THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Literacy Education of Federally Incarcerated Women

by

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study extends correctional literacy education research into a new Canadian federal prison - the Edmonton Institution for Women - during its first year of operation (November 1995 - November 1996), where students and teachers struggle to learn and teach amidst a new philosophy of corrections for women and a new vision for the education of women, yet also amidst debilitating crises, disruptive change, confusion, frustration, anger, and death.

An historical overview of prison education in Canada, a discussion of prison literacy, examination of the education of incarcerated women from a feminist perspective, and of noteworthy prison education programs and curricula, serve as the background against which the "Fireweed Education Centre," (the EIFW school), and its academic curricula and supporting materials are described. Interviews with teachers and with 14 inmate-students reveal many factors impacting women's education in this correctional setting, and illuminate the urgent requirement for rich and relevant learning materials and strategies.

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DEDICATION

To my daughter

Andrea

Fellow-student

(just let me read you this little part)

Sunshine of my life

Wind beneath my wings

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CHAPTER ONE

METHOD

Fire Flowers

And only where the forest fires have sped,
Scorching relentlessly the cool north lands,
A sweet wild flower lifts its purple head,
And, like some gentle spirit sorrow-fed,
It hides the scars with almost human hands.

And only to the heart that knows of grief,
Of desolating fire, of human pain,
There comes some purifying sweet belief,
Some fellow-feeling beautiful, if brief.
And life revives, and blossoms once again.

Pauline Johnson

This descriptive study extends correctional literacy education research into a new women's prison where students and teachers struggle to learn and teach amidst a new philosophy of corrections for women, a new vision for the education of women, debilitating crises, disruptive change, confusion, frustration, anger, and death.

Research Questions

Through research carried out in the new Edmonton Institution for Women, and more specifically within the prison school - the "Fireweed Education Centre" - this study aims to address these research questions:

1. What is the definition of literacy driving the Correctional Service of Canada's prison literacy programme in the Edmonton Institution for Women?
2. How do the literacy curriculum, instructional strategies and curricular materials work to support this purview?
3. What are the impacts of this definition and its supporting curricular texts and instructional methods for these women?

4. Addressing the questions posed by Jonathan Kozol, yet in the context of this more restricted purview: as a result of their prison literacy education, inmate-students will thus be "literate for what? competent to go where? And skillful to achieve what decent or destructive goals?"

Background to this Research

My experience as a volunteer literacy tutor with the Calgary John Howard Society and additional volunteer work with women incarcerated in the Calgary Remand Centre sparked an interest in the education of incarcerated women. The young ages of the majority of the women, the lack of education many of them exhibited, the knowledge that many of them were mothers solely responsible for the care of their children, the apparent ease with which they seemed to accept their imprisonment, the prison as a place where they met both friends and enemies and the almost "second-home" nature of the penal institution apparent for some women, caused me a great deal of concern and weighed heavily on my heart and mind. My concern deepened as I came to know some of the women - to know them as women of warmth, strength, and humour. Not for a moment condoning the crimes they had committed nor the harms they had done, I was nonetheless haunted by the tragedies of their lives.

Gaining Access

The Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW) officially opened on November 17, 1995, as one of five new female facilities created pending the long sought after closing of the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario. My research proposal was sent to Jan Fox, EIFW Warden, in late December 1995, and was subsequently forwarded by her to the Correctional Service of Canada's (CSC) Western Region headquarters in Saskatoon,

Saskatchewan, for their approval, which was granted in late March 1996, but of which I was not advised. In a follow-up telephone call to the Western Regional office in late April, I was apprised of this approval of access, and upon immediately contacting the Warden of EIFW, I was given permission to begin my research at my convenience. At this juncture, however, the EIFW community had experienced several serious crises of such a nature and to such an extent that demands were being made by the City of Edmonton for the prison to be closed. By the end of April 1996 the prison was virtually shut down following the removal of all but eight of the women while CSC undertook a major upgrade of the institution's security.

The initial proposal for my research had been strongly based in classroom observation of the teaching strategies used in the literacy education of the students, as well as examination of the curriculum and supporting texts used. The unfortunate events at EIFW precluded my proceeding as originally planned, however, and my visits to the institution were delayed for several weeks as I worked to rethink the form the research could take in light of the significantly changed circumstances. And indeed, when I did arrive at the institution for my first visit on June 11, 1996, neither the teacher nor students were in the classroom, the teacher being away on medical leave and the sole student working on her schoolwork in her living unit. No longer would it be feasible to carry out research in the classroom as had been originally envisioned. Instead, in the following weeks many hours were spent speaking with the first teacher contracted to instruct at EIFW.

With the security upgrades completed in the late summer of 1996, September saw

women at the medium and minimum security classifications gradually transferred back to EIFW, and I was able to proceed with interviews with eight inmate-students in October. November 17, 1996, the first anniversary of EIFW's opening, became the chosen end date of my research there. As some of the women initially at EIFW had been transferred to other institutions, and as their maximum security classifications determined they would not be returning to Edmonton, I interviewed four women in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert and two women in the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon during the final week of November, all but one of whom had been in the school at EIFW. Saskatchewan Penitentiary access was gained through contact with the Manager of the Female Unit at that institution, while access was gained to RPC through invitation from the teacher there, a graduate student working with Dr. Michael Collins at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, to whom Dr. Collins had spoken of my study.

Gaining Inmate Consent

Following the gaining of research access through CSC Regional Office and the Warden at EIFW, consent forms were presented to each of the women at EIFW at the time of our interview and were signed in my presence following my explanation to each of them of the nature of my research and the contents of the consent forms. Consent forms were sent to the Unit Manager at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary and to the teacher at RPC prior to my arrival, accompanied by a cover letter to the inmates requesting their participation in the research. At the Saskatchewan Penitentiary the consent forms had been signed prior to my arrival at the institution. Prior to the interviews, however, I explained to each student the nature of my research and advised them of the contents of

the consent forms. At RPC the teacher offered me the opportunity to explain to the women the nature of the research and to go over the consent forms with them prior to their signing.

The interviews with all of the inmate-students and with the second teacher were tape recorded with their permission. My discussions with the first teacher were not tape recorded, but rather field notes were taken, as it was anticipated there would be ample time for obtaining formal data via the interview process as the research project unfolded. It was not anticipated the first teacher would resign part way through the data-gathering process.

Once the interviews were transcribed, copies of the transcripts were forwarded to each of the women at her respective institution so each had the opportunity to read what had been said and to delete any portions of the transcript if she so wished: none of the women removed any of the transcribed statements. The transcripts were forwarded in one package addressed to the teacher or Unit Manager of the institution, with each woman's transcript addressed to her and placed in a separate unsealed envelope. When the transcripts were forwarded to the institutions, there was no way of ensuring the women's confidentiality, for although CSC staff must check incoming mail for contraband, there is nothing to prevent them from reading the material, although they are not supposed to do so.

Within this thesis the names of all inmate-students have been changed in order to protect their identities. The real names of the teachers have been used at their request.

Thesis Overview

This study examines prison education from an historical perspective; at prison literacy in its many conceptions; at the education of incarcerated women from a feminist perspective; and at some noteworthy prison education programs offered to various inmate populations from unique sources. Recent literacy curriculum developed for women is also highlighted.

The prison environment at the Edmonton Institution for Women is then entered, where interviews are conducted with the teachers and those students willing to participate in this study. Correctional Service of Canada documents concerning prison education are examined and described, as are the curricular materials chosen by the initial teacher for the students. Following completion of research work at this institution, interviews are subsequently conducted with former EIFW inmate-students now imprisoned in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert, and the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Following the transcribing of all interviews and field notes, texts are examined for themes arising from the words of students and teachers, with such themes subsequently organized to illustrate factors crucially impacting the prison education enterprise for these particular women. The thesis concludes with a strong and urgent recommendation for rich and relevant learning materials and teaching strategies as the crucial basis of women's education in Canadian federal penitentiaries.

Limitations of the Study

1. It was impossible to carry out the research as originally proposed. The many crises in the institution in the months between submission of the proposal to both the

University of Calgary and the Edmonton Institution for Women, and gaining access to the institution, necessitated a considerable change in research focus - from observation in the classroom to a more direct focus on the curricular materials and interviews with the women. The focus subsequently became one of describing in as much detail as possible the first year of operation of the Fireweed Education Centre.

2. The anticipated number of students interviewed was greatly reduced due to the partial closure of the prison.

3. The absence of the teacher from the institution, her corresponding ill-health, and her subsequent resignation reduced the amount of interview time available with her and served to constrain the subject matter discussed.

4. The unwillingness or inability of the Warden and/or Deputy Warden to meet with me constrained my ability to accurately reflect their vision for or view of education within this prison setting.

5. CSC mail security procedures made it impossible to ensure the interview transcripts would not be read when sent for review to the participants. Time and financial constraints mitigated against subsequent travel to hand-deliver the transcripts to the women in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary and the Regional Psychiatric Centre. In the case of the Edmonton Institution for Women, I was too trusting in believing the package sent to the teacher containing all the transcripts, including hers, would not be intercepted by security, with the possibility they would be read by CSC staff.

Significance of the Study

There is at present a dearth of research addressing the literacy education of women

incarcerated under federal sentence in Canada. This study contributes to the building of such a body of knowledge. Being the first educational research project carried out in the new Edmonton Institution for Women, the study offers a unique description of the first year of the prison school, the Fireweed Education Centre, including the challenges facing both students and teachers as they struggle to learn and teach in an unsettled and at times volatile environment.

This study serves to make visible a usually invisible segment of our society, specifically in regard to their literacy needs, and serves as a basis upon which to build further knowledge of and support for literacy programming for female offenders both within the prison setting and in the wider community. Illuminating the critical need for quality education for incarcerated female offenders wherever they may be imprisoned, this research highlights several exemplary programs upon which such quality education may effectively be built.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF PRISON EDUCATION IN CANADA

The education of imprisoned men and women stands historically as a significant correctional component in the ongoing effort toward the rehabilitation of offenders. The visions and possibilities held for prison education, although rarely realized, remain reassuringly constant throughout the decades.

As part of its "Declaration of Principles," the American National Prison Association announced in 1870 that prison education should play an integral part in corrections.

> Education is a vital force in the reformation of fallen men and women. Its tendency is to quicken the intellect, inspire self-respect, excite to higher aims, and afford a healthful substitute for low and vicious amusements. Education is, therefore, a matter of primary importance in prisons, and should be carried to the utmost extent consistent with the other purposes of such institutions. (Newman et al, 1993, p. 22)

In 1872, at the First International Penitentiary Congress held in London, England, Z. R. Brockway stated in his address that:

> The educational effort in prisons, if made efficient for reformation, must be well and thoroughly organized. No slate-and-pencil arrangement, with the teacher at the cell-door occasionally, but a veritable school congregated, graded, and divided into classes....The higher branches of study should be introduced, and inducements offered to young, capable men to prepare themselves for particular spheres of activity, even the learned professions. (Newman, 1993, p. 22)

In mid-nineteenth century Canada, penitentiary education was the responsibility of chaplains, and was thought of in association with spiritual development (Cosman, 1981, p. 39).

It was not until the 1936 Archambault Report, resulting from a Royal Commission

assembled to investigate the Canadian penal system, that the first major recommendations "advocating substantial education in penitentiaries" was made (Cosman, 1981, p. 39). Appalled by the "perfunctory manner in which the limited elementary academic programs were being conducted in federal institutions," as well as the "small number of inmates exposed to any opportunities for educational advancement," the report called for a complete educational system reorganization (Cosman, 1981, p. 39). Recommendations included revision and remodelling of sufficient depth to ensure provision of a

> well-rounded program of adult education structured to meet the needs, interests and abilities on an individual basis of the potential student body, the majority of whom [were] found to be academically under educated, vocationally unskilled and culturally deprived. (Cosman, 1981, p. 39)

In 1947, implementation of the Archambault Report recommendations was examined by General R. B. Gibson, and was found to be inadequate. In 1956, the Fauteax Committee also examined and expressed dissatisfaction with penitentiary education provision; yet again, in 1977, the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on the Penitentiary System in Canada expressed its criticism of federal penitentiary educational services. "The Sub-Committee's report drew attention to deficiencies in terms of quality, course content, curriculum, qualifications of teachers, and the meeting of external accreditation requirements" (Cosman, 1981, p. 40). Such criticisms were deemed justifiable, for:

> Penitentiary education in Canada has been characterized by a general lack of interest in genuine educational achievement, by inadequate standards of teacher selection and training, by a lack of discrimination in matters of curriculum between the trivial and the important, a lack of discipline and structure, and by a complete lack of educational research. (Cosman, 1981, p. 40)

Such education was perceived mainly as either "a time-filling activity whose main purpose

is to relieve boredom and soothe the conscious state," or as a way to provide skill-training for the employment market (Cosman, 1981, p. 40). Academic education was found to be

> largely a matter of skill-training, of the development of reading skills and vocabulary and basic mathematics up to the grade 10 level, and of correspondence courses, aimed at the passing of high school equivalency tests....Penitentiary education has simply not been conceived of in terms of the development of the powers of the intellect, in terms of enlightenment and the strengthening of reason, in terms of the development of man an historical person of a society and a civilization. Education in Canadian penitentiaries has been thought of mainly in terms of behavioural psychology, with human intelligence functioning merely as an instrument of human adaptation. How different from the traditional concept according to which education is analogous to the cultivation of a plant, with the action of education being like that of the sun! (Cosman, 1981, p. 40)

And Paul Wagner has stressed that:

> Simply having inmates process through basic education programs and acquire high school equivalency certificates does little to develop the intellectual skills necessary for a person to become (and to care to become) a reflective, deliberative, and responsible being. (cited in Cosman, 1981, p. 41)

Thus has prison education in Canada come under heavy criticism in recent years as being little more than an institutional means of "killing time," of preparation for menial employment (Morin, 1981b, p. 30; Cosman, 1981, p. 34), or as a tool of inmate control (Morin, 1981a, p. 16), with a resultant

> indescribable inflexibility in the preparation of school schedules and time tables; meaningless activity; incredible exertion of energy in dealing with minute details; endless and useless reorganizations and restructurings; an agonizing feeling of stupid sterility and demoralizing skepticism. (Morin, 1981b, p. 31)

While the above writers' efforts are concentrated on prisons for men, women prisoners have faced similar difficulties. Throughout the 19th and well into the 20th centuries, prejudicial attitudes have been expressed towards educating female inmates - the little education made available to them has been "aimed at their becoming wives or

domestics" (Newman, 1993, p. 7). Traditionally viewed as fallen women, their treatment has been, in some ways, worse than that for men, for they have often been housed in the same buildings as the men - in the attic or the cellar - and have often become sexual prey. They have been required to carry out domestic duties, sewing and washing for both themselves and the men, "doing what they would have done in the male dominant society had they not been in prison" (Newman, 1993, p. 11). Or they have spent their time in enforced silence and inactivity (Newman, 1993, p. 11). With their minority status in prisons and because of "traditional gender chauvinism (that women don't need vocational training or education)," programming for incarcerated women, both educational and vocational, has been slow to develop (Newman, 1993, p. 12). And women with a great need for education are "sometimes slow to take advantage of their educational opportunities in prison" (Newman, 1993, pp. 12-13).

From the limited research materials available on education for female inmates within the Canadian Correctional Service, it is strikingly clear that, up to approximately 1987, educational opportunities for federal female offenders were indeed scarce and the little that was offered was often inappropriate. In Phase 2 of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1979) *Report to the Solicitor General of Canada Concerning The Educational Program of The Canadian Corrections System*, the reviewers state:

> The [Kingston] Prison for Women [P4W] gives witness to the tremendous waste of valuable life involved in the penal institution for women who are, on the whole, of average intelligence and, who, more important, have the will to spend their time in more constructive ways. One is struck by the degree of depression and apathy displayed by inmates, and even more by staff members. There is a pervading air of despair, somewhat relieved by small groups of inmates and a few staff members who muster up the strength to support and encourage one another to resist the

effects of boredom and hostility.

> The Reviewers believe that there is an urgent need to expand and improve the quality of education and training programs for women, particularly for less traditional female roles. The penitentiaries for men have many more facilities than those for women. The emotional and intellectual needs of female inmates have for so long been ignored, to the point where the situation has reached a crisis. (OISE Report, Phase 2, 1987, p. 171)

The main reason offered for the dearth of suitable academic and vocational programming for women is the small number of women incarcerated in Canadian federal penitentiaries, and the economic unfeasibility of offering potentially costly programs to a small number of potential students, and to an even smaller number of inmates who would choose to partake of such programs. As stated in 1982 by the then Commissioner of Corrections:

> In my view, no one has ever been able to identify anything that some of the women (at P4W) are in any way interested in doing...I think the final result will still be that there will be a number of women who will not be participating in very much. But when you look back over their life history, there's a limit to what we can do and what can be expected of CSC with regard to this residual group. That's 250 women in all of Canada: now to me that's not a very large number. (Adelberg, 1987, p. 176)

In the experience of female correctional workers, it was found that "women who come into conflict with the criminal justice system tend to be young, poor, under-educated and unskilled" (Adelberg, 1987, p. 26). "Their chances of finding employment, furthering their education, or regaining custody of their children [upon release] were virtually nil. Few jobs existed for unskilled, uneducated women, particularly those with criminal records" (Adelberg, 1987, p. 12).

The classification of male inmates into categories which reflect the seriousness of

their offences and which determine the level of institution in which they will serve their sentences, be that minimum, medium or maximum security prisons, has not been reflected in the incarceration of women. It is reasoned that the small number of females has made it

> prohibitive to provide separate facilities or services appropriate to their needs (even their security needs). Ironically, it is the existence of classification (by sex) which has resulted in the limited program opportunities available to female offenders by isolating them from the general population, and, thus, from facilities and services. (Ross & Fabiano, 1986, p. 7)

The OISE Reviewers note that in P4W academic courses were offered to the Grade 12 level, with such courses limited to the social sciences, mathematics and English. While correspondence courses were also available, many inmates found this mode of learning boring and lonely. It was found that inmates "did not appear to be receiving adequate tutorial assistance, encouragement or direction in their pursuit of learning and development" (OISE Report, 1979, pp. 172-173). Vocational courses available for female offenders were limited to areas traditionally viewed as women's work, and were comprised of training in shorthand, typing, hairdressing and sewing, no doubt reflecting the belief that

> women are still not seen as primary breadwinners or in need of meaningful employment. Women reformers have repeatedly argued for an increase in the quantity of programs, but historically these were designed to integrate them into the domestic, female sphere. (Adelberg, 1987, p. 155)

Little opportunity was seen for women to prepare themselves for re-entry into society and the workforce, and the inmates themselves "seemed unable to identify alternate programs or means of learning, or to find constructive ways of occupying their time" (OISE Report, 1979, pp. 172-173).

Since 1935, one year after its opening, there has been a call to close the Federal

Prison for Women at Kingston, Ontario, and six decades later, and in anticipation of its closing, five new regional female facilities have been established in Canada. The Edmonton Institution for Women was officially opened on November 17, 1995, and it is the literacy education of women serving their sentences in this prison which is the focus of this research.

In light of the historical criticisms of prison education in Canada, an interesting and insightful opportunity presented itself for discovering the manner in which a fairly recent prison education curriculum document was created.

Curriculum Development

> Correctional Education, as a member of the Correctional Program family, contributes to the reintegration of the offender through the provision of programs that address the prerequisite literacy, numeracy, personal and employment skills and the pro-social attitudes and values necessary to function as a law-abiding, self-directed member of the community. (CSC proposed Role Statement: Correctional Adult Basic Education)

Following a 1987 decision of the Solicitor-General of Canada to focus prison education more emphatically on the teaching of functional literacy to persons incarcerated within CSC's institutions, Dr. Michael Collins of the University of Saskatchewan was approached to develop an adult basic education curriculum for federal prisons located within the three prairie provinces comprising CSC's Western Region. A collection of Correctional Service of Canada directives and guidelines for the provision of adult basic education, compiled as "Foundations of Correctional A.B.E. Principles and Characteristics," served as foundation documents for curriculum creation, delineating the parameters within which curriculum development would take place.

The CSC guidelines stated that: "Put simply, CSC Correctional Strategies require that all programming be CORRECTIONAL" (CSC, p. 1). Designated a "special form of special education" (CSC, p. 1):

> The unique requirement of Correctional Education is in addition to satisfying the standard objectives of each particular academic or technical area. Correctional Education staff routinely address identified needs of offenders as a reinforcement to other rehabilitation programs being carried out within the Institutional system. (CSC, p. 2-8-2)

A basis for providing adult basic education in the prison setting is reflected in the following CSC statement (incorporating academic education within the "employment" category):

> We believe that offender employment plays a crucial role in developing skills and abilities which will serve offenders on release, contributes to the good order and management of institutions, and reflects our society's belief in the value of work. We believe that offenders should be productively occupied. (CSC, p.2-1)

Without adequate literacy and numeracy skills, CSC contended, offenders were often unable to understand program content in other important areas focusing on perceived criminogenic factors such as antisocial attitudes, behaviours and values, cognitive deficiencies, substance abuse, mental illness and sexual deviance. "The cognitive, social learning approach to programming teaches offenders the skills and abilities to think and plan logically and provides them with alternatives designed to change socially unacceptable behaviour" (CSC, p. 2-4). Correctional programming, thus, must focus on the development and reinforcement of lifestyles that maintain law-abiding behaviours (CSC, p. 2-4).

