

**THE EXPERIENCE OF COERCION AND FORCED EDUCATION IN A
LABOUR MARKET ACTIVATION CONTEXT**

IAN CURRAN

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Abstract

On 28 November, 2010 the Irish government entered the European Troika's bailout programme. The austerity measures that came with it had a demoralising effect on the hundreds of thousands left unemployed after the economic downturn. The consequences of this are that it is the most vulnerable in society who are hit hardest by austerity. So, this thesis uses critical theory as a theoretical framework to highlight how the hidden curriculum contributes to a negative experience in first chance education. Also, the hidden curriculum prepares us for the workplace and contributes to why we tend to succumb to and obey the authority figures we encounter in life. From a Marxist perspective, capitalism is not just about economic exploitation. The ideas of the ruling elite are crucial in supporting this ideology and they depend on consent to maintain their power, which is achieved by controlling influential institutions such as the police, armed forces and the media. In relation to this research, it is the Department of Social Protection and labour market activation that results in job seekers experiencing coercion and forced education. These changes to policy and a renegotiation of the social contract have meant that someone who is in receipt of social welfare payments "must meet certain conditions or face payment reduction or sanctions if they do not attend meetings or participate in appropriate employment schemes, training or work experience" (Citizens Information, 2017). The methodology used is qualitative and three life history interviews were conducted. This thesis argues that labour market activation policy completely ignores the biographical context of the individual. Ultimately, when you take someone out of their context and then place them in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable environment, it can be a negative experience.

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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Aontas	National Adult Learning Organisation
APJ	Action Plan for Jobs
CE	Community Employment
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DSP	Department of Social Protection
EU	European Union
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Intreo	A new service from the Department of Social Protection. It is a single point of contact for all employment and income supports.
JobBridge	A scheme was a national internship scheme formulated in 2011 by the government of Ireland.
JobPath	An approach to employment activation which caters mainly for people who are long-term unemployed (over 12 months) to assist them to secure and sustain full-time paid employment or self-employment.
Job Seekers Benefit	Is a weekly payment from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to people who are out of work and are covered by social insurance (PRSI)
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PTW	Pathways to Work
PPP	Personal Progression Plan
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
Seetec	has been selected by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) to deliver JobPath in the Dublin, Border, and West regions and parts of the Mid-East and Midlands regions
SJI	Social Justice Ireland
Tús	Community Work Placement Initiative
Unite	Britain's biggest union

Chapter One – Introduction

1.1: Introduction

This introductory chapter begins by discussing what my research is about and introduces the reader to the three people who agreed to participate in this study. Next, I will discuss the recession and how these new labour market activation policies came about. Thirdly, I will explain to the reader why this research is relevant to me. Finally, I will outline the structure of the thesis.

1.2: Research

The aim of this research is to provide an account of an unemployed job seeker who has experienced coercion and forced education in a labour market activation context. The premise of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the participants lived experience, but more importantly allow them to tell their story, in their own words.

1.3: The Participants

I now would like to formally introduce you to the three participants of this research. All have selected pseudonyms of their choice and due to the sensitive nature of this study, other steps have been taken to protect the participant's identities. So, age, geographical location and where needed, other identifying information has also been changed.

Frank worked in the construction industry until the crash. He was unemployed for three years before he found part-time work. He currently works a few days a week and must complete and post out a casual docket to his local Department of Social Protection (DSP) office on a weekly basis. Robbie worked as a mail room clerk and since the recession, he has remained unemployed. He still regularly engages with the DSP. Joe is back in full-time employment and the only participant from this study to return to his former profession and full-time employment.

1.4: Recession

After the economic crash of 2008, economic think-tanks came to the rescue and saved the Irish economy from financial meltdown. It was then up to the population to help with the recovery and suffer the successive austerity measures that came with it. In my opinion it was the most vulnerable in society who had to bear the brunt of austerity.

Social Justice Ireland (SJI) (2012) released figures highlighting that the unemployment rate enlarged from 4.2 per cent in 2007 to 13.7 per cent in April 2013 and social welfare was cut from €204.30 to €188 a week". Subsequently, we witnessed an increase in emigration. A qualitative research study by Time to go? (2013) reported that since 2009 over 300,000 people have emigrated from Ireland. A 2013 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stressed that income inequality in Ireland is above the OECD average, but the gap between rich and poor became even greater. Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2012) statistics revealed that those at the top tier of Irish society were least affected by the recession and actually saw their disposable income increase by 8 per cent but in 2010, people within the lowest income bracket's disposable income decreased by 26 per cent.

In relation to this research, unemployment becomes a harsh reality of life under austerity. Furthermore, by agreeing to the terms of the International Monetary Fund/European Union (IMF/EU) bailout programme, the Irish Social Welfare system opened up its doors to the free market. Essentially, Neoliberalism is an economic ideology which has "become hegemonic as a mode of discourse" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3), it encourages the free market, the privatisation of state assets, the deregulation of trade and finance, and over time it has had "pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). As mentioned earlier, the Irish state has had to submit to the demands of economic bailout conditions and one of the core traits of neo-liberalism is "if markets do not exist (in areas such as education, or social security) then they must be created, by state action if necessary"

(Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In essence, neoliberalism orchestrates what is happening in Irish welfare policy.

The commitments to the bailout, caused the Irish government to make radical changes to welfare policy which had a detrimental effect on the lives of the unemployed. In July 2014, Social Justice Ireland's poverty and income distribution report indicated that since the recession, it is estimated that 120, 000 Irish people are living in poverty, nearly one in five children live in households where the families income is below the poverty line and most social welfare payments paid to single people are also below the poverty line.

Hopefully, this research will give the reader some insight into the lived experience of coercion and forced education that manifested from the transformation of labour market activation in Ireland.

1.5: Personal Nature of the Research

I graduated from Maynooth University in 2014. It was a bittersweet feeling. In a way, I was delighted that I had a BA double honours degree, but I was angry and unemployed. I began my educational journey four years earlier, and although I now had academic credentials I was back where I started, giving the government my autograph every Tuesday. The reason that this research became relevant and important to me ensued in the autumn of the same year.

It all began with a letter I received from my local Intreo office. In order to meet the terms of my Job Seekers Benefit, I had to attend a meeting at the offices of my local employment services. There were a dozen other unemployed males and me in attendance. We were greeted by two middle-aged men who after a brief introduction performed a PowerPoint presentation. They gave us the good cop, bad cop routine. Using an authoritarian approach one Intreo officer highlighted the importance of finding employment and emphasised the significance of proving that we were looking for work. His colleague was friendlier and informed us that they were there to support us and training would be provided to get us reskilled and back into employment.

Personally, I felt extremely frustrated. I noticed that there was very few genuine job offers available. Plus, I had been actively seeking employment since I graduated and I couldn't even get an interview for any position I applied for. If there were no jobs out there, then why was I here?

As I looked around the room I recognised a few faces from town and felt that everybody in attendance wouldn't be in this situation if there were genuine job opportunities out there and if they hadn't of been affected by the recession. This was confirmed once we revealed our employment history and when we compiled a list of the areas of employment that we were best suited to. As touched on earlier, in my opinion, the only reason long-term unemployment was a common theme in our discussions was that in reality there was a lack of genuine career opportunities. We were all assigned a case officer and had to attend a subsequent meeting the following week. Again, the Intreo officers repeated their introductory speech and concluded by stressing the importance of agreeing to the terms of our Job Seekers Benefit. Failure to turn up for meetings, accept any training offers or employment would result in a reduction in payment.

Over the coffee break, I got chatting to the other attendees and the main topic of conversation was the issue of completing a course and returning to education. There was a real sense of apprehension in the room. As we chatted in small groups those in attendance expressed their fear of having to return to education, do a CE scheme or be placed on the dreaded JobBridge programme. The gathering concluded with the bad cop telling us that if we failed to attend the meeting with our case officer that we could see our benefit reduced.

The following week I attended the meeting with my new case officer. She looked through my employment history. She felt that I should do a health care course and with my BA degree, there might be further employment opportunities in that sector. I really didn't want to do a healthcare course but I was aware that if I refused I would have my Job Seekers Benefit cut. I had a mortgage and bills to pay and I was also worried that this could possibly lead to a job as a care assistant. I am certainly not lazy. From the age of fourteen up until the economic crisis, I was always employed.

However, I definitely didn't want to do that as an occupation and felt that emotionally and mentally I wouldn't be able to do that as a profession.

As a mature student at Maynooth University, I had an extremely positive experience and enjoyed my three years as an undergraduate. It was my decision to attend but now I was in a position where I was participating in forced education. The course itself was QQI NFQ Level 5 Certificate in Healthcare Support for Healthcare Assistants. I found the content of the course modules relatively easy, but as I observed the other learners I noticed that the majority of them were struggling. Literacy issues, lack of Information Technology (IT) knowledge, computer skills and the inability to complete assignments was daunting to some of my peers. Throughout the course, I helped one man in particular, who was finding the entire experience overwhelming. No learning support was offered and the banking approach (Freire, 2005) to education was delivered by the tutor.

When I got accepted and gained a place on the Higher Diploma in Further Education (H-dip), I finally had a way out. I thought to myself how lucky I was to have an alternative to this Healthcare course and profession. The timing of this news couldn't have been better. Three hundred hours of work experience was also a requirement of the course. This was something that really left me unsettled. I felt that I was being exploited as it was unpaid labour in a demanding environment. Other key concerns for me involved the responsibility of caring for vulnerable people and my own mental state.

I arrived on my first day at 8 am. Straight away without an induction course or tour of the residential unit, I was in a small room with three patients. A Filipino nurse accompanied me and we set out to wash an overweight man in his sixties. To begin with, we had to lift him out of the bed with a hoist. He had a urinary catheter attached and when I saw this, I nearly passed out. The room was particularly warm, smelt awful, and as we worked at a frantic pace, I was continuously wiping the sweat off my forehead, the sound of the other patients shouting could be heard in the background. It was obvious that the nurses and carers were understaffed and on a few occasions, the nurse told me that it was great having someone to help. The man we cared for was

able to engage in conversation as we washed and dressed him. When we were finished, I placed him in his wheelchair and took him to the recreation room.

