Inside Looking Out:

The K-12 School Experiences of People Who Are Incarcerated in NL

by © Danielle McGettigan

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Abstract

This study explored the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in NL through the K-12 school experiences of people who are incarcerated, a population of people seldom heard from in this area of research. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and narrative inquiry, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five participants to gain insight into the impact their school experiences and experiences with exclusionary discipline had on their lives, the connections between the education and criminal justice systems, and their advice for education system. This study explored the research questions: What are the school experiences of people who are incarcerated and residing within the school-to-prison pipeline? What are their experiences with exclusionary discipline practices in school? What do these individuals feel that they would have 'needed' from their school experiences to aid in the prevention of them becoming prisoners? Is the school experience connected to the prison experience? What advice do these individuals have for educators and the education system? Through the lenses of labeling theory and self-worth theory, the employed framework underscores the understanding of human beings as worthy and interconnected. The findings illuminate the mechanisms of pathologization within the school system via deficit discourses embedded within institutional soft structures and explores the theme of containment, among others, as underpinning the essence of the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor. The study's implications for educators, policymakers, and humans implore the need for the fostering of authentic relationships through relationality and a deeper understanding of the self.

Keywords: criminalization, dignity, education, educational policy, exclusionary discipline, incarceration, labeling, pathologization, phenomenological narrative inquiry, relational pedagogy, relationships, restorative justice, school-to-prison pipeline

General Summary

This study investigated the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) by examining the K-12 school experiences of incarcerated individuals. Through individual, in-depth interviews with five participants, the study sought to understand the potential impact of school experiences, particularly those involving exclusionary discipline, on their lives, and the relationship between the education and the criminal justice systems. Participants' narratives revealed that school can be a site of marginalization and exclusion, contributing to feelings of inadequacy and isolation. This phenomenon can often be exacerbated by an intentional or inadvertent focus on students' deficits rather than their strengths. Additionally, the influence of educators, both positive and negative, emerged as a significant factor in shaping participants' trajectories. The findings highlight the importance of institutional changes required in order to create supportive learning environments that foster authentic relationships through a sense of belonging and value in all students. They also emphasize the need to critically examine the role of exclusionary discipline practices and their potential long-term consequences and highlights the need for educator's, policymakers, and stakeholder's deeper understanding of the self and relational practices. By listening to the voices of those who have been through the educational and criminal justice systems, educators and policymakers can gain valuable insights into how to improve educational outcomes, reduce the risk of justice system involvement, and encourage community collaboration across systems via a focus on interconnectedness.

Dedicated to the Memory of P.O'L.

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This thesis would not have been possible without the unwavering courage and openness of the individuals who shared their stories. I am deeply and forever grateful for their willingness to share their experiences and the powerful insights contained within. This research seeks to honour them and is a reminder of our interconnectedness as human beings.

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> "Whilst remaining itself what it is, we set it as it were 'out of action', we 'disconnect it', 'bracket it'. It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket . . . "
>
> - Edmund Husserl*, Ideas,* 1931

1.1. Researcher Positionality

I was raised on the shoulders of 'inmates', quite literally. My dad helps me fill in the memories I have as a little kid riding high on their shoulders while touring the Sand River prison forestry camps in the late 1980s. He was a parole officer for the Correctional Service of Canada, and in the early days of his career, he supervised offenders out on day parole from Springhill Institution and Dorchester Penitentiary in Nova Scotia. There the inmates learned to be tree harvesters throughout the course of a year, which led to their eventual release from parole to the community. I was about three to four years old at the time. We lived in tiny communities situated around the penitentiaries, and moved around quite a bit depending on where my father was stationed. There was a bus stop just outside our little house in Parrsboro, and the parolees would often be welcomed inside our kitchen to get out of the cold while they waited for their bus. The unwavering, innocent trust and connection I had with my parents always guided me. As a child, it was an unconscious thing; I existed as an extension of them. The things they normalized

became my universe. It is only now, when I look back on my life and my positionality for this research, I am beginning to realize how deeply their relationships with incarcerated and marginalized people influenced me. It is through this research that I am beginning the untangling of that phenomenon.

As an only child, a large portion of my early years was spent surrounded by adults, unknowingly absorbing their conversations. As I grew, I began to understand the nature of my father's work; he would say that I was surrounded by the 'correctional atmosphere'. His days spent visiting the prisons, checking in on parolees, and often 'bringing the work home' all worked together to shape my present and my future.

Finally, in 1988, the Correctional Service of Canada relocated Dad to St. John's, my parents' hometown. It was a place they had always wanted to return to. It was here Dad began implementing restorative justice practices in his own work as a parole officer and more notably through the establishment of his organization, Turnings. His career as a parole officer highlighted for him the major systemic gaps in support for incarcerated people reintegrating into the community. Upon retiring from the CSC and out of continuing efforts to help fill these gaps and reduce recidivism, Turnings was born. A former Catholic priest, Dad began the organization as the Metro Community Chaplaincy, offering Circles of Support programs to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in and out of the prison, to aid in their transition from incarceration to community. Throughout the evolution of the organization, I watched him face countless institutional barriers through his efforts to help move this work forward and felt the rage and frustration they brought. I felt his pain as he lost many 'guys' along the way to addiction and mental health issues. His office walls are still alive with their faces. Each barrier

and loss took something from him, and subsequently from my mother and me too. Somehow, he kept going.

A year after we moved back to St. John's, my mom, a former LPN, became a student assistant, providing one-on-one support for students struggling in the classroom. So it began in 1989 the beginning of a career that would not only profoundly influence the lives of her students, but my own life as well. She approaches her work with a certain authenticity that I have spent my life (and the course of this research) trying to pin down and describe. It is a rare mix of tenacity, selflessness, empathy, and humour that you wish you could bottle and distribute widely. Many of her students would continue to come to her for support, years after they passed through the doors of the classroom. I watched her, and I learned that a student was not just a body in a desk; I watched dad, and I learned that an inmate was not just a body in a cell. They are individuals; human beings with stories woven together by lived experiences. I have learned that sometimes we wear our stories on the outside - bold-faced and shiny, clear-cut. Unmistakable. Like armour. Other times, our stories are written on stained pages. Set aside or misplaced somewhere along the way yet composed of wisdom so deeply etched; on the inside looking out.

All of this contributed to a personal uncovering of a deep need to 'know' others and grappling with the meaning of 'knowing'; to understand how their lived experiences shaped them and contributed to the essence of who they are as human beings. I attempted to 'feel it all' - work the job, live in the community, become a part of the subculture - all to try and truly understand 'what it is like' to be someone else. There were times when I almost lost myself in the process. Upon reflection, the discovery of this need to 'know' was the beginning of a search for interconnectedness and its meaning.

As a dance teacher for the past eighteen years and a dancer my entire life, I have been fortunate enough to witness the vulnerability of others through music and movement and further experiment with my own vulnerability. There is a certain privilege that comes along with not only witnessing and experiencing this vulnerability, but also with physically being able to exist within that artistic space. I was a dance teacher before I became a high school teacher, and I am realizing the extent to which my lived experiences and relationships formed within that artistic space shaped my experiences as a classroom teacher and approach to relationships and pedagogy. Armed with these experiences so far and a B.Sc., I became a high school teacher in 2014. I began working as a substitute and replacement teacher in large Metro schools and alternative schools. I am forever changed from these experiences and bearing witness to the experiences of others.

Many of my teaching experiences exist in juxtaposition on multiple levels. I taught in large (often 'semesterized') high school math and science classrooms with over thirty students where 'getting through the curriculum' seemed to be Priority One. The courses ranged from 'Basic' to Advanced/Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB) levels. In physical contrast to this, I taught in small group settings in an alternative school (for students who were deemed 'unable to learn' in the 'regular' classroom, mostly due to behavioural issues), where Priority One shifted from 'getting through the curriculum' to 'getting through a single question' or oftentimes 'managing to open the book'. Students at this school only attended for half a day and were sometimes living in group home settings or in open custody. In many cases they would only attend for a few months before returning to their original school or going into custody at a youth correctional facility. I also taught at a live-in, closed facility for youth with

mental health and addictions issues. The youth were under the care of doctors, healthcare and youth workers, and would attend school for varied lengths of time during the day based on individually assessed needs. The facility could only accommodate a small group of youth at a time. Depending on the individual, the level of focus on the academics and 'getting through the curriculum' varied. The programming at the facility was individualized, and focused instead on overall health and wellness, behavioural therapy, and if necessary, treatment for addiction and mental health issues so that they could return to their communities and lives. For many of these young people, their prior experiences of school as a place of frustration and isolation shifted to one of belonging and success during their time at the facility. This shift can be largely attributed to the connections and relationships that thrived authentically in an environment where they were deemed to be 'allowed' to foster. I had the privilege of forming deep connections with youth who had lived experience far beyond their years. Their perseverance and resilience through unspeakable adversity humbled and inspired me, and I began to wonder how the same could happen for the education system as a whole.

Re-visiting my teaching experiences and observations throughout the course of the research journey opened the door for perspective and analysis. This process allowed for the placing of these experiences and observations on what I have deemed to be a 'connection continuum' - a 'scale' of sorts depicting the relationship between the physical school classroom environment and the level at which relationships were given the chance to foster within that environment.

Putting my math teacher hat back on for a moment, I will say that class size and composition and the degree to which authentic relationships are allowed to foster are akin to

inverse functions; they can serve to “undo” each other. One of my largest high school classes consisted of upwards of thirty-five registered students. This was a ‘basic’ Level III ‘semesterized’ math course with a high degree of student needs, including a range of exceptionalities, language and cultural differences, ages, abilities, attendance (and lack thereof), and living situations. As a teacher, I felt like I was up against the odds as I tried to reach every single student in that class and get to know them and provide them with the individualized instruction they deserved while simultaneously delivering the curriculum. For many, graduation and moving on with their lives was contingent on success in this course. The pressure they felt was the pressure I felt, and we navigated this together the best we could. Despite many breakthroughs and successes, there are still a few that slipped through the cracks. I kept wondering, “If only the situation the system placed us in gave us a fighting chance to begin with.” Perhaps a reflection of the exhaustion and frustration I felt at that time, I still wonder about the young people who I saw slipping and felt powerless to catch. I also wonder how fast this number would have increased if I had not put in the level of emotional and mental effort that I did, every single day. I fast-forward in my mind to the voices of the participants when they say, “School was a getaway…until it became another place to run from.” It is possible that this sentiment can ring true for both students and teachers.

Generally, and perhaps counterintuitively to some, the more advanced the course, the less the student needs overall, due to a variety of confounding factors. This is especially notable here, as it further highlights the disproportionalities within the system and responses to these disproportionalities in terms of the differences between the ideas of ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ when it comes to determining class size. Special attention is required in determining the size,

composition, and needs of students in ‘basic’ level required courses, especially in Level III, as they can often be an exceedingly critical turning point for vulnerable students. I invite you to listen deeply with ‘two ears’ to the voices of the participants are they share openly their school experiences and their advice for educators and the system as a whole. As you do this, I also invite you to consider the vast implications of their stories and advice, as well as the implications and questions that arose through the phenomenological process for the researcher.

My teaching experiences and observations at an alternative school can be placed slightly further along the connection continuum. The smaller class sizes and shift of focus to individual student needs allowed a greater space for the fostering of connection and relationships. For many of these students who were deemed ‘unable to learn’ in the ‘regular classroom’ (in most cases, removed from school for behavioural issues or in open police custody), the alternative school provided a space to enable learning through the establishment of trust between student and teacher. For others, however, simply attending the school brought with it a certain level of stigma; they recounted being labeled as a ‘bad kid’ or ‘stupid’ upon the return to their regular school. Some students embraced this label. It was a rare case that a student who was placed in this alternative school attended until completion. Instead, many students spent much of their junior high and high school years transitioning back and forth from ‘regular’ school to alternative school, to open or closed custody, and back again due to recurring incidences of behavioural or learning difficulties. This cycle contributed to an unsettled, transient school experience interspersed with fragmented moments of connectedness.

Even further along the connection continuum, are the teaching experiences and observations from the closed youth facility for mental health and addictions. The school

environment here consists of a series of small classrooms in a hallway in the live-in facility. Students referred to this facility have been deemed ‘unable to learn’ in the regular or alternative junior high or high school setting and must commit to a live-in treatment program that is tailored to their needs. The vast majority of the youth have been diagnosed with exceptionalities and are struggling with mental health and addictions issues. Under the direction of doctors, nurses, therapists, youth workers, and teachers, students take part in structured programming. In terms of teaching and learning, a student may complete a regular curriculum or modified curriculum. The class sizes are very small, sometimes one-on-one, and for many students the school hours became the highlight of their day. The environment, though ‘clinical’ and ‘sterile’ in many aspects, was conducive to the formation of deeper connection through the hopeful interactions between students and teachers. It is an environment where the most successful relationships between adults working at the facility and the youth entrusted to their care are based on honesty, trust, and accountability and set to be held in utmost importance - if one chooses to rise to the challenge.

Students experience the consequences of teachers’ lived experiences. Educators project onto students what they have learned, including the realities of working within a system that so often fails at honoring the individuals upon which it is built - the same individuals for whom it is supposedly built. If educators and policymakers fail to recognize these realities and subsequent projections, the cracks in the system will further widen. These cracks turn into crevasses, consuming the most vulnerable and creating an insurmountable division among teachers and students alike; among the human beings at the centre of it all.

Clearly, division is the antithesis of interconnectedness. For certain educators, I have noticed that this often includes an idealized and sometimes unconscious separation or division of 'selves': the 'teacher' identity and 'true self' identity. The 'teacher' identity is often a construct that is perceived as a protective barrier for the 'true self' against the trials and tribulations of teaching and working under the pressures of the educational system. Whether we want to contend with it or not, I believe that these constructed identities are preventing teachers from understanding what it means to be in true 'relationship' with students. In other words, divisions of interconnectedness within the self often trickle down to our relationships. As educators, we are privileged to bear witness to the vulnerabilities of the students in our care; yet we are often fearful of those same students bearing witness to our own vulnerabilities. We encourage students to live their truths, yet we hesitate to live our own.

1.2. Introduction

My positionality as a researcher and experiences as an educator have guided me authentically to this research. Within the qualitative framework of phenomenology and narrative inquiry, this study explored the school experiences of five incarcerated individuals at Her Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP) in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada and the impact these experiences had on their lives. Individual, semi-structured interviews took place on-site within the prison with human beings living in confinement and containment. Through guided, open-ended questioning, the interview structure encouraged participants to share their experiences openly. Through the lenses of labeling theory and self-worth theory, the study explored the research questions: What are the school experiences of people who are incarcerated and residing

within the school-to-prison pipeline? What are their experiences with exclusionary discipline practices in school? What do these individuals feel that they would have 'needed' from their school experiences to aid in the prevention of them becoming prisoners? Is the school experience connected to the prison experience? What advice do these individuals have for educators and the education system?

Via the individual stories of their lived experiences with school and incarceration, the participants illuminate the connections between the two and the profound impact these experiences had on their lives and offer advice for educators and the education system. The phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline is synthesized through the examination of their lived experiences, truths, and stories. Listening to the human beings at the center of the phenomenon seeks to strengthen the body of research that has been completed in this area, which to date has been mostly carried out using quantitative methods. The term 'pipeline' implies directionality and attempts to describe the relationship between the educational and criminal justice systems; a movement from 'Point A to Point B' in the form of school exclusion to juvenile and adult criminal involvement. 'School exclusion' may refer to exclusionary disciplinary practices within schools in which the student is removed from the learning environment, including expulsion and suspension. It may also include chronic absenteeism and leaving school ('dropping out'). Through the participants' stories, it is evident that the definition of school 'exclusion' is a complicated one that encompasses a multitude of contributing factors that extend beyond reactionary policies and punishments within the walls of the school. Irby (2017) would refer to some of these factors as the "indignities on which the school-to-prison pipeline is built." The following chapters document the synthesis of the school-to-prison pipeline

phenomenon through the lived experience of the participants and researcher - revealing at its core the need to explore the dimensions of ‘relationships’ and their impacts on interconnectedness with others and within the self.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I have given much time to reflect on the connection between the school system and the criminal justice system. There has been a dearth of Canadian-focused qualitative phenomenological research on the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline. According to Pesta (2018), the "aptly named 'school-to-prison pipeline' describes the relationship between the educational and criminal justice system (p. 1491). At the core of this relationship is the construct of exclusionary discipline in schools, or "school exclusion" (p. 1491). More specifically, exclusionary discipline in schools refers to the "actions that remove students from their regular classroom instruction for disciplinary reasons" (Nishioka, Shigeoka & Lolich, 2017, p. 6). Placed on a continuum from less to greater levels of exclusion, the most common forms of the practice include in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. The use of the term 'pipeline' implies directionality, and therefore it is important to assert that it is unlikely that suspension or expulsion alone is directly linked to criminal offending (Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Vanderhaar, Munoz & Petrosko, 2014, as cited in Pesta, 2018). Rather, it is more probable that the effect of school exclusion is mediated by negative short-term outcomes, such as delinquent behaviour and dropping out of school, that funnel students toward the criminal justice system (Cameron & Sheppard, 2006; Vanderhaar, Munoz & Petrosko, 2014, as cited in Pesta, 2018).

The consequences of excluding students from school by means of suspension or expulsion should not be underestimated. Nance (2016) supports this claim by pointing out that not only do students lose valuable instructional time, but exclusion is associated with lower achievement levels. The effects of exclusion go beyond academic performance. In the article

"Out of School Suspension and Expulsion" (2013), the American Academy of Pediatrics state that "students who experience out-of-school suspension and expulsion are as much as ten times more likely to ultimately drop out of high school than are those that do not" (p. 1001). A snowball effect reaching into adulthood is described as a student who does not complete high school can expect to earn considerably less over a working career and to have fewer educational and employment opportunities than a high school graduate (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Further, if parent(s) working away from the home leave the excluded student unsupervised, the likelihood for engaging in more inappropriate behaviour is increased (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013). Cuellar and Markowitz (2015) evaluated whether out-of-school suspension increases referrals to the juvenile justice system among youth with a history of offending behaviours and point to the conclusion that it does. More specifically, the results demonstrate that among this population, being suspended out-of-school on a school day is associated with a more than doubling of the probability of offense. The analysis has direct implications for the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in that "school suspension policies designed to handle problem behaviour in school may contribute to overall crime rates out of school, highlighting a significant potential disadvantage of using out-of-school suspension as part of a school disciplinary policy" (p. 105). Most notably, the results of the study provide evidence for the school-to-prison pipeline where the likely mechanism is that suspension leads to days spent in the community with reduced supervision and increased opportunities to commit crimes (Cuellar & Markowitz, 2015).

The vast majority of existing research on the school-to-prison phenomenon has been completed using quantitative methodologies and based in the United States. Several articles of

this nature, including Wolf and Kupchik's (2017) School Suspensions and Adverse Experiences in Adulthood, test their hypotheses through the analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent to Adult Health. This survey is described as a "nationally representative survey conducted by the University of North Carolina Population Center" (Wolf & Kupchik, 2017, p. 415). The findings suggest that "students who are suspended from school by the time they are in grades 7–12 are at significantly greater risk of criminal victimization, criminal activity, and incarceration years later as adults, even when controlling for dozens of relevant student-level and school-level variables" (p. 423). The article High School Experience and the Risk of Adult Incarceration (Arum & Beattie, 1999) describes the quantitative study's assessment of high school educational experiences on the risk of incarceration for young men aged 19-36 using event history analysis and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data in the United States. In this case, the findings indicate that "high school experience has a lasting effect on an individual's risk of incarceration" (Arum & Beattie, 1999, p. 532). Further, the authors speculate that this effect is likely due to "the effect of education on the propensity for criminal behaviour, which would increase the overall risk of imprisonment" (p. 532). In the article Quick to Punish: An Examination of the School to Prison Pipeline for Marginalized Youth (2015), authors Salole and Abdulle present their research from a Canadian perspective. Based in the Greater Toronto Area, the research employs a qualitative methodology through interviews collecting personal narratives (Salole & Abdulle, 2015). Interested in the perceptions of fairness and justice of marginalized youth, informal interviews were conducted and the youth and "five front line workers" (p. 140) (social worker, teachers, Child and Youth worker) were asked to relay their experiences related to: education, discipline in school, and the criminal justice system.

For the research participants, the findings state that a "seeming lack of flexibility" with regard to enforcement of rules around minor infractions in school enhanced youth participants' feelings of "detachment and exclusion from school" (p. 144). Another prominent emerging theme from this research focused on "just how disruptive school discipline is to the lives of marginalized youth" (p. 149). Most importantly, and most relevant to the research at hand, is the finding that "discipline, suspensions and negative attention can undermine the learning experience of even the strongest students, can diminish the trust students have in teachers and adults, and can permanently alter their commitment to education" (p. 149). It is imperative to point out here the assertion of Hirschfield (2008) that alludes to the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon:

> Just as the success of a 'College Prep' track can be gauged by the share of students in this track who attend college, the reliability of penal and exclusionary practices at weeding out those students on the 'fast track' to jail may, perversely, legitimate and reinforce these practices. (p. 92)

2.1. Labeling Theory

In the article Juvenile Delinquency and Self-Sentiments: Exploring a Labelling Theory Proposition (2016), authors Kroska, Lee, and Carr suggest that the goal of the [juvenile] justice system is to treat and rehabilitate delinquent youth to prevent future violations. They go further to shed light on numerous studies that suggest encounters with this system have the opposite effect on teens, leading them to "reoffend at higher rates than they otherwise would" (p. 73). This reaffirms the suggestion of Hirschfield (2008) as previously discussed, that the system is in essence perversely feeding the school-to-prison pipeline.

Labeling theory draws strongly on symbolic interactionism (Triplett & Upton, 2015). Upon its rise in 1960s, theorists asked criminologists to think of deviance and deviants as "social constructions that result from a process of interaction", exploring the importance of social reactions in shaping the behaviour of those who are reacted to, or labeled as, deviant (Triplett & Upton, 2015, p. 297). Tannenbaum (1938) offered an early yet vital contribution to labeling theory, beginning with the simple argument that people view youths who break the law as somehow different, or worse, than those who do not break the law (as cited in Triplett & Upton, 2015, p. 299). Further, labeling such youth in turn affects both the way society reacts to them and the way they react to society. The participants' accounts of their school experiences offer insight into the effects of labeling, in turn contributing to the synthesis of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon that this research seeks to explore.

It follows that increasing recidivism and labeling youth can be viewed as contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline. According to labeling theory, this unintended outcome of increasing recidivism stems from two interrelated processes that unfold after a delinquency label is officially applied (Kroska, Lee & Carr, 2016). The first process suggests that a delinquency label changes youths' opportunity structures "in ways that limit their ability to pursue conventional routes to socioeconomic success" (Kroska, Lee & Carr, 2016, p. 73). The second process builds on the first in the sense that a delinquency label leads others to treat the labeled youth in ways that promote the adoption of deviant self-meanings (Kroska, Lee & Carr, 2016). In turn, subsequent deviance motivates the affirmation of those self-meanings.