Included in the CSC Guidelines was a list of characteristics of effective

literacy-for-reintegration programs. Program effectiveness would come as a result of content reflecting the diversity of human experience, which is relevant and meaningful to the inmate, addressing real-life issues and concerns such as substance abuse, assertiveness, family, children, sexuality, and violence; integration of life skills development with basic skills development; a basis in behavioural objectives; programs which are self-paced, competency-based, and open-entry open-exit; opportunities for student practice and application of skills in real-life situations and settings; the use of individual and group methods, educational technology, and a range of techniques, among others (CSC, p. 5-1).

In development of the academic curriculum, Collins also took into account the national adult literacy surveys conducted by the council of Ministers of Education (1988) and Southam Newspaper Group (1987-88), as well as the intention of the Solicitor-General which was publicly declared as a more emphatic emphasis "on the teaching of functional literacy to prison inmates," with functional literacy identified as the successful completion of Grade 8, a level adopted by UNESCO, and widely adopted in the U.S.A. (Collins, 1988, p. 1). Collins asserted that curriculum guides and other materials which were compiled as part of the project would provide a practical means for prison educators in the Prairie Region to comply with the Solicitor-General's initiative while retaining their commitment to deliver the full range of grade levels 1 - 12 courses that would meet respective provincial guidelines (Collins, 1988, p. 1).

In advance of curriculum development, Collins met for deliberations with a task group comprised of representatives from CSC institutional instructors and educational administration, the provincial departments of advanced education, and ABE teachers

working in non-prison settings. Rather than attempting to reach a consensus brought about by compromise, Collins stated the task group's goal was to reach "a common understanding of the issues at stake and to identify broad categories of 'common essential learnings,'" after which the consultants were "to attempt a synthesis which would meet sensible requirements for a degree of justified standardization" (Collins, 1988, p. 10). An "anticipated (or hoped for) consequence" resulting from the task group meetings was a realization that government representatives and administrators were not so bent on "restricting teacher autonomy in curriculum matters" as had been supposed, and that it was apparent there was "a fairly wide terrain for teachers to exercise professional judgment in interpreting curriculum" (Collins, 1988, p. 12). As Collins had expected, differences in perspectives on curriculum emerged and were traceable, in general terms, to "behaviouristic, interpretive-experiential, and critical (social change) emphases" (Collins, 1988, p. 9). Conflicts in philosophy and pedagogy reflected different underlying, often unstated, assumptions about the meaning of literacy and the purposes of ABE (Collins, 1989, p. 52). He noted that although, as a result of these deliberations, there was

> a strong inclination, with attendant justifications, in favor of the kind of specification statements included in this curriculum design, insistence on an exclusively reductionist format and implementation across the entire curriculum is now widely viewed as dysfunctional. (Collins, 1989, p. 15)

Collins' curriculum was set out in a behaviouristic/reductionist format, and although he suggested that some teachers would "appropriately...be inclined to follow the proficiency statements and suggested criteria for evaluation rather closely" (Collins, 1988, p. 15), he urged prison educators to go beyond the reductionist format and to view literacy from a

more comprehensive frame of reference than that of the Solicitor-General's stated Grade 8 proficiency requirements, which were to serve the Correctional Service of Canada as the "formal indicator of 'functional literacy'" (Collins, 1989, p. 51). Collins also dissuaded the use of prescriptive, pre-packaged curriculum designs with a specificity imparted through behavioural statements or purpose statements subject to quantification, while acknowledging the task group's opinion that CSC might prefer this as it would be most amenable to management control, warning that "[e]ven if this were the case, the consultants could point to cases where over-arching behaviouristic and prescriptive curriculum designs are encountering serious problems with implementation and management on a day-to-day basis" (Collins, 1988, p. 11). As a further caution, Collins stated that not only were there extensive studies highlighting "the shortcomings of prescriptive over-arching curriculum models," but that the use of such models presented problems including various forms of student and teacher resistance (Collins, 1988, p. 6). Nonetheless he noted a strong indication from the task group that "the specificity imparted through behavioural statements or a series of purpose statements is required in any formal ABE curriculum design at this time" (Collins, 1988, pp.11-12).

> Many of the participants recognized that placing an emphasis on practical experience and critical understanding in a contextually relevant ABE curriculum based on adult education principles would require a change in perspective that has not yet been actually incorporated within the provincial departments, though it is already part of the discourse on curriculum even at policy implementation levels. (Collins, 1988, p. 12)

While in this curriculum development discussion Collins stated he was aiming for a format which encouraged teachers to adopt materials and pedagogical strategies in

keeping with their own philosophies of education and teaching styles, he recognized that "predominant institutionalized (i.e., provincial) criteria for ABE must be taken into account even though they are now under critical review" (Collins, 1988, p. 6).

Collins turned his focus to one of curriculum "as the basis for professional development that can be connected to an on-going consideration of trends and issues in curriculum" (Collins, 1988, p. 16). In spite of what the curriculum specifications delineate, Collins placed the onus squarely on the shoulders of teachers to go beyond the behavioural/reductionist statements of the curriculum as presented; rather than being mere receivers and transmitters of curriculum, Collins called for teachers to be informed creators of curriculum by, for example, "invent[ing] additional strategies to facilitate critical thinking, communicative competence, and aesthetic appreciation in all subject areas" (Collins, 1988, p. 16). In an environment which tends to infantilize students, and with a curriculum that could have a similar impact upon prison educators, Collins worked to illustrate that neither students nor teachers need be infantilized in the prison education setting.

By including prison educators in the curriculum process from the beginning, and in viewing the completed curriculum project as a basis for ongoing staff development, Collins saw the standardized curriculum as thus becoming "contextually relevant and a means for subsequent changes in the program through rational communicative, rather than manipulative, discussions between prison educators and administrators" with its design and implementation thus serving to improve the communicative competence not only of students but of the staff as well (Collins, 1989, p. 51).

Collins offered concrete ways in which prison educators could go about the developmental task. Because neither specific texts nor textual references were mandated in the curriculum document, Collins opened wide the possibilities for teachers to choose rich, relevant and meaningful materials for student use, encouraging student production of basic literacy learning materials which could "result in significant educational benefits" (Collins, 1988, p. 17). Teachers were encouraged to go beyond the "accumulated...stocks of classroom materials selected in accordance with teacher preference, provincial curriculum indicators, and the budget allowance," that may already have been on hand in the institution, and were further entreated to be professionally committed, competent, and creative in their curriculum development endeavours (Collins, 1988, p. 17). It could be seen that restricted budgets for educational materials could require creative curriculum materials' development on the part of prison educators, thereby precluding the purchase of prepackaged "workbook" types of materials, thus opening the way for students' own stories and other written texts, as well as subject matter of immediate and long-term relevance to students, offered in a way that would be of the most personal value to them.

Should the institutions' existing stocks of curriculum materials prove insufficient for teachers to address all of the curricular components set forth in the document, Collins alerted teachers to his annotated reference list of materials. Included in these references were texts which reflected Collins' philosophy of valid educational practices toward which he wished to guide those prison educators who would move beyond the reductionist position to a more critical stance. Included were Jonathan Kozol's *Illiterate America*; Kazemek and Rigg's "Four Poets: Modern Poetry in the Adult Literacy Classroom;"

Francis Kazemek's "Functional Literacy is Not Enough;" and Phyllis Noble's *Formation of Freirian Facilitators*. Indeed, Collins stated: "Prison educators already committed to fostering a critically informed approach to literacy, locating it in broader social and cultural contexts, are alert to the pedagogical possibilities that can emerge from even large scale institutionally-based initiatives" (Collins, 1989, p. 54). In considering the perspectives out of which these referenced authors wrote, teachers were alerted to ways in which literacy may be perceived beyond that of the "functional" Grade 8 proficiency level promulgated by the Solicitor General.

While segments of Collins' curriculum document can be clearly seen to address job-related functions, he qualified such inclusion by stating that it is not difficult to understand the

> shortcomings of legitimizing claims that attempt to tie in new functional literacy initiatives directly with the acquisition of jobs. When the economy is slack even university graduates, let alone ex-prisoners, have to scramble for employment....It is fallacious to define literacy in terms of perceived job market needs....When this tendency prevails, curriculum and formal educational endeavors are inevitably shaped by artificial constraints. (Collins, 1989, p. 53)

Collins suggested, therefore, that linking staff development with curriculum concerns offered a context for dialogue among both staff and students about the nature and construction of their education programs. Those whose existing pedagogical efforts derived their inspiration from a fuller understanding of what literacy entails, and which promoted genuine communicative competence, would thus find support. The alternative, Collins suggested, is

> to accept, in a taken-for-granted manner, the deployment of increasingly technocratic overriding curriculum schemes that serve to de-skill the roles of both

> teacher and student, and to erode the essential critical dimension of a committed vocational practice. (Collins, 1989, p. 54)

For such a committed practice of prison adult education, Collins perceived the challenge as one of establishing "literacy programs as permanent activities rather than quick-fix solutions," and of organizing "relevant staff development sessions for ABE teachers, students, inmate tutors, and administrators," with the thoughtful consideration of curriculum as the appropriate place to begin (Collins, 1989, p. 54). Collins made it very clear that this document should act as a guide only; that prison educators must go beyond the reductionist statements delineated by the document and become co-creators, with their students, of a curriculum rich, relevant, and meaningful.

In light of the Correctional Service of Canada's focus on literacy, we now turn to a discussion of this field, an area which is not as simple or straightforward as it would at first appear to be.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERACY

A Perception of Crisis

Canadians are in the midst of a perceived crisis in literacy, with an estimated one in five of the adult population deemed unable to function adequately with the normal daily tasks requiring the use of reading, writing, and numeracy skills (Calamai, 1987, p. 7). Within the prison population, it is estimated that 50 percent of incarcerants are functionally illiterate. With the perception of such high rates of illiteracy come concerns regarding its impacts on our society, from a "huge economic and social cost" which "business, government and society must pay" (Calamai, 1987, p. 31), to metaphors wherein illiteracy is "often discussed in relation to such striking notions as war, disease, prison..." (Ilsley & Stahl, 1994, p. 5); and men and women with limited literacy skills subsequently likened to an "army of illiterates," marching against their will, "an army in numbers only. They have no leaders, no power, little support, few weapons and no idea where they're headed. Darkness and hopelessness are usually their banners" (Calamai, 1987, p. 7). "Being illiterate must be life imprisonment in a dark hole," suggests Harry Bruce (1990, p. 21). Thus perceived, it becomes logical to proceed to lead a war against illiteracy, or to find a "cure" for the disease of illiteracy, yet before the problem can be remedied, an assault launched, or a "cure" be found, it is necessary to determine an accurate "diagnosis."

Definitional Difficulties

To discuss literacy effectively, a concise and explicit definition would be of great

advantage. The definitional task, however, is not as simple as it would at first glance appear to be. A brief journey through the historical development of literacy in the Western world will illustrate literacy's changing nature, and will illuminate the challenges and dangers inherent in confining the concept of literacy within narrowly set parameters.

From Ancient Greece, where the highly prized abilities of oratory and dialogue were encouraged by Socrates and Plato, literacy spread gradually throughout the Graeco-Roman world, with its use restricted mainly to elites and scribes (Thomas, 1989, p. 4). The fall of the Roman Empire saw the guardianship of literate culture devolve to the Church (Thomas, 1989, p. 4). Although writing was invented some five thousand years ago, it was not until 700 B.C. that the Greek alphabet - the alphabet upon which the Western world's communication is based - came into being, while the fifteenth century saw the introduction of the printing press, with mechanically powered printing following in the nineteenth century (Thomas, 1989, pp. 4-5). In the twentieth century we have seen the widespread use of books, radio, television, satellite communications technology, and the continued and vastly expanding use of computer technology in the workplace, in educational centres, and in the home (Thomas, 1989, p. 5). What counted as literacy at the beginning of the twentieth century no longer renders one literate in society today; while the ability to sign one's name deemed one literate at a fairly recent point in our history (Scribner, 1984, p. 8), greater abilities are seen as requirements for attaining a literate status as we rapidly approach the twenty-first century. Just what those abilities are or should be remains a point of great contention.

In 1870, only 2 percent of the American population graduated from high school;

by 1910, the figure was only 8 percent, with 75 percent of this latter group going on to college; high levels of literacy and education were the province of only a small, elite group (Mikulecky, 1990, p. 26). By the 1940s, a "functional illiterate was one who had completed fewer than five years of schooling" (Thomas, 1989, p. 5), and throughout this century,

> responses to the demands of wars and technology and heavy emphasis on public schooling increased the basic literacy levels of the majority. As more individuals mastered basic literacy, contexts began to change. It became possible to communicate information in print more readily. More complex written information became part of the social and literary context. (Mikulecky, 1990, p. 27)

Indeed, as literacy abilities have climbed, literacy demands have increased (Resnick and Resnick, 1977), and "the complexity of literacy tasks has increased in reaction to the increased literacy sophistication of the population and the increased complexity of occupational and social tasks" (Mikulecky, 1990, p. 27).

Perhaps the simplest definition of literacy is that of "the ability to read and write" (Thomas, 1989, p. 3). Yet when we offer up questions such as "reading for what? writing to express what meaning?" and "speaking about what reality?" (Hunter, 1982, p. 140), the definitional enterprise becomes much more complicated. Goody and Watt argue that: "Choices about who reads, what they read, and how they use what they read always have been connected to the distribution of power in a society" (cited in Fingeret, 1990, p. 35). Who is doing the defining also has a great impact on how literacy is perceived.

> Political activists, sociologists and many adult educators tend to stress the ideas of literacy as a liberating influence, a means to empowerment and self-fulfillment through active participation in the learning enterprise and in the community.

> Reading specialists, on the other hand, tend to look at literacy definitions from a linguistic point of view where the debate is often between "literacy as decoding" and "literacy as thinking". (Thomas, 1989, pp. 6-7)

Notwithstanding the difficulty of the task, several definitions of literacy have been developed within the last half-century. In 1948, a United Nations commission proposed as a working definition of literacy "the ability to read and write a simple message" (Calamai, 1987, p. 13).

Echoing the work of Paulo Freire, the 1975 Declaration of Persepolis states that literacy is

> not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of an authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. (Draper, 1986, p. 6)

In the United States, the influential 1985 National Assessment of Education Progress study of American young people aged 21 to 25 defined literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (Calamai, 1987, p. 15), while the 1988 Canadian Southam Literacy Report stated its definition of literacy as "reading and writing skills in either of Canada's two official languages" (Calamai, 1987, p. 11), and functional literacy as "the ability to use printed and written information to function in society" (Calamai, 1987, p.7). It also states that the majority view holds the definition of functional literacy as having the "reading, writing and numbers skills necessary to perform tasks demanded by

the community and, especially, by the job," while noting that in Canada, as in other industrialized countries, the "debate has focused on 'functional literacy,' meaning the ability to effectively engage (or function) in the activities of the community" (Calamai, 1987, p. 15). One universally accepted definition of literacy has not been created; in fact quite the opposite is readily apparent. Significant debate has been carried out in the past and continues into the present.

Perhaps one of the most influential practitioners in the area of literacy is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who sought to revolutionize the lives of illiterate Brazilian peasants by working with them in non-traditional school settings to make their literacy possible, with "the chief object of the literacy process...not one of mere technical mastery of the written word, but a quality of consciousness, a changed awareness which the people could express through language and action" (Bee, 1981, p. 40). Freire maintained that the educative process was never a neutral one; and drawing on Freire, Bee argues:

> Functional literacy does just what its title suggests. It enables one to function, rather than dynamically interact with and transform one's society. If a person is to become genuinely literate as opposed to functionally literate, a quality of critical reflection must be engendered in the pedagogical methods. Without reflection and analysis of the cultural milieu, literacy becomes something handed out and isolated from life's realities. (Bee, 1981, pp. 49-50)

The literacy definition put forth at Persepolis can be seen to significantly reflect Freire's vision of what literacy potentially could mean. Others have their own vision.

Metaphors for Literacy

Sylvia Scribner (1984) discusses literacy in metaphoric terms - as adaptation, as power, and as a state of grace. Literacy as adaptation emphasizes a concept of literacy's

survival or pragmatic value, a functional literacy "conceived broadly as the level of proficiency necessary for effective performance in a range of settings and customary activities" in enabling people to fulfill "mundane situational demands" (Scribner, 1984, p. 9). She further suggests that adult basic education programs similarly are obliged "to equip adults with the skills they must have to secure jobs or advance to better ones, receive the training and benefits to which they are entitled, and assume their civic and political responsibilities" (Scribner, 1984, p. 9). However, as Scribner states: "Attempts to inventory 'minimal functional competencies' have floundered on lack of information and divided perceptions of functionality" and uniformity (Scribner, 1984, p. 9), and public discussions fluctuate between "narrow definitions of functional skills pegged to immediate vocational and personal needs, and sweeping definitions that virtually reinstate the ability to cope with college subject matter as the hallmark of literacy" (Scribner, 1984, p. 10). It would also be shortsighted, Scribner suggests, to adapt literacy standards to the personal and social needs of the present only; rather, such standards must also be considered in light of future requirements, yet there is no agreement on what future literacy demands will entail. While some would argue that increased levels of literacy will be required in light of computerized techniques of production and information handling, others, like McLuhan, would suggest that new communications media and new technologies may well serve to reduce general literacy requirements; others would argue that these new technologies are, in actuality, new systems of literacy (Scribner, 1984, pp. 10-11). "Even tender probing [of the functional approach] reveals the many questions of fact, value, and purpose that complicate its application to educational curricula" (Scribner, 1984, p. 11).

Scribner's literacy as power metaphor "emphasizes a relationship between literacy and group or community achievement" (Scribner, 1984, p. 11). Increases in the literacy skills of poor and politically powerless groups are viewed as a means for them to claim their place in the world (Scribner, 1984, pp. 11-12). Thus, problems of "poverty and political powerlessness are...inseparably intertwined with problems of access to knowledge and levels of literacy skills" (Scribner, 1984, p. 12).

Literacy as a state of grace is described as "the tendency in many societies to endow the literate person with special virtues" as rooted in both sacred and secular beliefs (Scribner, 1984, p. 14).

> [In this] state-of-grace concept, the power and functionality of literacy is not bounded by political or economic parameters but in a sense transcends them; the literate individual's life derives its meaning and significance from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of humankind, made available through the written word....Literate and nonliterate individuals presumably are not only in different states of grace but in different stages of intellectual development as well. (Scribner, 1984, p. 14)

Each metaphor embraces certain values, ofttimes unexamined, just as each makes certain assumptions about social factors in society - "the utilities of literacy and the conditions fostering individual attainment of literacy status" (Scribner, 1984, p. 14). Rather than valuing one metaphor over the others, Scribner suggests that literacy should combine elements of all three.

Building upon Scribner's work, MacKeracher offers "literacy as the use of written language" and "literacy as the creation of personal meaning" as additional vantagepoints from which literacy may be viewed. MacKeracher describes "literacy as the use of written language" as incorporating "skills in reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation,

vocabulary, composition and comprehension," with composition including "reproductive activities such as paraphrasing and summarizing, and productive activities such as creative writing" and comprehension as incorporating "the reproductive activities of analysis and the productive activities of synthesis" (MacKeracher, 1989, p. 380).

In MacKeracher's "literacy as the creation of personal meaning," literacy skills are described as allowing individuals to move "beyond passive reading and reproductive writing to actively producing and sharing meanings derived from personal experiences" (MacKeracher, 1989, p. 384). In order to create meanings from personal experiences,

> individuals must be able to think reflectively about their own life experiences, to ask questions about these experiences which will lead to the discovery of patterns in action and thought, and to conceptualize and name these patterns. To be able to share the meanings thus created, individuals must be able to disclose their ideas through dialogue with others or creative writing. (MacKeracher, 1989, p. 384).

Reference to only a few of the resources noted earlier as encouraged by Michael Collins clearly illustrates pedagogical practices and a philosophy for adult basic education in the area of literacy. Francis Kazemek states that literacy programs which "treat literacy as something to be acquired, not developed," result in

> the reductive kinds of instruction that train an adult to manipulate certain types of surface language conventions in a very restricted range of situations; it results in "survival" literacy training or competency training of one kind or another. And it is precisely here that the criticism of those who contend that literacy training is often little more than a means of social control and manipulation is relevant.... (Kazemek, 1985, p. 333)

Kazemek urges the use of poetry in learning to read, stressing the reading of "a poem for wonder and joy is just as valid a function as reading an employment application," and poems, songs, and language experience stories require no "correct" answer, as do

workbook exercises (Kazemek, 1985, p. 334). Rather, they encourage group discussion, social interaction, and "allow individuals to raise their own questions and to seek their own answers" (Kazemek, 1985, p. 335). Combining both reading and writing, such an approach also "gives adults an opportunity to express and create as well as to analyze and communicate" (Kazemek, 1985, p. 335).

