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What Impact Would a Change to the Curriculum on Vocational Beauty Therapy Courses in the Dochas Centre (Mountjoy Prison) have on Teachers and Prisoner-Learners: an Action Research Study

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What impact would a change to the curriculum on vocational beauty therapy courses in the Dochas Centre (Mountjoy Prison) have on teachers and prisoner-learners?

An Action Research Study

Carina Brereton

MA in Higher Education

2014

Supervisor: Orla Hanratty

DIT Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre

Declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Master of Arts in Higher Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part fulfilment of the above named Award.

The work reported on in this thesis conforms to the principles and requirements of the DIT's guidelines for ethics in research and the study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Irish Prison Service.

Word Count (excluding abstract, preliminary pages, references and appendices): **21,607 words**.

Signed.....

Date.....

Abstract

This action research study is an interpretive inquiry into the impact of curriculum design on female prisoner learners at the Dóchas Education Centre, Mountjoy Prison, Dublin. The objective was to understand prisoner learner experiences of vocational training courses in the discipline of beauty therapy. In particular, it aimed to understand the motivation for participation in the beauty therapy course and the effect of the course structure and assessment approach on learner perceptions of the training experience. The research design is qualitative and interpretivist in nature. The data was gathered via a series of semi-structured interviews, with prisoner-learners and teaching staff. In addition, three full days of lesson observations took place periodically during two cycles of action research.

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret how both teachers and learners experience a change in curriculum and assessment. The aim of this action research study is to trial a different assessment methodology and curriculum plan on the beauty therapy vocational course. The objective was to establish whether or not a more unitised and learner-centred approach to curriculum design, involving diagnostic assessment and registration of individual learners on level-appropriate qualification units, which lead to certification of competence in individual beauty therapy services; would lead to an increased sense of achievement and overall satisfaction levels amongst prisoners.

The findings of the study highlighted a gap in the knowledge and understanding of the special requirements of these types of courses in terms of physical resources, realistic working/salon environment and curriculum content, based specifically on the identified needs and goals of learners. Upon examination and reflection of the literature it became apparent that there were a number of issues relating to education provision in the Dóchas Centre, including many factors and challenges which are outside the control of the teaching staff. Findings may suggest that the Irish Prison Education Service has placed disproportionate importance on the Leaving Certificate and other general education courses in the Dochas Centre. This study highlights that a new multi-agency direction is required in order to research the vocational training and employability skills that female prisoner-learners require, so that they can leave prison with employable and marketable skills and knowledge, thereby enabling them to earn money legitimately and independently upon release.

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List of Abbreviations

AONTAS - Irish National Adult Learning Organisation

CDETb - City of Dublin Education and Training Board

CRP - Community Return Programme

CSO - Central Statistics Office

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

ESRI – Economic and Social Research Institute

ETB – Education and Training Board

FAS – Training and Employment Authority

FE – Further Education

FET – Further Education and Training

FETAC – Further Education and Training Awards Council

HEA – Higher Education Authority

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council

IPS – Irish Prison Service

ITEC – International Therapy Examination Council (UK)

NFQ – National Irish Framework of Qualifications

NVQ – National Vocational Qualification (UK)

OFSTED – Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (UK)

QQI- Quality and Qualifications Ireland

RWE – Realistic Working Environment

SOLAS – Further Education and Training Authority

UCD – University College Dublin

VET – Vocational Education and Training

VTCT – Vocational Training Charitable Trust (UK)

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Context of the research

In Ireland, the Irish Prison Service and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) produced a study on recidivism rates which was published in 2013. The study found that the recidivism rate of female offenders in Ireland within three years was 57%. (Irish Prison Service & CSO, 2013)

The Dóchas Education Centre is a closed, medium security prison for females aged 18 years and over located in Mountjoy Prison in Dublin (Irish Prisons Service, 2013). Attendance at school is voluntary in all prison education units in Ireland.

The Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) is both a UK regulated and international awarding organisation in the hair, beauty, sport and hospitality sectors as well as a registered charity; donating funds to prisons and other educational causes. VTCT awards qualifications which are aligned to the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) at levels 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 and are equivalent to FETAC and HETAC awards.

1.2 Motivation for the research

Beauty therapy is a particularly important vocational discipline in the context of the Dóchas Centre, because along with hairdressing these are some of the only female-orientated trades in the economy. Furthermore, these trades enable skilled hairdressers, nail technicians, beauty therapists and complementary therapists to work on a self-employed basis; this can be a very attractive career pathway for ex-prisoners, who may find it difficult to secure traditional employment upon release.

With the recidivism concerns outlined above it was the intention of this action research study to explore ways in which the Dochas Centre and the Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) could work together to investigate the most appropriate curriculum model on the beauty therapy vocational courses in the prison and to understand the perceptions and needs of prisoner-learners in relation to beauty therapy education and training.

Most studies regarding educating women in Irish prisons are part of larger male and female combined studies and have only been carried out in a small number of areas. Few writers have been able to draw on any systematic research into the vocational education needs of women in Irish prisons. This indicates a need to understand the various perceptions of vocational education that exist among prisoner-learners in the Dochas Centre. It is a constant finding in the literature that key life events such as securing suitable employment, acquiring a stable partner and completing education degrees increase the likelihood of desistance from offending (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

The researcher's current role at VTCT is as the Specialist Lead, managing the development of qualifications and the associated assessment strategy for courses delivered in VTCT approved assessment centres. More specifically the researchers' role on the beauty therapy course at the Dóchas Centre is as an external curriculum and assessment advisor to tutors on behalf of VTCT. The researcher does not conduct any teaching or assessment of the outcomes of training, but is the designer of the course structure, assessment methods and materials.

1.3 Purpose of the research

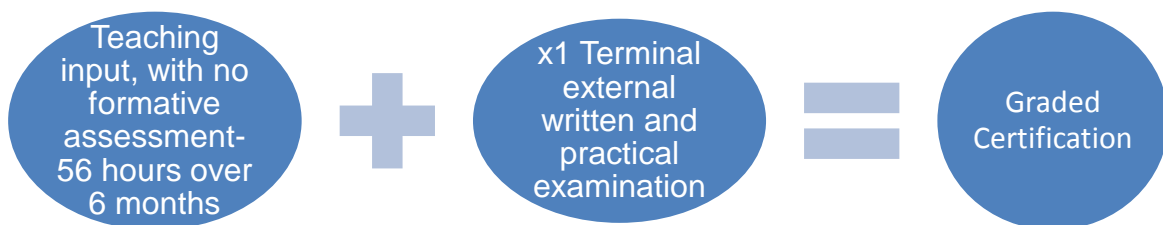
The purpose of this study is to qualitatively explore the impact of a change in curriculum plan on a vocational beauty therapy course. This study aimed to establish whether prisoners preferred to be internally assessed by their tutor on a continuous basis, with each beauty therapy service unit leading to a qualification, rather than having a purely end-loaded external summative assessment at the end of the course. The central question is *would this curriculum change have other impacts on prisoners such as feelings of enjoyment of the learning experience in a less pressurised and less stressful environment? Enhanced prisoner motivation?* The focus of this research lies in the participants' stories, narratives and experiences surrounding their experience of participating on beauty therapy vocational courses whilst in prison. Outputs of this study will be used to inform the decision on whether or not a permanent change in curriculum plan for the beauty therapy course should be implemented.

1.4 Models of curriculum and assessment

This action research study is a qualitative investigation of students' and teacher experiences and perceptions of the differing impact of moving from a Curriculum Plan A model to a Curriculum Plan B model (outlined below) on the beauty therapy vocational education course.

Curriculum Plan A (ITEC) – End-loaded summative assessment with no formative assessment, leading to a terminal external exam with an outcome of graded certification (Pass, Merit, Distinction). This curriculum plan is externally accredited by ITEC (UK Awarding Organisation).

Fig 1: Curriculum A



Curriculum Plan A

Since 2007, beauty therapy courses at the Dóchas Centre have been delivered using Curriculum Plan A. This involves a minimum of 56 hours of teaching, where the teacher delivers theory and practical classes for a period of approximately six months. At the end of the course, an ITEC External Examiner conducts a practical examination visit and externally assesses every learner in one final summative practical skills exam. At the end of the course,

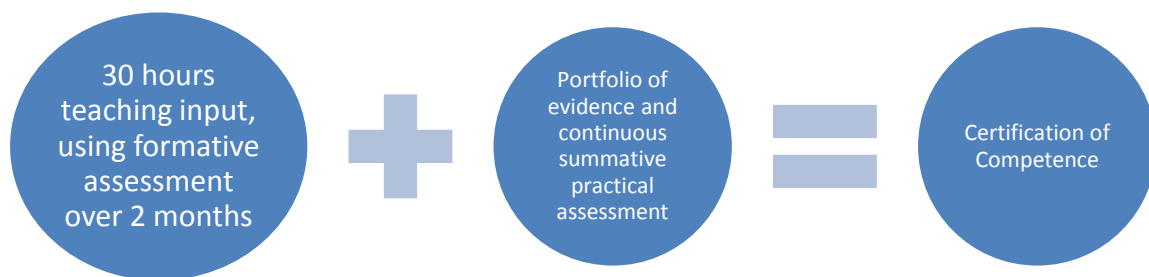
the students also complete an externally set and externally marked Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) paper. The practical and theory exams are both graded and the grades which can be achieved are outlined below:

- Pass: 60%-74%
- Merit: 75%-89%
- Distinction:90%-100%

The aggregate mark for the practical skills examinations and the multiple choice questions determines the overall grade of the qualification.

Curriculum Plan B (VTCT) – Continuous summative assessment and use of formative assessment, leading to summative competence-based assessments, using a binary grading system (Pass/Refer) with an outcome of certification of competence. This curriculum plan is externally accredited by VTCT (UK Awarding Organisation).

Fig 2: Curriculum B



Curriculum Plan B was implemented as part of this action research study on the beauty therapy vocational course at the Dóchas Centre. The course is delivered over 30 hours and takes approximately two months using a process of continuous formative and summative assessment; whereby the tutor is the assessor and assessment achievement is based on a

binary grade (Pass/Refer). An internal verifier (in this study; the researcher, is the internal verifier) internally quality assures a sample of formative and summative assessments. The awarding organisation (VTCT) externally quality assures a sample of assessments and verifies the internal quality assurance procedures. A portfolio of evidence is compiled to ensure that the learner has achieved a specified number of competent practical assessments and theoretical tasks, across a range of content from the course syllabus. See Appendix C and Appendix D for ITEC and VTCT syllabus documentation.

By implementing and evaluating a short-term change in practice, the overall aim of this study is to inform decision making on the future choice of curriculum and assessment which ‘best fits’ the needs of learners and teachers at the Dóchas Centre. In doing so, the study may also contribute to national knowledge, considering that the Dóchas Centre is the flagship women’s prison and training centre in Ireland (Reilly, 2013).

1.5 Organisation of chapters

This chapter will now conclude with a short outline of the remaining chapters. This thesis has five chapters in total. Chapter two reviews the literature relevant to common models of curriculum used in vocational education and training as well as the vocational education sector in Ireland and prison education. Chapter three discusses the research design and the theories and methods underpinning this thesis. Chapter four presents and discusses the findings of this action research study. Chapter five reflects on the study, its findings and implications for practice. Recommendations for practice, as well as suggestions for further study are also discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the literature relevant to the research questions on vocational education and training, curriculum and prison education for women. This will include discussion of the literature surrounding the vocational/further education and training sector in Ireland, as well as framing this in a European context. This chapter will also examine the literature relating to common models of curriculum relevant to the context of this study. An evaluation of the international literature on prison education also forms part of this chapter.

2.2 Vocational education and training

The Irish government implemented radical reform in 2012 in the vocational education sector. Following more than a decade of education and training structures inspired by the Sorbonne Declaration for Higher Education (1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999) and the Copenhagen Declaration (2002), reforms were implemented in the vocational education sector in the same manner as for higher education (West, 2012). The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 established a new integrated agency; Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). This agency is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training. In addition, it is responsible for the maintenance, development and review of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) (QQI, 2014).

In 2013, the Further Education and Training Act 2013 provided for the dissolution of FÁS and the establishment of SOLAS, as the new Further Education and Training Authority in Ireland. SOLAS has now published the first ever strategy for the Further Education and Training (FET) sector (2014-2019). The overall aim of the strategy is to develop a world-class integrated system of FET in Ireland, which will promote economic development and meet the needs of all citizens. The 2014 strategy follows a radical overhaul of the structure of the Vocational Education and Training (VET)/FET sector by the government (SOLAS, 2014). Whilst many welcome changes are contained in the document, in the view of this researcher, the authors failed to address many of the underlying issues in vocational education; including recognising that vocational education can occur at higher education framework levels (6-10) as well as further education framework levels (1-5). In particular, the

authors did not seek to investigate possibilities for further integration of vocational education within Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) leading to skilled employment in trades and crafts, which are not, already established courses within HEIs. Examples could include floristry, hairdressing, beauty and spa therapy, jewellery making and textiles. The SOLAS (2014) strategy paper acknowledges the historical position of Level 6 and Level 7 construction related vocational education in HEIs and the associated funding streams from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). In the view of this researcher, the conclusions of the SOLAS (2014) strategy paper are not well supported, as the paper has failed to recognise an important aspect of the vocational education sector; that being it's placement within a higher education context in addition to it being a vehicle for transition between further and higher education. A major criticism of the SOLAS (2014) paper is that it fails to advocate for the establishment of vocational education pathways into and within higher education and is disproportionately focussed on progression directly into employment, as a worthy outcome of further education.

The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) companion report to the SOLAS FET Strategy entitled 'Further Education and Training in Ireland: Past, Present and Future', highlights how vocational education and vocational training evolved separately in Ireland, due to a lack of strategic direction at central level (ESRI, 2014). The ESRI research also indicated that in terms of accreditation, just 24% of FET graduates gained a major award, with just over 5% of those gaining major awards at Levels 1-3 combined (SOLAS, 2014). The beauty salon sector in Ireland has grown organically since 1972, when Bronwyn Conroy opened the first beauty school in Dublin offering UK and Swiss qualifications. Since then the sector has grown significantly and beauty salons are now the main employers in the sector. For more than 40 years, the only available qualifications in Ireland in the sector were awarded by UK and Swiss exam boards. There are now 150 private and state providers of beauty therapy vocational education and training and they all offer UK or Swiss qualifications, alongside the recently developed (2013) FETAC qualifications in beauty therapy. Treatment risk insurance in the sector in Ireland is solely underwritten by UK brokers; so, for insurance reasons and employer recognition of UK qualifications in the industry, UK qualifications are still preferred by education providers to ensure that their graduates are employable and insurable in the industry upon completion.