The next patient we tended too, was extremely hostile and covered in some of his own faeces. The smell was unbearable. I sweated profoundly and rubbed his arm affectionately as the nurse cleaned him. He calmed down and his roars were replaced with quiet mumbling. She cared for him to the best of her ability but was under so much pressure to get to the next patient. I noted that there were signs of bodily waste still on the sheets. This wasn't a lack of neglect from the nurse she was just overworked and had another patient waiting to be cared for. By the time we got to the next resident we were joined by another carer who helped the nurse wash and clean this gentleman. He had dementia and was rather aggressive. He spat in the carers face and lashed out at the nurse. At this point I had my mind made up and when we finished I informed the head nurse that I was quitting. This type of work wasn't for me. The labour process resembled one of the many production lines that I worked on in the past. Just like the manufacturing industry, we had targets to meet on a whiteboard. Although, the targets now were not products, but human beings. The process was exactly like a conveyer belt on a production line and the work ethic and objectives were disturbingly similar.

I walked home relieved but semi-apprehensive. If the DSP discovered that I didn't abide by the term and conditions of my personal progression plan, maybe my job seekers benefit could be cut. I was living from week to week and struggling financially. Any reduction in payment would have a detrimental effect on my day to day living. I took a chance and just reported that I couldn't find a work placement and had finished the course. The ensuing months leading up to undertaking the H-dip remained free from any contact with Intreo or the DSP. However, the experience stuck with me and I often thought about what mental or physical state I would be in if I had no alternative options and ended up as a care assistant in the pressure cooker environment of healthcare. When I decided to register for the Masters in Adult and Community Education I immediately thought that forced education would make an interesting area of research.

1.6: Thesis Content

The remainder of this thesis is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter Two: Will discuss the methodology used. It will also reveal both my ontological and epistemological stance and outline the methodology conducted. The process of data collection and analysis will then be highlighted and any ethical issues I encountered will be highlighted.

Chapter Three: Explores the relevant literature that shaped this research. It examines ideology, the hidden curriculum and coercion and forced education. Throughout, this research it links the relevant policy to the literature.

Chapters Four and Chapter Five: My analysis and findings section is divided into two separate chapters. In both chapters, I examine the key themes that emerged from the interviews I conducted. This allows those who have experienced coercion and forced education to tell their story. Moreover, I attempt to make meaning of the data I collected from the conversations I had with the three participants and link the findings to the theoretical framework I used. Chapter Four will focus on life before labour market activation and Chapter Five will concentrate on the experiences during and after the labour market activation process.

Chapter Six: Will conclude by presenting what I have learned during this research.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1: Introduction

The objective of my research was to explore the experiences of coercion and forced education in a labour market activation context. To complete this thesis, I needed to collect primary data and obviously, this could only be achieved by speaking to people with lived experience. This chapter departs with an explanation of both my ontological and epistemological positions. I then provide a description of the data collection methods utilised. Next, I will discuss the sample and data analysis. Finally, I will highlight the ethical considerations.

2.2: My Ontological and Epistemological Position

According to Grix (2002) ontology is the starting point of all research. When I decided to register for the Med in Adult and Community Education, I wanted to study something that was relevant to me. I felt that having experienced both coercion and forced education it would make for an interesting area of research. In turn, this shared experience with the participants of this study has proved to be an invaluable tool throughout my thesis and as May (2010) points out that “both the researcher and those, people who are part of the research, carry with them a history, a sense of themselves and the importance of their experiences” (p. 21). Furthermore, the knowledge I wanted to discover is as Cresswell (2007) states “known through – the subjective experiences of people” (p. 20). From the literature that has shaped this research, a critical theory paradigm is the most suitable theoretical framework as it also matches my own ontological stance which seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244).

From an epistemological viewpoint, the knowledge I wanted to uncover was also from lived experience and as Ryan (2002) highlights that epistemology “is thus concerned with the nature of knowledge, what constitutes valid knowledge, what can be known and who can be the knower (p. 15). This would be achieved through qualitative research and solely life story interviews.

2.3: Qualitative Research

As eluded to earlier, due to the nature of this study, quantitative data analysis was never really an option. As qualitative data analysis:

Engages researchers more actively with subjects than a standard survey research. The researchers must listen to lengthy explanations, ask follow-up questions tailored to the preceding answers, seek to learn about interrelated belief systems or personal approaches to things – rather than measure a limited set of variables. (Schutt, 1999, p. 303)

I wanted to find out about people's experiences. So, the best method of research was qualitative which "fundamentally is a non-mathematical analytical procedure that involves examining the meaning of people's words and actions" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 121). Who better than to tell of their experiences of forced education than those with the lived experience. I wanted rich data and life story interviews would be the method I used to obtain this data.

I wanted to uncover the participant's story. Plus, I believe it is impossible to understand the subject of coercion and forced education without hearing about individual biographies. Hearing the participant's story is important and as Atkinson (1998) points out it:

Brings order and meaning to the life being told, for both the life being told, for both the teller and the listener. It is a way to better understand the past and the present and a way to leave a personal legacy for the future" (p. 8)

As the interviewer, it was my job to guide the interview and let the interviewee describe the life they have lived to date. With regard to this study, life stories are an important part of the research. As Atkinson highlights that they:

Affirm, validate and support our own experience in relation to those around us. They enforce the norms of moral order and shape the individual to the requirements of the society" (1998, p. 10).

By guiding the interviewee, it allowed me to adapt questions and the flexibility of this method permitted me to follow up and investigate any important leads. Whereas, a standard formal interview involves a question and answering procedure, I felt that it doesn't provide the same results as it can restrict the participant from talking freely and can also be a bit intimidating and regimented compared to an informal approach.

2.4: Sample

My research question explored a specific group. I wanted to be able to hear from others who shared the same experiences as myself. Originally, I didn't know where to start and found it very hard to recruit some interviewees. I emailed all my Gmail contacts explaining the nature of my research, what it entailed and if they wished to participate in an interview. Furthermore, I stated that if they hadn't experienced forced education themselves would they considering asking any friends, family or colleagues who had. I also placed a similar request as a Facebook status. I received one reply from this process and then asked the respondent if they knew of anybody who also shared this experience. The process is known as snowballing and it proved fruitful "this technique is useful for hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify, interconnected populations" (Schutt, 1999, p. 131).

In the end, the final sample is derived from using a snowball approach to sampling which resulted in the final three participants all being men and aged between thirty and thirty-nine years. Additionally, with it being a small sample, it means that it is non-representative of the general population. Nevertheless, it permitted me to form three rigorous interviews and I believe that the data I gathered is relevant and important.

2.5: Data Analysis

Once I had selected a research method, nominated a sample method and guaranteed that the research was conducted within a professional code of ethics I was able to begin. After initial contact, two of the respondents asked to be interviewed in their home and one suggested that we meet in a local coffee shop. The first interview proved

to be successful and this permitted me to continue with life story interviews throughout the research. As touched on previously, once the interview was completed the recording was uploaded to my laptop, listened to and then transcribed the very same day. After the initial interview, some concepts were still fresh in my mind but more importantly, I knew how time-consuming transcribing can be and by doing the transcripts early, it ensured that I had the opportunity to prevent this from occurring in any subsequent interviews. This was evident in the theme of fear that I discovered and was a major theme in the final thesis. If I hadn't adopted this approach I might have been unsuccessful in discovering elements from such an important finding.

This enabled me to see what categorizations and themes developed from these findings, any key topics, codes, categories, recurring themes that emerge were underlined and highlighted. These themes were then interconnected to the literature review and my research question. I also made photocopies of the transcripts and proceeded to cut out the various themes and colour coded them. Each theme was then pinned onto the wall in my office and visually this benefited me and made the task of categorising easy. From this process, I developed a systematic approach to writing the analysis of findings and the discussion chapter.

2.6: Ethical Considerations

By following Maynooth University's social research ethics guidelines, I was aware that subject well-being is a serious ethical consideration that is a fundamental part of fieldwork "every field researcher should consider carefully before beginning a project how to avoid harm to subjects" (Schutt, 1999, p. 320). Taking this on board, I attached contact details for an organisation on the consent form (see appendix).

By disclosing sensitive information, the interviewees could see "direct harm to the reputations or feelings of particular individuals is what researchers must carefully avoid" (Schutt, 1999, p.320). After I explained the details of the consent form I asked the participants to select a pseudonym of their choice as it protects their anonymity and gives them an input into the research.

When conducting previous research, to ensure that the participants are tranquil and content beforehand, I began by talking a little about myself and my research. I then asked them to briefly tell me a bit about themselves, such as their hobbies and interests. By using this technique, I created a rather comfortable environment for the interviews to take place, but more importantly, it allowed for an open framework and saw that two-way communication flourished, which allowed the interviewee to feel more relaxed. Once, this relationship was established and the interviewee felt comfortable, I proceeded with the interview. I was aware that unemployment, poverty and bad experiences can trigger one's emotions so I abided by the recommendations of Schutt (1999) who believes that “it is also important to establish rapport with subjects by considering in advance how they will react to the interview arrangements and by developing an approach that does not violate their standards for social behaviour” (1999, p. 305).

After analysing and transcribing the interviews, I still felt ethically obligated to change and omit certain aspects from my findings. I believe that some features and characteristics of the people who emerged from our conversations made them identifiable. For that reason, I made the respective changes that were necessary. However, these changes did not change the data retrieved or in the context in which it was given. Also, some of the data I collected was of a sensitive nature. So, when I believed that certain issues might develop from my findings, I contacted the participants directly and provided them with a copy of the transcript. I only proceeded when the participants were happy with the transcript and were satisfied that their identity remained anonymous and secure. I strongly believe that I managed all issues of confidentiality to the best of my ability and that the final research project is ethically sound.