2.2. Self-Worth Theory

According to Covington (1984), self-worth theory focuses attention on the pervasive need to approach success and to avoid failure, causing a sense of worthlessness and social disapproval. Since society generally recognizes that personal worth is largely dependent on one's accomplishments, it follows that ability is a "critical component of success" and inability a "prime cause of failure" (Covington, 1984, p. 8). Moreover, self-perceptions of inability are direct contributors to self-worth. The author goes on to state that "the self-worth model emphasizes feelings of worthlessness arising out of the disclosure of incompetency (shame and humiliation)" (p. 8). I propose that this shame and humiliation may be a consequence of exclusionary discipline, school-based interactions, and lived experiences felt by those individuals who reside in the school-to-prison pipeline. With the support of the work of Kroska, Lee, and Carr (2016), and the emerging themes in this research, connections between labeling and self-worth will be investigated further.

Sociological approaches to understanding the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon are ubiquitous, and they offer important insights into the ideological, political, structural, and policy underpinnings of youth criminalization. In the chapter, "The Indignities on Which the School-to-Prison Pipeline is Built: Life Stories of Two Formerly Incarcerated Black Male School Leavers", Irby (2017) asserts that the body of work in this area "would be strengthened by qualitative research that offers insights into the lived experiences of Black males and the ways they personally make meaning of their experiences" (p. 16). Irby is bringing to the fore gaps in the research akin to those I am attempting to identify and address. Though my research did not

employ the same racial lens, the focus on the human beings at the centre of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon remains consistent.

Irby references *Being Bad: My Baby Brother and the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (Laura, 2014), describing it as a close example of the qualitative research that is needed. In this work, the author presents the story of her brother's transition from "a boy enthusiastic about learning, to being diagnosed with a learning disability, misbehaving in school, and his eventual brushes with the criminal justice system and incarceration" (as cited in Irby, 2017, p. 17). Throughout this transition, Laura points to the missed opportunities of school leaders and teachers to engage her brother and support his difficulties. Further, this account places other human beings - families, school leaders, teachers - at the centre of the phenomenon alongside the subject in question.

Irby (2017) presents two men's first-hand accounts of the school-based experiences that predated each of their eventual incarcerations through "in-depth, one-on-one interviews using a personal narrative approach" (p. 20). According to the author, the individuals under the pseudonyms "Deon" and "Aaron" "represent a population of people who are often talked about but seldom heard from in school-to-prison pipeline research" (p. 17).

Throughout the work, Irby (2017) places his primary focus on the concept of non-inherent dignity, "an acquired condition of self-worth premised upon a person's condition, circumstance, and behaviour" (p. 17). This focus can be extended to draw connections directly with self-worth theory as described by Covington (1984). Thompson (1997) also offers support for this connection asserting that "situations which threaten self-worth are those which are likely to reveal low ability, and low ability is most evident when poor performance occurs despite expending effort" (p. 50). Irby (2017) describes Aaron articulating his losses as a series of

experiences that “eroded his sense of self-worth” leaving him “’deep down, just hurting’” (p. 27). Aaron recounts his experiences growing up in a “’fire and brimstone type of house’” where corporal punishment was often enacted by his mother who struggled with drug and alcohol addiction (Irby, 2017). He regarded the lack of a meaningful male role model as a major factor that shaped his lack of school success, and his experiences “both at home and at school did little to enhance his self-worth” (p. 28). Despite these experiences, Aaron stated in his interview that he faced little difficulty meeting the academic demands in his early years of schooling (Irby, 2017). However, this enthusiasm and giftedness was not reciprocated by adults in his household (Irby, 2017). Rather, it was the low grades that would elicit a response (Irby, 2017). By high school, Aaron was “physically present but not emotionally present” and “too far gone in terms of low self-regard” (p. 32). In his high school of approximately two thousand students, he considered himself a “face in the crowd” (p. 33). He stated that “’there was never anybody in front of me who made me feel like I could be *anything*’” (p. 33). It is here I suggest this statement and its underpinnings may hold powerful implications in terms of policy and practice for educational leaders who acknowledge the existence of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. Aaron’s sentiments will frequently be echoed throughout the accounts of the lived experiences of my participants as presented here in subsequent chapters.

Aaron subsequently experienced a stint of incarceration for six years and shared that substance abuse and addiction was a prevalent part of his life (Irby, 2017).

Deon’s first-hand account of his school experience predating his eventual incarceration offers another window into the “roots upon which the school-to-prison pipeline is built” (Irby, 2017, p. 23). Deon’s story is different in the sense that he left school before graduating, and soon

after entered a “vicious cycle of incarceration and recidivism” (p. 19). His personal narrative reveals frequent experiences with exclusionary discipline in school, stating that “early incidents of outspokenness and defiance” led to referrals and suspensions (p. 24). He found himself having an identity crisis at a very early age, and he was becoming a “disciplinary problem” due to frequent fighting at school (p. 24). In early junior high, Deon was sent to a reform school where he remained for the next two years of his life (Irby, 2017). He described this experience as “living in fear of both other students and many of the Jesuit brothers who ran the school” (p. 24). Upon his return to high school, Deon’s disregard for school worsened, eventually joining gangs and “involving himself in a negative lifestyle” (p. 26). Although he attended school until the 12th grade, he never finished the year, often going to school intoxicated and ending up involved in fights (Irby, 2017).

In the discussion section, Irby (2017) refers to the interlocking experiences of Deon and Aaron as “early indignities of criminalization” (p. 33). He describes the “disposal, containment, violence, and loss of relationships” as primers for “not seeing value in their selves” (p. 33). Most significantly, Irby goes on to speak of “disposability as the root of the pipeline” (p. 36) and was interested in the “myriad of ways that people, even those well-intentioned, marked them as ‘problems’” (p.22). I assert here that these aspects of the discussion are directly connected to the theories of labeling and self-worth, even though Irby does not explicitly state this. Further to, and succinctly, Irby suggests that a sole focus on the school-to-prison pipeline, without sufficient accounts of direct experiences, “masks the potential for new oppressive forms to emerge even if and when the current pipeline falters” (p. 37). Moreover, Irby (2017) describes the purpose of his research as the presentation of a “glimpse into the early life experiences of two Black men whose

containment experiences and subsequent behaviours might be used to support the sort of ideological justifications that foster overly punitive school cultures, climates, disciplinary policies, and practices" (p. 37). In later chapters, we will bear witness to the participants' stories and their own lived experiences of containment as Irby mentions here. Though this research does not allow for the application of the same Black racial lens as seen in Irby's work, many similar themes arose through the lived experiences shared by the participants and via the synthesis of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon.

In the chapter, "Pathologizing the White 'Unteachable': South London's Working-Class Boys' Experiences with Schooling and Discipline" (2017), author Stahl investigates how white working-class boys experience pathologization and deficit discourses in their schooling as they negotiate discipline structures within their schools. Drawing upon empirical data from an in-depth sociological study of twenty-three white working class boys, Stahl makes theoretical connections between how pathologization (within the school and wider society) contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline and how these "young men become constructed with and through deficit discourses contributing significantly toward low academic achievement" (p. 91). The author's discussion of pathologization provides a deeper dimension to the aforementioned concepts of labeling theory and self-worth theory and how they are connected to the human beings at the centre of the school-to-prison pipeline. While Pesta (2018) refers to the school-to-prison pipeline as the relationship between the educational and criminal justice systems, Stahl offers an extension on this definition, referring to the pipeline as the "*institutional practice* of funneling school students, who are often from disadvantaged backgrounds, into the criminal justice system" (Stahl, 2017, p. 92). Delving deeper, he references the 2011 work of Candlin and

Crichton, which posits that particular populations in schools are often subjected to deficit discourses of educators "who may construct their pedagogical practice around a perceived shortfall in a student's ability to learn due to their membership in a distinct social or cultural group" (p. 4). In considering how experiences with schooling contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, Stahl theorizes the identity formation of the white-working class young men in his study, as constituted through "multiple, overlapping forms of pathologization, inside and outside of schooling", as they pursue spaces to construct a "respectable working-class masculinity" (p. 94). Further, in constructing their identities as learners, the white working-class boys in the study have schooling experiences shaped by the low expectations and deficit discourses of their educators, becoming "potential victims" of a school-to prison pipeline through their negative experiences with "schooling, the police, and wider media depictions of the white-working class in schools" (p. 94). Reay (2010) suggests that to understand the experiences of these vulnerable young men, it is important to consider school cultures as a "cacophony of classed, gendered and raced voices" where students attempt to negotiate their social and learner identities (p. 281).

I discovered Stahl's work in this area later in this research and writing journey and became completely intrigued by the deep connections between his findings and elements of the participants' lived experiences and themes that are presented here in subsequent chapters. Where Irby's unique work provided a profound insight into lived experiences at the heart of the school-to-prison pipeline and helped to support the validity and chosen methodology of my research, Stahl's UK-based research offered connections on a cultural level.

Newfoundland and Labrador and the United Kingdom, particularly England and Ireland, possess rich histories that are genetically and culturally intertwined. In fact, Her Majesty's

Penitentiary, or HMP, NL's largest and main prison and the place where the participants in my research were incarcerated at the time of their interviews, is the only prison in Canada named in honour of British royalty, similarly to all prisons throughout the UK. According to Heritage NL (2000), upwards of 90% of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are descendants from people who came from England and Ireland between the early 17th century and the late 19th century. This has had a profound impact on the development of Newfoundland and Labrador's cultural identity.

Akin to the UK, there is evidence in NL of the pathologization (labeling) of the white, lower socio-economic status male into social groups with characteristics that are similar to those as outlined by Stahl. For Stahl, white Britons from low-income backgrounds lacking in cultural resources to form a respectable identity are frequently associated in popular discourses with the pejorative term, "chav" (Stahl, 2017, p. 97). He goes on to state that this pathologization is furthered by a "morose pop culture fascination in UK society with the interrelationship between social class, education, and behaviour" (p. 98). In NL, there is evidence of a similar fascination and pathologization via the term, 'skeet', as seen through cultural references and colloquialisms, often made 'in jest' via comedic performances and cultural commentary (see the NL comedy troupe The Outhouse on YouTube, for example).

This pathologization can often manifest in school contexts through 'staffroom' deficit discourses between teachers and school staff regarding students who may fall into the previously mentioned social groups and the notion of their 'ability' (or lack thereof) in school (Stahl, 2017, p. 100). This contributes heavily to the formation of certain students being considered "unteachable" (p. 98). Through my own experiences as a teacher in NL, I have witnessed similar

deficit discourses taking place. Through the participants' stories of their school experiences in the chapters that lie ahead, echoes of these discourses are also recognizable.

2.3. Policy, the School-to-Prison Pipeline, and NL Schools

It is imperative that school discipline policies be examined in the school-to-prison pipeline discussion. The article Net-Deepening of School Discipline (Irby, 2012) presents an ethnographic content analysis of fifteen chronological district-wide annual codes of student conduct from a large urban United States school district. Through the examination of school policy documents, Irby (2012) reveals policy changes that, over time, make "severe punishment increasingly likely" (p. 197). These changes are referred to by the author as a "net-deepening" of school discipline, emphasizing the potential for this phenomenon "to undermine the effectiveness of proactive and restorative forms of school discipline" (p. 197).

Irby (2012) asserts that over the past twenty years, school safety and discipline research has highlighted the tendencies of districts and schools to adopt increasingly harsh discipline approaches. Punitive and exclusionary discipline practice, particularly overuse of removal as punishment, random drug sweeps, and the use of surveillance technologies characterize "post-Columbine, post-9/11" public school settings (Lewis, 2003, as cited in Irby, 2012). Further, researchers have also found that in certain schools, the enforcement of dress codes and school rules takes precedence over teaching and learning (Kupchik, 2009). These findings stand in contrast to the general consensus among researchers that "positive behavioural and proactive approaches to discipline do more to foster student achievement than do punitive approaches" (Sharkey & Fenning, 2012, p. 101). In the article, Restorative Justice: Pedagogy, Practice, and

Discipline authors Morrison and Vaandering (2012) show their support for this consensus. They take this support a step further, arguing that North American public school districts rely too heavily on punitive regulatory frameworks to maintain a sense of school order. It is important to note here that a "sense" of school order does not equate school order. Further, Irby (2012) points out that "punitive frameworks are not grounded in sound education philosophy and practice" (p. 198). In fact, some aspects of punitive frameworks, such as random drug searches, prove to be "clear-cut examples of law enforcement encroachments into educational spaces" (Irby, 2012, p. 197). Within a punitive framework, any effectiveness of the exclusionary discipline practice of suspension can be undermined if it is applied with less discretion to a wider range of students and behaviours (Irby, 2012). Bear (2013) argues that suspensions can work in the interest of the child and their peers and are only effective in structured and supportive school environments. Most importantly, Irby (2012) brings to the fore a critical point "in the ongoing critique of harsh disciplinary responses" that many students get into trouble not because of their involvement in violent incidents, but because of actions "labeled by administrators as disobedience and insubordination" (p. 199).

This discussion takes a natural turn into the acknowledgement of the formation of "school-to-prison tracks" when school discipline systems are "incapable of systematically remediating and reintegrating youth who get into trouble back into an educational track" (Brown, 2003; Christie et al., 2005, as cited in Irby, 2012, p. 199). Further to this, those students who find themselves in trouble at school, experience an array of disciplinary phenomena that are a result of entrenched inequalities (Irby, 2012). Most relevant is the assertion of Irby (2012) that the "systematic exclusion that characterizes school-to-prison phenomena exacerbates the denial of

educational opportunities for the most educationally vulnerable student populations while not sustainably making schools any safer for the youth that remain" (p. 199).

In theory, a written discipline policy provides guidelines for what should happen when a student breaks a school rule. More specifically, if a student acts in 'X' manner, a disciplinarian should respond with 'Y' corrective action (Irby, 2012). Since policy changes reflect value changes, redefinitions and new discourses "gradually recast behaviours as more or less severe" (Irby, 2012, p. 203). This recasting or "net-deepening" would now require the disciplinarian to respond to 'X' behaviour with 'Z' corrective action, requiring them to "think and act within a new cognitive structure that (re)frames his or her decision-making as incorrect at the onset" (p. 203). Changes such as these can be referred to as the "criminalization of conduct" due to this applied logic of defining and ranking offenses (Whitman, 2005, as cited in Irby, 2012, p. 203). Since, according to labeling theory, rules reflect values, Irby (2012) suggests that school discipline policy texts where these deduced values are "codified" (p. 203) would provide insights into the changing nature of school discipline. Since the power of policy creation and enforcement is in the hands of adults, it follows that the framework "shifts the analytical lens from student behaviours to adult decision-making in school settings" (p. 203). More specifically, the framework "situates adults' biases, opinions, and educational institutions' processes of modifying rules" (p. 203) and changing corrective actions as projects to subjugate student behaviours.

I turn the focus here to the Student Suspensions policy of NL Schools (formerly the Newfoundland English School District) Section four of the policy text, "Suspension by a School Administrator", outlines five student offenses that can warrant a suspension. Section 4.1 of the

document states that “a school administrator may suspend a student from one or more class periods; a course or program; school; the school bus; or, a school-sponsored activity where the student: is a threat to the safety of others; seriously disrupts the teaching and learning process; deliberately damages the property of the school; deliberately damages the property of others on school property or during school-sponsored events; and refuses to abide by the school code of conduct and/or other school/district policies” (NL Schools, 2016). The sixth criterion states that suspension may be enacted if “the school administrator has reasonable grounds to suspect that the student is involved in criminal activity and/or is under the influence or in possession of illegal drugs and/or alcohol” (NL Schools, 2016). According to DeMitchell (2012), a “regulation or policy violates due process guarantees if a reasonable person would not know what to refrain from doing or not know what must be done in order to follow the law, rule, or regulation” (p. 13). In other words, if it does not meet this standard, it is vague. Based on the previous discussion and the discussion that follows, close examination of the language of school district policies may be warranted.

2.4. Critiques of the School-to-Prison Pipeline Metaphor

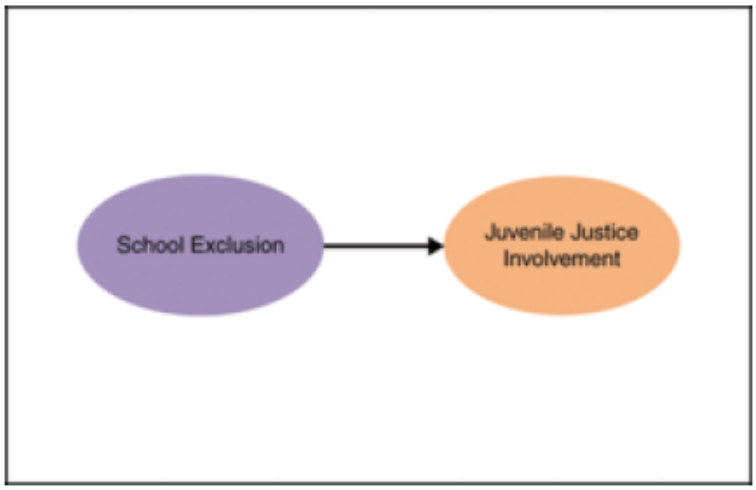
In the 2018 article, Examining the School-to-Prison Pipeline Metaphor, authors Crawley and Hirschfield place the school-to-prison pipeline under the proverbial microscope. Their research begins with a conceptual examination of the phenomenon, and takes the reader through the political backdrop, timeline, utility, and critiques of the metaphor. It is suggested here that the “school-to-prison pipeline metaphor has gained widespread acceptance as a slogan that critically depicts the relationship between schools and the criminal justice system” (Crawley &

Hirschfield, 2018, p. 3). Further, the authors assert that one of the "clear benefits of the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor is its ability to raise awareness and alarm", providing "jarring visual imagery and a simple narrative" (p. 5). The conceptual integration aids in the galvanization and legitimization of coalitions of stakeholders "across institutional domains that seek to reduce exclusionary and criminalizing practices and expand disciplinary alternatives" such as restorative justice (p. 5). Moreover, the pipeline framework employs a lens that emphasizes the negative impact of exclusionary discipline and "school-based criminal justice interactions" (p. 5).

Despite the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor's powerful social justice, political and advocacy benefits as presented here, scholars such as McGrew (2016) have suggested that the metaphor "lacks theoretical elucidation" and complexity (as cited in Crawley & Hirschfield, 2018, p. 5). McGrew (2016) goes on to assert that theories of resistance, social reproduction, and political economy tend to be conspicuously absent from, or improperly situated within, the school-to-prison pipeline literature. Upon close examination, Crawley and Hirschfield (2018) describe a "rhetorical inflation" (p. 6) of the statements about the role of law enforcement in schools. Additionally, the authors bring to light a failure of leading proponents of the metaphor to document "exactly how school exclusion facilitates involvement in the criminal justice system" (p. 6). They allude to the previously discussed implication of directionality in the metaphor, contending that "there is a much more complicated and intricate relationship" (p. 6) that exists between school exclusion and prison. Skiba, Arrendondo, and Williams (2014) offered the simplest model of the school-to-prison pipeline (Figure 1), explicitly displaying the "pipeline" directionality metaphor.

Figure 1

Simplest Model of the School-to-Prison Pipeline

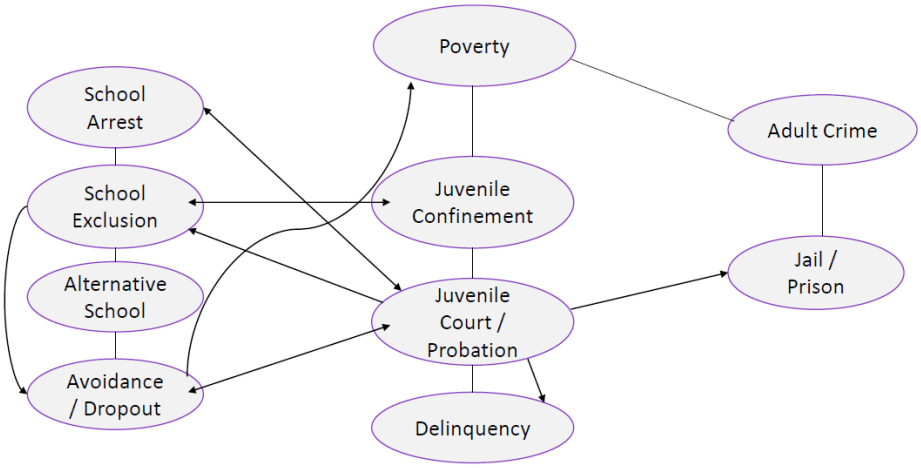


Note. From Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 546–564.

Following from this, Crawley and Hirschfield (2018) refer to a "probabilistic, multi-directional and often multi-level model" (p. 7) of the school-to-prison pipeline defined by Hirschfield in 2012 (Fig. 2). This model emphasizes macro processes that shape the course to prison, while acknowledging the "unique experiences of individual students that include potential diversions or disruptions" (p. 7). In this model, we see multi-directionality and confounding factors.

Figure 2

Probabilistic, Multi-Directional, Multi-Level Model of the School-to-Prison Pipeline



Note. Adapted from Hirschfield, P. J. (2012). A critical assessment of theory and research on the 'school to prison pipeline.' *American Society of Criminology 2012 Meeting*, Chicago, IL.

This mention of the acknowledgement of the unique experiences of individuals residing within the pipeline alludes to the importance of research focusing on the human beings at the centre of the phenomenon (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

School-to-Prison Pipeline Model Highlighting Lived Experiences at Its Core

Note. Adapted from Hirschfield, P. J. (2012). A critical assessment of theory and research on the 'school to prison pipeline.' *American Society of Criminology 2012 Meeting*, Chicago, IL.

Figure 3 provides a visual representation of 'What is Missing?' from the previously mentioned models, emphasizing the importance of providing a space in this area of research to hear from the human beings at the centre of the phenomenon so that we may learn from their lived experiences.

The following chapter delves into phenomenological methodology, exploring the philosophical underpinnings and shares the experiential journey of the researcher through the process of its undertaking.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological methodology, one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with a group of five incarcerated individuals at Her Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP) to gain insight into their school experiences. The interview process explored the school experiences of the participants and the existence of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in Newfoundland. The open-ended questions proposed to the participants throughout the interviews provided insight into the following: What are the school experiences of incarcerated individuals residing within the Pipeline? What are the experiences with exclusionary discipline of those residing within the Pipeline? How does one's self-worth play into this Pipeline? How do these individuals view their own self-worth? What do they feel they would have 'needed' from their school experiences in order to remove themselves from the Pipeline? Is the prison experience connected to the school experience? What advice do these individuals have for educators and the school system?

Phenomenological research methods are used to study areas where "little is known or to explore sensitive content" (Donalek, 2004, p. 516). Participants were recruited based on the fact they are living within the phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline, since they were once in school and are now incarcerated. This tactic is consistent with the suggestion of Donalek (2004) that the phenomenological researcher recruits potential participants "who have lived the phenomenon in question and are willing and able to describe their experiences" (p. 516). Drew (2001) states that "unless we acknowledge our already meaning-endowed relationships with the

topics of our research, we are deluded about grasping the essence of any phenomenon" (p. 19). In other words, research is not truly phenomenological unless the researcher's beliefs are incorporated into the data analysis (Donalek, 2004, p. 516). My lived experiences within the framework of restorative justice and as a high school teacher have fueled my beliefs in the concept that simply by being human, you are worth something. These beliefs have guided me authentically to a phenomenological approach to the methodology. It is important to note that "in order for phenomenological research to be credible, documentation of the process must exist from the selection of the topic to all phases of the collection and analysis of the data and creation of the essential description of the phenomenon" (p. 516). A journal was kept throughout the entire process, from conception of the topic to the analysis of the data.