2.3 Curriculum

2.3.1. Beauty Therapy

The SOLAS (2014) strategy document provides growth projections by ‘occupational families’. One criticism of this approach however, is that it is unclear, whether hairdressing and beauty therapy services would fit under the ‘Arts, Sports and Tourism Family’, where broadly neutral occupational and sector effects are predicted or the ‘Sales and Customer Care Family’, where strong growth is predicted as sales occupations are expected to gain shares in the skill mix of many sectors.

In terms of occupational business sector growth, there is a body of research which indicates a ‘Lipstick effect’ in hair and beauty industries during times of recession. Women are more likely to buy beauty products and services during recessions according to a paper entitled ‘Boosting Beauty in an Economic Decline: Mating, Spending and the Lipstick Effect’ which encompasses five studies undertaken by researchers at the University of Minnesota, University of Texas and Arizona State University. It is asserted in the paper that “findings empirically demonstrate the lipstick effect showing that women seek to boost beauty specifically in times of economic recession” (Hill, Rodeheffer, Griskevicius, Durante & White, 2012 p13), experiments revealed that the psychological process driving the lipstick effect are rooted in women’s mating psychology. The results lend additional support for the hypothesis that the lipstick effect emerges in response to heightened mate attraction efforts, arising due to diminished access to mates with resources (Hill et al., 2012). Whilst the study may not provide conclusive evidence as to the reasons for growth in consumer spending in the hair and beauty industry during economic downturns, it does prove beyond doubt the recession-proof nature of the hair and beauty sector. The findings by Hill et al., highlight the importance of the beauty salon services sector as a contributor to the economy; as well as being a viable career route for women with vocational qualifications.

2.3.2. Common models of curriculum

In Europe, work to restructure the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector has resulted in a series of joint instruments which are aimed at promoting commonality and mobility of vocational education in Europe. One of these instruments, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), represents a change in approach for many countries with a

shift in emphasis towards learning outcomes rather than curriculum content (European Parliament and Council 2008, cited by West, 2012).

This action research study focuses on the effect of implementing a change in the curriculum plan, moving away from a curriculum which leads to an International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC) qualification, towards a curriculum which leads to a Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) qualification.

The ITEC model of curriculum for beauty therapy has been historically influenced by the approach adopted in Higher Education (HE); that is a content-based focus of curriculum, using norm-referenced summative assessment. The ITEC beauty therapy curriculum has been adopted in the Dóchas Centre since 2007.

Since the early 1990's, the VTCT adopted an outcomes-based and competence-based model of curriculum and assessment for beauty therapy. In particular, it has been led by developments in VET and Further Education (FE), rather than Higher Education. The VTCT beauty therapy curriculum is being introduced to the Dóchas Centre for the first time as part of this action research study.

Higher Education has tended to focus on the content and process of learning rather than its outcomes (UDACE, 1989 in Maher, 2004). There are many advantages to be gained by moving away from a content-based focus of curriculum to a more student-centred approach (Robertson, 2001). Learning outcomes offer a means by which attention can be focussed on the actual achievements of students rather than just teaching input (Maher, 2004). Over the last decade, the ITEC model of curriculum has evolved in this direction, but has not completely adopted the approaches commonly used in VET, such as an explicitly outcome-based, objective-based or a competence-based curriculum.

Vocational education and skills-based training in the UK has developed and built upon Ralph Tyler's (1949) seminal work on the objective-based approach to curriculum design, which is underpinned by a framework of competence-based qualifications. Tyler (1949) asks four questions relating to the purpose of a curriculum:

- What educational purposes should the institution seek to attain?
- What educational experiences are likely to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organised?

- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Tyler's (1949) 'statements of purpose' have become known as objectives which can be designed using specified verbs, to devise behavioural or performance objectives or criteria. Recently updated by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), Bloom's taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives (1956) is a framework for classifying learning outcomes or objectives in cognitive terms (i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation). Indeed it is still in use and underpins the design of many outcomes-based curricula worldwide. Watson (2002, p. 208) defines a learning outcome as "being something that students can do now that they could not do previously...a change in people as a result of a learning experience".

The idea of working with competencies in the educational context originated in the US; labelled as performance-based education (Maher, 2004). In the UK, VET was redeveloped using the competence-based approach in the 1990's, represented by the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) (Colley, David, Diment & Tedder, 2003). Beauty therapy courses have evolved into two types of courses; one using the competence-based outcomes approach and the other end-loaded broader content focussed programmes where beauty therapy is just one element of the curriculum. "Prescribed curricula for VET courses emphasise the acquisition of skills (job-specific and transferable), along with underpinning knowledge to ensure their appropriate deployment in the workplace...approaches are rooted in outcome-referenced models of curriculum design and delivery" (Colley et al, p. 4). According to Prideaux (2003), one criticism of this model is that it restricts the curriculum to a narrow range of student skills and knowledge, which can be readily expressed in behavioural terms. Higher order thinking and problem solving may be excluded, as they cannot be articulated in behavioural terms. Hussey and Smith (2003) assert that the clarity, explicitness and objectivity attributed to learning outcomes is largely spurious (Maher, 2004). However, Barr and Tagg (1995) present some powerful arguments to support the shift towards an environment in which students are empowered to take responsibility for what they learn (guided by explicit learning outcomes that clearly link to assessment).

Competence-based education enables students to become competent employees (Velde, 1999). Employers have long argued that they are more interested in what students can 'do' rather than what they 'know'; this adds weight to the argument for the adoption of a learning

outcomes approach (Jackson, 2000). A competency is usually seen in the context in which it will be used and it includes a functional component, a personal or behavioural component, a cognitive component and an ethical component (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996). Studies on authentic assessments demonstrate that when students perceive that an assessment resembles their future professional practice (i.e. as authentic); they are stimulated to study more extensively and develop more generic skills (Gulikers, 2007). A key requirement of the VTCT beauty therapy curriculum is that summative assessments must take place in a Realistic Work Environment (RWE) (Armstrong & Hughes, 2000). Furthermore, this also links with the expectancy-value theory; as students are likely to place a high value on successful learning in a realistic 'beauty salon' context, by achieving performance deemed to be of an acceptable standard by employers (Wigfield, Tonks, & Kluda, 2009).

Biggs (2003) places emphasis on process rather than content. In addition, he also highlights that achieving outcomes at identified levels relating to the desired knowledge, understanding or application of the subject matter, will be valuable to students in professional roles. Biggs (2003) also advocates the use of precise verbs to define the required level of performance and argues that performance-assessment is the most effective way of assessing functioning knowledge. He presents the idea that aligning the 'Three P's' will ensure that the curriculum, teaching and learning activities and assessment dovetail neatly into one another, as follows:

- Presage – Prior student learning, identification of learning needs and planning the teaching and learning activities and assessment.
- Process – The learning activities which the student will undertake.
- Product – The outcome desired from these activities.

The use of both objectives and outcomes has the effect of focussing teachers on both broad statements of intent (outcomes) and narrow and specific objectives (assessment criteria) (Biggs, 2003).

2.3.3. Assessment

The use of competency-based continuous assessment has been widely debated in vocational education, along with questions of norm-referenced principles and criterion-referenced principles. Another interesting difference between the curriculum plan implemented during

this action research study and the incumbent curriculum plan is the use of criterion-referenced, outcome-based assessment. This is an approach advocated by Biggs (2003) who argues that marking and grading models should be criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced.

The following table is adapted from Popham (1975). Table 1 highlights the differences in purpose, curriculum content, assessment items, mark allocation and interpretation between criterion-referenced assessment and norm-referenced assessment.

Table 1: Illustration of differences between criterion-referenced testing and norm-referenced testing

Source: Popham (1975)

Dimension	Criterion-referenced testing	Norm-referenced testing
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine whether each student has gained specific skills or knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To rank each student with respect to the achievement of others in broad areas of knowledge. • To differentiate between high and low achievers.
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures specific skills which make-up a designated curriculum. • Each skill is expressed as an instructional objective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures broad skill areas sampled from a variety of textbooks, syllabi and judgements of curriculum experts.
Item characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each skill is tested by at least four items in order to obtain an adequate sample of student performance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each skill is usually tested by less than four items. • Items discriminate between high and low achievers.

<p>Score Interpretation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each individual is compared with a preset standard for acceptable achievement; the performance of other learners is irrelevant. • A student's score is usually expressed as a percentage. • Student achievement is reported for individual skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each individual is compared with other students and assigned a score. • Student achievement is reported for broad skill areas.
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2.3.4. Teaching and learning

The use of practical formative assessment as a pedagogical tool is a particular characteristic of competency-based vocational education. The concept of formative assessment predominantly sits within a constructivist framework. Black and William (1998) describe formative assessment as being those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Dunn and Mulvenon (2009) assert that research has incontrovertibly revealed that the use of formative assessment facilitates improvement in instructional practices, identifies gaps in the curriculum, and contributes to increased student performance. Butler and Winnie (1995) contend that learners use formative feedback to monitor their engagement with tasks, which in turn, generates internal feedback. Self-regulated learners differ from their non-self-regulated peers by generating more internal feedback, responding positively to external feedback and increasing efforts to achieve learning goals (Bose & Rengel, 2009).

The Irish Adult Learning Organisation (AONTAS) describes the learner-centred approach as one that adopts a person-centred approach which is very different from the approach that focuses all the power, knowledge and status in the teacher (AONTAS, 2000). The learner-centred approach has also influenced the practice and methodology of schemes which are

targeted at unemployed people and disadvantaged young people. In particular, there is growing recognition that tackling this task must involve a holistic approach to learning. A learner-centred approach places the learner at the centre of the learning process and not the syllabus; as such, they are self-directed equals in the learning process, along with teachers. This approach is holistic in that it attends to the whole person and recognises their life experience as valuable prior learning. Using a constructivist teaching approach, learning occurs by creating realities and meaning as a form of co-creation of knowledge. The teacher may seek to determine learning styles such as visual, auditory/aural, reading/writing and kinaesthetic by using learning style questionnaires (AONTAS, 2012). The primacy of skills and knowledge acquisition is supported by the widespread use of popularised theories of learning styles in Further Education (FE) (e.g. Honey & Mumford, 1992) (Colley et al, 2003). According to SOLAS (2014) the Irish FET sector is both learner-centred and participative in its pedagogical approach.

2.4 Prison education for women

2.4.1 Ireland

Smyth (1999) reports that girls are more likely to have lower academic self-images than boys and girls also tend to have a lower sense of control over their lives, which is disproportionately found amongst those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A group of women who participated in the Certificate in Women's Studies in the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) in University College Dublin (UCD) reported negative experiences of school. The women identified negative beliefs originating from their school experiences, such as being told that they were not 'bright enough' or 'good enough' to continue, which led to low expectations and feelings of shame (Smyth & McCann 1999).

Judge Michael Reilly, appointed as an Inspector of Prisons in 2008, presented an Interim Report on the Dóchas Centre to the Minister for Justice and Equality in October 2013. The Reilly Interim Report states that "significantly different considerations apply when dealing with women prisoners" (p. 6). The report confirms that unacceptable overcrowding is the single greatest problem associated with the Dóchas Centre. Homelessness and a lack of diversionary options for certain women contribute to this problem. Since 2010, the Dóchas

Centre has consistently operated way in excess of maximum capacity which has had many negative effects. For example, arguments between women are a constant feature and tension exists throughout the centre where the slightest issue can spark a major altercation. A significant number of women in the Dóchas Centre have experienced childhood sexual abuse, abuse in adult life, indifference and neglect; punishment is not a new experience for them. Imprisonment dramatically increases the likelihood that they will lose their homes (if they haven't already), threaten their relationships with families and children as well as their mental health (Reilly, 2013). Reilly (2013) also refers to education within the Dóchas Centre in his Interim Report, and states that when women are imprisoned for short sentences, it is difficult for teachers to make worthwhile progress with the cohort as the time span is not sufficient. Reilly spoke with prisoners from the group he categorised as being likely to be homeless on release and those who come from marginalised backgrounds with poor education. The majority of these women told him that they are just looking for help, any help to “get off these bloody drugs” (p. 11), “get my children back” (p. 11) and “get away from the abuse that I have suffered from him” (e.g. a spouse/partner or some other person exercising power over the woman in the community) (p. 11).

According to the Irish Prison Service (IPS) strategy document, vocational education in prison and in the Dóchas Centre is on the agenda between 2012 and 2015, specifically listed as Strategic Action number 6. The IPS state that they will devise specific strategies for younger prisoners, women, older prisoners, sex offenders, protection prisoners, violent offenders and those suffering from mental illness. In addition, the strategy document notes that it will build on and enhance current programmes and services, including accredited education and vocational training.

In the view of this researcher, one of the limitations of the IPS strategy is that it fails to recognise the need for planned, targeted vocational education as part of pre-release training and preparation for employment or self-employment. The IPS makes a commitment to commence the roll out of the Community Return Programme (CRP), which is extremely positive in the view of this researcher. The CRP is an incentivised scheme for earned temporary release under which offenders who pose no threat to the community, are offered early temporary release in return for supervised community service.

2.4.2 Understanding the international outlook on education in prisons

In England, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) conducted a review into the education provided for young female offenders, under the age of 18. The review found that the quality of the information on the educational background of young women received by prisons, was often poor and education programmes developed were not relevant to prisoners' needs. There were complaints that the level and type of study were pitched too low. Furthermore, teaching standards were criticised for being too low; although it was acknowledged that education staff were working in difficult circumstances with potentially disruptive people, with limited training on how to deal with issues. The report recommended developing the role of the 'learning support worker', to act as learning mentors both during custody and in the community (Ofsted, 2004). Although the Ofsted Report was conducted a decade ago and related to minors, it is the view of this researcher that perhaps some points raised by Ofsted could be validly applied in the context of the Dóchas Centre?

