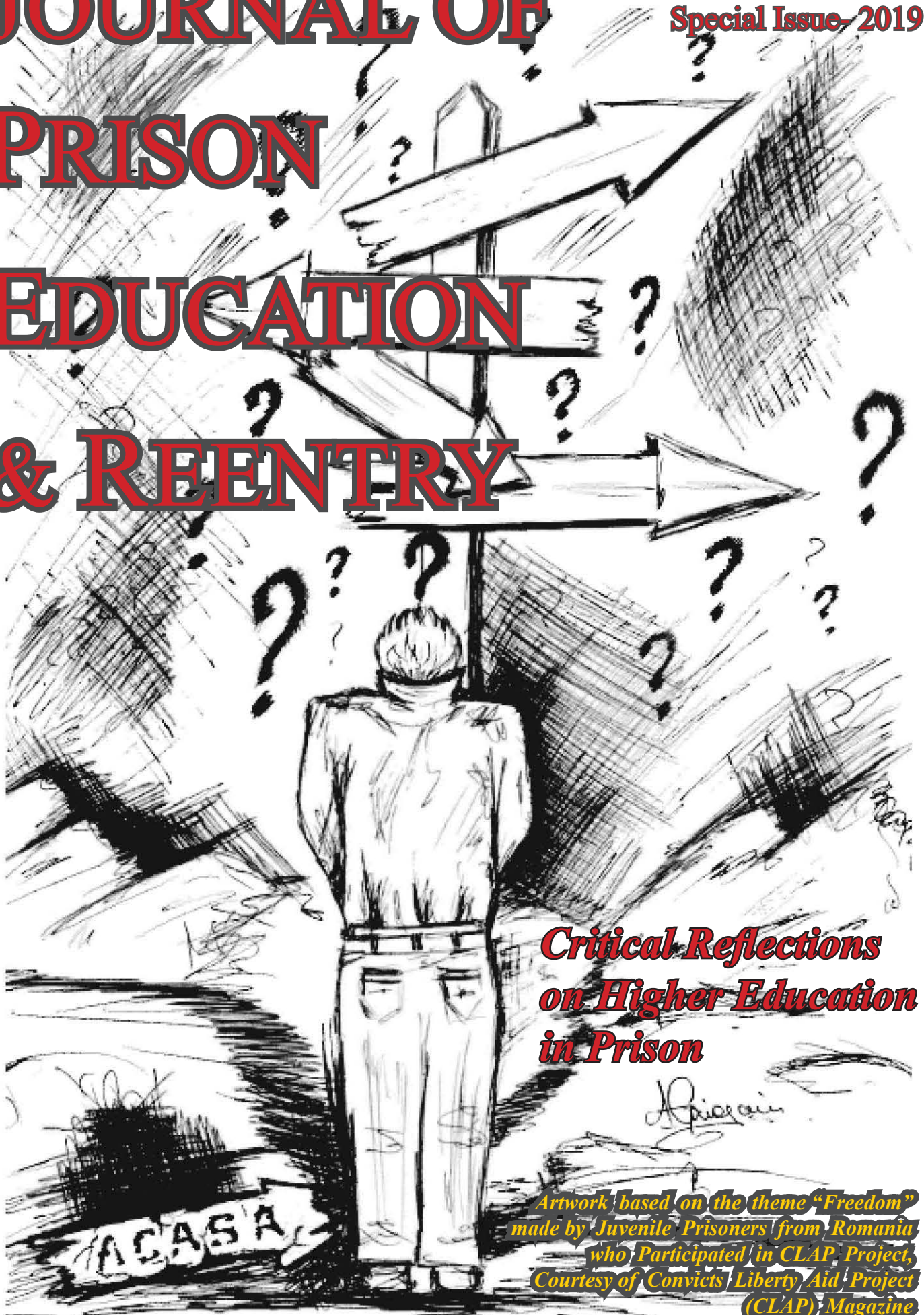


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*Critical Reflections
on Higher Education
in Prison*

*Artwork based on the theme "Freedom"
made by Juvenile Prisoners from Romania
who Participated in CLAP Project,
Courtesy of Convicts Liberty Aid Project
(CLAP) Magazine*

FEATURE-EDITORIAL

Critical Reflections on Higher Education in Prison

DRS. HELEN NICHOLS, SUZANNE YOUNG AND CORMAC BEHAN

Since the publication of the first issue of the *Journal of Prison Education and Reentry* (JPER) in 2014, the journal has provided an international platform for researchers and practitioners to explore education in prison *and* during re-entry into the community with a multidisciplinary approach. These approaches include, but are not limited to, criminology, sociology, pedagogy and policy. We, the editors, are delighted to present the first special issue of JPER within which we explore the current landscape of higher education in prisons through a collection of contributions. More specifically, this special issue brings together examples of initiatives that involve partnership work between universities and criminal justice institutions to create opportunities for educational innovation involving people in the free community as well as those impacted by the criminal justice process.

University involvement with criminal justice institutions in an educational capacity is not a new phenomenon. Through the establishment of the “Crime-A-Challenge” Society at the University of Oxford in the 1950s, criminologist Max Grunhut, a firm believer in prison as a place for education and reform, brought together boys serving sentences at Huntercombe Borstal with Oxford law students, which involved Oxford students attending the borstal for residential stays. This kind of engagement was later continued via educational classes delivered by the University of Oxford at HMPs Grendon, Oxford and Bedford. At the same time, the Open University has provided higher education in UK prisons for over 40 years spreading their *Students in Secure Environments* programme to over 150 prisons through the core belief that education should be accessible to all.

In the 1990s, the *Inside Out* initiative was established by Professor Lori Pompa at Temple University in the United States. Now described as an international movement, the *Inside Out* programme comprises of more than 150 correctional and higher education partnerships, more than thirty think tanks and in some cases, public workshops. Realising the need for incarcerated individuals to have the opportunity to continue their education on release, Professor Baz Dresinger (John Jay College, Central University of New York) founded the *Prison to College Pipeline* in 2011. Administered by the Prisoner Reentry Institute, the pipeline provides prisoners with access to public university-level education, mentorship, and community support to increase their chances of timely graduation and employment upon release. Replications of this initiative are now being seen in the UK, South Africa, Jamaica and Trinidad. Similar initiatives have once again resurfaced in the UK with the establishment of the *Learning Together* programme led by Drs Amy Ludlow and Ruth Armstrong at the University of Cambridge. This has since become a national and international programme which brings students from outside and within prison walls together to learn alongside one another and is situated within a broader scope of programmes within the *Prison University Partnerships in Learning* (PUPiL) network.

Although this is not an exhaustive list of such programmes, the aforementioned examples evidence the internationalisation of collaborative practice which aims to facilitate innovative, interactive higher education experiences in “hard to reach” environments involving students, practitioners and academics to create meaningful exchanges between people who would usually be separated by the imperatives of the criminal justice system. Beyond these initiatives, other educational projects have begun to emerge globally including *Making the Connection Project* (Australia), *Book Clubs for Inmates* (Canada), *India Vision Foundation* (India), *Africa Prisons Project* (East Africa), *Hudson Link for Higher Education* (USA) and *Project Rebound* (USA). The increasing number of universities partnering with criminal justice institutions globally (but particularly in Western countries) to deliver higher education can be viewed as a reflection of the positive success stories shared amongst the higher education communities (see Inderbitzin, 2015; King, et al. 2018; Lockard and



Rankins-Robertson, 2011).

The aim of this special issue is to bring together insights and challenges of delivering higher education in prison or within reentry settings. The papers within this issue offer critical reflections, student evaluations and innovative pedagogical approaches that acknowledge the learning journeys of students, teachers, facilitators, coordinators and academics. There is no doubt that these partnerships are creating meaningful learning journeys and breaking down societal barriers for people with convictions, but as acknowledged by the collection of articles, there must also be caution given to the ethical, pedagogical and practical challenges that are embedded in these initiatives. On ethical grounds people residing in prison, or those recently released, can be considered one of the most vulnerable populations of learners. People in prison or who have since been released are positioned very differently in society from university students and care needs to be taken not to put any of the learners at a disadvantage or in worst case scenario, cause any harm. The wellbeing of both the people with convictions and the university students is paramount, yet the nature of the short term HE courses can lead to difficulties for individual learners both during and after the learning process (see Young, 2018). This special issue seeks to elaborate on some such challenges and how they have been responded to in practice.

The setting of many of the learning programmes that are being developed and the ability of the learners on those programmes results in a number of pedagogical challenges that have received very little attention to date. These courses are higher education initiatives and thus consideration must be given to how higher education is being delivered. Furthermore, the pedagogical lessons learned from the programmes are important to explore the similarities and differences between traditional higher education and those delivered in a criminal justice context. There is an abundance of pedagogical literature on education in prison and strategies of teaching and learning in higher education but less have been developed when the two institutions have come together in a learning capacity. The aim of this special issue is to highlight the pedagogical approaches used in the programmes and consider the challenges that have arisen.

The articles in the issue fall under four key themes that address the issues discussed above. The first theme of the issue is *transformative learning*. Bringing together university students with people currently or recently incarcerated is often argued to have to a transformative effect for learners, however the relationship between transformation of self and learning is multifaceted and by no means a linear process. The first paper by Gray, Ward and Fogarty, "Transformative Learning Through University and Prison Partnerships: Reflections From 'Learning Together' Pedagogical Practice", discusses transformative learning through a lens of a transformative ripple model. The authors draw on evaluation data from two Learning Together courses and discuss the importance of a transformative pedagogy to help facilitate the learners' transformative learning journey of self. The transformative ripple model is applied to demonstrate how university-prison learning partnerships can lead to both individual and institutional transformations. The authors argue that for these learning environments to be truly transformative, the pedagogical approach must also be transformative in nature. The paper emphasises that it is equally important to consider how higher education is delivered as well as what is delivered within these spaces. The paper by Ludlow, Armstrong and Bartels, "Learning Together: Localism, Collaboration and Reflexivity in the Development of Prison and University Learning Communities", engages with the challenges of collaboration and reflexivity in the conceptualisation and development of partnership learning communities between higher education and criminal justice institutions. It is grounded in experiences of partnerships in the United Kingdom and beyond, and considers the policy and practice challenges of partnership-working between higher education and criminal justice institutions. They argue persuasively that we need to reflect critically on how different socio-political and cultural realities (both within and beyond national borders) might shape the particular nature of these partnerships.

The second theme of the special issue recognises the importance of *inclusive learning environments*. This is an important theme given the unfamiliarity of learning spaces for different cohorts, who would not ordinarily occupy educational environments in the manner in which these initiatives are delivered. Gosling and Burke present their article "'People Like Me Don't Belong in Places Like This': Creating and Developing a Community of Learners Beyond the Prison Gates", which reflects on a community-based model of higher education in the UK involving university students, criminal justice service users and practitioners. Adopting

edgework as a conceptual framework to create an inclusive learning space, the authors discuss their exploration of students' motivations to engage with higher education and consider how lecturers providing taught sessions have come to think differently about how they deliver higher education; leading to exploratory questions about higher education delivery more broadly. In the article, the authors reflectively examine the process of "pedagogical brokerage" in navigating the management of expectations, incongruity and vulnerability while also identifying the emerging institutional differences in how the purpose of higher education is viewed. Gosling and Burke argue in this contribution that more intensive pastoral care is needed for those engaging in challenging personal journeys and they acknowledge the recognition of the importance of pathways both into and out of higher education. The second article within this theme by Zampini, Österman, Stengel and Bernalick entitled "Turning Gender Inside-Out: Delivering Higher Education in Women's Carceral Spaces" offers an important contribution to the special issue by discussing the gendered learning space in the context of prison education. Drawing on their experiences of delivering higher education with women and men in prison, the authors offer critical reflections of gender dynamics within the classrooms and the pedagogical challenges that arose. This paper highlights the normative gendered assumptions within the prison setting and draws comparisons between an all-female cohort of learners and mixed cohorts of learners. The authors argue that a gendered consciousness can be beneficial in unifying student and prisoner learners whilst also disrupting the hegemonic masculine environments that can too often lead to women's voices being marginalised in learning spaces.

Theme three of the contributions centres on reconsiderations of *social identities*. With a particular focus on broader "behaviours of desistance" (Nichols, 2018) whereby notions of self and conceptions of others are challenged within unique learning spaces, the following articles examine the personal transformations experienced by learners. In their article "'There's More That Binds Us Together Than Separates Us': Exploring the Role of Prison-University Partnerships in Promoting Democratic Dialogue, Transformative Learning Opportunities and Social Citizenship", O'Grady and Hamilton explore the way in which education in penal institutions can present opportunities for social, economic and cultural transformation. Considering the role of education in enhancing social citizenship, the authors reflect on how their higher education programme delivered in a UK prison facilitated the positive challenging of stereotyping and othering through debate creating "de-othering attitudes". Arguing for a need for social citizenship to grow into active citizenship, the authors propose that better cooperation is needed between prisoners and "outside communities", and through a critical pedagogical approach, positive change can be achieved amongst all involved in agency, legitimacy and empowerment. The subsequent article by Turner, Broad, Miles and Maruna, "Learning Desistance Together", considers transformation of self by discussing processes of desistance through learning. Their paper highlights how aspects of desistance were evident amongst both university and prison-based students on their course "Learning Criminology Inside". The authors discuss desistance in a broader sense, whereby the focus is not desistance from crime but rather desisting from previously held norms and values. Drawing upon feedback from students on the course, the authors argue that bringing together university and prison learners can be beneficial for encouraging desistance from stereotypical views and criminogenic identities. The authors also discuss the challenges in delivering a course within the prison setting and consider the importance of resilience amongst staff and students and how this in itself can feed in to desistance.

The final theme of the special issue concerns *practitioner reflections*. Within these important contributions, practitioner narratives provide more personal commentary on the junction between lived experience and reflections on educational practice. The first piece to be presented in this theme by Arroyo, Diaz and McDowell, "Needed Specialists for a Challenging Task: Formerly Incarcerated Leaders' Essential Role in Postsecondary Programs in Prison", provides the authors' own experiences of managing, leading and teaching post-secondary education programmes in the United States are examined. Detailing the work of the "Hudson Link for Higher Education" project in New York, the authors (and self-proclaimed activists) of this paper specifically focus on the lived experience of incarceration as a source of expertise. The authors argue in this paper that it is those with such experiences who are the "needed specialists" for delivering academic programmes for incarcerated people. As a third-party coordinator, the Hudson Link project brings together correctional organisations with partner colleges for accredited work with the overarching objective of breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty, mass incarceration and institutional racism. The authors have taken the opportunity

in this paper to communicate a call to action to recognise the kinds of expertise that should be seen as valuable in this work, the value of “inside teaching” experiences and the need to give those who have been formerly incarcerated empowering opportunities. The second article within this theme, and the closing article to this special issue, is “‘It’s About Whose Voices Matter and What That means’: Reflections on Insider/Outsider Status in Prison Classrooms”. Within this article, Tynan presents a practitioner piece which provides a different view of the value of lived experience in the prison setting. Rather than seeing lived experience as inherently valuable, Tynan argues instead that it is “another tool in the pedagogical toolbox” to disrupt institutional norms and that this approach can still be achieved by those without such experiences. Through a distinctly personal reflective account, the author examines the challenges and outcomes of bringing together university students and serving prisoners in a learning space that she describes as a “nexus between prison and university”. Describing such environments as being dialectical and held together by dialogue, Tynan positions herself within the reflection to broaden the reader’s consideration of how lived experience can be placed within such initiatives to generate dialogue and facilitate critical thinking about imprisonment and future prospects.

We believe this special issue highlights many of the successful outcomes that stem from prison-university partnerships while also presenting a significant insight into the challenging nature of this work. The initiatives reflected on throughout the articles highlight how valuable this work is to learners, educators and institutions in overcoming the long-standing barriers to higher education for people with convictions. Evidently, the collaborative nature of this work is central to possibilities of success. However, as highlighted in this special issue, critical reflection lies at the heart of ensuring that the aims of the programmes can be realised and sustained. Therefore, we present here a collection of articles that provide a ‘realistic celebration’ of the projects being undertaken, whereby challenge and adversity reveal themselves to be just as empowering as the rewards experienced.

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Special Issue Editors:

Guest Editors

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When Pestalozzi Went to Meet Bonaparte

THOM GEHRING

The effort to democratize higher education—to make it accessible to working, and even underclass people—has been a difficult and protracted journey, full of impediments and outright reversals. One juncture on this journey was the establishment of the first polytechnic institute, in Paris, 1795, by the French Revolution's National Convention. The purpose of the institute was to connect secondary and postsecondary education, especially for the preparation of civil and military engineers. (*The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. [1971]. New York: Oxford University Press, vol. II, p. 1097). But as prison educators know, political and administrative changes can sometimes reverse the effect of improvements, however secure they may seem at the moment. Hence, the story of Pestalozzi and the man who established the Paris polytechnic institute.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was an important Swiss educator. He is also known as the person who started teacher education, and was most famous while alive for establishing education-oriented juvenile institutions for delinquent war orphans. Pestalozzi was a supporter of the French Revolution, but there was a terrible problem after the French invaded and occupied Switzerland in 1798. In many villages all the parents had been massacred and the children needed help. The French army supported Pestalozzi in his prison education work, mostly by providing buildings and other resources, but there were limits to what they could do. In 1802 he went to meet Napoleon Bonaparte.