3.1. Phenomenology as a Qualitative Research Method

Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the life world (van Manen, 1990). It involves the use of thick description and close analysis of lived experience "to understand how meaning is created through embodied perception" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1373). Phenomenology contributes to deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing "taken-for-granted assumptions about these ways of knowing" (p. 1373). The primary target of phenomenological knowledge is "the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 11). Throughout this research, there was a commitment to keeping this primary target as a guiding principle.

Simply put, phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis of all knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). It then follows logically from this that any phenomenon serves as a suitable starting point for an investigation. Because all knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know and depend upon (Moustakas, 1994). For further exploration of this claim, one must look at the roots of the phenomenological research method. The term *phenomenology* was used as early as 1765 in philosophy and the writings of Immanuel Kant (Moustakas, 1994). The origin of the word *phenomenon* is in the Greek word *phaenesthai*, meaning "to flare up, to show itself, to appear" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 23). Within this original meaning lies a motivation for generating new knowledge through experience.

Often referred to as the father of phenomenology, philosopher Edmund Husserl's (1859 - 1938) initial work focused on mathematics (Laverty, 2003). As a mathematics teacher, I found this to be especially intriguing, and sought to examine the connections between the scientific method, the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and how it relates to human science inquiry. Husserl's work changed over time, moving the focus from the objectivity of mathematics to view phenomenology as "equally objective and subjective" (p. 22), finally having subjectivity dominate his pursuits. Husserl's phenomenology is a *transcendental phenomenology*, as it "adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 39). Further, it asserts that the only thing we know for certain is that which appears before us in consciousness, a fact which guarantees its objectivity (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1965) concluded that "phenomenology is the 'science of

science' since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted (or ignore), the very essence of their own objects" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 40).

Moustakas (1994) speaks of phenomenology as the first method of knowledge, since it begins with the "things themselves" (p. 35). It is a methodology that, step-by-step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions in order to reach "a transcendental state of freshness and openness" (p. 35).

Husserl described this 'setting aside of presuppositions' the *Epoché*, a Greek word meaning to stay away from, or abstain (Moustakas, 1994). According to Schmitt (1968), it is a process that is fundamental to transcendental phenomenology, requiring the researcher to "invalidate, inhibit, and disqualify" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994) all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience. Within the Epoché process, is the process of *bracketing*, enacted by the researcher to help achieve a "state of unbiased understanding" (van Manen, 2014). Previous beliefs regarding the phenomenon are suspended and 'put out of play', while remaining bracketed. For this process to be successful, Moustakas (1994) asserts that the researcher must recollect and suspend their own experiences in order to enter and understand the lived experiences of others residing within the phenomenon.

Prior to the interviews, existing predictions, or preconceptions regarding how the participants would respond to interview questions were documented in the journal. The predictions were analyzed. Throughout this bracketing process, it emerged that these predictions had been shaped by my own personal encounters with people who have experienced incarceration, as well as my experiences working with youth as a high school teacher.

Given that I confronted the preconceptions, I worked to put them aside by moving them from the unconscious to the conscious, with the purpose of becoming a 'bystander' in the memories of the participants as they recounted them in the interviews.

Besides Epoché and bracketing, Husserl (1913) developed a three-stage approach called *free imaginative variation* (as cited in Moustakas, 1994). Stage one, *exemplary intuition,* involves the researcher attempting to think of every instance of the phenomenon in order to look at and understand the range of possibilities (Moustakas, 1994). This provides a model to shape new images of the phenomenon in stage two of the approach called *imaginative repetition* (Moustakas, 1994). It is important to note here that the range of possibilities is endless, but at some point the researcher must stop since the essence of the phenomenon is present in all these instances (Moustakas, 1994). This 'stopping' occurs when data saturation is achieved. Turner (2002) offers an adapted definition of data saturation for phenomenological analyses, defining it in terms of the "emergence of themes from the analysis" (p. 298) and a "consensus across the views expressed" (p. 298) by the participants. Stage three involves the *synthesis* of the common themes or instances into one reality or description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Based on the phenomenological method, I did not propose a hypothesis to be supported by the evidence. Instead, the structure of the phenomenon is described so that it can be understood in a holistic and comprehensive way. The first person 'meaning(s)' of the participants' experiences are of interest rather than mere objective interpretations of behaviours.

3.2. Existential and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic, or interpretive, phenomenology is another of the three types of Western phenomenology, the other two being transcendental and existential phenomenology (Kafle, 2011). As discussed, an essential premise underlying transcendental phenomenology is that to reach an understanding of reality, we can suspend our personal opinions or pre-conceived notions. Existential phenomenology rejects Husserl's belief of the possibility of complete reduction and the firm attempt of the researcher to concentrate upon "re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world" (Kafle, 2011, p. 188). Simply put, existential phenomenologists have the philosophy that phenomenological research should not be conducted from a detached, objective or seemingly disengaged standpoint. Hermeneutic phenomenology takes this idea a step further, as it involves a process in which the researcher and participants work together to explore and develop their understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Martin Heidegger, Husserl's student, extended Husserl's ideas and went out on a limb to declare that nothing can be encountered without reference to the person's 'background understanding', and that every encounter entails an interpretation based on the person's background (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger uses the term 'pre-understanding' to describe the organization and meaning of a culture which are already in the world before we understand (Koch, 1995). In other words, 'pre-understanding' is already with all of us. It is a structure of our being as we exist in this world, and therefore not something that we can entirely eliminate – or bracket.

3.3. The Phenomenon of the Journey Through the Process(ing)

Heidegger's concept of 'pre-understanding' emerged as a vital instrument for digging deeper into my own journey through the research process and developing a higher level of understanding of phenomenological methodology. When the concept for this research was initially conceived, a phenomenological approach to the methodology was a natural fit, as the main intention of this research is to give voice to the human beings at the centre of the phenomenon and shed light on their lived experiences. As previously outlined, my first encounter with phenomenology as research methodology was Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which puts a strong emphasis on the process of 'bracketing' for the researcher. The research pattern based on this school of thought believes that it is indeed possible to suspend personal opinion; that it is possible to arrive at a single, essential and descriptive presentation of a phenomenon (Kafle, 2011).

So, I did my due diligence and attempted the process of 'bracketing' well in advance of going into the prison to interview my participants. I began by journaling about my own positionality as a researcher. I attempted to predict how my participants would answer the interview questions, and then analyze why I thought they would answer this way. This process allowed for a more conscious awareness of my own biases and preconceptions of the phenomenon in question before heading into the participant interviews. According to Husserl's transcendental phenomenological process, these biases and preconceptions must be recollected and then suspended in order to successfully enter into the lived world of others and understand their meaning of the world and the phenomenon being studied. I dug deeper into Husserl's early

writing and discovered his first mention of the term ‘bracketing’ and how it relates to a certain “suspension of the thesis”:

> It is not a transformation of the thesis into its antithesis, of positive into negative; it is also not a transformation into presumption, suggestion, indecision, doubt (in one or another sense of the word); such shifting indeed is not at our free pleasure. Rather it is something quite unique. We do not abandon the thesis we have adopted, we make no change in our conviction, which remains in itself what it is so long as we do not introduce new motives of judgment, which we precisely refrain from doing. And yet the thesis undergoes a modification - whilst remaining itself what it is, we set it as it were "out of action", we "disconnect it", "bracket it". It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connexional system. (Husserl, 1931, p. 106)

Revisiting these words from Husserl during the analysis paved the way for a deeper understanding of ‘bracketing’ and my own attempts at suspension of presuppositions prior to the participant interviews that took place within the prison walls. It is here I turn the focus to the last two lines of the passage: “And yet the thesis undergoes a modification - whilst remaining itself what it is, we set it as it were ‘out of action’; we ‘bracket it’. It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connexional system” (p. 106). Reflecting upon these lines I began to realize that the task of ‘bracketing’ should not be approached with the intent of garnering a distinct and sheer removal of one’s prior knowledge or preconceived notions about the phenomenon in question, or about any of the lived experiences that help to synthesize the phenomenon being studied. If we look closer, it is evident that Husserl is stating that we, and our preconceived notions and presuppositions, remain ‘bracketed within

the bracket'; that is, they cannot purely be eliminated, as that would be an elimination of self and our experiences which helped shape the idea of 'self' and is what led us to the desire of researching the phenomenon in the first place. From this it becomes clear how Heidegger, Husserl's student, arrived at the concept of 'pre-understanding' and how nothing can be encountered without reference to the person's 'background understanding', and that every encounter entails an interpretation based on the person's background (Heidegger, 1962). This 'pre-understanding' - what our own lived experiences bring to the understanding of the phenomenon - are alive and well, inside the bracket. Similarly, as the participants in this research have been effectively removed from society via the processes of marginalization and incarceration, they still remain.

The following section outlines the specific methods utilized in this study, including participant selection, data collection through in-depth interviews, and the comprehensive data analysis process. Some key challenges that can arise in phenomenological research will also be discussed.

Chapter 4: Method

4.1. Participants

Utilizing purposeful sampling and criterion-based selection the participants for this research were selected from an exclusive population of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians whose voices are seldom heard. These were individuals who currently reside within the school-to-prison pipeline in the Province, simply by having a history of attending school and experiencing subsequent incarceration. Since this research focused on the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in Newfoundland and Labrador, participants were screened to meet the following criteria:

a) they are residents of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador;

b) attended the majority of their schooling in NL;

c) have been convicted of a criminal offense at the provincial and/or federal level;

d) are individuals who are currently incarcerated at Her Majesty's Penitentiary (HMP).

My personal and vocational contacts who were supportive of the research acted as facilitating gatekeepers to gain access to participants. These contacts include parole officers employed by the Correctional Service of Canada in NL, as well as the founders and executive directors of an established non-profit organization in St. John's who work directly with offenders and ex-offenders on community reintegration and mental health efforts. My contacts were thoroughly informed of my research interests and they subsequently provided direct access to a pool of potential participants who matched the above criteria and were interested in participating.

In an initial meeting on-site at HMP, the potential participants were provided with a prepared statement describing the nature and purpose of the study. Written permission from the HMP assistant superintendent was obtained to gain access to HMP and conduct interviews, as well as a security clearance to enter the prison as a civilian. Prior to written permission, the research proposal was provided for independent review to the HMP superintendent and then discussed with the researcher in a subsequent meeting.

Out of the pool of approximately sixty potential participants, five people who were incarcerated came forward and expressed their desire to become participants in the study, making their individual intention to participate known in confidence to the facilitator of the prison council meetings. The facilitator then passed their intention and names along privately to me in order to schedule the preliminary meeting and individual interviews.

According to Cohen and Arieli (2011), snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is a distinct method of convenience sampling "which has been proven to be especially useful in conducting research in marginalized societies" (p. 426). The prison environment can be viewed as a marginalized society in and of itself. I was ready to utilize, if necessary, this sampling method for additional participant recruitment. Cohen and Arieli (2011) provide support for this plan, as they suggest that the snowball sampling method "can serve as a complementary strategy to increase research efficiency and quality and reduce the chance of sampling bias" (p. 427) in the event of challenging circumstances in the research environment. Atkinson and Flint (2001) describe the snowball sampling method as a means of reaching a target population by creating contacts with a respondent's circle of acquaintances (as cited in Cohen & Arieli, 2011). In other words, it is a method that uses the "social networks of interviewees to expand the researcher's potential contacts" (Cohen & Arieli, 2011, p. 427). Further, when studying hidden

or hard to reach populations, as I am, the research sample is usually small and the option of conducting a survey will be limited.

Snowball sampling allows the researcher to use "past ties and communication with prior research subjects in order to gain access to and cooperation from potential new subjects" (Cohen & Arieli, p. 428). This is especially significant in establishing contact with "relatively closed populations such as societal elites, gangs and extremist groups" (p. 428). The people who are incarcerated participating in my research are members of the relatively closed population of Her Majesty's Penitentiary. The importance of trust in gaining access to and enlisting the cooperation of the participants cannot be underestimated. Cohen and Arieli (2011) state that trust is a central factor in the establishment of a working relationship with the research participants. Moreover, trust can facilitate and enhance cooperation in an environment of uncertainty and risk, "common to populations who fear exposure" (p. 428). In other words, the knowledge that the researcher was referred by a trusted person "increases the potential for trust and cooperation in providing data" (p. 428).

In terms of sample size, my goal to have at least three participants up to a maximum of five was met without incident, as five willing participants came forward and expressed their desire to take part in the research. Snowball sampling did not have to be utilized. The decision to involve a maximum of five participants held true to the suggestion of Starks and Trinidad (2007) that typical sample sizes for a phenomenological study range from one to ten participants. Although diverse samples might provide a broader range from which to "distill the essence of the phenomenon", data from only a few individuals who experienced the phenomenon - and who can provide a detailed account of their experience - "might suffice to uncover its core elements" (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1375).

4.2. Data Collection

In the text *Researching Lived Experience*, van Manen (1990) states that the point of phenomenological research is to "'borrow' other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole human experience" (p. 62). In this phenomenological investigation of the experiences of those residing within the school-to-prison pipeline in NL, I sought to understand what it is like for those who reside there and the effect it has had on their lives. Through the lenses of self-worth theory and labeling theory, I sought to explore their school experiences and the existence of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in NL. It is important here to re-state the research questions: What are the school experiences of incarcerated individuals residing within the Pipeline? What are the experiences with exclusionary discipline of those residing within the Pipeline? How does one's self-worth play into this Pipeline? How do these individuals view their own self-worth? What do they feel they would have 'needed' from their school experiences in order to remove themselves from the Pipeline? Is the prison experience connected to the school experience? What advice do these individuals have for educators and the school system?

Prior to in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant, a preliminary meeting was arranged with the participants to review the purpose of the research and the research questions. Englander (2012) suggests that this preliminary meeting is an opportunity to establish trust with the participants, review ethical considerations, complete consent forms, and review the research questions. My goal for this meeting aligned with Englander (2012) when he states that

the initial meeting “gives the participant time to dwell and ponder on the experience” (p. 27) of the phenomenon under study and can aid the researcher in obtaining a richer description during the interview. Similarly to the method of Fraelich (1989), it was conveyed to the participants that all identifying information will be removed, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 89). To ensure ethical research, Informed Consent forms approved by the Tri-Council were carefully created, presented, explained, confirmed to be understood, and signed by each participant. A sample of the form is included in Appendix C (p. 143). The participants were informed that no personally identifying information would be used and their legal names would be replaced with pseudonyms. After reaching a mutual agreement, a future date and time for the in-depth, semi-structured, on-site interview was arranged with the understanding that due to the nature of the prison environment, the interview date and time was subject to change.

The participant interviews took place within the prison; human beings living in confinement and containment. I entered as a civilian, requiring repeated security checks and clearance, and experiencing seemingly endless stints of sitting in the small, archaic waiting area just behind the main doors of the prison waiting for my escort to arrive to take me deeper into the narrow passages of the one hundred and sixty five year old building. I was subject to the rules for civilians entering the facility: No cell phones, no cameras, no physical contact, no items besides the approved basic digital audio recorder. There was never a guarantee that anything planned would actually happen on the day or time initially scheduled, an inherent chaos lurking beneath a system of ostensible order. Two of the interviews had to be rescheduled due to the prison going into lockdown after an incident occurred that resulted in the death of an incarcerated person.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant individually ranging from approximately thirty minutes to sixty minutes. These interviews took place in a small interview room in the prison situated near the prison guard post. Each participant was escorted from their ward to the interview room individually. I followed the suggestion of Moustakas (1994) and engaged in an informal, interactive interview process utilizing open-ended comments and questions characteristic of phenomenological research. Prior to the interview, I engaged in the previously described method of epoché so that, to a significant degree, "past associations, understandings, 'facts', biases are set aside to not colour or direct the interview" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). That is, I attempted to set aside preconceptions regarding the participants and their lived experience within the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. Broad questions, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), may facilitate the obtaining of "rich, vital, substantive descriptions" of the co-researchers' experience of the phenomenon that will become the raw data for this study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). Van Manen (1990) supports the importance of paying attention to silence, the absence of speaking, the silence of the unspeakable and the silence of being or life itself, as it is herein that one may find the taken for granted or the self-evident. Examples of the interview questions I asked are given in Appendix D of this document (p. 148). It should also be noted here that the phenomenological researcher is not as concerned with the factual accuracy of the participant's memory but instead the lived, persistent meaning of an early emotional memory (Moustakas, 1994). In this case, these early emotional memories may be the school experiences as described by the participants throughout the interview. Each interview, with the permission of the participant, was recorded using a digital audio recorder capturing the raw data for the future transcription and analysis. The digital recording files for

each interview were transferred from the audio recorder to a secure hard drive for storage and were only accessible to myself as the research and my supervisor.

Immediately after each interview and acting as a primary step in the analysis process, reflective notes were written in an attempt to capture the overall sense of the interview, the atmosphere, the impression of the openness of the participant, as well as any significant points and observations that would be important for future reference in the analysis process. The transcription and coding process is outlined in detail in the next subsection. Since member-checking is an important part of data collection, it is important to mention here that I employed member-checking by returning to the participants with the transcripts of which they approved. Short, follow-up, one-on-one meetings took place in the same interview room inside the prison so that the participants had the opportunity to review and approve the interview transcripts.

4.3. Data Analysis

Englander (2012) suggests that for phenomenological research to achieve the same rigorous quality as natural scientific research, it is important that "data collection and data analysis are both seen as part of a single, unified process" (p. 15). In order to accomplish this, data was analyzed by following the phenomenological reduction procedure as outlined by Moustakas (1994) and Hycner (1985). Phenomenological reduction is not only a way of seeing, "but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 76).

An obvious first and vital step in the data analysis is the transcription of the interview recordings. Hycner (1985) suggests that the transcription should include "the literal statements and as much as possible the notation of significant non-verbal and para-linguistic communications" (p. 280). Additionally, it will be helpful to leave a margin to the right of the transcription "so that the researcher will later be able to note what they believe are the units of general meaning" (p. 280). The interview transcription process began almost immediately in the days that followed the completion of the final on-site participant interview. The promptness of beginning the transcription process provided the important opportunity to have the memories of the interviews 'fresh' in the mind for effective recollection and context. First, the interview recordings were listened through in their entirety before any transcription occurred. During this listening process, the post-interview notes were revisited to allow for the best opportunity for rich context. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim and manually using Microsoft Word. The transcriptions (research data) were approached with openness to whatever meanings that emerged, bracketing as much as possible the researcher's meanings and interpretations. Essentially, at this stage, I entered the world of the unique individual who was interviewed in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying, rather than what I expected that person to say. To check whether I have been able to bracket my presuppositions, I followed the suggestion of Hycner (1985) and listed those presuppositions of which I am consciously aware. The recordings were listened to multiple times and the transcriptions read multiple times to get a sense of the whole interview and "provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meanings and themes" (Hycner, 1985, p. 281). Following this was process of horizonalization, a very rigorous process enacted to delineate units of general meaning, themes, or horizons

(Moustakas, 1994). Hycner (1985) suggests that the researcher goes over "every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted nonverbal communication in the transcript in order to elicit the participant's meanings" (p. 282). The coding process was carried out with the aid of the qualitative data analysis computer software, QDA Miner Lite. This software simply acts as an organizational tool for the data, providing a sense of structure for the researcher during the data analysis process. The five interview transcription files were imported into the program. The transcription data for each participant interview was read and analyzed by the researcher, and memo notes were kept during this analysis to keep track of the codes generated and any other related notes. High quality, thorough memo writing acts as data exploration and enhances the continuity of conception, enabling contemplation and facilitating communication during the analysis process (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008).

Keeping the research questions at the forefront, I combed through the data in multiple iterations, identifying emerging patterns and relationships. One hundred and nine (109) codes were created (see Appendix E, p. 149). QDA Miner allows for the simultaneous comparison of the transcript files, and the passages in the texts related to a code were highlighted and labeled with the corresponding code name.

Next, Moustakas (1994) suggests a thematic clustering of the codes (or "horizons") into core themes. Hycner (1985) offers an elaboration on this action, stating that it is the beginning of a "very critical phase in the explication of data" (p. 284). At this stage, I re-addressed the research questions to the units of general meaning or codes and began to group the codes into categories. I also followed the suggestion of Hycner (1985) that states if there is ambiguity or

uncertainty at this time as to whether a general unit of meaning is relevant to the research questions, it is always better to be on safe side and include it.

Van Manen (1990) suggests that making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is "more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure-grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of 'seeing'" (p. 79). Further, he proposes that phenomenological themes may be understood as the "structures of experiences"; experiential structures that compose that experience (p. 79). Thus, through the analysis process of the lived experiences, we must come to the realization that phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations. Metaphorically speaking, they are more like "knots in the webs of our experiences" (p. 90). This analogy helped provide clarity and allowed for a deeper understanding throughout my process of thematic analysis.

The next stage involved the construction of individual textural descriptions, or narratives that explain the participants' perception of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This is a procedure which requires the "phenomenological viewpoint of eliciting essences as well as the acknowledgment of existential individual differences" (Hycner, 1985, p. 292). Individual participant narratives were constructed based on the accounts of their lived experiences. The creation of these narratives was a transformational endeavour that proved to be a profoundly revealing process in terms of themes and my own understanding of the phenomenon as a researcher. Intricacies and subtleties of the participants' experiences emerged through the elucidation of these narratives. They are presented as written and without interpretation in the following chapter.

4.4. Issues in Phenomenological Research

Hycner (1985) offers a discussion of issues in phenomenological research that every researcher must be able to respond to and address. Throughout the discussion so far, I have addressed and acknowledged many of these issues, including validity. I will present some of these issues in further detail here as the proposal would not be complete without this discussion.

The first issue involves the randomness of the sample. Phenomenological research is often subject to frequent criticism from experimentally oriented researchers due to the fact that the sample is not truly 'random' (Hycner, 1985). For this research, this is an accurate statement, since I intend to recruit participants who reside within the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon *and* are able to articulate their experience. However, it should be remembered that as a phenomenological researcher I am seeking to illuminate human phenomena, and "not in the strictest sense generalize the findings" (Hycner, 1985, p. 294). From the very beginning, I have made clear that my intention is to recognize and give voice to the human beings that lie at the centre of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon in NL. Further, randomness of the sample in the form of participants who are unable to articulate their experience may have kept me from fully researching the phenomenon to the depth that is required.

Following this, it is appropriate here to specifically respond to the issues of generalizability that often arise in phenomenological research due to the limited number of participants. I will state here that my intention is to illuminate the lived experiences of my participants; if successfully accomplished, this in and of itself extremely valuable. Hycner (1985) provides support for this statement when he says that "in the process of even investigating the

experience of one unique individual we can learn much about the phenomenology of human being in general" (p. 295).

Chapter 5: Participant Narratives

What follows in this section are simply the narratives of the participants, presented in the order they were interviewed. It is important to empower and honour these individuals by acknowledging the agency and ownership of their stories. Their stories speak for themselves - created from the interview transcripts without interpretation from the researcher, allowing for transparency and authenticity. The interviews began with the open-ended question, "Describe your earliest memories of school", with the intent to allow for a free-flowing, semi-structured interview with guiding questions throughout. As you read, I invite you to consider the collective experience of the participants, how their school experiences were intertwined with their lives, and the ways in which their stories and advice can inform educational policies, pedagogy, and practice while providing a starting point for the synthesis of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon.