All interviews were conducted by myself and recorded on a Smart Recorder application on my Sony Xperia phone. The recordings were then uploaded onto an external hard drive in a password-protected folder. The research data will remain in a secured location until my research project is graded, after five years, all participant data will be destroyed. Throughout my research, I was aware of the power dynamics at play and throughout I was aware to never abuse this position. All subjects were

treated respectfully and considerately throughout the time I spent in the field. My interviews and all my findings will be presented honestly, neutrally, and openly.

2.7: Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted why this research is relevant to me. Also, I revealed both my ontological and epistemological positions which are rooted within the realms of critical theory. I believe that my study is addressing issues of exploitation and inequality, which have been established by lived experience. Moreover, I have justified my sole reliance on qualitative research methods. The proceeding chapter will look at the literature that shaped this study and the theoretical framework for this research.

Chapter Three – Literature Review

3.1: Introduction.

The aim of this research is to allow those who have experienced coercion and forced education in a labour market activation setting, to tell their story. Power is exercised in diverse ways within society. Be it coercive, economic or ideological. It is a force which preserves the dominant class in powerful positions. According to Giddens (1997), ideology is the “shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups” (p. 83). So why do we merely accept the hand we are dealt? To answer this question, I will begin by discussing ideology. Which Althusser (1971) states “represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their conditions of existence” (p. 162-165). Next, I will look at the pivotal role that the hidden curriculum plays in preparing us for the workplace. This then permits me to investigate the concept of coercion and consent formation by using the Department of Social Protection’s (DSP) policy of payment reduction for those who refuse to undertake education or training offers. Throughout this literature review, I will focus and draw on two specific documents which affect current issues, Pathways to Work (2012) and Action Plans for Jobs (2012).

3.2: Ideology

Ideology embodies the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness" (Marx, 1970, p. 47). Marx developed a theory of base and superstructure “the connection of the social and political structure with production” (1970, p.41). The base is centred on both the means (tools, machinery, factory’s, materials) and relations of production (the property capital, commodities, bourgeoisie and proletariat). The superstructure is linked to all elements of society. This comprises of ideology, the norms, beliefs and values. It also includes the social institutions that exist in society (education, religion, the media) politics and government. This superstructure manifests from the base and is essential for legitimising the status quo and allows them to be dominant and in turn, it reproduces inequality:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time, its ruling intellectual force. The class, which has the means of social production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant relationships grasped as ideas. (Marx and Engles, 1970, p. 64)

In capitalist society, the ideas of the status quo are the “ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of their dominance” (1970, p. 64) and from this ideology we see their dominance legitimised. The outcome of this means that a false consciousness manifests, the way the world functions is masked and we fail to see how the world really works. One ideology that emerges from this superstructure is the false stereotype that the unemployed are “seen to be “a bunch of scroungers looking to spend more time on the sofa” (Barnes, 2012).

A variety of contributing factors adds to the general public perceiving that those in receipt of unemployment benefit are lazy, workshy and happy to live on benefits. The right-wing press reinforces these negative stereotypes of the unemployed being less productive members of society. The jobless are viewed as a problem and a blemish on society. The person unemployed is caught in a trap and especially in a recession, it is difficult to get out of. As a social problem, it is easy to manipulate to favour of those in power. The experience of unemployment is captured brilliantly by Boland & Griffin (2015):

It is unsurprising that the stereotype of the unemployed person on society can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby social devalued individuals are afforded fewer opportunities. These people are then more likely to reinforce the stereotype by remaining unemployed. This encourages the stereotype that unemployed people are indeed lazy, and so on. (p. 44)

If there are no realistic opportunities out there then how can one find a job? The only thing they can do is sign on. Ideologies like this promote the interest of the status quo, cement their power and their function remains "to secure the assent of the oppressed and exploited" (Lefebvre, 1968, p. 76).

The influence of this ideology is littered throughout both the Action Plan for Jobs (2012) and Pathways to Work (2012) “the DSP will continue to implement its powers to sanction individuals who fail to engage with the ‘pathways to work’ approach” (p. 34). If there is a recession then surely there are fewer employment opportunities and more competition in the labour market. Marx (1859) states that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” (1859, p. 24). This desperation and fear reinforce the ideology that when you are successful in gaining employment, you should be thankful and “it forms a disposable industrial reserve army, that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost” (1867, p.18).

For, Davis & Moore social stratification is necessary if society is to function, certain positions in society are more important than others “functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions” (1945: 242). This fails to mention what happens in a recession as even the so-called lower ranking positions aren’t even available.

3.3: Hidden Curriculum

As soon as we enter the education system we are immediately introduced to the process of secondary socialisation. Durkheim argues that education as a social structure, organises us to become functioning members of society:

Is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states as a whole and the special milieu for which (he or she) is specifically destined". (1972, P. 204)

It is also in the environment of the education system where the norms, values and expectations of capitalist society are instilled in us through the hidden curriculum "the experience of schooling and not merely the content of formal learning, is central to this process" (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p. 125) Wotherspoon (2009) highlights other characteristics of capitalist society that are learned through the hidden curriculum. He says that in school “students learn values of conformity, competitiveness, deferred

gratification, obedience to authority, and adjustment to success and failure through their experience in classrooms and other school settings” (p. 22).

Functionalists, stress that if we are to adapt to social life and become functioning and contributing members of society "the school class functions to internalize in its pupils both the commitments and capacity for successful performance of their adult roles" (Parsons, 1964, p. 130) but this form of social control ensures that the elite in power, remain in power and it serves to promote this ideology and prepares the rest of us for the workforce. As Bowles & Gintis argue:

Schools are not as an agency of social mobility but as reproducing the existing class structures. Sending a silent, but powerful message to students with regard to their intellectual ability, personal traits, and the appropriate occupational choice and this takes place through the hidden curriculum. (1976, p. 31)

Additionally, the reproduction of labour power is not only a reproduction of its skills but "a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser, 1976, p. 6). Similarly, Bowles & Gintis show that we invisibly learn through the school system we learn to follow rules, orders, commands and work in harmony with others. In addition, critical thinking is not encouraged and teachers are rarely questioned or challenged:

Schools are not as an agency of social mobility but as reproducing the existing class structures. Sending a silent, but powerful message to students with regard to their intellectual ability, personal traits, and the appropriate occupational choice and this takes place through the hidden curriculum. (1976, p. 31)

Those who opt not to advance to higher or further education may gain employment. The submission learned from secondary socialisation becomes second nature and by then they are already obedient employees and the competitiveness of the employment sector safeguards any opposition to injustice or poor contracts, pay and conditions.

This is an all too common theme in contemporary society. We should be thankful for a job and the anxiety and distress reinforce the ideology that when you are prosperous in gaining employment, you should be grateful. The instability and uncertainty that

accompanies this new wave of employment policy can generate a culture of fear and anxiety.

Another way that the status quo exercise their power and control through the education system is what Freire calls “banking education” (1970, p. 58). Students are not encouraged to speak, raise questions or critically reflect. They are expected to sit quietly and listen to the teacher for the day and as illustrated by Illich (1973) very little teaching takes place:

A second major illusion on which the school system rests is that most learning is the result of teaching. Teaching, it is true, may contribute to certain kinds of learning under certain circumstances. But most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, in a few rich countries, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives. (p.125)

In return, the experience of school can be unstimulating and boring. In some cases, this can lead to learners hating school and not pursuing any education when they leave the compulsory education system. However, the secondary socialisation process has been completed and “the experience of schooling and not merely the content of formal learning is central to this process” (Bowles & Gintis,1976, p. 125). This type of indoctrination sees the labour force ripe and ready to provide capitalism with a new generation of workers.

The recession has contributed to so many people returning to education with some Aontos (2017) reporting that some “200,000 adults involved in formal, further education programs” and are participating in “second chance education”. Qualifax (2017) promote further education and highlight that “there is a huge amount of opportunities for adults who feel they didn't make full use of their first chance in education”. I argue that a large portion fell through the cracks due to negative experiences at both primary and secondary school.

When the unemployed are in engagement with the DSP submission to authority continues. Besides, if people are undertaking courses against their will it is hard to stimulate critical thinking plus the course on offer by the DSP are best suited to our

changing economic climate and as pointed out in the Action Plan for Jobs (2012) initiative “many workers have been displaced with scarce opportunities to return to previous work” (APJ, P. 12). One solution for the state is to reskill and retrain those affected by the recession and if this is to be achieved it must see “the development and delivery of education and training to meet the needs of those on the live register and national skills needs” (APJ, P. 15). To reinforce this change in policy those in receipt of social welfare payments can face sanctions if they feel that they aren’t suited to the course on offer.

If adults are forced into QQI courses designed to suit the economy they might not match their needs or interest. Knowles (1979) highlights that this is:

Because adults define themselves largely by their experience, they have a deep investment in its value. And if they find themselves in situations in which their experience is not being used, or its worth is minimised, it is not just their experience that is rejected – they feel rejected as persons. (Knowles, 1970, p. 54)

It could be further argued that an outcome of this can see negative experiences of education from the past resurrected and repeated in ‘second chance’ education and unemployment are just a lived reality and accepted as bad luck.

Lefebvre (1969) claims that by “accepting our position in society as just a way of life and a natural occurrence we entrench the status quo it is the role of ideologies to secure the assent of the oppressed and exploited” (p.76). More disturbingly, not only do we accept these circumstances we also support them as:

The class, which has the means of production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. (Marx & Engles, 1845-46/1970, p.64)

3.4: Hegemony, Coercion and Consent Formation

While Marx was solely interested in economic determinism and argued that a revolution was the only way to change society. Gramsci believed that the Proletariat revolution that Marx predicted failed to materialise because hegemonic control legitimises the Bourgeoisie. Counter-hegemony can be the engine of social change. Hegemony “the essential ingredient of the modern philosophy of praxis” (1932/1975, p. 235)” works by securing the citizen's consent. Gramsci argues that a complete system of attitudes, beliefs and values exist that legitimise the status quo. Society simply accepts their ideas and it manifests into an everyday occurrence, we do not question or participate in any form of critical action and then are coerced by the ruling elite “exercised by legislative or executive powers, or expressed through police intervention” (Gramsci, 1932/1975, p. 235). Power can be exercised not only through force and violence, hegemony sees “man is not ruled by force alone. But also by ideas” (Bates, 1975, p. 351).