Pestalozzi made a journey to Paris, as a member of the consulta called by Bonaparte to decide the fate of Switzerland. He hoped to take advantage of his stay in France to disseminate his pedagogical ideas. But Bonaparte refused to see him, saying that he had something else to do besides discussing questions of a, b, c. Monge, the founder of the Polytechnic School, was more cordial, and kindly listened to the explanations of the Swiss pedagogue. But he concluded by saying, 'It is too much for us!' More disdainful still, Talleyrand had said, 'It is too much for the people!' (Compayre, G. [1907]. *The History of Pedagogy*. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., pp. 434-435; emphasis in original).

Despite their different roles, Napoleon, Talleyrand, Monge, and Pestalozzi were supposed to be on the same side; that is precisely why this story is so difficult. Pestalozzi went on to help many people, but did it without assistance from those who should have been his natural allies. From literacy education, through to postsecondary and advanced education, prison educators have to be consistent in their support for each other—if only because very few others support them.

Thom Gehring retired as the research director of the Center for the Study of Correctional Education at California State University, San Bernardino. His scholarly emphasis is on the history of correctional education and prison reform. He has been a correctional educator since 1972. Dr. Gehring did his Ph.D. dissertation on the correctional school district pattern of organization. He serves as the historian for the Correctional Education Association. Earlier as a Professor of Education, he worked to direct the erstwhile EDCA correctional and alternative masters degree program.



Transformative Learning Through University and Prison Partnerships: Reflections From “Learning Together” Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract: *This paper critically discusses two London-based “Learning Together” prison university partnerships—Middlesex University with Her Majesty’s Prison (HMP) Wandsworth and London South Bank University (LSBU) with HMP Pentonville. The paper documents how students experienced the shared classroom learning approach designed on principles of “transformative pedagogy”, and how students interpret their personal development and the knowledge and skills gained as a result. We share the steps taken to bring the learning together pedagogical philosophy to life and use evidence from module evaluation findings and critical reflections to demonstrate the transformations that happen. We interpret our findings through the lens of a transformative ripples model. In addition to exploring personal transformation, the wider transformations that occur within the public institutions at the centre of these collaborations—the prisons and the universities—are discussed. We argue that for prison and university partnerships to be truly effective, they must embed transformative pedagogic practices at their heart, ensuring the “how” we teach is as important, and deliberately considered, as the “what” we teach.*

Keywords: *Prison education, transformative pedagogy, prison–university partnerships, experiential learning, social justice education, prisons*

The UK is currently seeing expansion in the development of prison–university education partnerships in the way community-based students are brought together to learn alongside in-prison students. These are styles of classroom knowledge exchange that encourage active participation and nurture dynamic processes of self-realisation. They are collaborations specifically intent on developing mutually beneficial exchange for the students taking part and the prisons and universities involved. Moreover, they are collaborations that can have impacts for wider social change. The growth in prison–university partnerships currently occurring in the UK can be linked to the government’s ambition to improve the provision of education in prisons both at the compulsory curriculum level and at the higher university level (Coates, 2016; Gauke, 2018). These partnerships can also be connected to understandings of prison “rehabilitation” and the factors that most successfully assist reintegration into the community on release. It is shown that engagement in education while in prison is linked to lower rates of re-offending (Davis et al., 2013; Ministry of Justice, 2011; Ministry of Justice, Government of the United Kingdom, Justice Data Lab and Prisoners’ Education Trust, 2014) and greatly improves chances of entering employment on leaving prison.

The aims of this paper are to critically discuss the delivery of two prison-based modules founded on the shared classroom design and pedagogic practice of the Learning Together approach. The module Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice was delivered by Middlesex University in HMP Wandsworth prison (January–May 2017) and the Education as Social Justice module was taught by London South Bank University



(LSBU) in HMP Pentonville prison (September 2016–January 2017). The partnerships come under the umbrella of the *Learning Together* network led by Amy Ludlow and Ruth Armstrong since the collaboration of Cambridge University and HMP Grendon in place from 2015 (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2015). Transformative learning is an underpinning principle of the learning together model in that it is learner-centered, participatory, and interactive. Classroom participation and dialogue are core features of the learning and teaching approach.

For the academic year 2018–19, 24 universities and 23 prisons are partnered together delivering 31 different courses. Geographically, Learning Together courses are run throughout England, with clusters in Cambridge, London and the North West of England. The majority of the partnerships have been in place for between two and three years. A number of the modules are running as first-time pilot projects, but many are in their second and third year of delivery. A second Middlesex–Wandsworth module was delivered between October 2018 and January 2019. Nearly half (46%) of the courses being delivered within the network are Criminology focused (Learning Together Network, 2018a). The authors of this paper led the delivery of the modules in the two London prisons comprising groups of community-based and in-prison students.

In this paper, we document how students experienced the shared learning approach designed on principles of *transformative pedagogy*, and how they interpreted their personal self-development and the knowledge and skills gained as a result. The discussion reflects on the common pedagogical practice that is grounded in the values of the wider learning together approach, which endeavors to create high-quality and academically rigorous learning experiences that encourage and support individual, as well as social and institutional transformation. The learning together model is typically narrated as inclusive learning communities with principles of equality and mutual respect reflected in the structures, policies and practice in place.

In this paper, we share the steps taken to bring the learning together pedagogical philosophy to life and use evidence from module evaluation findings and critical reflections to demonstrate the various transformations that happen. The concept “transformative pedagogy” is central to our interpretations (cf. Pompa, 2013a, 2013b). An underpinning framework, or model, applied to the material we present is the metaphor of the *transformative ripple*. This is useful to convey how, by planting the foundations of an enriching and empowering education base, other important social values emerge, which become shared within, and beyond the classroom. The paper demonstrates the wider value and benefits that emerge through this ripple-like effect as the impact and influence of the learning approach filters out beyond the student learners and the teachers immediately involved. Both the community-based and in-prison students reported significant alterations to their sense of self-determination and confidence as a result of participating in this shared class teaching model. As a knock-on effect, aspirations and goals for the future are reimagined (cf. Werts, 2013). Thus, we critically discuss the nature of *transformation* itself: What is it that is changing as a result of the conditions created, and what is the wider impact that can be deduced from this transformative ripple model? This is an underpinning research question of this paper.

A key organising concept of the learning together approach is transformative pedagogy and the way special attention is paid to *how* people teach and learn. Classroom participation and dialogue are core features of this pedagogical practice. In this way, students are contributing to the co-creation of knowledge that draws from the exchange of different perspectives and ideas among a diverse, mixed group of learners. We argue that for prison and university partnerships to be truly effective, they must embed transformative pedagogic practices at their heart, ensuring the *how* we teach is as important, and deliberately considered, as the *what* we teach.

In addition to exploring personal growth, we discuss the changes that can occur within the public institutions at the centre of these collaborations—the prisons and the universities. A second underpinning question of this paper therefore is: Through these enriching higher education experiences, can universities go further, in their role as public institutions, to extend values of social inclusion? Removing barriers to higher education can contribute more widely to social change and social justice.

The Learning Together network and the other prison university initiatives emerging in the UK are part of a more extensive prisons–university educational movement.¹ These emulate and borrow from programmes established in the USA such as the *Inside-Out* programme operating from Temple University, Philadelphia since 1997 and the “Prisons-to-College Pipeline” project in John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York

(Halkovic et al., 2013). Other international initiatives include the “African Prison Project”, “The Prison Education Project” and “Project Rebound” (Champion, 2018), illustrating the growing popularity of prison education. These partnerships go beyond the standardized lower-level literacy and numeracy courses and core curriculum teaching that make up education provision in English and Welsh prisons. Further, they add a different dimension to the distance learning model of the Open University (OU) degree courses accessible in English and Welsh prisons. Specifically, this is in the way partnership courses are delivered through face-to-face, in-class teaching in the same format as conventional university teaching and that comprise in-prison and community-based students learning together.

Transformative Pedagogy

Transformation is a key concept in interpretations of teaching and learning journeys and is applied extensively in analysis of prison education that brings community-based students into prisons to learn alongside in-prison students. Theories of transformation, in this context, make reference to the personal individual transformations that occur, as well as the wider societal, community and institutional changes that can happen. Armstrong and Ludlow (2016) suggest by bringing prisons to the outside community, and the outside community into prisons; in essence delivering *education across walls*, acts of wider social responsibility, societal awareness and acceptance of prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration is enhanced. Darke and Aresti (2016), writing from their experience of running a university prison partnership say, “it not only provides an enriching educational experience, but transcends social barriers and changes the ways that participants can view themselves and the world around them” (p. 31). Similarly, authors writing on the Inside-Out programme, collated in *Turning Teaching Inside-Out* (2018), report on the transformative effects, relating it to the individual change it brings, the values of social change it contributes to, and the institutional impacts it has on universities and prisons. Pompa (2013b), the founder of the USA Inside-Out programme, states it “moves beyond the walls that separate us. In a more literal sense, it moves, actually, *through* the walls. It is an exchange, an engagement—between and among people who live on both sides of the prison wall...” (p. 133). Bumiller (2013) also writing on Inside-Out states “testimonials from both inside and outside students often report ‘life changing’ effects of participating in a course, such as finding a direction in the pursuit of social justice or renewing their commitment to higher education” (p. 178). These themes are drawn out further in our paper.

Different terms are used in reference to the combined community and in-prison student groups in prison university programmes such as *inside* and *outside* students or *in-prison* and *community-based* students. In this paper we adopt the terms community-based and in-prison students.

Prison–University Collaborations in Context

The university and prison educational partnerships emerging across the UK can be linked to the general drive for better educational provision within prisons, as well as the benefits from building and investing in these organisational relationships. Internationally, there is widespread recognition of the importance of providing meaningful education in prison (Champion, 2018), provided by the Council of Europe Recommendations 1989 (Council of Europe, 1990) and echoed by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (2015), known as the Mandela rules. The Council of Europe particularly note that education in prison should be “no less important” than education provided in the outside community (p. 11), and indeed, should “resemble adult education outside prison” (p. 13). Costelloe and Warner (2014), in their analysis of “Prison Education Across Europe”, argue that if learning is grounded in an adult-education philosophy, it “offers a far richer and more authentic form of education” and as such, “can facilitate changes in a learner’s perception, attitudes and world view that are more likely to be truly transformative and lasting” (p. 175).

Following this global trend, in line with evidence on the effectiveness of prison education on recidivism rates (Champion, 2018), UK prison and university partnerships can be discussed within ideas that those who are incarcerated should be able to build necessary skills and competences that facilitate re-entry and inclusion in society upon release. The Coates report (2016) *Unlocking Potential* called for improved prison education highlighting that education provides “the chance to re-enter society successfully, to find work, to

live fulfilling lives” (p. i). Indeed, Coates acknowledged the value of higher education in prison and went further by calling for prison–university projects to be more than “isolated initiatives” and for higher education institutes (HEIs) and universities to ensure “pathways are facilitated for prison learners to gain access to college or university on release” (p. 55). This philosophy is advocated by the Council of Europe’s recommendations (15 and 16) that the outside community should be involved as fully as possible in prison education and that measures should be taken to enable those in prison to continue their education after release (1990).

The significantly lower rates of re-offending among those who participate in education while in prison was mentioned earlier. The USA longitudinal “Three-State Recidivism Study”, consisting of a treatment (involvement in correctional education) and a comparison group (no involvement), showed lower rates of recidivism by those who participated, in terms of re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration (Streurer et al., 2003). The meta-analysis of educational programmes for incarcerated adults by Davis et al., (2013) found that people who participated in education in prison were 43% less likely to recidivate than those who did not.

More recent ministerial statements relating to prison reform and education in England and Wales were made by Justice Secretary David Gauke in May 2018. Similar to Coates, Gauke paid particular regard to prisoner re-entry and reintegration on release from prison and acknowledged the importance of access to education and employability skills saying prison should be “a turning point” where “the first step is education” (Ministry of Justice, 2018).

Discussions on the state of prison education in the justice system of England and Wales can therefore be located within the prison reform agenda under government scrutiny, albeit interrupted, and arguably with insufficient progress, since its initial announcement in 2016. The *Prison Safety and Reform* White paper (Ministry of Justice, 2016) set out ambitions for reform and in 2016, six prisons across England and Wales were “re-rolled” as “reform prisons”.² Intended as models of radical reform, these empowered prison governors with devolved budgets and autonomy, so improvements could be made more effectively within individual prisons. HMP Wandsworth was designated as one of the six reform prisons. The Middlesex–Wandsworth partnership was established during this period of internal change along with HMP Wandsworth’s desire to make available a greater breadth of education to the people in their prison. Indeed, amongst the ambitious, yet in part, contentious reform prisons management policy, HMP Wandsworth lost its designated status. This is too complex to discuss here, but it must be noted, reform and continued improvement is an ongoing institutional priority. Political upheaval as a result of the EU Referendum and *Brexit* and the subsequent dissolution of Parliament on 3 May 2017 caused a halt on the meaningful continuation of the prisons reform policy as envisaged in the 2016 White Paper, and the criminal justice system of England and Wales has a long way to go to fulfil its stated ambitions.

The HMPs Wandsworth and Pentonville Learning Together Courses

The following section provides a brief description of the two prisons in which our modules were delivered, an overview of module content, the students participating, and their motivations to take part in the learning together teaching and learning style.

HMPs Wandsworth and Pentonville are combined category B and C adult male prisons in London.³ Both prisons were built in the mid-1800s and hold populations in excess of 1000 men.⁴ Both are *local prisons* designed to accommodate people serving *short sentences* and are close to courthouses in which trials are scheduled to take place with transfers out to other prisons. As such, the two prisons in which our courses were delivered, operate with highly transient populations. The average stay for a person in HMP Pentonville is approximately 60 days (HMIP, 2017, p 5). The transient populations inherent in both prisons was a challenge in terms of ensuring the in-prison students remained in residence long enough to complete the modules. A number of the Wandsworth students requested to be put “on hold” so they could complete the course before transfer. This in itself placed great responsibility on the course conveners to provide a valued and meaningful educational experience that outweighed the option of transferring to a less crowded, more appropriate prison environment.

The Contemporary Issues in Criminal Justice module delivered in Wandsworth mirrored the criminal justice course teaching at Middlesex University. The module was run over ten weeks in 40-minute subject-

specific lectures given by Middlesex academics with subjects explored and debated in small focused group discussions led by a team of group facilitators. Topics included crime and deviance, youth justice, court sentencing, desistance theories, comparative international prison perspectives and race and the criminal justice system.

Sixteen students completed the module; nine in-prison and seven community-based students. The Middlesex community-based students were candidates in law, politics and criminology. Six were female and one male, which broadly reflects the gender balance of Social Science students generally. The main interest in taking part was linked to the experience of studying in a prison setting. A core feature of studying criminology is to appreciate the complex and nuanced nature of crime and offending, and having the chance to engage in what was referred to as an “immersive” learning experience, was highly regarded. The Middlesex students especially commented on the rewarding opportunity they had been given to learn alongside people in prison. Advancing knowledge by applying theoretical learning to real life was also an incentive. To them, this was an enriching experience they emphasized could never be achieved through any subject expert, or specialist criminal justice texts. These benefits are summed up in the following comments provided by Middlesex participants:

Overall I think it was fantastic. ...one of the main things that drew me to it was the fact that it was going to be this very immersive experience that had two elements of society that don't necessarily overlap very frequently. (Middlesex University)

“It was an invaluable lesson being with those that have been through the criminal justice system...we wouldn't have had this any other way” (Middlesex University).

“This kind of experience is not replaceable...from talking to those students (Wandsworth)...that is something I could never get from a book...” (Middlesex University).

Interests also related to gaining employment within the criminal justice system, with this seen as experience that would facilitate it, in addition to the way this type of opportunity could enhance already established professional practice skills. Two community students were developing specialisms in *restorative justice* approaches, and one had for many years worked with homeless and young adults. Sadly, there are many overlaps among these groups with imprisonment experiences. Shay (2018), reflecting on her experience of running a version of the Inside-Out programme, similarly set out the particular usefulness studying a course of this nature has for law school students, in the way it involved more nuanced discussions about certain criminal justice topics (p. 248).

The main motivations for the Wandsworth in-prison students to take up this shared classroom opportunity included keenness to study at the level of university education with a special interest in criminology as a subject. A few expressed the wish to understand the criminal legal process with more clarity, with topics such as court sentencing and the disparity in sentence lengths between offence types of particular interest. Comparative prison systems were also subjects they were keen to hear about. The Wandsworth in-prison students viewed the contribution they could make to a criminology module as valuable in the way personal life experiences could illuminate the theoretical perspectives applied in studies of criminal justice. One young man expressed this in the following comment:

“I feel there are many contentious issues that have not been addressed or are pending that need to be brought to light about the prison system.”

The Wandsworth in-prison students came from a range of educational backgrounds with a mixture of those leaving school without formal qualifications, and those achieving GCSEs, A Levels and bachelor's degrees prior to prison.⁵ Three were currently studying *Open University* (OU) courses by distance learning and felt our weekly class-based sessions helped with that learning.

