulting from the data collected, in relation to schools, mothers, prisoners and HM Prison Service and the practice section considers the implications for practice for each group of stakeholders. Finally the chapter will conclude with a set of suggested next steps for research in this field followed by some final reflections.

## **6.2 The Orientating Themes**

As the theories and definitions of fatherhood continue to develop (Collier and Sheldon, 2008; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Gregory and Milner, 2011; Lamb, 2004) the academic debate has moved to consider the changes in the social structure of the role and the diverse family circumstances in which fatherhood is now often located. In particular, there is a developing discourse, of fathers referred to as having 'special circumstances' (Lewis and Lamb, 2007) or as 'vulnerable fathers' (Burgess, 2007). Specific groups receiving more detailed attention have included non-resident fathers (Dunn et al., 2004; Flouri and Malmberg, 2012), teenage fathers (Wilkes, Mannix and Jackson, 2011) and violent fathers (Featherstone and Peckover, 2007; Harne, 2011).

Central to these discussions have been the identities of fathers and their perceptions of this (Hawkins and Dollahite, 2007), within the context of a re-defined role. This identity can be viewed particularly clearly in relation to the involvement of fathers in the education of their children. This has developed as a focus of research and of Government policy (DCSF, 2008; DfE/DH, 2011; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Potter, 2012) culminating in a range of approaches to involve fathers in the education of their children, perceiving them as a 'hard to reach' group.

This study has sought to contribute original knowledge to both research areas identified above, by considering each of them within the context of a particular group of vulnerable fathers, who as yet have received relatively little research attention – fathers in prison. Although the number of studies has increased, demonstrated by examples such as Earle (2012), Meek (2007), Walker (2010 a,

b), these and others examine the realities of fatherhood within a prison context and reflect upon the challenges faced by this group, including a developing 'deficit model of fathering' (Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) in Walker (2010a)) arising from the labels of 'vulnerable' and 'bad' fathers which are dominating the on-going fatherhood discourse. They do not however extend this debate to consider the theories of PIE and examine how these can link to the identity of an imprisoned father and the potential this has to be a 'powerful narrative for change' (Earle, 2012, p.396) for them.

Closely related to this is the growing body of literature relating to the children of prisoners (Codd; 2008; Hairston, 1998; MOJ/DCSF, 2007; Robertson, 2012). This is now arguing for the pivotal role schools can play in the support and development of this group of children (O'Keeffe, 2008; O'Keeffe, 2013; Roberts, 2012). Guidance has been developed to offer schools suggestions relating to, for example, management of emotions, key points of contact and training for staff (Barnardo's, 2013; Ormiston, 2007). However, there is yet to be a systematic UK-based consideration of the central role of schools in facilitating the rights of a child to the involvement of their imprisoned father in their education (Roberts, 2012).

Prison-based researchers have examined the roles of mothers as 'gatekeepers' for imprisoned fathers (Dixey and Woodall, 2012; Walker, 2010b) but again this has yet to be related to involvement in education and is currently considered more broadly in relation to access and contact. In the same way, it has begun to reflect the circumstances of imprisoned fathers and how their role can be enhanced, but until now there appears to have been no single study which considers both issues in relation to the educational progress and development of the children of prisoners.

### **6.3 Implications for Stakeholders**

'troubled families do not live in a vacuum but are 'nested' in surrounding institutions – extended families and friends, the community and the larger economy and society' (Klein et al., 2002, p.99)

Families with a father in prison are connected to a number of institutions (for example, schools and prisons), people (parents, wider family) and their local community. At the conclusion of this study it is now necessary to consider the

results for each group of stakeholders - schools, mothers, prisoners and HM Prison Service - reflecting upon the findings of the study, the implications for policy and for practice in relation to the initial research questions.

Each group of stakeholders will be considered in turn under three headings – research, policy and practice, highlighting the importance of research informing and developing potential government policy and institutional practice, as emphasised in the on-going debates by researchers such as Hammersley (2013). Each set of stakeholders will be presented within the context of the current research landscape of the children and families of prisoners. At the end of each 'practice' section an example of good practice will be provided offering a suggestion of how the approach could be implemented in that context.

### Schools

#### *Research*

This aspect of my study has contributed to the growing body of literature (for example Morgan et al. (2011), O'Keeffe (2013) and Scott and Codd (2010) contending that schools lack a fundamental understanding of the needs of children of prisoners. It has demonstrated that children of prisoners were not a group of children of which schools were fully aware. The interviews with the three groups of stakeholders supported the view that schools were at very different points on the developmental spectrum in relation to the children of prisoners and it was evident that a small number of schools were well positioned to support the child, mother and wider family. They offered examples of good practice including direct communication with the imprisoned father, understanding of the need for school absence, opportunities to compensate for this absence and offering a school ethos where the mother or wider family felt at ease in seeking support and informing the school. All these elements are highlighted by Barnardo's (2013) in their recent guide to good practice.