The profiling and monitoring of those on the live register combined with the needs of the labour market ensure that labour market activation can take place. In order to increase the employability of the unemployed both reskilling and upskilling may be required. PTW (2012):

Strong interagency links between Intreo and the education sector ensure the best outcomes for job seekers” and that can mean the offer of training opportunity. The introduction of both momentum and springboard were enlisted with responsibility to provide skills and training to up to 23,000 jobseekers. (p. 8)

The Pathways to Work (PTW) Approach has Five Strands:

1. More regular and ongoing engagement with the unemployed
2. Greater targeting of activation places and opportunities
3. Incentivizing the take up of opportunities
4. Incentivizing employers to provide more jobs for people who are unemployed
5. Reforming institutions to deliver better services to the unemployed

In return for the state's commitment to finding you work, in the unemployed will be asked to sign a social contract which “individuals are made aware of their responsibility to commit to job search and/ or other employment, education and training activities or risk losing welfare entitlements” (p. 6) This is a renegotiation of a social contract.

As discussed in the introduction when I was affected by these new policy measures it resulted in one-on-one engagement with a case officer and after that initial meeting, I had to agree to “the signing of a rights and responsibility and commitment to a progression plan” (PTW, 2012, P. 13). We have to accept that this is the way of the world and we just need to deal with it. So, it could be argued that, we succumb to these terms, fearing that society will break down and the unknown could be a dystopian nightmare where only the fittest survive with” danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes, 1996, p. 52). Fear and our acceptance of austerity simply legitimise the dominant class in society.

According to Gramsci, this is pure coercion and shows how power exists and is transferred from society’s institutions (DSP) “by the means of the political and syndical association; these, however, are private organisms, left to the private initiative of the ruling class” (Hoare and Smith, 1999, p. 527). Violence and force are generally a last resort for the military and state but the threat is always there. In the case of labour activation and the social contract provided it does record mutual commitments between the customer and the state but this contract does clearly declare that failure to look for work, undertake training will “risk losing welfare entitlements” (P.6). The threat of force may not be mentioned by the case officer it is issued unobtrusively.

As law abiding citizens we accept the legitimacy of the state “there is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom” (Rousseau, 1755, p. 46). This, Gramsci claims is because of the institutions of civil society (the department of social protection) functions and exercises power in secretive ways. Essentially consent is “characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 80). According to Gramsci this is how institutions achieve consent which is

manufactured and “bestows only an illusion of reality” (Althusser, 1971, p. 29) and it just makes “common sense so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things” (Boggs, 1976, p. 39).

Nevertheless, counter-hegemony means that the ruling elite can be challenged and social change can take place. The working class may only challenge the status quo if they are conscious of their actions. Gramsci calls this mass consciousness “in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed” (1971, p. 641).

Gramsci believed that there are two types of intellectuals. Traditional (literacy, scientific and cultural) “whose position in society has a certain inter-class aura about it but derives ultimately from past and present class relationships and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations” (Hoare and Smith, 1999, p. 131) and organic “the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class” (Hoare and Smith, 1999, p. 31). This leads to traditional and organic intellectual ideologies clashing as the traditional intellectual legitimises the capitalist system but the organic intellectuals seek to destroy it:

Each man, carries on some form of intellectual activity, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (1971, p. 9)

The problem for society is that those opposed to the status quo and the production of organic intellectuals need to side with traditional intellectuals and join this ideological cause “the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence” (1970, p. 10) An example of this in contemporary society would be the national anti-water charges campaign, protest against American military use in Shannon Airport and the recent developments at Apollo House in Dublin. Through informal education “active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, “permanent persuader” and not just a simple orator” (1971: 10) local communities can adopt the role of the intellectual and protest. They can “sustain people’s critical commitment to the social

groups with whom they share fundamental interests. Their purpose is not necessarily individual advancement, but human well-being as a whole” (Smith, 1994, p. 127).

At government level in Ireland, there is some opposition to these policies. However, from my research, I failed to uncover any evidence of any Irish community action groups or protest movements fighting back against these labour activation policies. If you fail to consent to the terms and conditions you are sanctioned and as Freire commentated “the oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom” (Freire, 1970, p. 47). The United Kingdom has provided some examples of counter-hegemony with community action groups like Unite (2016) forming to challenge sanctions that are afflicting, more poverty on their communities and demoralising the unemployed “half a million people, many of whom have been plunged into poverty, unable to heat their homes or even eat”.

3.5: Neoliberalism and the Welfare State

Activation policies are a fundamental component of this new legislation. They aim to rapidly increase the employability of those on the live register and attempt to motivate them to increase their efforts in sourcing employment. It also claims that “in Ireland, we have traditionally adopted a passive approach to supporting job seekers compared with other OECD countries” (PTW, 2012, P. 10). To aid the state the services of private requirement firms were also acquired. The location of this research (the east coast) sees that British firm Seetec overseeing the JobPath (JP) programme, and new and expanded activation and training programmes have been authorised. The state feels that by contracting with the private sector it will not only complement its own resources but privatisation will “deliver service and build up access new skills and competence in areas such as case management of clients, employer engagement and job-matching potential” (PWT, 2012, P. 42)

Neoliberalism tends to exploit a crisis and Ireland after the global economic downturn was the perfect place to be. The welfare state in Ireland and these labour activation firms operate on a “payments by results basis” (PTW,2012, p. 45). This approach was

successful in both Australia and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, to increase the activation process, on a quarterly basis a network of international and domestic policy experts will report to the cabinet committee on economic recovery and jobs.

The success of the JobPath programme means that the activation process is key. This is achieved through a number of case officers assigned to both the DSP and JP. The latter sees those on the live register now becoming a commodity and by using “a payments-by-results contracted service will see long-term job seekers receive individual support to help them address barriers to employment and assist them in finding jobs” (PTW, P. 5). Once JobPath was established PTW declared that some 20,000 job seekers were “accelerated referrals to JobPath once it was established” (p. 21) These referrals will then increase significantly with “60,000 referrals made to JobPath providers in 2016” (Varadkar, 2015, p. 80).

When addressing labour activation measures in a 2015 Dáil Éireann debate, Sinn Féin TD Jonathan O'Brien highlighted that job seekers are:

Being forced into low-paid jobs because it is done on a commission basis and the private companies are only paid if they are successful in placing somebody in employment. What is happening is that people are being directed into low-paid jobs with no job security. (p. 35)

Subsequently “this will, in essence, convert citizens into company assets, PPS numbers on a screen, each of which with a price tag attached.” (O’ Braonain, 2014). The consequences of these new policies mean that the most vulnerable in society are not only after losing their jobs but now must sign another contract with a privatised employment service. Weekly meetings and appointments are mandatory and failure to comply with the terms of your contract can see that individual “face sanction in the case of non-compliance” (PTW, 2012, p.10).

3.6: Conclusion

The evidence provided in this section highlighted the influence that the hidden curriculum plays preparing us for the workplace and in general submitting to authoritative figures and contributes to people not continuing with education and

choosing to enter the workforce. The current economic climate contributes to, too many people experiencing insecurity, uncertainty and sadly no long-term stability. This is where the relationship with Intreo is established and brings me to the starting point of my research project. It is here that an individual within the social welfare system has to meet certain conditions if he or she is to continue to receive job seekers allowance and this is where forced education exhibits.

By accepting that this is just a way of life and natural we cement the status quo's position "the totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (Marx, 1970, p. 21). Coercion sees this problem remain unchallenged but this is a relatively new issue in Irish welfare policy. Since these changes, the implementation of sanctions "to tackle low-intensifying job search" has increased rapidly "100 in 2011 to 1500 in 2014" (PTW, 2012, p. 8). The next two chapter's will analysis and discuss my findings.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

(Part One – Before Labour Market Activation)

4.1: Introduction

This section will analysis and discuss the findings from the interviews I conducted and presents the emerging themes from the data produced from three conversations. All three interviews saw the recurring theme of early schooling emerge. I have split the analysis and discussion of research findings into two separate chapters. Part one will allow the three participants to discuss their time spent in both primary and secondary school. Throughout, this chapter I will set up the discussion of the themes with a description of the findings that materialised from the life history interviews that took place.

4.2: Hidden Curriculum

All three participants had an adverse time spent within the Irish education system and as a result expressed that they had negative experiences in both primary and secondary school. It became apparent that these bad memories made a lasting impression on them all. Generally, it is in the education system where we are exposed to cultural norms and values. It is here we learn the importance of rules, regulations and to obey those in authority. The issue of confinement and submitting to authority was an early theme I discovered. The following data provides numerous examples of the important part that the hidden curriculum plays in instilling society's norms and values.

'I hated school I'm like a bird. I like to be out. I don't like to be confined in a classroom. It was like a prison in there. You know what I mean. Why would you want to do that why would you want to be locked up in a class room all day? I hated it full stop. In there for eight hours a day'. (Frank)

'It was kind of restrictive in my opinion. You're getting indoctrinated. This is the way things are. You know authoritarian. This is the right way. No, this is the only way. Em, even my first day I didn't want to go because I never been to pre-school. So, it was traumatic for me. So, that probably contributed to not liking it straight away. I hated one o' clock as you knew play time was over'. (Robbie)

From my own perspective, I use to dislike the smell of the place, the gothic architecture of the building and the ambience and silence of the hallways. The wooden desks were also uncomfortable. Even when I vote on Election Day the building has the same smell and the hallways are haunting and intimidating.