The “Education for Social Justice” module delivered in HMP Pentonville was linked to the Education faculty of LSBU and focused on how education is used as a tool for social change and the factors that can influence that. The history of education, the different learning theories, and the use of technology in education were covered in this course. The partnership developed as a result of the prison wishing to explore a prison–university course outside of the traditional criminology subjects that are typically taught within these progra-

mmes. Twenty-four students completed the module: 12 LSBU students and 12 Pentonville students. The LSBU students were on an Education Studies programme comprising *traditional* undergraduate students, plus work-based students. The work-based students (four of the 12) were employed in nursery, primary and secondary school settings and attended LSBU one day a week on an accelerated study programme. Ten of the 12 students were female. Akin to the Social Sciences, this is the typical gender balance among students on Education Studies degree programmes in the UK. Similar to the Wandsworth cohort, and in-prison populations more generally, a wide range of educational backgrounds were reflected, including those who left formal education before secondary school and others who had completed a degree prior to their prison sentence.

The delivery of the modules in both institutions carried the same academic expectations of university level tuition, with formal processes of assessment and achievement expected. A strength of the learning together approach is embedding academic rigour. Both modules finished with a celebration event where students completing the courses were able to recognise their achievements in front of friends and family.

Transformative Pedagogy in Practice

Before discussing our findings in detail, this section describes how Learning Together courses utilise an approach of transformative pedagogy in the classrooms they create. A working definition of pedagogy is the science of the art of teaching (Pollard, 2011). Particular attention is paid to the mechanisms and practical approaches that are employed to create purposeful learning environments which, in turn, facilitate transformation. In the context of transformative learning, learning together draws heavily on the work of Mezirow (1997), whereby transformation is defined as “the process of effecting change in a frame of reference” (p. 5). The process of personal change occurs when students are provided with alternative frames of reference and a new lens through which to view the world. Learning can be said to be transformative when a person has the opportunity to form and re-form meaning as an ongoing and iterative process. It is learning that is dynamic and evolving, where the roles of student and teacher are interchangeable and interlinked (Taylor, 1998). By placing particular emphasis on the contribution adult learners can make in the classroom, their experience and pre-existing knowledge acts as a valuable starting point for future transformation (Dirkx, 1998).

The chance for students to engage in critical self-reflection is a key feature of transformative learning theory. However, the process of learner transformation is not linear, does not happen at the same rate for all students, and the resulting transformation can be difficult to measure and evaluate. In the analysis presented in this paper, we are exploring transformation in terms of the pedagogy developed and embedded in our prisons learning. That is, the explicit tools and teaching techniques used in the Learning Together classroom, which facilitate self-reflection and recognition of how the learning is changing one’s capabilities. More recent definitions of transformative learning explore the reimagining of “identity” as a hallmark of transformation (Illeris, 2014), which is particularly relevant in the context of the learning together approach. This is explored further later on in this paper.

A Transformative Toolkit

Transformative learning assumes that learning is a social process and as such is built on social constructivist models developed by key theorist Lev Vygotsky (1986). Social constructivism focuses on the role of language in learning and how the social interactions between peers, and more experienced others, combine to support a learner to extend their knowledge and understanding (Mujis and Reynolds, 2018). This learning theory is also aligned to the critical pedagogy approach advocated by Friere (1972), which places dialogue as the most important tool in the classroom.

In the learning together context, transformative pedagogy is learner-centred, participatory and interactive, therefore a range of tools and techniques are employed that help foster a transformative learning culture. These tools and techniques have a common purpose, which is to develop and support effective dialogue between learners and is central to the learning approach we apply (cf. Darder et al., 2009).

It is important to describe the specific tools and techniques employed within our prison courses, as assumptions are often made about broad approaches such as *inclusion* without due regard paid to the teaching practice

that enables it to truly happen. The pedagogic tools employed in both of our Learning Together courses align specifically with the methods employed by Kilgore (2011) in his account of bringing critical pedagogic practice into a prison education environment. The careful selection of such methods is a means to enable student autonomy, engagement and dialogue—all central features of transformative learning.

In tune with referring to tools and techniques, the following section describes the key components of the “transformative toolkit” as we refer to it. This places emphasis on the “authentic learning space” and the deliberately structured class sessions we design. The authentic learning space refers to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment and is achieved in a range of specific ways sensitive to the context in which the teaching is being delivered and molded to our student audience. As part of this authentic learning space, the use of effective questioning to support class dialogue and debate is crucial and was planned into each week’s class session. In the context of our courses, this is to maintain focus on the social and criminal justice subjects under discussion and to maximize subject comprehension. Importantly, however, it has particular relevance for making sure sessions do not stray into conversation areas that objectify the in-prison students with their personal experiences. Moreover, valuing the students’ ideas and contributions is built into the small group discussion format and reiterates the culture of respect. The learning together approach empowers students to take risks with their learning, pushing them outside of their usual comfort-zone, which is the very essence of transformation (Maguire, 2016).

The close planning and structuring of our teaching and learning sessions with the aims of each session explicitly set out, embraces the diverse learning needs of the student group. As part of the planning process, establishing clear expectations for learning is also a consistent tool, avoiding assumed knowledge, particularly for those who may have had negative experiences of education (Kilgore, 2011). Paying due consideration to effective working arrangements, designing the classroom space so that students can engage in dialogue and hold open and exploratory conversations within small groups, is another important method in a transformative learning approach (Cranfield, 2016). This is particularly important when students are discussing life experiences, and pays attention to the sensitive nature of the dialogue. With this in mind, establishing clear boundaries and high levels of confidentiality and trust between students is essential and is agreed and developed in the initial set-up. Establishing this atmosphere is a key intention of the learning together style and is put in place by the students themselves, in the way boundary-setting and establishing trust and parity is agreed at the beginning of the modules.

Methods

The following critical discussions of individual and institutional transformation are founded on reflections of our experiences in setting up and implementing the prison courses, as well as the immediate outcomes and effects felt by the students, and the staff more widely involved. The findings based on the Middlesex University–Wandsworth prison course are drawn from a formal process and outcome evaluation carried out during the course delivery (see Ward, Gray and Cracknell, 2017). The evaluation used a combination of methods, such as one-to-one student interviews and interviews with Middlesex lecturers, group facilitators and Wandsworth education staff. A fieldwork diary was also kept which documented the many and various discussions held during the setting up and implementation stages of the module. As the teaching style was a new undertaking for Middlesex University and Wandsworth Prison, a dynamic process of reflexivity was necessary. Documenting detail and nuance was an important part of the process. Classroom observation also formed a valuable method of evaluation. Ethical approval to conduct the evaluation research was granted by the Middlesex University ethics review board and permission given by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to share the research findings.

Due to resource limitations, a formal evaluation of the LSBU module was not possible, but intrinsic to teaching and learning practice, critical reflection on the teaching was imposed. The Pentonville data is taken from student reflective journals, field notes compiled by the course convenor and feedback comments by visitors to the course through its duration. By collecting and presenting personal stories, a rich narrative is constructed and is used for a fuller understanding of the methodological challenges associated with evaluating transformative learning (Kim and Merriam, 2011).

The “Transformative Ripples Model” in Action

When reflecting on the evaluations undertaken of our two modules, common themes emerged in the way transformation happens on a personal, individual basis, and on a social and institutional basis. We use a transformative ripple model to illustrate the impacts. Pompa (2013a) similarly referred to the “ripple” effect when discussing the Inside-Out programme and the wider impacts taking place from this style of shared learning. She gave examples of the “rippling” out expansions in the form of more “classes, think tanks, regional development and alumni activity” stating “the effects of this vibrant program are rippling in ever-widening circles” (p. 123). We develop the ripple model further by adding student voices which captures the transformative effects that happen when a pedagogical approach based on how students really learn, is embedded. If we consider the pedagogy we apply as a pebble dropped into a pond, the impact of the approach has various circular outward ripples as outlined below:

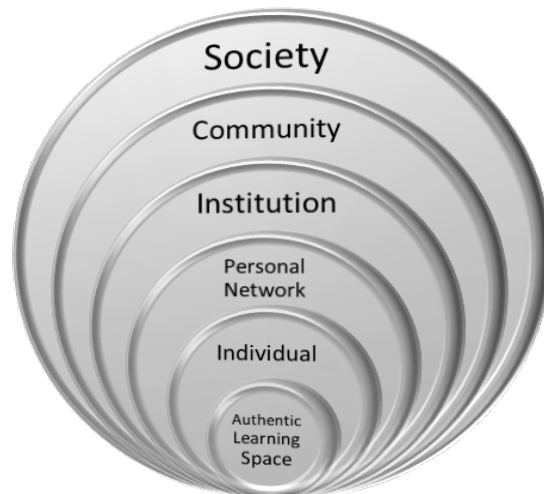


Figure 1. Transformative ripples associated with prisons university learning

Each of these is considered using evidence from our formal evaluation and critical reflections. As set out in Figure 1, the transformative ripples model begins with the authentic learning space, the classroom space we deliberately created to achieve the optimum conditions to foster student confidence. This ripples out from the individual learner to the students’ personal networks including family, friends and peers, before extending further to the universities and prison institutions involved. As the ripples become wider, but indeed less explicitly transformative, the community and societal level impact of this type of course design can also be considered. Whilst we acknowledge this level of transformation is hardest to capture, and difficult to illustrate with hard evidence, the critical reflection within our research indicates the real possibility for changes at the community and societal level.

Individual personal transformations and the authentic learning space. Both sets of students, prison and community-based, enthusiastically reflected upon the atmosphere created by the authentic learning space, the first drop in our transformative ripples model. Students reported on the positive, enriching experience involvement in the modules gave them, in terms of the interesting and stimulating topics and the in-depth discussions they were able to engage in within the format of the small mixed groups. Both the in-prison and community-based students commented on the unique opportunity sharing a learning space with people from different backgrounds to their own and exchanging knowledge and experience through dialogue gave. The small group discussions were particularly appraised as helping to test their held ideas and perspectives, knowing their contributions were valued, even if they were to be challenged and scrutinized by the other students.

The sense of satisfaction the learning together shared classroom approach embeds, that in turn helped students find their confidence and strengthen self-belief, were communicated with several student comments, such as the following:

“I like the fact that prisoners can integrate with university students. It creates a very good blend of knowledge and experience and also promotes a very positive environment to learn in.”

Similar sentiments were aired by the Pentonville in-prison students:

The course has been exciting and inspiring. The group work brought the best out of each and every one of us. There was an amazing exchange of knowledge amongst the group and it revealed the different skills that each individual brings to the table.

The cohesion and confidence established early on within the learning space was pivotal for students to put forward their opinions in a relaxed, non-judgmental way, allowing for the dynamic interrogation of ideas. A number of students, particularly the in-prison group, expressed thoughts on their own personal transformation as “personal growth” and as part of a “journey” with feelings of achievement and pride. The journey was not only from an emotional viewpoint, but also in the practical sense of gaining new skills, or building upon existing ones, that could be put towards further study and future employment. One Pentonville student reflected on the changes that had occurred in him personally in regard to inspiring ideas for future study: “I would describe my experience on the course as a brilliant eye opener. I’ve really enjoyed learning again and hope to use this as a platform to further my education.”

Student reflections also centred on points such as the sense of challenge and achievement they were taking from participating in university-level teaching and learning modules. The university-style environment, with specialist lectures, academic journal readings, set critical questions and the small group discussions, were particularly noted as part of the positive, enriching educational experience. It gave a chance to test and validate their capabilities at this higher level of learning and related to the structured sessions and guided critical questioning we set in place. By presenting a set of questions for discussion, independent student thinking is promoted, and the development of critical perspectives is supported. This is in the way students are encouraged to challenge existing perceptions and draw connections between the academic reading and personal experience. Questions such as the following are put forward: “How do the author’s arguments compare with last week’s reading?”, “How does the author draw their conclusions?”, “How does this compare to other reading you have done?”, “To what extent do you agree with their conclusions? Why? Why not?”

Appreciation was expressed at the sense of inclusion the classroom space garnered. This sense of inclusion and acceptance was uniquely powerful and expressed in the way “the university accepted us as one of them”. One student commented on the enriching experience of “studying in a normal environment”. The comments made in this regard can be interpreted from a perspective that it is the university as an entity that is viewed as accepting of people like them who were imprisoned at least in the present period. Indeed, feelings of stigma and concerns of social exclusion from societal opportunities on release from prison is a great concern, and the degree of humanity experienced within these courses went some way towards hope for the future. In some regard it can be linked to notions of identity and shaping new or rediscovered identities as students (cf. Clarke, 2016).

In exploring the concept of individual transformation, and in response to the question on the overall feeling students had been left with at the end of the course, one in-prison student who reported a fragmented early education expressed pride in himself for succeeding in the module: “I’m proud of myself for doing it.” The power of education was apparent within many of the comments connected to feelings of “building confidence and self-esteem” and developing “a good sense of achievement” and “a sense of self-belief.” These are important attributes for all student learners, but for some of the in-prison students who had not previously experienced education in any satisfying way, the learning together approach, intent on embedding empowerment and self-belief, is likely to have had an enduring impact. This aligns with the accepted notion that education is an empowering tool and is central to the critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire. This underpins both transformative pedagogy and the values of the Learning Together network: “What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves” (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 181).

With regards to the aim that involvement in the module can transform and shape future aspirations, many of the students talked about how the courses made them want to further their studies, or that it had given them ideas for future employment that would not otherwise have occurred. One Wandsworth student now has ideas to combine his accountancy background with statistical analysis of criminal justice data, for the employment options it could open up. This student stood out for the academic ability he already held, but other students noted how the opportunity to access education at this higher level had given them techniques

to reflect on what they could do, and how it could be applied in terms of future employment. One young man, now undergoing his second long spell in prison, had been moved to thoughts of employment in helping young people, saying “I want to help young people...guiding them using my own experiences”.

Transformation “rippling” out to personal networks. With reference to the next ripple within our model, we found a wider impact on the personal networks of those involved. These included peers based in the prison, among the university community, friends and family and other members of their close networks, as well as the education staff within the prisons, prison staff and university colleagues.

For the in-prison students, the effects as they ripple out to their personal networks were immediately felt within the general prison environment when they returned from their weekly courses. A number of students remarked the module sparked interesting and spirited discussions “on the wings” that were a welcome departure from the usual prison conversations. A Wandsworth in-prison student noted the different reception from his prison peers as a consequence of studying and doing well on the Learning Together course. He mentioned how others saw a difference in him which in a way can be linked to a reshaped identity as a university student. This was perhaps more emphatically endorsed due to achieving this success while mastering English as a second language. Werts (2013), in his writing on studying an Inside-Out course in Graterford Prison, Pennsylvania, similarly noted the ripple out impact from the class: “The energy generated in the class carried over into the prison, where men were studying together, competing for the best grade against each other, and having positive impacts on their peers” (p. 138).

These ripples outwards, and their effects, can be linked to notions of identity transformation. Clark (2016) writes on the change in identity that prison education can bring, discussing the way engaging in education in prison can help to shape self-identities that go beyond being “a prisoner”. Clark draws from the desistance writings of McNeil (2012), setting out how “the identities and narratives in prison reinforce a prisoner’s criminal identity (the term ‘offender’, a prison number, the subject of a narrative around risks of offending and its mitigation), rather than promoting any prosocial positive alternatives” (p. 4). As one Wandsworth student noted, “I have never really given myself an identity. I suppose I am a student”.

Several of the Wandsworth students not only commented on their own feelings of accomplishment from completing the module, but also the pride of their families. For some students this was particularly meaningful. It is true many people in prison have experienced disrupted, problematic family backgrounds and for whom demonstrating young adult success and receiving sufficient parental attention has had no place to emerge. One student in this category noted how pleased his father was which he said made him “feel good about myself” and was uniquely powerful in terms of the impact this course was having on personal self-fulfillment. This family pride was particularly felt at the end of course celebration when students, along with their family and friends, the group facilitators, lecturers, prison and education staff and wider university colleagues, gathered together in the graduation-style event to celebrate students’ successful participation and completion of the modules.

The importance of family support and the acceptance towards people being released from prison is recognised in criminal justice policy documents and reform proposals as essential in the rehabilitation and reintegration process (Ministry of Justice, 2014; Ministry of Justice, 2016; Cameron, 2016; Gove, 2016). This is also supported by literature on desistance theories and the crucial role of families as effective social bonds for reducing reoffending (Sampson & Laub, 1993, 2001; Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017).

The deeper and wider penetration the Learning Together course was having, which can be linked to notions of social change, related also to the nature of discussions the community-based students were having with peers, friends and family. They talked about conversations they held, in which assumptions and stereotypes could be challenged and narrow fixed views held about people in prison and their intellectual capabilities, could be confronted. One Middlesex student commented on the nature of the conversations she had been drawn into:

It opens up this great conversation about how useful and kind of wonderful a programme like this in terms of ... breaking down barriers and creating commonality. For me, it’s been the great basis for larger conversations about criminal justice and the way we perceive people who are incarcerated. (a Middlesex University student)

This was added to by another community-based student who came from a different cultural background and one where imprisoned people are afforded few rights. He himself took time to alter his perceptions of the capability and potential of people in prison. His comment illustrates the power of how education can change attitudes, and world view as mentioned earlier:

I told him [flatmate] “those gentlemen are very clever, they are so clever. They understand the articles and the readings very fast.” I would say “they surprised me a lot because they talked about those theories... knowledge through their own experience and they even extend that knowledge to something that I am not so familiar”. So, I told him, “do not underestimate anyone because of where they are going and what they experience, no, because they are good and they have such big potential to achieve more than a normal person, even as I do.” (a Middlesex University student)

Institutional transformations. Continuing with our analysis as framed within the transformative ripples model, we turn to discussing the way transformations can occur within the institutions our teaching and learning is rooted within. These are the prison and the university. We consider how the courses generated conversations and institutional debate around the purpose and nature of collaborative prisons and university education.