The remaining schools had not considered the children of prisoners in any detail prior to their interview with me. In some cases they were able to provide an approximate number they thought were affected but were unable to discuss how they supported this group. Lack of training and guidance was highlighted as a concern and a lack of time to support another group of children with very

individual needs. Following the interviews all recognised that this was an 'invisible' group and that some level of support was required.

Even schools who offered what was perceived as good practice in relation to children of prisoners (in line with that offered by for example Barnardo's (2013) had not considered the possibility of involving an imprisoned father in the day to day education of his primary school aged child. From the interviews carried out it was evident that they had not considered this as an option. Some schools went as far as indicating that, once in prison, a father could not be involved as he was no longer available for his child.

The broader research activity relating to schools and their involvement in supporting the children of prisoners has been slow to grow and is far behind the research agenda of the families and children of prisoners overall. Studies such as Morgan et al. (2011) and Roberts (2012) have begun to move the debate forward and to raise the profile of this group in an educational policy context. Barnardo's have recently launched a guide for schools in working with the children of prisoners. This makes brief reference to the potential for fathers to be involved in the education of their children but does not go beyond this and is not based on any research into this as a possibility.

### *Policy*

There is currently a significant policy gap within the DfE as highlighted by Codd (2008), Scott and Codd (2010) and Owen and Gill (2013) in relation to the children of prisoners and particularly in relation to schools and their role in facilitating full parental involvement in their education. Both this study and other recent research into the children of prisoners highlight the need for a coherent and consistent approach in relation to DfE policy towards the children of prisoners. Not since the Every Child Matters Green Paper (2003) has this group been considered as a separate group with individual needs at a policy level. The joint MOJ/DfE (2007) review of the children of offenders, demonstrated a shift towards reflecting on the needs of this group but the practical application of this document has never been realised.

There are pockets of good practice around the country (e.g. Gloucester Council – case study in Chapter 1) where local authorities or schools have begun to recognise the need for policies directed towards the children of prisoners and their families. However, even where this is the case, consideration of this group is at times superficial, considering important elements such as children feeling comfortable at school, communication between staff and parents and between schools and the police/social services. As yet, UK research-driven policy has not begun to consider how children can be offered the involvement of their imprisoned father in their education (in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2). However, from an international perspective, countries such as the US and New Zealand can offer examples of good practice in relation to this (Roberts, 2012).

All stakeholders indicated that there was a need for a coherent policy for the children of prisoners driven by the DfE. Headteachers made it clear that a central policy to be adopted by all schools was the first step in this process. Imprisoned fathers made regular reference to the perceived inadequacies of the school-based provision for their children and their poor communication with them as prisoners.

It should be noted however that policy documents can be broad, based on limited research and so there is potential for these to miss the key points requiring attention. A policy would need to include the following key features:-

- Support for how to identify this group of children (ideally this needs to link to a broader discussion about how schools are informed of the imprisonment of a parent). Identification of children of prisoners is still an issue requiring detailed consideration although it has been touched upon by a number of studies, for example, Boswell and Wedge (2002), Eurochips (2006), Barnardo's, (2013).
- Guidance on how to record, track and monitor this group (in relation to key indicators such as attendance, attainment, well-being)
- Identification of a named person within in each school to be the lead in relation to children of prisoners.

- Signposting to outstanding training offered by charities such as Hidden Sentence Training (Action for Prisoners Families). Action for Prisoners Families reported a very low take up rate for this training from schools.
- A clear message that schools are expected to monitor this group in line with other key groups within their schools and that they become a group reviewed during Ofsted inspections.
- Practical suggestions and guidance about how to involve imprisoned fathers in their child's education (when this is deemed appropriate and safe for the child) and the central role a school can play in this.

A number of charities (Barnardo's, 2013; Ormiston, 2007) have begun to produce basic guidelines for schools in their work with the children of prisoners, however take up of these is patchy and they do not include guidance to include imprisoned fathers in their child's education. None of the stakeholders I spoke to were aware of these as resources available to them. This policy would need to be launched in a high profile way across all schools nationwide.

Equally important will be the training of new teachers in relation to the children of prisoners. Initial Teacher Education will need to begin to ensure that our future teachers are in a strong position to work effectively with the children of prisoners and join the teaching profession aware of this group of children, their needs and be familiar with the policies related to working with them. This topic must be embedded within the ITE curriculum in a similar way to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, English as an Additional Language and behaviour which are now considered to be National Priorities.

### *Practice*

Implications for practice in relation to schools would no doubt have a significant impact upon the practice and workload of primary schools engaging with the children of prisoners, resulting potentially in 'schools at the centre' model of practice (Jones and Walker, 2011). Policy and practice relating to this group would require strong leadership and co-ordination to ensure all children benefitted from their entitlement to support and acceptance from the school

community and the realisation of their right to their father's involvement in their education.