5.1. Thomas

At the time of interview, "Thomas" was in his mid-thirties and an inmate at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's, Newfoundland. In and out of jail his entire life, this time he was there on remand for a crime that, if convicted, could result in a six year sentence. He spent the majority of his life in Newfoundland, with his formative years spent in a small community located approximately one hour outside of the capital city of St. John's. Raised by his grandparents in a household with eight other children, Thomas described incidences of feeling

negatively judged by others in the community due to his older brother's criminal history and their family name. After incidents with teachers and administrators, early brushes with the law and time spent in juvenile detention, he dropped out of school entirely in Grade 8. So followed a history of anger, substance abuse, and criminal behaviour.

5.1.1. Thomas' Story

During the initial group meeting and introductions, Thomas expressed a particular interest in 'telling his story', and this sense of eagerness was still present. In order to begin to elicit Thomas' school experience, the interview began with the statement, "Please describe for me your earliest memories of school and what it was like for you".

Thomas began his school years in a small elementary school "just down the road" from his grandparents' house, where he was raised along with eight other children, including three of his cousins whom he considered to be his brothers. His grandfather was an ironworker in the offshore industry, a trade Thomas would later learn for himself. With regards to his grandparents raising these children, Thomas recounted a lack of structure in the home, but stated that they "tried their best." He admitted that as of this current time he did not know the identity of his biological father. He simply described his biological mother as being "something else" and the reason why he was raised by his grandparents. He spoke of being sure that he was loved by his grandparents, but "that the difference was being *told*."

The size of the school reflected the size of the town, with a population of just over six hundred. He admitted from the outset that he started smoking marijuana and hashish at Grade 6, and that the teacher-student relationship was "kinda off to a rocky start, basically." Allusions to a

prominent incident of physical assault by an administrator came after this admission, with Thomas stating that even though he was only born in the 1980s, “even back then the teachers were somewhat abusive, you could say, right? I mean violently and stuff.”

Thomas stated early in the interview, “I always felt older than what I am.” This sentiment of a marked sense of ‘precociousness’ proved to be one of several themes interwoven throughout his story, along with feelings of being judged by teachers, administrators, and local police in the small community. When pressed on the source of these feelings, Thomas referenced his late older ‘brother’, who grew up with him at his grandparents’. Biologically, this ‘brother’ is actually his first cousin. Referring to his brother’s criminal activity in and around the small rural area, he elaborated:

> All the shit that he caused - ‘cause he was pretty bad and that - but all the shit he caused, goin’ through school, throughout the communities, with police, all that shit – and as soon as I was old enough - not *even* old enough, I should say - to come into the picture, it was like, right from him, straight to me. Guilty by association, ya know what I mean?

This ‘guilt by association’ serves as an underpinning for much of the anger and frustration that permeated Thomas’ school experience, further exacerbated by disciplinary incidents involving male teachers. In sixth grade gym class, he recounted kicking a ball and accidentally hitting the gym teacher in the face. After returning to the classroom, the teacher followed, yelling in Thomas’ face demanding an apology, eventually picking up a desk and “bouncing it off the wall”. He admitted being scared by this, as he was “only in Grade 6 at this point.”

Admittedly, school for Thomas was off to a “rocky start”, with academic difficulties not mentioned as a complicating factor. At the outset of the interview, he described being “not on the

same page as the rest of the students" while in school. More succinctly, he continued to say, "Um, it's not that I just couldn't do the work, I just couldn't - put up with the fuckin' bullshit, basically."

Thomas' initial description of the transition into grade seven, the first year of junior high, was marked by a sense of hopefulness. His twelve-year-old self believed that it would mean a fresh start; leaving the elementary school and the relationships contained therein behind. As he began grade seven in a new building, he discovered that some of the elementary school staff, including the administration and several teachers, had moved into positions at the junior high school. Thomas admitted that "this definitely didn't help" his transition, and that "they pretty much held grudges." He elaborated further:

> Simple little fuckin' things. Just…just pickin' and pokin' on every single thing. Um, [I] walk in to class, thirty seconds late. Ok, so, [another] guy can show up five minutes late and not an issue. I walk in thirty seconds later, and it's like 'Holy Hell', you know what I mean?

Thomas described his school life over the next two years as being subjected to a "snowballing" effect. Behavioural incidents at school resulted in after school detentions, often involving cleaning chalkboards and erasers. In Grade 7, Thomas began dating a girl a few years older, who was heading into Grade 12. He recounted that this caused the "older guys" at school to have issues with him, often ending in fights. One fight stood out in his mind, a physical altercation with one of these older male students. This led into a depiction of an incident with his principal after which Thomas described himself to have "lost total respect for the system." When asked to describe his most memorable experience with discipline in school, he recounted:

> Ah, so yeah I got in a fight in school. Um, actually, I pretty much got attacked, right? And he [the Principal] was kind of witness to it. But he said I had it coming to *me*, because he was after lecturing me about I was too young bein' with this girl - which I told him was none of his fuckin' business - and me and this other guy got into an altercation, it turned into a fight, guy got beat up, *I* got detention for it. His parents came to school, police, gonna charge me. Ah, in detention class I remember him [the Principal] comin' in and just grabbin' me by the fuckin' shoulders and squeezing and squeezing, and the man was like fuckin' 7'2" and fuckin' 300 and somethin' pounds - he was, he was a big man, right?

Immediately after this description during the interview, Thomas reflected on the role of the principal in that stage of his life, as someone whom he was supposed to be able to "turn to in hard times." Further, he stated that the incident "turned him" from those in a position of authority. He posited, "How could you go to someone with a problem, or with some issues, looking for help or guidance, when the guy pretty much left you hanging?"

Though criminal charges were not pursued for Thomas in relation to that particular fight, he did receive disciplinary action from the school. The administration determined that Thomas was not permitted to ride on the school bus, and as a result, would have to be brought to school each day by his grandparents. He reflected on how angry and isolated this made him feel at the time but remarked that "he shouldn't have let it bother" him as much as it did back then. Disciplinary incidents and subsequent exclusionary suspensions continued for Thomas throughout junior high, and along with those came his first experience with criminal activity.

Thomas and other youth from the community would hang out and play ball hockey in the parking lot of the elementary school, adjacent to the church. One particular evening, after a few "draws" [marijuana] and alcohol, some of the boys broke windows in the school and the church. Thomas was among the youth who entered the church, rifling through the sacramental bread and wine and causing general mischief. Police were called by members of the community. Instead of the police showing up to his grandparents' house looking for his brother, this time they were looking for him. As a result of the incident, Thomas was charged with Mischief and Damage to Property, eventually dropped down to the lesser charge of Common Assault, at the age of thirteen. Upon reexamination of the memory during the interview, Thomas asserted:

> Out of the seven or eight of us that got questioned and accused, and all this stuff, I think the guys just kinda put it all on me. I kinda lived the closest to the place and stuff, too, I guess. These guys [the police] had no evidence, these guys just - like I said, whether I did it or not - they had no evidence; you're supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. These guys just said, 'you done it, you're guilty, someone told us you done it, here you go'. And, that's it.

Thomas was sentenced with community service as punishment for the incident, under the conditions that he attend school every day, or else risk being sent to the youth correctional facility in Whitbourne, NL. It was not long after that he got into another physical altercation at school with a male student, resulting in criminal charges and a transfer to the Whitbourne facility. When reflecting on his time there, Thomas described a connectedness between his prison experience and school experience. At the time, he thought he was "just being singled out"

at school, but the population of other young offenders at Whitbourne gave him a sense of community and belonging:

> When I got to Whitbourne, there was so many other people there, from different places, doin' similar things, treated the same way. And, there are a couple of them still here at HMP.

Thomas was in regular communication with his Aunt's boyfriend in Ontario while at Whitbourne, and they discussed his prospects of leaving Newfoundland for Ontario upon his release. Despite being repeatedly told that he was too young at the age of thirteen to be leaving school and his family, Thomas was insistent, stating, "I'm coming, if you say you're there or not, I don't give a fuck, I can't stay here no more."

After his release, so began a cycle of fights with his grandparents due to his attempts at leaving for Ontario. He would pack a bag, leave the room, and return to find the bag unpacked. He reflected on this memory with perspective, expressing sympathy for his grandparents and his own difficulty imagining his reaction if his children tried to leave home in a similar manner. He stated:

> So, between losing faith in school and trust and guidance with teachers, principals, friends, the police, getting convicted of stuff that I still don't think that should've been possible, and, ah, growing up in an alcoholic environment, and drug environment - I guess it all played a role in it. I just had to get the fuck out of here. It was too much.

Shortly after arriving on the Mainland, he began to use hard drugs at the age of 14. Without a Social Insurance Number, Thomas lied about his age to find work as he was not

attending school. He recounted his Aunt's boyfriend using the label of "troubled youth" and the fact he was "going through a hard time" in order to help him find a cash paying job.

Thomas stayed in Ontario for about a year a half, before being convinced to return to Newfoundland by his then girlfriend. His grandparents pleaded with him to return to high school, something that he considered. He made it all the way to the parking lot outside of the school, but could not bring himself to get out of the car and go into the building:

> [I did it] just for my Grandparents, right? And, it wasn't fair to them, type thing, the way I seen it. Kinda felt bad for them, really. And for myself, I should say. Um, but yeah, once I got to that parking lot, I just, couldn't get out. I said, "I'm nervous". He [grandfather] shut the car off. He said, "Well I'm not goin'". I said, "I don't give a fuck". I opened the door and I got out and started walkin' away, right?

Thomas went on to admit that just being in the parking lot, considering going back into the school building, brought back too many bad memories of the negative environment he had previously experienced it to be. He stated, "I could picture it just starting all over again." He never went back after that.

From then on, around age 15, he hung around with older people. Drinking beer and smoking marijuana had progressed into hard liquor and "scattered Ritalin and stuff like that; things started escalating – quick." Thomas got into more trouble in the community and ended up on another stint at the Whitbourne youth correctional facility. Upon release, he returned to Ontario for a few years, and perpetuated the cycle by eventually returning to Newfoundland again. It was not long before Thomas became incarcerated as an adult at Her Majesty's

Penitentiary in St. John's for the first time. After his time was served, he returned once again to Ontario. He spoke of the differences between Ontario and Newfoundland. He said:

> And you know what? All the time I spent away, I never had a problem. Never had an issue, legal-wise. 'Cause, up there [Ontario], people never looked at you and judged you. They didn't pay to attention to what you sayin', where you were goin', or what you were wearin'.

Thomas described Ontario as a "different world" compared to Newfoundland. He spoke of a certain level of anonymity there that was not present on the Island, more specifically in small communities like the one where he grew up. He spoke of these differences with a level of disdain and frustration:

> I found that, in the smaller communities especially, that people were just so fuckin' nosy. Right? They wanna know every single that was goin' on, and when they'd found out, they'd add their own version to it. And it was just, I got, I got, I got put in detention in school. So by the time the story gets home, or I gets home, I got in a fight, I got beat up, I ended up fuckin' beating a window out, or - it was just so much got added on to the stuff, that, ya know, somethin' so small turns into somethin' so big.

Thomas made a connection between a dramatization and exacerbation of incidents in his personal life and the 'grapevine' of small-town gossip. He harkened back to the incident in school with older boys bullying him in the school hallways over a girl and their inability to just "let it go." This spurned a series of 'what-ifs':

> I mean, I'm just fuckin' wondering, like, if that never had to happen, all those problems never had to happen, issues with the principal, all that kind of stuff, would I have made it? The possibility was there. Right?

Thomas eventually got his GED (high school equivalency), went to trades college, and became a Red Seal Ironworker as several generations of men in his family had been. He spoke of family members who always had success, went to University, and stayed out of trouble. "You finish school, you go to college, get a trade, and a family - that's the way life's supposed to be", he said of what he hoped school would be for him. "I had plans, right? Before they got derailed, way too early."

Thomas offered advice to teachers and administrators working with youth in the school system today, asserting that they should be trying to "understand the kids; their background, their childhood, where they came from, and what they're going through." He suggested that teachers and admin should work with the kids, and "don't give up" because "where a child turns to go in life at that early age determines a lot, really – not just for them, but for society, really." He does not believe that "yelling and screaming" and physical punishment is discipline. True discipline, for Thomas, means to "sit down with the kid that's obviously being rebellious and not listening, because they're going through problems and issues." Of teachers and administrators, he said:

> If you chose that path, and you're in that line of work, I mean, you're obviously there to do that to help people. If I had to be sat down, and talked to, and things had to have been worked out properly, and given a bit more guidance and support, I think I would have stuck it out. I wouldn't of gave up. I mean, I had nothing to look forward to, I had

nothing to believe and have faith in. I mean, there was just no support system there. Right?

After this reflection, Thomas spoke about connections between the school system and criminal justice system. He once again recalled feeling "singled out" in school and then going to Whitbourne and realizing that "there were so many other people there, from different places, doin' similar things, treated the same way, and ah, there's a couple of them still here at HMP." In fact, he met the mother of his children during one of his times of incarceration at Whitbourne.

Thomas summarized his belief in the interconnectedness of the two systems with this statement: "And I mean, the kids leavin' school in Grade 7, 8 - I'd say it's a 90% chance you're gonna see them comin' through here [HMP]."

5.2. Jason

"Jason" was in his late twenties at the time of interview, and an inmate at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's, NL. Raised in the city, Jason recounted early life experiences of physical abuse, foster care, substance abuse, gang, and criminal activity that took his life from the island of Newfoundland to mainland Ontario and back again. His school life paralleled the instability of his home life, punctuated with incidences of assault, exclusionary disciplinary action, and moments of loss and connectedness. Jason described a life of being removed from and re-entering the K-12 school system, before ultimately making the decision to leave school in Grade 10.

5.2.1. Jason's Story

When asked at the outset of the interview to describe his earliest memories of school, Jason started back at his early beginnings in kindergarten at an elementary school in St. John's, NL. Self-described as a "hard case", he stated that he was diagnosed with "severe" ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) at a very young age. He spoke of his kindergarten teacher, remembering her by name, as being very patient with him, since he "was good for the most part, but always acted out a little bit; I was hyper and stuff". Every now and then he would get "hauled out of class" or his mother would be called to take him home due to his disruptive behaviour in class.

In Grade 2, Jason moved to Ontario with his parents for a new job prospect for his father. He recounted school on the mainland as being different from Newfoundland. In Ontario, he was the "odd person out", standing out as being one of the only "white kids" in his class and neighbourhood. Back home in Newfoundland, the population was overwhelmingly Caucasian. Of his new Ontario neighbourhood, he said:

> So, ah, my neighbourhood - we lived in low income housing so my neighbourhood was really culturized, too. And it was cool because in the summertime the community would come out and everybody would mix their cultures, right? We'd have summer parties and stuff.

Jason spoke highly of another one of his elementary school teachers, a person that stuck with him throughout his life. He described this teacher as having the ability to see that he was troubled and having issues at home, and therefore always tried to "pay an extra bit of attention" to keep him on the "straight and narrow." At the same time, Jason started "running around more with

guys in the community" and witnessed gang activity at a young age. Speaking of this time in his life he stated, "I wasn't really getting into trouble then, but that's where I was first seeing trouble and stuff."

After a couple of years in Ontario, Jason and his family moved back to Newfoundland because his grandfather was dying. He had lived with his grandfather for the first five years of his life, and they had a very close relationship. Returning to Newfoundland and his original neighbourhood also meant a return to his former school. This brought with it a certain familiarity, to which he said, "I think the teachers already had…already thought how I was gonna be" upon his return to that school.

After only a short period back home and in school, Jason's grandfather passed away. He recounted that around the same time as his grandfather's passing, a couple of boys from his neighbourhood had confronted him and stated that they were not actually his friends, but his biological siblings. This confused him. He stated:

> So I'm trying to figure out why these two guys are are tellin' me they're my brothers. At that time I find out that my Dad might not be my real Dad, right? So it's a lot of stuff that I took on at that period around ten or eleven years old.

Jason began "going on the run" from school with another boy from his neighbourhood. He recounted showing up to school in the morning only to leave shortly after, often being gone for days at a time. This behaviour led to an incident that he described as the first time he did anything that was "wow" [severe misbehaviour] in school. Both boys, during the school day, decided to get up onto the roof of the school building and refused to come down. The police, fire department, and a local news outlet showed up to the scene as they hung off the edge of the roof

threatening to jump. They were both suspended from school and taken into foster care that day, marking the first of several times Jason would be in and out of the foster care system. He reflected on the incident, stating:

> Yeah, so we were on the roof, that was a big, that was a big, big thing, right? 'Cause I guess they thought we were actually gonna jump and stuff but we were more or less, just, ya know what I mean, kinda just - doing it for attention. The thing was, my friend was in an abusive home; he was getting physically abused a lot. And I was gettin' hit and stuff at home too. The more damaging stuff to me was the verbal and mental abuse, right?

The two week out-of-school suspension ended and Jason was allowed to return to school. Eleven years old at the time, Jason finished the school year in foster care before returning home to live with his mother, who was struggling with mental illness. He reflected on his mother's struggles from his perspective as a grown man with his own struggles, stating that "she was probably trying to deal with things the best she could, and sometimes she just did things wrong." Jason informed his mother about the neighbourhood boys and their statement that they were his brothers, and she responded by telling him to ignore them. He described feeling at the time as if she were trying to keep him away from them, and away from his biological father, whom he described as "not really a nice person." He explained that on one hand, he understood his mother's intentions. On the other, he spoke of the difficulty of having to see these boys in the neighbourhood and pretend like nothing had happened. Each time he brought questions about his biological father to his mother, she would respond in anger. This continued until one afternoon, when she brought him to the store to get ice cream and then to sit by the duck pond. It was here where she admitted, in tears, the truth behind the boys' story. The man whom Jason had thought

his entire life was his biological father, was not. She admitted to him that his real dad had been living on the same block as they were this entire time. He spoke about the questions he had at the time and the feelings surrounding this information he had been given:

> And, um, like I wanted to figure out, 'why', you know what I mean; he's such a stranger and he lives at the other end of the block, how come he's, how come he never ever took part in my life, you know what I mean? What was goin' on there? And, how come, at least my brothers can't be a part of my life? You know what I mean? And um, I had a lot of questions surrounding that, right, but it was always just, it always just shot down. And then I found a lot of times when she got mad, ah, she would, like if I had got suspended from school, and came home, she would flip out and say "oh you're just like your Dad, you're gonna be in jail" and this and that, right?

Jason asked his grandmother about his biological father. She told him that when he was a young child, and too young to remember, his father would come down for a visit, and spend time with him. He knew where the man lived, and decided one day to go knock on his door:

> And, um, he told me to come in, come upstairs, he was drinkin' with a couple buddies, and, you know what I mean, he started tellin' everybody there that he was my father, right? And I was kinda like, "You're not my fuckin' father". And he was um, he kinda got upset about that, right? And this was like, our first, kinda real interaction, right? Yeah. And I was very angry at that age. Between 11 and 13, 14, I was a very angry kid, and um, you know what I mean, the whole world was against me at that point. And ah, I just started flippin' out at him. I was like, "you haven't been there for me at all." I said, "You don't come and try and be a dad, you don't come and try and spend time with me.

> Don't ever say you're my father." And his friends were kinda like [pauses and inhales]. Yeah, I was like, "if you're a father, fuck I feel bad for a lot of kids" you know what I mean? "You don't get that…you don't get that name from me, right?" I said, "my father's the guy who raised me since I was a baby, right? He works his ass off every day and he comes home and pays the bills, that's my Dad, right?" And he got so mad about about that. And I just stormed out of there. I left. And, but at this point too, me and my brothers, his other sons, we're good friends right? But we're not, we don't play it like we're brothers, we just play as buddies, right? And ah, we were all kinda like, that was just how it was normal for us. And um, so, ah, so yeah I never spoke to him then for a couple years after that. And every kind of interaction I think I've had with my father after that, it's been…most times it's ended in a fist fight.

Jason continued on to state that in addition to unanswered questions, he never really felt like he "belonged" at home. A year later, after entering junior high school, Jason was removed from his home and placed back into foster care. He would never live at home again from that point forward.

This move from home into foster care coupled with impending adolescence brought with it a different social life for Jason. Though he was only "12 or 13" at time, he began to hang out with the "older 15, 16, 17-year-olds." He was introduced to drugs and alcohol during this time, causing any interest in school to dwindle:

> And um, so I was 12, 13 years old and I was being, you know what I mean, at that age I'm starting to hang out with like the older, 15, 16, 17 [year-olds] and they're introducing me to stuff, you know what I mean, that they're just comin' into. So, me, I'm seein' a lot

> of things at my age that I shouldn't have been seeing and stuff too, right? And, um, my interest for school…that just dropped right off. I was drinkin' all the time, like even in the day at school, and I had no interest for the classroom whatsoever, and I was just trouble in there right?

The last time Jason saw his father face-to-face was on Halloween when he was sixteen years old. The interaction ended in a physical altercation. During a previous period of incarceration several years ago, Jason spoke to his father on the phone while he was in the 'Hole' (solitary confinement) at HMP. His biological brother, who was also incarcerated, was in the Hole at the same time. Jason postulated a DNA link between criminality and his father, brothers, and himself:

> Every one of my father's sons, that are able to be in prison, are in prison, you know what I mean? There's three of us, we're in prison, he's got two other boys, but, my other little brothers, Jacob and James, I've never even really met them. They don't even know I exist. So, my two younger brothers, they know I exist, but um, but it's like, we all kinda followed the footsteps - and I wasn't even in his home and I kinda followed in the footsteps, right? I think it's, a bit of it too has something to do with DNA and stuff too.

He elaborated further on this point, stating that the combination of family history of "getting in trouble", childhood trauma, and a lack of structure (or "the wrong structure") in his life lead up to his current life situation and being incarcerated. Jason went on the run to get away from family, and "if I did go to school, it was a way to get away." Lack of structure at home extended to a lack of support from his mother when he sat down to complete homework. He recounted

incidences of his mother responding to him with anger and ridicule if he did not understand the schoolwork, often resulting in physical abuse. He stated:

> I felt alienated at home, I didn't wanna be around my family, and like, my mom never took the time to sit down and do certain things with me, and then, when I got to school that was kinda like my getaway, but then when I'm at school it's like it turned into just as bad as being at home, right?

Only a short time passed after Jason returned from the two week out of school suspension before he was "kicked out." It was Grade 7, and Jason was getting into fights at school and drinking alcohol during the school day. He was often found inebriated at lunch time. He admitted that the school had given him "a couple chances", but then eventually "just had enough." The day he was expelled, he was involved in an incident that required police intervention. That same day, he was sent to the juvenile correctional facility in Whitbourne, NL to spend time in closed custody.

After his release from closed custody, Jason was placed in foster care with a family in a suburb of St. John's and was enrolled in a nearby school. Having a formal diagnosis of ADHD as well as a history of behavioural issues, he was assigned a student assistant to sit with him during classes and be present with him throughout the day. He spoke of a negative relationship with his student assistant, and the embarrassment that came with having an adult following him around all day. He felt as if the student assistant had a "preconceived notion of who he was" and was just there to "babysit" and make sure he "didn't do something crazy." Jason described himself as a "wanderer" in school, often bored and idle, spending more time in the hallways than in a desk in the classroom. He was aware that his ADHD exacerbated his inability to "sit still" and felt as

if his teachers and administrators just looked at him "as a problem." If he was being disruptive in class, he would have to sit in his desk outside of the classroom in the hallway:

> And that made shit so much worse. I felt like the teacher dissed me, you know what I mean? And everybody in the class is kinda seein' that. And, um, so I would just give the teacher a hard time. It was just more bullshit that I was runnin' into, just a different place, you know what I mean? And it was just, nobody was understanding what I was going through, and I didn't really know how to make anybody understand either, you know what I mean?