The Scottish Government also found that employment is regarded as the single most effective strategy in reducing reoffending rates (Scottish Government, 2009). This study noted that the prison service in England requires that all offenders at induction receive an initial assessment within five days and that a 'learning and skills needs assessment' must be carried out for all first-time offenders. The study also revealed that employers appear to be more interested in the essential skills of reliability, honesty, work ethic and an ability to work with colleagues. It was recommended that prisons should start pre-release activity sooner and ensure a focus on learning, skills and employability. Policy challenges were also identified in Scotland and the report stated that "Enabling people to move on in their lives through effective support rarely has the same priority as punishing people for their offending behaviour. It is particularly challenging in overcrowded prisons to provide suitable learning opportunities, when the main focus is on custody and maintaining order. Within Scotland's most deprived areas there is an evident pattern of recycling between communities and prison. The reasons why people stop offending are complex and vary according to individual circumstances, but sustainable employment and skills development are important factors; once accommodation, benefits and support for addictions are in place" (Skills for Scotland, 2012 p.42) (Scottish Government, 2012)

The Scottish Government have published two reports on their findings surrounding education in prisons. As part of these reviews, a survey was conducted on motivations and reasons for

participating in learning programmes whilst in prison. The survey revealed that, learning centre staff believe, that inmates take part in learning mainly to occupy their time usefully, with a low percentage participating in order to improve their job prospects (Scottish Government, 2009). A serious weakness with this finding however, may be that the authors failed to notice a possible flaw in their method; in that prisoner-learners themselves were not included in the survey, and the absence of the opinions of inmates may bring the validity of this particular finding into question.

2.5 Summary

Most of the international research suggests that there is a link between successful enterprise and vocational training in prisons and reduced recidivism rates. Hobby or interest courses have been reported to be helpful in terms of reducing aggression and providing a useful outlet for prisoners to occupy their time. Some researchers have reported that the prioritisation of education and training has been identified as being a significant challenge, particularly in overcrowded and under-staffed prisons where the emphasis is on security and custody. A strong relationship between vocational education and training and outcomes-based curricula and assessment, has been reported in the literature. In reviewing the literature, no previous data was found relating to beauty therapy vocational courses at the Dóchas Centre or any prison in Ireland.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this study and the action research methodology adopted in order to investigate the research questions. Action research involves actively participating in, proposing and implementing a change in work practice. Lewin (1946) describes action research as a cycle of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the results of the action research. In addition, this chapter examines the philosophical issues relating to the hermeneutical techniques utilised to analyse respondents' experiences, as well as the phenomenological approach utilised for interviewing and analysing data. Action research was the methodology used and data analysis was conducted using thematic development through the use of hermeneutics.

The proposal to implement a change in the curriculum plan and to conduct action research arose from initial discussions with staff at the Dóchas Education Centre, relating to the existence of specific challenges and problems which had arisen over time on the beauty therapy vocational education course. These issues included:

- A lack of fixity in course duration due to unexpected releases after Court appearances or other changes in learner circumstances, which results in the amount of time available for a learner to undertake the course being undefined. The incumbent curriculum model involved a minimum of one academic year, with all training being completed prior to the external examination at the end of the course. Many learners were released from the Dóchas Centre without certification, having completed six or eight months of beauty therapy training.
- Issues relating to incentives and motivation were a challenge due to the length of time for participants between starting the course and the end of year examination.
- The learning environment can be challenging due to a lack of professional beauty salon resources and the compact classroom environment allocated to beauty therapy within the Dóchas Centre.

These issues, as identified by staff, helped to inform the research question and sub-questions. Indeed support for this study provided by the education staff at the Dóchas Centre, was considered by the Irish Prison Service when granting permission for this action research to be carried out.

Research Question

- If the current curriculum plan and assessment strategy for the beauty therapy course at the Dóchas Centre was changed, would prisoners and tutors report greater satisfaction with the effectiveness of the course, in terms of achievement, motivation and the overall learning experience?

Research Sub-questions

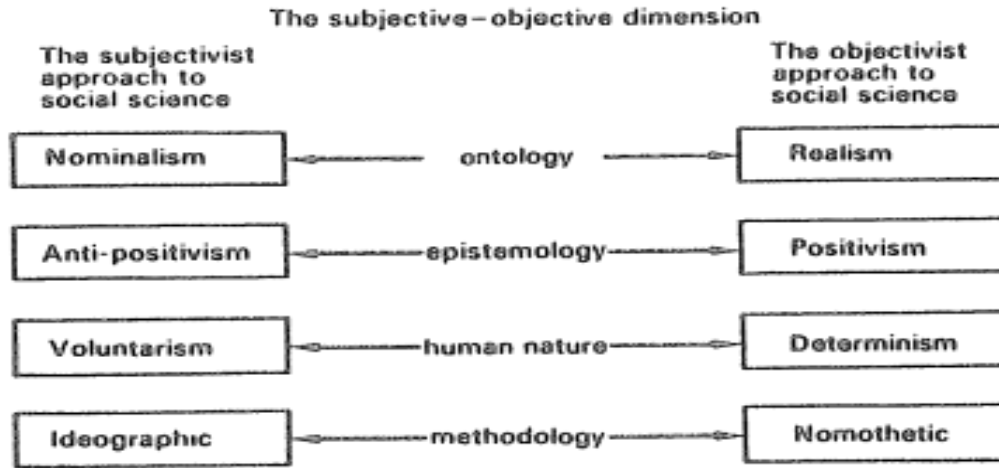
- Do prisoners and tutors feel that they would benefit from having a more commercial learning environment, such as a more spacious and professionally equipped beauty salon? If so, what would the perceived benefits be and how would this impact on the assessment strategy for the course?
- What are prisoners' expectations for future employment and self-employment? What are prisoner's past experiences of education, training and work experience?; including types of training, and level and type of qualifications achieved, before and during their current prison term.

3.2 Ontological and epistemological framework

Paradigm choice must always reflect the nature of the problem and the audience the research is aimed at (Creswell, 1994). The ontological and epistemological perspective most suited to this study is constructive-interpretivism (anti-positivism). This study adopts the subjectivist approach to social science. In particular, a constructive-interpretivist approach was deemed to most suitable for this study due to the axiological, ontological and epistemological premises established by such a paradigm. Burrell and Morgan 1979 (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001) illustrate in graphic form in Figure 3, the subjective-objective dimension.

Fig. 3: A scheme for analysing assumptions about the nature of social science

Source: Burrell and Morgan (1979, reprinted 2000 p 3)



Interpretivism is concerned with, understanding the way in which individuals create, modify and interpret their worlds (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The aim of this study involves establishing the effectiveness of a change in curriculum plan and assessment strategy. Effectiveness in the context of this study is considered using both levels of achievement and attainment, as well as learner enjoyment and perceptions of the learning experience. This study aims to document perceptions of participants relevant to the research question and sub-questions. “The central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p.22) Interpretivists analyse the perceptions of individuals in order to subjectively evaluate their perceptions.

Constructivists hold the view that knowledge does not exist independent of the learner, suggesting that knowledge is constructed (Blumer, 1969; Piaget, 1970; Kuhn, 1996). Von Glasersfeld (1989) and Vygotsky (1978) (as cited in Vrasidas, 2000) have made assumptions about constructivism; one being that the structure of the world is created in the mind through interaction with the world, and is based on interpretation. The constructivist epistemology proposes that education should encourage multiple perspectives. Vocational education prepares students for specific trades, crafts and employment (e.g. beauty salon services); it involves training students at novice level who aspire to be experts. “The goal of constructivist

educators is to guide students to think and act like experts” Bednar et al 1992 ; Brown et al 1989; Resnick, 1987 (as cited in Vrsasidas, 2000, p.8). As part of this action research study, a constructivist approach was adopted by setting up a realistic beauty salon in the training centre and conducting assessments during a ‘salon day’, where other prisoners were able to avail of beauty treatments from students. Learning and being assessed in a real salon environment is central to Curriculum Plan B and this action research study, as it allows learners to gain the skills, knowledge and attitude required for the job in a realistic working environment, with the benefit of supervision and feedback. “The constructivist paradigm also allows for the use of portfolios, self-development journals and problem-based tasks, as assessment methods to evaluate constructivist learning.” Duffy and Cunningham 1996 (as cited in Jonassen, p 170-198). Portfolios of evidence, reflection and assessment using problem-based and real-life tasks are key elements of the Curriculum Plan B, which was implemented during this study.

This constructive-interpretivist approach emphasises the analysis of subjective accounts enabling the researcher to understand the situation from the ‘inside-out’ (Burrell & Morgan, 2000). In order to reach an in-depth understanding of prisoner learner experiences on the beauty therapy vocational education course and the change in practice, it is recognised that the learners are the experts. They have first-hand knowledge regarding these relationships, and their stories and narratives were the focus during the data collection.

The epistemology of an interpretive approach has been noted by Hudson and Ozanne (1988) as particularistic, so that it is context-bound and involves context-dependent knowledge. This raises the question of generalisability; however, this is not of fundamental importance to interpretivists nor to this specific study. Constructive-interpretivism allows multiple realities to emerge, as different individuals can have different viewpoints of the world. As this study is qualitative in nature and did not involve the collection of any quantitative data, objectivism, positivism or realism were not appropriate perspectives for addressing the research question.

3.3 Action Research Methodology

Although action research produces results which cannot be generalised; the method can be used in order to change practice. This research study intends to improve practice by changing the current curriculum plan and assessment strategy for a short trial period. In particular, it aims to evaluate the impact of the change and to assess whether or not a permanent change in curriculum plan is warranted and/or feasible. There are two aspects to action research which

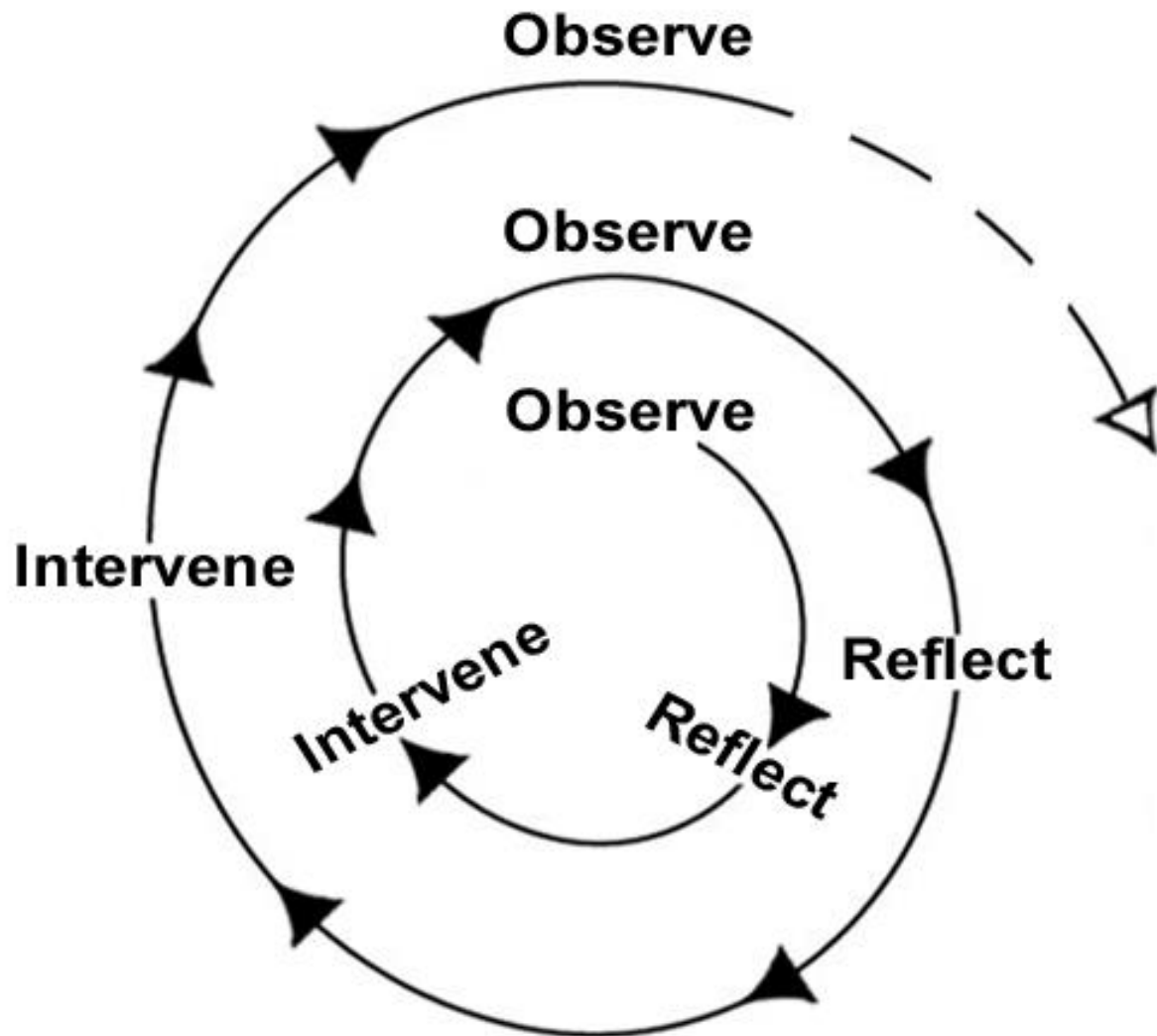
are relevant to this study; the first relates to improving an area of practice through seeking solutions to a problem and secondly, to establish whether or not the process used to implement the solution is effective. Action research considers three factors: the improvement of practice, the improvement of the understanding of practice, and the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place (Carr & Kemmis 1986). However, according to Schon (1983), there may be variations to this cycle when considering the context of the action research. For example, one may start with reconnaissance by monitoring and observing existing practice before planning. In this regard, the researcher started the research activity with a reconnaissance visit to the Dóchas Centre in July 2013. During this visit, through discussions with staff, the researcher ascertained many of the challenges faced by the beauty therapy programme team and this information and the factors and obstacles identified during this reconnaissance visit, fed into the research planning process.

One possible drawback of this approach is that action research is carried out by individuals who are interested parties in the research. In addition, there is a certain amount of ‘ad hoc’ planning which may also attract criticism in terms of unreliability of the data. However, in defence of the methodology, action researchers draw attention to the notion of commitment. An action researcher must be committed to rigorous examination and critique of his or her own practice. It is the degree to which action researchers are committed to this critical analysis of their practice that proves the true measure of the reliability in data gathering. Zeichner (1993) believes that although there has been much debate in the literature regarding the validity of action research, it is essentially irrelevant to many of those who actually engage in action research. The researcher’s view is that the purpose of this study is to improve outcomes for the Dóchas Centre as the primary detention facility for women in Ireland; therefore it is not necessary for the findings of the study to be generalisable. Moreover, stakeholder or researcher bias will not detract from the study in this context, as findings are only intended to inform future teaching and assessment practice on beauty therapy courses at the Dóchas Centre.