Interviews with headteachers indicated that there would potentially be some resistance to a shift towards involvement of the imprisoned father. Headteachers said they recognised the benefits of this for both the child and the father but highlighted that they felt it would be a challenge to persuade some teachers of the benefits of this. Full training and support would be needed to ensure that a shared understanding was held by all those involved.

Schools require a strategic plan to realise a vision of involvement, reflecting upon the guidance already received (which would have been shaped by the prisoners themselves). Each school would require a clear policy and action plan for working with this group of children. Key elements would need to include:-

- Identification of a key named person
- A school policy for working with the children and families of prisoners
- One off staff training for all staff on working with the children and families of prisoners and how to create an ethos/school environment where families feel welcome and able to approach the school when needed.
- Specific training for the key named person
- Developing strong links with at least one charity which supports the children and families of prisoners (e.g. Barnardo's, Action for Prisoners Families, Ormiton, PACT).
- Development of a check list/action plan for facilitating involvement of the imprisoned father. This would need to be generic list, which could then be customised for each child depending on their particular circumstances. It would need to include arrangements for visit days (e.g. sending of work, reading book, work to complete on journey and at the prison), ongoing communication between the school and the prisoner (e.g. via post or email – reports, scanned copies of work, updates), the opportunities for some telephone conversations



### **An Example: Child A**

The mother of Child A discloses to the headteacher that her husband has been imprisoned for 3 years. She asks for support for her daughter to ensure that she is secure and comfortable in attending school and will not be afraid of what others think about her.

The named teacher in the school and Child A's class teacher meet with Mum and agree an approach for Child A. Child A will be visiting Dad every 2 weeks with Mum. The prison is a long way away so this will take a whole day. Mum is concerned about the impact of this on the education of her daughter. The class teacher offers an approach where the work for that day will be sent with the child to do on the journey and will include some activities she can complete with mum and dad during the visit.

The named teacher offers to ensure a copy of each school report is sent to dad via 'email a prisoner' along with scanned examples of school work completed by Child A at the end of each term. A copy of the weekly school newsletter and half termly class letter (outlining topics for the half term) will also be

### Prisoners

#### *Research*

Participating prisoner fathers identified a very clear vision for their involvement in the education of their child during their imprisonment. Although their vision was clear there was no reference to their own personal literacy or academic skills. These were, however, referred to by the mothers as a potential issue. It is evident from this research and other findings, e.g. O'Brien (2010), Crowley (2012) and Williams et al. (2012), that literacy levels amongst prisoners are mixed – a matter which could potentially impact significantly upon the nature of the involvement that could be achieved in individual circumstances.

Mothers emphasised that fathers rarely had a clear understanding of the structure of school life or the content of the curriculum. They argued that this was due to mixed and in some cases unpredictable involvement in the life and education of their child prior to imprisonment and an unwillingness to engage in education due, in part it was felt, to their own literacy levels.

Although this does highlight some conflicting findings between the two groups it is evident that both the education services within prisons and prisoners themselves will be required to contribute to this enterprise if a meaningful level of involvement is to be realised.

### *Policy*

Current educational practice within prisons has a relatively limited scope due to the time and financial restrictions placed upon them. Prisoners have access to a range of courses including literacy and numeracy and in some cases, opportunities to engage in courses to develop their roles as fathers and to enhance their identity with this role as highlighted by Earle (2012) and Morrison (2011).

Given the mixed levels of engagement pre-prison, in order for imprisoned fathers to engage in the education of their child it would be necessary for educational policy within prisons to broaden its remit to include workshops for fathers in primary education. For example, the structure of the curriculum, key themes covered, the level of work expected, the types of books children read, how to interpret a school report and what each achievement level means.

Prison policy would need to recognise within its mission and include within its remit, specific arrangements for the education and support of imprisoned fathers, supporting them (where appropriate) to maintain and enhance their identity as a father. Arditti et al. (2005), Clarke et al. (2005), Dyer (2005), Earle (2012) all address the mixed relationship imprisoned fathers have with their personal identity as fathers. There is currently little opportunity for them to enhance this identity in their own eyes and those of their children and although not the main focus of this study, it is important to stress the potential benefits in the reduction

of re-offending as shown in studies such as Hairston (1991), Ditchfield (1998), Mills and Codd (2008) about which there continues to be on-going research.

### *Practice*

Implications for practice in relation to involvement in their child's education will require a significant psychological and real time shift for imprisoned fathers, for whom involvement may have been patchy, limited or non-existent prior to imprisonment. It will require a level of engagement in personal training, education and a willingness to develop their own knowledge and understanding to be in a position to support their child in their own education.