The perspective found in Jonathan Kozol's work is reflected in his statement that:

> People who suffer in a thousand ways apart from inability to read and write cannot be expected to achieve substantial gains in literacy skills if those skills are not directly linked to other areas of need and if those links do not consist of energizing words that can legitimize an often unacknowledged sense of rage....Effectuated rage is a forbidden concept in the politics of adult education....The word "oppression does not appear in...the voices of the people who control the major literacy programs of this nation....To speak of those who are 'oppressed' is to suggest that there must be 'oppressors.'" (Kozol, 1985, pp. 48-49)

In the Noble text we find reference to a liberatory education based on the work of Paulo Freire who, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, criticizes the "banking method" of teaching which projects "an absolute ignorance onto others" and which is a "characteristic of the ideology of oppression," negating "education and knowledge as processes of inquiry" (Freire, 1970, p. 53), and who states that the "banking approach to adult education...will never propose to students that they critically consider reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 55). Freire states this banking concept must be rejected in its entirety by those truly committed to liberation; in its place a concept of women and men as conscious beings, "and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world," must be adopted (Freire, 1970, p. 60). The educational goal of deposit-making must be abandoned, and in its place must be "the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the

world" (Freire, 1970, p. 60). No longer merely docile listeners, students now become "co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, 1970, p. 62).

> Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming - as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality...The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education - which accepts neither a "well-behaved" present nor a predetermined future - roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary (Freire, 1970, p.65)

And as Barbara Bee succinctly states: "The written word can subdue, deceive, pacify, and lull, or it can arouse, enlighten, stimulate, and awaken - depending on the ideology and practice employed. In short, education can be for domestication or liberation" (Bee, 1981, p. 47).

There are those who would extend the meaning of adult basic education/literacy beyond common conceptions for that term. As Laurent Isabelle states:

> Adult basic education in *prison*, for me, also means enrolment in college level courses or undergraduate university level courses or programs - albeit for a relatively small number of talented adults - very few of whom have ever had a rewarding school experience....Is that Adult Basic Education? Not for those educators who limit A.B.E. to a literacy program, nor for others who maintain that A.B.E. is only elementary and secondary levels of education of adults. It is A.B.E. for those educators who hold that a *first* experience at the post-secondary level, for talented and highly motivated adults, is basic for Canadians living in the last decades of the twentieth century. A.B.E. in federal prisons is basic education of an adult to enable him/her to become a responsible law-abiding, self-respecting and self-directing adult. A.B.E. in prison spans the spectrum from elementary to post-secondary education at the college/university levels. For the profoundly disadvantaged person who is a prison inmate A.B.E. must be nothing less. (Isabelle, 1989, p. 411)

And for David Watt, the discussion of literacy must also transcend the mere functional; for Watt, literacy must fundamentally "enrich and enhance" the individual (Watt, 1997).

Participatory Literacy Education

Within the past decade, the concept and practice of participatory literacy education has developed and is gaining momentum. Within participatory literacy education, students move from positions as mere recipients of literacy education to creators of curriculum, managers of programs, and the like.

> Active learner participation in adult literacy programs enables learners to take higher degrees of control, responsibility, and reward vis-a-vis program activities. Active participation can improve program efficiency, enhance learners' personal development, and enable them to transform the larger social contexts in which they live. (Jurmo, 1989, p. 17)

Jurmo suggests that literacy instruction can work to facilitate or to impede the development of fluent literacy; hence, for instruction to be successful, "learners must be given opportunities to take on highly active roles in making printed language meaningful to themselves and others" (Jurmo, 1989, p. 18). As defined by Sauve, "Participatory education is a learning and teaching process through which participants define their own learning needs and work out approaches to addressing them, with a view to making life better for themselves and those around them" (Norton, 1997). Whereas in the traditional classroom the learning process is controlled by teachers and curriculum developers who identify what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and how students' learning is to be assessed, in participatory learning, through a collaborative process students and teachers share the decisions regarding content, teaching and learning styles and assessment.

For participatory education the essential issue is maintaining a perspective on the degree to which there is a sharing of power, meaning that students and teachers ask such questions as:

"Who selects the material? By whose standards are students' abilities assessed? Who defines students' goals? Who evaluates students' progress and the learning process?" (Norton, 1997). Such questions stem from the belief that students require concrete ways in which to take more control of their learning and to actively participate in defining their own goals and ways of learning (Norton, 1997).

Participatory education often involves conversation, and students are encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge through sharing at a group level their backgrounds, cultures, experiences and dreams. "Materials have real meaning to the learners, reflecting the activities in which they want to use new literacy abilities and the content they care about" (Norton, 1997). Teachers are encouraged to engage in their own writing, along with their students, and to develop a climate of communication and mutual respect, and students, rather than relating primarily to the teacher, are encouraged to work together (Norton, 1997).

Jurmo offers a hierarchy of levels of learner participation to indicate that here, too, no one simple definition of such participation is in place: from most to least involved, this hierarchy includes conditions within which:

* Learners have greater degrees of control, responsibility and reward vis-a-vis program activities.
* Learners are consulted for some input into the instruction and/or management process.
* Learners cooperate with the rules, activities and procedures developed by the staff.
* Learners are present (physically or on paper) in the program. (Jurmo, 1989, p. 18)

In practice, at the highest levels of learner participation students are given ongoing

opportunities "to plan and implement a wide range of instructional and management activities within the program" (Jurmo, p. 18). While it is not possible for all learners to be actively involved in all activities all the time, the goal is to maintain a high level of student participation. As well, teachers "strive to limit the conditions (such as presenting learners with meaningless forms of language) that reduce efficient learning" (Jurmo, 1989, p. 20). While development of reading and writing skills is of course desirable, Jurmo contends such skill development is an inadequate literacy program goal; rather: "Literacy programs need to be structured to enhance the development of additional characteristics, including critical thinking or problem-solving, ability to work collaboratively with others, self-esteem, and interest in continuing one's education" (Jurmo, 1989, p. 20). These personal qualities are deemed basic to the development of a healthy, mature adult; without such qualities, students are "likely to remain passive and not use even the technical skills that he or she already has" (Jurmo, 1989, pp. 20-21). Learners can be assisted in acquisition of these traits through provision of opportunities for goal setting, exploring options and developing strategies for attaining goals through active experimentation (Jurmo, 1989, p. 21). Hence, central to the achievement of such important personal goals is active learner participation in the educational process. Reflected in this perspective is the work of humanistic educators, incorporating a view that education should

> aim at helping the learner to develop skills of inquiry that enable the individual (with or without the help of others) to take the initiative in a self-directed learning process. Learners should be able to access their own learning needs and objectives, identify human and material resources, and develop, implement, and evaluate appropriate learning strategies (Jurmo, 1989, p. 21).

The learner, in this view, should not be seen "as a mere object to be shaped by the educational process," but rather must become "the subject of his own education, no longer 'submitting to education,' but instead educating himself'" (Faure, cited in Jurmo, 1989, p. 21). Such humanistic educators argue, then, that a

> theoretically optimal experience of personal growth, whether in the form of "client-centered therapy or some other experience of learning," would enable an individual to "function in all (his or her) complexity" and actively chart the course of his or her life. (Rogers cited in Jurmo, 1989, p. 21)

CHAPTER FOUR

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Profile of Female Federal Offenders

As this study focuses on federally incarcerated women, it is important to gain at the very least some limited understanding of who these women are. A 1991 Report for the Correctional Service of Canada offers a profile of women under federal sentence (Shaw, 1991). At the time of the survey (July - November, 1989) 203 women were serving a federal sentence: 125 at P4W; and under Exchange of Services Agreements, another 78 were incarcerated in the provinces; 84% (170) of the women agreed to take part in the survey. As a result of their responses, the following information was obtained: over a third of the women (36%) were first offenders, having no previous convictions; 37% had between 1 and 6 prior convictions, and 27% had longer histories of offending, with 7 or more convictions. For the most part, previous convictions had been for offences "of a fairly trivial nature," including use of cancelled credit cards, false pretences, soliciting, minor theft or possession of drugs or stolen property, "immoral theatrical performance," causing a disturbance, public mischief, and vagrancy (Shaw, 1991, p. 10). The greatest majority of convictions were for "property offences, particularly fraud" (Shaw, 1991, p. 10). Previous offences involving the use of violence, such as robbery or assault, were much less common, and murder or manslaughter were very rare. A small percentage (9%) of this population had more than two prior convictions for violence.

Two thirds of the women had experienced physical abuse and over half had experienced sexual abuse at some time in their lives. Three quarters had a history of

alcohol or drug abuse, and two thirds had never been legitimately employed nor maintained steady employment.

> Many of the problems faced by the women are overlapping - those who had a disruptive upbringing tend to have a history of physical and sexual abuse and substance abuse, and to have dropped out of the education system and job market at an early age. Two thirds of the women were mothers (65%) and between them they had a total of 274 children. Excluding those whose children had been adopted at an early age, or were now adult, 48% had at least one child under 17 years for who [sic] they had some responsibility, and 24% at least one child under 5 years. Overall 70% of those with children had been single parents for all or part of the time. (Shaw, 1991, p. 60)

Representing just 2% of the total federal population, federally sentenced women can better be seen

> as part of the much larger group of women who come into conflict with the law across Canada. Some 5,000 women are remanded in custody to provincial prisons each year, and some 8,800 women admitted to provincial prisons on sentence. In addition, an unknown number of women choose prison in place of a fine, or end up in prison for non-payment. (Shaw, 1991, p. 47)

Of this population of federal female inmates, ranging in ages from 19 to 74 years, (33 years being the average), 46 (23%) were aboriginal; and of this total population, " 98 (48%) were serving sentences of under 5 years, 45 (22%) between 5 and 9 years, and 60 (30%) ten years or more". (Shaw, 1991, p. 59)

Academic education for federally incarcerated women is only one facet of the programming offered to them. In light of the severe problems they bring with them to a federal institution, other program options may require more immediate attention than literacy education or other areas of schooling. Such additional programming requirements and offerings deal with substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, parenting skills training, cognitive skills training, life skills, spiritual programmes, cultural programmes,

women's health and well-being, coping with a long-term sentence, and the like. As well, "...the crimes women have been incarcerated for at the Prison for Women...are clearly linked with such factors as sexual and physical abuse, poverty and racism" (Kendall, 1993, p. 35).

> In the last 15 years with the impact of the women's movement and the victims' movement, concern about the imprisonment of women has become much more focused. In particular, greater stress has been placed on the differences in the experiences and needs of men and women in (and out of) prison. The problems of addiction among women, the high levels of physical and sexual abuse, the increasing incidence of single mothers, coupled with the relatively low economic position of many women in society have all received much greater attention. Women in prison have few educational or work skills. In addition it has become clear that they tend to have a high level of health problems, and that there has been a general problem of over-medication. (Shaw, 1991, p. 5)

Creating Choices Task Force Report

As a result of ongoing criticism of women's imprisonment in P4W, a task force on federally sentenced women was established in March 1989, with the mandate to

> examine the correctional management of federally sentenced women from the commencement of date of sentence to the date of warrant expiry and to develop a plan which will guide and direct this process in a manner that is responsive to the unique and special needs of this group. (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 1)

Co-chaired by the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and the Correctional Service of Canada, and including a wide variety of government and community interests, the task force was grounded in a strong commitment to partnership, centred on the belief that through such partnerships solutions could be found. Within a "woman-centred" approach, the task force developed five principles for change upon which female corrections should rest. Reflecting the Mission Statement of the Correctional Service of Canada, with its emphasis on "individual dignity and rights, the potential for human

growth and development, community input and participation, and the sharing of ideas, knowledge, values, and experiences," these five principles were identified as empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environment, and shared responsibility (*Creating Choices*, 1990, pp. 105-111).

The principle of empowerment arose in response to the reduced life choices and inequities experienced by women generally in Canadian society and acutely experienced by many federally sentenced women. Typically poorly educated, unemployed, and survivors of physical and/or sexual abuse, federally sentenced women experience "feelings of guilt, fear, anxiety, alienation and confusion which are often elicited when they are apprehended and sentenced by the justice system, [combining] to produce a group of women with extraordinarily low self-esteem" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 106). Low self-esteem, in turn, serves to reduce a woman's ability to cope.

> It increases self destructive behaviour, so prevalent among federally sentenced women. It can contribute to violence against others. Low self-esteem reduces a person's ability to plan for the future, to take responsibility for her actions, and to believe that she can make meaningful choices that will help her live her life with respect and dignity. Conversely, increased self-esteem augments the ability to accept and express responsibility for actions taken and future choices. Accepting and expressing responsibility for oneself promotes strength and good self-esteem, creating a constructive cycle of empowerment. (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 107)

Robbed of the ability and opportunity to make responsible choices due to the dependence of many federally sentenced women on state financial assistance, alcohol and/or drugs, and upon men, these women need "meaningful options which allow them to make responsible choices" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 107). This second principle, then, with women experiencing the success associated with making sound, responsible choices, will allow

women to break out of the cycle of dependence.

The Task Force identified "respect and dignity" as the third principle upon which female corrections should rest, for "behaviour among prisoners is strongly influenced by the way they are treated;...if people are treated with respect and dignity they will be more likely to act responsibly" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 109). Canadian correctional institutions have often been criticized for their tendency "to encourage dependent and child-like behaviour among women" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 109). Women have reported being denied their "need for privacy, quiet and dignity" and the subsequent feelings of having neither rights nor control. This feeling leads to an "overwhelming sense of powerlessness and a total lack of motivation" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 109). Hence "mutuality of respect is needed among prisoners, among staff and between prisoners and staff if women are to gain the self-respect and respect for others necessary to take responsibility for their futures" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 109).

The fourth principle, that of a "supportive environment," is based in the belief that the "quality of an environment can promote physical health, psychological health, and personal development" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 110).

> Women in prison have too little access to fresh air, to light, to adequate nutrition, to social interactions based on dignity and respect, to ongoing relationships with those important to them outside the institution and to spiritual and cultural practices and experiences. They are denied the privacy, quiet, dignity and safety which are so integral to an adequate quality of life. (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 110)

"Shared responsibility," the final principle, holds that all levels of government, as well as community members, voluntary and private sector services, businesses, and

corrections workers, must take responsibility as interrelated parts of society (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p.111). The task force deemed this principle essential in order "to foster the independence and self-reliance among federally sentenced women which will allow them to take responsibility for their past, present and future actions," for the " holistic programming and multifaceted opportunities which support an environment in which women can become empowered, can only be built on a foundation of responsibility among a broad range of community members" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 111).

The guiding statement of principle subsequently proposed by the task force, incorporating the five principles outlined above, is as follows:

> The Correctional Service of Canada with the support of communities, has the responsibility to create the environment that empowers federally sentenced women to make meaningful and responsible choices in order that they may live with dignity and respect. (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 112)

It was upon the basis of this task force report that the new federal women's institutions were created across the country, with the vision that the principles developed would encompass the philosophy and guide the programming in and management of these institutions.

In the past, correctional programs had been "designed to respond to clearly defined, categorized needs, defined not by the women but by the program leader, or corrections officials," a model within which a "woman must fit herself and her needs to the available program" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 85). The task force proposed, in contrast, a "resources" approach which would require CSC "to seek out and obtain the required resources to respond to individual needs as identified by the women" (*Creating Choices*,

1990, p. 85). For programs, including educational ones, to be increasingly effective under this new perspective, they would have to be grounded in the following: programs would have to be woman-centred, reflecting the social realities of women and responding to their individual needs; they would have to support development of women's autonomy and self-esteem; the critical element of personal choice would have to be incorporated; programs would be oriented towards release; and development and provision of programs would be done in a culturally sensitive manner (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 86). Hence it was deemed that programs would require a holistic perspective, with all programming working together "to respond to the multifaceted, inter-related nature of a woman's experience" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 86). "For example, there must be an understanding that psychic trauma (such as the trauma caused by sexual abuse) can affect an individual's every action, including the learning of basic literacy skills" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 86). It was stressed that those involved in the delivery of specific programs would need to necessarily "be aware of and sensitive to the lives of the women and the effect their past and present experiences may have on factors such as their ability to concentrate or deal with new skills" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 86). Program areas identified by the task force as being most critical were: "education, skills development, mental and physical health care, alcohol and drug addiction programs, and programs to help maintain and strengthen family ties and community relationships, as well as programming pertaining to particular groups of women such as long-termers and Aboriginal prisoners" (*Creating Choices*, 1990, p. 86).

In light of the profile of federally sentenced women and of the findings of the

Creating Choices task force report, it is important to step back for a moment to view the education of women from a wider perspective.

Feminist Perspective on Education

Kathleen Kendall, in her report to the Correctional Service of Canada (1993), states that a new scholarship in adult education delineates the need to take women's unique experiences into account, with a resultant pedagogy which is relevant to the experience and lives of women (Kendall, 1993, p. 54). Kendall offers, as one of the points to be considered, that:

> Educational resources, curriculum and standards of evaluation should be developed in partnership with those it is meant to serve. Learners can participate in the construction of their own resources and curriculum design, define their own educational needs and evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs in terms of their own goals. This will help to ensure the relevance of education to their lives. (Kendall, 1993, pp. 55-56)

In *Women's Education*, Coats (1994) states: "Many women prefer cooperative and shared learning, active participation rather than passive reception, drawing on and valuing their own experiences, relating new knowledge to prior learning, recognizing affective as well as cognitive components of learning" (Coats, 1994, p. 61). She also emphasizes the need for a teaching and learning style for women which

> emphasizes the importance of group processes; acknowledges the importance of experiential learning; draws on the personal experiences of the women in the group; uses those experiences to move towards an understanding of women's place within society; focuses on the need to build confidence; [and] enables women of all abilities to move forward within a supportive group. The overall climate of learning should be one of cooperation and support, allowing women to value themselves and their achievements. (Coats, 1994, p. 121)

Women's education, however, has arisen from a Judeo-Christian heritage which

has not viewed the female gender kindly, nor taken women's need for education seriously. Mary Daly has illustrated a perceived misogynism of the "church Fathers" by noting that Tertullian informed women in general that they were "the devil's gateway"; Augustine suggested women were not made "to the Image of God"; Thomas Acquinas and his followers defined women "as misbegotten males;" Martin Luther remarked that "God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all;" and "John Knox composed a 'First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women'" (Daly, 1973, p. 3). "Christian theology widely asserted that women were inferior, weak, depraved, and vicious. The logical consequences of this opinion were worked out in a brutal set of social arrangements that shortened and crushed the lives of women" (Daly, 1973, p. 95). Male religion served to silence women, for "the 'sacred' words were all written by men and can only be repeated and echoed," suggests Daly (p. 151).

Also taking up the theme of the silencing of women, Carol Christ writes that stories of women and by women have not been told, and

> without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions in her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. She is closed in silence.... (Christ, 1980, p. 1)

Increasingly, however, women's education is being written and spoken of by women and a significant feminist discourse on the nature of and need for such education is developing. Belenky et al. (1986), in their study of the ways in which women come to know, offer an insightful epistemological categorization of women's perspectives on

knowing, beginning in *silence*, in which "women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority" (Belenky M.F., B.M. Clinchy, N.R. Goldberger, and J.M. Tarule, 1986, p. 15). Following this silence is the perspective of *received knowledge*, in which "women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge of their own;" and *subjective knowledge*, where "truth and knowledge are conceived as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited;" through *procedural knowledge*, in which "women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures of obtaining and communicating knowledge;" to *constructed knowledge*, a perspective in which "women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing" (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 15). Through this delineation of the ways in which it is possible to perceive progressively complex modes of thinking, there can be little doubt that all too many women in conflict with the law, both prior to sentencing and during and after incarceration, are reflected in the perspective of silence, in which women have little awareness of their intellectual capabilities: "They live - selfless and voiceless - at the behest of those around them. External authorities know the truth and are all-powerful" (Belenky, 1986, p. 134).

Echoing a question posed by Adrienne Rich, Belenky et al ask: "What does a woman need to know?" (1986, p. 193). Arising from interviews with the women in their study, they conclude significantly that "every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent

thought, and she needs to know it right away" (Belenky, 1986, p. 193).

Rich's response to this question is equally significant, and can be deemed to address Christ's emphasis on the need for women's stories to be told, for does not a woman,

> as a self-conscious, self-defining human being, need a knowledge of her own history, her much-politicized biology, an awareness of the creative work of women in the past, the skills and crafts and techniques and powers exercised by women in different times and cultures, a knowledge of women's rebellions and organized movements against our oppression and how they have been routed or diminished? (Rich, 1979, p. 240)

Lacking such knowledge, Rich suggests women consequently live estranged and without context, without a knowledge of "Womankind," and hence are rendered subject to male prescriptions for them, and projections of male fantasy upon them.

Feminist writer bell hooks states the need to make education, including basic literacy, a feminist agenda has not been stressed; neither has "the connection between sexist exploitation of women in this society and the degree of women's education, including the lack of basic reading and writing skills," been explored deeply by feminist activists (hooks, 1984, p. 107). Hooks cites feminist activist and scholar Charlotte Bunch in emphasizing literacy's political importance, for

> reading and writing help develop an individual's imagination and ability to think....an individual's access, through reading a variety of interpretations of reality, increases that person's capacity to think for herself....[and] reading and writing aid each woman's individual survival and success in the world, by increasing her ability to function in her chosen endeavors.... (hooks, 1984, pp. 107-108)

Bunch also cautions against assuming women are already literate, urging us not to ignore, as part of feminist education, "the value of teaching women to read, write, and think"

(hooks, 1984, p. 108).