A simple thing like the school uniform is another example of conformity in early life:

'It was just eh, the material was uncomfortable and constricting. A shirt buttoned up the top with a tie. It was grey and bland. It was just the same as everyone else. You had no personality just pushed into these uncomfortable clothes. You only had one. You hadn't the money to get more. So, it was just grubby, from playing and dirty, grass stains on the knee and once they ripped that was it. There was no going back. You just had to wear it as well when you are growing and you're stretching and outgrowing them. They can fit you one week and then they're showing an inch of sock. You look ridiculous. You couldn't afford a spare so what was the point of them'. (Joe)

The early school years' experience proved to be an introduction to punishment by force, verbal abuse and it was the first time that they were confined to rules and regulations. The three lads all shared similar experiences of life in the classroom:

'I always hated school. I didn't like it all. The teachers were cruel. Forcing you to sit down, stand up. Go for your lunch now. Play time is over. Even when you had to go the jacks you had to ask in Irish'. (Joe)

As this conversation materialized Joe and I couldn't remember the translation to Irish of this request. The taped was paused and we did a google search and discovered that

it was “*an bhfuil cead agam dul go dtí an leithreas?*” On a few occasions throughout this research the participants became emotional and the following story from primary school in particular resulted in me stopping the tape and asking if he was okay. Joe was fine and he continued;

‘I was bad at it [laughs] and she made me sit there until I said it, but I couldn’t and ended up going the toilet in my pants in front of the class. I was young, got over it but you shouldn’t have to go through that in school. The people there are meant to look after you. Sometimes you’d get the clip of a ruler for talking’. (Joe)

These early conversations saw learning absent from those early school years and they generated more examples of the hidden curriculum flourishing. Things didn’t improve at secondary school and they all shared the same contempt. It was still a focal point for their distaste for education and on various occasions this data suggests that it is because of the actions of some of the teachers. Robbie had difficulty coping with some subjects and found it frustrating when he couldn’t keep up with the rest of the class:

‘I didn’t like his demeanour, you know. He’d be impatient you know. Can you not get it by now? You know that type of way’. (Robbie)

Joe’s was in constant conflict with one teacher in particular who he felt had singled him out because of the name he carried:

‘This prick we had. I seen him hit students. Personally, to me he pulled me out of the class and made me sand down a window sill and varnish it because he seen my surname carved into it. There was over a hundred or so other names. He just had a dislike for me. He knew were we were from and he probably thought we were all trouble makers. At that time he knew my two older brothers and what they were like. The name just carried on and he treated me as a messer. Maybe because they [brothers] were messers and chatty it continued on to me and I got treated differently because of it. The thing is he is a horrible man. (Joe).

Struggling with difficult subjects meant that extra attention was required from the educator but this much needed support wasn't available and two partakers couldn't receive help at home as neither of their parents went to secondary school. Also, their family couldn't afford to get them grinds:

'My sister was away and my brother wasn't any great shakes either. It was probably my fault for not asking him to slow down'. (Robbie).

Robbie went into detail about the difficulty he had with one subject and felt that it was his teachers approach to delivering the class that was the prominent obstacle:

'For third year that put us into pass and higher level. Here's the thing, I didn't even go to a separate class. It was in the same fucking class. He was teaching honours. He'd pass people and go like you can take care of yourself and do your homework but he wasn't teaching us. He wasn't teaching us. He was like I want to get these honours lads their A's and that. So, it was basically you fell by the wayside. I ended up getting a D in pass which was terrible. You know. There wasn't any money in the house for grinds either'. (Robbie).

Likewise, Joe had the same problem:

'The boys at home couldn't help me either. [names brother] failed the inter¹ and not too sure about [other brother] I wasn't bothered anyway'. (Joe)

Frank admitted that he remembered very little of his time at both primary and secondary school but he did reveal that he also had difficulty with certain subjects:

'I use to just copy off whoever I sat beside. I had no clue what was going on'. (Frank)

¹ In June 1992, The Intermediate (Inter) Certificate was replaced with the Junior Certificate

4.3: Banking

When the conversation went into the direction of hating school it emerged that they all found the lessons exceedingly boring. Frank conceded that his mind was a blank and here he sums up his learning at secondary school:

'Stuck in a classroom. 'Then the next thing is your brain is only learning Irish and then all of a sudden you are brought into fucking geography and then you are all of a sudden brought into history and the three subjects you have learned that morning, if they asked you the following day you wouldn't remember. You weren't taking it in'.
(Frank)

An additional suggestion of "banking education" (Freire, 1970) materialised from the interviews. Joe and Robbie both used the term 'reading from a book' as the main learning methodology utilized in their post-primary school. This also points towards Illich (1973) as they all believed that very little teaching was taking place. They also felt that this is why the classes were so boring and a defining factor in why they shunned school:

'Just read from the book and put you to sleep nearly. Yeah, read from the book then give you your homework and that was it. That's what most of them did. You know. I know some of them have a hard job and maybe lost enthusiasm for it. Burn out'.
(Robbie)

Joe elaborated further:

'He would be real strict. Do everything by the book. Reading straight, everything word for word. If anyone wasn't paying attention or drifting off elsewhere they would be thrown out of class straight away. He would put you to sleep'. (Joe)

4.4: Branding or Streaming

When discussing the reproduction of labour power, Bowles & Gintis explain that we don't just see a reproduction of skills. We actually see the reproduction of our submission to the rules and regulation of capitalist society. The branding and streaming of students on the strength of their entrance exam for secondary school ~~the~~ results were not revealed to any of the participants. They were simply placed into a higher, middle or lower-class category. The grouping that the students were placed in would see their future planned out for them. Robbie explains this process best:

'In 1G they learn German, business orientated. 1F (which he was in) there was French and more arts orientated, liberal arts stuff. Then there was 1C (which was the technical, lower level maths, lower level Irish you know). They did metalwork, woodwork, technical drawing and all that. I hadn't a choice. We did stuff like classical studies, which was the study of Greek, Ancient Greece, and Ancient Rome. You know like the myths and the gods and all that stuff. That's how they ran it. There was 1m and 1C1 and they were like 1F extended. You know. So, let's say 6 classes for first year. It was a small enough school'. (Robbie)

When the subject of career planning in secondary school came out. Robbie did complete CAO forms for college but this was only because he didn't really know what to do when he passed his leaving certificate:

'I never really had a career plan or meeting. It was like maybe you're suited to the trade industry or apprenticeships or I never really showed any interest. I hadn't done any of the technical streams in school. Nothing was really discussed. Never mentioned anything. It was either go to [Institute of Technology] and do something that the points I got allowed or get a job in a factory. You're factory fodder. You know. Maybe'. (Robbie)

Robbie did decide to attend an institute of technology for two years but wasn't enjoying the course. He left after second year and sought employment:

'I got a job at [insurance firm] working in the post room. Sorting out mail. I enjoyed it there. I liked the people. It was great to be earning and enjoying yourself'.

Frank went to a different school and had no idea what class stream he was in but did recall doing metalwork, woodwork and technical drawing. I would later discover that Joe attended the same school as Robbie and he was placed in 1C which catered from the technical subjects:

'Eh, I liked the more practical hands on things like. Woodwork and metalwork'. (Joe)

When the crash came in 2008 Frank, Robbie and Joe like hundreds and thousands of other Irish people found themselves out of work for the first time since they left school. This was not just a time of economic turmoil it was also the beginning of a turbulent and stormy relationship with the DSP. Previous negative experiences of school and a frustration at real employment opportunities would see this situation ignited by coercion.

4.5: Hard Working

There is a certain stigma attached to being unemployed. All of the participants enjoyed work and confirmed that they would still have been working if they hadn't of been let go from their former jobs.

Joe left school after the junior cert to become an apprentice plumber;

'I just wanted to get out of there. Get done with school as quick as I could. I got a plumbing apprenticeship straight away. That's just the way it was'. (Joe)

Frank also wanted to learn a trade but his parents insisted that he stay at school and complete his leaving cert. This left him particularly discouraged:

'I wanted to be out working and earning money. I could have made a fortune only for me dad made me stay at school and that's the truth. I wanted to become a chippy

[Carpenter] or brickie [Bricklayer] [mimics his father's voice "but no you need your leaving]'. (Frank)

Frank felt that he was stigmatised since he became unemployed;

'You're scum, lazy a deadbeat. Everybody on the dole is scum. Everyone who works and is paying our fucking money. I often thought of getting off it and telling them to stick it up there hole but if you come off it, you will never get back on it'. (Frank)

The participants in this study all had fond memories of their time in employment. They expressed their frustration at not been able to find work and didn't take any pride in signing on or benefit financially from it.

When Frank left school, he got a job as a general operative in a factory;

'You were like a robot. Confined [does a robotic 80s's dance]. You could do it with your eyes closed'. (Frank)

He admitted that he enjoyed the monetary rewards from working for this particular electronic company but it wasn't until he got a job working construction did he talk passionate about his love for work and he found his whole time during the building boom to be the best years of his life:

'When I got into the building. The building was a great job. I loved the building. I drove machines. I loved machines. I always loved machines. I loved it. Then the building went bang! Why? Because of the banks'. (Frank)

I asked Frank what appealed to him most about working in construction:

'The building you're outside. You are getting dirty and you're filthy. [Factory] you're coming home and you're clean and you're like did I do a day's work but you're that fucking wrecked from sitting around looking at a screen you are braindead. Whereas the building I was driving a teleporter for five years'. (Frank)

Joe came from a proud family of tradesmen and construction workers. He explained that by getting a trade you had made something of yourself and this was important. Early on in life it was something that he had planned to do;

'My dad didn't have a trade as such. He was in the building industry, I don't think they did trades back then. Now, he just works for a building company. My brothers a chippy and the other is a spark. No other way in my house. We left school. You got a job and that's the way it was. A job and make money'. (Frank)

4.6: Conclusion

The findings in this section suggest that secondary socialisation and the subsequent negative experiences that come with it, contributed to the participants leaving school early. It also unearthed some of the events that contributed to them not pursuing further education or higher education. These findings were explored with the relevant theories used in the literature review.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion of Research Findings

(Part Two – During the Labour Activation Process)

5.1: Introduction

When we see the recession rear its ugly head all three men found themselves in the Irish social welfare system. This chapter begins with the participants discussing coercion. Next, they build on this concept by telling us about the fear they endured during unemployment. This chapter will conclude by hearing about their time spent in further education. Just like the previous chapter, I will set up the discussion of the themes with a description of the findings that transpired from the life history interviews that I facilitated.