'It's easy to fall into bad lives in prison, it's easy...you know, to get into bad lives, like move with the wrong crowd, get into mischief, so with me knowing that I've got my child out there, from that early stage in my sentence I said to myself, you need to get your head down, you need to complete what you need to complete, stay adjudication free, get on with everyone and try and get out as early as possible so that you can be there for your son. So I'd say that's the line that I took since I've been in prison, I think I've done well on this sentence in the fact that I've...to date I've addressed everything that I'm supposed address, and I'm coming to the end of my sentence' (Jason in Condry, 2012, p.68)

*'Seeing her reminds me that I must be good – I want to get out and be with her and be a proper dad.'* (Prisoner 2)

The findings of this study are supported by other studies focussing on imprisoned fathers and their motivation and engagement with family life during imprisonment - for example Condry (2012), Earle (2012), Clarke (2005). Prisoners emphasise their desire to stay 'clean' in order to return to their family lives and to be able to engage freely with their children, imagining their 'parenting possible selves' (Meek, 2007). They talk about a willingness to commit to education, training and obeying the existing rules to enable this to happen. However, despite this willingness, imprisoned fathers have had limited and often very varied experiences of engagement in the education of their children prior to imprisonment as highlighted both in my study and through studies such as Walker (2008) who highlights how imprisoned fathers 'come from and continue to have highly complex family circumstances' (p.9) often presenting them with little opportunities for engagement.

*'Not much really. She did all that – went to school and picked them up and took them. She did all the talking to the teachers – wouldn't let me near the place.'*

*Think she was embarrassed really – probably even more so now though!*  
(Prisoner 1)

## Mothers

### *Research*

Data from the headteachers, mothers and to a limited extent the fathers, indicated that mothers provided the main contact with schools, even prior to a father's imprisonment. It is the mothers who experienced the greatest levels of involvement in the education and welfare of their child, supporting children with school work, attending events and communicating directly with the school. Schools reflected the fact that this was their expectation and were surprised when fathers became involved.

The data within this study also supports previous findings which indicate the important gatekeeping role mothers can play in a range of circumstances, including in relation to non-resident fathers, fathers who work away and those who are in prison (Allen and Hawkin, 1999; Fagan and Barnett, 2003; Walker, 2010b). The data from my study demonstrated the pivotal role played by mothers in facilitating contact between father and his child, in many cases, prior to imprisonment and this role was enhanced upon imprisonment. The data from the prisoners and the mothers suggested that contact between father and child was entirely controlled by the mother (or a representative e.g. grandmother), who enabled telephone calls and face to face contact in the form of visits to the prison.

Mothers were evidently familiar with these high levels of engagement with schools and enabling this contact between fathers and their children, recognising this to be their role within the prison context and were also conscious of their wider role in relation to the education of their child.

This study demonstrates the important role these women play and how fundamental they will be to any successful educational programme designed to encourage the involvement of imprisoned fathers. Access to their child both face to face and via the telephone will be a central element of such a scheme and the mother will be required to facilitate it.

## *Policy*

DfE policy and charity documentation (e.g. Barnardo's, 2013; Ormiston, 2007) consider carefully how the remaining parent (in most cases the mother) is supported during the imprisonment of the father. Significant guidance now exists in relation to how schools, children's centres and prisons should engage with the families of prisoners and considerable research effort has been directed towards examining the treatment of them as a group (Condry, 2007; Comfort, 2007; Light and Campbell, 2006; Mills and Codd, 2008).

If policies to support the engagement of fathers in the education of their children are to be developed, some of the current guidelines for schools would require enhancement in relation to the role of the mother. Although mothers do recognise the gatekeeping role they perform, they seem uncertain as to how this role might extend to supporting a fathers' engagement in the education of his child.

## *Practice*

Implications for practice in relation to the interface between prisons and schools would need to be transformed, particularly in recognition of the central role played by the mother in contact with and involvement of an imprisoned father. In addition, mothers would need support in identifying themselves in this role. The data demonstrated that mothers were willing to sacrifice their own dislike of making contact with (in some cases) an ex-partner via telephone or visiting him in prison, for the sake of the children, which seem to suggest that this reluctance is unlikely to be a barrier, at least in the majority of cases.

Support for both the mother and the father would be required to encourage an equality of involvement, where neither felt marginalised and both could engage in the education of their child either individually or together on visits.

## HM Prison Service

### *Research*

This study has indirectly revealed a number of key areas which would require attention by HM Prison Service if imprisoned fathers are to become involved in the education of their primary school aged children. Although a representative of

HM Prison Service was not interviewed in the course of my work, it is evident through the interviews with each group of stakeholders that there will be implications for the service as a whole.

The interviews with the mothers and the prisoners provided the most significant data relating to the experience of the Prison Service in relation to the children and families of prisoners and the capacity to engage in a child's education. Both groups of stakeholders reflected upon the key barriers they currently faced which related to Prison Service policy, procedures and practice. It is evident that some of these barriers are perceived to be inherent in are in the nature of prisons and a consequence of their prime purposes, however there remains potential for some to be re-considered in order to offer opportunities to the children of prisoners.