Through literacy programs which are feminist in nature, hooks suggests that all classes of women, including and especially those from backgrounds of the working class and the poor, "could learn to read and write in conjunction with learning how to think critically and analytically" (hooks, 1984, p. 108), for, because of class exploitation and oppression, racism, and sexism, women as a group have been denied "the right and privilege to develop intellectually" (hooks, 1984, p. 113).

> Most women are deprived of access to modes of thought that promote the kind of critical and analytical understanding necessary for liberation struggle. This deprivation leads women to feel insecure about intellectual work and to fear grappling with new ideas and information. It may lead us to dismiss as irrelevant that which is relevant because it is challenging. (hooks, 1984, p. 113)

The antithesis of woman's traditional role is critical thinking, suggests Bunch, and such thinking requires a relationship to the world which is active, rather than passive (hooks, 1984, p. 114). In like manner, hooks states that a primary goal of the feminist movement should be the encouragement of women "to strive for education, to develop their intellects" (hooks, 1984, p. 114).

Adrienne Rich calls for a similar rigour in striving for the development of the intellect. Acknowledging that we are living in "a culture of manipulated passivity (the mirror-image of which is violence, both random and institutional)" (Rich, 1979, p. 12), Rich argues such manipulated passivity "has every stake in opposing women actively laying claim to our own lives" (Rich, 1979, p. 14). Rich argues that, as females' school education rewards their passivity, does not take their minds seriously, and indoctrinates both genders in stereotypic sex roles, the larger patriarchal capitalist system devalues the

work done by women, denies the uniqueness and importance of the female experience, and is physically violent towards women. Rich subsequently delineates the experience she believes women owe themselves, which is "the experience of taking responsibility toward yourselves," part of which means "refusing to let others do your thinking, talking, and naming for you; it means learning to respect and use your own brains and instincts; hence, grappling with hard work" (Rich, 1979, p. 233). Rich argues that women are perceived outside of the classroom not as sovereign beings but as prey and that consequently:

> The undermining of self, of a woman's sense of her right to occupy space and walk freely in the world, is deeply relevant to education. The capacity to think independently, to take intellectual risks, to assert ourselves mentally, is inseparable from our physical way of being in the world, our feelings of personal integrity....how much of my working energy is drained by the subliminal knowledge that, as a woman, I test my physical right to exist each time I go out alone? (Rich, 1979, p. 242)

The "reflex prejudgement" which Rich offers, that being "I do not deserve to take up time and space" (Rich, 1979, p. 244), is surely echoed in the lives of women in all walks of life, and can perhaps quite graphically be seen in the lives of federally incarcerated women. In light of such a context in which women strive to be, Rich suggests that teachers of women can "either teach passively, accepting these conditions, or actively, helping our students identify and resist them" (Rich, 1979, p. 244).

> We can refuse to accept passive, obedient learning and insist upon critical thinking. We can become harder on our women students, giving them the kinds of 'cultural prodding' that men receive, but on different terms and in a different style....We need to keep our standards very high, not to accept a woman's preconceived sense of her limitations....At a time when adult literacy is generally low, we need to demand more, not less, of women...for the sake of their futures as thinking beings.... (Rich, 1979, p. 244)

And as thinking beings, for women in a man's world this means "thinking critically,

refusing to accept the givens, making connections between facts and ideas which men have left unconnected" (Rich, 1979, p. 245). It means constantly critiquing language; ever watching and listening "in all the descriptions we are given of this world, for the silences, the absences, the nameless, the unspoken, the uncoded - for there we will find the true knowledge of women" (Rich, 1979, p. 245). In the breaking of the silences, in the naming of themselves, in the uncovering of the hidden and in making themselves present, Rich suggests women then "begin to define a reality which resonates to us, which affirms our being" and which allows women teachers and students to take each other seriously; in other words, "to begin taking charge of our lives" (Rich, 1979, p. 245).

It is not just incarcerated women who may be deemed unworthy to be challenged to become mature, thinking, independent beings who can take their rightful and chosen place in society. It is all women (and perhaps many men) who must work against undereducation, partial education, miseducation, and infantilization. Yet in light of even the limited understanding of imprisoned women we are offered through the work of Shaw and Kendall presented earlier in this chapter, such a need is particularly critical and urgent for incarcerated women.

CHAPTER FIVE

NOTEWORTHY PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS/CURRICULA

Throughout the prison education literature a very small number of substantive prison education programs are described. While not all programs to be discussed were available to women prisoners, all programs do reflect the possibilities available in prison education, and potentially in the education of women prisoners.

The Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project

A highly ambitious program in California in the early seventies reflects a project which was created for women only (Faith, 1993; Davidson, 1995). Initiated at the urging of interested prisoners at the California Institution for Women (with a population exceeding 600), the University of California developed and undertook the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project. From 1972 to 1976, weekends saw "carloads of graduate student instructors, professors, law students, artists, performers and community activists" from throughout the State of California converge on the prison from distances of up to 500 miles (Faith, 1993, p. 275).

While most of the inmates were not qualifed by regular university admissions criteria, they were able to take part in this program on a mature student basis. Although differing in age, ethnic and racial backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, education, lengths of sentence, and sexual orientation, "all were prepared to work hard to prove they could do university level work. And they did" (Faith, 1993, p. 277).

Accredited university-level courses and cultural events were offered in the prison, with courses designed according to priorities expressed by the prisoners themselves (Faith,

1993, p. 287), while cultural events took the form of poetry readings, concerts, and dances, as well as shows of artwork done by prisoners, a three-day Black Culture Marathon, the organizing of family days, and the like.

> In contrast with the existing vocational and school programs in the prison which offered instruction in sewing, hairdressing, office work or Grade 12 equivalency, we introduced the study of critical theory and substantive social issues affecting women's lives. (Faith, p. 287)

> As a collectivist program, the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project accepted the views of imprisoned women that educational programs and empowering knowledges were the most useful tools that could be offered within the confines of a prison. We also found music and the arts to be the most collectively healing antidotes to (and refuges within) an oppressive environment. (Faith, p. 285)

> To teach was to work together with students to ask critical questions, critique the androcentricity of conventional texts, make political sense of social reality, and effect changes in the construction of knowledge and the analysis of experience. (Faith, 1993, pp. 287-288)

The curriculum offered varied from year to year, and included such courses as: Women and the Law, Ethnic Studies, Radical Psychology, Politics: U.S. Institutions and Political Consciousness, Creative Arts, On Being a Woman, Drug Use in U.S. Culture, and Creative Writing and Literature. Thirty-five additional popular courses and workshops were offered, including Art History, Dance/Theatre, Journalism, Literature, Medicine and Society, Playwriting, Political Theory, Reading Skills, Sexism and Racism, Social Theory, Survey of the Blues, Women and Film, and Women's Health Issues (Faith, 1993, pp. 294-295).

Women needing academic assistance and those wishing to undertake independent studies were matched with volunteer tutors from the community or from the university's graduate program. Into the prison were "smuggled uncensored knowledge resources,

revolutionary ideals, and unqualified support for women trying to define themselves in a confusing, hurtful situation" (Faith, 1993, p. 297).

> We went to the prison with the idea that anyone, ourselves included, can benefit from becoming critically aware of social reality, and confident enough to act on that awareness. Education is for raising social consciousness as much as for gaining marketable skills. We believed social responsibility to be the purpose and the prerequisite for empowerment and liberation. We saw both universities and prisons as agencies of social control. The curricula (programs), student (prisoner) selection, and reward (punishment) processes are all determined by hierarchies, through which men and women are made to fit their class-divided niches as human commodities. We understood that schools have systematically deprived the majority of education without which political power (self-rule) is impossible. We agreed with Cicero's ancient dictum that "The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn." Our purpose was to facilitate rather than obstruct the learning process. (Faith, 1993, p. 310)

> The intended purpose of the SCWPP was to extend to women in prison the benefits of higher education and the empowerment that accrues from gaining political knowledge, recognizing constructive life choices (despite structural goal limitations) and acquiring skills to act on them. However, the program had at least as much educational value for the volunteers as it did for the prisoners. The volunteers came to understand who is in prison, and why, beyond the fact of having broken a law. The volunteers also received an education in the power of the state to delimit options for those judged criminal. (Faith, 1993, p. 311)

Faith states that recidivism rates, the most "conventional (if flawed)" means of prison program evaluation, nonetheless were worth boasting about: of the

> approximately 100 women who completed the credit courses and with whom we remained in touch for at least five years following their release on parole, only five were recidivated (that is, were returned to prison for a new crime or a violation of the terms of parole) compared to the normal CIW recidivism rate which exceeded 70 percent. (Faith, 1993, p. 314)

Other programs discussed in the literature were created and carried out on a much smaller scale, but nonetheless provide interesting insights into potentially effective prison education programs.

The Bedford Hills Project

In New York State's Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a women's maximum security prison, inmate Kathy Boudin, during her fourteen years of incarceration, was involved in developing education and peer counseling programs. Working as a teacher's aide while at the same time studying for her Master's Degree in education, Boudin was in a position to develop a curriculum unit dealing with AIDS, a topic of immediate and deep concern to her fellow inmates.

This curriculum was developed in response to the "intense emotional and intellectual energy" exhibited following the ABE reading class viewing a television program dealing with AIDS (Boudin, 1995, p. 142). Combining literacy, critical-thinking, and a problem-posing methodology, students were offered the opportunity to take an active part in the exploration of this highly relevant topic. Rather than "a curriculum approach primarily based on an individualized, decontextualized subskill model through the use of workbooks" (Boudin, 1995, p. 141), students engaged in curriculum development as they brought their fears and concerns, reading materials, discussions, reflections, and writings on AIDS to form the materials for the project. The creation of a play, subsequently performed for different segments of the prison population, a video of the play, and the formation of an AIDS peer counseling and education program were concrete outcomes of the literacy work done by these women. Another curriculum unit also arising from the concerns of the students resulted in a handbook for new inmates which would address the questions and fears experienced by women new to the institution.

In both curriculum units the concerns of the women became the basis for literacy

learning and included development in vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, writing skills, the use of free writing, knowledge of plays, as well as an examination of language forms (Standard American English, Black dialect, slang, "Spanglish," and informal speech).

> The strength of the critical-thinking, problem-posing literacy curriculum lies in the interaction of learners examining real problems in their lives and developing their literacy ability in order to examine these problems....As adult learners, they were able to enjoy a breadth of literacy genres, including drama, poetry and autobiography. The growth of literacy capability was accompanied by another kind of growth: that of the capacity to pose problems, to analyze them, and to act in cooperation with others. The development of these qualities is especially important for people in prison because of the challenges the learners face in being able to reconstruct a life in society. The critical-thinking literacy curriculum, by inviting learners to join in defining their own educational experience, is one method of encouraging this. (Boudin, 1995, p. 144)

The Pine Grove Project

In 1994 the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) published the findings of "women-positive" literacy activities undertaken in twelve communities across the country. The purpose of this phase of their research was to examine what women-positive literacy programs, planned and carried out by women literacy students themselves, would look like if the women were given the opportunity to create their own literacy project. One of the communities which participated in this activity was the voluntary academic upgrading program at Pine Grove Correctional Centre, the Saskatchewan provincial prison for women located in Prince Albert. Although some federally-sentenced women serve their period of incarceration at this institution, it primarily houses women with less than a two-year sentence. With an average daily "count" of approximately sixty-seven women, virtually all of the inmates are First Nations,

primarily Cree.

Students at Pine Grove were invited to discuss possible activities they could engage in for this project, and the outcome was a decision to create "crisis resource booklets for different regions of the province" (Lloyd, 1994, p. 205). Together the students wrote a crisis scenario with which they were familiar, determined whether or not community resources were available to assist women in dealing with such a crisis, and working individually, as a group, and with the larger inmate population, identified both formal and informal sources of assistance.

This project was deemed woman-positive for several reasons, including the acknowledgement that the "everyday lives of many women in conflict with the law take place in a context of crisis," a reality often ignored both by agencies providing social services and the criminal justice system, and that "the women themselves are expert not only at identifying the crises in their lives, but also at identifying what they need in order to deal with these crises" (Lloyd, 1994, p. 205). In the students' writing of the crisis scenarios, the program acknowledged that "their way of telling their story should be the authorized version of what happens in their lives," and that "informal, peer networks of support are as important as social agency and charitable support" (Lloyd, 1994, p. 205). As well, "it acknowledged that women can learn to trust their gut-level response, a response that is often spiritual and emotional as well as rational" (Lloyd, 1994, pp. 205-206). In addition, the women were given the space to write and talk about both the quality and the quantity of their lives (Lloyd, 1994, p. 206).

This conscious attempt to produce a holistic resource for women gave some

What this feminist curriculum does not do is "tell women what to think, how to live, or what to do," nor does it tell women "they must change, or in what direction to move," nor "encourage women to change themselves in order to fit in better or to lie to themselves in order to feel better" (CCLOW, 1996, p. 11). It does invite women to think about issues of invisibility and power, to look at their lives and the lives of others and to make connections between them (CCLOW, 1996, p. 11). Learners' contributions are valued, their strengths recognized; they are helped to see that their knowledge is important and valuable, and they determine the content of the curriculum (CCLOW, 1996, p. 14).

> When women learners are at the centre of the curriculum, when they guide curriculum, when they participate in discussions, when they see their words written and read by others, when they recognize the value of their words while realistically acknowledging the challenges ahead of them beyond the classroom walls - when these things occur, women are strengthened in ways that are hard to measure but that nonetheless serve them well. (CCLOW, 1996, p. 14)

UVic/SFU Prison University Program

While female offenders at the Kingston Prison for Women enjoyed few opportunities for furthering their education beyond the seemingly mundane (as did those women who chose to serve their sentences in provincial institutions under the Exchange of Services Agreement, thereby losing their access to the few federal programs offered), a highly regarded program was being offered to male inmates serving their sentences in the Matsqui and Kent institutions in British Columbia. Originally offered through the University of Victoria and later through Simon Fraser University, over a period of twenty years (1973-1993) male prisoners were given the opportunity to earn an undergraduate university degree. Acting as an off-campus facility within the prison walls, the program

attracted "20% of the prison population (average of 50 students per term) and has been described as the most successful program of its kind in North America" (Duguid, 1981, p. 148). The theoretical assumptions upon which this program was based

> were firmly grounded in the cognitive-developmental tradition, flowing from Piaget's work in cognitive development through Kohlberg's linking of those stages to levels of moral reasoning ability. The emphasis, consistent with Kohlberg, was never on morality per se nor even on moral content, but on moral reasoning, the development through the cognitive growth implicit in higher education, of high levels of empathy (role-taking) and improved decision-making capabilities. (Duguid, 1981, p. 148)

> We assumed throughout that our students had certain deficits and that we were not there to "change" but rather to develop, to facilitate a natural process of growth that had been stunted or distracted by environmental and social factors....(Duguid, 1981, p. 149)

This "humanities core curriculum" was developed to link "knowledge, understanding, judgement and choice," and was promoted as follows:

> The curriculum readings, selected from classic and modern sources, provide an introduction to a wide range of topics and themes central to both the humanities and to living in contemporary society...the curriculum can serve to enhance cultural literacy and critical thinking abilities. Through reading primary sources ranging in time from Socrates to Skinner, students examine the moral, ethical, cultural and political issues by which Western intellectual traditions have characterized the human condition. Socrates' decision to drink the hemlock, Thoreau's rationale for civil disobedience, George Eliot's ruminations about duty, and Orwell's dark visions of the future - all demand of the reader an effort to understand and judge. Accompanying writing assignments encourage student discussions and help focus students' writing, stimulating reasoned analyses under the direction of a tutor/instructor. (Duguid, 1988, p. 57)

Results were quite astonishing. For those persons attending this university program, recidivism rates were seen to be dramatically reduced. In spite of the successes realized through this program, however, the Correctional Service of Canada chose not to renew the $400,000/year university program contract as the CSC focus changed in the late 1980s

to concentrate on adult basic education/basic literacy and on life skills, areas which were intended to more directly address factors leading to the commission of crime and resultant incarceration.

Although these specific prison education programs may no longer be offered in any penal institution, they speak eloquently to the possibilities for meaningful and potentially life-changing educational endeavours within a prison setting. Such programs may require substantial monetary and/or volunteer resources, but societally we are not currently inclined to offer such enriching opportunities to those persons presently inhabiting our prisons at an increasing rate and at great expense to the Canadian taxpayer. While the average annual cost of incarcerating a male offender in a federal institution in 1993-4 was $45,753.00, the yearly cost for incarcerating a woman during this same fiscal year was $78,221.00 (Solicitor General, 1995). This latter cost can be expected to have greatly increased in light of the five new female facilities created within the past few years, of which the Edmonton Institution for women is but one. In light of the substantial decrease in recidivism rates resulting from the larger Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project and the UVic/SFU university program, it can be maintained that such enriching educational opportunities can be seen, if only at the very least, as having enormous potential to save the Canadian taxpayer vast amounts of money, not to mention the apparent potential for substantially and positively changing the lives of inmate participants.

We turn now from these past prison education projects to enter the school at the Edmonton Institution for Women.

CHAPTER SIX

FIREWEED EDUCATION CENTRE - THE FIRST YEAR

Preparing for the Opening

In CSC's Western Region, which includes the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, teacher services for federal penal institutions are contracted out to the private company Excalibur Learning Resources, which also holds the contract for all of Ontario and is currently working to obtain the contract for the Pacific Region. With the Edmonton Institution for Women scheduled to open November 17, 1995, correspondence dated June 30, 1995, from the EIFW Warden to the Vice-President of Excalibur indicates the teacher was to be in place by September 1, 1995, in order to have "the education programs...in operation once the women arrive."

The First Teacher

With a Master's Degree in Intercultural Education, many years' teaching experience in adult education, notably with Native students, and one year as a correctional educator at Drumheller Penitentiary (a male federal facility in Drumheller, Alberta), Arlette, the first teacher, had approached the prospect of working at EIFW with high hopes and expectations:

> When EIFW was publicized, CHANGE was the attraction; change of conditions, layout, structure and approaches. Rehabilitation was on the mandate but the approach was to be holistic, woman centered, integrative, and empowering in a cooperative system, where the client is involved in planning and decision making. I saw a new opportunity to implement the practices supporting the theories of Freire. A community in the making - a sense of sisterhood where women could do for women, according to their needs, providing mentoring for one another. What potential, what empowering promises held, both for clients and staff, and finally, a sense of freedom to facilitate new development in learning and healing. What a

dream for all the women involved. (Barrette, 1997)

Perceiving education as a process of transformation, rebuilding bridges, and empowerment, and recognizing the women would bring to their educational endeavours varying past experiences requiring healing, Arlette drew upon the work of Freire and others from which to approach her teaching. Using as foundation documents the *Creating Choices Task Force Report* and *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Belenky et al, upon which the women-centred approach of EIFW is based, Arlette indicated several additional texts of import in her work, including: *The Spirit Weeps* by the Nechi Institute (dealing with incest); *Healing the Addictive Mind* by Lee Jampolsky; Martha Baldwin's *Self-Sabatage*; Robert Becker's *Don't Talk, Don't Trust, Don't Feel*; *Adult Children of Abusive Parents* by Steven Farmer; *Healing the Child Within* by Charles Whitfield; *Magic of NLP Demystified* by Byron Lewis and Frank Pucelik; David Ellis's *Becoming a Master Student*; and Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*.

As an "educator working in a correctional setting, not a correctional worker in an educational setting," Arlette saw her role not as standing in judgement of the women, but giving them "the best that I can; not to abuse them or to make things worse for them."

Naming the School

In order that a penal institution is not reflected on inmate-student transcripts, schools in federal correctional centres are given names which can effectively disguise their location while nonetheless remaining reflective of the particular institution. Thus, for example, as Drumheller Penitientiary is located on the top of a hill, the school is named the "Hilltop Education Centre."

philosophy and objectives of the school were necessarily rooted, is as follows:

> The Correctional Service of Canada, as part of the Criminal Justice System, contributes to the protection of society by actively encouraging and assisting offenders to become law abiding citizens while exercising reasonable, safe, secure, and humane control. This broad statement encompasses the overall mission (November 1995) of the Education and Training Division:
>
> > To assist in meeting the identified education and vocational needs of offenders in fostering rehabilitative aspects required for reintegration to the community as productive, contributing, law-abiding citizens.
> >
> > To facilitate continuity in educational programming when offenders are released to the community.
> >
> > To provide appropriate library services similar to those in the community, while meeting the needs of the correctional environment.

The specific mission (November 1995) of the Fireweed Education Centre as developed by Arlette states:

> The Fireweed Education Centre is dedicated to offering a multi-dimensional and holistic approach to education. The learning process aims to foster a desire for life long learning, personal growth and development. [By December 1995, this sentence had been modified to include "marketable skills."]

Alberta Education's aims and goals for secondary education were fully endorsed in this application, and were specified and quoted as follows:

> Aim of Education
>
> The aim of education is to develop the knowledge, the skills and the positive attitudes of individuals, so that they will be self-confident, capable and committed to setting goals, making informed choices and acting in ways which will improve their own lives and the life of their community.
>
> Goals of Secondary Education
>
> - develop the ability to think conceptually, critically and creatively; to acquire and apply problem solving skills; to apply principles of logic; and to use different modes of enquiry.