Being the new kid in the neighbourhood, Jason reported being "bullied and picked on" by his classmates and began getting into fights "as a way to fit in" and to show that he would not be pushed around. This attitude and behaviour trickled back into the classroom, leading to an altercation with a teacher and disciplinary incident that would become one of his most prominent memories from school:

> So one day I got up to leave the class, and it was only like 20 minutes before school was over, and he grabbed ahold of me. And I said, "Take your fuckin' hands off me", right? And he said, "You're sitting down in that seat and you're not leavin' til I says." And I went over and sat down in the seat, right, and I said, "How about this? In five minutes I'm gonna get up and when you put your hands on me I'm gonna punch you in the face". And he said, "Yeah, we'll see about that". And um, he went on, talkin' to the kids, and everybody's there lookin' at the clock, just waitin', right? And I'm sittin' there, and I'm tappin' my fingers, and five minutes hit. I just jumped up out of the desk. I walked for the door, he grabbed ahold of my arm, or he grabbed ahold of this arm [demonstrates], yeah, he

> grabbed me, and I turned around and I just clocked him in the face, and, he fell back, and there was blood and stuff. And I just ran at him, and then like four or five of the male students, they got up and like grabbed me and was like, 'Calm down'. And ah, I just looked at him and said, "I told ya". And I walked out, right? And um, I lit a cigarette in the hallway and walked out of the school. I was horrible, b'y.

Jason admitted that being physically abused when he was younger gave him a "don't touch me, and I won't touch you" attitude and a kneejerk reaction. He was arrested later that evening of the incident, and though he was not charged for the assault, he was charged with having a weapon. He was removed from school for a two-week period, and during that time, he just "ran around the neighbourhood":

> To me at that point, like, that time in my life was um, it was precious time, and I think keeping me out was the worst thing that they could do. It just - when you got two, three weeks to play with, you don't gotta go to school, at that age, when the two, three weeks is up you don't wanna go back to school.

After the two-week period, Jason was allowed to return to school. He felt as if the teachers and staff were avoiding him. He believed that there was two parts to this avoidance; fear of him due to the assault coupled with an attitude that he would not be in the school for long. He said, "I think they just more or less thought that it was only a matter of time before I'm gone anyway." He continued to "act up" in class, resulting in more classroom removals by teachers and frequent office visits. One particular day, the principal had his last straw and Jason was removed from the school permanently and enrolled in the 'District School' in St. John's (a Newfoundland and Labrador English School District-run (now NL Schools) alternative school for youth who are

removed from the regular system for a variety of reasons, including mental health and addictions issues):

> Yeah, they told me I was done there and they sent me to the school in St. John's – the 'District School', they called it. I was there, and I, I was around a bunch of kids who were just like me. I can't remember doing any schoolwork. I'd go there for a couple hours a day and leave. I would just go there and kick it with the other 'bad kids' and leave. I can't remember one specific thing about that place. I just remember goin' there and sittin' there doing nothing. I wouldn't even mark my name on the exercises, you know what I mean? It was just nothin'. Go there, wait for smoke break, and then leave.

Jason committed offenses that resulted in him returning to closed custody and subsequently was removed from District School. Instead of returning to the Whitbourne youth correctional facility, he was sent to a live-in group home closed treatment facility for youth in Ottawa, Ontario. The school experience at the facility was different from the regular system, with more opportunity for 'hands on' learning that Jason felt he was good at. On the other hand, he indicated that there were occurrences of abuse at the facility as well. He stated he was sent there to undergo treatment for his anger issues but admitted that his time there made him "worse more than anything." He felt that his "head wasn't there", and once again he felt the familiar desire to run:

> Like my head most of the time was like, "how am I gonna get out of there"? And I used to run. A lot. 'Cause I was always a wanderer, you know what I mean? I always used to wanna just go and explore, you know what I mean? Like if I had that now, I was in that big city by myself, I'd go and explore that big city, right? And that's what I used to do. I'd go on the run.

> There was never ever no like set structure, in my life, right? It was always like 'do it this way' or you know what I mean, there's no other way to do it? And like if I didn't like the way that I was supposed to do things, I didn't agree with it, I just wouldn't do it, right? And um, yeah, at that time too, I just, I never, I never really listened to anybody.

Jason began stealing cars in Ottawa during his time at the facility. The police tracked him down and explained that he was under investigation for the thefts. In lieu of being charged, the police and the facility staff decided to send him back to Newfoundland. There, he continued with car thefts, eventually resulting in charges and was once again sent to the Whitbourne facility. The cycle continued several times before he was finally released back into the regular school system in time for the start of high school at age 15. This was the first time Jason could recall enjoying school, and spoke of a positive relationship with his grade ten English teacher:

> I had this English teacher, and um, she was ah, she always encouraged kids to like get up out of their seats and stuff, and like, if we were reading like um, like, Romeo & Juliet, or somethin'. Like, I'm big into music and stuff, too. And um, like rap and all that, and, I write and ah, anything musical, like, I'm into it. And ah, so she used to get to me that way. 'Cause I'm always fidgeting and I'm always movin' around or I'm on my phone, or I'm, you know what I mean, tryna meet a girl down in the hallway somewhere. I guess she just figured out in her head how to, you know what I mean, how to, adjust the classroom to me.

He continued:

> And um…there's no teacher ever done that before, right? And in the morning times, she'd come in, and she'd lay down a screenplay on my desk. And um, she's like, "This is

> what we're gonna read today." And ah, so I used to get up, and get on like the class clown, but I would read the play, right? [laughs] And she loved it! And all the kids loved it too, right? Oh, I would go hardcore with it, right? So doin' the different voices, and everything, and ah, then like when I was done that, I would sit down, and I'd just do work for the rest of the class, you know what I mean? It was like I just got it out of my system.

While in high school, Jason ended up back in Whitbourne for offenses he committed in community. Upon his release, he became a father for the first time. He returned to high school, eventually leaving on his own to find work and support his girlfriend and new baby. His English teacher remained a positive figure in his life and his family's lives, as he believed that she was the only teacher who saw him for "who he really was." He moved back in with his grandmother. He felt that everything was going good at that point, for the "first time in his life." Jason took the time to elaborate on the qualities he believed set his English teacher apart from others:

> I think she was the type of person who took more interest in people, who they were as individuals. And she got to know her students. 'Cause all they get is the file from the school before and whatever they hear and stuff, and I think she heard a lot of stuff too, and maybe she seen past all that and she seen past the front and she seen that, you know what I mean, I was probably going through stuff and that's the reason why I was being the way I was.

5.3. Jonathan

"Jonathan" was in his early twenties at the time of interview, making him the youngest participant of the group, and one of the youngest inmates currently serving time at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's. Though his family roots are in rural Newfoundland, he spent his early

years growing up and attending school in Ontario. His story consists of academic and athletic success in school. However, these successes were cut short by a series of personal losses brought about by a turbulent home environment, his father's criminal involvement, and his mother's lifelong struggle with mental illness.

5.3.1. Jonathan's Story

When recounting his earliest memories of school, Jonathan admitted from the outset that he was "a bit of a bully on the playground and stuff." He recalled having a lot of friends and enjoying school, despite "having a rough time at home" and "being mad all the time." Academically, Jonathan never struggled.

His school life and home life were "pretty easy going" until around Grade 6. At that time, his mother started a new relationship with a man named "Greg." Jonathan admitted that he did not get along with Greg, and "stuff started getting different" at home. He explained that he witnessed Greg being abusive to his mother, and he would often get involved to help defend her. This involvement would often result in anger and aggression between him and Greg. Eventually, social services became involved, marking the start of a vicious cycle for Jonathan moving back and forth between his mother's home and other living situations. He stated:

> Foster care or whatever it's called got involved. And they made my mom choose whether she could have me or him in the house, and she chose him. So then I started stayin' at friends' houses and stuff, like couch-surfing.

When he first found out he would be placed in foster care, he ran away from home. Eventually, social services managed to track him down and he was assigned to a foster home in a

neighbouring town. After a few days at the home, he reached out to a friend of his uncle to come pick him up and take him away from there. He ended up in another town, taken "under the wing" of another friend of his uncle, who got him a job. After a short time, he found himself missing school and home:

> I always kept wanting to go back to my mom's house, so like, um, because like I did wanna go to school and stuff, like I enjoyed school, and I got really good grades and stuff. And I knew to get anywhere I'd need to go to school, but she just wouldn't let me [come home], right?

Jonathan explained that his mother suffered from bipolar disorder and gave birth to him when she was fifteen. He outlined arguments and fighting at home between him, his mother, and father. He speculated on the reasons why he had certain experiences at home:

> So sometimes, I'd be living there, and then I'd come home - my mom had bipolar [disorder] and stuff, and my dad wasn't nice to her, so like, growing up, I guess, my mom was only 15 when she had me, so she was used to guys being mean to her and stuff. And I think she felt like she needed a guy in her life, or something? I dunno, something weird like that.

He continued on to describe a cycle of 'acceptance and rejection' in his living situation and home life:

> I kept trying to go back there [to his mother's house], so I could go to school and stuff, and then I'd be there for a week or two, and me and him [Greg] would get into an argument and then I'd come home and there'd be a note on the door along with my bags, so ah, that's how I ended up not, ending up here, I guess, eventually, 'cause I kept having

> to find different ways, you know what I mean? Like I'd be living with someone, and then I'd be working and doing something, and then I'd give it all up to go back to my mom's house, and then I'd have to start all over from scratch.

Jonathan longed to be at home to be close to his younger sister. She too was placed in foster care for several years before being returned by social services to live at home again with his mother. During the times when he was living in his mother's house, he stated that he did go to school, having almost "perfect attendance", despite skipping homeroom each morning. Though he attended other classes throughout the day, his frequent absenteeism from homeroom triggered automated calls home from the school. When his mother received these calls, Jonathan stated that she did not believe it was just homeroom he was skipping, and it would often put him back in the cycle of being 'kicked out' of the house:

> Before school starts every day, you gotta go to homeroom. Like, to get your stuff together and stuff - but I never went, right? 'Cause I hated it. There were a bunch of good lookin' girls in the class and stuff, and I'd be stoned, or whatever. I dunno, I just didn't want to go. It was pointless anyways, you just went in there and sat at the desk and then you went to your class, so, I'd be in someone's car, doing something, or - but at the end of the day they'd phone home if you missed any classes, and homeroom, they called home for that too. So then my Mom started telling everybody, 'Oh he doesn't go to school, he doesn't do this, he doesn't do that', right? But I had perfect attendance almost like when I was living there. She was just always making up excuses for me, like she say that I flipped out all the time, and beat up the house, but she'd call my aunt to come down and see how bad I was, 'cause my stepdad would be in jail or something,

and she'd come down, and there'd be nothing done to the house. I'd be sitting at the table. She was just, I dunno, somethin' different about her, right?

He elaborated further on his observations of his mother's behaviour towards him and others, outlining a significant revelation he received during a conversation with his mother's partner, Greg:

> She was always making excuses, you know what I mean? 'Cause her sisters and other members of our family used to call her out on it. They used to be like, "You don't take care of your own son, blah, blah, blah" and then she'd try to explain herself. But everybody knew the truth, right? And years later, I ended up selling a lot of dope and stuff and I ended up meeting my stepdad at places - he's dead now, he killed himself. Um, but ah, like I'd go to someone's house and he'd be there, and me and him had a couple heart-to-hearts and stuff, and he informed me, like, "You know all those times your mom said Social Services said you couldn't live at the house? She was lying' blah, blah, blah" – 'cause he'd be fighting with her and stuff, right? And ah, Greg never lied. That was one thing about him, right? He was an honest guy. He spoke a lot, but what he spoke was the truth. So, um, that told me pretty well what was goin' on.

Jonathan reiterated that those times when he would come home to find his bags packed for him and not allowed back in the home, his mother told him that her reasoning for doing so was to ensure that social services did not take his sister away. He was of the understanding from his mother that his very presence in the home was enough to cause Social Services to come remove his sister from the home. He further outlined his thoughts while thinking back to that time in his life:

> I thought it was Social Services. I thought I legitimately wasn't allowed to live there or my sister might get taken away. So I stayed away, right? I never spoke to my mom for five years before she died. Well, I came home for the last two months when she was sick, but I stayed away completely so my little sister could live there, right? But ah - yeah, when my mom was sick and stuff, Greg was at this guy named Paul's house. He ended up telling me, he ended up saying like, "You know all those years that your mom said you couldn't live here 'cause of Social Services and your sister would be taken away? Well, she just didn't want you there, right?" It was like anything I did, like you know what I mean? Like I'd come into the house, and one of my buddies or my ex would drop me off, and I'd come in the house and sit down, and she'd start with me right away like that. Like even when I didn't live there, I'd come over and Greg would be outside shoveling or something, and he'd come in to smoke a joint with me or something, and we'd smoke a joint in the porch, and then I'd come in and I'd sit down on the couch - I'm living on my own at this point - and like she hadn't seen me in six months and she'd start right away like, "Jonathan what are you doing with your life, blah blah blah", right? And she kept saying, like when I was 12, it was, "Jonathan you're almost a man now, you gotta start making choices for yourself". And when I was 13, it was, "Jonathan you're almost a man now" and then when I was a man, it was, "Jonathan you're a man and now do your own thing", right?

Jonathan summarized these feelings and stated, "So my whole life, I was expected to already be doing good, but I never got the set-up to be able to do it, you know what I mean?." He admitted that in hindsight, he would have gone voluntarily into foster care. He stated that at the time, he

just wanted to be close to his friends, and he was "so angry at everyone pushing him away that he ended up pushing himself further away." He described having a false sense of 'knowing' at that time is his young life when he said, "At the time I figured I could do it all and I had it all figured out, but now when it actually comes to it, I realize that I didn't know anything."

This admittance took Jonathan back to memories of his biological father, who was in his life from the time he was an infant until about four years old, and then again at twelve years old. He described his father as being unstable emotionally, with a "really bad temper" that caused "everyone to be afraid of him." His father was sixteen years old when Jonathan was born.

At the age of twelve and in the years that followed, Jonathan began to hang around the same "rough crowd" that his father was a part of. He felt at that time that he was once again bonding with his father, but more so in a "buddies" sort of way as opposed to a typical father-son relationship. He admitted that he would have never been able to physically share a home with his father growing up due to his father's anger and suspected mental health issues:

> Like he'd never, like ah, I never told him I loved him, or he's never said it to me, like ah, it's not like that, you know what I mean? I wouldn't be able to live with him anyways. Like he's the type of guy, he'll go outside to change the oil on his bike and then get a bit of oil on his shirt and tip the bike upside over and throw the wrench through the window, and pick up the TV and throw it through the coffee table, like he's got a really bad temper, right? Like the dog'll bark and he'll kick the dog in the guts. Like he's messed up, right? Like he's definitely bipolar, or something is definitely wrong with him.

Jonathan stated that other people around him had similar experiences with his father, and would tell him about his father's outbursts:

> Everybody I've ever met, when they find out that I'm his son, is just like 'Holy fuck man, your Dad's nuts, right'. I'm after introducing some of my buddies to him and stuff so they could work things out between them, and the next day I'd get a call from by buddy saying, 'Your Dad smacked me in the head with a baseball bat last night man, like what the fuck right' and so it's just like, I care about him as a friend, but I never looked at him as a father, you know what I mean?

He went on to state that though his relationship with his stepfather Greg was also more so a "buddies" one, he felt that he always cared about him more than his mother or father did. During the times he was trying to stay in school, Greg would often ask around to see if he could find a place for him to stay. Despite this, he admitted to sensing a juxtaposition in their relationship:

> Like he always cared, more than Mom did? But at the same time, at the end of the day, he was the reason why I was living on the street, like you know what I mean? In the beginning.

Jonathan turned his recollections back to focus on his later years in school before ultimately leaving in Grade 11. During his junior high and high school years, he was a promising young athlete and the captain of his school's Triple A hockey team for two years. In reference to his time as team captain, he stated, "I felt like I was at the top of the world."

He reiterated that he did not struggle academically and even if he did not go to school everyday, he would go at the end of the week and "pick up his books." He knew that in order to continue to play hockey, he had to maintain a certain grade average. This was the driving force that helped him maintain a connection to his academics and teachers. He stated:

> I was the type of person, even if I didn't have a place to sleep the night before and a shower to get in, at the end of the week I still went in, or called ahead and I said, "Miss could you please make a folder for me, of all the work I missed", do you know what I mean? Because like I didn't want to fail. Like, my whole life, I was, like I said, it was 'Jonathan you gotta do this, you gotta do this, you're almost a man now, you're almost a man now' but in the back of my head I was always so mad at my mom 'cause I just wanted to do good. And I was trying so hard, but it was never good enough, right?

Jonathan's time in the physical high school classroom was not always 'smooth sailing'. He admitted that there were times when the anger he was feeling often resulted in outbursts, triggered at times by the behaviour of other classmates:

> A couple times, more or less, the times I got in trouble, were like people in the class and interrupting the teacher while I was trying to listen. Some guy like snappin' his lighter or something, and I'm after like belting a couple chairs off someone's head. Or like, being rude to the teacher, or - you know what I mean? Like when I was kid I put all my energy into picking on other people, but then as I got older it was like I almost picked on people who deserved it, you know what I mean? People that were just being an idiot. Like, I had so much stuff going on and these people came from rich families and everything was fine at home, but they were just being a retard for no reason, you know what I mean? Just being a nuisance.

The 'chair incident' resulted in a five day suspension for Jonathan. He offered another recollection of another incident of which he described his actions as vengeance for another student, "Tyler" that was being bullied in school:

> Like, I had a guy in school, he had a speech impediment, Tyler was his name, and ah, I kinda felt bad for him and took him under my wing. And he wouldn't come to school 'cause he was frightened to death of his own shadow, and, the one day he came to school in Grade 9 - 'cause that's when you go to high school, right? He came to school, and this guy, he was smokin' a cigarette down to the rock, like I said, he only like a Grade 2 education, right? 'Cause he was always so scared to go to school. Like I knew him my whole life. Yeah, and he had a speech impediment, and people made fun of him and stuff. Like, I used to make fun of him myself, but like I said, as I got older, I changed, right? Anyways, this guy robbed his cigarettes from him and stabbed him with a pencil, right? And ah, I ended up goin' nuts at him, and this thing with the lighter was afterwards, right? It's the same guy. He ended up doing a bunch of time 'cause he robbed a corner store, him and some other guy, with a samurai sword. Right? [laughs] And that was in Grade 11, I remember that. But ah, yeah. For no reason whatsoever. And it just pissed me off a lot because I had a reason to be acting like that, and I wasn't, so why should you, do you know what I mean?

Despite difficulties in his personal life and struggles with substance abuse, Jonathan maintained his dedication to his hockey training and the Triple A team, with dreams of playing professionally post-high school. As part of ongoing training, he was billeted to a hockey family in a neighbouring city to take part in exhibition games. It was during this time that "everything changed" when he suffered a broken leg. When asked about the circumstances surrounding the incident, he did not elaborate. Instead, he stated, "It was something bad. It wasn't an accident." This took place at the beginning of his Grade 11 year.

In the eight months that followed, Jonathan went through physiotherapy with the hopes of 'getting his leg right' to play hockey again. The end of the summer finally rolled around, marking the start of the new hockey season. When the time came to try out for the team, his doctor made the decision that he was not medically ready to play. He stated:

> That kinda broke my heart. And that's when I said, "Fuck it all, right?" I stopped caring then, right? It was like everything that I ever, everything that I ever tried to do, it felt like it always came back. I always got screwed over in the end. It was like I couldn't win, no matter what, right?

Jonathan made the decision to stop going to school and began to abuse drugs and alcohol. Of this time, he said:

> I stopped going to school. And that's when I started doing drugs instead of just selling them, and, I dunno, even the people that I could always depend on to give me a place to stay stopped wanting to deal with me 'cause I was drinkin' and flipping out all the time, and that's when my life took a 180, right?

He admitted that despite the best efforts of his vice principal to keep him leaving school, his anger prevented him from going back:

> "Mr. Brampton", he was the vice principal, and oh man, he was relentless. When I first started to screw off in Grade 11, he used to come to my house and everything. I was staying at this guy "Dave"'s house, and he ended up showing up there and then once I was walking down the road and he kept like pulling the car in front of me and getting out and tryin' to make me get in the car. Even he was physical, like tryin' to force me a couple of times, you know what I mean? Grabbed me and shook me, 'cause he knew I

> was, like I was a straight A student, you know what I mean? Like he was just like, "So what if you can't play Triple A? Come back and play for the school team". He's like, "There's other options, Jonathan. You're only 15, go to foster services, they'll put you in a home. Stop being an idiot", right?

Around the same time, Greg's father was hospitalized. Jonathan was asked by his mother and Greg to come home to live with them and take care of his younger sister while they were spending time at the hospital. He stated that this invitation lifted his spirits and gave him the strength he needed to try and move forward. He moved back into his mother's home, was taking care of his sister, and went back to school. This situation proved to be short-lived:

> I started going back to school, 'cause I was happy. I was living back home with Mom and stuff, so what if my leg was broken, at least I had that opportunity to be at home. And Mom and Greg were always gone to the hospital every day, and then one day, I came home and for no reason and there was a note on the door: 'Jonathan, pack your stuff and go. Don't disturb me about it, just leave', right? And I just like, "What the fuck, I never even did anything." And that's when I was just like, "You know what? Fuck it. I'm never gonna be able to finish school, I'm never gonna be able to do anything", you know what I mean?

He took a moment to reflect on this time in his life, its significance to his school experience, and how they are intertwined:

> I was mad at my mom, I was mad at my leg; I was just mad, right? It was like I've tried so hard. No one has tried as hard as me; I've literally walked like kilometres to just go to school and get some books for the weekend so I can do, you know what I mean? I'm after

> walkin' to school to get my books, and then home from school and then to hockey practice, and then not have anywhere to sleep that night. Walk around for the full night and then walk back to school, you know what I mean? Like that's, that's a hard way to go about it. Like, literally, without showering and stuff. And I'm the type of guy like I don't like being dirty, like I can't even go on the range down there without showering and stuff, like I think that's gross. But at the time I was just so, I was so, I don't know what the right word - I was just so committed to doing what I had to do. Like, I'm after, literally having to sleep at a basketball court and wake up in the morning and then go and have to walk to school, you know what I mean?

Jonathan outlined what he believed was driving him to keep moving forward during this time in his life:

> I think it was just the, the - I just knew in my heart that I deserved to not suffer. I knew if I kept on goin' to a certain point, I wouldn't have to deal with this forever, you know what I mean? If I could just make it to 'here'. Like I got buddies and stuff now that are playing on the under teams for the NHL and stuff, you know what I mean? And I remember playing hockey with them or against them, and I was better than them. So it's just like, it really sucks. And it's just like I got robbed of my opportunity.