Key feedback related to the distance travelled to prisons, the public transport available (often discouraging families from visiting) and the expense of this (echoed in findings of Clark (2005), Codd (2008), Dixey and Woodall (2011)). Specific concerns in relation to educational involvement include - being unable to bring school resources into the prison, the lack of resources within the prison for children to engage in, with their families and the seating arrangements within the prison hall providing an unfavourable setting for family activities.

Imprisoned fathers and the mothers reported that they would welcome the opportunity to engage with their children further on visits, preventing boredom and often bad behaviour which often occurs in an attempt to seek attention. Fathers recognised the visit as a key opportunity for engagement with their child(ren) both more broadly (as revealed by Dixey and Woodall, 2011) but also specifically in relation to school. Their views again reflected the restricted resources available at visiting times, preventing this level of engagement taking place.

It is recognised that prison policy and practice is required to put the safety and security of the public, staff and other prisoners at the heart of its approaches to imprisonment and rehabilitation, however these priorities do not prevent opportunities existing to make small adjustments, leading potentially to significant improvements for the children of prisoners and their family life.

### *Policy*

The Prison Service and Prison Inspectorate is keen to demonstrate that it is recognising the importance of prisoners' families and their role in reducing recidivism and in better outcomes for prisoners upon release. As yet, there is no evidence that this recognition extends to the importance of children's rights to parental contact, although this children's rights perspective is acknowledged in the work of charities and non-governmental organisations, for example, The Danish Institute of Human Rights (2011) study.

In order to enable imprisoned fathers to engage in the education of their children, there would need to be a significant adjustment in overall prison policy in relation to the availability of high quality prison library resources (e.g. children's books and resources). The rules surrounding the materials which can be brought into a visitors' centre on a visit day will require adjusting and prisons will need to provide age appropriate educational resources to visiting families on those days.

It will be necessary for the Prison Service to work closely with schools and educational and prisoner charities to develop resources which families could use when visiting. It would be helpful if prisons could investigate the possibility of families bringing school resources with them on visits (this would have some clear security implications).

The Prison Service will need to review its policy in relation to the children and families of prisoners, moving beyond paying lip service to them as a group and beginning to recognise the positive impact this level of involvement could have on re-offending, while also recognising the benefits to the children of prisoners and their rights to parental involvement. This shift in policy would need publicising to all visitors and prisoners' families in an attempt both to encourage new thinking and to make known the opportunities available to them.

### *Practice*

The implications for practice would relate to the resources available in the visitors centre. Both mothers and imprisoned fathers referred to the lack of resources for primary school aged children to use on visits. In some prisons there is an area for volunteers to use resources with children of a certain age (e.g. art activities,

games or other activities) but there is little opportunity for children to use these resources with their parents, except on family visits which are not available in all prisons and are seen to be a privilege as discussed in Codd (2008).

Where resources are available they are limited in their focus and do not necessarily relate to the educational development of primary aged children. It would be necessary for a prison to consult with a local school or educational charity to equip the area with books suitable for primary school aged children, educational games, worksheets and other activities which could be carried out collaboratively. It would also be possible to involve charities for prisoners' families in resourcing such spaces, given that they are often already significantly involved in the running of the refreshment and childcare facilities within a visitor centre.

My interviews suggest that imprisoned fathers would welcome the opportunity to complete school work with children on their visits. The reasons advanced related to their current frustration at having limited engagement with their child during visits which become focussed on practical considerations with their partner/ex-partner and children quickly become bored and disengaged. It is apparent that children are more likely to discuss their school life when engaged in school related activities than in a more formal context sitting across a table. It is evident that there are some security implications here in that visitors being permitted to bring anything into a prison environment carries inherent risks. It is also clear that resources brought in would need checking from a security perspective which would require additional personnel.



### **An Example: Prison A**

Prison A is a category B prison which currently offers visiting on a daily basis, with additional enhanced family visits on certain occasions, but as a privilege.

The prison planned to enhance the visiting arrangements to enable children to engage more constructively with their imprisoned father during the visit. They had limited capacity to engage more staff at visiting times to check resources being brought in children. The governor responsible for visiting and prisoner welfare made contact with a local school and the charity involved in running the visitor centre at the prison. A working party was set up at the prison to look at ways to enhance the resources and facilities available for primary school aged children during visits.

The charity offered to contribute funds to the group and this was matched on behalf of the prison by the governor. Volunteers then put together a set of packs of resources relating to different curriculum subjects in different year groups in primary school.

## **6.4 Next Steps**

The rights of prisoners' children continue to be denied full recognition by schools and the prison service. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:-

- children should not be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parents (Article 2)
- children should have the right to have direct and frequent contact with their parents from whom the child is separated (Article 9)

In this context it is interesting to note that the Children and Families Act 2014 has amended the Children Act 1989 to insert into UK law 'a presumption of parental involvement'. Without wishing to enter the debates surrounding the implications and likely impact of this provision, it is at least arguable that it marks a significant

step towards ensuring that UK law and policy reflects the central principles of the Convention.