The action research method used for this study encompasses a double reflective cycle. This process of research involves observing, intervening and reflecting. If the researcher is not satisfied with the first intervention, the cycle can become a spiral; as one goes through the process again; the second time with a greater understanding (Wallace, 2013). The double reflective cycle is illustrated below in Fig.4:

Figure 4. Action Research in Further Education – Double Reflective Cycle

Source: Susan Wallace (2013)



Sample Size and confidentiality

Interpretive research seeks to understand the ‘lived’ experience, by selecting respondents who are willing to talk about their experience and who are diverse enough from one another, in order to enhance the possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience

(Polkinghorne, 1983). Erlandson et al. (1993) report that the principle concerning purposive sampling is to maximise discovery of heterogeneous patterns and not to generalise to the broad population; thus satisfying the lack of concern interpretivists hold for generalisability. The number of participants in this study was determined by the number of prisoner learners who volunteered to take part. It is difficult to state an exact number of overall course participants as learners are transient by nature. A continuous intake approach is adopted on the beauty therapy vocational courses, as regular course attendance is not common. Approximately eight learners have their names registered on the beauty therapy courses at any given period of time; however, class sizes did not exceed five learners during the course of this study. Five learners and the course teacher took part in the interviews and lesson observations. This represents 100% of course attendees who participated in the study. All participants stated that they were grateful to be given the opportunity to comment on and possibly contribute to the course structure and organisation; these statements were perceived as being extremely positive. This may explain the high response rate to participation in the study. In addition to the course teacher, the Head Teacher took part in planning and reflection meetings.

Confidentiality was assured by ensuring that all data collected was coded and no participants were identified; the identity of participants was anonymised during the study. The participants chose a simple coding method of 'Learner 1-5' and the course teacher was initially coded 'Teacher 1' and later 'Holly'. Participants later agreed that the researcher could allocate first-name pseudonyms in order to animate and humanise the final text. However, no real names were used in the study.

3.3.1 Course Teacher Profile

Holly qualified as a beauty therapist and started teaching beauty courses in the Dóchas centre in 2006. Holly has been delivering courses leading to either an in-house certificate awarded by the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb) or to qualifications awarded by the UK examination board (ITEC). Holly has not been previously involved in the summative assessment of students, as all summative assessments were conducted by ITEC via external practical and theoretical examinations. The implementation of this action research study required the teacher to adopt a formal assessment role for the first time as well as implementation of an internally assessed, internally quality assured and externally verified model of curriculum. This will require Holly to achieve a VTCT Assessor Award

qualification. In the interim period, an internal verifier (the researcher) is required to countersign all assessments conducted by Holly until she achieves the assessor qualification.

3.4 Research Methods

Two primary research methods were used during this study involving interviews and observations. The first research method consisted of interviews with prisoner learners and the teacher using a phenomenological approach. The interviews took place at a very early stage in the process, during the first cycle of action research and the implementation of a change in practice. The second research method consisted of three full days of lesson observations at various stages in the double reflective cycle of implementation of the action research in order to understand the impact of the change in curriculum and assessment plan. These lesson observations of the beauty therapy course took place over three days during implementation of the new curriculum model: 29th January 2014, 5th February 2014 and 12th February 2014. An observation rubric linked to the assessor qualification (See Appendix E), was used on the first observation and field notes were taken on subsequent observations. Furthermore, a series of action research planning and reflection meetings with the teaching staff also took place between July 2013 and February 2014 and researcher notes from these meetings also formed part of the research data.

The overarching research question related to achievement levels, motivation, attendance levels and the effectiveness of the implementation of the change in curriculum plan. The research question and sub-questions were addressed via a combination of interviews and lesson observations, as well as reflective meetings with the course teacher and the Head of School. Measuring the effectiveness of teaching and the new curriculum approach is difficult in terms of student evaluation interviews, as a valid universal criterion measure for the effectiveness of teaching is not yet available (Clayson, 2009). According to McKeachie (1979, p385), teaching effectiveness is described as “the degree to which one has facilitated student achievement of educational goals”. Therefore, teaching effectiveness can be measured using a variety of criteria, depending on the purpose, function and objectives of the course (McKeachie, 1979). Possible criteria could include enhancement of students’ interest and motivation (Marsh & Roche, 1997).

The research sub-questions relating to the learning environment, past educational experiences of learners and expectations and aspirations for the future, were addressed directly in the

learner and teacher interviews. Action research using phenomenological interviews was deemed to be most suitable for this study as the results of implementing a change in curriculum design and assessment strategy are being observed and evaluated. The interpretive approach recognises the importance of the researcher's involvement. The researcher is often referred to as 'the human instrument' (Fetterman, 1989) in observation, selection, coordination and interpretations of data (Sanday, 1979). In this study, the researcher is heavily immersed in the research process, not only in conducting the research, but also in the roles of curriculum and assessment planner, internal quality assurance verifier and advisor to the lecturer. It is important to interpret the phenomenon, but more importantly to develop an understanding of the meanings ascribed to a particular phenomenon (Cantrell, 1993). In this study, knowledge generated from interpretivism is ideographic in nature; specifically writing about individuals and their experiences. Traditional methodological requirements presuppose that the researcher knows what is to be investigated. However, a phenomenological approach to interviewing involves an attempt to clarify the investigated phenomenon and its meaning to the individual; in this study, the teachers and prisoner learners. Again, the validity of such a determination of meaning depends upon interest, driving one towards the particular knowledge which will be developed (Kvale, 1983). It is not uncommon for respondents to change the description and meaning of their experience during an interview; these changes may uncover new aspects and understanding of the experience (Kvale, 1983). Emphasis or omissions of events can create a framework to uncover the underlying meanings concerning the respondents' experience of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983).

3.5 Interpretation and Theme Development

Interpretivism in this study relates to perceptions enabling the researcher to focus on what occurs in a given context; in this study, the impact of a change in curriculum plan on prisoner learners. "It incorporates multiple realities including different perspectives (prisoner learners and the tutor) and researcher involvement" (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug 2001, p5). Ideographic knowledge has been gathered in this study, regarding individuals and their experiences. The researcher can only understand the social world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the topic under investigation (Burrell & Morgan, 2000). This approach emphasises the analysis of subjective accounts, enabling the researcher to understand the situation from the 'inside-out', while considering the study in relation to other elements of participant's lives (Burrell & Morgan, 2000).

The emic approach to research investigates how local people think, how they perceive and how they categorise the world (Kottak, 2006). Employing this approach, this researcher used the participant's own terms and descriptions as they appear in the research texts. Verbatim transcriptions enable the researcher to 'stay close' to the respondents' 'lived' experiences (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The use of verbatim text in this paper will ensure that in this study, the participants' experiences are conveyed as lived and perceived by them. It was essential to take a look at the 'bigger picture' in order to reveal what the statements and descriptions meant from the participants' perspective. There are two aspects to the emic approach used in this study. Firstly, no effort was made to substantiate the participants' descriptions with external verification (Kvale, 1983). Secondly, the interpretation of the research text should not incorporate hypotheses, inferences or conjectures that exceed the evidence provided by the transcript (Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore, in this study, only data provided by participants either as part of the interviews or arising from lesson observations or action research planning and reflection meetings, was used in interpretation or thematic analysis.

Hermeneutic interpretation seeks to highlight how people interpret their experiences and to show how cultural viewpoints are adapted to a person's unique life situation (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1982). In addition, it is acknowledged that motivation, assessment methodology and course structure may be influencing factors in terms of learner certification rates; however for the purpose of this study it is deemed to be impractical to attempt to gather quantitative data on the link between curriculum design and certification, due to time and access to the Irish Prison Service constraints.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

A research ethics application was submitted to the Irish Prison Service in October 2013 for this study (see Appendix B). The Irish Prison Service (IPS) granted approval in November 2013 with the following conditions attached:

- A copy of the completed research paper should be lodged in the Open Learning Centre, Irish Prison Service College.
- Access to the Irish Prison Service is dependent upon the availability of staff resources.

There were no envisaged risks to prisoner learner participants who were all over 18 years old and gave their informed consent to participate in the study. An information letter was given to each participant outlining the details of the study. In order to ensure that participants

(including those with literacy difficulties) fully understood the nature of the research, the details of the information letter and consent form were read aloud to each participant and a full explanation of the research was given by the researcher before participants were asked to give their consent. Participants could inform the researcher at any time, if they wished to opt out of the study, even after signing and providing informed consent, this decision would have been respected and accepted; however this did not occur during the study.

3.7 Summary

This chapter provides justification for the use of action research in this study. The methodology adopted incorporated teaching observations combined with phenomenological interviews, utilising the interpretivist paradigm to contextualise the findings. Action research was deemed to be most suitable for evaluating the impact of the change in curriculum for prisoner learners as it addresses the issue of the ‘lived experience’ associated with the changes in classroom practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction

During this action research study, data was gathered from interviews with prisoner-learners and interviews with the teacher, planning and reflection meetings involving the researcher, course teacher and other supporting teaching staff, in addition to three full days of lesson observations. A double reflective spiral approach of observe, reflect, and intervene (Wallace, 2012) was used and integrated using Elliot’s (1981) four-step approach: plan, act, monitor and reflect. Data gathered from the first cycle of action research was used to inform the second cycle. In this chapter, thematic analysis of the data gathered for this study will be discussed. The findings of the action research study will firstly be presented and then discussed.

4.2 Action Research

Table 2: Cycles of Action Research

Source: Elliot (1981)

Action Research Cycle and Data Source	Planning	Action	Monitoring	Reflection
Cycle 1 Data Sources: Meeting notes. 23rd July 2013 at the Dóchas Centre. Course teacher and VTCT	Identification of current issues relating to the beauty therapy course (Curriculum Plan A). Identification of gaps in current quality	Discussion of issues identified with colleagues at the Irish Prison Education Service, VTCT and FÁS –Tolka Valley Community Training Centre.	Preparation of action research proposal to trial a change of curriculum plan. Proposal for partnership arrangement between the Dóchas Centre	Submission of action research proposal. Agreement reached with FÁS CTC to support internal

<p>qualifications staff.</p>	<p>assurance procedures which will be needed for implementation of Curriculum Plan B.</p>		<p>and FÁS CTC to support internal quality assurance. Possible VTCT charitable application to support resources.</p>	<p>quality assurance in terms of facilitating the course tutor to gain the VTCT assessor qualification. It was decided that the researcher should take on the role of internal verifier for the duration of the study. The VTCT charitable application should be postponed until after the study is completed.</p>
<p>Cycle1 Data Source: Meeting notes. 11th September 2013. Meeting with Dóchas Centre staff-course teacher, and the head of school.</p>	<p>Curriculum content planning for Curriculum Plan B: course duration, how to advertise the course internally in the prison to attract participants, course assessment strategy and internal quality assurance.</p>	<p>Production of Lesson plans mapped to VTCT record of assessment books.</p> <p>Choice of specific qualifications at different levels.</p> <p>Identification of resources required.</p> <p>Submission of research proposal to the Irish Prison Service Research Ethics Committee at the next submission</p>	<p>Monitoring and review of the developing course plan and feedback provided by the course teacher and the researcher.</p> <p>VTCT qualification forum arranged for course tutor to attend at the FÁS Tolka Valley Community Training Centre.</p>	<p>Revision of the planned start date for the new course due to issues within the prison.</p> <p>Meeting between the FÁS CTC internal verifier and the course teacher to discuss internal quality assurance of the new course.</p>

		window.		
<p>Cycle1</p> <p>Data Source:</p> <p>Meeting notes- 11th December 2013.Meeting with Dóchas Centre staff.</p>	<p>Planning curriculum and assessment plan, incorporating feedback from the internal verifier at FÁS CTC including the problem of student uniforms as a requirement for the qualification.</p>	<p>Design of the internal advertisement for the course in the prison.</p> <p>Drafting of the dress code policy for assessments.</p> <p>Finalisation of the course plan, handouts and assessment plan.</p> <p>Distribution of the qualification requirements to interested/potential participants.</p>	<p>Monitoring of course uptake and timetable availability in relation to other beauty therapy courses and possible overlapping courses.</p>	<p>Revision of course start-date.</p>
<p>Cycle 1</p> <p>Data Sources:</p> <p>Three student interview transcripts(records) and researcher notes during interviews in morning class on 29th January 2014</p>	<p>Identification of students' motivations for attending the course.</p> <p>Identification of students' aspirations for further study and desires in terms of course content and the curriculum plan.</p>	<p>Gathering of main suggestions from students for improvement of the course plan.</p>	<p>Discussing students' suggestions with the course teacher. Some suggestions were positively received by the course teacher others were not positively received due to health and safety concerns, class management difficulties and resource issues.</p>	<p>Reflecting upon student suggestions which could be safely and practically integrated into a revised curriculum plan.</p>
<p>Cycle 1</p> <p>Data sources:</p> <p>Two lesson observations field notes from afternoon sessions and notes from reflection meeting with course teacher and the head of</p>	<p>Discussion with the course teacher, prison officer and the head of school.</p>	<p>Joint delivery of the first class lesson with the course teacher.</p>	<p>Lesson observation: observation of the teacher and students and whole-class discussions relating to the research question and sub-questions.</p>	<p>Realisation that despite extensive planning with Dóchas Centre staff, that preparatory elements had been omitted from the curriculum plan, including diagnostic</p>

school on 29 th January 2014				assessment and a lack of appreciation of the 'readiness' of learners to undertake the course. The next stage is to plan the revision of the course plan.
Cycle 1 Data Sources: Interview with the teacher and two students transcripts (recordings) and researcher notes during interviews in morning class on the 5th February 2014	<p>Identification of students' motivations for attending the course.</p> <p>Identification of the teacher's views on possible student motivations and aspirations.</p> <p>Identification of specific challenges faced by the teacher.</p> <p>Identification of students' aspirations for further study and desires in terms of course content and the curriculum plan.</p>	<p>Support provided to the teacher on clarifying qualification, assessment and internal quality assurance requirements for the VTCT qualification.</p> <p>Gathering of suggestions from students for the improvement of the course plan.</p>	Gathering of themes and patterns arising from all six interviews, which could be used to inform further change in Cycle 2 of the implementation of the new curriculum plan.	Reflecting upon student and teacher suggestions which could be safely and practically integrated into a revised curriculum plan.
Cycle 2 Data Source: Lesson observation, field notes from afternoon sessions and notes from reflection	<p>Revision of the curriculum plan following the first cycle of implementation.</p> <p>Planned changes include: preparation for skills development i.e. students performing</p>	Implementation of the revised curriculum plan and performing formative assessments and internal verification samples.	Observation and recording of results.	Reflection on areas for improvement.