- acquire basic knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes needed to become responsible citizens and contributing members of society.
- become aware of the expectations, and be prepared for the opportunities of the work place as employees or employers; as entrepreneurs or volunteers.
- learn about themselves and develop positive and realistic self-images.
- develop constructive relationships with others, based on respect, trust, cooperation, consideration and caring as an aspect of moral and ethical behaviour.

(1989-90 High School Handbook, p. 6)

Within the application for private school status, Arlette stated such status would enable the development of "individualized, competency based courses consistent with Alberta Education Curriculum Guidelines," in addition to providing "a challenging opportunity for the Correctional Service of Canada and Alberta Education to explore and develop innovative and creative strategies for correctional education and result in maintaining the quality of service to our learners."

Although school hours of operation were originally designed to fulfill CSC's requirement for library access a minimum of two evenings per week, this schedule never materialized. The school and library were thus operational from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily, with the possibility clients could access services after the 4:30 p.m. count. Operating on a year-round, continuous intake basis for the literacy, ABE and high school programs, the school was expected to offer 230 days of operation per year, excluding statutory holidays, weekends, maintenance shutdowns or short lockdowns.

Preliminary CSC research had indicated that inmate participation in education programs within CSC institutions was on average 30%, which would translate into 18-21 students based on EIFW's projected capacity of 60-66 offenders. It is surprising, then, that the classroom at EIFW was designed and built to accommodate only eight students

and the computer lab to hold only four computer stations.

As a result of Arlette contacting all of the institutions from which the women would be sent to glean the pertinent educational information she required, by October 1995 such data was available for only 47 (48%) of the 102 women eligible to transfer to EIFW. Nonetheless, it was felt this information was relevant in determining the educational needs to be addressed (Table I).

In the March 1996 application for private school status, enrolment was as shown in Table II.

TABLE I: INITIAL EDUCATIONAL STATUS

STATUS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
No testing done	7
Had refused testing	6
Literacy (0-6)	8
ABE (6-10)	10
GED	8
High School (correspondence)	7
University	1
TOTAL	47

TABLE II ENROLLMENT AS AT PRIVATE SCHOOL APPLICATION DATE		
	In-Class	**Correspondence**
Literacy	3	
ABE	9	
GED		4
College		
University		1
TOTAL	12	5

A section of the private school application offers clear descriptions of the various levels of educational programming to be made available to the inmate-students, and reads as follows:

> **Literacy/ESL (0 - 6)**: Many inmates are in need of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. This program will be offered in association with the P.A.L.S. [Project Adult Literacy Society] project. Using specifically designed materials, individual tutors and computer assisted learning (with audio instruction) to support group delivery will enhance the learning process.
>
> **Adult Basic Education (ABE)**: is designed for adults who are functioning below Grade 10 level. This program includes basic upgrading in English, Mathematics, Sciences, and Social Studies. It includes Computer Assisted Learning (Plato 2000, 1995) as well as regular classroom instruction and study. The delivery will be offered by contract personnel from the Excalibur Learning Resource Centre. This program is a prerequisite for enrolment at subsequent educational levels. Also, it can act as a refresher for more mature learners who have been away from the educational enterprise for many years.
>
> **Secondary Education**: various options available.
>
> a) accredited High School courses through Alberta Correspondence School with in house instruction.

b) G.E.D. - General Education Diploma preparation leading to an Equivalency Diploma.
c) CALM 20, Special Projects/Interest, Native Language courses designed to meet Alberta Education standards and the needs of our students.

Post Secondary Education: self-funded by students.

a) Technical and Vocational: Students must meet entrance requirements of the Institutions. Courses are available through correspondence from N.A.I.T., S.A.I.T., and various Colleges in Alberta.

b) University level courses are available through correspondence from Universities offering Distance Education (i.e. Athabasca, Simon Fraser, Queen's).

The objectives and philosophy of the school were presented in the application as follows:

> We recognize that individual adult learners have varying past experiences, competencies, learning styles, and educational needs. Women also have various priorities based on the stages of their life cycle. It is our belief that education is a life long process, a state of openness and receptivity, which distinctly affects the learner mentally, affectively and morally. Consequently, it is our objective to provide a wide range of educational opportunities for the learners to enhance themselves academically, socially, and economically so that they may return to the community as empowered and responsible citizens.
>
> Our goals for the future are:
> - expanding our educational staff: teachers, librarian, counsellor.
> - expanding operation of the Library from 2 to 5 evenings and weekends.
> - expanding the Library and Learning Resource Centre.
> - establishing joint community education ventures.
> - expanding distance education opportunities through technologies: teleconferences, CAI, etc.

As a minimum consistent enrolment of seven full-time students was required for private school status to be granted, the Fireweed Education Centre had not obtained such status even as late as March 1997. Many students were part-time (half-days), and thus even with 12 people attending, the necessary quotas were not met, as the four students working on correspondence courses could not be included as they were registered as

Alberta Distance Learning students. Therefore the application was denied at the time, and the later transferring out of most of the women served to postpone indefinitely the possibility of achieving such status. Since that time, and following Arlette's departure, the idea has been abandoned for, in her words, "the value of accreditation was lost".

CSC's expectations for the contract with Excalibur Learning Resources appears to have been that the teacher would bring with her all of the course materials and resources required for school and library. Such was not the case, however, and it was therefore incumbent upon Arlette to select and order curriculum materials, and in addition to simply managing the library as had been outlined in her contract, she was required to create it. Although Arlette had initially been advised by CSC that no budget was in place for such materials, requests for resources were made and materials subsequently purchased for both classroom and library, with a basic investment in library reference materials for the school, texts related to high school literature courses, legal texts (as per Correctional directives), and resources for in-house programs such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, recreation, and other areas of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and well-being.

Because there was no budget for the library and school, donations of books were sought from the public and private sectors: print materials for the library were received from private individuals, church groups, the University of Alberta, Grant McEwan College, and the Edmonton Public Teachers' Resource Centre. The large volume of books received made it necessary to become quite selective in accepting further donations as space in the library for additional materials was soon at a premium. Arrangements were made, however, for accessing materials from the Edmonton Public Library under its "shut-

in services" program. (For examples of books requested by the women, see Appendix I).

In addition to resource acquisition, it was necessary for Arlette to learn several computer systems, including the Computer Lab system (Plato); the Imagic library program; the OMS (Offender Management System) for case and file management; Windows, to correspond with other staff in the institution; and EXCEL. Although a stand-alone computer was available in the library for cataloguing and managing the library system, and four computers were available on a separate network to students in the computer lab, nine months following Arlette's arrival at EIFW still no computer had been made available in the teacher's office, where Arlette anticipated she would require two separate computers, including one for the OMS and a stand-alone for computer lab monitoring, as well as a printer. In the interests of security, computer modem access to outside sources was not permissible, and thus Arlette was prevented from accessing information via this means.

The Curriculum

Due to the projected educational levels of students expected at the institution, the majority of curricular materials obtained were at the basic literacy and ABE levels, with the greatest number of resources for these levels comprised of materials published by Laubach (Appendix II), and purchased from and on the recommendation of the Edmonton P.A.L.S. Project.

Adopting the Alberta curriculum as a guideline, Arlette stated she used an approach based on an adult education model while concentrating on skills that would have to be mastered to a Grade 10 level in mathematics, English, social studies and science.

Rejecting as "too based in life skills rather than academics" the previously discussed curriculum developed by Michael Collins, and highlighting the need for a significant amount of remedial work by the students, Arlette chose to use the Alberta Vocational College adult basic skills list which contains in ungraded progression a list of essential academic skills for ABE. A brief sketch of the curriculum in the areas of social studies, science, computers, vocabulary development and Native studies was offered by Arlette.

In social studies, Arlette stated her basic concentration was on Canada, the world, and a number of global issues which would offer students an overview preparing them for study in this subject at the Grades 10 and 11 levels. Through use of the textbook *Origins: A History of Canada*, with corresponding videos for each chapter, and the text *Across Canada*, a geography text with accompanying workbook following a physical and economic geography of the country, students would be exposed to the materials orally, visually, and through reading and writing. Beginning with physical regions, students would progress through map skills, graphs, and how the earth was formed, the latter tying in with earth science in the study of weather patterns. Subsequent application of knowledge would lead into the "cognitive area of learning with application and understanding of principles of that knowledge, and inference, leading well into the discussion of such things as Native rights, political conflicts. Knowing your country is a number one priority." This also points to important skills required in the job market, suggested Arlette; "For example, what other resources do we have? In the area of tourism, how will this be affected if we keep polluting the water, cutting the trees? It opens up all kinds of possibilities."

In the Native Studies course which Arlette had also used when teaching in the Drumheller institution, a collection of readings gathered from anthropology courses she had taken were adapted to the appropriate levels and combined with overheads and videos as the basis for a significant amount of discussion. Movies such as *The Last of the Mohicans* would be used as the basis for critical discussion. Films portraying the lives of Joseph Brant (*Divided Loyalties*) and Louis Riel (*Riel*) would be viewed and would also serve as the basis for critical discussion. Speeches made by such Native leaders as Big Bear would be read on the basis that "social and political dynamics today are a result of historical events, and the better we understand these, the better we can make informed decisions and judgments."

For the science curriculum Arlette advised she had developed her own teaching materials for human biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, animal biology and plants. Current scientific discoveries would be included in the curriculum to illustrate the constantly changing nature of the field. One of the limitations of studying science within a prison setting is that no lab work is possible due to security concerns, and thus Arlette had developed a "general science prep course that would prepare someone for science at a Grade 10 level, and then students would go on correspondence packages."

Each subject, of course, "has a vocabulary of its own [and] once you understand the language of these subjects they are not so difficult to understand; students can explore and discover new interests and options."

Arlette sought to make the learning relevant to the students, taking their histories and learning styles into account, and to offer critical education where questioning and

computer lab in order that students could "access this for completion of assignments for correspondence school, or for a newsletter for the institution, or for the Native Sisterhood memos, etc." For security reasons and to prevent illegal activities, all printing had to be monitored and students were unable to work in the computer lab unsupervised.

Some inmates were given the opportunity to train and work as assistants within both the computer lab and the library, within parameters as outlined by Arlette:

> The teacher assistant has a function to be, not responsible for the security [in the computer lab] but to cooperate with the teacher to make sure nothing is abused. The same with the library assistant. They follow guidelines and procedures. It is not their responsibility to make security decisions or sanction other inmates regarding their behaviour, but they can remind people of different rules and obligations. This is one of the unwritten rules in a prison; you can't put one inmate in supervision over others because these dynamics are taken back to the units, so we see assistants in peer role models.

The women working in the computer lab and library were provided the same training as Arlette received with the exception of certain functions involving security concerns.

The Crises

Before the process of setting up the school and library was completed, the women began arriving at the institution, and Arlette quickly ran into obstacles which prevented the smooth transition to a fully functioning school.

> The women were at a higher [security] level; the building was not finished; the high concentration of maximum-security level women required physical supervision at all times, and it was necessary for me to stop being a teacher to become a guard, wearing a radio at all times in addition to the standard PPA [personal panic alarm] to monitor movement of students and clients in the school, library, and computer lab.

With the women now in the institution, Arlette was presented with additional duties which included acting as educational counsellor, working with CSC staff in the completion of

over some access, responsibilities, policies, and decisions made, suggesting it was like being on the fence, "shot by both sides." The responsibilities inherent in each of Arlette's roles served to confuse the students, she felt, as well as to engender mistrust, thus undermining her educational relationship with the learners. In retrospect, Arlette expressed her perception of these early months in the prison:

> Pretty soon the tension grew. Administrators and committees made arbitrary decisions over processes they did not fully understand. Authority to finalize was not delegated. Verbal agreements never concretized. Energy was misdirected and everything had to be done "yesterday!" I kept seeing the deadlines approaching yet so much still needed doing. We opened on schedule and everyone knows the results that followed. Violence occurred more frequently and escalated both physically and psychologically. Unpredictable and erratic flare ups were daily occurrences after a while. (Barrette, 1997)

The Edmonton Institution for Women did open on schedule, and the women were gradually transferred to this new facility. The majority of the women early sent there were from the Kingston Prison for Women, and as they were at the maximum security level were housed in the specially designed "enhanced unit." The enhanced unit had been built to accommodate a total of twelve women, offering room for six women at the maximum security level and six spaces for women in crisis. Within a very short time, however, 18 women at the maximum security level were quartered in this unit. On February 29, 1996, inmate Denise Fayant was found hanged in her cell in the enhanced unit one day after her transfer to EIFW from the Regional Psychiatric Centre. Although Denise was alive when discovered by CSC staff, she died in hospital on March 2, and while her death was originally classified a suicide, in mid-May 1996 two fellow-inmates were charged with her murder. Preceding and following this incident, within a very short period of time a total of

seven women escaped briefly from the institution, with a resultant public outcry raised in light of these incidents.

> The stress affected everyone. We were all living in hope for "down the road" or sometime in the future when we would all be better off. We would look back at this time and say, "it wasn't that bad." The women had believed the same and now were rebelling against a situation which gradually drifted toward the "old system." The bottom of the structure which had held such promise and expectation essentially eroded. The whole system became more rigid and defensive in management, procedures, policies, and practices in order to survive public uproar and the scrutinity of the investigations. (Barrette, 1997)

On May 1, 1996, less than six months after its opening, the Edmonton Institution for Women was virtually shut down. All but eight women at the minimum security level were transferred to other institutions in the province, and throughout the spring and summer security upgrades were undertaken to render the institution more secure.

Arlette suffered her own crises during the early months of 1996. Surgery in late March took her away from the institution for several weeks, and upon her return the majority of the women had been transferred out. Soon after, Arlette's sister died tragically and Arlette flew home to Eastern Canada for the funeral. In summer Arlette underwent an emergency appendectomy, and during her recovery from this operation received news that one of the EIFW staff members, an experienced corrections employee, had also died tragically.

> Sleeping pattern disruption became chronic. I started dreading the environment and yet my involvement in the work and determination to see it through kept me coming back. I had to identify my triggers and come to the conclusion that the whole environment presented for me similar characteristics of a dysfunctional and abusive family. We had secrets, violence, isolation, denial, paranoia, division, broken promises and scapegoating....And all the time the cameras kept rolling....For me, the next few months were an exercise in survival - maintaining basic operations and finishing implementation of the Library and computer project.

> The routine work gave me and the remaining few clients a sense of stability and predictability badly needed in the wake of chaos. (Barrette, 1997).

Serious reexamination of her motivation and commitment to the responsibilities and duties of her teaching position led Arlette to contemplate "the role of education within the rehabilitation mandate of the CSC. I was not convinced that rehabilitation could be effective in our mandate. Consequently, after a serious period of soul searching, I left EIFW" (Barrette, 1997).

The difficult and at times tragic circumstances of the early months in the Edmonton Institution for Women had a profound effect on the teacher, and on her ability to carry out the duties and responsibilities of her position. The students were greatly affected as well, as we shall see in the following pages.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INTERVIEWS

Between June 11 and November 17, 1996, eleven visits were made to the Edmonton Institution for Women. The Saskatchewan Penitentiary in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, were each visited on one occasion in late November, 1996, in order to interview some of the women who had been transferred to these facilities from EIFW upon the partial shutdown of the latter institution in May 1996.

Whereas initially the intent had been to focus on the literacy curricular materials and the teaching strategies used within the classroom at EIFW, to be ascertained by physical examination of the materials and observation of the teacher and students within the classroom setting, the partial shutdown of the prison due to the many crises within the first several months of operation precluded that research process. The majority of the women participating in the school programme had been at the maximum security level, and all inmates at this classification were transferred from EIFW to more secure correctional facilities within Alberta and Saskatchewan, with no expectation they would be returned to EIFW in the foreseeable future. No new inmates were received at EIFW pending the security system upgrade carried out over the summer months, and of the eight inmates remaining at EIFW, two were subsequently released, and only one of the remaining six women was in the education program. Once access had been gained to commence research in the prison, this one student remained in the school programme; because she did her studies in her unit, however, the classroom was empty.

It was not until late August 1996 that a slow transfer of women to EIFW began, and by late October the classroom was again full. As the study was modified to focus on the first year of the EIFW school, with November 17, 1996, being the first anniversary of its opening, interviews with those students willing to participate in the study began in early October. Martha, the substitute teacher, made possible my addressing the students in the classroom to present my research focus and to invite the women's participation. Eight students at EIFW, as well as four in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, and two in the Regional Psychiatric Centre, agreed to participate. One of the women in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary had not been at the Edmonton Institution for Women, and another woman from the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, although having spent some time at EIFW, had not attended school there. These two women expressed an interest in taking part in the research, however, and their participation was welcomed.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format; specific questions were asked of each participant, but each was also invited to speak of her experiences in the school at EIFW, in other institutions where she had served part of her current or previous sentence(s), and to speak of any other educational issues she wished. Because this is a literacy/education study, and not a criminological, psychological, nor sociological one, particular types of questions were not asked. For example, participants were never queried as to the nature of their offences, reasons for committing their offences, experiences they may have had at the Kingston Penitentiary for Women, nor were they probed for any form of information which could be deemed of a personal, sensitive, or sensational nature. The structured questions asked were:

1. What is the highest grade level you have attained?
2. To what do you attribute your current reading and writing abilities?
3. Why are you involved in this literacy education programme?
4. Do you believe that improved reading and writing abilities will help you when you are released back into the community? If yes, how will they be of benefit? If no, why not?
5. Does this literacy programme address your current literacy needs?
6. Can you think of any way in which the programme could better meet your needs?
7. Is there any way in which the outside community could assist you in your literacy development while you are in this institution? Upon your release?
8. What do you hope to do upon release?

The educational levels of the women, both upon initial involvement with the criminal justice system and in their current studies within the schools, were as shown in Table III.

TABLE III: EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

Number of Women	Initial Level	Current Level
1	Grade 3	GED
1	Grade 5/6	GED
1	Grade 6	GED
1	Grade 6	Grades 4 - 6
1	Grade 6	Grade 11
1	Grade 7	Grades 8/9
2	Grade 8	GED
1	Grade 8	Grade 10
1	Grade 9	Grade 8
1	Grade 10	GED
1	Grade 10	lst yr Athabasca Univ.
1	Grade 11	GED
1	Grade 12	4th yr Queen's Univ.

Drawn up as they were almost a year prior to the interview dates and based on statistics which had indicated the majority of incarcerated women have fairly low literacy and educational levels, interview questions were developed with low literacy levels in mind. Subsequently, in interviewing the women working at the university level, the word "literacy" was omitted in question 3, and the word "educational" was substituted for the word "literacy" in questions 5 and 7.

Factors Impacting Prison Education

Throughout the course of the interviews several themes emerged which illuminate and illustrate the reality of participation in correctional education programs for some women.

1. Schooling in Other Penal Institutions/Inter-Institution Disruptions

It soon became apparent that many of the women, essentially those who had longer histories of involvement with the criminal justice system, had been involved in education programs in many correctional institutions. Eleven of the fourteen women spoke of participating in such schooling, with three of them mentioning education taken in youth detention centres where attending school is mandatory. One of the women had been incarcerated in six separate institutions, provincial and federal, during the course of her relatively young life, ranging from a youth detention centre through a series of remand centres to EIFW, the federal penitentiary where she is now serving the end of her sentence.

Many of the women had served time in one or more correctional institutions in which there may not have been adequate educational opportunities. This seems to have

been the case most frequently in remand centres, where it is expected the average length of incarceration will be relatively short. Women being transferred from one institution to another have their educational programs disrupted and educational opportunities may or may not be present in the institutions to which they are sent. For the participants in this study it would seem that although they may have been working on particular courses in one institution, upon being transferred educational documentation and course materials did not appear to follow them to the receiving institution. The transfers, in many cases, also entailed a transfer from one province to another, with each province having different educational systems and requirements. Transfers between provincial and federal institutions also meant a difference in availability of educational opportunities, as did moving from a juvenile detention centre in which education is mandatory, to an adult provincial or federal institution upon commission of a new indictable offence. Education is neither standardized between provinces, nor between and within federal and provincial institutions across the country, nor within the Prairie Region.

Held in protective custody in Edmonton Remand prior to arriving at EIFW, and having been in and out of Edmonton Remand for the past ten years, Kari had done some schooling there but reported all schooling had been cancelled due to the government's withdrawal of funding. She also reported a lack of educational opportunities in Medicine Hat Remand. Recently having served ten months in Calgary Remand, Kari reported a lack of assistance from the teacher, stating she was having great difficulties in math, but was given only a calculator rather than direct teacher assistance for her work on this subject. Kari also noted a lack of schooling upon her subsequent transfer to Bow River

Correctional Centre: "They have absolutely nothing in there." She did qualify this statement by noting the teacher at BRCC did try to determine her educational level and did arrange for her to work on the computers. Kari had anticipated that the teacher from Calgary Remand would continue working with her after her transfer to BRCC; however, when no further contact was made, "I just got fed up and I said 'Forget it.'"

Another student, Diane, expressed her thoughts on the inter-prison school disruption she experienced.