Currently it is unusual for a primary school child with a father in prison to be identified and then supported in relation to this particular need. This study is an attempt to expose the lack of knowledge and skills available in primary schools regarding these matters. It has revealed that children, mothers and imprisoned fathers are concerned about their reputations in the school and local community and are thus often prevented from seeking the necessary help and guidance.

Schools appear to reflect a view that imprisoned fathers have become separated from the life and education of their child and are therefore underserving of consideration in relation to the education of their children. Mothers, although welcoming the idea generally of a father's involvement in their child's education, had not considered it as an option nor recognised the importance of their role as potential facilitators.

Only the imprisoned fathers themselves had any very clear vision of the possibilities. Whilst unexpected they would appear to welcome opportunities for participation. Once again however, it must be noted that in a small number of cases, involvement with an imprisoned parent will not always be a positive experience for a child, or may even be dangerous. Clearly, in these instances, child protection must be a priority and contact may not be appropriate. All key stakeholders welcomed the proposition of increased involvement for the imprisoned father, although at different levels.

In addition to the policy and practice implications already within this chapter, brief reference must also be made to the potential next steps in relation to this field of research. There are three distinct areas which require examination:-

- 1) As there has been a consensus amongst the key stakeholders participating in this study that intervention would be welcomed, it will now be necessary to seek the opinions of the children of male prisoners, both those who visit their father regularly and those who have only telephone contact.

- 2) Study of the training of new teachers in working with the children of prisoners would also require some consideration. This is a field yet to be explored but without which, there will be a continuing lack of awareness amongst initial teacher training students of the individual support needs of this group.
- 3) Although the introduction of educational resources within prison visiting halls has been suggested as one method, it would be beneficial for a pilot study to be undertaken in at least one prison to trial the use of school resources on visits. This could then be evaluated and disseminated more widely across primary schools and the MOJ to inform the development of policy and practice.

For this intervention to succeed there will be a need for three essential elements to be present namely– commitment, resources and training.

#### *Commitment*

- on the part of the criminal justice system to support this approach and to attempt to facilitate an enhanced level of involvement.
- on the part of the family to support this engagement through regular visits
- on the part of the prisoner in engaging in ‘positive jail actions’ showing a willingness to commit to engagement.

#### *Resources*

- Schools demonstrating a willingness to provide resource packs for children to bring on prison visits
- Prison staff being in a position to check resource packs securely
- Prison service being willing to work closely with local schools and charities to develop a set of ‘in house’ resources for families to use

#### *Training*

- Prison service engaging in ongoing training in how to work effectively with the children and families of prisoners on visits

- Prison service willing to extend the education and training opportunities available to prisoners to include familiarisation with the primary curriculum, school and subject structures
- Schools willing to engage in training for staff about how to work with the families and children of prisoners and prisoners themselves, remotely.
- Initial teacher education to begin to recognise this as a developing issue within their field.

## **6.5 Concluding reflections**

In the context of my own professional practice, my school/classroom experience clearly demonstrated the multiple social disadvantages to which the young children of prisoners are subject to and I became increasingly aware of the extent to which these are reinforced by educational inequalities which are deeply entrenched within 'our way of doing things'. This was reinforced by a series of prison visits during which I witnessed, at first hand, something of the realities of the lives of families with an imprisoned father.

My views as a result of this were, whilst no single policy innovation was likely to transform the situation and prospects of those children, it must surely be possible to devise policies and procedures which would permit a substantial measure of active participation by imprisoned fathers in their education. The benefits of such participation would of course be dependent on a host of factors unique to individual families; nevertheless, I was - and remain - committed to the view that there is a strong ethical imperative, reflected not least in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which places an obligation on public institutions to facilitate parental engagement in the education of their children.

The research journey has led me both into the complexities associated with the changing phenomena of 'fatherhood' and the vast research literature which seeks to explore it and the present realities of the social institutions of schools and prisons. The empirical aspects of the work have immeasurably enhanced my understanding of the issues and in some small way, I hope, extended our knowledge of this difficult area.