Notions of institutional transformation could be evidenced in the reactions coming forth from Wandsworth education staff, prison staff, and senior prison governors. They took pride in the progressive approach they were implementing by accepting community-based students into their prison to learn alongside in-prison students. The Wandsworth Prison Governor in post at the start of our module believed collaborative learning with higher education institutions was invaluable in the way it could help people re-establish their lives on release. He tweeted in support of the module: “Proud of this initiative and the learning that will come from it for us, our men, and Middlesex University students”. Also, as the course progressed, reports of its success filtered back to Middlesex University with accompanying pride among senior colleagues supporting the initiative from the outset. It is indeed the case that university students of criminal justice need a broad, informed and compassionate understanding of offender and imprisoned groups. Providing an opportunity for university students to learn alongside the offender groups they are likely to gain employment with, can help nurture the right attitudes of acceptance, belief and respect among future criminal justice practitioners. It is therefore imperative that universities are open to encouraging avenues into these areas of employment, and that the risk and ethical dimensions that need consideration within this work are embraced without institutional fear and overly sensitive interpretations of risk and harm.

With regards to the Middlesex lecturers who taught on the Wandsworth module, all found that extending their teaching practice into a prison-based classroom brought with it professional benefits. Despite teaching criminology for some years, most staff had not been inside a prison. It was evident the value derived from the in-prison teaching experience was transformative in the way staff were introduced to the talent among the in-prison learners and the immediate empowering results this deliberate collaborative teaching and learning style was seen to be having. The following comments given by Middlesex University lecturers draw attention to the unique teaching experience it provided:

“It was an extraordinary teaching experience...one of the most collaborative teaching experiences....”

“Given what we do, engaging with people in the criminal justice system and people on the receiving end of it ... seeks to ground or apply what we do to the real world”.

In this paper we argue that programmes such as the learning together initiative encourages a more pluralistic culture in universities and prisons that can be transformative for the institutions, as well as for the individuals participating. Universities as public services should be committed to being socially inclusive, welcoming students from different and diverse learning backgrounds. Indeed, this is frequently stated in university mission statements via corporate strategic vision documents. Involvement with initiatives of this type are important evidence for universities to demonstrate commitment to “widening participation” agendas currently promoted at the national policy level through the Higher Education and Research Act (2017). Widening participation is defined by removing barriers and facilitating entry for people from non-traditional educational

and social backgrounds and strongly embeds principles of social justice and equality of opportunity and diversity (Thomas et al., 2017).

Community and societal transformation. Within the alterations we could see happening, specifically the way new dialogue about how collaborations between prisons and universities can have far-reaching positive impacts for both, we consider the final stages of the transformative ripples model we apply. This sees the transformative effect rippling out towards the community and society more widely (cf. Pompa, 2013a, 2013b). Societal transformation is, perhaps the hardest to capture and one of the furthest from the pebble of pedagogy. In terms of evidence to illustrate this, it is less tangible than the direct individual and institutional transformations we were able to evidence, but comes from our reflections on the outcomes of both courses. Nevertheless, wider changes and aspirational transformation in society about the role of education in prison and the role universities should take to support positive efforts for social justice are beginning to form. Pompa (2013b) says something metaphorically along the lines of wider societal transformations: “The hope is that, in time, through this exchange, these walls between us, around us, and within us will become increasingly permeable and, eventually extinct—one idea, one person, one brick at a time” (p. 133).

The partnership that occurs between university and prison institutions generates links with other organisations within the community, for example, through external visitors interested in the programmes and local media representatives who become informed, potentially also contributing to changed perceptions of the institutions and people involved in these courses. For example, a visitor to the LBSU–Pentonville project, not directly involved in teaching or in the criminal justice system, but who was keen to learn more about the course by attending a class session, expressed, “Within minutes, I could quickly feel any preconceptions I had subconsciously held, relating to current prisoner education, being totally eradicated. I left the prison feeling both inspired and ‘re-educated’ myself.”

Criminal justice institutions such as prisons should not be viewed as separate entities to the communities in which they are located, but as a part of them, with important opportunities to embrace social justice and inclusion. This was particularly apparent for our two prisons that are set in the heart of London’s residential and business communities, who have much to gain from contributing to community reintegration pathways and utilizing the skill and potential held among prison populations. The results that can emerge from prisons, extending beyond their walls into the community, and the outside penetrating and positively contributing to what goes on in prisons as Ludlow and Armstrong (2015) suggest, is socially transformative. It adds meaning to social responsibility and enhances wider societal awareness.

The ripple effect out towards the community also includes future employers of Learning Together students. Part of the transformative aim of the module, studying within the prison walls, was that it can develop and build upon skills that are transferable and will enhance future employability within the criminal justice system. The inspired learning that emerged from our authentic learning space built this up among our students. The community-based students commented that the collaborative style of learning conducted among a diverse group of people with very different background experiences, helped to develop a set of skills not ordinarily focused on in campus-based classroom learning. A number of the community-based students, both Middlesex and LSBU, expressed the course had generated a heightened interest and aspiration to work with people in prison as a potential career opportunity. Prisons can find it difficult to recruit graduate-level prison officers as the role is not viewed as rewarding in the way it is in other countries such as Norway, for example (Pratt, 2008). The exposure to prison work that our module facilitated, altered notions of what *prison work* entails and how interesting, varied and satisfying it can be. The Prison Service of England and Wales has been shifting their focus to concentrate on graduate recruitment in an attempt to further professionalise the service.

Equally, the possible transformative effects of bringing the *outside* community *in* as part of the Learning Together programme and how this can ripple out to benefits for wider society can be seen in the way one Wandsworth student draws attention to the advantage with seeing people in prison for who they really are, and that is as “normal people”:

People have a different perception of prisoners, but once they get to know us, [we’re] more than that, like friendly people...we’re just normal people at the end of the day [and changing perceptions] will give others a chance, down the line, in employing ex-offenders.

These views are supported, and made all the more powerful, when considering the UK Government discussions on prison reform and the education and employment strategy, in recognising that it, “will help break down both the barriers and the prejudices prisoners have faced” (Gauke, 2018). Government level discussions on prison reform in the English and Welsh system centre on the positive impact prisoners can have within society upon release and the importance of education and employment within prison as pivotal to the way successful reintegration can be achieved. Utilising the existing talent and competence of people in prison, rather than wasting it by denying access to education, is related to these values. This recognition was powerfully articulated at the end of module ceremony by a Wandsworth student, who expressed the collective sentiment of the men and the gratitude they held for being given this educational opportunity: “I want to say thank you to my fellow desisters, not ex-offenders, for proving that we’re an asset to society and not a liability to society.”

This comment raises important critical questions of why such gratitude is expressed when receiving an educational course in prison? Rather than articulations of extreme gratefulness for these one-off experiences of classroom education, the exceptional achievements and contribution people in prison have to offer to wider society should be foregrounded.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has set out the transformative pedagogical approach employed by two London Learning Together partnerships. We argue that for prison and university education partnerships to be truly effective, they must embed transformative pedagogic practice at their heart, ensuring that the *how* we teach is as important as the *what* we teach. Our argument has been formulated, and interpreted through a transformative ripples model, to demonstrate what it is that is changing as a result of the pedagogic conditions we created, and the wider impact this approach can have on individual, institutional, and social transformation. This was an underpinning research question. We have considered how transformation can be enacted, through what we call the transformative toolkit, and the extent to which it can be seen. The ripples model demonstrates how far reaching transformation can extend as a result of the prison-university educational partnerships we were involved in. This paper has presented the role of the educator as key to drop the “pebble” that begins the ripple process by creating an authentic learning space and using the right pedagogical tools to nurture confident learning. It is, however, also necessary to reflect on the role of the student in taking responsibility for the way transformation happens. Taylor’s review of transformative theory and practice (1998) encourages practitioners to work collaboratively with students in creating conditions specifically intent on fostering transformative learning. For learning together pedagogic practice, this is an important aspect for sustaining transformative learning opportunities.

Prison and University partnerships, through Learning Together and other collaborative networks, have arguably *raised the bar* for the delivery of higher education in prison, and have highlighted the need for a greater range of higher education offerings. The partnerships that operate as a part of the Learning Together network provide a workable blueprint for the delivery of higher education in prison and have become an important and valuable part of university curriculums. These partnerships, founded on principles of accessibility and inclusion, offer a richer kind of engagement with learning and a wider range of students can gain access to conventional and established forms of teaching and learning (Haggis, 2006).

Establishing programmes that benefit the individual and the institution, and which positively impact on the wider networks of those involved, does not come without its challenges and must be tackled head on for any long-term meaningful benefits to be felt. From our experience of getting the Wandsworth module off the ground, it was clear a programme of this nature needed complete “buy-in” from the top-down in both institutions—the prison and the university. In terms of the prison, a pre-existing relationship with the then governor was the link from which the implementation of our module became possible. In regard to operational management, it would not have been possible to execute the weekly module sessions without members of the education staff facilitating the arrival of the men in the classroom by physically going on to “the landings”, opening cell doors, bringing men from their work places, and so on. It was apparent, just in this small way, that prison policy decisions in terms of staffing levels has a profound effect on the operation of a “purposeful

activity” in prison, which is a central element of prison and rehabilitation reform.

Going forward, as part of wider university learning communities, there is an opportunity for universities to take the lead in establishing and supporting prison to university pathways that is evidently needed. As Coates (2016) requested, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and universities should engage with facilitating access for people with prison experiences. She noted voluntary guidelines are in place in respect to the admissions procedures of universities and stated “fair, proportionate and transparent practice” is necessary when assessing the suitability of applicants with criminal records (p. xx.). In May 2018 the UK Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) removed the requirement for university applicants to declare previous criminal convictions. This is linked to the “ban the box” campaign taking hold, which is now supported by many employer organisations including the civil service so that applicants are not obligated to declare criminal convictions at the initial recruitment stage of employment. Although the ban the box movement has culminated in government reform so that people do not have to declare their criminal convictions at the initial stage of applying for a university place, there needs to be a cultural shift in how the community, and society more widely views people released from prison. There is a wealth of talent, skill and commitment of those who have spent time in prison that is not being utilized. HMPs Pentonville and Wandsworth are London-based prisons and “pipelines” to London universities can be opened through these prison–university partnerships.

Transformative learning based on the pedagogical practices established by the Learning Together programme have been analysed within the relative short term of their establishment four years ago. The foreseeable transformative effect from a teaching and learning method of the style Learning Together programmes adopt, requires continued self-reflection. In terms of the future, research based on the foundations of this paper and others, needs to extend to analysis on student experience and outcomes for prison learners post-release as they access further study and employment. The future destinations of the university learners need to be examined as well to gauge the longer-term influence programmes adopting this “immersive” approach have. This is in order to understand how, when and why transformative learning experiences translate into positive outcomes.

Our prison–university partnerships within the learning together initiative aimed to provide an accessible and inclusive learning space in which ideas and assumptions were explored among a group of people from different and diverse social backgrounds and life experiences. The pedagogical toolkit on which the modules were based provided an educational experience for all students which is individually transformative in the way it develops self-confidence and purpose, reframing expectations and beliefs and developing future aspirations and goals. From interpreting our findings through the transformative ripples model, evidence from evaluation data and critical reflection, demonstrates the way transformations begin with the individual and filter out towards the institutions in which they are grounded. Moreover, values of acceptance and inclusion are reinforced which can extend beyond to the community and society more widely.

The paper has located the discussion of transformation within the wider prisons policy of England and Wales and argues there is much value to be had in expanding this style of learning and teaching. Prison students have academic capabilities that need to be utilised rather than wasted, and appreciation of the complexities of crime and offending are a compulsory part of criminology course curriculums. As such, it is imperative criminology courses reach beyond campus-based, textbook learning to illuminate the breadth of prison, offender reintegration and community rehabilitation type employment roles that are available. Alongside developing these uniquely beneficial educational programmes, progress needs to be made in the way people with criminal convictions are able to access higher education establishments once they leave prison. Universities and higher education colleges should be committed to developing prison to university pipelines.

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Footnotes

¹ Prison university partnerships are also operating across a number of other universities, such as Durham University since 2014 (Durham University, 2014), and Kent University since 2015.

² The autonomous “reform prisons” were HMP Coldingley, HMP Highdown, HMP Ranby, HMP Holme House, HMP Kirklevington Grange and HMP Wandsworth.

³ Male prisons are organised into four security categories from A-D. According to the Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 40/11, category B prisons are for “whom the very highest of conditions of security are not necessary but for who escape must be made very difficult”. Category C prisons are for those “who cannot be trusted in open conditions but who do not have the resources and will to make a determined escape attempt”.

⁴ Prison population records show Pentonville usually has a daily “roll” of around 1200 men and Wandsworth 1500 (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2018).

⁵ GCSEs and A Levels are the national examination certificates taken in England and Wales. GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education), are taken in several core and chosen subjects, usually at the end of year 11 at the age of 15-16. A levels (Advanced Level) are normally taken, in usually 3-4 chosen subjects, at the end of year 13 at the age of 17-18.

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Learning Together: Localism, Collaboration and Reflexivity in the Development of Prison and University Learning Communities

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Abstract: *This paper engages with challenges of localism, collaboration and reflexivity in thinking about the conceptualisation and development of partnership learning communities between higher education and criminal justice institutions. Grounded in experiences of partnership working in the UK and Australia, our arguments are twofold: First, drawing on missions, policy and practice challenges, that there is a case to be made for partnership—working between higher education and criminal justice institutions; and second that, although there is a need to think about collaborative international structures, there is also a need to reflect critically on how different socio-political and cultural realities (both within and beyond national borders) might shape the particular nature of partnership working. Therefore, while warmly welcoming international collaboration in this field, we urge caution in importing or exporting different “models” of partnership working. We make the case, instead, for open-textured theoretical and empirical reflexivity.*

Keywords: *Higher education, partnership, localism, reflexivity*

So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty.

—United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [the Nelson Mandela Rules]*, Rule 104(2), 2015

This article presents a reflection on the development and evolution of the Learning Together program in England and Wales (where the first and second author are based) and the attempts to date to implement the program in Queensland, Australia (where the third author is based).¹ Learning Together is an educational initiative that aims to build transformative learning communities through bringing students from higher education and criminal justice organisations to learn together as a group face-to-face in a prison environment (for further discussion, see Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016; Nichols, 2018). Developed and led by the University of Cambridge since 2014, over 40 higher education and criminal justice institutions in England and Wales now collaborate as a network (the Learning Together Network), in conversation with international academic and criminal justice partners.

In his foreword to Paulo Freire’s seminal *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Shaull asserted that education cannot be a neutral process; instead, it functions as an instrument to facilitate conformity or “becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Shaull, in Freire, 1970, p. 16). Inspired by Freire’s vision of education as the practice of freedom, together, we seek to locally co-produce theoretically



informed learning communities, that is, we seek to establish locally adapted learning communities in collaboration with our students (whether or not incarcerated) which are influenced by relevant theories. Specifically, we ground our practices in educational, sociological and criminological theory (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016), with the aim of ensuring that learning transforms, rather than merely reproduces, power structures that can be exclusive, excluding, divisive and oppressive. This does not ignore the lack of autonomy and freedom experienced by those trapped in the justice system, nor the barriers to education such institutions may erect (see e.g. Kilty & Lehalle, 2018; Warner, 2018). Nevertheless, as Jewkes has noted, quoting Scott and Codd (2013, p. 170), although “prisons are ‘places of sadness and terror, harm and injustice, secrecy and oppression’... they can also be places of great humour and playfulness, friendship and camaraderie, educational enlightenment, successful therapeutic intervention and transformative achievement” (Jewkes, 2015, p. xi).

Freire argued that good education is the “practice of freedom”: a deeply civic, political and moral practice, which subjectifies and empowers learners to mobilise their skills and talents and recognise their stake in shaping the world for social good. As Horton and Freire put it, “[w]hat the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves” (1991, p. 181). This sort of learning transforms “the weakness of the powerless...into a force capable of announcing justice” (Freire, 1997, p. 36). It inspires “civic courage” (Freire, 1998), which fuels individual, institutional and social transformation. It is this approach to education that we seek to embrace in Learning Together, an approach that stands in stark contrast with the emphasis on vocational education which has typified prison education in both the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia in recent years.