meeting with the course teacher on 5 th February 2014	treatments on themselves first before on clients e.g. manicure. Amendment to uniform and resource requirements and practical skill sessions. Amendment to assessment plans and qualifications used i.e. the skincare module delivered at different levels. The content is similar but learning outcomes and assessment criteria are at different levels and therefore, appropriate to ability levels within the same group.			
Cycle 2 Data Sources: Lesson observation notes on 12 th February 2014	Continuation of revised curriculum plan.	Continuation of revised curriculum plan.	Observation and recording of results in VTCT qualification logbooks and internal quality assurance reports.	Reflection of positive results of the revised curriculum plan, thoughts on challenges and discussion of possible improvements for the future.
Cycle 3 Data Source: Planned 8 th April 2014 implementation of VTCT summative assessments for registered learners to	Summative assessments and internal verification for VTCT qualifications were planned for 8th April 2014. This date was later rescheduled and subsequently cancelled due to internal issues at	The VTCT external verification visit planned for May 2014 was cancelled. The Dóchas Centre was subsequently removed from the VTCT list of active assessment centres in June 2014.	Dóchas Centre staff have advised that due to internal pressures and issues at the prison, outside of the control of the education department; they do not have the resources to continue	A meeting will be scheduled in 2015, to discuss the findings of this research study and a charitable application to VTCT for capital funding for the

claim certification for achievements.	the prison.		with the VTCT curriculum plan or qualifications in 2014 and they hope to be able to re-visit offering the VTCT qualifications and curriculum in the prison in the future.	beauty salon, as well as professional products (student kits) and staff resources (assessor and internal quality assurance training). VTCT is the only charity that provides this type of grant aid to female prisons in the UK and Ireland. The Dóchas Centre is the only Irish Prison eligible to apply for this funding.
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The data generation was interspersed between various stages of the implementation of the action research. Prisoner-learners and teacher interviews took place during Cycle 1 of the action research only. Lesson observations and whole group discussions took place during Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 of the action research. Planning and reflection meetings with the course teacher and other supporting teachers took place before, during and after, the implementation of the change in practice (Cycles 1 and 2). The interviews were based on semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A); however, standardised precise wording was not used when questioning all interviewees, as the researcher had to use more colloquial language with some participants for clarification purposes. Upon reflection, it would have been optimal to interview learners individually for a second time once the new curriculum plan had been in place for some time. Unfortunately, this was not possible due to both time constraints and prison-related factors outside of the control of the researcher and education staff at the Dóchas Centre.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

The data gathered for this study was analysed primarily by using thematic analysis. This method shares many of the principles of content analysis, but it is more exploratory in nature and is less concerned with the frequency of occurrences (LTTC, 2014). The data for this study involved transcripts of the interviews, and field notes from lesson observations and action research planning and reflection meetings. The process employed by the researcher to analyse the data gathered from the Dóchas Centre involved extracting the key themes by examining commonalities, differences and relationships.

Through analysis and interpretation, an understanding of respondents is achievable. Spiggle (1994, p.499) notes, “We may grasp their meanings and experiences by translating between *their “text” and our own* experience, knowledge and ideas and points of correspondence between their expectations and our own”. However, this may lead to subjective interpretations because different researchers have a different knowledge base from which to draw inferences from the data (Spiggle, 1994). The researcher is fully aware that such biases may arise, but will strive to provide the least subjective interpretation of interview transcripts possible; based on the research text as it emerged from the participants.

4.4 Interpretation and Theme Development

The quality of research findings is contingent upon the in-depth knowledge of background information (pre-understanding) the researcher possesses in order to allow insightful linkages to be drawn between this background knowledge and the data set (Thompson, 1997). Some of the transcripts of the interviews and the texts from lesson observation field notes contained phrases and sentences using Shelta, Gammon (Gammin) or Cant (Minceirtoiree) informal language dialects, uniquely used by members of the Irish and English travelling communities. The closest ‘language cousin’ is thought to be ‘old Irish’ as many Shelta, Gammon and Cant words used today by Travellers have appeared in documents dated between 1000 AD and 1200 AD (Heritage Council, 2014). The researcher’s previous experience of teaching vocational beauty care and personal grooming courses to members of the travelling community assisted with interpretation in terms of language usage and the context of discussions.

The iterative spiral of understanding is central to hermeneutic philosophy (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). This iterative procedure involves two distinct stages. The first is an intuitive intra-text cycle in which a text (such as an interview transcript) is read in its entirety. The intra-text cycle of the texts occurred on numerous occasions throughout data analysis and due to the small number (six) of participants the researcher was able to acquire a more holistic insight into the perspectives of each participant. Further readings were then undertaken to develop an integrated understanding of the perspectives conveyed in the interview transcripts and field notes. The second phase is an inter-textual one, whereby the researcher looks for patterns (similarities and differences) across the interviews and views expressed during lesson observations (Thompson, 1997). It was during this phase that the researcher was looking for key themes within the research texts.

4.5 Key Themes

Three key themes were identified. Table 3, shows the underlying sub-themes in addition to how the key themes link with the overarching research question and sub-questions.

Table 3: Thematic analysis

Data Analysis	Themes	Sub-Themes	Link to research question (RQ) and sub-questions (SQ1) and SQ2)
<p>July 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting notes from first planning meeting at the Dóchas Centre. ➤ Researcher Interpretation 	<p>Theme 1: Past socialisation and positive attitudes towards education.</p> <p>Theme 2: Motivation and impact of change in curriculum plan.</p>	<p>T1: Teacher's positive attitude to education and desire to enable learners to succeed.</p> <p>T2: Attendance levels, high drop-out</p>	<p>SQ1: Learning environment and resources.</p> <p>SQ2: Future learning and career aspirations and</p>

	<p>Theme 3: Challenges and future aspirations.</p>	<p>rates, varying commitment levels of students whilst on the course. Low certification rates.</p> <p>T3: Lack of fixity of course duration, uniforms, student kits, textbooks, employment opportunities for prisoner-learners, drugs, behavioural/class management issues, and concerns about VTCT internal quality assurance requirements.</p>	<p>opportunities for learners.</p>
<p>September 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting notes from second planning meeting with Dóchas Centre staff. ➤ Researcher Interpretation 	<p>Theme 2: Motivation and impact of change in curriculum plan.</p> <p>Theme 3: Challenges and future aspirations.</p>	<p>T2: Learner motivation to complete courses, drug addiction and mental and emotional health factors.</p> <p>T3: Internal quality assurance, registering learners online with no computer access,</p>	<p>SQ1: Learning environment and resources.</p> <p>SQ2: Future learning and career aspirations and opportunities for learners.</p>

		resources, qualification requirements, and future opportunities for learners.	
<p>December 2013:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting notes from third planning meeting with Dóchas Centre staff. ➤ Researcher Interpretation. 	<p>Theme 2: Motivation and impact of change in curriculum plan.</p> <p>Theme 3: Challenges and future aspirations.</p>	<p>T2: Levels of pressure on students, paperwork burden on teachers, anticipated positive impact of curriculum change on learners.</p> <p>T3: Teacher anxiety relating to being responsible for summative assessment decisions for the first time, assessor qualification, qualification paperwork, and availability of prison officers to support class timetable.</p>	<p>SQ1: Learning environment and resources.</p> <p>SQ2: Future learning and career aspirations and opportunities for learners.</p>
<p>January, February, March 2014:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Student interview transcripts (intra-text readings) ➤ Teacher interview 	<p>Theme 1: Past socialisation and positive attitudes towards education.</p> <p>Theme 2: Motivation</p>	<p>T1: Previous qualifications, systematic approach and identification of learner needs, different</p>	<p>RQ: Effectiveness of change in curriculum plan considering: sense of</p>

<p>transcript(intra-text readings)</p> <p>➤ Lesson observation notes (researcher interpretation).</p> <p>➤ Reflection meeting notes (researcher interpretation).</p>	<p>and impact of change in curriculum plan.</p> <p>Theme 3: Challenges and future aspirations</p>	<p>achievement and ability levels, family and peer group attitudes to education, personal positive attitudes to education, and prison authority attitudes to education.</p> <p>T2: Additional in-prison allowance for attending courses; interest in course content; career aspiration; personal interest; hobby/pastime activity; qualification; sense of achievement; tea, coffee and biscuits; use of beauty products; increased opportunity for certification; less pressurised, more enjoyable course experience; more flexible and learner-centred curriculum plan; security of assessment material.</p>	<p>satisfaction, achievement, motivation and the overall learning experience.</p> <p>SQ1: Learning environment and resources.</p> <p>SQ2: Future learning and career aspirations and opportunities for learners.</p>
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		<p>T3: Cost of equipment and products may be a challenge to self-employment on release, time to practice skills allocated within prison, lack of professional kits/ uniforms, curriculum – gel and acrylic nails, educational resources during course, positive about opportunities for self-employment as a result of doing the course and achieving certification.</p>	
<p>April, May, June 2014:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interview transcripts, observation and meeting notes (inter-text readings). 		<p>T1: Prisoner-learner’s positive attitude to education in general and to the beauty therapy course.</p> <p>T2: Time and</p>	<p>RQ: Effectiveness of change in curriculum plan considering: sense of satisfaction, achievement,</p>

		<p>resources allocated to skills practice, literacy and numeracy, improvement in technical skills, security of assessment material, positive about the opportunity to contribute to the course plan and to suggest course content, positive about the learner-centred approach, lack of control over other areas of prison life, feeling of empowerment and life/goal planning around achievements on the beauty course, positive success stories of previous learners who achieved certification.</p> <p>T3Time and resources allocated to skills practice,</p>	<p>motivation and the overall learning experience.</p> <p>SQ1: Learning environment and resources.</p> <p>SQ2: Future learning and career aspirations and opportunities for learners.</p>
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		curriculum content, eyebrows (HD brows), gel and acrylic nail enhancements, spray tan, literacy and numeracy, improvement in technical skills.	
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Key themes will be described with supporting extracts from participants’ narratives and extracts from lesson observation field notes. Participant narratives and observation records remained the focus of the analysis in order to stay true to the ‘lived experience’ of the prisoner-learner and teacher’s experience of the change in curriculum plan as understood by them.

4.5.1 Key Theme 1: Previous learning experiences and positive attitudes to education

The first key theme was the previous learning experience of participants as well as their own attitudes and their familial attitudes to education. The majority of participants believed that education was important and this was evident in the descriptions provided in the interviews. It emerged that prisoner-learner participants on the beauty therapy course were predominantly those with medium-term or long-term sentences remaining (from 1-2 years up to 6-7 year sentences). Indeed not one participant on the beauty therapy course stated that they were serving a short sentence. For most course participants, this was not their first term of imprisonment.

Previous experiences of education and vocational courses

All prisoner-learner respondents had participated previously in other courses: in the Dóchas Centre; in another prison such as Limerick Prison or in England (HMP Holloway); or outside the prison via a private training provider of part-time weekend courses in beauty therapy or hairdressing. The types of courses previously undertaken by respondents in prison included

hairdressing, beauty therapy, cookery, art, ICT, pottery, addiction studies, retail studies, and the Leaving Certificate.

Interview question asked to all prisoner-learner participants: Have you done any other education courses in the Dóchas Centre or in another prison or on the outside?

Elsie: *“I did hairdressing when I was in Limerick Prison in 2009 and I also did hairdressing when I was here in the Dóchas Centre in 2012. I also did another course with *****[private training provider] in Cork, so I am interested in all this[hair and beauty industry] and my niece does it as well and makes a few pound as well, you know. I’ve also done art, pottery, woodwork and stain [stained] glass windows and art. The stain [stained] glass window making, the first one now is [difficult], but once you get the hang of it, it is easier. I got a Level 3 for the hairdressing.”*

Sarah: *“In Limerick prison, I did hairdressing, On the outside I started doing a Level 4 beauty course on a Saturday and I paid them €2,000 I had to drop out in the end because so much was going on at home; two of my brothers died and there were lots of other things going on, I just couldn’t keep up with it. It’s a shame because I lost the course fees as well. I would love to get back into it [beauty therapy] I did Level 3 FETAC Skincare already in Limerick prison as well. I did my Leaving Certificate in Limerick Prison and I did a course in retail sales, I got a distinction in FETAC Level 5 Addiction Studies as well, and I’ve done computer courses”.*

Jessica: *“Yeah, I did my Junior Cert; I didn’t leave school until I was 16 so I did my best in education.”*

Claire: *“I did my A levels in school, but never progressed to higher education. Now I’m doing a degree in humanities through the Open University here in Dóchas. The beauty therapy course at Level 5 with all the anatomy and physiology was very intense, but once I passed the exam and got my qualification, that gave me the confidence to take on the OU degree”.*

Maeve: *“Yeah, I did, does that course I did before count? Cause I got a cert remember? It was an in-house course, so not really a proper cert with any levels like FETAC or anything.”*

Eyebrows, facial, massage, manicures, tinting. Yeah I loved it, eyebrow tweezing and everything.”

On the 29th January during a lesson observation, some prisoner-learner participants told the researcher that they were attending the course as a sort of hobby, pastime activity as the topic was something they found to be interesting. In particular, they wanted to learn about beauty therapy treatments for personal interest.

Systematic approach and identifying learner needs

During interviews with prisoner-learners it became apparent that they held varying levels of previous qualifications, as well as varying previous experiences of education. It did not seem apparent in the first lesson observation that any consideration was given to their previous qualifications and experience or ability level. A learner-centred approach did not seem to be employed in the class delivery. The prisoner-learner cohort appeared to have a mixture of different abilities and previous educational experiences. It did not appear to the researcher during the first lesson observation that a systematic approach to the training had been used. During the interview with the teacher (Holly), the handling of learner data and identification of learner needs was discussed. The following section provides an excerpt from this interview.

Interviewer: “Is there a central bank of training records at the centre?”

Teacher (Holly): “*There probably is, but I wouldn’t have access to it; it wouldn’t be something that would be used by teachers on a day-to-day basis.*”

Interviewer: “Is there any way to check a learner’s previous qualifications or training record?”

Teacher (Holly): “*Each teacher would have a FETAC folder, but they are not centrally held. Abdul is the man to talk to about that, he would have access to all FETAC records, so for example if a prisoner has done a course in Limerick or outside there would be a record of it; but it is not normal practice to check a student’s previous qualifications before they start a course. It can be done, but it is not normal practice. All the records are held centrally – it is not a normal process to check their qualifications; I just ask the students themselves what they have done before and I take on whoever signs up, provided I am sure of their level of*

commitment to the course. Some students say they have done other courses, but we only have a record of FETAC courses undertaken and I wouldn't normally check that myself as I said."