There is a limited amount of research with prisoners. This is partly due to the difficulties of gaining access and co-operation. This research makes an important contribution, as it is unique in conducting interviews with fathers in an English prison relating to their involvement in their children's education. Nevertheless, it is a small-scale study, limited in scope, and of course has its limitations. It is based upon samples of mothers, imprisoned fathers, and headteachers, all of whom were recruited in an opportunistic way. Moreover the interviews with mothers and fathers were conducted in the context of a single prison. However, getting access even to that one prison was a major logistical achievement. Both the mothers and fathers were essentially self-selected and were not couples, but independent volunteers. A recognised problem with researching prisoners is the typically low levels of literacy, rendering some forms of data collection and communication unfeasible. As reported, I initially tried to recruit fathers with a printed flyer, but soon abandoned that in favour of a snowball sample. This also avoided the possible filtering of prisoners by staff. However, in the end, I was dependant on the co-operation of staff for access to prisoners, and there may have been some selection there. Nevertheless, no one used the interviews as an opportunity to plead their innocence or to seek my support in any way. They all told me their stories in a generous way. Finally it is important to acknowledge that the stakeholder groups selected provide only a part of the picture. Thus no children with imprisoned fathers were interviewed, nor were prison officers or representatives of HM Prison Service. Although these exclusions were justified on grounds of ethics, access and resources, they consequently limit the fullness of the picture.

I consider that the following tentative conclusions are justified and have some value.

1. There seems little, if any, doubt that 'fatherhood' is developing; the nature and rate of change and its differential impact across the social spectrum may be contested, but the research clearly demonstrates that our social expectations of the role and responsibilities of fathers is moving in an increasingly 'participatory direction'.

2. As importantly, social perspectives regarding the proper relationships between children, parents and the state have developed from those of property and parental rights to relationships characterised by 'parental responsibility and 'the rights of the child', enforced if necessary, by law and state institutions.
3. I hope to have demonstrated that the issues raised are both important and neglected. Prison-based research is an expanding area of scholarship but I have been unable to find any domestic work which explores the issues surrounding parental participation by imprisoned fathers in the education of their children.
4. It seems reasonable to assume that whilst primary schools have developed policies directed to meeting the needs of a wide range of their pupils and their families, the children of imprisoned fathers (whose needs should clearly be considered 'special') are, with rare exceptions, neglected.
5. Mothers may have pivotal roles to play in any policy directed towards imprisoned fathers' involvement. Whilst realistic in their expectations, they are not unwilling to facilitate participation and they recognise the potential benefits for their children – not least for the legitimacy it can bring to the school experience.
6. On the assumption that the imprisoned fathers interviewed reflect at least a significant proportion of the male prison population who have primary school aged children, it seems reasonable to conjecture that their, perhaps surprisingly, positive attitudes provide the basis for concluding that a policy of facilitating substantial involvement with the education of their children is worth pursuing.

The barriers to a policy initiative in this field are daunting; in addition to the obvious resource implications, the responses of the headteachers interviewed

clearly demonstrate considerable hesitation at the prospects of classroom teachers engaging directly (even if remotely) with imprisoned fathers. To have any real prospect of success, the teaching profession would be required to embrace the enterprise and acknowledge its obligations to children whose special needs and indeed rights, have been overlooked.

Whilst I have not, in the course of this research, attempted to address issues of penal policy, it is reasonable to assume that, for the Prison Service to facilitate a programme of active parental involvement of prisoners in the education of their children, would require very substantial changes in their practices. Whilst the prison service is committed to rehabilitation as one of its core policy objectives and acknowledges the central significance of fostering family relationships as an important aspect of that objective, it seems probable that the service would be reluctant to go so far outside its usual operational procedures to make this policy a reality. Apart from the obvious resource and training implications, it must be recognised that at the level of national politics 'prison reform' is not usually considered high on the list of priorities for public policy initiatives.

More positively, any initiative would not be starting 'from scratch'. The work of the charitable and voluntary sectors, discussed earlier in this thesis, provides ample evidence that innovation is possible and can be effective. From the many informal contacts I have experienced and the support offered to me during the course of my fieldwork, I am in no doubt, that these sectors would do everything possible to facilitate such an initiative.

I am persuaded that the issues raised here are important and warrant a consideration within the public arena. Any progress directed towards realising the rights of the children of imprisoned fathers is likely to be slow and faltering; I hope that this work has revealed that there is a case to be answered and that, at however modest a level, one or more pilot projects should be considered.

My initial views and perspectives have been tested in the course of my work – but have survived, though now hopefully, in the form of reasonable opinion and judgment based on the evidence.

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## Appendix 1:

### Sample letter to headteachers



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and social research  
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4<sup>th</sup> January 2012

Dear Colleague,

**Research focussing on the children of prisoners**

I would welcome the opportunity to come into school and talk to you (or another member of your team, if this would be more suitable/convenient) for a short period of time about the children of prisoners. I would like to speak to schools who have experience of working with this group of children and those that don't

This is for a research project and I have attached a short outline of the project. Please do let me know if you need any further information before you make a decision about your involvement.

The research is part of my PhD at the Institute of Education (University of London) as part of my ongoing professional and academic development as Programme Leader of the BA(Hons) Primary Education with QTS at Edge Hill University.

This study has received ethical approval from the Institute of Education in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines. Any information provided by you would be confidential and would be presented in such a way that it could not be linked back to you. You would also have the right to withdraw at any time if you did not wish to continue.