Drawing on the work of African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu in her 2014 article, Katrin Flikschuh describes a “growing preoccupation with practical problem-solving” (2014, p. 2) that can tend towards global theorising, which she argues is “morally and intellectually inadequate” (2014, p. 25). She also draws upon Wiredu’s assertion that “[t]wo virtues, then, are sought after here: one, to be particularistic enough to be capable of knowing ourselves; and two, to be universalistic enough to be capable of knowing others. Or perhaps these are two sides of the same virtue” (Wiredu, as cited in Flikschuh, 2014, p. 1). Specifically, in this paper, we examine the areas of commonality across our different cultural, social, political and legal contexts, as well as reflecting on aspects that distinguish these contexts, thereby enabling us to more critically and reflexively examine and (re-)evaluate our own respective justice and educational environments. In doing so, we embrace Flikschuh’s concept of philosophical fieldwork as conceptual discovery and non-empirical fieldwork, which can function as a “corrective to our current state of ignorance regarding the thoughts and views of distant others in the context of global normative theorising” (2014, p. 1).

In many ways, Flikschuh’s observations, and the concerns that flow from them, resonate with what Freire might call the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—an approach to intellectual inquiry that reproduces existing power structures, in part because learning is neither grounded in, nor shaped by, an account of the realities of those who learn. For Flikschuh, global theorising, which often assumes and embeds western values, risks perpetuating practical policies that are “morally well-intentioned but theoretically misguided” because, through ignorance, such policies are pitched “at superficial culture rather than underlying tradition” (2014, p. 25). Once again, Flikschuh’s argument echoes Freire’s writing. In 1972, for example, Freire wrote, “[o]ne cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (1972, p. 93).

This paper engages with some of the challenges of localism, collaboration and reflexivity, through thinking about how we conceptualise and develop partnership learning communities between higher education and criminal justice institutions. Our overall arguments are twofold: first, in our different cultural contexts, there is a case to be made for partnership-working between higher education and criminal justice institutions, based on what we see as somewhat intersecting missions and comparable policy and practice challenges; and second that, although there is a need to think about collaborative international structures for the development of theory, policy and practice, there is also a need to reflect critically on how different socio-political and cultural realities (both within and beyond national borders) might shape the particular nature of partnership working. Therefore, while we warmly welcome national and international collaboration in this field, we urge caution in importing or exporting different ‘models’ of partnership working. We seek to make the case,

instead, for open-textured theoretical and empirical reflexivity.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, we explore the missions of our universities and prisons, arguing that, despite contextual differences, they are interconnected and have somewhat similar aims as institutions that seek to be individually and socially transformative. In the second section, we build on this argument to outline how, in our distinct national contexts (namely, Australia and England and Wales), prisons and universities have some common challenges and pressures that can frustrate them in realising their ambitions. We argue that existing learning opportunities in prisons and universities in both of our countries can be, in different ways, exclusive and excluding, failing to live up to a Freirean vision of transformative education. In the third section of the paper, we explore some of the theoretical underpinnings and emergent practices that have characterised the emergence of Learning Together in England and Wales. Drawing on comparative reflections that emerged from our international collaboration, we consider how mutual curiosity might help us to critically reflect on the frameworks that inform prison-university partnership working. Such curiosity may be both intellectually enlivening and vital for the delivery of transformative learning opportunities across different national and international contexts.

At the outset, we acknowledge that there may be several reasons why people who are incarcerated do not and perhaps cannot engage effectively with education. We recognise that many have backgrounds of trauma, violence, mental illness, addiction and homelessness that may have preceded their entry into prison and, in some instances, may continue to occur in the prison context. We do not seek to trivialise the impact of these compounding and intersecting challenges on people in prison and that this may preclude interest and/or engagement in education; nor do we ignore other blockages to accessing education in prison, including, but not limited to, access to educational materials, internet access and the withdrawal of education as a disciplinary measure. Against the background of these individual, social and institutional challenges, this paper explores the aspirational potential and benefits of university/prison education partnerships and tertiary education in prison at a broad level in two countries.

Different Hemispheres but Similar Missions

At first glance, higher education and criminal justice organisations seem unlikely bedfellows: while criminal justice organisations are typically seen as institutions of confinement, control and coercion, higher education organisations promise empowerment, liberation and expanded horizons through learning. As Fine and Torre put it and drawing on earlier work by Weis and Fine (2003), “[p]risons are explicitly about State control: schools are much more complex settings of social reproduction and radical possibility” (Fine & Torre, 2004, p. 16). Though we recognise the tensions between the aims of higher education and criminal justice organisations, as well as their discomforts, our view is that both organisations, in both of our different national contexts, may have more in common than might initially appear. As Farley and Hopkins noted recently:

Enabling educators based in both prisons and universities are invested in the design and delivery of courses which provide positive and constructive outcomes for marginalised individuals and for Australian society at large...Fundamentally, both institutions share the same goal of improving access to education for this most marginalised student population (2018, p. 148).

In this section, we explore these commonalities by examining the interconnectedness of the organisations’ missions. In the next section, we continue by considering their common challenges and pressures.

Though we agree with Richard Hil’s caution that “[t]here is ... no necessary connection between what is claimed in slogans and what actually goes on” (2012, p. 61) in modern universities, mission or vision statements offer useful starting points for reflecting upon the aspirations of public institutions and the potential relationships between them. Looking first at the mission statements of our own universities, the University of Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), and the University of Cambridge in England, we find that both institutions aim to provide excellent educational experiences for their students. In so doing, both universities strive to improve society, building towards fairer, and more prosperous and sustainable communities (see University of Cambridge, 2018b; University of Canberra, 2018). Similarly, turning to the missions of criminal justice organisations in Australia and in England and Wales, we also find significant common ground.

ACT Corrective Services (2018), for example, articulates an ambition to “be recognised as a leader in the provision of effective corrective service which positively changes lives, reduce re-offending and prevent future victims”, “provid[ing] sustainable opportunities for offenders to lead law abiding and productive lives in the community through rehabilitation and reintegration”. In England and Wales, Her Majesty’s Prisons and Probation Service (2018) seeks to “prevent victims by changing lives” and “reduce reoffending by rehabilitating the people in our care through education and employment”. Just as with universities, criminal justice organisations see themselves as striving to positively transform and improve society by encouraging individuals to fulfil their pro-social potential. Furthermore, while prisons may not be thought of immediately as seats of learning, and universities may not be thought of immediately as obvious destinations for people sentenced to imprisonment, education is explicitly embedded in the legislative framework within which prisons operate. University admissions policies also commit to widening access for people who have experienced social disadvantage. This encompasses many people who are under the supervision of criminal justice institutions.

In the higher education context, universities promise admission to students “of the highest intellectual potential, irrespective of social, racial, religious and financial considerations” (see e.g. University of Cambridge, 2004). The admissions policy at the University of Cambridge (2018a) aims for “aspiration” and “fairness”, encouraging applications from “groups that are, at present, under-represented” and ensuring that “each applicant is individually assessed, without partiality or bias, with a focus on ability and potential.” In England and Wales, widening participation has become a measure of excellence within the new Teaching Excellence Framework. This framework partly determines the allocation of government funding between universities (House of Commons Business, Innovation & Skills Committee 2016, p. 9). Likewise, the University of Canberra (2018) “pride[s itself] on being a beacon of equity, diversity, inclusion and access” (p. 4). The Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales (NSW) recently advised that

Australian Universities do not ask people to disclose criminal records or whether they have been in prison....In fact I think it might be a breach of discrimination law on the basis that it is not relevant to undertaking study. (Baldry, 2018)

She acknowledged, however that some students may face more specific hurdles relevant to their chosen area of study, “e.g. student teachers, social workers, medical doctors, those wanting to be admitted as lawyers etc before they can undertake placements/internships and so on”.

There are significant policy drivers, then, for universities to improve access to higher education for people who come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In this context, people in the criminal justice system form an important constituency for universities committed to locating, harnessing and nurturing talent wherever it resides. However, it appears that many university admission policies and practices, at least in England and Wales, still fall short of good practice, excluding many people with a criminal record from university. In addition, there is no standardised approach to collating and using the information universities collect about applicants who declare criminal convictions (Evans, 2018).

In the prisons context, an aspirational vision for learning is articulated in the relevant international legal and policy documents that inform both the Australian and English contexts. The Mandela Rules, unanimously adopted by the United Nations in 2015, require prisons to provide education. They describe education as central to a person’s social reintegration upon release; enabling people to live “law-abiding and self-supporting” lives (Rule 4). Rule 104 highlights particular needs to educate illiterate and young prisoners, but also envisages a role for higher education, with the rules stating that “further education” should be open “to all prisoners capable of profiting thereby.” The Rules also outline a vision for prison learning that remains connected with educational institutions in the community. Strong emphasis is placed on providing learning opportunities within prison that are comparable with those in the community (Rule 4) and on building learning communities that transcend prison walls, such that education can continue post-release (Rule 104). The Council of Europe’s (2006) *European Prison Rules* describe a vision of prison education that is similarly responsive to individual needs and aspirations and integrated with educational provision in the community (Rule 28). *The Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia* (Australian Corrective Services Ministers’ Conference, 2012), provide inter alia that: prisoners should be provided with access to education that enables them to develop appropriate skills and abilities to support reduced re-offending when they return to the community (Rule 3.6); prisoners approved as full-time students should be remunerated equivalently to prisoners employed

in full-time work (Rule 3.8); and a high priority should be accorded to programmes addressing literacy and numeracy (Rule 3.9).

Although these legal provisions do not always translate into enforceable rights, their inclusion within the international and domestic legal frameworks communicates important aspirations that ought to guide policy and practice in both of our jurisdictions. The positioning of education within these rules as part of core prison “business” finds ready support in the literature that attests to the benefits of learning for living a non-offending life (e.g. Davis et al., 2013; Pompoco et al., 2017; Vacca, 2004). More ambitiously, these rules push us, as educators, to engage with prisons as equal partners, albeit with different expertise. They incite us to probe rationales for university and prison practices that stand in the way of good learning for students in prison and post-release in the same ways it would otherwise occur in the community, outside of any criminal justice involvement.

Beyond law and policy, the interconnected missions of prisons and universities are recognised by some members of the general public. When public opinion survey organisation Ipsos MORI explored social attitudes in the UK towards crime prevention, 48% of people surveyed thought that schools had a role to play in reducing crime (Duffy et al., 2008). Two-thirds of people surveyed by Esmée Fairbairn in 2005, believed that young offenders who cannot read ought to receive compulsory education, rather than custody. Similarly, in a study in the United States, three-quarters of respondents saw increasing education and job skills training for young offenders as the most effective way to reduce youth crime (Krisberg & Marchionna, 2007, p. 6). In a recent survey of 1200 adults across Australia, 82 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “we should spend more money funding effective prison-based education and treatment programs so that people leaving prisons do not commit new offences” (Fitzgerald et al., 2016, p. 316).

This evidence suggests that cross-nationally, many members of the general public recognise transformational educational opportunities as valuable ways to respond to, and reduce, crime. This is broadly consistent with Maruna and King’s (2004) work on public opinion and community sanctions. Noting the problems of conceptualising “public opinion”, Maruna and King argued that the general public wants “affective” as well as “effective” criminal justice: responses to crime that serve an expressive (or symbolic) function and meet emotional needs for security; indeed, they have suggested that “[j]ustice is, at its heart, an emotional, symbolic process, not simply a matter of effectiveness and efficiency” (Maruna & King, 2008, p. 347; in the Australian context, see Freiberg, 2001; Fitzgerald, Freiberg & Bartels, 2018). Punitive criminal justice policies can appear to meet these expressive and emotional needs, such as fear of crime, but Maruna and King’s work suggests that these needs can also be met by stories of transformation and redemption. The transformative potential of educational experiences is well documented, both in research and narrative accounts of people who were formerly imprisoned (e.g. Boyle, 1977; James, 2016; Prisoners’ Education Trust, 2018). These narratives, combined with Maruna and King’s findings, suggest that the general public might welcome university and prison partnership working as a way through which both institutions could better achieve their missions and as a way through which needs for affective criminal justice might be met.

Comparable Challenges in Different Contexts

As with their missions, criminal justice and higher education organisations ostensibly have very different approaches to learning and learners. Within prisons, education can be hampered by narrow understandings of “rehabilitation” and narrow aims to reduce criminogenic risks. These understandings can result in remedial-focussed learning, which is narrowly future-oriented; correcting deficits and equipping people with basic skills so that they might “function” in society post-release, including by becoming “employable” often in low-paying jobs. Furthermore, “success” for our criminal justice systems in Australia and England and Wales is, ironically, and somewhat misleadingly, often measured by reoffending rates. Despite some recent policy drives to extend support “through the gate” (e.g. in the UK, Coates, 2016), most relationships in prison, including educational relationships, terminate abruptly upon release. By contrast, universities approach their learners as sites of potential, tied to aspirational and expansive visions of what learners’ futures might hold. Rather than correcting deficits, university learning promises to cultivate high functioning, independent thinking and critical capacities. While the success of universities is also measured in terms of employment

outcomes, the measures also take into account graduate earnings and the positive contributions university graduates make to social progress.² Through alumni departments, universities manifest ongoing interest in the fulfilment of individuals' possibilities long after they leave university. This feeds back into the university community's sense of pride and achievement to inspire and motivate others.

Despite these ostensible differences, we turn now to interrogate the realities of learning in prisons and universities, arguing through this evidence that prisons and universities might have more challenges in common than a first glance might suggest. Both institutions may be thought to have untapped potential and unmet need—failing in some comparable ways to live up to Freire's ambitions for education as the practice of freedom, promoting critical thought and empowerment for educators and students alike.

Untapped potential. It is undoubtedly true that many people who enter the criminal justice system have poor or limited previous experiences of education. In 2014-15, 42 percent of adult prisoners in England and Wales reported that they had been permanently excluded from school prior to their arrival into custody (Coates, 2016, p. iii). Nearly half of the children in custody (46%) had underachieved at school (Youth Justice Board, 2006). The "school-to-prison pipeline" (Krezmien et al., 2014) is well documented. Fractured or exclusionary experiences of education in the community increase the risks of subsequent criminal justice involvement and imprisonment (see generally Hemphill et al., 2017; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; McAra & McVie, 2010). Stigmatising, non-aspirational and marginalising experiences at school can 'set people up' for life in prison by negatively labelling, excluding and detaining young people, and sending them to the fringes of educational spaces, where there are fewer stimulating learning opportunities (Graham, 2014; see also Christle, Jolivet & Nelson, 2010).

With these incoming negative educational experiences, it is unsurprising that educational deficits in prisons are high, and successful engagement of people in education is low. In England and Wales, 57 percent of people entering prison have the literacy skills of an 11-year-old or below (Skills Funding Agency, 2016). This is three times higher than in the general adult population (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2012). Similarly, in Australia, according to the Victorian Government, only 40% of people in prison in that jurisdiction have basic literacy and numeracy skills that enable them to cope independently in the workforce (McDonald, 2015). Systems in both jurisdictions could do more to equip people with these skills whilst in custody. Three-fifths of people leaving prison in England and Wales have not achieved identified employment, education or training outcomes (Coates, 2016, p. iii). In Australia, 36% of people released from prison have not completed their final year of compulsory secondary school education, while 18% have completed only two years of secondary school education. The equivalent figure for Indigenous people leaving prison in Australia is almost double this (30 %) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015).

Seen in this light, then, low educational attainment whilst in custody might be viewed less as an indication of limited potential or capability and more as a reflection of systemic educational failings in the community. This is compounded by the provision of education that may be poor quality or simply not valued in an environment that is commonly regarded as coercive. For example, in 2016, the NSW Government announced its intention to reduce the number of teachers and educational officers in its prisons from 158 to 87, a move the NSW Teachers Federation described as "appalling" (ABC News, 2016). Furthermore, while uptake of higher education in prisons in England and Wales and Australia is low; in Australia, only 1.7% of eligible are engaged in higher education (Productivity Commission, 2018) and participation in higher education in prisons is in fact falling in England and Wales: see Coates, 2016). However, this may say more about the paucity of available higher education opportunities than the potential of people in prison to study at this level, with a limited range of courses available and educational resource that is mostly targeted at basic skills development. In England and Wales, the Open University recently described "a glass ceiling beyond [basic levels] for prison learners, with anything above that seen as, at best, an optional extra rather than a coherent progression route for students" (cited in Coates, 2016, p. 38). A recent study of prison education in England and Wales showed that a fifth of prisoner learners would have preferred to be studying at a higher level than they were currently (Coates, 2016). The emphasis upon vocational learning opportunities has been criticised (see e.g. Warner, 2018), on the basis that it prevents prisoners from reaching their full potential. For example, Dame Coates asserted in her review of prison education in the UK that "education should be aspirational [and] must offer a learning journey that is truly transformational and enables progression to higher levels" (2016, p. 38). Already

in 1990, the Council of Europe recognised that education in prison should “aim to develop the whole person” (p. 8) and a “wide concept of education” adopted (1990, p. 13). A United Nations report goes further in suggesting that “[a]ll persons [in prison] should have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality” (Munoz, 2009, p. 9; for discussion, see Warner, 2018). Critically, Munoz affirmed that education in prison is more than a tool for change; “it is an imperative in its own right” (2009, p. 2). In some ways, criticism might also be levelled at the research that has been published about the role of education in prison, which has often (though not exclusively, see e.g. Runnell, 2015) explored the relationship between education and desistance from crime through the lens of its benefits for employability post-release (Abrams & Lea, 2016; Davis et al., 2013). Pike and Farley recently suggested that “[i]t is time that correctional administrators stopped thinking about education and vocational training purely in terms of increasing employability”, as many ex-prisoners will never find employment. Accordingly, “the emphasis should shift to helping prisoners to become law-abiding citizens with more opportunities to contribute positively to their communities” (Pike & Farley, 2018, p. 90).