> When I go to different places, they always start me on something different, you know. Like for instance when I was in Edmonton [EIFW] I started my correspondence; then when I got here [RPC] it's different. I start my GED. And you know, I'm confused. I don't know what really level I'm at, you know, and it's hard. I wanted to continue with the correspondence from Edmonton, but they didn't send the stuff, and they don't want to. So I think that it would be better, if we get shipped somewhere else, that they let us continue from where we left off here, you know, instead of starting us on something new again.

When sent to a different prison, Diane explained that "you don't continue where you left off, or they say, well, you're beyond that now; you can try something else." As a result of an assessment at EIFW, Diane started taking high school correspondence courses there. "It was the English and math that I needed help with. Now here [RPC] it's the math and the social and the science." Laura, too, mentioned a result of inter-prison transfers. Currently preparing to write the GED exam, Laura stated she had "never stayed in one institution long enough to fulfill or go through with the tests, so that's why I'm going to try and stay here until I get this testing done."

In some institutions it would appear there was little in the way of any schooling available. This seemed especially evident in several remand centres located in both large

and mid-size cities in Alberta. This could in part be a result of the nature of remand centres, where inmates are essentially held from the time of arrest until the court appearance which specifies their sentence upon conviction of a criminal offence, and upon occasion includes a waiting period until space is found within an appropriate receiving institution. Although the average or common length of stay in a remand centre may be only a matter of weeks or months, for some women the duration has been closer to 12 or 18 months.

In the Calgary Remand Centre a teacher is available for all inmates on a two-day per week basis. His time must be divided between the men and women, and because of the smaller number of women with whom he would work on the female unit, it is doubtful he could spend a great amount of time there. Because of the relatively short average length of stay of the majority of women so remanded to custody, and due to continuing cutbacks to education which have necessitated a decrease in the hours allocated to the majority of teachers in remand centres throughout the province, very little time would be available for teachers to work with those few female inmates who may desire to continue their education while so incarcerated.

2. Reasons for participating in education programs

Some insight was gained into why the women were involved in the academic education programs. For those women testing at less than a Grade 10 level, education is rendered mandatory by the Correctional Service of Canada. For some students schooling was something to do to fill the time they were required to serve.

The only thing they've got is the school program in this institution [EIFW], and

> everybody works at their own speed, or people do it just so they ain't bored, that's the other thing. (Lori)

Barbara reported having participated in a considerable amount of schooling within another federal institution under mandate to do so. "I had to do it, otherwise I would have to be locked up, and I don't want to be locked up." Confined to her cell in that institution, she had not had an opportunity to participate in schooling. Now at EIFW, although she was not required to further her education, and although she did not want to be in the school but rather wanted a job elsewhere in the institution, Barbara wanted to complete her GED math course.

Candace, due to be released on parole within weeks of our conversaton, had some very specific reasons for continuing her education while in prison.

> A lot of time schoolwork seems to keep your mind occupied, so I do a lot of schoolwork. Anything that has anything to do with some kind of work gets you out of here for awhile, that you just focus on one thing. But mainly I can say to this day now I could read better and I could write better, instead of just making up how to spell a word in my mind, so I am planning to move on. I would like to get maybe my Grade 10 or 12, something that could get me a job out there.

While recognizing that a criminal record could make finding a job difficult, Candace nevertheless felt that continuing her education while incarcerated was a valuable use of her time.

> I think it's worth [it] for myself, for my self-respect and myself as an adult and a mother to have this education for my own good, not only for jobs or anything else, but to help my children, help to achieve them also, to help them growing, where you don't pick up a book and just pretend to read, but that there is stuff in there that you could read, and you could help them out with their homework and stuff like that, so I feel like I'm benefiting all way around. I'm not doing this for anybody else but for myself, and that's basically where I am. I have children, I have nieces, nephews, that want me to read to them; my grandmother and everybody else. I'm not [going to] quit now just because I can't get a job out there.

Candace reported both her 16-year-old son and 12-year-old daughter were doing well in school.

> I always encourage them to go to school because as a person inside the system, a lot of us don't have the education and we just kind of gave out - the street got the best of us and that's how we ended up with such a low grade, or either we didn't find school very interesting. Back then I could think that, oh, what do I have to do this for, you know. I'm not going to use it. And now, when it comes time, I wish I did pay attention in school and learn a lot more. That way I wouldn't be so struggled with it to this day. But hey, I'm never too old to learn, I was told, so!

Kari stated she was involved in the school at EIFW "because I know now that I need a job; well, not a job. I need my education in order to get my job, and because I've got kids, too. Probably come to me for help one day and I won't even know what to do". Valerie stated she wanted to "go to school and get my education because the Parole Board looks at things like that, and also because I wanted it." Laura had particular goals in mind as she participated in the education program.

> First I'm going to do this GED thing; then I'm just going to continue with my high school correspondence, regular high school, cause there's certain courses that I want to take when I get out that I've taken already in high school on the street.

Laura acknowledged she "might as well continue, plus it's for free. Got to take advantage of it, you know."

Michelle had been working in a professional field at the time of her arrest, but due to the nature of her career and her offence would be unable to return to work in her field following release. Now undertaking post-secondary studies for the first time, her hope was that "education credentials" combined with her work experience would compensate in future and allow her to qualify for a new career path.

Kathy's first choice for "work" upon arrival at EIFW was the school.

> When I got caught for my offense, that was the first thing I thought of, was that I could make the best of it and go back to school. I always enjoyed learning, as an adult. As a kid I didn't because I didn't think I knew, I was so stupid, but I know I'm not.

Many of Kathy's early school years had been spent in special education classes due to a learning disability. "I thought I was really dumb, so that kind of discouraged me. I couldn't read or write till halfway through Grade 6." Kathy had experienced delight, however, at the results of the educational testing done at EIFW upon her arrival.

> My grades here were excellent when I got my tests here; like when I did the tests to see what grades I was in [at another prison] my highest was Grade 11 for some English. Here I got some Grade 12s, or one Grade 12 for vocabulary, so I'm really proud of my tests. That's the silver lining in it all. It [prison] saved my life plus I'm going to school.

Susan, serving a lengthy sentence, was working at the post-secondary level, and had begun to do so because she was not required to participate in any other programming in P4W, where she had spent much of her sentence prior to arriving at EIFW. She had been encouraged by another inmate at P4W, a woman completing her first degree, to spend her time in prison well. Because she was not required to participate in other prison programs, Susan advised that:

> there was nothing else for me to do, and I was rather bored, and one doesn't have to be in prison very long to find out that the whole daily routine is so mundane that it's no wonder that people become couch potatoes. I would look at people who have been in jail for five years, and all I could think of was I don't want to become like that, because they didn't do nothing, no hobby craft; they might read a Harlequin romance once in awhile, but they were just couch potatoes; watch TV and have a boring job; just go there, put in your hours so you can get your measly $5.00 a day. And I don't want that for my life. No.

3. Curriculum

During the course of the interviews the women offered some insight into the

curriculum/materials area. Natalia was one of the early students at the school, and remained at EIFW when the institution was virtually shut down. In response to my question about whether or not the school program was meeting her needs, Natalia responded:

> Not really. The books that they have here are not....OK, they did a test when I started. Well, they're giving me books that I can do with closed eyes and they don't have any advanced books. I don't know if they order them or what, but Arlette gave me books and she said finish them, and I said, well, they're too easy. You know I don't have time to sit here and spend, wasting my time on something that I already know, and she wouldn't do anything about it, and then when Martha came, we went into storage where they have the books and I looked and it's like everything's the same.

At EIFW Kari seemed to have the opposite concern.

> I got a book slapped to me. Of course, she's trying to figure out where I am, and that's cool, OK, cause I like that. But still, I'm given a book and paper to do and it's like I can't figure it out for myself. I really need somebody to sit there and actually explain it to me the way I understand it and maybe help me with it for the first half hour, and then let me go from there. This isn't working, just giving me the books and letting me figure it out.

Kari advised she was currently doing well in math, however, "cause I'm doing kind of some easy stuff."

Laura, currently working on her GED at another federal institution, voiced the need for "up-to-date books that will help us study well for our GED, cause they're all these old books and tattered-up books down there. There's some new books, but it's all just, it's really easy work. It's like they think we're kind of slow or something, I don't know." Referring to materials covering such things as "nouns and verbs and all that," Laura stated: "I'm not stupid. It makes me feel stupid. Sometimes I don't even want to go, you know, cause I know how to do the work; it's just that I've got to review myself."

Candace spoke briefly about the materials she was using in preparation for her GED, and in speaking of the workbooks available in the school at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary advised: "we have writing skills, reading, *Challengers*, all those. We have everything that our school should have."

Valerie was in the school at EIFW for approximately two months prior to her transfer to another prison, and "liked [school] because it was simple; something I can relate to. The words weren't too big, you know." She "liked the books there. They weren't complicated, or too easy for me. They were just average, just right, cause I don't have a high education or anything; can't understand big words, so I liked them. I was doing writing skills and English, and I got a lot out of that." Although preferring to work on her own, Valerie advised that students in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary had been given the opportunity to

> write our own opinion on, if we had a family tradition on Thanksgiving, like how did we spend that day, what it means to us. So stuff like that I like doing it as a group, but like schoolwork, I like working at my own pace because it takes me some time, like I need time to understand what I'm doing and to question, if I don't understand something.

In response to a question regarding the kinds of materials used for reading, Karen responded it depended upon the student's level, but that it was "just regular literature."

Working in a maintenance job in the mornings at EIFW, Marilyn attended school in the afternoons, and felt the change in activity a source of motivation for her. Marilyn had been given the Steck Vaughn *Gateways to Correct Spelling* and *Language Exercises* books; however, perhaps because she had only been in the school for two days she had not yet begun work on them.

Susan indicated a real love of learning, and based on her educational experiences at P4W, spoke of the things she missed. "I love to read, but reading is a lot different than actually sitting there making notes and knowing that you're doing a test on it." Having taken part in a Women Writers [Literature] course at P4W taught by a female professor from Queen's University, and held one morning each week from 8:00 - 11:00 a.m., Susan stated:

> That was the one thing we looked forward to, and the women, I think there was 10 or 12 women and we all had to read the same book and come back and discuss [it]. I think in the beginning we did a little bit of poetry to give us some time to read the first book, and usually we would have a book read easy in a week cause what else is there to do over there. It was like a clique because you know we'd be able to discuss the characters and why did they do this and it was like a psychology course in itself, studying a book together and each having our own opinion about each character and their motives. I miss that. I'm sure there are other people that would enjoy it here. I really miss class-taught, though. My God, I think when I get out though, I definitely will do an audit course, just to sit in a classroom and enjoy the professor talking.

At the time of the interview, Susan was working on an Educational Psychology course through Queen's University. "Once in a while I do a little studying. It's nice and quiet in here. It's actually quite interesting." Susan spoke of her desire for a curriculum which would enable her to participate in educational activities similar to those experienced at the Kingston Prison for Women, and I quote her at length, allowing her words to reflect the richness she seeks.

> It's true; there's nothing really to do in jail, and I'm really glad that they had university courses [at P4W]. Like even now I'm trying to get some kind of a program in here, cause the programs here are basically geared towards substance abuse, alcohol, anger management, survivors of sexual trauma, you know, those kinds of things. I'm at that point, maybe because I've been in too long, I am looking for a group, and I'm sure there's other people that - there's got to be someone like myself in jail that feels the same way - of a course that - I'm tired of going back and

> ripping open my scars and having to heal myself. You can only do that so many times and you're going, I'm sick of it, I don't want to do that anymore. Like I know why I'm in jail, I know I've got to do my time. You can only do so much healing until you get to the point where - I want to step forward now, I want to learn how to pull myself back together, how to motivate myself. I need something to focus forward, instead of backward. I hope you understand. I don't even know what you'd call it. Organization management or something, I don't know. I can't put it into words, but all I know is it would be stepping forward, cause I think there are skills that we need to learn in here, especially anyone who's been in for a major amount of time, is being able to regroup and I think everyone that comes to jail has to do that, cause we have people in here that used to be bank managers, in high places, and they come to jail and they know that they can never be a bank manager again, or whatever their job was before. The chances are you're not going back to that field, so they have to regroup, focus.
>
> I'm not looking for credit. I'm looking for my own personal interest and I suppose I could find a book somewhere in this library and, it's not the same as having a group, and having that support that comes. That's what I miss from doing university classes where there's other people, so you can bounce ideas and read each other's assignments and correct them, and, it's just a bond there that is different than just everybody doing their own time and all you do, the only thing you do together is watch Y and R. So what, you know! There's something about working as a team to a common goal and working out all the little glitches and personality conflicts, and I think that's maybe what I'm looking for. Like yeah, I've done assertiveness training and how to; all the right lines and the right approach. That's good, but how about doing something where you have to actually use those tools. Like yeah, everyday we do have to use our, try to use your assertiveness training, but actually go through a project where you know horns are going to lock and be able to have some kind of, not a referee but someone there to guide you through, because that's where a lot of people that come to jail, their problem is, is that we do have a bit of a stubborn streak, and theory is good and CSC is famous for, you know, give them the program, give them the theory. Theory is good - you have to live the theory.

Susan's enthusiasm, and the rich and varied nature of her ideas here stand in significant contrast to the words of her peers quoted above. As the only woman interviewed who had had extremely positive educational experiences within the prison setting and the only respondent who had taken part in significant post-secondary studies, Susan's words reflect the rich possibilities for learning even in such an environment, just as they serve to

highlight valuable learning processes; group discussion on common texts, opportunities to bounce ideas off one another, reading others' writings, and having others read yours, the desire to grapple with difficult issues and ideas under the guidance of a facilitator, and the common bond that develops from having such shared experiences. Such possibilities are infinitely worth striving for.

4. Barriers

While barriers frequently exist for many women in their attempt at participation in literacy/educational upgrading in the wider community (Horsman, 1990), for incarcerated women some of these barriers may well be removed; lack of finances, childcare concerns, lack of transportation, time constraints, presence of family or other responsibilities which would preclude participation, spousal lack of support for, or active antagonism toward, women trying to grow and change, and lack of knowledge about appropriate programs and their availability, may be rendered non-issues in the prison setting. Indeed, some of the women's comments reflected the removal of such barriers, for as Laura noted, correctional education is "free," and Natalia indicated similar advantages, and some disadvantages, for:

> here you don't have to worry about rent, you don't have to worry about food, so the only thing you have to worry about is getting your education. And most of us have been in other institutions for a long time and this is probably the first institution to have a school, so you don't have a long time. If I had like a year or two years I could probably have gotten my GED by now.

However, while some important barriers may be removed in the correctional setting, others remain, and many were identified by the women.

> I wanted to go to school, but it was confusing cause unsettled. Arlette didn't have all the books, whatever, so I really wasn't - I was in school there but I didn't get nothing out of it, cause it was too confusing for me.

Upon arrival at EIFW, Natalia had been in the school only one day before the teacher left on medical leave. Prior to the teacher's return, three substitute teachers were brought in at different times to carry out the teaching function. Within a month or so, Martha, one of the substitute teachers, became the main substitute. Within weeks, and following the many crises in the institution, all but eight of the 27 women were relocated to other penal institutions. Although Natalia remained at EIFW because of her minimum security status, concentration on her schoolwork was difficult.

Elissa explained the difficulty experienced in having a series of substitute teachers in such a short timeframe.

> One didn't know where I was at, one didn't know nothing; it made me unbalanced cause I [would] have to start all over again explaining and explaining who I was, where I'm at, and what I'm doing and stuff like that.

This concern was expressed not only at EIFW but at another institution as well. Commenting on her current schooling in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Laura stated: "Well I like the school, and I like the teacher that we have now, but the teachers are never consistent, like this is our third teacher we're going through." Having been in this penitentiary for only three months, and in an attempt to explain her understanding of the frequent teacher turnover, Laura stated:

> Well, because of the way these people have to work their contracts and stuff, everything's permanent [sic] but now they're saying there's another teacher coming that got a permanent job but the contract's only so long and then she has a backup, another backup teacher. It's pretty screwed up. What they don't understand is that we want, like this teacher that we have now knows a lot about us and what there is

> to know about us and where we're at in our work and stuff. What they don't understand is that we need consistency, otherwise it's not going to work.

At EIFW Diane also spoke of the way the series of teachers/substitutes affected her, stating the turnover "was hard, too, because we weren't used to them, and we were rebelling against them because they taught things differently than Arlette and it was, you know, confusing us."

c. Vulnerability in appearing different

In the school at EIFW, Kari was working at an academic level which she perceived as being lower than that of her peers. Very self-conscious about being so far behind the other students, she was seeking the assistance of a tutor.

> I have a problem with the teacher coming and saying, well, and reading. Like she'll read some of my work and other people will be right near me, and I'm just so embarrassed because I'm so low and I really need a lot of help - more help than what a teacher in a classroom can give because she's so busy with everybody else. That's why I get bored of it easily, because I'll sit there till what, after coffee or smoke break, and I'll say, well, I want to go back to my unit now. It's like I can work at my house better than I can work in a classroom. And so that's basically [why] I really need a tutor. I'm a very slow learner. I need one-to-one really bad, but with that, if I can get that - which they've already asked me, so hopefully they get me one - and if I get that I know I'm going to go somewhere.

Having been in the school for only one week, Kari hoped her tutor would be able to work with her in her unit until she was at a level where she would be comfortable returning to the classroom. "Right now it's not working, it's not, and I don't know how to tell them that. I guess I'd better let them know." Kari felt that although she was having difficulties in the classroom, other students weren't.

> I have a problem working in the class, and I came in here today and I felt, well, I have to be here because it's something that I wanted to do, but I expected a little bit of, a different, I expected to have somebody helping me all the time. It wasn't like I

> expected, so you know I am feeling very uncomfortable in there, and I don't know what to say or what to do. The only thing I could do is probably let the teacher know after coffee break how I'm feeling and then also let her know this is where I'm at and this is what I really need. And I don't know how that's going to go.

Kari advised she was currently doing well in math "cause I'm doing kind of some easy stuff," and although the teacher did offer her assistance if she required it, Kari didn't "want to ask for help because I don't want everybody to know what I'm doing."

At the other end of the spectrum, working at the university level Susan also keeps her abilities to herself.

> I don't advertise to fellow inmates. If they say, "Are you doing a course?" I say "Yeah." I try not to say I'm doing university cause right away they look at me like, "Oh, you think you're too good for me." And you don't have to say anything. I've had a few people try to lock horns with me, and I just don't have the time or energy, sorry. If you want to hate me because I'm furthering my education, what else is there to do in jail?

d. Requirements to first prove ability and interest before pursuing education

Student difficulties in pursuing educational avenues of choice were expressed by both students and the teacher. Arlette advised that in 1991 an incomplete CAAT-C Assessment had been done at P4W on one of the women (unidentified) now at EIFW. An EIFW Primary Worker had very recently suggested to Arlette that this student, who had obtained scores of Grade 5.3 in language (the incomplete portion of the assessment) and Grade 9.3 in math, should work on the GED program. However, in 1992 this woman had received credit for a first-year English course from Queen's University and in 1993 had begun a Food and Beverages program of which she had successfully completed two and one-half years. Arlette felt that upgrading to the GED completion level was inappropriate as this student was now working at the post-secondary level; hence, it would be more

appropriate for her to work on her Food and Beverages program rather than going back to lower level work.

Currently working at approximately a Grade 8/9 level in the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Elissa had wanted to work toward Grade 12 completion, "grade for grade."

> But they say I have to write my GED to get any other courses after that, and I don't want to write it. I'm sure if I'm doing grade for grade, I'm sure they'll think she really wants to do this, whatever, but they say I've got to do this to prove to them that I'm willing to, that I'm not a waste for these courses, basically, but you know that it's not a waste of money or time; I'm still going to do grade for grade. In Edmonton they were fine with it, that I was going to do grade for grade, but here they say you've got to write your GED if you wanted to take any courses, like university courses.

For three years Susan, then in P4W, fought for permission to take university courses offered in the nearby Collins Bay male federal institution, and every year new rules were brought in which served to delay her access. Initially she was advised she would have to complete one correspondence course before being able to access "prof-taught" courses at Collins Bay. Upon successful completion of that initial course, she was required to take one university course offered in P4W. "They want to make sure you're not just going over there to find a boyfriend." The following year a seemingly arbitrary rule was made that women serving Susan's particular sentence could not attend professor-taught courses at a male facility until they had completed five years of their sentence. This latter rule came into effect just as Susan was signing up for a course. Following Susan's protesting of this new rule to her lawyer and others, the Warden finally consented to Susan's request on the condition Susan agree to go "handcuffed and shackled," to which Susan responded she didn't care how she went, as she was "going for the university program...not going for

the guys."

Barbara, no longer at EIFW, having been transferred to another institution at the time of the "shutdown", had been in other institutions prior to arriving at EIFW as one of the first women to be transferred there, and had completed previous schooling within the criminal justice system at the provincial level.