Over the several years that followed, Jonathan travelled to another province, trained as a scaffolder, and landed a job. During this time, his mother became sick with cancer and died. He returned to her small hometown for the funeral. During the service, he was intoxicated and got into an altercation with family members when he saw that his mother's final wishes to have a closed casket were not being honoured:

> My mom said she wanted to have a closed casket, and I went in and the casket was opened, and my grandfather said something to me. And my uncle pushed me, so I popped him in the head. And they called the cops on me so I put a pew against the door and locked myself in there and threw a couple pews through the window, and picked up fourteen assaults on police officers, and a bunch of death threats. So I pled guilty to that and they gave me ten months and I did my time.

Jonathan stated that the relationships in his life, particularly his relationship with his mother, as an overarching theme in his life that led him to be "inside the prison walls". He reflected:

> Definitely my relationship with my Mom, right? It was just the way I got treated. It was the way I was always put last in her eyes. It was, even right up to her death, right? And then I got stuck here and the next thing you know - she wanted a closed casket, and I was the only one who stood up for her, and closed the casket, but still I was wrong, for everyone else, "Oh she's dead, she doesn't care if the casket's open". Blah Blah Blah. No. She asked for the casket to be fuckin' closed. So even though I was still doin' the right thing, somehow I was wrong, do you know what I mean? I was always just fuckin' - it was like everybody was always looking for a reason just to be like, "That Jonathan, b'y, he needs to get his shit together." But the whole time I'm just doing what I believe in - not even just what I believe in - what's right. You know what I mean? Like someone asks ya fuckin', "Oh when I die I want a closed casket" - because she looked real sick. My Mom was a beautiful girl when she was, you know, before she got sick. She was one of the prettiest women I know. And when she got sick with cancer she was like forty pounds, she lost all of her teeth, she was sick, right? And so she said, 'cause there were

> hundreds of people at her funeral, all she said was, "I want a closed casket. I don't mind if you and your sister and my parents look at me. But other than that, that's all I want." So I walk into the fuckin' funeral, and I'm like, "Good job respecting your daughter's last wishes", you know I mean? And all of a sudden I'm the bad guy. Like no, I'm just saying that this is the way it should be. And, everyone's just making me out to be the bad guy.

The discussion surrounding 'relationships' prompted Jonathan to turn his thoughts back to his time in school, and he offered his thoughts on his own relationship with the school system overall:

> What's the way to make things right? Just by bettering what went wrong in the first place. [If I were the principal of a school], I'd take the time to sit down and see what's going on, and I'd talk to the two students and I'd say, "Yo, what's up? Like, what's the problem here?" and I'd explain to them, "Handle your shit outside of school…take it out back." No, but honestly, I'd try to figure out why, why it's happening, you know what I mean? Like, some guy might step, and nobody knows he's got shit goin' on. He can't keep a place to live, his mom's sick, his sister's out doin' something, you know what I mean? Nine times out of ten there's a reason for something when it happens. Like, some guy walks past you in the hallway and he gives you a dirty look. Most people aren't gonna turn around and smack him over the head with a cup, there's something leading up to it, right? Your woman's pissin' ya off. So, if I was the principal, I'd ask him into the office, and I'd ask him what was goin' on, and if he wasn't giving me a good enough answer I'd call his parent or guardian, and I'd say, "Listen" - I wouldn't jump to conclusions - I'd just say, "Listen your son's not in trouble I was just wondering how

> things were going on at home", you know what I mean? Before you call home and you make things worse. Call home and you say, "Yo, this guy got in trouble today", next thing you know he goes home and he's kicked out of his house. And you didn't even know what was going on in the first place. And now there's even more problems and he comes back and he stabs the guy because he got him kicked out of school, you know what I mean?

He offered advice for teachers and administrators, to help better their relationships with the students under their care:

> I dunno, probably just like, get to know your students, and figure out what stuff people got going on, you know what I mean? Sometimes everything is not on the surface, and one guy might just be being a nuisance and an asshole for no reason, but the guy next to him when he hits him over the head with a chair, might have been sittin' on it for months… There's always usually a reason for people's actions. People just don't react to nothing. Like I said, I definitely had a good school experience, I appreciated all my teachers' help and guidance and stuff. It got me a long way, it just, in the end, I just couldn't keep up with the bullshit.

Reflecting on his life and his school experience, he offered some advice for his 'younger self':

> Just don't give up. Keep going. Everybody, somebody out there has got it worse than you. Just one day it can get better. No matter how hard it is now, if you keep going through school and stuff, there's always a way out of it. Right? That's what made me walk to school in the mornings, is, just the idea that a couple more years and I can get a student loan and go to university. A couple more years, I'm almost there, right? And then

you don't need anyone, right? And then you're on your own. But when you're from K to 12, you need support, you know what I mean? You need somebody that's gonna help you out. Like, I had money. You know what I mean? But I had to be doin' stuff to get the money. I couldn't go to school and pay rent, and live here, and do this, you know what I mean? So, no matter how hard it is, just keep your head up, and one day it'll all figure itself out. And then one day when you're going to university and stuff, you can look back at it and say, "Fuck you", right? Basically.

5.4. Paul

At the time of interview, "Paul" was in his early thirties, heading into the final year of serving a two-year sentence. This was not his first sentence served at Her Majesty's Penitentiary. Growing up in a low income, centre city area of St. John's, he described a tumultuous home environment and parents who struggled with alcoholism and instances of physical abuse. Before ultimately leaving school in the ninth grade, Paul conveyed therein his academic and behavioral difficulties related to his struggles with ADHD.

5.4.1. Paul's Story

When asked to describe how he felt his teachers and administrators viewed him as a person, Paul responded with the term, "shit disturber." He elaborated, explaining a 'divide' of sorts in opinions about him as a student and person; two opposing camps so to speak. According to Paul, some of his junior high teachers would say, "He's not here to learn, he's just here to disrupt the class." He spoke of attempts to expel him from school, on the grounds that he was

"totally disruptive to the running of the institution." On the other hand, he described a couple of "good teachers" who said, "Man, the youngfella's just a bit hyper, like he just needs more attention; he needs *help*."

This discussion led to the question of if, and how, these opinions affected his view of himself. Paul began by stating that he was the "Black Sheep". He recounted that he spent much of his time in school asking himself the question, "Why do I even bother to try?" He internalized the negative opinions of his teachers, and felt as if he was being "kicked while he was down" and that it did nothing to help his confidence in himself:

> I'd show up on the day of a test, and [junior high teacher's name] actually looked at me and said, "Paul, what are you even doing here?" I said, "No, Miss – I actually studied for this today." And it came to the point where [my teachers'] attitudes towards me were, "Same song and dance, man" or "You're only here 'cause your parents must've told you to come and write the test and they'd give you some money for the weekend."

Paul had much to say about his school experiences and the effect they had on his life. He spoke with a certain candor; an eagerness that caused him to 'jump around' in his story as the memories came flooding back. When asked to speak about his earliest memories of school, he stated that his elementary school experience was mostly a positive one in terms of academics and experience with teachers. Diagnosed with ADHD at age 4, he was prescribed medication for the condition that he still takes today. With his description of elementary school, came admissions of often being the victim of bullying while in school:

> I was always a fighter and stuff like that, and like, people used to pick on me 'cause like, a lot of people I went to school with knew my parents and knew that they were

> alcoholics, and stuff like that. As soon as someone would say something about that, and my little sister, she used to be overweight, and a lot of people, and if anyone would say anything about her it would just trigger me to go off. And, especially, even the doctor says now that I was under-medicated. I should've been on a lot more medication than I was, back then.

Paul elaborated further on the effect his parents' alcoholism and lifestyle had on his life throughout his school age years. His parents were bar owners, and his mother tended the bar for over forty-five years. Paul stated that because of this, "the party was always at our house". He admitted that he was always around alcohol, people abusing alcohol, and the resulting volatile behaviour that often came along with its abuse:

> All the other kids would be out havin' fun and doing stuff on the weekends, and I'd had to have be home refereein' me parents, b'y! 'Cause if not they'd probably kill each other! Right? It's shockin' to say, but like, that had a lot of effect of my schooling too, right? And they were always hard on me, like tellin' me to do better, and stuff like that. And used to hold stuff over my head, like, oh, you know what I mean, 'you can't do this the weekend…you're not doin' this and that, your school marks and stuff like that. And this just come to a point that like, I just stopped goin'. Ya know what I mean? 'Cause I had to always be home takin' care of my mother all the time, 'cause my dad left for 5 years. And she just like, she'd be drunk from the time she woke up, and I had to get my sister ready and bring her to school.

Heading into junior high, Paul's parents fell upon financial hardship, and as a result lost their family home, after which "everything went to complete crap". He reflected on him and his sister

not having lunch money for school most days, which prompted him to begin selling his ADHD pills to obtain money for food and other things they needed. He stated:

> Like, by rights, Child Services should have really stepped in years ago when we were kids, like the way I sees them step into people's lives now. I'm not totally like [agreeing with] Child Services and stuff like that, but like, there's a lot of people that grew up like we did man, in housing, in poverty and stuff like that, like, you know what I mean?

Due to Paul's ADHD diagnosis and records from elementary school, he was provided with a student assistant for the first time that would be at his side in class throughout the school day. This triggered instances of bullying by other students. Paul described the negative attention he felt was brought by the presence of the student assistant:

> They would say, "Man, you're like 15 years old and you got a babysitter followin' you around." But, I had that bad of [a case of] ADHD they assigned me a student assistant because they had to follow me around, and the criticism I got for that, there was a lot of times I didn't want to go to school, you know what I mean? The student assistant – [name] - he really did help me, but the way I was singled out, you know what I mean, I couldn't, like, go hang around with my friends or anything like this, 'cause I had a student assistant.

Despite this, Paul stated that behaviorally and academically, he did very well in Grade 7 with the help of his student assistant. Then, due to what Paul suspected to be "position cuts", he lost his student assistant just as he was heading into grade 8, resulting in an exacerbation of his behavioural and academic issues:

> And ah, that was it, after that it was like, if I wasn't in the office, I'd be like, we were like always out just hangin' out doin' stupid shit, like smokin' weed, and smokin' cigarettes. And like, we spent a lot of time, it was just me going to school was "Yeah, who wanted to buy my meds?" and then "Oh, I got some money for lunch, I got some money for a draw and smokes." That's the way it was. After the student assistant wasn't there, like he did keep me in line, like I got deadly grades in Grade 7 when he was there.

Academically, Paul admitted to struggling especially with math in school, while being more successful at science and subjects that he held interest in. This continued into Grade 8, and brought with it frustration when he would ask for help in class, often speaking out of turn:

> But like, math and stuff, I was constantly asking teachers, and they'd get frustrated, like "Paul, you're disrupting the class, go to the office." And like, I'm only asking for help with my work, I know ya got nineteen other students to tend with, but like "Miss!" you know what I mean? Like, constantly. I needed the one-on-one help, you know what I mean? And I couldn't get it back then, you know what I mean? So then I'd just get frustrated and they'd send me to the office. And I wouldn't go to the office, I'd go out the back door.

He continued, describing how a then classmate – and now prison mate – was often sitting in the principal's office with him after they would be sent out by the teacher for talking:

> Me and [friend], like the other fella that's here [in prison], spent more time in the office than - most math classes we'd be there. Almost every math class, yeah. Two of us, like, I'd be askin' him about the math stuff, and they'd get mad at us for talkin' in class - "Well, you're not gonna help me, Teach. Maybe he'll help me."

When describing his experiences with being disciplined in school, he spoke of a time when he was suspended, along with two of his friends, for pulling the fire alarm during exam time. The suspension meant that he was not to attend school for two weeks. When he returned after the suspension, he felt overwhelmed by the amount of missed work and wondered how and if he would ever catch up to the rest of the class:

> And after that two weeks [suspension time] we went back to class and it was like "Oh, well, we missed all this, so how am I sposed to pick up?" I don't know none of this stuff, like the formulas, the fractions, like, it never helped me. And yes, they had to discipline me, but it never helped me. You know what I mean? Like it just put me further behind. And made me more frustrated with it, that I basically just gave up, you know what I mean?

As time went on after returning from the suspension, Paul found himself finding excuses to leave the classroom to avoid having to deal with the frustration of the academic struggles he was experiencing. He described feeling "overwhelmed" and "aggravated" in the classroom, exacerbated by his ADHD and his lack of student assistant. This avoidance turned cyclical, and he would ask to go to the washroom during each class only to spend the time wandering the hallways or leaving the building entirely. At the age of 15 and in the ninth grade, Paul attended only fifteen days of school:

> And I'd go to school like every now and then. Just like once or twice a week pretty much. Just so I wouldn't lose me spot. Like they'd tell ya if you didn't go for seven days, they'd call, and be like, "Oh you gotta come in tomorrow", and I'd go in, and roam the halls. You know what I mean? Just to be there.

Paul provided some insight as to his thought processes during the time he spent roaming the halls of the school. He spoke of a lack of understanding of the value of school at the time:

> Well, a lot of people, like the older crowd that we grew up with, man, everybody, back then, we were livin' in the ghetto [sic]. The only way you had money was people that sold weed and sold stuff like that. So everyone's like "Oh you don't need an education, come work for me."

At the beginning of the tenth grade, Paul was offered a roofing labourer job by his friend's father. He accepted the job and never returned to school. Comparing his frustration with school to the idea of a steady income, it made for an easy decision at the time:

> Like it was either, why am I gonna go to school and get frustrated, when I've already got a job, and I'm makin' probably more than what a teacher makes - he was paying me 25 dollars an hour back then, so like, I just give it up.

After leaving high school, Paul stated that "nobody [from the school community] reached out to help." His aunt set him up with a tutor as an attempt to encourage him to return to school. The tutor completed an academic assessment and informed him that due to his "lack of academic foundation", he was better off "dropping out" and completing an adult basic education program when he turned eighteen. In his words:

> I needed the foundation, and I didn't have that. And they told me there was no, like it was impossible. Like but all the time in the world, even one-on-one help, I still would've never gotten my high school [diploma] like that. I was too far behind. The damage was already done, right?

For the next ten years, Paul would continue working in the roofing job he accepted before leaving high school. In 2013, he attended a credit recovery program at a local community centre where he successfully obtained credit for high school Level I. Around the same time, he took advantage of an apprentice ironworker's course offered by a company in the offshore oil and gas industry. He set his sights on a local GED program with aspirations to become a journeyman ironworker. Before he was able to enter the program, Paul was arrested and charged with driving offenses and sentenced to time at HMP. After he was released, he reoffended and was sentenced to another year in prison.

Paul was asked the question, "What do you believe is the overall thing that resulted in you being where you are today [at HMP]?". He took some time to reflect and stated that it was "a lot of problems at home", exacerbated by his "teachers getting fed up" with him that led him on his life path. Paul hesitated to place the blame on the teachers, instead speaking with hindsight and understanding of a lack of resources and stress he believed his teachers were facing at the time. He pinpointed an academic 'breaking point' that helped solidify his decision to leave school:

> They [teachers] had such a high caseload even back then, they were just, they pushed ya through, ya know what I mean? And it just come to the point that I'd write a test and then I'd get like a 10% or 15% on the test, and I actually tried to do that test. My last exams and stuff I graded so low that that was it…yeah, that was pointless. That was the break; like it was impossible, you know what I mean? Like this one math test I done like that, I studied – I remember spending the whole weekend studying - and I still only got a 33% on it. And it was that test – I remembers exactly – it was that test that pretty much broke

> me, yeah. I was like, "Man, I'm tryin' harder and harder and harder and I still never got nowhere with it." I think that was the breaking point, yeah. That was the end of Grade 9. And it even seemed like, the teacher, it even seemed like everything she was testin' me on was harder than everybody else's. But I guess when I looks back at it now it's where I was so far behind.

He described further how his school struggles impacted his perception of himself:

> And it may it seem [to me] like they [teachers] were all out to get me, like they all didn't want me, like they were purposely trying to make me fail. But when I looks back on it now, doin' the same math and stuff that I'm doin' with the teacher up there [at HMP] now, it's the same stuff, you know what I mean, it's not that they were all trying to fail me, and stuff like that. By the time I started to put my foot down, like between Grade 7 and Grade 9, man, there's a lot of stuff I missed! That's like the foundation. That is your foundation for high school, yeah. And I realize that now.

Paul spoke highly of two teachers that he believed made a "memorable impression" on him. When asked to describe their characteristics, he elaborated:

> He [his art teacher] like always, like even if, like he might've been my art teacher, but anything I needed help to, man, he'd help me. You know what I mean? Like math, stuff like that, he'd always help me. And he'd always have these programs to try and keep us out of trouble. Like he used to have hockey on Monday nights over to St. Bon's, like everybody'd just grab their gear and go show up over there, you know what I mean? Like camping outings, and stuff like that. I'm tellin' ya, him and [my gym teacher], the two of 'em made a memorable impression on me.

Paul's gym teacher, whom he kept in contact with after leaving school, passed away suddenly several years ago. He reflected:

> I used to work out with him after school and stuff like that. He's the one that got me into weights, and, eventually into the Ironworkers [union]. He's the one who told me, he said "Listen go do this course", you know what I mean? So, yeah. I misses him all the time. He was a really good friend of mine. I talked to him right up 'til about two weeks before he died. It was never expected; came right out of left field.

Reflecting on his own experience in school, he continued to offer insight into the behaviours of students who experience difficulties in the classroom:

> Like if a kid is acting out and stuff like that, he's probably not doin' that because he's just trying to give you a hard time or he's a little arsehole, little punk, or whatever…that's probably how, the way he shelters himself from being so far behind, you know what I mean? Like, he's acting out, like it's almost like, he's doin' it because he don't know how other way to act. Like he's that far behind he would just rather be in the office than sit there and get frustrated with that.

Following this, Paul offered some advice for teachers and administrators on how to support and cope with these student behaviours:

> Try. Take the kid aside and do like, I know it's a lot of kids like it, but take them aside and build an education plan that is actually suited for them. Test the different levels and stuff that they're at. Do a test on them and see where they grade, you know what I mean? Maybe that's the problem. Do some other test to see, like ok, if this is Grade 8, and they only knows the Grade 5 stuff - yeah, find out where they are, like how educated they

> actually are. More individual case management is the only way I can think of. And the kids that are given a hard time, like mostly probably the kids in District School, maybe like do a certain evaluation on them to see where they stand.

Paul's advice for students coming up through the school system today was the same advice he gives to his own son, "And, I just says, "B'y, all you can do is try, you know what I mean? Don't give up. Just never give up", is what I tells him."

Reflecting on what he needed from school and how he ended up where he is today, Paul continued:

> I just wanted my Grade 12 to be able to go do a trade. You know what I mean? To like prepare ya for the real world, and stuff like that. But I looks back on it now man, like I missed a lot of stuff, I never had no graduation, I never went to no prom. Like I wasn't, like, I never even had a girlfriend til I was like 20-odd [years old] or somethin', 'cause I was just so flat-out working. You know what I mean? And then I started working in bars downtown, same way my Mother and that did, and like, I don't want my son to go that route, you know what I mean? 'cause it brang me into the route of crime, and sellin' drugs, and bein' here, and just - like I really wants to take my kids and move 'em out of here, to be honest with ya? 'Cause this place is going to the dogs, man. With the opioid epidemic, and the way people are on pills and that now, it's only time before the heroin and stuff gets here. It's here now, but it's not as mainstream and it is in BC [British Columbia] and stuff like. You take a walk through downtown [of a city in] BC and that man, it will scare the shit of ya. Like zombies. Crazy. But like I'm so scared for my son

and my daughter to grow up here. Like I'm gonna be that crazy old man sat on the step with a shotgun. You know what I mean?

5.5. Joshua

At the time of interview, "Joshua" was in his early thirties and serving the last few months of his sentence at Her Majesty's Penitentiary in St. John's, NL. Throughout his interview, Joshua articulated an isolating school experience exacerbated by a learning disability and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), resulting in his abandonment of school in the early months of grade ten. He recounted a lack of structure in his home life, personal struggles with addiction, and a history of physical abuse suffered at the hand of his father.

5.5.1. Joshua's Story

When asked to think back to his earliest memory of school, Joshua admitted from the outset that the simple act was a difficult thing for him to do, and that this was the first time he had thought about it in a very long time. He went on to state that he never really enjoyed school and reasoned from the outset that this was partially due to the issues he was having at home. In his recollection, he speculated: "I probably went to school with stuff on my mind, right?"

Following this, Joshua's recollections moved ahead a few years to elementary school. He detailed an incident of physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his grade four teacher. He admitted to swearing in the classroom one day when the teacher was in earshot. The teacher, not being able to pinpoint the culprit, held Joshua and three other students back after class and made the accusation while pointing at them individually, "It was either you, you, you, or YOU; you are

the only ones that would do it." Joshua got up to leave the classroom in response to the allegations. The teacher physically prevented him from fully walking out of the classroom by "grabbing and slamming" him. Joshua did not tell anyone about the incident and admitted that "he kept it to himself."

Due to his "learning disabilities and behaviour issues", namely Attention Deficit Disorder, Joshua stated that he was placed in a special needs class for the entirety of junior high. During this time, he attended school for two hours a day only and had a full-time student assistant. According to Joshua, he was on a reduced schedule because he was "interrupting the other kids from learning."

Joshua admitted that he got "most of his experience" in school during the junior high years (Grade 7, 8 and 9). He spoke of a positive relationship with his art teacher and stated that it was the only class he truly enjoyed. He also stated that he had a good relationship with his student assistant. During those two hours a day of school, he would often "only do one worksheet" and the rest of the time would be filled differently:

> And then for the rest of the time we would go to the computer room and play on the computers, or we could go to the gym and shoot around a ball, or we'd go to the Home Ec [Economics] room and we'd make cakes or pizzas and all that kind of stuff. Or, we'd leave the school and we'd go look at the war ships, or go bowling - I liked it. It was better than sitting in the classroom and doing a lot of work.

Throughout junior high, Joshua recalled being sent out of class or suspended for behaviour issues related to his ADD. He was aware of being the subject of many administrator meetings and had a sense that he was being 'talked about':

> They [school administrators] had a lot of meetings where they would bring every teacher that I had, and guidance counsellors, and principals - everybody would be there. They would go into the library, set up the tables, and every teacher I had would be there, and my mother would be there, right? And I would be there, I'd be there for a like little bit of it and told to go on and wait in the computer room or whatever. And they'd have the meetings all the time on me, right?

Coupled with the meetings, he recalled, "And they sent me for psychiatric assessments in the Janeway Hospital to find out like, 'what the fuck is wrong with him', like, 'somethin's goin' on', kinda thing, right?"

Heading into high school in Grade 10, Joshua noted a sudden and significant change to his daily school routine. The reduced time and special education class was no more, and he found himself in the regular high school classroom on a full-time basis with obvious gaps in his learning:

> Then when I go to Grade 10, I'm threw right in the classroom with everybody else who's doin' stuff that I don't know nothing about, because I'm doing work that's not - like, in Grade 7, 8 and 9; Grade 9 I'm probably doing like Grade 7 work, right? I went from going two hours a day, doing one worksheet of times tables - and this is like, easy times tables, right? Like, 5 times 7, stuff like that, you know what I mean? Like most kids are learning like 'x times y' or whatever that is. Like I don't know how to do that, right?

He further outlined this increasing frustration to his student assistant:

> And I said, "I don't know how to do this work, I've never done this before." And he's like, "What do you mean you haven't done this before?" Like he's getting frustrated with

> me and mad at me and everything, right? He's like, "How do you *not* know this? Every other kid in the class knows. Like, you're in Grade 10, you passed, you're here from Grade 9, obviously you know this, Joshua. You're not trying."