For these reasons, although low levels of previous educational attainment and limited, or basic, educational engagement whilst in custody do not seem promising signs of fertile learning “soil”, it would be misguided to think that prison-based learners in Australia or England and Wales lack potential, including the potential for higher education. It would be equally misguided, in our view, to think that the potential of everyone successfully admitted to university is well-supported or that those who do not gain a university place do not have the potential for study at that level. Access to higher education institutions and experiences upon admission, especially at more prestigious institutions, are unequal (Jerrim & Parker, 2015; Norton, 2018; Office for Fair Access, 2015; Stevenson, 2012). A report from the Social Mobility Advisory Group in England (2016) found that “socio-economic disadvantage continues to be the most significant driver of inequality in terms of access to and outcomes from higher education” (2016, p. 1). Research also shows that the transformative effects of higher education are not equally distributed across all students (e.g. Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015). A wealth of untapped potential exists among people we fail to attract to our universities and those who join university communities, but struggle to thrive during their studies and in life thereafter. We think untapped potential is a common international challenge for our prisons and our universities, and one that might be better addressed through working together.

Unmet need. As noted above, we readily acknowledge the complex needs of many in the justice system, especially in relation to trauma, mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, under/unemployment and lack of education. There is a clear need for universal, selective and indicated prevention to address these intersecting issues. Downes, Nairz-Wirth and Rusinaite recently articulated 10 key principles for inclusive systems in and around schools, including equality and non-discrimination; the right to expression of voice and participation, as well as other educational rights; a holistic approach; differentiation in prevention approaches; building on strengths; the representation and participation of marginalised groups; and life-long learning. Many of these apply equally in the context of education in prison.

Our reading of the literature suggests that the unmet potential we have described above derives partly from a common challenge of unmet need. Within prison, this relates to the predominant conception of education as narrowly remedial and rehabilitative. Learning needs are often identified through compulsory, deficits-driven processes that are repeated by multiple agencies within the same prison and on arrival to each new prison and, even once identified, support for specific learning needs is often unavailable (Coates, 2016). Assessment processes do not always capture learning differences for which additional support is needed (Coates 2016, p. 13). As discussed above, existing practices in educational assessment can lead to an over-emphasis on low-level remedial provision, rather than a consideration of how to engage a learner more holistically and ambitiously to engage and overcome barriers to their participation to fulfil their educational potential.

A remedial emphasis also runs through predominant understandings of the relationship between education and rehabilitation. Educational participation is routinely used as a sentence planning target, or as a relevant factor to assess and reduce a person’s risk of reoffending (Australian Corrective Services Ministers’ Conference, 2012, Rule 1.3; National Offender Management Service, 2014, [2.15]). However, the relationship between educational achievement and risk reduction can be too narrowly understood and poorly evidenced. Rehabilitation, as a central goal of imprisonment, is mostly understood as ‘making the unfit fit’ (Maruna, 2012,

p. 74). In some cases, this means that education is only valued narrowly as it pertains to this kind of rehabilitation; in other cases, the rehabilitative value of engaging in education is misunderstood and overlooked (Coates, 2016; see also e.g. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, 2016, p. 25; Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2015). This can mean that access to educational provision, especially higher educational provision, is not prioritised, or worse, blocked.

Two levels of unmet need can thereby thwart learners with potential in prison—not having adequate procedures to help people to identify their learning potential and, if identified, not having either the ethos or the provision to enable learners can achieve that potential. These unmet needs may account for the decline in higher education study in prisons in England and Wales in recent years, with only 200 higher education qualifications at Level 3 (A-Level equivalent) or above delivered to a population of over 86,000 prisoners in 2014-15. This amounts to a decrease of more than 85% on the number of Level 3 qualifications that were delivered in prisons in England and Wales in 2012-13 (Coates, 2016).

Unmet need can similarly thwart potential at university. Though undergraduate student satisfaction is reportedly high in the UK and Australia overall (see e.g. Universities Australia, 2018; Universities UK, 2018), there are well-documented shortcomings in existing measures of satisfaction and levels of student participation in the relevant surveys. Students' experiences vary significantly across groups and between universities. In Cambridge, some of our university-based Learning Together students have described feeling that the University had unrealistic expectations of their latent capability. Others, in common with students elsewhere in the UK, described unmet needs for psychological and emotional support during their studies, and related depersonalised, detached, frenetic and overwhelming experiences of learning with too few opportunities for processing, reflection or synthesis—learning that makes them feel that ideas are the preserve of a few, and an “indulgence” which has little utility or bearing upon real life. In his seminal text on Australian universities, *Whackademia*, Hil expresses similar sentiments, arguing that “universities tend to churn out graduates who are entirely unprepared either for the world of work ... or for active participation in everyday civic life” (2012, p. 194). In his subsequent book, *Selling Students Short* (2015), Hil drew on interviews with 150 students across Australia to report on students' dissatisfying experiences of large class sizes, inadequate facilities and feeling lonely and isolated. He ultimately critiqued a system “increasingly obsessed with performance-based, administrative concerns”, lamenting that the “informal spaces that once enabled to immerse themselves in the presence of others, to contemplate, think and reflect, have over time been significantly eroded” (2015, p. 4).

Once more, unsatisfactory experiences of university life are not equally distributed within diverse student populations. Socio-economically disadvantaged students tend to do least well at university, even controlling for prior attainment. White students who are not from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have better course completion, attainment and employability outcomes and report highest levels of satisfaction with their university experience (Mountford-Simdars et al., 2015). A report, commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council of England, found that some of the standard approaches to university curricula and learning can favour students who are better situated socially and economically. Experiences of support and encouragement from teaching staff, and a sense of belonging, were found to be critical in stimulating students' learning and attainment. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and students who are struggling financially, had less positive overall experiences of learning within universities, and less positive overall experiences of their relationships with teaching staff and their peers, with weaker senses of belonging. There are many ways in which their needs—financial, social, emotional and pedagogical—are not being met. The learning opportunities that universities provide can be both exclusive and excluding, inaccessible to many with the potential to do well, and isolating for many who learn there (Hil, 2015).

What emerges, then, despite prisons' and universities' ostensibly different approaches to learning and learners, is a somewhat common picture of untapped potential, unmet need and the inherited difficulties of working within imperfect institutional and social structures with ever-increasing pressure on resources. Prisons and universities are both susceptible to criticism for being exclusive and excluding learning communities that merely reproduce rather than transform existing power structures. They are both “locked in” in some of the same ways, under pressure “to serve State interests, dependent on state dollars, and in the grip of a ‘control society’ in which ideologies of safety and justice are undermined by practices of surveillance and outcomes of inequality” (Fine & Torre, 2004, p. 16; see also e.g., Taylor, 2013). The challenge for both institutions is there-

fore how to work within this context to provide high-quality, expansive and inclusive learning opportunities that capitalise on the individual and communal potential of transformative learning. We see prison and university learning communities as one way of helping both institutions to rise to this challenge.

The Case for Open-Textured Reflexivity

So far, in this paper, we have made an argument for partnership working between universities and prisons, based on some similarities across the different national contexts of Australia and England in the missions of our institutions and the challenges that they face in achieving their missions. However, as Mayes et al. (2018) have acknowledged in the Canadian context, even without the existing barriers present in both corrections and universities, forming a cooperative relationship between any two large institutions presents challenges, including security concerns, logistical considerations and resource implications (see also Farley & Hopkins, 2018).

In this section, we consider the thornier matter of *how* universities and prisons might work together. We begin by considering some of the theoretical underpinnings of Learning Together in England, and the values and practices that have emerged. We then turn to consider some of the different socio-political and cultural realities we encountered and reflected on together in Australia, which have prompted new questions about ways of doing, knowing and understanding prison and university partnerships. In this way, we seek to respond to and overcome the Flikschuh's concern about "the apparent lack of interest in finding out what—and how—distant others think" (2014, p. 3). Drawing on these experiences, we make the case for reciprocal international collaboration in place of "exporting" or "importing" "models" of prison and university partnership working—open-textured local, theoretical and empirical reflexivity. Through this, our hope is that we can begin to articulate common high-level values to build community and solidarity within and across borders, and advance theory, evidence, policy and practice.

1. Learning Together in England—theoretical underpinnings and emergent practices. The design of Learning Together in England is grounded in resonances between the individual and social components of transformative learning and movements away from crime. In the educational sphere, Learning Together has been influenced by the critical pedagogical work of Paolo Freire (1972; 1998), Jack Mezirow's (2000) work on emancipatory and transformative learning, and Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's work on communities of practice in learning theory. Criminologically, Learning Together has been informed by the work of desistance scholars, especially Shadd Maruna, Fergus McNeil, Stephen Farrell, Anthony Bottoms and Joanna Shapland, whose work has advanced understandings about how people move away from crime (see e.g. Shapland et al., 2016). Within processes of learning and desistance, Learning Together is especially interested in the role of stigma and prejudice, and the potential of intergroup contact—engaging with people across perceived, and experienced, social "differences"—to reduce stigma and prejudice (e.g. Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), catalyse learning (e.g. Gurin et al., 2002) and support desistance (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010).³

One of the characteristics that transformative learning, intergroup contact and desistance theories share is their close attention to the social contexts in which transformative interactions occur. Transformative experiences—of learning, stigma reduction, and desistance—do not happen in isolation. Jack Mezirow's (2000) educational research positions challenges to individuals' "frames of reference" at the heart of transformative learning. Drawing on Habermas (1984) distinctions between two major forms of learning (instrumental and communicative), Mezirow highlights the particular importance of communicative learning to transformative educational experiences. Instrumental learning seeks to control and manipulate the learning environment and focuses on improving performance. Communicative learning, by contrast, emphasises what a person means and views knowledge as a route through which we understand ourselves, our connections with others, and the world around us. We learn from and with others and realise our own potential best when we are also involved in recognising and realising the potential of others (Dweck, 2006; Gurin, Nagda & Lopez, 2004).

The importance of mutuality and social context in learning is echoed in findings from studies on intergroup contact. Collaborating on a task in circumstances of parity which reduce power imbalances can be important for creating environments for "meaningful encounters" (Valentine, 2008) in which stigma and prejudice reduce (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Sociological and geographical literatures explore

the benefits of reducing perceptions and experiences of stigma and prejudice from the perspective of creating more inclusive and sustainable communities (Amin & Howell, 2016; Bauman, 2016; Sennett, 2018; Valentine, 2008). Desistance research suggests that increasing relational capital and access to pro-social opportunities and support, while reducing perceptions and experiences of stigma and prejudice, can increase the probability of positive outcomes after prison (LeBel et al., 2008; Meisenhelder, 1982; Sharpe, 2015). Stigmatisation, by contrast, tends to perpetuate segregation, exclusion and persistent offending (Braithwaite, 1989). This evidence suggests to us that the relational contours of potentially transformative learning environments share some of the same characteristics as environments that are conducive to supporting desistance from crime—environments that develop, enable and “scaffold” the exercise of autonomy, have equality and mutuality at their heart, and nurture and sustain inclusive community networks.

Building from this research, and some of the intersections we see emerging from the different strands of literature, Learning Together Network partnerships have generated a set of core values. These values form part of our common Terms of Reference, which anchor our practices and operationalise our vision. These values include:

- potential – nurturing talent wherever it is found;
- progression – providing routes for our learners to reach their potential and working collaboratively to challenge the structures and practices that limit this; and
- participation – collaborating with our students and with each other to co-produce transformative communities of learning.

Underpinning all of our values is a commitment to parity and to reflexive evaluation – paying close attention to curating learning communities that bring people together in ways that reduce power imbalances and to evaluating our practices in ways that shape our knowledge base and help us all to develop our practices.

As Learning Together has developed within the criminal justice and higher education contexts of England and Wales, we have negotiated practices to reflect these values and commitments. Working towards potential means that our courses are open to all students, who are recruited on the basis of their future contribution, rather than defined by their past. We do not exclude people based on the offences for which they have been convicted. This is partly pragmatic, because we know that conviction type does not always accurately reflect offending. It is also partly ethical and intellectual, because we do not wish to perpetuate hierarchies of harm between offence types, and because community networks and resources are equally, if not even more important, to support desistance among people convicted of high-profile and commonly stigmatised types of offending, such as sexual offences (McAlinden et al., 2017; Bartels, Walvisch & Richards, 2019). We also do not have minimum formal education qualification requirements—we admit people who believe they can undertake the work required and can evidence the skills and commitment to complete the course. For many of the reasons that we outlined in the second section of this paper, we have not found formal educational qualifications to be a good measure of intellectual potential, notwithstanding the challenges of teaching and learning with students of high intellect who need extra support to develop the necessary formal study skills.

Valuing progression has meant that we do not believe in delivering one-off courses within prisons or with people on probation, without plans for how students can build from their learning. Our approach favours community building, based on ongoing learning-focused relationships with all of our students, including as they undertake multiple courses, transition between institutions and/or into the community. Our students are encouraged to stay in touch with each other and support each other in their learning. We aim to support all of our learners equally, responding to their needs as students, and supporting their progress as alumni. We hold alumni events and write references. As standard academic practices, these commitments also reflect the value of parity among all Learning Together students, which continues to be central to our practices even outside of the classroom. Parity has meant developing an approach to recruitment that is identical for all of our students. Our application forms, selection criteria and processes are the same for all students, and students attend the same security and boundary-setting session at the start of each course together, to discuss and subscribe to the prison and university’s rules and create their own community rules for the course. After courses end, all students can stay in touch with each other if they so wish. We encourage all of our students to think about how

they can continue to support and sustain each other between courses, and how they might share their talents and ideas to nurture their own progression, as well as the progression of others. Reflecting these values within our commitment to evaluation has involved developing participatory methodologies through which we work with our students to understand their experiences. We have, for example, worked with our students to make films and write songs about their experiences, and engaged in group data analysis sessions with our students.

2. Learning Together in Australia—new challenges and possibilities. Growing international interest in Learning Together over the last four years has nurtured a critical engagement with the underpinning evidence and emergent values that have informed the initiative so far. In 2016, we travelled together between Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne, collaborating with professionals and students across different prisons and universities. These exchanges highlighted many ways in which the Australian local context presented new opportunities to develop locally grounded Learning Together practices that might fulfil similarly transformative aspirations within a different context. We were able to organise one knowledge exchange event including representatives from prisons and universities from four jurisdictions within a private prison on the outskirts of Sydney. We also held events within universities in Canberra and Melbourne and met with practitioners and policymakers in local prisons separately. Within this vast landscape with devolved penal power, existing research relationships between prisons and universities were clearly less well established and more regionally diffuse and varied than in England and Wales.

Flikschuh's idea of philosophical fieldwork requires a preparedness to step outside one's comfort zone conceptually rather than physically. This preceded but was supplemented by the first and second authors' visit to Australia, which in turn prompted the third author to view aspects of her own country and culture through fresh eyes. As Flikschuh put it, "[r]eflexive awareness of one's own unavoidable parochialism can serve as whetstone to the endeavour towards relatively greater non-parochialism" (2014, p. 19). In particular, we were struck by or reminded of four features of the Australian context: (a) the country's geographical scale as compared to the UK; (b) the devolved nature of criminal justice in each state and territory; (c) the nature of existing relationships between universities and criminal justice institutions; and (d) the impact of Aboriginal histories and traditions, including the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the criminal justice system. Although Indigenous people comprise only 3% of the general Australian population, over a quarter of the adult prison population is Indigenous; this rises to a third for the female population and over half of the juvenile detention population. In addition, Indigenous people generally perform worse on all health, education, employment and recidivism indicators (for a comprehensive recent overview, see Australian Law Reform Commission, 2017). In this final section of our paper, we reflect on these issues to consider how local realities might shape ways of doing (practices), knowing (methods) and thinking (understanding), to enrich prison and university partnership working more broadly. We conclude by returning to Flikschuh's work to consider how a commitment to locally co-produced practices, national and international collaboration, and empirical reflexivity, might enliven partnership working and prove vital for the development of transformative theory, policy and practice in this field.

Even before setting foot in a prison or university in Australia, we were learning. As we began to travel and study the map, we were struck by the vast expanses of inhospitable land, peppered with population hotspots. Australia is the sixth largest country in the world by landmass, but, for such a geographically large landscape, it has quite a small population, of approximately 24 million people. This contributes to making Australia the second wealthiest nation in the world (Shorrocks et al., 2017). Despite this wealth, a relatively large (and rising) percentage of the Australian population are imprisoned, with an imprisonment rate of 222 per 100,000 in June 2018 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). By way of comparison, the imprisonment rate in England and Wales in October 2018 was 141 per 100,000 (World Prison Brief, 2018). Prisoners in Australia housed in 114 prisons (Productivity Commission 2018) across six independent states and two territories, which governed by their own legal framework, policies and procedures and underpinned by nine different frameworks for the criminal justice and sentencing systems more generally. Federal offenders, who account for about two percent of offenders, serve their time in state and territory prisons.