5.2: Coercion

Frank gave a detailed description of the process he went through when he was made redundant:

‘That was the very first time I was out of work since I left school. I had to go down the dole. That was torture. I felt like a piece of shit or piece of chewing gum on somebody’s foot and having to walk in there and ask the government for the dole. I told the father I didn’t want to sign. I done everything to avoid going down there. I ended up with the doctor over it. I really lost the plot. Signing the dole was getting a handout. I didn’t need a handout. I was earning bobs. I was willing to go out and earn but the work stopped’. (Frank)

'Almost a year I was on the scratch [dole]. I then got a letter. It was the first week in January. I got a letter telling me in a nice fancy way that I had to meet a woman in town. She was an arrogant ass and I was older than her, man. She was younger than me and she was telling me what to do with my life. All I wanted to do was choke the young one. The way she talked to you. In a nutshell I was told to do a course or my money would be cut. End of'. (Frank)

He also reminisced about his time in the building trade and specifically his love of driving machinery:

'Five years later and you were gutted. The building finished. No work. I use to bring the teleporter home on a Saturday as true as fuck. I've photo's at home. I use to polish it with wax. It would be spotless and then on Monday it would only be on site two minutes and it would be filthy' (Frank)

I asked him why he did that. His reply:

'I loved it, Ian. I loved it. I loved the job. That teleporter was like my mam and dad. All my family in a machine you know what I mean. I just loved it man. When you get a good job you can't explain it. You can't. It's only when it's gone you go. Fuck. In the new job I always think back to the building and go ah I wish I was back on the building and go ah I wish I was back doing that. Look at me now doing this'. (Frank)

Robbie had been dealing with his case officer for some time and although he had really good computer literacy, they insisted that he attend numerous *European Computer Driving Licence* courses:

'They kept getting me to do these shitty computer courses. ECDL and the like. I did them, which was pointless, but I did them'. (Robbie)

When I asked him why he did them. He replied:

'I'm tired of dealing with them. I don't want any aggro off them' (Robbie)

Joe had been unemployed for two years before he had to consider completing a course. When he was on his Personal Progression Plan. He was deferred to another case officer and he was offered a *Community Employment Scheme*. This left him angry and frustrated:

'They wanted me to clean the Proddy (Protestant) graveyard. That is in some state. It's used by heroin users and you wouldn't know what you would find in fucking there. I didn't really respond to that but they knew I wasn't happy and I left the meeting and then I had another one a while later and in this one they suggested I do a course'.
(Joe)

He continued to vent his anger:

'I'm out there trying to get work. Which is trying to find something that isn't there. There just ticking a box. Making you do something you don't want to do. When you are dealing with a case officer it is a different level'. (Joe)

Robbie also had to complete a twelve-month CE scheme. He explained that this fell under the umbrella of Tús (Community work placement initiative). I wasn't familiar with this scheme so, I asked him to tell me more about it; From 2013 PTW through the DSP provided 30,000 places (16,000 starts) CE Schemes and the Tús programme. According to PTW these opportunities will “enhance job prospects through adding work experience and training activities” (p. 24) Additionally these active labour market interventions will “ensure that the people who participate in community employment schemes get a quality experience” (p. 10)

'It's another bloody fudge. Eh CE can be private. You can be a cleaner in a fucking office. You know. Tús is different. It mainly requires you working for a charitable organization'. (Robbie)

Robbie's Tús scheme meant that he had to work eighteen hours a week for the Saint Vincent de Paul (SVP). The duration of this contract was for one year. He received an

extra €20 in social welfare payments. His job description meant he spent that time in a warehouse unloading trucks by hand and sorting out charitable donations. Everything from clothing to furniture had to be separated and stored away before they would be dispatched to the various SVP shops in the city centre. Again, he consented to these terms and was relieved that he was working indoors and not doing more physical labour:

‘There was a cleaner of [stadium], [tourist site] and [a tourist office]. They could have you cleaning them. They just said that they [SVP] were looking for someone and there was a good crew down there and that I’d like it. She was alright to be fair. She wasn’t like I am putting you were I’m saying and shut up about it. You’ll always get work when you work for nothing’. (Robbie)

When he finished the Tús scheme Robbie had complete another computer course. This time he felt that the DSP were a lot more aggressive with him:

‘They basically said do this or your money will be stopped. I think it is stupid pointless and a waste. What’s the point wasting time doing something you already know?’ (Robbie)

He explained this to his case officer but it fell on deaf ears. When he continued to debate his position. The threat of a payment cut was issued. He then agreed:

‘They said that you are required by the social welfare to do it. If I had of said no, I’m not interested in that, my money would have been stopped’. (Robbie)

Eventually, Robbie got onto a course that he was actually interested in and excited about:

‘I was just signing and I got sent for that I had to attend another meeting. This time it was for a course that I was interested in’. (Robbie)

Sadly, this generated its own problems which I will touch on later.

Frank continued to prove he was looking for work and every once in a while, he would have to complete forms. He was then asked to consider a healthcare course:

'I was made do it. I was made do the course or the dole was going to cut me off and was sent on a meeting. FAS had a day out of courses and there was no course there that I liked. So, the woman with FAS told me I had no say on it. I had to do it. If I didn't do it, they would have cut me off. I done FETAC 5 caring, caring for the elderly. Looking after old people. For someone like me who shouldn't have had to do it'.
(Frank)

Joe was also pressured into carrying out a health care course:

'I was kind of pushed as I was on a progression plan and had signed it. Which meant that I had said I'd engage with them and this plan. They said this was meant to do what was best for you'. (Joe)

Frank summed up his experience of coercion:

'I felt like I was trapped by the government. The government had a rope around my neck and if I didn't do what I was told they were going to hang me. You should be given an option. You shouldn't be put in a corner with a lot of boxing gloves in front of you and you have no way out. I was put in a corner or I would love to the get the government or these people that put me in a corner and I still to this day feel that I'm in a corner'. (Frank)

It is impossible to talk about coercion, without discussing fear and how it contributed to them consenting to do a course against their will.

5.3: Fear

Fear plays a pivotal role in these findings. The fear of forced education ensures that Frank will work in a job he hates. Rather than sit in a class room he would prefer to

be outside and doing physical labour. Frank also revealed something that unsettled me. I had to pause the tape and ask him if he was ok. After the interview was completed I once again asked him if he was fine and furthermore, I told him if the situation that he is about to describe materialized that he could call me at any time. I also provided him with the phone number of an organization that support people in distress. We discussed this again before I left his home and it was agreed that he would talk to his father and brother before doing anything that might put himself at risk. He also informed his father that he was upset and had a chat with him after I left his home. I contacted him numerous times since this incident and he is fine:

'I know it is bad up there but I'd rather be up there than doing a course. I'm telling you now. If the dole sent me on a course again. I'd try to commit suicide or I'd do something crazy'. If I get let go out of [current job]. If I get sick and get let go and put on a course again. I am stuck here but it lets me do the other stuff I do [he cuts grass, landscaping, removals and fishing). They don't care about your mental health. You are just a number'. (Frank)

Although he is only part-time it keeps the DSP off his back and the threat of benefit cuts is no longer an issue for him:

'Since, I'm on the yellow docket, I fill them out every week. They don't hassle me. Their off my back. That's the only reason I'm there. I am free to go fishing, doing gardening and other stuff'.²

In saying that, he doesn't have any real job security and currently in his job he informed me that he is being exploited by his employer. Also, with regard health and safety he is at danger of an accident or serious injury, but it is a risk that he is willing to take. He can't quit as he will have to sign back on and is fearful that he will be made do another course. All he wants to do is work:

² These are called causal dockets. Those in receipt of job seekers benefit have to mark the days they have worked for the week and then return the completed form into their local social welfare office.

'He treats us like shit. Even though this job is part-time I still feel bullied. If I showed you the videos. You'd go are you off your head. I hate them up there. You're just a rat on two legs picking up rubbish. Go through scrap. Separate it. Go through black bags, plastic, sort out metal, timber, aluminium, brass, copper. If you find batteries or stainless steel they have to be sorted and you pick at everything. Nothing is wasted. I'm up there a few years now and I'd say I've every disease under the sun working there. I'm being honest with you. I am not messing'. (Frank).

I asked him if he considered looking for work elsewhere:

'There is nothing out there, man. I'm telling you'. (Frank)

Joe was also exploited by an employer who would only pay him cash in hand for a few day's work. The work wasn't consistent and he was paid strictly off the books. This meant that he couldn't inform the DSP:

'I got laid off in 2010. There was loads let go before me. I did well enough to hang on. Then it was getting odd jobs and nickers³ here and there. One or if lucky two a week. You couldn't predict it. I was collecting the dole as well but there was no point in doing it right. I managed to get work off [builder] but it wasn't full time and he would only give me cash and never the whole weeks work. I didn't want to be working and signing but what could you do. Plus if I got injured on site I was fucked. No insurance'. (Joe)

He was frightened that if he got caught that his benefits would be cut. He was struggling already and even with the cash in hand payments he was just about surviving:

'It's not a case of it [money] going into the bank and not to be touched. It's going straight back out of the hand. So, I couldn't risk getting it interfered with. So, the work wouldn't pay the bills and I needed the dole. Em, I wasn't been greedy just keeping

³ Cash in hand payments

the head above water'. I hated it. You couldn't make any plans. You're struggling, waiting for work to come in'. (Joe)

Labour activation policy encourages “jobseekers to be more active in their efforts to find work” (PTW, 2012, P. 4) After completing his course Robbie, struggled to find a work placement and any job advertisement that he sees requires a minimum two years’ experience. He keeps applying for employment and has to keep a record of his job hunting as proof that he is looking for work:

‘You keep getting the same responses or not even the interview. I just keep the letters for the social. My last meeting was in October but I had the emails of jobs I applied for. Seetec will be next. I’m dreading that call’. (Robbie)

5.4: Seetec

Robbie is really frightened of getting a letter in the door from *Seetec*. Frank and Joe also expressed their concerns about the British employment specialists. This discovery really intrigued me as nobody had any first-hand experience of dealing with the organization. Plus, any stories that they had about the company was always either hearsay or of second hand in nature. Besides, Seetec are only recently operating at a local level. The corporation’s reputation from the United Kingdom has certainly proceeded them.