Joshua stated that he lasted about a month longer in that classroom before explaining to his parents that he was planning on quitting school. Despite his mother's pleas to stay, he made the decision to leave school and not look back. His father gave him an ultimatum, "If you want to quit school, you better get a job." Reflecting on this turning point, Joshua stated, "And then…it was terrible after that; it was a 'downward spiral', right?"

Soon after 'dropping out' and in the years that followed, Joshua spent a significant amount of time in jail. Though he did not provide details of the situations that led to these incarcerations, he recounted that the atmosphere of his living situation was a contributor:

> Ah, just that, at the house - I guess, ah - it was just horrible livin', right? That's all it was. It was livin' in an atmosphere that's just shitty, and everything about it was just horrible. Right?

Despite the subsequent years of difficulties in and out of the prison system after leaving school, Joshua described having no regrets about that decision at the time; he just "did not want to be there". He offered a metaphor as he reflected:

> 'Cause like, it's like um…picture now if you're hired on to a job to paint a big mural on a wall…and you don't know how to paint. And everybody's sayin' like, "Are you gonna do it?! You gonna do the work?!" Right? And you're like, "Jeez b'y, I don't know how to paint, right?" And everybody's like, "C'mon! Get with it, man! Do the work!" Right? And then everyone around me is paintin' on the walls and I'm just standin' there, like, "I

> don't know how to do it". That's just the way I felt. Like I didn't know what was goin' on with the work, right?

From his perspective, Joshua offered some insight into how his life took him from school to a cycle of incarceration. He outlined how he was physically surrounded in his neighbourhood by drugs and alcohol and inevitably fell into substance abuse and theft to fuel the habit. He stated that he "wasn't educated about getting ahead in life" and was "confused about life itself; not knowing what he was supposed to be doing." He emphasized that for him, it was this complete lack of guidance in his personal and school life that ultimately led him to a cycle of incarceration:

> Like I can't blame on it nobody, but like, you know what I mean, it's just like sometimes guidance is a huge thing, right? If you're growing up in a home where nobody's tellin' you the importance of certain things - for instance, like you hear about kids when they're growing up, they absorb everything. They learn from what's goin' on around them. Now, if you're a little kid and all you're learning is what you see is violence, substance abuse, anger, fuckin' rage, fuckin' hate the people you're supposed to love, like you know what I mean? That's all you learn, right?

He continued on to explain how this 'complete lack of guidance' encompassed his lived experience of his personal life and community at that time:

> You're not learning nothin' about like seeing your parents paying rent on the car, you don't see them like even drivin' with a license. It's just like, "Fuckin' Jesus the cops are chasin' me again today!" You know what I mean? That's normal, I guess. The way it is, right? And ah, pretty much just that, right? And that's why like I said to you, it would be

> a good thing for them to teach that in schools. The stuff - maybe not for most kids - but for the kids who are actin' up and shit, right? I think that would be a great thing for kids. Even like a summer school program, right? For them kind of kids. To just teach them about that. Right?

Joshua elaborated further, offering his advice for teachers and administrators about how to interact with their students, especially those who may be struggling. He spoke of a collaborative approach:

> I would say work with them rather than try and punish them. Rather than say, "Oh you're being suspended" and stuff like that, like, just work with 'em, and like ah, don't try and do harm. Don't be like tryin' to take them away from their family and stuff like that by phoning Child Welfare right away, and like, trying to do total harm right away. Instead, just try and work with 'em, and just like, tell them and just teach them the necessities of schooling and stuff. Some kids might not even know that.

He recalled an inability to understand the value in the curriculum he was being taught at that time. As an adult, he wondered how his life would have been different if he had "got that piece of paper that said Grade 12 on it." Joshua thought about the things he would say to his younger self if he could travel back in time, offering insight into some of the things he believed he needed from school but did not receive:

> I would've told myself, I would've said, "Listen, don't do this. You're goin' on a wrong road. And you're gonna have a lot of misery ahead of ya if you don't do your schooling and get the education that you need to find good work to keep your life stable." You

know what I mean? Like, you pay your rent, and like, mortgage a home and do all those things, right? Yeah, I guess a lot of young kids don't know nothin' about that stuff, right?

On how to get students to see the value in being in school:

I think a good way to do that is show them what could be, the negative. Show them how shitty life can be. Show them like the repercussions of not doing it all, right? I think that would be an awesome way. And show 'em some statistics. Tell 'em. Tell 'em the actual stats on stuff, say like, "90% of kids who fuck up in school they end up on welfare with nothin', and struggling." There's gotta be some stats on that. Like, teach the kids the actual odds of where they're goin'. Like, "the odds are against you if you don't do this", kind of thing, right?

Joshua perceived a connection between his school experience as a youth and his prison experience as an adult. He spoke of parallels between exclusionary discipline practices in school and the prison system:

They are connected, definitely. Um…like, detention. I guess that could be looked at as a way of a form of punishment, like punishment in life for breaking the rules on the streets. Instead of detention, it's Lock-Up. Right? It's almost like, in school, it's like the principals and stuff is like 'holdin' court' against the kids, kinda.

Joshua offered advice to aid in the dismantling of the parallels between these two systems:

I think there should be instead of detention and suspension, I think there should be somethin' where they reward the kid, the kid who's actin' up, kinda reward him in a way to lift himself up, and make himself feel better about himself. Like give him a little piece of paper that says, "You won an award for most improved behaviour" or something, you

know what I mean? Like, kind of lift him up a little bit, and think better of himself. Make him do an extra class or somethin', but don't tell him it as a punishment, like, "You gotta do this", right? Come at him in a good way, and just be like, "We think it would be great for you to do this class, like it's better for everybody, you know, and there could be benefits to come out of it for you." Right? And like, talk to him in a way, like, "It's beneficial to you. It's not a form of punishment at all." And teach him, in that, about life. Like, the way it could be, right? For actin' up.

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As an expression of gratitude for the participants and to honor their openness in the sharing of their experiences, I invite you, the reader, to take a moment to 'take in' their stories. Allow yourself to reflect on their words and the implications and questions that may arise for you during this process.

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The following chapter presents a thematic analysis of the participants' narratives, weaving together the threads of their individual experiences to illuminate the broader phenomenon of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Chapter 6: Discussion

According to van Manen (1990), "[Phenomenological] writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us with what we know" (p. 127). This section presents the 'unions' or connections as they emerged as themes via the participants' accounts of their experiences within the school-to-prison pipeline. Through the thoughtful discussion of these themes, the essence of phenomenon can be synthesized.

6.1. Theme A: School Experiences and Life Experiences are Inextricably Intertwined

At the outset of each interview, the participants were asked to describe their earliest memories of school. This open-ended question allowed for a free-flowing interview process, providing space for probing questions in order to gain insight into their school experiences. Throughout the course of the interviews about their school experiences and as evidenced in the narratives, the participants inherently offered stories of their lives. In beginning with their school experience, each participant offered intertwining life experiences that seemed to deepen in connection throughout the course of the interviews. Thomas demonstrates this process perfectly; he would say, "School is something that everybody gotta do. It's part of life; it's like breathin'".

Thomas' unique experiences of growing up and attending school in a small rural town further accentuated the connections between his experiences inside and outside of the school walls. In rural areas, the school is often the centre of the community, staffed by familiar faces who make that community their home. In other words, the 'grapevine' can be shorter in a small

town, contributing to incidents occurring at school becoming common knowledge among the residents beyond the school walls.

For Thomas, the collective memories regarding his older brother's past criminality in the town contributed to a further deepening of the connections between his school experiences and life experiences. Early in the interview, Thomas spoke of a 'guilt by association' that crossed over from his personal life into his school life:

> As soon as I was old enough - not even old enough, I should say - to come into the picture, it was like, right from him [brother], straight to me. Guilty by association, ya know what I mean?

As evidenced in narratives, prompting the participants' to describe their earliest memories of school at the outset of the interview set the foundation for the sharing of the inseparable connections between their school and life experiences. Regardless of where the participants grew up, similar processes rang true. Jason, for example, grew up in an urban, centre city environment that stood in contrast to that of Thomas. From the outset, Jason's detailed account of his school experiences was alive with rich description of his neighbourhood and home environments. He would often switch quickly between the two as he recalled them in his memories:

> So, ah, my neighbourhood, we lived in low income housing so my neighbourhood was really culturized, too. And it was cool because in the summertime the community would come out and everybody would mix their cultures, right? And we'd have summer parties and stuff. But, like um, the school situation, like um, I remember the teacher I had there, he's one of the teachers that sticked with me throughout my life, Mr.K."

Positive recollections of life experiences outside of school were often associated with positive

recollections of school experiences. A similar phenomenon was noted for negative experiences, as can be observed throughout the participant narratives.

6.2. Theme B: Implicit and Explicit Labeling of Students by School Staff

This research sought to explore labeling theory as it relates to the school experiences of those within the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon and the connections labeling has to their self-worth. Re-visiting the concept of labeling theory through the work of Kroska, Lee, & Carr (2016), an "official deviance label" promotes the development of deviant self-meanings. Moreover, the authors refer to the triggering effects of labeling as "exclusionary processes" that explain the individual's movement into a 'deviant' group, as well the isolation of these deviant groups from mainstream social life (p. 82). This description offers an interesting insight into the mechanisms upon which the school-to-prison pipeline is built. Further, we can imagine the aforementioned 'deviant group' as the 'pipeline' itself.

All the participants shared experiences of being labeled in school, both implicitly and explicitly. I use the term' implicitly' here to refer to instances of labeling that are not necessarily direct comments from a teacher or school staff member, but instead reactionary measures enacted based on deficit discourses or past behaviours.

Joshua outlined explicit incidences of labeling in school starting as early as Grade 4. Another student had cussed in the classroom, but Joshua described being the one who was blamed, yelled at, held back, physically kept from walking out of the classroom, and "slammed into a desk" by his classroom teacher in response to the incident. When asked if Joshua ever told anyone else about the incident, he stated that he "kept it to himself".

Admittedly, Joshua “didn’t like school a whole lot”, stating that he had “issues at home” that caused him to go to school with “stuff on his mind”. Diagnosed with a learning disability and behavioural issues, the school decided that he was only permitted to attend school for two hours per day with a student assistant at his side throughout most of junior high. Once he reached high school in Grade Ten, he found himself suddenly attending school full-time, and was placed in the ‘regular’ classroom. Of this experience, he said:

> I went from going two hours a day, doing one worksheet of times tables - and this is like, easy times tables, right? Like, 5 times 7, stuff like that, you know what I mean? Like most kids are learning like x times y or whatever that is. Like I don’t know how to do that, right?

Joshua stated that interactions occurred with the teacher in almost every class that involved him being singled out due to his frustrations with his lack of academic foundation. He did not feel supported; instead, he described just repeatedly being called out by the teacher in a dismissive manner with, “Oh do your work, you’re not doing your work!”. He eventually left school without completing Grade 10.

I argue that these experiences outlined by Joshua - feeling unsupported, unprepared academically, and dismissed in school - are examples of the results of collective implicit and explicit labeling practices enacted by school staff that compounded to a peak in high school. Joshua outlined a history of struggles throughout his life and school experience, and it is likely that he was subjected to, what Stahl (2017) would refer to as, a pathologization of the ‘unteachable’. An aspect of this pathologization can be as simple as the implicit labeling practice of an educator maintaining low expectations for a certain student, based on past experiences,

deficit discourses, and/or a lack of understanding and re-evaluation of the student's needs. This process can be viewed as a 'pipeline' in and of itself, as it is further endorsed by the school system through 'pushing students along' without a comprehensive (or sometimes basic) understanding of needs/gaps in their learning, coupled with insufficient supports for the future teachers who will receive these students under the guise that they are prepared for their grade level. Further, students are more likely to intentionally disengage from schoolwork rather than engage in a struggle and confirm educators' low expectations (Stahl, 2017, p. 104). As a result, low expectations become normative for both academic achievement and behaviour. Brown (1991) puts it lucidly when he says, "[these young men] raised on a steady diet of dumbed-down reductive basic curriculum turn out as we could have predicted: uninterested in reading and writing, resistant to, or woefully unprepared for, the intellectual work of the higher grades" (p. 223). Essentially, there is a deficit of relationship (more on this later). Joshua, having experienced similar to what Stahl and Brown are discussing, analogizes this perfectly through his mural metaphor:

> Picture now if you're hired on to a job to paint a big mural on a wall, and you don't know how to paint. And everybody's sayin' like, "Are you gonna do it?! You gonna do the work?!" Right? And you're like, "Jeez b'y, I don't know how to paint, right?" And everybody's like, "C'mon! Get with it, man! Do the work!" Right? And then everyone around me is paintin' on the walls and I'm just standin' there, like, "I don't know how to do it". That's just the way I felt. Like I didn't know what was goin' on with the work, right?

When asked about how he was viewed by his teachers and administrators, Paul quickly replied,

"shit disturber - 'he's not here to learn, he's here to disrupt the class'". He elaborated on how this label affected his self-worth via a sense of apathy, as he found himself exasperated and wondering, "Why do I even bother to try?" Though Paul admittedly had difficulties in school, his story was marked by struggles at home that crossed over into his school life. Both of his parents suffered from alcohol addiction, and his mother was relatively well-known in the community due to her job. He attributed much of the bullying he experienced in school to labeling by others based on judgements of his poor upbringing and parents' lifestyle. He outlines this clearly when he says:

> People used to pick on me 'cause like, a lot of people I went to school with knew my parents and knew that they were alcoholics. As soon as someone would say something about that, and my little sister, she used to be overweight - and if anyone would say anything about her it would just trigger me to go off.

Paul was a self-proclaimed "fighter"; attempting to remain resilient in the face of his struggles. Though he recounted being vocal in school in his attempts to obtain one-on-one academic help, he experienced a lack of consistent support in return. Despite his behavioural issues and exceptionality, he was assigned a student assistant in seventh grade only to have them removed the following year. The consistent lack of support led to a sense of frustration and apathy, akin to Joshua's experience. A pathologization of the 'unteachable' continued:

> But like, [in] math [class] and stuff, I was constantly asking teachers [for help], and they'd get frustrated, like "Paul, you're disrupting the class, go to the office." And like, I'm only asking for help with my work, I know ya got nineteen other students to tend with, but like "Miss!" you know what I mean? Like, constantly. I needed the one-on-one

> help, and I couldn't get it back then, you know what I mean? So then I'd just get frustrated and they'd send me to the office. And I wouldn't go to the office, I'd go out the back door.

This mechanism so succinctly described by Paul is labeling theory and pathologization in action, as we can clearly see a deviancy label being applied, and eventually adopted, by the individual being subjected to it. Labeling theory broadens the point of view of this research in a similar way it does for Stahl's work by pointing out that "deviant groups provide social shelter from stigma as well as providing collective rationalizations, definitions, peer pressure, and opportunities that encourage and facilitate deviant behaviour" (Stahl, 2017, p. 82). The participant narratives offered evidence of this 'social shelter' through shared experiences of exclusion and belonging. This concept will be explored further as the theme discussion proceeds in this chapter.

For Jason, the pathologization of the 'unteachable' became the pathologization of the 'untouchable'. He expressed with no reservations about how he felt he was labeled by teachers and school staff when he stated, "I think they just looked at me as a problem". After dealing with major traumatic life events before the age of ten, he turned to drugs and alcohol that further impacted his school experiences. The severity of disciplinary incidents increased, leading to police involvement and exclusionary disciplinary action. He was admittedly "always on the run" in an attempt to get away from his troubles at home; "School was a place of escape, until it became another place to run from". Jason's experiences with labeling in school were evident in the humiliation and anger he felt in being "singled out" via exclusionary discipline practices combined with a lack of meaningful relationship with his teachers and assigned student assistant. According to Jason, there was a lack of trust in his relationship with the student assistant whom

he felt passed judgment on him every day. Via his narrative, he provided evidence for deficit discourses within the school that helped provide the foundation for a collective attitude of labeling from school staff that left him feeling unsupported and 'pushed out'. Speaking of his student assistant in particular, he said, "It was like she already had a preconceived notion of who I was, and she was just there to just babysit and make sure I didn't do somethin' crazy, right?"

Further, I argue that these deficit discourses or 'preconceived notions' acted as a mechanism of physical and emotional isolation for Jason that would continue into his adult life; a pathologization of the 'unteachable' into the 'untouchable':

> Well, at that time, like everybody knew - I'm sure the teachers had to know I was out there fighting and stuff - so like, I never liked anybody ever puttin' their hands on me, and um, when I was younger I was abused and stuff right, so, like, 'don't touch me and I won't touch you'.

This discussion deepens in the next subsection as the discussion flows from the exclusionary process of labeling to the practice of exclusionary discipline and the related thematic phenomena that arose across the participants' experiences.

6.3. Theme C: Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Schools Contribute to an Environment of Student Distrust and Apathy by Weakening Vulnerable Relationships and Exacerbating Feelings of Isolation and Abandonment

It is helpful here to revisit the 2015 work of Salole and Addulle, who examined, from a Canadian perspective, connections between education, discipline in school, and the criminal justice system. Via discussions with marginalized youth, teachers, and social workers, they

determined that exclusionary discipline practices and a seeming "lack of flexibility" surrounding rules in school "enhanced the youths' feelings of detachment and exclusion from school" (p. 144). Further, themes emerged in their research that highlighted how especially disruptive school discipline can be to the lives of marginalized youth.

Exclusionary discipline practices enacted by educational institutions are not just limited to out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, but extend to all disciplinary measures that involve removing students from their learning environment as a consequence for their behaviour. Similarly to the participants of Salole and Abdulle (2018), Irby (2017), Stahl (2017), a multitude of other research studies on the school-to-prison pipeline, and students whom I have encountered in my teaching practice, the participants in this research shared experiences with exclusionary discipline that had a significant impact on their lives and commitment to their education.

The participants' experiences with labeling as previously discussed flow naturally into this present discussion. Jason shared some particularly succinct insights when discussing his experiences with exclusionary discipline. As his struggles in his personal life magnified and affected his school life, his experiences with exclusionary discipline became increasingly alienating. His teachers would often place his desk outside the classroom, a practice that he felt made everything "so much worse". He described feeling at the time as if the teacher had "dissed" him in front of everyone in the class, and he felt that he needed to protect himself by fighting back. He spoke of feeling dismissed and isolated, his frequent disciplinary incidents causing a further disconnect between him and his teachers.

After being suspended multiple times, eventually expelled, and moved to a new school, he described feeling "shuffled"; a stranger in a new school and area. His alcohol use increased,

exacerbating behavioural incidents at school, reaching a boiling point when he was arrested for assault. In response, he was given a two week out-of-school suspension. Similar to the participants in Salole and Abdulle's work, Jason described a deepening of the detachment from school and increased feelings of isolation. During the two weeks, Jason said he just "ran around the neighborhood", often getting into more trouble and becoming more detached. Reflecting back on that "precious time" in his life, he felt that "keeping me out [of school] was the worst thing they could do", stating that it just effectively compounded his feelings of detachment from school, leading to apathy and making the return to school that much more difficult.

Upon his return to school after a lengthy suspension, he felt as if there was an unspoken distance between him and his teachers; a further deficit of relationship. It was as if his teachers had too become apathetic.

Paul's description of his experiences with exclusionary discipline were associated with feelings of being ignored and dismissed as he was asking for help in class. Self-described as often "aggravated" and feeling overwhelmed in the classroom, he recounted being sent out of class for being "disruptive." Struggling with ADHD and a lack of one-on-one help, Paul felt that his calls for help and asking those around them for help with work were viewed as disrespectful and disruptive by the teacher.

Paul's time spent avoiding classroom frustrations by wandering the halls of the school proved to lead to escalating levels of disciplinary action. After a two week out-of-school suspension, he described a similar deepening sense of detachment and eventual apathy as Jason did, coupled with an inflamed frustration at the academics. All these factors combined with his personal struggles and worked to effectively fuel the pathologization he was experiencing,

pushing him further away from school and leading to eventual drop out:

> And after that two weeks we went back to class and it was like 'oh, well, we missed all this, so how am I s'posed to pick up?' And yes, they had to discipline me, but it never helped me. You know what I mean? Like it just put me further behind. And made me more frustrated with it, that I basically just gave up, you know what I mean?

As previously evidenced in his narrative, Thomas left school in the eighth grade after experiencing a series of out-of-school suspensions. His experiences feeling judged and labeled by teachers and community members contributed to his decision to leave. He described school as a "bad environment", full of accusations and "guilty by association" attitudes, with "little to no support or guidance." When he was returning to school from his final suspension, he made the decision to walk away and never look back. The school had become a symbol of trauma for him with "too many bad memories" coupled with fear of descending into another cycle of negativity.

The participants shared experiences of abandonment, containment, and isolation in their home and personal lives. School was a place to provide them with a sanctuary; a second chance at 'social shelter'. Instead, for many, it became "another place to run from" where additional experiences of abandonment and isolation led to disempowerment, disengagement and eventual indifference; indeed, the opposite of what a sanctuary should be. In the next subsection, the thematic phenomena of containment as it relates to the connections between the school experience and prison experience will be examined.

6.4. Theme D: Containment Experiences - Connections between Life, School, and Prison

Irby (2017) highlighted the relational concept of 'non-inherent dignity' while framing his

discussion surrounding youth criminalization and the school-to-prison pipeline. The criminalization process, akin to the pathologization process as previously discussed, is one that initiates the production of "criminal others" through the systematic dispossession of human rights but more importantly their potential to learn and grow (p. 17). Through his research, Irby learned that his participants had been subjected to a certain criminalization that effectively worked to diminish their sense of non-inherent dignity, an "acquired condition of self-worth based upon a person's condition, circumstance, and behaviour" (p. 17). The relationality of the concept comes from the fact that it can be supported and eroded in the context of social relations and reflects the nature of relationships and what it means to be human. The greater the erosion, the greater the deterioration of the individual's ability to recognize their own inherent worth. In other words, non-inherent dignity is a sense of self-worth that can be influenced, positively or negatively, through interactions with others.

Thomas, Paul, Joshua, Jason, and Jonathan shared experiences in their personal and home lives that had already significantly diminished their self-worth outside of the walls of the school. When the education system subsequently failed to understand and meet their needs, their ability to see their own potential in relation to others was degraded. Even in these times of degradation and within the failure of the system as a whole, positive relationships formed in school were able to provide moments of hope and a regeneration of the sense of self.

Underpinning this phenomenon were the participants' lived experiences with containment, a thematic thread among their stories that offered insight into the connections between their lives, school experiences, and prison experiences. The coding process first elicited the theme of containment, which was assigned to segments of the participants' stories that spoke

of experiences and circumstances in which they felt ‘contained’; powerless or unable to escape. Oftentimes these experiences and circumstances were coupled with feelings of abandonment and isolation.