> When I was a young offender, I was in the Youth Centre, and that's where I got my Grade 8, my Grade 9, and my Grade 10 and my Grade 11 and my Grade 12, because I was taking, like I did English, I did math, I did science, I did social studies. I did all the subjects all at once, just like a normal school, and I found it to be really helpful. The teacher was really helpful and stuff, and the work I got, I found it easy to understand and stuff. I was at RPC in Saskatoon, and I liked their educational programs there, because that's where I was working on my GED there too, as well, and they seemed to help you with whatever subject you wanted to do; they had the materials available. Whereas when I was in Kingston they wouldn't even let me go to school because I was a high risk offender, so they called [it], and I was on a super-max unit and I couldn't get a job and I couldn't go to school, cause I already had my Grade 10, so they said I wasn't eligible to enter into school, so I spent quite a few years in there, and I didn't get any education at all.

Once students have completed high school courses, which are paid for by the Correctional Service of Canada, no further financial assistance is available from CSC should they wish to pursue post-secondary studies. Susan did report, however, that she was able to access bursaries while in P4W in order to finance her university courses. Lori noted that

> while in prison women pursuing studies cannot afford studies so either their families help them or they try to save money [which] is a long and hard process at $5.25 per day. Very few can achieve this. We don't make enough money here to achieve this goal. So hopes and dreams get shattered before they even start. I was in Kingston and the same problems are there that are here.

Michelle, who was just beginning her post-secondary studies at EIFW, also noted as a personal concern the lack of financial support through the prison system for those wishing

to pursue education beyond the high school level.

e. Requirements to work elsewhere in the Institution

Natalia had arrived at EIFW four months following the opening of the institution. Within weeks, and following the many crises in EIFW, all but eight of the women were relocated to other penal institutions. Although Natalia remained at EIFW because of her minimum security status, concentration on her school work was difficult, and her services were required full-time in the Corcan graphics industry within the prison. Although she had been working in graphics in the mornings, following the removal of most of the women from the institution only one other inmate remained to work there, where a project, delayed for two weeks because of the many incidents, remained to be completed and the goods shipped to the purchaser.

While this requirement to work elsewhere in EIFW seems an isolated, necessary factor due to the partial shutdown of the institution, this situation is reminiscent of the 1988 experiences of Therasa Ann Glaremin and others in P4W in the late 1980s. In a radio interview subsequently published in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* (Bell, 1992), Therasa Ann advised:

> even though they [CSC staff] were pushing to get you to your ABE, they needed people to work in the institution in laborious positions - like in dining, kitchen, cleaners, laundry; they needed people to perform laborious functions to keep the institution tidy and that. They put me in the kitchen apart from the fact that I wanted to go to school. They said that I wasn't going to need my education when I got out, that I would probably get a job in a restaurant or as a cleaner, if I wasn't a housewife. (Bell, 1992, p. 36)

f. Stress

The stressful nature of the EIFW environment during the early months of operation,

discussed earlier by Arlette, served to interfere with Natalia's ability to concentrate on her schoolwork, and her comments allow some insight into life in the prison during the early months of its operation.

> For a while there I couldn't concentrate because there was a lot of things that were going on around here that was getting to me and was bothering me that I couldn't even concentrate and I was getting so much headaches, because of everything that goes on here, and because you live in this environment. You can't run anywhere away from it, you can't even go for a long walk, you can't even stay in your room without them coming every half an hour checking on you, so you don't have anywhere to go, so you just keep it in and then you just kind of concentrate, you can't even do your work. So I was like that for, I would say, a month. I would just come in class and just sit there, and you know, I just didn't feel like doing anything, and constantly, headaches. Sometimes I would just cry my eyes out. I never got headaches before I came to this place. I would just cry my eyes - because the pain is so dramatic, and I don't take anything because I just don't take pills, so you know, it's hard, it's hard. Like on the street, you know, I was never stressed. You do [become stressed] once in a while in school work, but it wasn't as much as this. And you take a break, you go for a walk, or you do things in the house, whatever, and you come back to your work again and do your homework again - that's what I used to do. I lived right by [a city park], an apartment there, and I'd do my work, and then you know, once it started getting too much or sleepy I'd go for a walk and come back and just start on it again, and I'd be fresh again. Nothing like that to do around here, so it's really hard.
>
> We can't get away from it. Where can you go? You come to school, you hear the same thing; you go to the house, you hear the same - you're in the same environment. Like on the street, you leave your house, you're with different people, and you know that even if they get to you, you know it's just going to be for the day. You do not have to take it home with you cause people are not coming home with you. You don't have to deal with it after you leave the school. So you just do your work, do whatever you have to do, you leave, go home, and it's a different environment; go shopping, it's different. And they [CSC staff] just can't understand that. The same thing happen on the street? I don't think so.

g. Need for/value of tutorial assistance

Michelle had just begun a distance education course through Athabasca University, and although tutorial assistance is an integral part of participation in Athabasca University

courses, Michelle was prohibited from contacting her tutor as phone privileges available to inmates do not include such long-distance calls. Consequently Michelle had requested the services of a community volunteer tutor, but was skeptical one would be in place prior to her release. As we have seen, Kari too had requested a volunteer tutor to work with her one-to-one, preferably in her living unit rather than in the classroom where she was reluctant to display her academic ability level in front of the other students.

The value of tutorial assistance was demonstrated by Candace, who had served part of her sentence in RPC. Entering the criminal justice system with a Grade 3 education, Candace advised she had done a significant amount of schooling in prison.

> I had a tutor that tutored me for about six months at RPC, and where he worked with me on one-to-one on a daily basis, so I learned a real lot of things. He was very patient with me, and to this day I give him thanks for having so much patience, because I'm able to do a lot more than I did before, but this is one of the male prisoners that was in the system.
>
> I guess at first I was embarrassed of my age; I was only twenty-eight when I started really knowing how to have the ability to read and write and stuff that I wasn't able to do, but I was on a one-to-one basis. As my tutor in RPC used to say, "You're never too old to learn." So that's what I always think of. I always think of stuff like that when I feel like I'm going to give up. But now I just think of it as learning something new each and every day.
>
> You have to feel comfortable with your tutor, or you're not going to achieve. If you don't feel comfortable you're not just going to open up to anybody, so I was very comfortable with my tutor in RPC. That's where I achieved the way I did. And I did a lot of schoolwork on my own, on my own time.

It had originally been expected that tutors for students at EIFW would be accessed through the Edmonton PALS Project, but no tutors had been made available from this source, as PALS felt its tutors were not trained for working within a prison setting, nor could tutor safety be absolutely assured. The Edmonton John Howard Society Literacy

Having been in the school at EIFW for only two days prior to our interview, Marilyn voiced the need for an additional teacher because the substitute teacher "sometimes spends a lot of time with one student and there's people waiting to talk to her," although the time spent waiting for teacher assistance, "gives you a break, a few minutes' break from using your brain." Lori was less positive about having to wait to receive teacher assistance.

> I may be stuck for a couple of days. I get frustrated because I can't retain the material. The teacher has to help everyone, not just one. Some are too shy or embarrassed to ask, for fear of being ridiculed by other cons. Some mornings our teacher is available, but there are days where she may have to be in institutional briefings.

Valerie voiced the need for an additional teacher if there were many students in the classroom as there were when she was at EIFW.

> Someone needed help over here, and someone needed help over there, and like some people are kind of slow and need a little bit more time to understand what they're doing, and so you have to go through it slowly. And then some, you know, are quicker at thinking than others; they can get it right away. So I think, you know, [we need] an extra teacher.

Diane had found attending school in the afternoons "very boring; I was always trying to fall asleep in school cause you know I had nothing to do." When the substitute teacher was working with a particular student, "when we wanted to ask her something, we knew we couldn't because she was tutoring the girl."

5. Initiation of School Participation

Initiation of student participation in academic correctional education programs may be dependent upon the type of institution and the interest of the student. For example, in youth detention centres education is mandatory. In remand centres, it would appear an

inmate must request access to schooling if she wishes to pursue academic studies while so incarcerated.

Natalia had arrived at EIFW in March 1996, having been transferred from Bow River Correctional Centre, a minimum security facility in Calgary, where she had served one year following incarceration in Calgary Remand for a reported ten months. While in Calgary Remand, and realizing she would be there for quite some time, Natalia initiated the start of her own schooling. In speaking with staff, she was advised she would have to request a meeting with the DDO (Deputy Director of Operations); upon meeting with him and another staff person and discussing with them her request for schooling, the prison educator at Calgary Remand contacted her within a week.

Subsequent to completing the required CAAT assessment, Natalia began working at the Grade 5/6 level in spelling, English, and writing. Deciding to work on preparation for a GED, she subsequently began working at this level in "social studies, math, literacy, and English," the latter being her second language. Working essentially on her own in her unit, Natalia reported, in direct contrast to Kari's experience described earlier, having had the opportunity to acquire assistance from the teacher during the afternoons which he spend on the unit. Like Kari, however, upon being transferred to Bow River Correctional Centre because of her low-risk status, and although wishing to continue working on her schooling, Natalia's requests to meet with that institution's teacher reportedly went unanswered.

At the federal level, inmates who are assessed at less than a Grade 10 level are mandated by CSC to participate in academic upgrading. Although CSC's mandate is to

provide education to the Grade 10 level only, they will finance education to the Grade 12 level, but education beyond that undoubtedly would have to be at the initiation of the student.

For Susan, who had entered prison with high school completion, it was at the urging of a fellow inmate completing a Bachelor's Degree that Susan began her post-secondary studies. She was encouraged to do so in order to the make the best possible use of the time required to serve her lengthy prison sentence.

> She came to talk to me. I think she was a chairperson [of the Inmate Committee] at the time, and asked me what I was going to do with my time. And she encouraged me to take university courses because that's one of the first things that set in is boredom and then you lose your motivation - you just lay down and spiritually die, and she got me going and you know I took my correspondence.

6. Sources of Support

Of the fourteen women interviewed, only two indicated a great deal of encouragement and support for pursuing their studies. Susan had the extensive and involved support of her fellow-inmate at P4W, who acted as the catalyst for Susan's pursuit and at this point near-completion of her first undergraduate degree. As our conversation turned to the possibility of continuing on to graduate school in prison, Susan spoke of her mother's pride in her, Susan being the only one in her family to have gone on to university, and with laughter Susan related her mother's frequent comment that Susan should come out of prison with a Ph.D., due to the length of sentence Susan is required to serve.

Candace spoke warmly of the tutor in RPC who offered her such a great deal of support.

helpful." Karen described what made her a good teacher.

> She helps us with our work if we have troubles, and she's good to talk to, too; like you know she doesn't keep, she doesn't push us to do our work and all that. But she makes sure that we are working, though. She doesn't keep pestering us.

Valerie spoke highly of the main substitute teacher at EIFW: "I liked Martha because she was understanding. She took her time with us to understand something."

The attributes of a good teacher in the prison setting include, in Diane's words, "one that'll have patience with us, you know, be there when we need to ask questions of her, and I guess someone who knows what she's doing."

8. Student Suggestions for School Improvement

I invited the women to discuss how their educational programs inside the institutions could be improved. Consistent and sufficient teaching staff was a concern at both EIFW and the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, while computer access was high on the list of several of the women, mainly those at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary. At the Saskatchewan Penitentiary Karen voiced a desire for consistency in teaching staff:

> It took a long time for us to trust our teacher and get along with her, and it should kind of stay that way, you know, if we get along with her. They should try and understand that. We don't take advantage of our teacher, you know.

At the same institution, echoing the desirability of having one teacher as opposed to frequent teacher turnover, Elissa also suggested that availability of computers was needed. "We need up-to-date things. I know how to work a computer, but most people don't here." Female inmates in this institution were unable to access computers "because they're at the main building and they can't take us over there cause the men are there." Elissa suggested lack of space in the classroom may have been a reason computers were

not made available for them to use, although "even two would be good cause you know, most people ain't into things like that, it's so modern."

Also at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, Candace suggested:

> What I think would really benefit is typing, typing courses. Like computers - we can have no computers here but computers are the thing right now. So I just think it would be best if we did have some computers to upgrade ourselves, so we're not so lost in the world there, because the world does use a lot of computers nowadays. I typed this letter for my sister and it took me almost two hours just to type two lines, and I just wanted to speed. I'd just really like to get into some kind of typing course or any kind of course that will enable my fingers to move faster, that's what I need. [At] RPC we had computers where a lot of us learned how to use the computer, and now when we come here we look at a computer like we can't bother with it.

Michelle, just beginning her work at the post-secondary level at EIFW, lamented the lack of permission to bring in a personal computer and lack of access to a stand-alone computer: the student-accessible computers in the lab at EIFW are for computer assisted instruction via Plato programs only. Although Arlette had hoped to acquire computer word processing programs for the computer lab, she had not been able to do so prior to her resignation.

The women at EIFW also indicated the need for consistency in teaching staff, as well as additional teaching staff for more immediate academic assistance. Valerie also expressed the need for information on upgrading possibilities upon release: "It's just that I need more information on where I can go for upgrading, and I don't know anything about it." As we saw earlier, Susan had very specific curricular ideas for what the educational program could incorporate, based on her very positive university experiences while at P4W.

9. Contribution from the Outside Community

Apart from the contribution volunteer tutors could make, mentioned by only a few of the women, none of the students were able to offer ideas for ways in which the outside community could positively contribute to the educational programs in EIFW, the Saskatchewan Penitentiary or the Regional Psychiatric Centre.

10. Plans for the Future

The majority of the women were able to articulate plans for the future following their release from prison. (As Susan is only part way through a very long sentence, she was not asked to respond to this question.) Natalia, Kari, Elissa and Karen expressed an interest in the field of social work, while Diane expressed interest in working with children. Barbara indicated a desire to pursue university studies but had not yet identified a specific field of interest. Valerie hoped to continue her academic upgrading upon release, while Lori's goal to be a chef appeared quite firm, as did Marilyn's desire to become an auto mechanic.

Michelle described her educational plans as being up in the air and voiced a need for advice, but stated she had "started on the path to a helping profession through a B.A. I'm now reconsidering a B.Ed. With that at least I'm employable at the end of four or five years."

Natalia's plans for the future were to "finish my education and be something, before my son grows up." Her plans included attending AVC and then going into social work, a goal which had crystalized as a result of her current volunteer work carried out in the Edmonton community under Temporary Absence status leading up to her release from

EIFW. Kari stressed:

> When I get out I have to do some serious work cause what I'm taking is social work, cause my goal is to help kids, and I can't do that unless I have my social work, and so I really want to get this happening. It's my life. I really want to get this. It's really important. This is very important to me.

Barbara advised that when she had served time at the Saskatchewan Penitentiary, she "never got any opportunities to go to school. I was always locked up." Acknowledging that education would make a difference to her, she added, "I know I have to get my Grade 12 if I ever want to go to university, and if I ever want to get a good stable job I know that I'll have to get my education." Although she was interested in many things, Barbara did not at this time have a specific university program identified.

Marilyn expressed a wish to continue her education to enable her to have a profession following her release, and identified auto mechanic as her career choice. Stating that math would be of value in studying auto mechanics, which she plans to pursue at NAIT, Marilyn nevertheless stated she did not like math, but did enjoy reading books, although not for schoolwork purposes. Anticipating release from EIFW in March 1997, she was concentrating on math as well as reviewing other course materials to refresh her skills.

Lori anticipated she would be able to complete her Grade 10 prior to release, and hence would have the qualifications necessary to enter the Chef Program at SAIT.

Laura had two years of her sentence yet to serve and was participating in the education program because she had particular goals in mind: "First I'm going to do this GED thing, then I'm just going to continue with my high school correspondence, regular

high school, cause there's certain courses that I want to take when I get out that I've taken already in high school on the street."

Currently preparing to write the GED exam in January 1997, with plans to take correspondence courses to complete a "regular Grade 12," Karen's goals included social work, for she wanted to "help people." Diane's future goals were "to finish school in here before I get out, and hopefully find something - like I want to work with little children, you know, or younger children, stuff like that."

In the closed environment of the prison, it is perhaps not difficult to make educational plans for the future which may be somewhat unrealistic, or the reality of which may not be fully understood by the student. Hence we have seen some women with relatively low educational levels planning for professional careers which may in reality be quite out of reach prior to completion of a great deal of preparatory academic work, and indeed some professions may be closed to the women in light of their criminal records alone. While it important not to thwart the dreams the students have for their futures, it is important they be assisted in setting realistic, attainable goals.

The Second Teacher - Martha

With an American teaching degree and many years' teaching experience in both the United States and Canada, Martha applied for, and in February 1996 obtained, one of three substitute teaching positions at the Edmonton Institution for Women. While Martha had not previously taught in a correctional institution, nor had she experience in the area of adult education, an interest in women's issues and the feminist movement led her to courses and substantive reading in these areas, and, combined with a great interest in

working with women, acted as the motivation behind her application for the position. "When I came here I didn't know anything about CSC, I didn't know anything about Excalibur and its philosophy and how it works, and I hadn't had any real work with women in prison," Martha advised. Although having subbed at the institution extensively for months prior to our October 1996 interview while Arlette was away on medical or compassionate leave, and having become the sole substitute teacher in April 1996, Martha felt she had not been apprised of many important details.

> I never talked to Excalibur. I was working with Arlette; she was the one in contact with Excalibur all the time, so I had no contact with them really, except they would call once in a while and say, "Can we help you?" but I've never seen their philosophy. Actually I've been reading it, the information that I have here - I've been reading their stuff, but I never had anything to do with them. I don't know what their contract is with the institution; I've never signed a form for Excalibur except to come on as a sub; I've never signed a contract with them; I don't know what the budget is for the school; I don't know any of that stuff. So I just learn things as I go along. So I go by the needs of the women. That's been my thing. Rather than Excalibur says this, the prison says that, it's what do the women need, and can I do it? And if I can, I will, and if I can't, I'll find out who can.

Martha explained the philosophy by which she approached her role as prison educator.

> My philosophy is that they are women first and prisoners second, so I treat them as women first, and then if the other plays a part, then, it's always in the background there, but if it doesn't have to be brought to the fore, then it's not. They're not treated like prisoners, they're treated like women, and I think that for women, the best thing they can learn is independence. Actually that's true of everybody but women are lacking this so much more. From school on they're not really trained to think in terms of career, like boys are, and even though we know women have to work we still haven't made that a real part of the training and a real part of the philosophy of the school, to make sure that girls understand that they've got to train because half of them will be divorced, and most of them will have children, and most of the children living in poverty are living with single mothers, so somehow we've got to get this thinking so that they plan for their own life, plan for independence, and when women come in here, that's my philosophy of the whole thing, is help them plan for independence. Help them **plan** for what they're going to do when they leave here.

Ensuring course calendars were made available to the students, Martha invited and encouraged the women to see for themselves "what the possibilities are; you might get a whole bunch of ideas that you never thought of before, but whatever you do, plan something."

While Arlette had spoken mainly of matters pertaining to the set-up of the school and library, and of the many challenges, both institutional and personal, with which she had to deal and which demanded her full attention during her time there, Martha spoke almost exclusively about the students during our taped interview.

> And what's really interesting is that a lot of the women here have come in with a plan. Like one says I've got to finish my GED; the one thing I want to do most is finish my GED, so that's her plan, and the other one says she wants to go back and work on her reserve, and she knows where she wants to work, so she's working towards that. And she's filling in all the gaps. She knows that there are gaps in her education. Why they happened I have no idea, it doesn't really matter, but she knows there are gaps, and so she's trying to fill these gaps in. She's working on the math now and going through and making sure she understands everything step by step. And the other woman, her goal is to finish this one course for her high school. She's pregnant now and she has another child, so for right now her energies are towards finishing this and carrying through with her pregnancy. It's too hard for her to plan too far ahead, but she is thinking in terms of what she wants to do once the baby's born and she's home and off parole. She's got a job waiting for her at home, in the family business, but I think she wanted to think beyond that, is starting to think beyond that.
>
> And there was another one who, up to Grade 6 she didn't learn anything, and she can't tell, I was asking her what happened in Grade 6 that she finally could begin to read. She doesn't remember, she doesn't know what it was. Someone told her she's dyslexic, but she doesn't know what kind, she doesn't even know who told her this. You know, there was a time when everybody was dyslexic, that was the one word that came up constantly, so I'm not sure if that was during that time of, if it was an actual test. She's not sure, but she's been able to adapt. She's really quite bright, in my opinion, and she's quite high on the scores, and her goal is to learn - she just wants to learn, so she's really motivated to learn, to upgrade, and then once she feels she's ready for Grade 10, 11 and 12, then to go into those. Actually I think we ordered her a course. We did, but in the meantime she's working at the basics.

She's going to school fulltime.

Some Gentle Spirit

During the course of the interview Martha advised she had spent years living in a convent, having been a teaching nun. While no longer a nun, her years in the convent seem to have given her a special affinity for the women with whom she was currently working, and she spoke of the similarities between convent and prison life.