When the state decided to “deliver the potential for reduction burdens in national regulatory regimes across departments like DSP” (APJ, 2012, p. 39) It meant that social protection was now opened up to the free market and the introduction of private recruitment companies like Seetec begin to engage with those on the live register. A somewhat type of boogeyman, or an urban legend has been generated around Seetec and in the process, they have created a climate of fear. I didn’t know much about them. My conversation with Robbie played out like this:

Robbie: *‘I heard they’re a nightmare. They are trying to get you to take any job or course. The brother’s friend has been placed on this Seetec and he said that they try*

to get him on any type of job anywhere. You know, not valuing what his skill is. You know, your unemployed so, take that. He said that wants something where he doesn't have to travel as it would end up costing him money to work'.

Ian: Is it like the dole?

Robbie: No. You have to go in every week and sit there and look for jobs and courses on the computer. They are looking at you. Like you are in a work camp. You know. They have computers in there and they'll say sit down there then look at courses or jobs and I want to see you do it. I'm telling you. I'm telling you. That's what I've heard. You tell them that you have a computer at home and I can do that at home but we can't see you at home doing it, they say. So, how do we know you are doing it?'

Ian: and if you don't?

Robbie: 'I don't know. They have you. They have you for a year and there is nothing you can do about it'.

Ian: What do you mean they have you for a year?

Robbie: When you are placed on the Seetec you are placed on this programme for a year and you have to comply with all their requests or you're in trouble.

Ian: Do you deal with the DSP?

Robbie: No, they wash their hands of you. You are signed with them for a year. That's how it works. It's basically your entering into a contract with them that is separate from the social. You're theirs for the year. They get commission from every job they get somebody. So, it's another big fudge. It's a fudge. All these things'.

Ian: What happens after the year?

Robbie: I think you have to sign back on to the social again. You have to resign again. It is not like your payment is switched or anything. You have to go back, resign on and go through the fucking shite again. Turas Nua is another one.

Robbie didn't know anything about Turas Nua but once again he ended the conversation about Seetec by discussing how fearful he was of this employment specialist:

'I would not like to be in that situation. If I got a case officer who was a little fucking tyrant who would tell you to take any old job or course and send me somewhere in the arse end of nowhere. I don't drive. I heard that happening. You'd be out of pocket before you got paid. I'd hate dealing with someone like that. You know. You know, someone with no compassion. They are just there to fill a quota. You're just a tick in the box. That's the way they see you as they are commission based on every person who gets a job. It's like fire em in, fire em in. That's what I think anyway'. (Robbie)

Joe, also provided me with another example of the fear that is attached to the name of Seetec. He was back working in a full time job but expressed his relief that he wasn't on social welfare anymore. He heard some stories about a new company working on behalf of the DSP:

'I hear it's a lot more intense now. Lads at football are going down there every week to show that they are out looking for work and they go down to them and talk about why they aren't looking and what they could be doing. They'd be offering them courses again, like I was. Stuff that just wasn't relatable'. (Joe)

Frank continued to vent his anger at his current employer. He was also terrified of Seetec and confessed he is glad they couldn't send for him:

'[Boss] is a bastard above. You don't know the half of it. As I said I could show you videos, but there is nothing out there and if you leave you are put back on a list with the dole and I heard now that the dole will cut you off automatically and it is not the dole. It is run by an English company. They ring you up and you go down and if you don't do this course or that course your dole is cut off. You don't get any say or anything'. (Frank)

5.5: Experience in Further Education

When I evaluated my findings, it became apparent that forced education wasn't successful. Frank and Joe were participating in a course that they had no interest in completing. As they progressed through the course they were biding their time and looking for employment opportunities. As I deliberated prior, Frank managed to secure part-time work and Joe gained full time employment. Neither men completed their respective healthcare courses.

After a few encounters in forced education Robbie finally got to complete a computer course which he was really interested in. He truly enjoyed the learning experience and felt that he learned new things. However, he failed to secure a work placement and even though he excelled on the course and was top of the class he hasn't any experience and with regard future career prospects, this is his Achilles heel. While he felt that his time in further education was beneficial the outcome was negative and as I have stated occasionally throughout this chapter he is currently unemployed. Whereas Joe and Frank had no issues with securing a work placement they were polar opposites of Robbie and didn't want to complete the required three hundred hours work experience. They both compared their first day back in education to their previous experiences of post primary school.

5.6: Back in School

The following extracts share echoes to previous conversations we had about primary and secondary school and proposes that 'second chance' education mirrors the original educational experience:

'It was like been back at school again. I didn't want to do it. This is not me. I like working with my hands and the outdoors. I'm not an indoor man at all. I'm not into writing. Give me a chainsaw and a hatchet. I'll cut that tree down in twenty minutes. I'll log it, I'll block it, have your fire warm, but see writing paper, technology, now you had to get laptops. You had to look stuff up on the internet. You would learn more on the street'. (Frank)

'I was nervous. It was like back sitting in a chair and I thought will I be good enough for this. I felt inadequate. It got me down but I just got on with it'. (Joe).

Joe felt that the tutors were good but one in particular brought back memories of the incompetent teachers he had in the past:

'There was two main teachers and a few others. One was alright the other was a dope. The good one was relatable and made us have good conversations. There was some there who had work placements sorted and where on them and some people worked already and had to do the course for their cert. He'd get the people to tell us about the stuff that happened at work. Get them to talk about their experiences. I'd just listen and learned from them. I hadn't got the work part of the course done but it was good the way we heard first hand'. (Joe)

I proceeded to ask him about the other teacher and why he thought that the teacher was a dope:

'Just was and would come in on a power trip and be like I'm up here listen to me, stop talking shut up and listen'. (Joe)

I asked him if this teacher actually told the class to shut up:

'No, it was the attitude. There was all adults there and one fella was in his late forties or early fifties. He got thrown out of the class for talking away and explaining stuff to people beside him. The teacher didn't like him and told him to leave. A grown man getting thrown out of a class for doing something silly. The teacher was unreal'. (Joe)

Frank also had issues with teachers he disliked:

'The teacher would use a projector. After the fourth slide I wanted to strangle them. I'm back at school and what did I hate all my life? School! What did they do? Put me

back in school! The teachers were in and around my age with a stuck up attitude. That's the impression I got'. (Frank).

Both Frank and Joe expressed their concern about the emotional labour involved in care work. The former really did have issues with this and again he became emotional in the interview. Once more, I asked him if he was ok to continue and he said he was grand and wanted to finish the story:

'I did the course but not the work placement. I'm not into wiping old people's asses and looking after them and all that. If it was me dad. I don't mind that but not other people's mam and dads. No. I then got the job at [company name] I didn't give a fuck what I got because there was no way I was going into a home. Now, I'm stuck in a junk yard. Looking through other people's waste. It's not the nicest job in the world. It's not the healthiest job in the world. You either work for [boss] or you do a stupid course.' (Frank)

Again the subject of coercion developed and the fear of going back to do a course is enough of a deterrent for Frank. He would rather work in bad conditions:

'What do you do? You can't win. This is a no win situation. If you don't do the job you're on the dole or on a course back writing and reading Ann and Barry books. I'm nearly forty, man. I don't need to be going back. I need to be going forward'. (Frank)

Frank's issues with the emotional aspects that come with work in the care sector could be traced back to bygone experiences that haunt him. These events really troubled him and he felt if he worked in a residential home it might resurrect some ghosts from his past:

'I went to the doctor, I told him about my past experiences with life. I'm not going to discuss them on that [points to the recorder]. I've had a lot of shit in my life but the thing I couldn't handle on that course was people dying. I couldn't handle that. I was only after getting over mam. What would happen if you got attached to someone at work and they died? You have to deal with death and I don't like dealing with death.'

That would be the hardest thing. I was only after getting over a friend and then I was fucked into this thing. They don't care if your mother dies. They don't give a fuck about you. All you are is a piece of shit. You open up old wounds looking at them and even though you might have the craic with them. Imagine I came in tomorrow and one was dead. What the fuck would I do? (Frank).

Joe also had reservations about working in this field and is thankful that he found work:

'It would have been horrific work. Touching people. Cleaning people. It was just something that I didn't want to do. Not for me. I felt that from the very start. It was never for me'. (Joe)

5.7: No Support

Robbie had completed two years at an Institute of Technology and wasn't fazed by returning back to education. He was looking forward to completing the course and getting a job in an area he was interested in. A fundamental reason for this was his sincere interest in the course:

'It was Computer Networks IT. I had an interest in making computers work. I like that type of thing. I like doing that. Fixing that kind of thing. I thought it would be a good area to get into'. (Robbie).