Interviewer: "Does diagnostic assessment or entry assessment take place?"

Teacher (Holly): "*No. There are some literacy tools that other teachers use, but nothing is held centrally and I don't do any upfront testing; I just kind of know what I'm dealing with.*"

Interviewer: "Are there any record systems or monitoring systems for tracking progress?"

Teacher (Holly): "*Apart from individual teachers maintaining FETAC folders, there is nothing.*"

It was observed during the lesson observation in Class 1(theory) on the 29th January that many learners were demonstrating knowledge on the subject, above the level of the qualification and some below. It became evident during class discussions that many had already achieved similar qualifications in the past and that duplication of learning and assessment was taking place. Some students appeared to find the level of knowledge of their peers intimidating and thus, were very quiet in class. The learners who did display competence above the level expected, seemed to be bored and restless at times.

Positive attitudes towards education in general and to the vocational beauty therapy course

All prisoner participants in the study cited that education was very important in general but the researcher found it difficult to gather information as to the rationale for this opinion.

Elsie: "*Education is very important; my Mother thought education was very important. My little girl, my daughter is seven and she goes to school every day; she has never missed a day of school in her life*".

Maeve: "*I would say education is very important; my family always thought it was very important.*"

The teacher (Holly) reported that staff, regard education as being very important; however, they are reliant on prison officers to support prisoners in attending classes. This includes allowing prisoners to take time away from their duties (mainly cleaning).On one occasion

during a lesson observation on the 5th February 2014, one prisoner-learner was directed not to attend the beauty class by a prison officer, who instead directed her to spend the morning cleaning the healthcare facility. The prisoner-learner attended the class in the afternoon, but was at a disadvantage in the lesson (practical tasks) because of her absence from the morning theoretical session. The prisoner-learner described to the class, the teacher and this researcher how she had protested against the prison officer's instruction not to attend her beauty class as she had spent the previous evening until 7pm cleaning the healthcare facility. Teaching staff are also reliant upon the availability of a prison officer to be present in the school at all times. However, due to staff shortages arising from dealing with other problems in the prison, a lack of prison officers on duty in the school was cited by the teacher (Holly) as a regular cause of disruption to scheduled class times.

Teacher (Holly): *“Sanctions from the prison officers can be a challenge, they [students] can be pulled out of class for something or today as you saw we had one student who was told to go and clean the healthcare facility instead of coming to the beauty class. The officer said she was late for class anyway, so there was no point in going. I would have preferred her to be here, even if she was late as we have a lot to cover and we are preparing them for an assessment. Some of the officers think we are just playing around with beauty products down here; they don't see it as a proper course or as something important for the prisoners to attend. They see it as entertainment; we are just keeping the prisoners occupied – but it is much more than that. We are teaching them a trade and life-skills; they learn things through the vehicle of beauty therapy, that they would never have learnt before such as hygiene, how to deal with people, how to communicate with people. These are all very important. It's a pity the course is not taken more seriously by the prison as it can really be beneficial to the women.”*

All prisoner-learner respondents reported a general interest in the hair and beauty sector, both from a personal interest perspective and as a potential career pathway. Some expressed it as the only accessible career pathway for women and particularly for female ex-prisoners.

Maeve: *“Men can do carpet fitting, electrician or plumbing or other trades but the only trades women can do realistically is hairdressing or the beauty. Women are interested in these things. These are the only courses in here where you might have a chance of working for yourself when you get out. You won't get a job with previous convictions so working on your own to earn a few pound is the only way really. When I get out, all I want to do is spend*

as much time with my children as I can; so I don't want a job. If I could do a few sets of nails in the evenings for money, I'd be happy with that. It's very important that this course is available for us in here. I think it is fantastic to have this, considering where we are...in a jail, like."

When asked about how valuable they thought the beauty therapy course was and whether the availability of this course in the Dóchas Centre was important:

Sarah responded-

"Yes, because we're girls, well it is[important] to me anyway, I'm just interested in this kind of thing. There's nothing to stop a woman being a roofer, but to work for yourself I'd say it's much easier for women to set up as a mobile hairdresser or beautician or even just as a mobile nail tech rather than roofing[laughs]"

Maeve said –*"You have alot more 'you time'[laughs] and you can do something you're interested in. I think it is important for women to have this course in here"*

Overwhelmingly, the theme that predominates was a positive attitude towards education for both prisoner-learners and the teacher. All prisoner-learners expressed that they view education as being extremely important and a valuable part of prison life, as well as preparation for their release. Specifically, both prisoner-learners and teaching staff regard the beauty therapy courses as being important and beneficial for women prisoners.

4.5.2 Key Theme 1: Discussion of findings

Although some courses previously undertaken by prisoner-learners did lead to a recognised certification such as FETAC, most did not lead to certification. Prisoner-learners reported that they had undertaken previous courses prior to participating on the beauty therapy course (e.g. the Level 3 VTCT Skincare module). Much of the course content in the Level 3 VTCT Skincare module may have been completed previously on other Level 3 Skincare modules such as FETAC and on the hairdressing course; examples of duplicated course content may include health, safety and hygiene. When asked about the process for identifying previous learning experiences and adopting a learner-centred training model for developing the course curriculum, the teacher reported an ad-hoc process for identifying learner needs. This lack of data tracking from initial assessment for diagnostic purposes, through to progression evaluation and certification tracking on a per learner basis, on the beauty therapy course at

the Dóchas Centre, reflects the findings of the ESRI (2014) study of the FET sector in Ireland, as cited by SOLAS (2014). This study highlighted the poor data infrastructure around further education in Ireland, in comparison with international standards. In relation to data management the ESRI found a “Bewildering myriad of FET data, a multiplicity of data-gathering systems across FET, a lack of systematic data collection and analysis of FET data at national (and local) level and limited use of data in decision making at all levels”. The ESRI stated that “the current data collection within the FET system is wholly inadequate for the purpose of performance measurement on key indicators, such as course completion rates, accreditation levels and progression patterns” (ESRI, 2014 p xiii) (SOLAS, 2014). Findings from the present study in relation to data management on the beauty therapy course in the Dóchas Centre are consistent with national and local findings in the ESRI report.

Not one participant in this study stated that they were serving a short sentence; so the challenge associated with delivering meaningful education interventions in a short time-frame, as cited by Judge Reilly (2013) in his interim report, did not exist in relation to the beauty therapy course. In addition, there did not appear to be a sense of joint purpose between the teaching staff and prison officers, which is consistent with findings in Scotland. The Scottish Government (2012) noted that “it is particularly challenging in overcrowded prisons to provide suitable learning opportunities, when the main focus is on custody and maintaining order” (Scottish Government, 2012 p.42)

4.5.3 Key Theme 2: Motivation and the impact of change in the curriculum plan

Impact of the change in curriculum plan

Only one prisoner-learner had previously participated in some beauty therapy modules in the Dóchas Centre using the end-loaded curriculum plan (Curriculum Plan A), which involved undertaking a final practical exam and a multiple choice question paper; with the final grade being achieved by calculating the average grade achieved across both assessment instruments.

Claire described her experience of the beauty therapy course and the end-loaded curriculum model:

Interviewer: “Tell me about your experience on the beauty therapy course last year”.

Claire: *“Beauty therapy would not be my chosen career path, in fact my daughter was so surprised to hear when I told her on the phone that I was studying beauty therapy (she lives abroad you see); she really thought it was amazing. My favourite parts were the anatomy and physiology and the skincare as well. I wasn’t that interested initially, I sort of fell into it as I came along with a friend who was already doing the course, so I joined in half way through the course, but I still passed the Level 5 exam which was a great sense of achievement. Although I will say that I thought the course was very intense and challenging, it was by no means easy, but Holly is a good teacher, she is motivated so that motivated me. I’m now doing my Open University course as well, so I won’t be doing more beauty therapy after this, but I have found it to be very enjoyable, people are drawn to these subjects, there is a natural interest there.”*

Interviewer: “Having experienced both, do you prefer an end-loaded training programme, where the assessment for your beauty therapy diploma occurs at the end of a nine month training programme or would you prefer to be assessed after each unit or module during the course?”

Claire: *“No. I don’t like it. I think having the exams at the end is far too much pressure and is very off-putting and such a long time has passed since you covered some of the course it can be difficult to retain it all for the exams, although it was a great sense of achievement when I passed. I’d say for most people, that kind of pressure would be too much. Having continuous assessment all the way through the course every 4-5 weeks like what is happening now is much better, it gives you good input time and takes the pressure off a bit.”*

Claire was the only research participant who had actually experienced the implementation of both curriculum models (A & B). Although she did pass the exam on the end-loaded programme, she expressed similar views to some other prisoner-learners who had not experienced the end-loaded programme but had imagined that they would prefer continuous assessment.

Interviewer: “Would you prefer to have an exam at the end of the whole course or would you prefer to be assessed after each unit?”

Sarah: *“I think after each maybe? I wouldn’t mind though, I don’t mind exams either. I have an appeal coming up though so I might not be here for four years, so I would like to be assessed at every unit, just to make sure I got a certificate for everything that I had achieved, rather than wait for a big diploma at the end in case I didn’t get the whole thing; at least I would leave with certificates in the treatments that I did pass the test.”*

Interviewer: “How often would you like to be assessed?”

Sarah: *“I think every 6 weeks after each unit would be okay.”*

When **Elsie** was asked the same question she responded: *“Oh no, I wouldn’t like a big exam at the end of a six or nine month course that would be too much pressure and also I might forget what I have learnt. I would like to have a test after each part as I do the course; it would be less pressure all together”.*

Jessica, also responded similarly: *“I prefer to do the exams as we go because we would be taking it in more and it would probably be staying there, rather than like you know what I mean, learning this and learning that and trying to think of everything at the end. So it would all be still fresh in me head to do the exams every now and then during the course, rather than at the end.”*

First action research cycle observation of the impact of the change in curriculum plan

Classes 1 and 2 (29th January) introduced the first cycle of action research and practical implementation of the new curriculum model. In Class 1, Holly the teacher explained that in the afternoon Class 2 a formative practical competence-based assessment would be taking place. Holly explained the assessment process and helped the students to prepare themselves. The content of the lesson was similar to previous lessons, however, practical assessments with formative feedback was used instead of tutor instruction. The idea of a ‘test’ or ‘assessment’ seemed to create some nervous tension in the room and the usual chatter amongst prisoner-learners almost vanished. The researcher interpreted this change of mood positively as a reflection of the focus and attention of prisoner-learners on the assessment tasks. A feeling that the prisoner-learners were taking the assessment seriously and giving it importance was recorded in field notes. In terms of practical technical skills demonstrated in the first cycle of the change in curriculum and assessment model, not much change was observed in terms of skill improvement and in some cases prisoner-learners were making

errors which hadn't previously been observed. It is possible that such errors could be attributed to nervousness. The overall observed impact during the implementation of the first action research cycle was mainly a difference in prisoner-learner behaviour and interpersonal communication. It was also observed that the teacher (Holly) was also a little nervous in the new situation. The researcher's role in the first implementation of the competence-based practical observation was to internally verify a sample of assessments conducted and to support the assessor by giving feedback at the end of the session. It was observed that the assessor (teacher) gave high quality, clear and evaluative feedback to students and the internal verifier (researcher) agreed with all of the assessor's skills-based judgements.

After Class 2 on the 29th January 2014 and before Class 3 on the 5th February 2014, the researcher and teacher met to discuss and reflect upon the first implementation of the action research cycle. It was decided that when implementing the second cycle of the new curriculum plan, more would be done to ensure students were at ease and more specific guidance on the assessment requirements would be provided to students. It was also decided that working on peers/fellow classmates did not create the realistic working environment needed for competence-based assessment. These reflections informed further curriculum plan revisions used in the second cycle of the action research.

Second action research cycle observation of the impact of the change in curriculum plan

On the 5th February, during Class 3 the teacher used the morning session to establish the theoretical basis for the afternoon practical assessment. This included advising the learners to recruit some 'client models' from the wider prison population. The teacher also included the key theoretical elements from the syllabus in preparation for the practical assessment in the afternoon class. These included revision of technical knowledge and professional codes of conduct including beauty salon dress-code/uniform, personal hygiene and appearance, punctuality, client care/protecting client modesty, professional communication and consultation skills. In the afternoon session (Class 4), a visible difference in student performance was observed. All the students were prepared and punctual, being in attendance before the class commencement time. The teacher, Holly noted that this was the first time this had occurred. Each treatment station (work area) was prepared to the required standard as per the VTCT qualification requirements. All students were dressed according to the required dress code with their hair tied back neatly off the face, no jewellery, short clean nails and

closed-in footwear (all in accordance with hygiene, health and safety requirements). Each student had brought a model for the beauty treatment assessment. Throughout the treatments, the standard of client care and interaction with clients was observed to be excellent for all students in the class. The teacher stated that this was also the first time she had observed this level of competence in the class and she was surprised at how quickly a noticeable improvement in behaviour and performance had occurred. There was a visible difference in motivation levels, enthusiasm; punctuality, attention to detail, personal presentation, attitude and attention span of the learners. The level of technical skills demonstrated by all students in the class had also improved in comparison with the previous assessment in Class 2.

During the individual assessment feedback sessions with learners, all learners expressed how they enjoyed the process, that they found it motivating and found they learned more than in previous practical sessions (Curriculum Plan A), where competence-based assessments and formative feedback had not been used. Learners responded positively (and sometimes emotionally) to the praise and acknowledgement of progress from their teacher. It was observed during at least three assessment feedback sessions that learners' body language visibly changed and demonstrated that they were emotionally moved; cheeks blushing, wide smiles and tearful expressions when the teacher gave them supportive encouragement and statements of approval e.g. "I am so proud of you". On the 12th February, another cycle of the new curriculum plan was implemented. Findings in this session were concurrent with findings in the previous class and further improvement was observed in all the areas mentioned previously. It was observed that learners had 'settled in' to the new curriculum plan and seemed familiar with the new assessment requirements. Learners appeared to be more relaxed, confident and self-directed in preparing themselves for the assessment. Technical skill ability was also observed to have improved from the previous observation on the 5th February.