I would hope that the outcomes of this research would impact positively both on our practice in relation to this topic with our trainees but may also provide schools with some helpful strategies to use in the future.

If you feel able to help me, I would be very grateful and would ask you to contact me via email on [okeeffeh@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:okeeffeh@edgehill.ac.uk) so that we can arrange a time that is convenient for you.

Yours sincerely,

Helen O'Keeffe  
Primary Undergraduate Full Time Programme Leader  
Edge Hill University

## Appendix 2:

### Sample Prisoner Consent Form

# DADS

*Do you have a son/daughter who goes to Primary School?*

*Are they aged between 5 and 11 years?*

*Would you like to know more about what your child is doing in school?*

*Would you like to help out with their education and be able to talk to them more about school?*

I am carrying out some research here, in your prison, to find out whether Dads who are in prison can be, or want to be, involved in the education of their child.

Would you be willing to take part in a discussion with me about this for about 1 hour? This discussion will involve some questions but also a chance for you to share your thoughts about the education of your child(ren) and whether you would like to be more involved.

I will be asking you about how often you see your child, what relationship you have with them, how much you would like to take part in their education.

Please understand that you do not have to take part in this project but if you feel this is something you **would** like to do, please sign the consent form opposite and return it to the member of staff who gave it to you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I **would** like to take part in this research project about the ways in which fathers in prison can be involved in the education of their child(ren).

I have at least one child who is at Primary School

I understand that the information I give in the interviews will be used in the project but that I will not be identified by my name at any point.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time if I do not want to take part and there will be no consequences.

I understand that the interview will be recorded but that these recordings will only be heard by and used by the interviewer.

The length of my prison sentence is \_\_\_\_\_ years.

I have \_\_\_\_\_ of my sentence left to serve.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.  
Helen O'Keefe

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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





## Appendix 3:

Prompt Questions for each group of stakeholder interviews

## Questions for Schools – Headteacher/SENCo/Child Protection Officer

Do you have any children in your school who have a father in prison?

**Yes**

Do you know how many?

How were you informed of this? Who gave you this information?

As a school, do you feel it is important for you to be provided with this information? Why? (***whether they respond yes or no***)

What additional support is in place within the school for these children?

In your position and from your perspective, do you think there is more that could be done for this group of children?

Would you welcome additional guidance in supporting them?

Would you welcome an initiative which supported their fathers in being involved in their education?

As a school, do you think it would be beneficial to the child for their father to be regularly informed of their progress and to have the opportunity to engage in some activities with them on visits?

Would you as a school be willing to provide written or oral academic progress reports to fathers in prison?

What concerns might you have in relation to this as a potential initiative?

## Questions for Mothers of Prisoners' Children

Do you have any children with their father in prison?

How many?

How many of those are primary school aged?

Were you in regular contact with their father before he was sentenced?

Do you keep in contact with the father of your children while he is in prison?

Do you take your children to see their father in prison?

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

How long is the sentence that their father is serving?

How much of the sentence does he have left to serve?

Was their father involved in their life before he was sentenced?

If yes, to what extent?

If no, why not?

Was their father involved in their education before he was sentenced?

If yes, how?

If no, why was this?

Does your child's school know that their father is in prison?

Did you tell them? Why, or why not?

How do you feel about schools knowing this information? Do you feel they should know?

Do you think it is important for your child to be supported by the school while their father is in prison?

If yes, in what ways?

If no, why not?

Would you welcome a further level of involvement for fathers in prison – i.e. that fathers could be involved in the education of their child? E.g. by reading their school reading book with them when they come to visit, receiving a pack of

information from school about the topics they are covering and a report on their child's academic progress.

If yes, why?

If not, why not?

## Questions for Prisoners

### **General Contextual Questions**

How many primary school aged children do you have?

How old is each one?

Do they live with you now?

If no, how often do you see them or have contact with them?

What forms does this contact take?

Before you were sentenced, how involved were you in your children's education?

How involved are you now?

### **Questions relating to time serving sentence**

How long is your sentence?

Do you have contact with your children?

If yes -

- What forms does that contact take? (e.g. visits, phone calls, letters etc)
- How regular is this contact?
- Do you enjoy having this contact? Why?
- Do you find it beneficial to you?
- What are some of the things you found difficult about this contact?

If no –

- Why not? What factors prevent this from happening?
- Would you like to have contact (or more contact)?
- What forms would you have like this contact to take?
- How do you feel about not being able to see or speak to you children in this situation?

Would you welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the education of your child?

Why?

Assuming this, what form would you like this involvement to have taken?

Do you feel that it is important for you to know what is happening in the education of your child and your child's progress while you are in prison?

Do you feel this would be helpful for you?

If yes – in what ways?

If no – why not?

Do you feel this would be helpful for your child?

If yes – in what ways?

If no – why not?

Do you think there is anything else that schools or the Prison Service could do to have helped you know how your child was doing?