> In the convent, in the first years when you're not working in the field, all you have to concentrate on is what's in front of you, the walls around you. We couldn't read any newspapers, we couldn't watch the news, we could only read holy books, and so you were concentrating on the person who's got a mess over here, or the person who makes too much noise slamming the door, or the person that doesn't clean the sink. I know what [the inmates] are talking about, I know how your world narrows in. It becomes narrow, and I think the big point of this prison has got to be to keep those walls getting wider and wider, keep it from getting narrower and narrower.
>
> And that's one of the reasons also why, when the women need something, if I can get it to you this minute I will. If it takes five minutes I will do it but I will not let it drag on, because I've also been in that waiting position, where you always have somebody making the decisions for you. You're waiting for days and weeks sometimes to know whether you're going to stay [as a teacher] in this school or go on into another school. Nobody discussed it with you, but you know that on some day within the next two weeks this thing is going to come out. You're going to find a letter on your bed, and then you know whether you're staying or whether you're - if you have no letter you're staying, if you have a letter on your bed you're going, but this can take weeks; there's a buildup of weeks before this happens. Nobody discussing it with you, or you're waiting for somebody to call back, you're always waiting for a superior, always waiting, and it's a killer. It brings your self-esteem down, so when they [the inmate-students] have something that needs doing, it's important. It's important in their life and I will treat it with importance, and that again brings up their self-esteem, but if it is of no importance, then they are of no importance, that's the feeling you get. So I think we just have to keep reversing these things.
>
> There are certain channels you have to follow in here, and they take time, and if somebody, you're supposed to go [to a meeting] this week, well maybe that person got sick, they were supposed to be at the meeting, well then you have to wait another week or whatever. So where you have to do it I guess you have to do it,

> but where it's avoidable, avoid it. How do they stay motivated in their own programs and in themselves if nobody finds them important and their needs important?

While in Martha's view security and the good order of the institution were deemed to be important to CSC, she did not perceive CSC would view the women as important at that point in time.

Following our discussion of the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, Martha stated that if she were staying on as the teacher in the institution, she would work toward creating similar programs, incorporating the creative in the learning taking place. She indicated an interest in having several of the women participate in a novel discussion, based on an article she had read in the *National Catholic Reporter.*

> It talked about a program where [inmates] had a discussion group on a novel, where they would discuss the character and what happens, and the development and all, cause and effects kinds of things. What they found was the people who had come to this session, nobody came back into the prison, and my guess is that it would be [for] a couple of reasons. One, they would see themselves mirrored in the successes and in the failures of the person in the book. They see, I think, the successes and failures of the character in the book, and what leads to success and what leads to failure, and the other one is that I think they begin to think bigger than inside here. They begin to think social events, they begin to think life, they get a life kind of thing, where in prison there are so many small things they are always constantly concentrating on, and it's like seeing, getting a life actually, and they I think get excited again, come alive again, get motivated again, and go out and get on with it.
>
> The thing that I would hope happens in this prison (and I haven't had enough experience with other prisons) but what I see happens is that when they come in, they've been fighting laws, rebelling a lot of them, and they just continue that mentality in here, and for some of them it's just fight, fight, fight, fight, every little thing is an uproar. If you didn't go and get coffee in the school, well you know that would be a big thing to get upset about. But hopefully in seeing other things, they will get beyond this four walls stuff, think bigger. They've got to get out of this mentality, and I think literature and discussions, programs, will do that, so these things become small things. I know what they're talking about, because I lived like that [when] I was in the convent.

Interestingly, Martha's words echo those of Susan, and illustrate the potential for active participation by both Susan and Martha in the creation of a very rich curriculum. And Martha's current, significant interest in the *Making Connections* curriculum holds some very exciting possibilities for future literacy learning opportunities for students involved in the Fireweed Education Centre.

Following Arlette's resignation as prison educator at EIFW, Martha was indeed chosen as the new teacher, and through her involvement with the Catholic Women's League and the generosity of that organization, bursaries are now available to students at EIFW for studies at the post-secondary level.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AND LIFE REVIVES

The first year of operation of the Fireweed Education Centre was a difficult one, complicated as it was by the series of very serious, unfortunate incidents. The school, like the institution, had held a great deal of promise for new ways of relating to incarcerated women, new ways of fostering and nurturing women's growth and development, enriching the possibilities for their lives and the choices they could make. Philosophies of empowerment, healing and growth had filled the vision. The unfortunate realities of life in prisons, and the dangers inherent for inmates and staff alike, however, served to severely overshadow that vision. The many crises, both personal and institutional, resulted in death, illness, the resignations of corrections staff as well as the teacher, and significantly affected the education of all the students both quantitatively and qualitatively.

For Arlette these months became a time of bare survival, and while a researcher would normally expect a "subject" to put her best face forward, this would have been a monumental task for Arlette in light of her experiences leading up to and during the weeks of our meetings. She needed to speak about issues more crucial than curricula, and had more pressing concerns than those of the researcher, for there was a great deal more involved in her life as prison educator at that time. Trauma and death and survival in a penal environment, while difficult for everyone, can be expected to have a great and adverse impact on contract personnel such as teachers.

Due to the isolation Arlette experienced within the institution, where discussion of concerns and frustrations seems not to have been possible, it was perhaps natural that

much of our discussion during our many hours together gave her a much-needed opportunity to break the silence she had necessarily maintained during the period of investigation following the incidents, and in light of the media focus. Hence, rather than speaking of the details of the reading and writing curricula, Arlette needed more urgently to speak of her concerns regarding her place and her experiences within the institution, and the many frustrations inherent in setting up the school and of being a contract employee in such an environment. In light of our discussions, which brought a great deal to the fore for Arlette, she was forced to re-examine her work in the institution, made more difficult by the personal tragedies and illnesses which had such a significant impact upon her. Upon re-evaluation of all these factors, Arlette chose to resign.

Although unanticipated changes in research focus were necessitated by events at the Edmonton Institution for Women, it is nonetheless possible to ascertain answers to the original research questions as we seek: (a) the Correctional Service of Canada's definition of literacy driving the prison literacy programme; (b) the ways in which the curriculum and supporting materials work to support this purview; (c) the impacts of this definition and the supporting curricular texts and instructional methods upon the students; and (d) the resultant literacies, competencies, and skills inmate students will possess as they serve the remainder of their sentences and are released back into the community.

(a) Notwithstanding the new vision promulgated by the *Creating Choices* task force report, CSC's definition for prison literacy education had not been responsive to the recommendations contained therein. Available CSC documents indicated completion of Grade 10 remained the measure against which offenders were to be rendered literate, with

this limited schooling serving at the very least to keep the inmates productively occupied. No opportunity was available for me to ascertain an expanded CSC perspective, as repeated requests to meet with the Warden regarding her vision for the school were responded to only insofar as she was not available or not in the institution, and although an appointment was made with the Deputy Warden/Director of Education for which she chose both the date and time, she was subsequently absent from the institution on the day of our scheduled meeting. Thus it was impossible to garner the vision the Warden and/or Deputy-Warden held for the educational enterprise at the Edmonton Institution for Women, a vision which undoubtedly carries significant consequences for the educational endeavour and for the teachers and students involved.

The Correctional Service of Canada can be clearly seen to restrict women's access to education in several ways. CSC's mandate is to offer education to the Grade 10 level only. Courses at the Grade 11 and 12 levels will be funded by CSC only for those women upon whom CSC is willing to expend the financial cost. CSC will not pay for post-secondary courses, and by maintaining inmate pay at exceedingly low levels does not offer the means by which inmate-students can acquire the costs of tuition and books for post-secondary courses available through distance education programs from several educational institutions throughout the country. CSC can dictate educational programs for students which may not reflect the women's choices, abilities, or interests, thus serving to further disempower them. Even classroom size physically restricts the number of students able to participate in educational programming. In addition, non-support of correctional educators by CSC staff can be seen to adversely impact the teachers and resultantly the

students as well.

(b) While CSC can be seen to severely restrict inmate-students' educational opportunities and possibilities for independence, positive growth and change, the teachers hold the potential for nurturing the reversal of that process. The vision held by Arlette for the education of the women was exceedingly positive, delineated as it was as being holistic, empowering, transformative, and infused with a state of openness and receptivity. Martha defined her vision as education for independence and widening the walls of the institution. Amidst the crises and confusion of the first year, however, it would seem the teachers, through the learning experiences offered to the students, in actuality supported CSC's definition, serving to restrict literacy learning to decontextualized, solitary workbook activities with questionable value or relevance for the students involved.

While allusions had been made by Arlette to a critical pedagogy grounded in the work of Freire, and to an holistic, empowering approach to education, there is limited evidence to suggest such theory was translated into practice. A storage room filled with significant quantities of Laubach workbooks in multiple copies for each level would suggest that women's lower literacy level education was to be offered through this means; indeed, the sheer numbers of these workbooks would indicate it was anticipated they would be used by the expected majority of low-literate women. The women themselves confirmed the use of such curricular materials, and offered little indication of the use of any other materials or modes of learning.

(c) The impact of such a narrow view of literacy offered the women through CSC's definition of literacy and the curricular materials presented to them would suggest a

continuation of much they had experienced before - restricted choices, continued dependence on others, and a lack of meaningful, relevant, intellectually stimulating, and life-enriching, life-enhancing educational opportunities.

(d) Prison literacy education based on solitary independent work in restricted competency-based materials can offer students little more than literacy for continuing dependence on external authorities and conformity to their place in society, with few, if any, new ways of experiencing themselves and their world enabling them to strive toward, or even see the possibility for, empowered, enriched lives.

Incarcerated students' abilities to effect meaningful change remain severely restricted, for if the prison school is full there is no other school to apply to; if inmate services are required for work in other areas of the institution, they do not have the option of refusing to work to attend school instead. Should they be unable to afford post-secondary courses, they are also unable to access work which would pay enough to allow them to save for tuition and books. Should they be transferred from one institution to another, they have no assurance as to whether or not their course materials will be sent with them to the receiving institution, or if there will be adequate, if any, educational opportunities available to them.

Many of the women have had years of educational opportunities in prisons, and if they have not progressed in, or been changed by, their educational endeavours, the cause could lie as much from what they have been offered as from the energies they have been willing to expend on their studies. Indeed it is possible the curricula and materials offered them have not been worthy of their energies or their time.

Through the educational opportunities offered incarcerated women, it is imperative that passive, obedient thinking be refused, and that critical thinking be nurtured. Rather than restrictive dependency-producing learning activities, inmate-students urgently require meaningful and relevant curricula which will nurture and encourage their abilities to think, critique, problem-solve, discuss, imagine, and create. The noteworthy programs and curricular materials presented earlier in this document offer concrete means by which teachers can immediately incorporate such activities into their classrooms. The words of the women illustrate the need for rich and empowering educational opportunities, and, for Susan, a longing and desire for challenging ideas to explore and an opportunity to think and to learn through engagement in meaningful activities with her peers. Surely it is imperative, at the very least, that the women be able to articulate what they are reading beyond it being "just regular literature."

Because these women are prisoners, the general public may well view life-enriching, life-enhancing, and possibly life-changing educational opportunities as inappropriate and unnecessary, while simultaneously begrudging them even the meager educational opportunities offered. The influence of this education, however, will of course extend beyond the students to their children and other family members and to the communities to which they will return upon release. It must be remembered these women will again walk among us; will again take their places as mothers, wives, daughters, workers, influencing the lives of those around them for good or for ill.

Perhaps during the Fireweed Education Centre's first year it was impossible for the teachers to attempt or accomplish more. While the early months of the year were filled

with preparation of the school and library for the influx of students, remarkably the last few months of the first year of operation may be seen as reflecting that earlier time: a new teacher with her own philosophy of correctional education, finding her way and her place in a penal environment; students one by one being transferred to the institution, undergoing the required educational assessments for determination of appropriate levels for continuation of schooling and seeking permission to attend; students meeting and adjusting to the institution, to each other, to their new teacher, to the more secure environment, and to a philosophy of corrections which had reverted back to its more rigid form. The positive learning experiences resulting from enriching programmes such as those offered at Bedford Hills and Pine Grove, however, stand as rich alternatives for both students and teachers at EIFW, with possibilities not reflected in classrooms where prisoners work through prepackaged materials, isolated from one another as each works at her own level on her own subject in her own book at her own desk, each one's vision narrowed to the filling in of this blank or the circling of that answer.

In the teacher's hands is the potential for rebirth, and in curriculum development the vibrant possibilities for new life for the school and the students, through empowerment, healing, growth, the expanding of horizons, the intellectual opening of doors and the pushing back of walls. Martha, and all prison educators holding similar visions, are deserving of much support in their efforts, not only and necessarily from the Correctional Service of Canada, but crucially from the wider community as well. While Arlette was unable to realize her vision for the Fireweed Education Centre, undoubtedly due in large measure to the early challenges she faced which took valuable time and energy from her

teaching role and duties, she did prepare the ground upon which Martha may now build. While systemic institutional barriers will continue to confine the learning experiences possible for inmate-students, the very real possibility offered by Collins - that teacher autonomy in choice of curriculum is not as restricted by those in authority as had been supposed, and that a fairly wide terrain exists within which teachers may exercise their own professional judgment in interpreting curriculum - will nurture our hope for the fruition of those vibrant possibilities now resting in the teacher's hands.

If education is to capture the minds, hearts and imaginations of the students, surely the students must be offered ideas, texts, and activities worthy of their time, thought, and energies. Inmate-students must be given the opportunity for active, creative participation in their own educational endeavours, must be nurtured and prodded as women capable of intelligent thought with potential for the creation of knowledge, capable of raising their own questions and seeking their own answers. The consequences of education that is anything less comes with a price more than they, or we, should be willing to pay.

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Appendix I

Library Books from the Edmonton Public Library, November 12, 1996: received in EIFW for twelve women who had requested reading materials either by book title or by subject.

Set 1:
The Old Silent (1989) - Martha Grimes
Who Killed James Dean (1995) - Warren Newton Beath
Hostage One (1989) - David E. Fisher and Col. Ralph Albertazzie
Devil's Workshop (1996) - Kate Gallison
Walking After Midnight (1984) - Karen Robards

Set 2:
Making Peace With Yourself (1985) - Harold H. Bloomfield, MD.
Walking Shadow (1994) - Robert B. Parker
The Robber Bride (1993) - Margaret Atwood
First Pedigree Murder (1994) - Melissa Cleary
Stress, Sanity, and Survival (1978) - Robert L. Woolfolk and Frank C. Richardson

Set 3:
Wuthering Heights (1983) - Emily Bronte
The Poetry of the Canadian People 1720 - 1920 - N. Brian David (Ed.)
After All (1995) - Mary Tyler Moore
Pole to Pole (1992) - Michael Palin

Set 4:
Ellen Elliott: A Pioneer (1979) - Elizabeth Andrews (Tape)
Lady Susan - Jane Austen (Tape)
Dr. Weisinger's Anger Work-out Book (1985) - Hendrie Weisinger, Ph.D.
Creative Crafts and Stitchery (1976) - Better Homes and Gardens
Country Crochet (Magazine)

Set 5:
The Spiral Path: Explorations in Women's Spirituality (1992) - Theresa King (Ed.)
Take Charge of Your Emotional Life (1991) - Robert Langs
The Woman's Tale: A Journal of Inner Exploration (1980) - Ronda Chervin, Mary Neill & You.
Keeping Secrets (1988) - Suzanne Somers
Pale Sun, Crescent Moon - Cowboy Junkies (CD)

Set 6:
Each Time We Love (1993) - Shirlee Busbee
Beyond Tomorrow (1987) - Fern Michaels
Fallen Hearts (1988) - V.C. Andrews
Jury Duty (1996) - Laura Van Wormer

Set 7:
Memnock The Devil (1995) - Anne Rice
Servant of the Bones (1996) - Anne Rice
Solving Life's Problems (1980) - Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho
The Poet's Work (1979) - Reginald Gibbons (Ed.)
To Wrestle and To Dance: Reflections on the Power of Faith (1993) - James R. Wilkes

Set 8:
Chase the Sun (1995) - Rosanne Bitner
A Dangerous Fortune (1993) - Ken Follett
Days of Grace: A Memoir (1993) - Arthur Ashe and Arnold Rampersad
No Jacket Required - Phil Collins (CD)

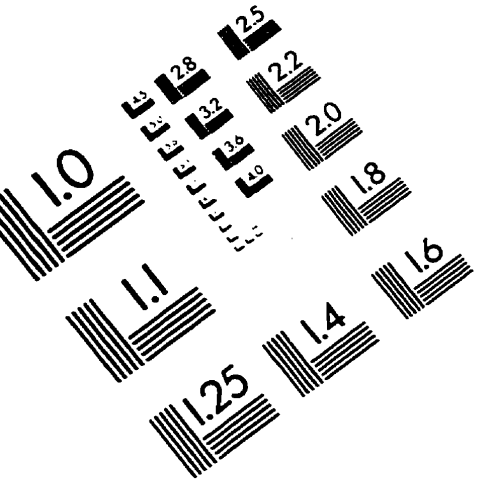
Set 9:
Crossfire Trail (1954) - Louis L'Amour
Treasure Island (1972) - Louis L'Amour
Beautiful British Columbia (Summer 1996) (Magazine)
Arizona Highways (October 1996) (Magazine)
Canadian Horseman (September/October 1996) (Magazine)

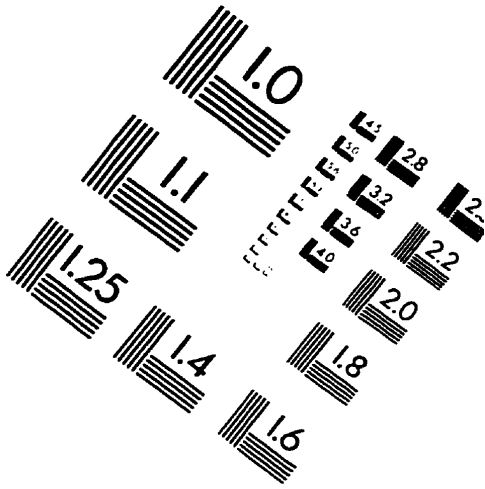
Set 10:
Such Devoted Sisters (1992) - Eileen Goudge
The Comedy of Errors - Shakespeare
Four English Comedies of the 17th and 18th Centuries (1950) - J. M. Morrell (Ed.)
Lion's Bride (1996) - Iris Johansen
The Birthday Girl (1995) - Stephen Leather

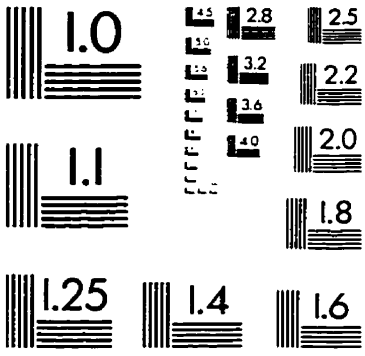
Set 11:
The Journal of Sylvia Plath - Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough, Ed.
Dust Devil (1996) - Rebecca Brandewyne
Gypsy Sins (1993) - John Lawrence Reynolds
Where Old Bones Lie (1993) - Ann Granger
Embraced by the Light (1992) - Betty J. Eadie

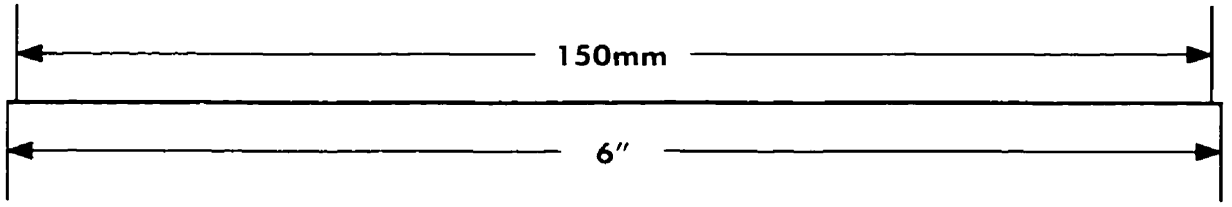
Set 12:
In Contempt (1996) - Christopher Darden with Jess Walter
Love and Guilt and the Meaning of Life, etc. (1979) - Judith Viorst
Moonlight Becomes You (1996) - Mary Higgens Clark
The Rainmaker (1995) - John Grisham

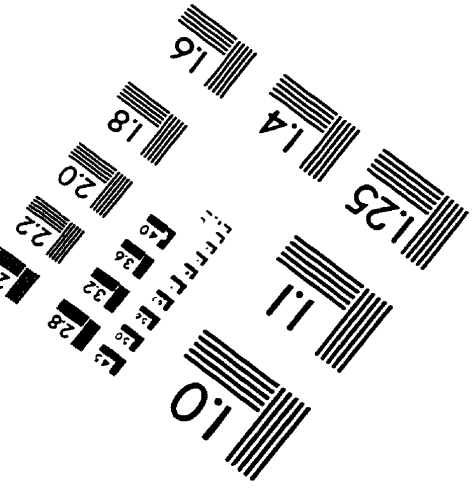
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

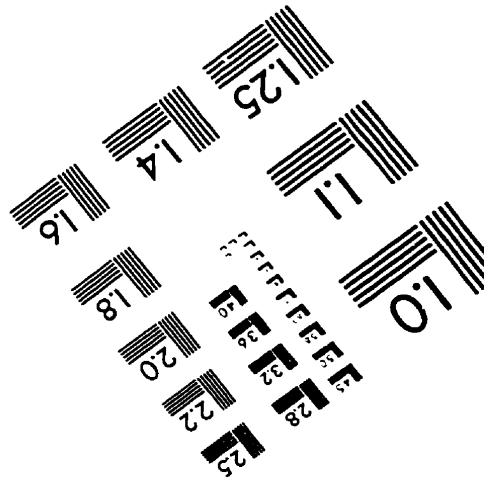












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