There are some limited examples of existing partnerships between prisons and universities, although these are disparate in terms of geography, form and duration. Two notable examples are the Australian National University Legal Literacy Programme, which began in 2010, and the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program,

which commenced in the United States over 20 years ago and started in two prisons in Victoria in 2015 (RMIT, 2015). The Legal Literacy Project involves ANU law students visiting the ACT prison once a week for six weeks. The students co-produce a syllabus of law classes by discussing which topics the students in prison would like to learn about and can cover a broad range of legal issues including family, employment, criminal and business law, depending on the interests of each cohort of participants. The students from the university then design workshops that focus on the relevant legal issues identified and together they role-play different aspects of the legal system, law and legal process (see Right Now, 2012). This program involves the dissemination of information from university students to people living in prison, and has not been formally evaluated, it nevertheless constitutes an important example of an effective prison/university partnership. In Australia, Inside-Out involves classes of 15 “inside” and 15 “outside” students. In an evaluation involving pre- and post-program anonymous student surveys, focus group discussions and peer review teaching practice, results showed the program was positive, with students saying they had grown through the program and it had broken down differences between the inside and outside students. After the program, a think tank began operating at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, with 20 inside and outside students, as well as RMIT University staff, meeting fortnightly. This group seeks to provide input on criminal justice issues, such as how to improve the quality of prison life (Martinovic, 2016). There are other examples, including the efforts of Richards and Bartels to set up a Learning Together partnership with the Queensland University of Technology, but examples tend to be local and specific and have not become accepted practice across either higher education or penal institutions.

In stark contrast to Australia, England and Wales is geographically small, with a comparatively large population of over 58 million, more than double that of Australia. As set out above, comparatively lower percentage of the population is incarcerated. The number of people in prison has been falling slightly over the last few years but is still the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe. In this geographical context, many people housed in the 118 prisons across England and Wales regularly move around the estate, both nationally and regionally. This is particularly true of people who are serving sentences in excess of 15 years. There are some regional differences, but a central management structure has allowed the Learning Together Network of prison and university partnerships to engage with the system at a national strategic level, as well as through local relationships between prisons, probation trusts and universities. Building on many years of prison sociology scholarship, particularly entailing detailed ethnographic work, local and national partnerships have benefitted from a strong ethos of collaboration and a long history of educational partnership working in different forms (see further Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016).

The scale of England and Wales, the national coordination of prison policy and management, and the depth of existing empirical research relationships, have each contributed to enabling fruitful dialogue between academy and prison policy and practice. This dialogue has, in turn, enabled Learning Together to push in fairly coordinated ways at the frontiers of criminal justice and higher education practices and policies. Outcomes of this include continued contact between students who are part of the Learning Together community in the face of institutional prison conventions that typically stop relationships at the prison gates; the development of a digital learning platform to support learning in the context of little other existing access to technology in prisons; and local and national action challenging universities to consider previous criminal convictions only once an application has been evaluated on its merits.

Within the context of England and Wales, with its smaller geography, centrally managed prison system, and prisons’ more systemic openness to working with universities, it has made sense for Learning Together partnerships to come together as a national network. National collaboration has helped students to progress in their learning as they are transferred between institutions across the country, just as university students sometimes transfer their studies to other universities. Some Learning Together students have begun courses in one prison and finish their studies at a different prison with the support of a different partner university. Similarly, examples exist of students who transfer to another prison temporarily for extended family visits nearer their hometown and link in with Learning Together partnership activities and studies in their temporary host prison. Other students have come from taking a Learning Together course as an undergraduate or graduate in one university, to be involved, as student or facilitator, at another university. With so many partnerships now operating across England and Wales, these collaborations designed to nurture potential and provide routes of

progression have not obscured the many differences among partnerships. Each partnership has local strengths and challenges that are shaped by the type of prison, its population, function, architecture and location, as well as the strengths, focus and sometimes constraints of the local university.

In Australia, the geopolitical realities of the criminal justice and higher education systems felt distinct. Farley and Hopkins capture some of Australia's geographical distinctiveness in terms of "painful immobilisation", where prisons are often many hours' drive from the nearest town (2016, p. 150). They see this as a "core strategy" of the modern Australian penal system and extend this concept to include the lack of access to internet-enabled devices for students in prison. Despite general policy encouragement of education as a tool of rehabilitation, they argue that "this lack of internet access undermines ... access to higher education in the short term and successful rehabilitation in the long term" (2016, p. 150). However, to the outsider, there are some intriguing outcomes of the "enduring social and cultural isolation of modern Australian prisons" (2016, p. 150). Farley and colleagues have utilised technology, including internet access, on a comparatively grand scale to provide access to higher education in far-flung prisons across Australia, especially through the Making the Connection project, which was run by the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) from the end of 2013 until mid-2018. This project developed two technologies that did not require internet access: a server-based solution (called the USQ Offline Enterprise Solution) and a notebook computer solution (called the USQ Offline Personal Device). The Enterprise Platform is deployed into correctional centre computer labs, while the Offline Personal Devices are allocated to prisoners to take back to their cells. Incarcerated students can access their courses via an offline version of USQ's learning management system. They can enrol into five programs (Tertiary Preparation Program; Indigenous Higher Education Pathways Program; Diploma of Arts; Diploma of Science; or Associate Degree of Business and Commerce). The project was active in Queensland (all prisons except the reception centre); Western Australia (10 prisons); Tasmania; and the Northern Territory (two prisons and one work camp). The project enrolled some 1,700 prisoners across 39 centres. Retention rates for these prisoners were higher than for non-incarcerated students in the same programs (76% vs 65%) and grades were slightly better than for non-incarcerated students. The project has now been transitioned into business-as-usual at the USQ, which will continue the project with the participating jurisdictions while still negotiating with the remaining four jurisdictions (Farley, 2018; see also Farley & Hopkins, 2018). While Farley et al. (2016) highlight the challenges of limited internet access for students in prison, even the tenets of this conversation are remarkable from a comparative perspective, with such limited existing provision in England and Wales. It is possible to see how local context in Australian partnerships has shaped these higher education practices and advanced the dialogue around technology in learning and internet access beyond what has been perceived as politically and practically possible elsewhere.

If local contexts necessarily and profitably shape ways of doing, our travels also brought alive the ways in which local contexts can also shape ways of knowing—of interrogating the nature and impacts of local practice. The geography and central management of the prison system in England and Wales means that applications to conduct research in prisons go through a central ethics board, which is specific to Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, in addition to assessment by local university ethics boards. A long history of empirical prisons research in England and Wales has built strong and trusting relationships between prisons and universities, in which close and sustained ethnographic description of prison life has been possible. This benefits partnership practices and establishes a basis of trust for accessing prisons for delivering courses, as well as evaluating the experiences and impacts of Learning Together partnerships. High levels of trust and understanding between prisons and universities permit a more open exploration in research, expanding the questions that can be asked and how those questions can be explored. It is possible to get local permission to conduct evaluation at a single prison as well as multi-site permission for comparative national evaluation.

By contrast, in Australia, the devolved nature of criminal justice power makes this process more cumbersome, with eight prison systems operating a variety of research approval processes. The 40 Australian universities are also generally located in capital cities, often far from the major prisons, which may in turn be governed by a different legislative framework. As an example of this tyranny of distance, one prison in Western Australia is over 1,000 miles from the nearest university and capital city (Darwin, in the Northern Territory), which is governed by a different legislative sentencing and corrections framework. In addition, there is a much more limited culture of prison research in Australia; indeed, external researchers may be regarded with

wariness, if not outright hostility. The contrast with the established prison research tradition in England and Wales, was readily apparent to the third author while she was based in Cambridge in 2015. This was again reinforced by the observations of the second and third authors during their visit to Australia and ongoing attempts by the third author to gain research access to Australian prisons.

Ways of knowing are not only shaped by the sometimes-bureaucratic processes of clearance procedures; the making of academic knowledge can also be enlivened by the nature of questions that are thought to be of local interest, and local preferences and cultural approaches of working towards answers. The first two authors had never previously travelled to Australia and were struck by the public rituals of acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter Aboriginal) cultures and connections to the land. We enjoyed enlivening dialogue with prison practitioners whose work focused on responding to the needs of Aboriginal prisoners. Some of these colleagues noted parallels between the concerns and pedagogy of Learning Together and traditional forms of teaching and learning through dialogue within Australian Aboriginal traditions (see also Kilty & Lehalle, 2018, in the Canadian context). Beyond synergies in terms of practice, we could see how co-producing learning and evaluation in this context might expand our ideas about what our research questions should be, and how we could go about answering them. Considering Indigenous research methodologies in the American context, Gone (2018) explores the benefits of Indigenous research methods, arguing that they can enliven us to new questions and new ways of asking them. But Gone also warns against methodological exclusivity, arguing that researchers should avoid ‘indigenous-western’ binaries and instead move towards ‘Métis knowledge’, a conscious mixing of interests and approaches to methodological enquiry. He argues that the kind of dialogue this mixing produces is at the heart of good scholarship. One could call it learning together.

Concluding Thoughts

Farley and Hopkins recently observed that, in both prisons, and in universities, “higher education is and should be also about human development, social relationships, social mobility and social justice” and it is “critically important that we continue to work together to overcome the institutional, structural and systemic barriers that adversely affect incarcerated university students” (2018, p. 150). Naturally, ways of knowing shape what is known; this leads us to our final reflection. There is a sense in which, through working as an international community of prison and university partnerships we can, together, shape what is known, and what is knowable, drawing comparatively from each of our local contexts. We have recently reflected on current approaches to risk management in some prisons and universities in light of an old children’s tale called “Chicken Licken”. In this story, a young chick has the unfortunate experience of an acorn falling on his head. Confused by this new experience, the young chick runs to the King to tell him that he believes that the sky is falling down. On his way to the King, the chick gathers many other animals with him, who all run with him in fear of the perceived impending sky falling disaster. Chicken Licken is a sad story which ends with all of the animals being eaten by a fox before they had chance to realise that the sky wasn’t really falling down—it was just an acorn.

In her article, Flikschuh (2014) warns of the potential ills of lazy global theorising, where local practical problems are addressed in light of norms transferred without sufficient care from familiar to unfamiliar global settings. We recognise the dangers she highlights. However, we also recognise the experiential truths of the Chicken Licken tale. In the face of new experiences, it can sometimes be easy to misunderstand a context or problem. Without others around you, with whom you can stop and exchange experiences and ideas, it can be tempting to forge ahead without questioning whether the assumptions we bring to new experiences or environments really hold. Similarly, without others around you, it can be easy to take for granted, and embed rather than challenge, existing thinking that may not reflect the best of what might be. There is a sense in which the “chickens” of each of our cultural realities—the myths that persist, and the ways these shape our practices, methods and knowledge—can be productively disrupted and developed through locally grounded, open-textured theoretical and empirical learning together.

Flikschuh argues that it is “reasonable to assume that those who are distant from us geographically and culturally are likely to conceive of and reflect on the realities of their social worlds and natural surroundings

in ways that differ from how we conceive of and reflect on our social realities and natural environments” (2014, p. 16). The joys of collaboration implicit in her paper are found in how we render these differences intelligible, through what she describes as “a genuine and sustained curiosity and interest in what-and how-distant others think” (2014, p. 25) and an acknowledgement that all knowledge and ways of doing things, are, at their root, parochial. Flikschuh thinks that collaborations of this kind—what we have described as open-textured reflexivity about our practices, methods and theoretical frameworks—might help to avoid “the foisting of practical recommendations upon distant contexts on the basis of merely presumptive claims to universal validity or generalisability” (2014, p. 21).

In this paper, we have sought to make a case for prison and university partnerships in both Australia and England and Wales (for recent discussion in the Canadian context, see Kilty & Lehalle, 2018; Mayes et al., 2018), but this does not mean that exporting one form of partnership working from one locality to another will necessarily be equally appropriate or beneficial. Above all, the Learning Together programme does not present a replicable model that can be adopted holus-bolus, without regard to the local criminal justice and university contexts. By taking time to get to know others in different cultural contexts, and by thinking critically and reflexively with others about our own theoretical underpinnings and practices, we have come to know ourselves a little better. This has, in turn, helped us to recognise and test some of our assumptions and ‘myths’. Within the Learning Together Network, we continue to collaborate with each other nationally and, increasingly, internationally, including with colleagues in Belgium, Denmark, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, South Africa, Spain and the USA. Through working collaboratively, with curiosity about both common and divergent problems, strengths, interests and approaches, our hope is that we might together be able to develop frameworks for comparative research and policy and practice development that emerge from, and are strengthened by, their localism. By working towards comparative knowledge production in this locally grounded way, we hope to develop new questions, new approaches to answering these questions and new knowledge that will enliven the transformative potential of our local and global prison and university partnerships. In the context of the framework of Flikschuh’s philosophical fieldwork as conceptual discovery, our reflections in this paper also help us avoid the imposition of lazy global normative theorizing and cultural invasion, however well intentioned. However, we recognise the need for further research in this area, including empirical research on the effects of university–prison partnerships. This should in particular focus on the voices of people with lived experience of education in prison (see e.g. Anonymous, 2018; MacPherson, 2018; Nicholls, 2018), including their perceptions of barriers to participating in prison–university partnerships. Privileging these voices would in turn further Freire’s vision.

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Footnotes

¹ The initiative in Australia was undertaken in collaboration with Dr Kelly Richards, Dr Bronwyn Ewing and Emeritus Professor Russell Hogg of the Queensland University of Technology.

² See for example the new measures of 'learning gain' being developed under the LEGACY Project (2018), funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

³ For a more detailed account of the theoretical basis of Learning Together and the values and practices that have flown from this basis, see Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016.

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“People Like Me Don’t Belong in Places Like This”: Creating and Developing a Community of Learners Beyond the Prison Gates

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Abstract: *It is widely accepted that individuals with criminal convictions experience multiple disadvantage and deprivation, and, as a result, are considered least likely to progress to higher education (Unlock, 2018). The risk-adverse nature of higher education application processes further compound such disadvantage, even though there is no evidence to suggest that screening for criminal convictions increase campus safety (Centre for Community Alternatives, 2010). Drawing upon ethnographic data, the discussion critically reflects upon the development of one situated Learning Together initiative based within a University in the north-west of England. In doing so, the discussion highlights a series of emerging opportunities and competing contradictions that span over three key developmental areas: creation, progress and maintenance. We anticipate that the findings will go some way in opening up a wider debate about the sustainability of initiatives that seek to create dynamic educational partnerships between the higher education sector and criminal justice system more broadly.*

Keywords: *Higher education, criminal convictions, risk, widening participation*

Although education has been identified as a pathway to rehabilitation and resettlement (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons, 2014) there appears to be limited opportunities—on a local and national level—for those who have a criminal conviction to access higher education. This may be due to unspent criminal convictions (Unlock, 2018), limited confidence and self-esteem (Champion and Noble, 2016), a lack of previous educational attainment (Prison Reform Trust, 2017) and/or presence of risk-averse bureaucratic admission processes (Bhattacharya et al., 2013). The actual and/or perceived nature of the higher education sector subsequently hinder opportunities (directly and/or indirectly) for people with criminal convictions to connect with, and learn from, prosocial peers (Runell, 2015), strengthening visions of a crime free future (Maruna et al., 2004) and improve employment prospects (Ministry of Justice, 2018). This is a significant issue for the sector (and society more broadly), providing a stark contrast to the rhetoric associated with the widening participation agenda.

The widening participation agenda is a strategic priority and socio-political position taken by recent UK Governments to restructure the higher education sector, based upon the notion of equality (Armstrong, 2008). The aim of the agenda is two-fold: to offer opportunities to individuals who are traditionally under-represented in higher education and address discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different socio-economic groups (University of Edinburgh, 2018). In doing so, the widening participation agenda claims to pay particular attention to those who are from lower socio-economic groups and/or considered to have limited participation in schools and local neighbourhoods (University of Edinburgh, 2018). Along with mature and first-in-family students, people with criminal convictions typically share characteristics that Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), and Government call “disadvantaged” (Unlock, 2018). As a result,



such individuals are not only considered least likely to progress to University, but, routinely under-represented within the higher education sector.

Although the widening participation agenda is intended to demonstrate the sectors commitment to “open up” higher education, it would seem that such efforts have been applied in a piecemeal fashion. In 2018, UCAS outlined plans to remove the criminal convictions disclosure box from University application forms in time for the 2019 admissions cycle (Weale, 2018). The Prisoners Education Trust (2018) suggest this is an important step that will prevent the “chilling effect” of the disclosure box, which can deter people with criminal convictions from applying to University, and go some way to address some of the arbitrary and unfair admission practices that have prevented individuals from reaching their full potential through higher education. Although a step in the right direction, such endeavours do not necessarily mean that access to higher education will naturally improve for people with criminal convictions. Rather than eradicating the criminal convictions screening process, UCAS have merely displaced the process. With responsibility now firmly placed at the door of each individual higher education institution.

In addition to macro socio-political discussions about widening participation and access to higher education for people with criminal convictions, we must also engage with grassroots attempts to better understand the needs and experience of current higher education students with criminal convictions. According to Armstrong (2008) students from non-traditional backgrounds find it difficult to access and engage with higher education in a meaningful way. Indeed, the limited overlap between non-traditional students lived experience and the traditional customs, norms and values of higher education can make University life more challenging for those from disadvantaged and under-represented groups (Kahu and Nelson, 2018). If the sector is to demonstrate a genuine commitment to widening participation, efforts ought to extend beyond seemingly positive rhetoric and political discussions about access, towards a genuine attempt to engage with the complex, multifaceted issues that face people with criminal convictions who wish to engage in higher education (both before and during their journey through higher education).