'I really enjoyed it. We did (A Plus) Configuring Windows, Troubleshooting Problems with Windows and Installing Components in the Computers. In the afternoon we might have a discussion or we'd take a computer apart. You then had to do an exam which is industry standard worldwide, you know? In America that qualification I got can get you a decent IT support level job. I really liked the (A Plus), both parts. Two parts 801 and 802. Network plus which was like all network issues. Issues with Wi-Fi and internet base. I did stuff like cloud essentials which was the cloud but just a basic qualification in that but I got it. No work though. The market here is crazy'. (Robbie)

Frank and Joe openly admitted that they had no interest in the healthcare course. They both faced obstacles when they returned to education and believed that there was no support there for them. Robbie's experience in further education is in stark contrast to them:

'Alright, I don't use a laptop and one teacher was good and she let me hand (assignments) it up written in good handwriting. You know. It couldn't be scribbled. She would let you hand it up that way. The other one forced me to use a laptop and print it out and it was a disaster. I couldn't use a laptop or printer. It was degrading really. My partner was good enough to help me and showed me how to work the laptop and how to print and everything. As I said it was like been back in school and sanding that window sill'. (Joe)

Frank was similarly irritated when it came to using technology:

'No help there. As I said, you barely got a cup of tea. You were handed assignments and told to do them. Use a computer and that. I got the brother and father at home to help me. That's how bad it was. I didn't like their [teachers] attitude. So, I wasn't asking for help. I got help off [brother] and got merits and passes'. (Frank)

None of the participants completed their respective courses and this was to do with the completion of the work experience module. Frank produced a document that his class received from the course director. He explained that the class was bored with the course and the delivery of the modules and this led to poor attendances and poor punctuality from the learners.

Frank and Joe kept looking for work and eventually both became employed and they didn't pursue a work placement. They categorically stated that they didn't want to work in a care home. Sadly, for Robbie he actually wanted to get work experience as he saw the Information Technology (IT) sector as an area that he would love to work in:

'They were supposed to help you. You would think that they had a partnership with these people that would take you on. That would be the sensible fucking thing to do, but they struggled. Oiliúna [Private training company] said they couldn't find anything for me. I got my qualifications but when you look at the jobs specks they are looking at two years' experience. You know'. (Robbie)

Now he was back to where he started on Job Seekers Benefit. Robbie suggested that the training company should have a follow up course that was a natural progression for those who didn't acquire a work placement. He did ask if there was any possibility of undertaking a course that he believed would improve his employment prospects and give him an advantage in the long term:

'Well rather than been back on the rock 'n roll [dole] there is a MCSA (Microsoft Certified Solutions Associate). Which is server. It's a good qualification to have. You know when companies have a user account and need a password. It has been run in the past but they aren't doing it now'. (Robbie)

I asked him if he enquired about doing it privately but he couldn't afford it. Any of the courses that would benefit him were not subsidised by the DSP. This finding was resonated by both Frank and Joe. While unemployed they were all open to any courses that would help them progress in their respective professions or something that interested them.

5.8: Open to Beneficial Education

These conversations reminded me of the work of Malcolm Knowles, who suggests that the learners were experiencing the traditional pedagogy approach to teaching in further education. Knowles moves away from teacher centred learning and focuses on the adult's experience and self-direction "they see themselves increasingly as producers or doers" (Knowles, 1970: 45). Robbie aside, neither Joe nor Frank had any interest in the course they were placed on and had a negative experience.

Whereas Robbie was interested in anything that was IT related and enjoyed his course. As discussed earlier he wasn't as enthusiastic about completing a course which he felt was pointless. Sadly, for him, he had to complete 'another office admin type thing' for seven months and nothing manifested from it. Frank and Joe believed that there was no point learning something that you wouldn't need:

'The only thing I liked on that course was first aid. I do a lot of fishing and hunting so, it was nice to know. I learned that if someone has an accident and you keep the person calm the better chance they have of staying alive. I was interested and wanted to do it. It was interesting and that'. (Frank)

Over the years he also enjoyed doing safe pass courses, completing his teleporter ticket and before he was placed on the healthcare course. Joe enjoyed his six months at [Institute of Technology] as part of his plumbing apprenticeship:

'That was good but more theory. There was some practical but more theory behind it. Maths and the like. All to do with getting the apprenticeship'. (Joe)

Before he was placed on the health care course Joe asked the DSP if he could do some training that was related to his trade and would give him an extra advantage in the jobs market:

'I argued the point there was loads of work if I could get a GID cert (Gas Installer Domestic). I get that I am more employable and that way I wouldn't have to sign and could be back making money again and get back to doing what I do, but they didn't want to know, you know. I am too old to be reading training willy nilly. Books and that aren't for me. I like boxing biographies, autobiographies and the like. If I wanted to learn something I'd chose something I liked'. (Joe)

5.9: Conclusion

This chapter attempted to explore the impact that labour market activation policy has had on those on the live register who participated in this research. This has resulted in

them experiencing coercion and forced education, leading to a negative experience in second chance education. Just like the previous chapter these findings were explored with the appropriate theories used in the literature review.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

This thesis has highlighted the experience of coercion and forced education within a labour market activation context. Through the lens of critical theory, my study showed that in first chance education, the hidden curriculum contributed to the participants' dislike of both primary and secondary school and their major focus was to leave school early and seek employment. From a Marxist perspective, exploitation is another defining factor. The participants voiced their concerns about how they believed that CE Schemes were exploiting them and offered up no genuine job opportunities. Waiting in the wings employers have also abused the current economic climate and the vulnerable position of a job seeker. We have heard how working in a dangerous environment is seen as a better alternative than completing a healthcare course, or how the bureaucratic process within the social welfare system only complicates proceedings and has meant risking prosecution to make a small monetary gain. Furthermore, nobody I interviewed is benefiting financially from the proceeds of social welfare payments. It could be further argued that due to the competitiveness of the jobs market, it benefits the employers and recruiters, who have a rich pool of potential employees to choose from. Your PPP sees that you must accept any employment opportunities and realistically that means low-paid jobs that have no security. It is a case of zero hour contracts above long-term contracts.

First chance education had a negative impact and lasting impression on the participants and this experience is rekindled when forced to participate in further education. The authoritative figures from the past are no longer teachers and are replaced with social welfare officers, case officers and tutors. Moreover, the banking approach (Freire, 1970) to teaching and the boredom and negative learning experience that comes with it, supports the participants' experience of education being boring and pointless in second chance education. Nothing has changed and it is like been 'back in school'. Gramsci highlighted how power and control are transferred from institutions (Department of Social Protection) in society and benefit the social hierarchy. Here we see evidence of coercion, with the threat of force always there and it exists in the small print of the social contract. Failure to comply with the terms and conditions can activate benefit sanctions.

When you then add this conflict to the financial pressures, moral pressure and social pressure that arises from unemployment it has a demoralising effect on a job seeker, and in some cases, this study found that depression and suicidal thoughts had manifested.

The participants who agreed to be interviewed for my research revealed that after attending an Intreo appointment, they were recommended a health care or IT related course and the main objective of Action Plans for Jobs (2012) is the “enhancing the employability of the unemployed, reskilling and upskilling workers/unemployed persons close to the labour market are tailored specifically to the needs of this cohort of the unemployed” (APJ, 2012, P. 114). These labour market activation policies are all about the system and ignore and fail to consider the individual. By taking on this research, it permitted me to hear the voices of those directly affected by this change in policy. What I have learned is that forced education hasn’t worked for the participants’ of this research and contributes to, many negative outcomes for an individual who just wants to work.

Unemployment is a soul destroying experience and it is only made worse when external forces add further pressure on people. I believe that these new labour market activation policies can contribute to the unemployed being perceived to be job shy and lazy. This is evident in the terms of a personal progression plan when you have signed this social contract declaring that you are actively looking for employment. This implies that you might actually be happy to live on €193 per week and aren’t actively looking for a job. This doesn’t make sense to me. During an economic downturn, it should be a time of supporting those who have been hit hardest by the recession. The participants of this study all worked hard when leaving school right up until the recession. This gave them a sense of worth and pride. When you take that away from them and see them enter the social welfare system it has a deleterious bearing on their life. A wage packet is replaced by what they see as a handout and this can be a humiliating experience.

Forcing people to complete courses only increases the anxiety, frustration and tension that already dominates unemployed life. If there was evidence that these labour market

activation policies actually worked and benefited society then we might have enough to have a genuine debate on the issue, but I believe that they simply do not work and they just add to the list of other difficulties that exist.

This research also discovered that a cycle of fear among those involved in the labour market activation process. This genuine fear also powered an urban legend built around the British recruitment firm Seetec. Like all urban myths, they are always tales second hand in nature. I found that the urban myth that surrounds Seetec was no different. According to Stolley (2005) “they provide cautionary warnings about modern society” (P. 183) the fear that is generated by Seetec means that the individual has submitted to their terms and conditions before they have even engaged in one of their labour activation programmes.

By focusing on the perspectives of the three participants of this thesis, it has allowed me to highlight and show the whole experience of unemployment. Every aspect of one’s life is affected by this. Employment opportunities are limited and there is fierce competition for jobs. Again the ideology of the ruling elite is evident. When one is lucky enough to obtain work they should be thankful. From my research findings, I argue that you can’t extract somebody out of their context, you must take into account their life history. With regard to this study the participants were all hardworking and with that came a sense of self-worth and pride. When you combine this with negative experiences of past education and force them to do something that is alienating to them, it is inevitable that it will have a negative outcome.

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Appendix



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Date //

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project on forced education as part of my M.Ed in Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University.

This interview may take up to one hour and with your permission, we would like to tape record the conversation. A copy of the interview tape will be made available to you afterwards if you wish to hear it.

There are no risks involved in this research and the interview does not constitute any type of counselling or treatment.

The benefit of this to you is that you will have access to the research when it is finished and you may use it to understand how your experience compares to others.

All of the interview information will be kept confidential. We will store the tapes and transcripts of our conversation safely. Your identity will be kept confidential and we will use a pseudonym of your choice to identify your interview data. Neither your name or private information will appear in the final research project. The study results will be kept safely in storage for five years and then terminated. Your participation is voluntary. You are free to refuse to take part, and you may refuse to answer any questions or may stop at any time. You may also withdraw at any time up until the work is completed.

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact me at iancurran1979@gmail.com or my research supervisor Dr David McCormack at david.mccormack@nuim.ie or (01) 7083947.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie.

Should you experience any kind of distress or discomfort as a result of the study, you can contact the Samaritans 112 Marlborough St, North City, Dublin Phone: (01) 872 7700

“I have read the description above and consent to participate.”

Signed: _____

Date: _____