Motivation, Practicing Skills, Technical / Educational Resources

One of the most interesting comments regarding the impact of the curriculum plan came from a prisoner-learner called **Sarah**, at the beginning of the VTCT Level 3 skincare course. When asked about the organisation of the course timetable and time allowed for skills practice and assessment and linking this to motivation she stated:

"I would find it easy enough to find people to practice beauty treatments on, yeah but I haven't done any practice yet, but I'd say it would be easy enough. We don't have any

*skincare products to use to practice; they just don't sell it in that shop. The shampoo and conditioner is like f***** very dear [expensive] €5.50 a bottle, but you'd hardly ever see a cleanser or a moisturiser; I tell ya, it was like Christmas two or three weeks ago when they had a bottle of Nivea cleanser and toner, it's gone now, we bought it all. So other than that your family can leave it in. But sure then it can get nicked [stolen], someone can just go in and empty out all your bottles into a cup and there is nothing you can do about it. But people whose families are far away like, they have nothing in the way of moisturisers or cleansers anyway. So if I was to practice doing the beauty treatments outside the class I would be using the stuff that my family brought in for me and I'm very lucky that my family are very good, but I would want to keep those creams for myself anyway and not use them up on other people's faces just for practice. My daughter brings me up moisturisers and cleansers when she can. They have packets of shampoo that the prison gives you so at least you'd be clean, but they're horrible and no creams at all so your skin would be fierce dry. If you don't have family looking out for you, it can be real rough in here."*

Interviewer: "Do you feel you get enough skills practice on the course? Is there enough time for that during the class?"

Sarah: "*Well I've only started, so we'll see how it goes, it might get better, but so far not really. We only have a half day practical session in the class a week, so we'd need more practice I would say to pass the qualification, and it would be better to use the creams from the beauty classroom rather than using up stuff our families brought in for us, if we're lucky enough; most of them have nothing in here. You'd really need a decent bit of practice to stay motivated and get confident in your skills.*"

The teacher (Holly) had some very definite views on the prisoner-learners' future goals and aspirations as well as current motivation to actively participate in the beauty therapy course.

Interviewer: "What kind of things do you think attract higher numbers to take part in the beauty therapy course?"

Holly (Teacher): "*Tea and coffee would be an attracter; but I find I don't want to do it as it is too messy. If they hear you have biscuits you'd be full. I'd end up buying them myself the whole time as there is no budget. I do bring them the odd time as a treat and it does draw the*

numbers. Maybe a beauty product kit; if that was available they would definitely sign up for the course.”

Interviewer: “If we did have beauty product kits and uniforms for students, how would you recommend we should organise that?”

Holly (Teacher): *“I would wait until the training part is finished and issue the kits before the assessments; they would have to show commitment first. There would have to be rules around the number of kits issued.”*

Interviewer: “What do you think about the idea of the prison holding beauty kits for VTCT qualification holders to be given to them on release?”

Holly (Teacher): *“I think that is a very good idea and would be a real motivator for the students.”*

Interviewer: “What do you think the students see as the most important thing that they want to get out of the course?”

Holly (Teacher): *“I think it is qualifications and self-esteem and to pass the time as well.”*

Interviewer: “Do you think they have aspirations to get a job when they get out?”

Holly (Teacher): *“Yes I think they do, but these students are not at this stage yet, you know it’s like Maslow’s theory, the hierarchy of needs; their immediate focus is to get out of here and to try to get off the drugs. Getting a job will come later if they achieve those goals, many of them cannot see beyond the release date at this point. I suppose if educational achievement or certification was in some way linked to TR [Temporary Release] that would be a motivation for them. Their number one motivator is to get out, everything else is secondary. Getting a job is not an immediate motivator. They would sell their Mothers and their Grannies to get out of here. It’s like what my manager always says and she is right; if they had an exam on in the morning, even if they had been working towards it all year- even the Leaving Cert or something; and someone came along and said if you go and clean the kitchens you have a chance of getting out – they would ditch the exam and go straight to clean the kitchens. Getting out is the only real motivator for them.”*

Interviewer: “Do you think gaining skills is a motivator? Do they want to gain the skills?”

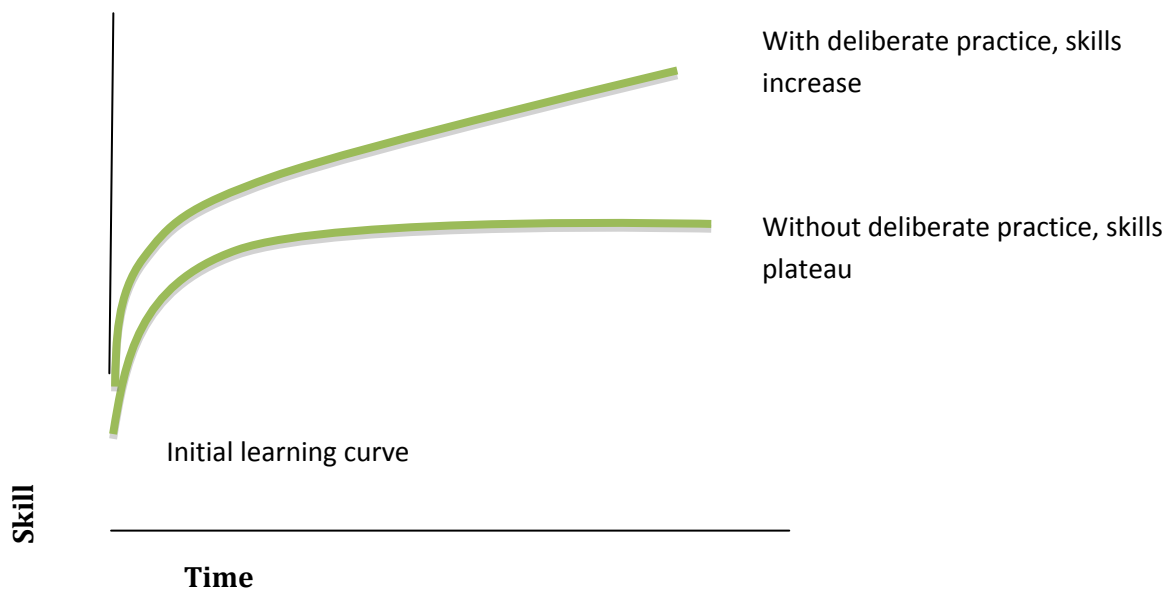
Holly (Teacher): *“I do yes; I do think they want to gain the skills. Reading and writing is not a priority in the traveller culture and a lot of them are travellers, they don’t see literacy as being important but they do want to gain new skills.”*

4.5.4 Key Theme 2: Discussion of findings

Many participants reported that they would like to have more time to practice their skills under supervision during timetabled class hours. Indeed, there may be merit to this view as practice time allocated to the course may need to be increased for this purpose. The lack of physical technical resources to support this practice was also a concern. Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer, (1993) found that that the most able of practitioners who engage in ‘deliberate practice’ continually display excellence. Practitioners of any occupation use deliberate practice when they first develop and learn skills. Once they have achieved their initial qualification, skills plateau as they settle into the more routine use of such skills (Petty, 2004). Ericsson et al. (1993) highlight that for experts, who continually experiment through deliberate practice, their level of skills will continually increase. Conversely, those who only use deliberate practice in their initial stages of training, and fail to maintain it, achieve lower standards.

Fig.5 Deliberate Practice and Expert Performance

Source: Adapted from Ericsson et al (1993) by Petty (2004)



The student participants were very forthcoming throughout the study with suggestions for improvement and amendment of the course curriculum, delivery methods and enhancement of resources. The teacher (Holly) promoted participation empowerment within the class and the students' reaction to this was extremely positive. Many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate and contribute to the course planning in this way, as they alluded to the fact that they were not given an opportunity to exert control over any other aspect of their lives in prison. The teacher's approach to facilitating open discussions was extremely helpful. "Freire recommends that the teacher becomes a co-learner or equal partner with the student in the learning process" (Rinder, 2004 p79) and this attitude and approach was displayed by the teacher (Holly) during the lesson observations. The students appeared to be motivated by the fact that the teacher was also working simultaneously towards a VTCT assessor qualification, at the same time they were undertaking a course of learning leading to a VTCT beauty qualification. The teacher and students were both embarking upon a new and shared journey, relating to VTCT portfolio building and the assessment process itself; this appeared to generate deepening levels of trust between teacher and student.

4.5.5 Key Theme 3: Challenges and future aspirations for learning and self-employment

Challenges

Challenges faced by teaching staff include difficulties arising from the drug problem within the prison. During lesson observations on the 29th January, and the 5th and 12th February 2014, it was noted that one or two prisoner-learners were feeling tired or ill due to 'coming

down' from 'methadone' or other drugs. Maintaining the attention of the class was difficult for the teacher due to the influence of drugs; although it was observed that the teacher performed extremely well under these circumstances and on the whole, held the attention of most of the class. During the class, prisoner-learners perform beauty treatments on each other and other prisoners, who participate as practice models; these sessions are supervised by the teacher and form part of the lesson observations included in this study. Prisoner-learners' attitudes to attending the course and completing the coursework appeared to be influenced by the prison environment.

Physical altercations between prisoners, arising from disputes centred on the topic of drugs or theft of personal items was reported as a feature of everyday life; it was reported that this affects the participation of prisoner-learners on the beauty therapy course and their attitudes to attending the class. During lesson observations prisoner-learners discussed that physical and mental bullying plays a part in prison life. This was evidenced when one prisoner-learner described her experiences of the results of disputes with other prisoners. Discussion transcripts were recorded in the researcher's field notes.

Elsie: *"Women can be fierce mean. If they wanted to hurt you, they'd even do things like sneak in and replace your conditioner with Immac [depilatory hair removal cream]; it would burn the scalp off you and the hair on your head would fall out in clumps"*

Prisoner-learners attend classes every day and complete their homework against a backdrop of bullying, addiction and fragile mental and emotional health affected by the emotional distress of being separated from their children and families, the overall prison regime and having to survive in overcrowded circumstances (Reilly, 2014); whilst burdened with the responsibility of daily work duties. It was observed that these factors can have an impact on the quality of education delivered and the learning experience enjoyed by prisoner-learners on the beauty therapy course. Furthermore, in order to keep the status quo; prisoner-learners understood the need to balance prison life with course attendance. In addition, it was considered an acceptable compromise for prisoner-learners to work together on practical tasks during class, even if they were involved in an outside dispute with classmates. Moreover, it was observed that a real attempt to maintain harmonious relationships during classes was made between prisoner-learners and each other, and prisoner-learners and the teacher.

Sarah commented about the challenges faced regarding the lack of learning resources in the Dóchas Centre to support the beauty therapy course: *“I love looking at the teacher’s books, I’d love to get to keep some of the books and workbooks, they look great. It is a pity that there is only a teacher copy; it would be good to get a copy for each student as well. We usually spend the theory class writing down notes that the teacher calls out or that she writes up on the board, but it would be good to at least get a photocopy. I hear that even the primary schools now have interactive whiteboards and all that gear, but we don’t have anything except paper and pens. If I could change anything about the course it would be just the room, it’s too small and if we could use proper beauty salon nail products and equipment, I’d love to learn how to do the nails, gel and acrylics and all that stuff. We need our own kits as well to practice with, professional beautician uniforms, books and workbooks would be great to really have a proper chance of passing the exams; so we can work in the trade on the outside.”*

Barriers to learning were also cited by **Elsie** who stated –*“Definitely less people should be in here, it’s too small, it can get fierce crowded. Miss, as well there needs to be a bigger sign outside the door cause it’s hard to find the class and people just walk in because they don’t know this is meant to be a beauty salon room. No, just the size of the room really, I wouldn’t know what type of equipment or products we are supposed to be using, that’s what I’m here to learn I suppose? I think it is important, but I don’t know what the right equipment or products should be. We just got one handout so far, we haven’t actually got books, so it would be good to have them, although my reading isn’t great so maybe workbooks or something I could colour in and fill out would be better, nothing too complicated like. We haven’t got that stuff, so I don’t know really. I think she [teacher] is very good. You know parts of it are a bit intense but she’ll get round to everyone, you know what I mean? I mighten [might not] get it first time, but I’ll defo [definitely] get it second time round, do you know what I mean? Like, I’ve a problem with reading and writing and all that; so she’s good, she’ll give you the individual attention. I was often in front of a teacher five or six times before I’d get the point, but Holly will come and explain it just to me and then the penny would drop[I understand], so she is very good and she is very easy to get on with.”*

Future aspirations for learning and self-employment

A further element to this key theme was that of future aspirations. During the student interviews, respondents expressed their opinions on the structure of the course and suggested improvements which they felt should be made. This included additional curriculum which they felt would make their opportunity for self-employment via offering a mobile beauty service offer more attractive to potential customers.

All respondents related their comments to personal goals. When asked in interviews if they would change anything about the course so far, **Jessica** responded *“I wouldn’t change anything, I would add things. I would add the gel nails and acrylic nails”*; **Maeve** said *“The course is good but the room is far too small and we don’t have the kits or books or uniforms, and I’d love to do the eyebrows next, that’s all really.”* **Sarah** also gave a similar response *“I would like a career as a beautician, I would like to do gel and acrylic nails, I’d like to do manicures in here, because you have to do that first [industry pre-requisite qualification requirement for treatment-risk insurance]; so if that was on the course here I could do the gel or acrylic nails when I get out.”*

From the prisoner-learner perspective, aspirations for employment concerned an understanding of the need to practice skills in a realistic working environment, as a preparation for real work in a beauty salon or working on a self-employed basis as a mobile beauty salon service provider.

When asked about her future aspirations, **Sarah** said *“Yes I want to get a job. Or set up a mobile beauty service, I’ve noticed with the recession it didn’t really hit the hair or beauty industry; people are still paying money to get their hair and nails done and their tan, that’s what I’ve noticed anyway, so the money is still there for that. People still care what they look like even if there is a recession on and they are willing to pay – so I’d definitely like to get the certificate to set something up when I get out. I’m up for appeal next year, but I’m only starting a six year sentence now, well I’m two months into it. It is such a shame because it was originally a suspended sentence, so if I hadn’t f***** up during that time, I wouldn’t be here, I was raging with myself but you’re forced into it, well you wouldn’t understand, but anyway I’m facing a long stretch so I’d like to get some beauty qualifications so I can set*

something up when I get out. I'm in my thirties now so it would be great to have that to look forward to."