Jonathan’s experiences are an important place to begin in the discussion of containment. His story stood out from the other participants in the sense that he did not share experiences that included reports of academic struggles in school. Though he self-described as a “bit of a bully”, his school experiences were also not marked by significant involvement with exclusionary discipline in school. Mechanisms of exclusion and isolation that Jonathan was subjected to occurred significantly in his home life - a cycle of ‘push and pull’ due to a difficult and tumultuous relationship with his mother, stepfather and other adult male figures in his life around that time. Near the outset of the interview, Jonathan stated that school for him was “pretty easy going until I reached Grade 6”, when he started “getting kicked out of his house” due to conflicts with his mother’s boyfriend Greg (stepfather). Jonathan explained that he would often intervene in their arguments in defense of his mother and end up in direct conflict with Greg. Foster care eventually got involved and his mother faced a choice of “him or Greg” staying in the house. She “chose Greg”, and so began this ‘push and pull’ cycle in Jonathan’s life of living in foster care, ‘couch surfing’, and his mother’s house. He would often come home to packed bags with a note on the door from his mother stating that he was no longer allowed to stay there.

Jonathan shared that besides being close to his little sister, his motivation to be at home was driven by his desire to be in school. Of this, he said:

“I always kept wanting to go back to my mom’s house because, like, I did wanna go to school and stuff, like I enjoyed school, and I got really good grades and stuff. And I knew to get

anywhere I'd need to go to school, but she just wouldn't let me, right?"

Jonathan outlined how he kept trying to go back to his mother's house so he could feel a sense of security and attend school. Oftentimes he would be accepted back into the home, only to find himself in another conflict with Greg, perpetuating the cycle. This cycle provided the framework for the containment Jonathan was experiencing, which continued through his adolescence and into his adult life. This containment eventually manifested itself in the physical form via incarceration. He alluded to this directly when he stated:

> So, that's how I ended up here [prison], I guess, eventually, 'cause I kept having to find different ways, you know what I mean? Like I'd be living with someone, and then I'd be working and doing something, and then I'd give it all up to go back to my mom's house, and then I'd have to start all over from scratch.

Jonathan succinctly outlines the essence of containment here through the experiences of rejection, abandonment, isolation and the cycle of setbacks requiring "starting from scratch" each time. Similarly to experiences outlined by the other participants, Jonathan also viewed school as an escape; an opportunity to break the cycle. As a promising athlete, Jonathan's motivations in school were driven by his dedication to his school hockey team and the successes he associated with that aspect of his life. He spoke highly of his teachers, and felt that they respected his perseverance despite his home situation and did their best to help him.

In the beginning of high school, Jonathan's demonstrated hockey abilities with the school team allowed him the opportunity to be selected for the Triple A team. In the midst of this incredible opportunity, Jonathan had his leg broken. After the healing process, he was unable to be medically cleared to continue, a fact that "broke his heart" at the time. He stated that the

breaking of his leg “was not an accident” and when discussing the incident alluded to his involvement with drug-related activities connected to his biological father. He offered further insight into the containment he felt surrounding his father and Greg:

> Like he [Greg] always cared, more than Mom did? But at the same time, at the end of the day, he was the reason why I was living on the street, like you know what I mean? And my dad and his brothers are jailbirds, and they’re always here, or up away, or, you know what I mean? So, I just didn’t have any options whatsoever. After I lost hockey I lost everything.

Jonathan’s poignant story offers support for the existence of the seed of motivation and perseverance that a sense of belonging in school can offer to empower young people to see beyond the containment they are experiencing and provide the motivation needed to move forward. Thomas, Paul, Jason, and Joshua, through their stories, also highlighted the existence of this seed while simultaneously pointing to school as a hopeful second chance to escape this containment. As has been revealed through their stories and subsequent discussion, their hopefulness for school to be a place of belonging and growth was diminished along with their self-worth through various mechanisms of pathologization. This pathologization process effectively acted as a catalyst for the extension of their containment experiences into their adult lives.

The participants were invited to share their thoughts on the question, “Is the prison experience connected to the school experience?” and their responses were deeply insightful and grounded in their own individual experiences. Joshua approached the question by drawing similarities between school-based exclusionary discipline practices - detention, for example - to

'Lock-up'. He elaborated, stating that "detention can be looked at as a form of punishment" in the same way incarceration is "punishment in life for breaking the rules on the streets." He continued on to say that in school, "it's like the principals [and staff] are 'holdin' court' against the kids."

Thomas offered comments on the connections between the school and prison experiences that echoed his experiences with isolation and labeling in school.

> Somewhat, yeah, for sure, for a lot of people, especially my generation because there's so many guys that even when I met [them] in Whitbourne [youth detention centre] - I thought it was just me bein' singled out - but when I got to Whitbourne, there was so many other people there, from different places, doin' similar things, treated the same way - and there's a couple of 'em still here at HMP.

His perspective suggests that a sense of belonging that was lacking throughout his school experiences was found during his periods of incarceration, referencing the aforementioned concept of 'social shelter' and highlights the similarities he noticed between the people around him. The insights he offered regarding the people he was surrounded by during times of incarceration provides a direct connection to Stahl's suggestions that when considering the school to prison pipeline metaphor, "When schools are unpleasant places, individuals often search for spaces where they feel valued, such as the street which, in low-income neighborhoods, contributes to a high risk of associating with some form of criminal activity" (Stahl, 2017, p. 107). It is important here in this discussion to recall Jason's comments about his time in 'District School' after he was removed from the 'regular' school system:

> Yeah, they told me I was done there [at the 'regular' school] and they sent me to the

> ‘District School’ they called it…and I was around a bunch of kids that were just like me. I would just go there and kick it with the other ‘bad kids’. I think it was just a place to put me. Just to say, ‘Hey, he’s bein’ schooled’, you know what I mean?

Their perspectives speak to the power structures that exist within large institutions and the connections between these structures within the education and criminal justice systems. More importantly, they offer deep insight into the mechanisms of pathologization that drive the school-to-prison pipeline. Continuing with the process of elucidation of the essence of the school-to-prison pipeline metaphor, I argue that the notion of containment ‘frames’ the pipeline, in both the literal and figurative sense.

In the following final chapter, the participants’ advice for the educational system will be presented and discussed, along with implications for the educational and criminal justice systems.

Chapter 7: Recommendations and Implications

Keeping with the nature of phenomenological inquiry, this research seeks to honour the lived experiences of the participants at the centre of the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. Their narratives as presented in Chapter Four speak for themselves, as they provide us with the invaluable opportunity to reflect and learn. Presented with the intention of referring back to their narratives in Chapter Four and the discussion in its entirety, this Recommendations chapter offers the participants' advice for teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the education system holistically. Their recommendations came at the end of their individual interviews, with the purpose of providing space for reflection and contemplation within the flow of the recollection of their experiences. The participants were asked the open-ended questions: What advice do you have for teachers and administrators, and the education system as a whole? What advice do you have for students coming up through the school system?

For many of the participants, positive experiences during their time in school came via moments of hopefulness and connection with a particular teacher or administrator. The participants were offered the space to share what they believed were the characteristics and practices of that person that allowed for an authentic relationship to foster. Coupled with the nature of their advice for the education system, the emergence of this shared phenomenon speaks to the concept of relationality and the importance of authentic relationships in education.

Through his advice, Thomas urged educators to engage in relational practices by taking the time to truly 'know' the students in their care - "where they came from, their background,

their childhood, and what they're going through" - with the understanding that "where a child turns to go in life at an early age determines a lot". He clarified that while he understood that "there needs to be discipline" in schools, the choices that educators make when carrying out disciplinary action should be based upon decisions made after self-reflection as to why they became educators in the first place; "to help people."

Paul pointed out the need for a similar awareness in educators, advising them to understand that if a "kid is acting out" it is possible that this behaviour is a way for the child to "shelter himself" from the shame of "being so far behind." He elaborated on this, advocating for educators to enact in relationship building by taking "the kid aside and building an education plan that is actually suited for them." His advice was rooted not only in his personal experiences with school and life, but in his experiences as a father too. Thinking of his own son and his challenges in 'opening up' about issues he was experiencing, he challenges educators to work with their students to "find out just how educated they actually are" and establish a plan to move forward together.

Jason's advice focused on the deep need for educators to have empathy and compassion for their students and realize that "that's just a kid and there's reasons why that kid is being the way he's being." He asserted that educators "need to be that one person [for that kid] that is there to work with them instead of being against them." He spoke of a mutual respect that can evolve from authentic relationships, and instead of singling a student out, educators should work to "figure out ways to shape things around them." He stated that through this process, school will perhaps become "the positive outlet instead of being a place where they can come and be negative because of everything else they have going on in their lives."

Joshua suggested that the most effective way for educators to connect with their students on a deeper level is to practice openness, and not be afraid to show them the "negative" consequences of how a life without education can look. Coupled with this, he suggested that discipline could be reframed in a way so that the student does not see it as 'punishment'; instead, they could see it as a way to better themselves in their lives and benefit their class and community as a whole.

The participants collectively urged students in the system today to try and find it within themselves to "never give up" in the face of adversity because "all you can do is try." Jonathan reminded them to "keep going" because "somebody out there has got it worse than you, and one day it can get better." Jason extended this notion by suggesting that students try to adopt a sense of "openness" by not being afraid to share their feelings because "if you look hard enough and reach out, you never know what you're gonna find."

It is vital at this point in the discussion to revisit and contemplate the statement of Irby (2017) when he discusses the "dispossession of a young person's human potential" and the politics of disposability and containment that accompany it (p. 18). Speaking to the previous discussion of the mechanisms of pathologization and criminalization that drive the school-to-prison pipeline, Irby suggests that these mechanisms occur through the creation of categories of "otherness" that enable people in positions of official power to act in ways that diminish an oppressed person's autonomy… relational connections, ability to fulfill substantive needs, and strips away at his or her sense of self" (p. 18). I argue that the process of 'othering' is rooted in a state of 'unknowing'. This state of existence often arises from a certain stagnancy of ignorance within the self that gives rise to a lack of understanding as to how to 'dwell together' in authentic

relationship with others. Through this research, determining my positionality as researcher, and my own experiences as an educator, I have realized the sheer importance of recognizing the power held within the institutional 'soft structures' and the profound influence these structures have on the lives of the human beings who exist within them, students and educators alike.

So what does this all mean for us as educators? As humans? Framed and driven by containment, is the pipeline a collection of people experiencing abandonment, forced together by failed relationships? As educators, we need to ask ourselves, "What is preventing us from being in authentic relationship with people who are experiencing marginalization?" and "How do we contend with the notion that schools can be places of trauma carried out in the name of education?"

The education system needs to 'wake up' to its role in the school-to-prison pipeline by uncovering and truly acknowledging the ways in which deficit discourses within institutional soft structures - organizational culture, communication processes, leadership practices, knowledge and expertise, and most importantly, relationships - can become weapons of trauma for those which they are supposed to serve. While these structures exist with the formal hierarchical components of the institution, they are the very foundation upon which the institution is built. They can become, as Irby (2017) would say, the "indignities on which the school-to-prison pipeline is built"; or they can become the honors on which authentic relationships are built.

Relational pedagogies are educational approaches that prioritize the cultivation of positive relationships as a fundamental element of the learning process - the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with their students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support them throughout their journeys together (Su and Wood,

2023). These approaches, such as restorative justice practices, trauma-informed practices, and social-emotional learning, are gaining increasing recognition in educational research. However, they can be co-opted by educational institutions with the expectations placed on the shoulders of educators to put them into practice without the required institutional supports in place. It can be particularly difficult for educators experiencing the stress and financial insecurity of a precarious job contract, exacerbated by factors such as lack of access to suitable places to meet with students to discuss their work, insufficient time for marking and feedback, and heavy teaching loads (Su and Wood, 2023, p. 232). The reality of circumstances such as these can make it difficult for educators to connect meaningfully and build learning relationships with their students.

Most importantly, practices not clearly grounded in a view of humanity as worthy and interconnected can be rudderless, so that even the most diligent attempts at developing relationships can be side-tracked (Vaandering, 2011). For educators to effectively enact relational practices in their classrooms, these conditions of groundedness need to exist at the institutional level if these institutions "are serious about the teaching quality and student learning experience as they have claimed" (Su and Wood, 2023, p. 232).

Through this research, professional practice, and the planning and engagement of professional learning alongside school districts and government stakeholders, I have observed a general lack of deep understanding of the concept of relationality that brings with it a certain sense of confusion and hesitancy when it comes to moving it forward on an institutional level. It is my suggestion here that this hesitancy may stem from a similar process as mentioned previously, a certain stagnancy of ignorance that can arise from a fear of what we will find when

doing the required work of ‘looking inward’ first and foremost within the self. Educator and reflexive praxis researcher Ellyn Lyle articulates this eloquently when she says, “Sometimes we face uncomfortable renderings of the self that leave us feeling fractured, our identities in crisis” (2019).

For those facing these ‘uncomfortable renderings’ for the first time, I assert that the ‘only way out is through’ by recognizing and holding onto our interconnectedness as humans. This process also holds true for the larger ‘breaking down of silos’ that needs to happen in our educational system, criminal justice system, and communities to reveal the interconnectedness that exists therein.

I am deeply grateful to the participants who entrusted me with their stories, hoping that sharing them would benefit others. I emphasize the importance of hearing, understanding, and valuing their wisdom and insight with a sense of urgency. The implications for this research are vast, and this thesis serves as a springboard for further exploration into the multitude of themes and their significance, ultimately serving to inform and inspire meaningful systems change.

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Appendix A

Ethics Approval Letter

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561
icehr@mun.ca

www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	**20200614-ED**
Approval Period:	October 15, 2019 – October 31, 2020
Funding Source:	Not Funded
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Education
Title of Project:	*Impact of K-12 Schooling on Incarcerated People in Newfoundland and Labrador*

October 15, 2019

Danielle McGettigan
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Danielle McGettigan:

Thank you for your correspondence of October 2, 2019 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project. ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* to October 31, 2020. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before October 31, 2020. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact

with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are required to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. If you need to make changes during the project which may raise ethical concerns, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration prior to implementation. If funding is obtained subsequent to approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR before this clearance can be linked to your award.

All post-approval event forms noted above can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications: Post-Review* link on your Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research

KB/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Faculty of Education

Appendix B

Current Ethics Approval

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

ICEHR Approval #:	20200614-ED
Researcher Portal File #:	20200614
Project Title:	*Impact of K-12 Schooling on Incarcerated People in Newfoundland and Labrador*
Associated Funding:	Not Funded
Supervisor:	Dr. Dorothy Vaandering
Clearance expiry date:	**October 31, 2024**

Dear Danielle McGettigan:

Thank you for your response to our request for an annual update advising that your project will continue without any changes that would affect ethical relations with human participants.

On behalf of the Chair of ICEHR, I wish to advise that the ethics clearance for this project has been extended to **October 31, 2024**. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) requires that you submit another annual update to ICEHR on your project prior to this date.

We wish you well with the continuation of your research.

Sincerely,

DEBBY GULLIVER
Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)
Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Appendix C

Sample Informed Consent Form

Faculty of Education
www.mun.ca

Informed Consent Form

Title: *Impact of K-12 Schooling on Incarcerated People in Newfoundland and Labrador*

Researcher: *Danielle McGettigan, Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, p16dgm@mun.ca, (709)693-0466*
Supervisor: *Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, Faculty of Education, dvaandering@mun.ca*

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled: *Impact of K-12 Schooling on Incarcerated People in Newfoundland and Labrador*

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, *Danielle McGettigan*, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction

I am Danielle McGettigan, a Masters student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University. As part of my thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, associate professor in the Faculty of Education.

As a high school teacher and current graduate student, I am experienced in working with people from a variety of backgrounds including those who have experienced challenges in their lives. I also have significant experience in the handling of sensitive information.

As a Masters student I am gaining experience in applying ethical research skills under the supervision of Dr. Vaandering who is an accomplished educator/researcher with experience and research interests in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the educational context.

In this research I hope to give you the opportunity to share your experiences with school and how they might have impacted your adult life.

Purpose of study:

To my knowledge, there has been little to no research completed on the school experiences of incarcerated persons. I propose to help fill this gap as these experiences are extremely important to informing research in this area.

My plan is to conduct in-depth, one-on-one interviews with people who have experience with incarceration to gain insight into their school experiences. I am hoping to find out how your school experience impacted your life.

What you will do in this study:

You will participate in a one-on-one interview during which you will be asked a series of guided, open-ended questions to guide our conversation. I will invite you to speak openly and candidly about your experiences with school using questions such as, "Describe your high school experience. *How did this experience affect you?"*

You will be able to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will be reminded of this at the start of the interview.

Length of time:

Approximately 30 minutes for preliminary/introductory meeting followed by approximately 60 minutes per interview.

Withdrawal from the study:

At any point before, during, or after the interview if you decide to withdraw, you can let me know. This will have no consequences. I can be contacted directly by phone at 709-693-0466 or you may inform the prison council facilitator who will then communicate this to me.

Once the interview data has been transcribed and you have had the opportunity to read and approve it, your participation can no longer be withdrawn. One week after the interview ends, you will be contacted to discuss any potential questions you may have.

Possible benefits:

This research study could be beneficial to you as it seeks to give voice to your school experience and any impacts this experience has had on your adult life.

There has been little to no research completed in this way, in this field, in NL. The focus will be on shedding light on your authentic, lived school experiences.

Possible risks:

You may find describing your school experience and subsequent experiences with incarceration to be emotionally triggering. Due to this, counselling, in the form of the HMP psychologist, will be available on-site during and after the interviews.
You will be able to make a specific appointment time with the HMP psychologist if desired. You will be reminded of counselling services available to you before the start of your interview.

Confidentiality

It is my ethical duty to safeguard your identity, personal information, and data from unauthorized access, use, or disclosure. The data from the research project may be published in a journal or presented at a conference, but the data will be reported in aggregate form which means I share what I have learned from you, not specific details about you. Protecting your privacy and confidentiality is extremely important and will be maintained throughout the research project.

Anonymity:

Anonymity refers to not disclosing your identifying characteristics, such as name or description of physical appearance.

Your identity and personal information will be safeguarded and not discussed with any persons outside of the investigation team. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in the release of findings, and no other personally identifiable information will be discussed. While your participation will not be directly reported, prison guards or other staff may know who participates in the study, due to the confined, secure and routine nature of the environment.

Birth names will NOT be used and pseudonyms (fake names) will be used instead. Birth dates (except the year) will not be collected, nor descriptions of physical appearances.

You will be interviewed individually, thus increasing anonymity.

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure your anonymity, and that you will not be identified in any reports and publications without your explicit permission.

Recording of Data:

Each interview, with your permission, will be recorded using a digital audio recorder capturing the raw data for future transcription and analysis by me. The recordings will be held on a password protected, encrypted hard drive and will be used solely for transcription purposes.

Storage of Data:

I, the principal investigator, and my supervisor Dr. Vaandering will have access to and supervision of the data. Data will be stored on a password protected, encrypted hard drive and deleted after the required retention period. I will have a copy, and Dr. Vaandering will have a copy.

Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Reporting of Results:

Transcription, Thesis, direct quotations, no personally identifying information

The data will be used in a thesis and reported in a summarized form. Any direct quotations used will not contain any personally identifying information.

What I learn from the research project may be published in a journal or presented at a conference, but the data will be reported in aggregate form which will mean that you cannot be personally identified from the data presented in the study.

Once complete, the thesis will be available online via the QEII Thesis Collection: https://research.library.mun.ca/view/theses_dept/

Sharing of Results with Participants:

After interviews are transcribed, I will employ member-checking. This means that once I transcribe the interview, I will return to you with the printed transcription in order to validate your responses and check for accuracy. I will provide you with a copy to read yourself, or if you wish, I will read the transcription of your interview aloud to you. At that time, you can change or clarify anything you said in your interview. The transcription copy will be destroyed once you have finished reviewing it. Once the project is complete, copies of the final thesis document will be made available to you if requested. I will make copies of a summary of the results and deliver them to HMP to be distributed to you.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: *Danielle McGettigan, p16dgm@mun.ca (709) 693-0466, Dr. Dorothy Vaandering, dvaandering@mun.ca*

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:
Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read (or listened to) and understand the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.

- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be destroyed.
- If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:

☐ I have read/listened to what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to the use of quotations that contain no personally identifiable information. ☐ Yes ☐ No

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

Appendix D

Sample Interview Questions

Note: *Italicized questions* are follow-up probing questions to the initial prompt.

Describe your earliest memories of school. *How did these experiences affect you? What dimensions, incidents and people connected with the experience stand out for you?*

Tell me in as much detail as possible about the first experience you can remember with being disciplined (by a teacher or administrator) in school. *How did this experience affect you? What dimensions, incidents and people connected with the experience stand out for you?*

Tell me about your overall experience with discipline in school. *What feelings were generated by the experience?*

Tell me about your most memorable experience with discipline in school. *How did this affect your opinions of yourself?*

Describe how you think your teachers and administrators felt about their students.

Describe how you think your teachers and administrators felt about you. *How did their perceptions of you affect your view of yourself?*

From your perspective, what happened that resulted in you experiencing incarceration?

What do you feel you needed from school?

What did you hope school would be for you?

What advice do you have for teachers and administrators? For the school system as a whole?

What advice do you have for students coming up through the school system?

Is the prison experience connected to the school experience?

Appendix E

Code List

- **Attitude Towards School**
  - Frustration
  - Hopefulness
  - Hopelessness
  - Anger
  - Abandonment
  - Embarassment
  - Isolation
  - Apathetic
  - Reckless/Acting Out
  - School as Sanctuary / Escape
  - Belonging
  - Understood
  - Bullying Others
  - Being Bullied
  - Overwhelmed
  - Worthless
  - Betrayal
  - Valuable
  - School as Prison
  - Fear
  - Enjoyment
  - Academic Success
  - Athletic Success
- **Attitude Towards Self**
  - Positive
  - Negative
  - Self-Aware
  - Confusion
  - Disposable
  - Feelings of Anger
  - Precocious
  - Guilt
  - Doubt
  - Persistent
- **Exceptionality**
  - ADHD
  - LD
  - Behaviour
  - ADD
- **SES**
  - general SES
  - Poverty
- **Attitude Towards Teacher**
  - Respectful
  - Appreciative
  - Frustrated
  - Angry
  - Lack of Respect
  - Distrustful
  - Student Assistant - Negative
  - Student Assistant - Positive
  - Feeling judged
  - Assault
  - Connected
  - Apathy
  - Worthy
  - Misunderstood
  - Contempt
- **Criminal Activity**
  - Early CA
  - General CA
- **Disciplined in School**
  - Suspension
  - Expulsion
  - Calls home
  - Leaving
  - In-School Suspension
  - Sent out of Class
  - District School
  - Whitbourne
  - Detention
  - Community Service
- **Major Life Events**
  - MLE - misc
  - Alcohol/Drug Abuse
  - Death of Family Member or F
- **Home Life**
  - Maternal - Positive
  - Maternal - Negative
  - Paternal - Positive
  - Paternal - Negative
  - Foster Care
  - Siblings
  - Left Home
  - Abuse
  - Maternal - Mental Illness
  - Paternal - Mental Illness
  - Containment
  - Disposability
  - Isolated
  - Lack of Structure
  - Group Home
  - Treatment Facility
  - Acceptance
  - Security
  - Loss
  - Small Community/Rural
  - Urban
- **Advice for Teachers/Admin**
  - Empathy
  - Varied Approach
  - Compassion
  - Kindness
  - Open-mindedness
  - Awareness
  - Respect
  - Connectedness
  - Sedulity
- **Advice for Students**
  - Persistence
  - Connection
  - Perspective
  - Diligence
- **What School Should Be**
  - Future Prep
  - Life Success
  - Life Skills
  - Safe Haven
  - Non-Punitive Discipline
  - Reality Check