In terms of future career aspirations, **Jessica** also expressed her desire to work as a beautician when she is released. *"Like em, I've always been around beauty and me sister has two salons, yeah so I enjoy everything really and Holly is a good teacher as well. Yeah, I might be able to get a job in me sister's salon, because that's what she always wanted. Just to learn the[nails services] I remember I was going to do the course to do the nails, and me sister was going to buy the kit which was around €450, so I'd like to be able to learn that stuff in here, so she could help me when I get out. I wouldn't be able to afford it on me own; so if I got the certificate and all, she'd be delighted. But you'd need the kit as well to start you off. I want the qualification and also to get a job, otherwise what's the point? I could get a job with me sister if I had the skills and the quali [qualification], maybe one day. Me sister, before she opened up her salon she used to go round to all her client's houses with a mobile kit. I'm not just here to pass the time, because I like doing it."*

Jessica also perceived the existence of certain barriers and challenges faced in pursuit of her goals: *I'd like to do massage, I'd like to do the gel nails as well and nail art and I have a good enough hand at the nail art myself, but we haven't got the products or equipment in here to do those proper beauty treatments. I don't know I'd like to have books and workbooks. I think Holly is grand, if you don't understand something, she'll come to you and work you through it on your own, she's good. She makes it interesting, I like the classes, but Holly is great. The room should be bigger, cause it gets very f***** claustrophobic in here, but I think that considering where we are (in prison) it's great, I wouldn't complain."*

Interviewer: "Reflecting upon the first assessment, would you change anything in the teaching environment?"

Holly (Teacher): *"Just the space and equipment, and teaching resources. I'd like course books and workbooks and an interactive white board. I'm just used to working with little or nothing, because there is no money in here. I'd love an autoclave for the hygiene, because a lot of these students will have health problems and I know that when they are using tweezers, they are not being sterilised properly and you do get blood spots, so there is the risk of cross infection and the risk is higher within a prison population. I really would love an autoclave."*

Interviewer: “We have implemented the new assessment and curriculum model twice with one unit now, are you planning to roll this out across other units with this group of students?”

Teacher (Holly): *“Oh yes, I’d like to try the basic manicure unit next and then the eyebrows- you know that unit shape and colour eyebrows. There is a lot of tinting that goes on in the houses; they have a lot of kits that they have robbed from me here, so they do get the practice in that![laugh, sigh]. I have to store stuff away and keep it under lock and key. The products would definitely be an attractor for the course, maybe well known professional products such as Dermalogica – would definitely get them interested in learning beauty therapy. They all know that kind of thing. I’d love to be able to say we are doing a professional facial now, if they are doing facials at the next level.”*

In Class 1, it was observed that the physical resources available for the beauty therapy course in the Dóchas Centre were below the norm for physical resources on the same programmes elsewhere, such as in the ETB (formerly FÁS) community training centres. Usually professional couch roll is used to line treatment couches for hygiene purposes; however in the Dóchas Centre, the teacher and students were using hand towel tissue paper, which is not of sufficient size to cover the couches. Flammable products were stored in a wooden cabinet and the teacher expressed concerns about the potential fire hazard that this method of storage presents. The teacher had a textbook for herself but no teaching or learning resources for students, so she had to read out relevant sections of her textbooks to students, so that they could transcribe into their copybooks.

In Class 2 on the 29th January 2014, the overcrowding in the small classroom was challenging for the teacher and students. It was noted that this had a negative impact on students’ ability to learn the practical technical skills. The students and teacher were visibly agitated and frustrated, due to the confines of the physical environment. Following Class 2, the researcher and teacher met to discuss and reflect upon the first implementation of the action research cycle. The teacher expressed concern about the burden of implementing the continuous assessment model as the sole subject expert within the teaching team. The support of an internal verifier is a requirement of the qualifications. A visiting technically competent and qualified internal verifier from another centre has been organised to support the future implementation of Curriculum Model B. The teacher (Holly) was feeling nervous at this point and expressed concern that this may not be enough support for her to deliver and assess the course. The teacher also expressed concern regarding the extra administration burden that the Curriculum Model B presents, which includes registering learners online with VTCT and

claiming certification online for students from VTCT following the external quality assurance visits. Lack of administration support in the school and lack of computer access for teaching staff were cited as potential barriers to the implementation of Curriculum Plan B.

The teacher appeared to be much more relaxed during the classes on the 5th February 2014 and appeared to be more familiar with the assessment criteria. During this session, the teacher was being assessed herself, as she was working towards her VTCT assessor qualification. Once the teacher achieves this qualification, it will allow her to make independent assessment decisions for learners without requiring the co-signature of an internal verifier. The teacher explained that this might also be a barrier to the permanent implementation of Curriculum Model B, as she did not feel supported in terms of budget by the prison management to undertake this extra training leading to an assessor qualification.

Throughout the lessons on the 12th February, prisoner-learners regularly vocalised their position regarding how much they enjoyed and were motivated by the new curriculum model. The teacher also expressed how pleased she was with the results. Barriers to the continuation of Curriculum Model B were discussed and included lack of physical and human resources to support its implementation permanently in the prison.

Elsie described how she felt a new sense of purpose, new goals to work towards and an atmosphere of comradery between classmates; they felt in control of how the beauty course could be developed over time in order to meet their needs. She explained how she felt attending the beauty therapy course had become a welcome distraction for her, she said “*sometimes in here [in the beauty classroom]you’d forget where you are like, you’d forget you’re in jail*”.

4.5.6 Key Theme 3: – Discussion of findings

It became evident during this study at the Dóchas Centre that the vast majority of students participating on the beauty therapy course were women who have come from marginalised and disadvantaged communities. Indeed, many of the research participants expressed their previous experiences of and attitudes towards education in a manner concurrent with the findings of Smyth and McCann (1999). In particular, feelings of low self-confidence, low

self-esteem and low expectations, along with a feeling of a lack of control over their lives and future goals, were consistent with those reported by Smyth and McCann (1999). Findings in Judge Reilly's (2013) interim report relating to problems and tensions arising from physical overcrowding, as well as the emotional and mental distress which prisoner-learners are experiencing in the Dóchas Centre, are consistent with the findings from the teacher and student interviews and observations from this action research study. Judge Reilly's conclusions relating to the unique factors surrounding women in custody are also similar to the findings of this study.

The researcher would argue that other courses on offer in the Dóchas Centre such as art, pottery, stained glass making and the Leaving Certificate, whilst valuable and enjoyable, do not offer such solid employment and self-employment future prospects and opportunities to prisoner-learners as vocational courses related to the hairdressing and beauty therapy industry.

4.6 Summary

Three key themes were presented and discussed in this chapter relating to the main research question and sub-questions surrounding the issues of past socialisation and educational experiences of learners, the perceived impact of the change in curriculum plan, and learner motivation. Challenges faced by staff and learners, as well as future aspirations for further learning and self-employment were also addressed. Conclusions to the study and recommendations will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The main aim of this study involved an evaluation of the effectiveness of the change in the beauty therapy vocational course curriculum plan, in relation to the following factors: sense of achievement, motivation and the overall learning experience. Other objectives included assessing the learning environment, resources and future career aspirations of prisoner-learners. The main findings of the study in the Dóchas Education Centre are as follows:

1. Teachers and learners have a positive attitude towards education.
2. The short-term change in the curriculum plan implemented in this study yielded positive results in terms of an improvement in learner performance and attainment during formative assessments; motivation; improved attendance and satisfaction levels.
3. Systematic or formal identification of learner needs and previous qualifications achievement via diagnostic assessment or reference to learner files is not currently in place on the beauty therapy courses.
4. Assessment or learning planning does not take place for individual learners on the beauty therapy courses.
5. There is some duplication of course content across hairdressing and beauty therapy modules and some other beauty courses previously undertaken by learners (e.g. hygiene, health and safety, fire safety).
6. Many learners face literacy and numeracy difficulties with beauty therapy courses.
7. Beauty therapy courses are not sufficiently resourced in terms of teaching and learning materials, technical/professional equipment and products and physical space allocated to the course.
8. The numbers of learners undertaking beauty therapy courses remains low and action is required in order to increase participation.
9. Prisoner-learners have career aspirations to gain employment and self-employment in the beauty industry, which is seen as a viable and realistic career route for ex-prisoner women in particular.

5.2 Limitations

The scope of this study was limited due to time constraints and therefore, only allowed for the investigation of the research question and sub-questions over one module and not over the whole course, as originally planned. As a consequence, actual course completion figures, and qualification achievements or certification rates, did not form part of the data collected. The current study has only examined a short-term evaluation of a change in the beauty therapy curriculum over two cycles of implementation within the skincare module and not on other modules on the beauty therapy course. This limitation means that study findings need to be interpreted cautiously.

5.3 Recommendations

A clear finding to emerge from this study is the positive reactions and performance of learners on a shorter, more unitised curriculum, using continuous assessment rather than terminal assessment. A key recommendation, therefore, is for the Dóchas Education Centre to permanently implement the new beauty therapy curriculum plan trialled in this study which leads to VTCT qualifications. Moreover, in order to facilitate the permanent implementation of continuous criterion-referenced assessment on the beauty therapy courses, a budget should be made available to support the course teacher to undertake and achieve an assessor qualification. Additional resources are also recommended to pay a daily rate for a suitably qualified, visiting internal verifier on at least three occasions during an academic year. This internal verifier would support the course teacher with internal quality assurance, assessment planning and standardisation of assessment.

Another finding to emerge from this study was the lack of a systematic approach or diagnostic assessment to identify learner needs. This resulted in students with mixed learning abilities all being taught together and working towards the same qualification, which was too challenging for some and too easy for others. Learners of different abilities can be taught together; however, it is advisable that learners work towards qualifications which have learning outcomes and assessment criteria suitable to their own ability level. For example, the syllabus content in the Skincare module, can lead to VTCT qualifications at both Level 3 and Level 4 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. The qualification content is similar, but the assessment is differentiated appropriate to framework levels.

It is also recommended that an induction or diagnostic assessment is conducted by the course teacher prior to the commencement of the course. This would enable learners' curriculum needs and ability levels to be determined by prior learning and student's learning preferences. In addition, difficulties with literacy and numeracy can be identified and interventions planned in a learner-centred way, using contextualised free teaching and learning resources such as those available from www.skillsworkshop.org or similar websites. Examples of learner activities which use beauty therapy as a 'vehicle' for developing literacy and numeracy skills include activities on cash handling in a salon, reading instructions on a beauty product or service timings in a salon.

Identification of future learning goals and career aspirations could also be identified at induction stage and incorporated into learner-centred course planning and used in informing curriculum content. The current curriculum is not arranged in a targeted way with an occupational role or identified service which could be offered by those who have completed the course; on a self-employed basis. Perhaps the curriculum could be revised to be more targeted and arranged into a series of '*self-employment pathways*'. For example, it was identified during this study that many learners would like to offer gel and acrylic nail enhancement services on a self-employed basis upon their release. It is recommended on the basis of this finding that the beauty therapy course curriculum could be revised to include a '*nail services pathway*' which could be delivered over three consecutive courses leading to the following qualifications: Level 3 VTCT Basic Manicure, progressing to the Level 4 VTCT Manicure Certificate and finally to the VTCT Level 5 Diploma in Nail Technology. The Level 5 qualification is the industry required standard for professional practice as a Nail Technician and to obtain treatment risk insurance. A second example of a '*pathway to self-employment*' in the beauty sector arising from findings in this study could be developed based on an '*eye treatments pathway*' which could be delivered over three consecutive courses leading to the following qualifications VTCT Level 3 Award in Basic Make-up, progressing to the VTCT Level 4 Award in Eyelash and Eyebrow Treatments, and finally to the VTCT Level 5 Award in Lash Extensions. This curriculum would equip learners with the skills required to offer a commercial mobile 'Lash and Brow' service, which has become popular in the industry, with many businesses now solely offering eyelash and eyebrow treatments.

This study finds that prisoner-learners are motivated and interested by the potential of opportunities for future self-employment in the beauty industry. It is recommended that the

Dóchas Education Centre supports the provision of information advice and guidance on how to set up a mobile beauty service. Innovative ways of supporting this could include inviting guest speakers such as former prisoners of Dóchas, or UK prisons; Holloway, Pentonville, and Channings Wood (via VTCT networks) who are now offering a mobile beauty service on a self-employed basis following the achievement of a beauty qualification in prison.

Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into what motivates prisoner learners to participate and apply themselves to their beauty therapy studies. A strong motivational link to any activity which may bring prisoner-learners closer to release was evident in this study. This finding may support a recommendation to formally link vocational education achievement to the new IPS incentivised Community Return Programme (CRP), previously discussed in Chapter 2. In light of this research, if commitments to vocational education and the CRP made in the IPS strategy document (2012-2015) were implemented in a tangible and meaningful way; it may be possible through future research to demonstrate a link between prisoner-learner participation in vocational education and improved recidivism rates.

A major finding of this study was the lack of teaching, learning, technical equipment, product and other physical resources available for the beauty therapy course at the Dóchas Centre. The VTCT has provided whole grant funding for the establishment of beauty salon academies at Pentonville, Channings Wood and Holloway prisons. These three prisons offer vocational beauty therapy courses leading to VTCT qualifications.

In consideration of the pertinent role of the beauty therapy course as a route to self-employment for ex-prisoner women, it is recommended herein that the IPS apply to the VTCT for a charitable grant donation for capital funding to support the renovation of one of the larger classrooms in the Dóchas Centre, into a custom designed and professionally equipped beauty salon. VTCT charitable funds are also available for the purchase of teaching and learning resources such as textbooks and workbooks for students as well as interactive white boards as part of the classroom infrastructure, in order to facilitate students with a wide range of learning styles. Student beauty product and equipment kits and uniforms can also be funded by VTCT.

Exploration of the research literature surrounding prison-based education reveals that much of the focus concentrates on general education, rather than vocational education; maintaining

order within the prison. The provision of education can be perceived by staff as a distraction for prisoners to help occupy their time. Encouragement of lifelong learning in the Dóchas Centre, rather than a learner-centred approach to targeted vocational education is evident from the findings of this study; calling into question the current thinking and ethos surrounding education in prison. This suggests that more resource and attention is required in terms of targeted pre-release education leading to viable self-employment. In consideration of this study, and the government's policy paper 'Pathways to Work' (2012) and the 'SOLAS Strategy document for Further Education and Training' (2014), perhaps IPS and CDET B should direct more strategic focus, resource and attention to the beauty therapy courses in the Dóchas centre.

5.4 Further Study

This research has highlighted many areas for further investigation such as recidivism patterns, and certification rates of prisoner learners who have undertaken beauty therapy courses within the Dóchas Centre. Further investigation could also be extended to include the hairdressing course, since many prisoner learners are enrolled on both the hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. A further study could assess the long-term benefits (if any) derived from offering Dóchas Centre learners, targeted vocational education and training, based on viable pathways to self-employment in the hairdressing and beauty salon services sector.

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