In an attempt to illustrate some of the challenges and rewards that stem from working alongside students with criminal convictions in higher education, the following discussion will critically reflect upon the development and progression of one situated Learning Together (LT) based within a University in the north-west of England, United Kingdom. In doing so the authors will explore three key developmental areas: *creation*, *progress* and *maintenance* over four separate but inter-connected sections. The first section explores some of the guiding principles that underpin the *creation* of a community-based LT initiative. The second section outlines the methodological approach, and the penultimate section critically reflects upon the initiatives *progress* to date. To conclude, the final section explores how such initiatives can *maintain* momentum and meaningfully engage with wider socio-political debates about the sustainability of educational partnerships between the higher education sector and criminal justice system more broadly.

Creating a Community of Practice

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), a community of practice consists of a group of people who share a craft or profession. It can evolve naturally due to participant’s experience of a particular area, or be deliberately created with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a specific field of study (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice are formed by and for people who wish to engage in a process of collective learning (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). It is through the process of sharing information and lived experiences with the group that members learn from each other and have the opportunity to develop both personally and professionally (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This form of learning has existed for as long as people have been sharing their experiences through storytelling and is rooted in Peirce’s concept of community of inquiry (Shields, 2003) and Dewey’s principle of learning through occupation (Wallace, 2007).

The authors were keen to create a community of practice, within a University, in an attempt to open up higher education (albeit on a small-scale, local level) for people with criminal convictions. Demystify stereotypes and preconceived ideas about “who” engages in higher education and what University life consists of. As well as work towards the provision of more flexible and accessible pathways to higher education for people with criminal convictions. Since September 2016, the authors have designed and delivered a University-based

initiative for males and females who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system, and postgraduate students from the criminal justice programme at the host institution. The initiative consists of 15 two-hour sessions taught across the academic year from October to April. Each taught session explores a contemporary penological issue through a series of accessible questions such as “how do we explain crime and criminality” and “why do people stop offending”.

Although flexible, the authors aim to engage no more than 20 students per academic year. Ten from the postgraduate community (from within the host institution) and 10 from local criminal justice services (including both practitioners and service users). All interested parties must apply via a bespoke application form that explores an individual’s motivation for participation, hopes and fears. Applicants from outside of the institution are also required to complete a criminal convictions screening form, co-created by the authors and head of legal and student governance. All applications with unspent criminal convictions are considered at a bespoke criminal convictions screening panel which is made up of the authors, representatives from the host institutions student and legal governance department and LT student representatives (with lived experience of the criminal justice system). The panel aims to mirror institutional policies and practices whilst at the same time, create a process that is transparent and progressive; rooted in discussions about applicants as people, with qualities and potential, rather than a catalogue of criminal convictions with a name.

The fundamental aim of the initiative is to create a safe space for criminal justice academics, students, service users and practitioners to come together and work towards the creation of a community of practice where scholarly activity, life events and professional experience are recognised, applied and practiced within and beyond the classroom. As the initiative has grown, the authors have recognised how community engagement, as a pedagogical framework, holds the ability to reduce cultural distance between academic researchers and the communities in which they work (Rubin et al., 2012) whilst at the same time enriching learning and strengthening communities (Power, 2010).

Community engaged pedagogy embraces a form of experiential education that encompasses both curricular and co-curricular activities, where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as both students and teachers seek to achieve real objectives for the learning community, as well as a deeper understanding of skills for themselves (Brandy, 2018). It provides a way in which academic insight and lived experiences may be integrated to create organic teaching and learning opportunities, whereby students, staff and community services are all educators, learners and generators of knowledge. Community engaged pedagogy is an important tool for LT as it provides a way in which the traditions, norms and expectations of the academy can be stretched and diversified to reduce sociocultural incongruity (Devlin, 2011) and alienation (Mann, 2001) amongst and between non-traditional students. Thus, creating a more dynamic, community-focused teaching and learning experience. Although initiatives such as LT create a series of opportunities for the sector, we must also recognise that as the conventions of pedagogy are stretched and standardised academic practice are challenged, a series of competing contradictions begin to emerge. The authors have utilised the terms: scope, transparency and endings to encapsulate such challenges. Each of which will be revisited in the penultimate section of the article.

Methodology and Methods of Data Collection

The authors employed grounded theory as a methodological and analytical framework given its inductive nature and emphasis on the continuous interplay between data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1999). Grounded theory holds the assumption that it is essential to gain familiarity with the setting under study (Wells, 1995; Egan, 2002) so that rich interpretations of reality can be generated to explain and understand a particular setting or group of people (Annells, 1996). As research guided by grounded theory do not begin with a precise question (Charmez, 2006), the researcher can employ an array of data collection techniques to study ordinary events and activities within the setting in which they occur, in an effort to understand what ordinary activities and events mean to those who engage in them (Fetterman, 1998).

The authors utilised fundamental principles and prescriptions of grounded theory to develop and sustain a longitudinal ethnographic study alongside two cohorts of LT students. Ethnography places a strong emphasis on exploring a particular phenomenon; has a tendency to work with unstructured data and employs an analyt-

ical strategy that involves an explicit interpretation of meaning (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Ethnographic approaches provide a way in which researchers, having identified a problem or issue worthy of investigation, can begin to collect data that is typically unstructured (Lett, 1990; Barnes, 1996). Reflectivity is a significant component of ethnographic research. According to Ruby (1980), to be reflective researchers must systematically reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data collection and generation. The ultimate goal of reflectivity is to create a balance that dissolves the distinction between the ethnographer as a theoriser and the participant as passive data (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1993).

Since the inception of LT at the host institution, the authors have sought to build meaningful dialogue and reflexivity into all teaching, learning and research endeavours that take place amongst and between LT participants (staff and students alike). Given the infancy of our programme, the authors sought to blur conventional boundaries between teaching, research and civic engagement. Choosing to see each activity as interconnected yet mutually exclusive. Before our LT programme began, the authors obtained full ethical approval from the University research ethics committee. During the first taught LT session, the authors explained their aspiration to develop understanding, insight and pedagogical practice for students with criminal convictions in higher education. The authors also explained how they intended to collect data throughout the duration of LT, reassured students that participation in the research was voluntary and provided an opportunity for questions. All students were provided with informed consent forms to read, sign and return if they wished to participate in the research.

During the first year of LT, the authors decided to employ informal methods of data collection, such as informal discussions, participant observation, and reflective practice, only. Informal discussions and participant observations were recorded as field notes after each LT session (usually within 24 hours), kept in a locked filing cabinet in the author's office and subject to manual thematic analysis once the course had ended. In addition, all LT students were given notebooks so that they could record their thoughts, feelings and experiences. The authors explained the role of reflexivity as a teaching, learning and research tool so that all students fully understood why they were asked to keep a reflective journal during their studies, and why their diary entries could provide an important source of empirical data.

At the end of the course, 10 students provided consent for their reflective journal entries to be included in the research. Each of which have since been transcribed and subject to a thematic analysis via NVivo: a software programme used for qualitative and mixed-methods research (Kent State University, 2018). Typically used for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video and image data, including but not limited to interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media and journal articles (Kent State University, 2018). As the second year of LT approached, the authors were keen to create more opportunities for LT participants to engage in peer-to-peer dialogue and reflexivity. A small pot of funding was obtained from the host institution for two LT students to undertake paid internships, with the authors, one day per week, over a period of four months. The aim of the internship was to provide an opportunity for LT students to design and deliver a one-off focus group with their peers to explore how LT participants made sense of their higher education experience. Three LT students volunteered to participate in the focus group. Focus group recruitment took place via email, with a generic email sent to LT students institutional email address. Upon reflection, this method of recruitment may not have been the most appropriate and limited participation in the focus group—particularly amongst students who were new to higher education—given that many LT students openly discussed their inability and/or reluctance to engage with the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

The forthcoming discussion is based upon a series of findings from a variety of methods of data collection (informal discussions, participant observation, reflective journals, the authors own reflective practice and focus group data) that have been subject to either manual or NVivo assisted thematic analysis. This analytical process has produced five over-arching themes (vulnerability, risk, authenticity, (un)belonging, and critically reflective practice) that will be discussed in the following section. Although the aforementioned approach to data collection and analysis have allowed the authors to open up the subject area, it is important to recognise that the gains offered by ethnographic research are met with certain limitations. Such as characteristically small sample sizes, the inability to generalise findings to a wider population with confidence (Gray, 2009), the relatively long period of time ethnographers spend in the field and fundamental questions surrounding the reliability and validity of ethnographic research and its subsequent findings (Hammersley, 1990; LeCompte

and Goetz, 1982).

Despite such limitations, as ethnographic fieldwork employs an array of research methods over an elongated period of time—that provide an opportunity for continual data analysis and comparison to refine constructs and capture participant reality (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982)—the authors felt that this was an appropriate way to open up the subject area. The grounded nature of ethnographic fieldwork allowed the authors to organically unravel and experience the *creation, progress* and *maintenance* of LT, as and when it unfolded. Undertaking research in “real time” as the LT project developed meant that the authors relied upon the voice and experience of LT participants to shape the narrative of LT within our host institution. Although the findings cannot be generalised beyond the time, setting, place and people involved, the forthcoming discussion provides an interesting insight into the challenges and rewards that surround working with “non-traditional” students involved in a non-traditional project within one situated higher education institution.

Moving Beyond Edgework: Stepping Stones and Stumbling Blocks

From an early stage in the development of LT, the authors realised that the initiative sat on the periphery of both higher education and criminal justice policy and practice. Upon reflection, it would seem that although higher education institutions and local criminal justice services perceived the initiative as a “good thing” there was a lack of clarity surrounding what the initiative was actually trying to achieve and why. With this in mind, the authors made a conscious decision to embrace a fluid approach to the creation and development of LT, opting to utilise participants lived experience of the programme in “real time” to steer and direct the overarching aims and objectives of the initiative. This approach to teaching and learning required the authors to invest a considerable amount of time in understanding what LT meant to its participants and why:

“You can always get the grades but that doesn’t mean that you have really learnt something does it?” (Participant 1).

“My perceptions were all from like academic textbooks and doing essays (...) but to actually hear it first hand was really interesting” (Participant 2).

Maybe they were thinking that people in academia would be judging them but hopefully after this they have realised that no, not everyone is. Not all society is marginalising you or treating you that way. That there is a bit of acceptance in society and that’s given them a bit of hope. (Participant 3)

I’ve never really got theory but one of the non-MA guys, after a lecture on theory, said to me ‘I wish I’d know that 18 years ago.’ It was like he was rewinding back through the whole of his life, due to a theoretical lecture. He was able to make connections after a lifetime of going in and out of the criminal justice system. (Participant 4)

The discussions also made me question some of the perhaps, lazy, assumptions that I make. My views are based on the experience of working in prisons for over 20 years. However I’m aware that I have a lot of anecdotal knowledge. A lot of local knowledge but I don’t have an overview nationally and I certainly don’t have opinions and views that are based on evidence-based research. I realise that the more I think and talk about crime, then the less I actually know. (Participant 5)

“She said I had potential (...) that really made me believe in myself” (Participant 6).

Although insightful, attempts to adopt such a flexible approach were however, challenging. Upon reflection, it would be fair to say that the authors readily embraced both personal and professional uncertainty as they embarked upon their LT journey; simultaneously negotiating discussions about innovative practice and risk management. Although this was an intellectually stimulating position to be in, creating and developing

a LT initiative within a higher education setting, required the authors to take steps and/or risks that extended beyond the remit of their typical, day-to-day duties. Existing literature on community-engaged pedagogy provided a way in which the authors could make sense of their efforts to reduce socio-cultural distance between academic researchers and their local community. Although invaluable, the pedagogical literature on “belonging” in higher education does not extend to critical discussions about how to negotiate and merge cultural borders between higher education and criminal justice service provision.

In an attempt to make sense of our endeavours, the authors drew upon the work of Lang (2005) who devised the term *edgework* in an attempt to explain why people take risks as part of leisure activities. Traditionally, the term *edgework* describes how crime can provide a means whereby people can get a thrill or pleasure by engaging in risk-taking behaviour. Going right to the edges of acceptable behaviour, challenging the rules of what is acceptable and exploring the edges that exist along cultural boundaries. Albeit in a different context and for different reasons, the authors identified with the notion of *edgework* as they were going to the edges of acceptable or traditional practice in higher education whilst at the same time exploring cultural boundaries between our host institution and local criminal justice service provision. In using this phrase, the authors are, developing the work of Lang (2005) through an attempt to make sense of, and communicate how, initiatives such as LT can take academics to the edge–periphery of institutionally recognised and embraced endeavours, whilst at the same time provide a way in which traditional–longstanding practices are challenged and risks can be taken.

Scholars such as Rooijen (2018) suggest that taking risks is imperative for achieving innovation in higher education settings. This is because risk taking can be helpful when working through and attempting to solve differences in ideas, reaching a consensus in thinking and making informed decisions (Koh et al., 2015). Academic risk taking consists of learners assessing familiar and unfamiliar outcomes of a learning activity (Pierre, 2018; Robinson and Bell, 2013). Learners (including both staff and students) can choose to become involved in an activity based upon the possible benefits and consequences of what will be learnt and/or gained as a result of participation (Robinson and Bell, 2013). Although the notion of risk taking is uncommon in higher education, it is an important concept (particularly in a pedagogical sense) given its ability to increase motivation and academic achievement amongst students (Clifford, 1991). According to Dewey (1916) during the thinking and learning process, a level of personal, pedagogical and professional uncertainty arises. Beghetto (2016) suggests that there is good uncertainty and bad uncertainty. Bad uncertainty results from learning experiences that do not include necessary supports and structures. Whereas, good uncertainty provides students opportunities to engage with the unknowns of a challenges in an otherwise supportive, well-structured environment (Beghetto, 2016).

In the context of classrooms, educators often replace uncertainty with over-planned learning experiences (Beghetto, 2017). There are benefits in doing so beyond maintaining a sense of consistency, calm and control; students can and do learn from routine problems and assignments (Lee and Anderson, 2013). However, the key limitation to these types of learning experiences is that they do not give students opportunities to engage with and learn from uncertainty (Beghetto, 2017). The role and function of *good* uncertainty within the teaching and learning process supports the idea that learning environments—such as Universities—should create learning environments where all participants can take risks (Dewey, 1916). The authors suggest that initiatives such as LT—situated within higher education institutions—provide an opportunity for educators and students alike to invite *good* uncertainty into the classroom and embrace personal, professional and pedagogical risk taking.

Although there are various forms of prison-university partnerships, our initiative is the only University-based initiative that brings together criminal justice academics, students, practitioners and service users. With this in mind, the notion of *edgework* provides a useful way in which we can begin to make sense of the design and delivery of LT within a community context as opposed to a prison context. The term *pedagogical edgework* provides a way in which we can begin to explore cultural boundaries between higher education and criminal justice, demystify actual and/or perceived boundaries between members of the student population, and, break down boundaries between service providers and service users (whether that be in the criminal justice or higher education sector). Indeed, the notion of pedagogical *edgework* provides a way in which individuals (who may not necessarily know each other) can confidently explore vulnerability and uncertainty within

and beyond the classroom, whilst working towards the achievement of a common goal.

Although saturated with uncertainty, pedagogical edgework allows both staff and students to explore personal and professional vulnerability in a safe, reflective and open fashion. In an attempt to integrate principles of community-engaged pedagogy into our teaching and learning practices, whilst at the same time, respond to the needs and demands of all LT students, the authors made a conscious decision to design and deliver an *organic curriculum* coupled with *collective teaching practices*. Both of which were new ventures in the authors teaching career. Rubin et al., (2012) suggest that the process of developing and implementing an organic, responsive curriculum encourages the creation of a teaching approach that embraces co-learning and co-production. With this in mind, the authors drew upon the principles of co-learning and co-production to develop an organic curriculum that was authentic and responsive, directed by the needs, skill set and experiences of those participating in LT.

The processes involved in the design and delivery of an organic curriculum highlight just one of the ways in which the authors embarked upon pedagogical edgework. This is because students and staff were attempting to work together to create meaningful course content, discussing appropriate teaching approaches, designing learning activities and developing assessment strategies. To help facilitate this process and establish a truly organic curriculum, the authors drew upon the co-operative learning literature (see Fink, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Biggs and Tang, 2011) to inform both formal and informal methods of teaching and learning methods, and enhance staff–student and student–student interaction (Mills and Cottell, 1998; Johnson et al., 2007; Mills, 2010). Existing research suggests that creating and developing an organic curriculum helps to foster a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose (Reckson, 2014; Cook-Sather, 2017). Both of which are important components of a community of practice within a higher education setting.

The authors also embraced *collaborative teaching practices*. Collaborative teaching practices take place when two or more people share responsibility for educating some or all students in a classroom (Villa et al., 2008). It involves the distribution of responsibility amongst a group of people for the planning, instruction and evaluation of a classroom of students (Villa et al., 2008). There are four different models of collaborative teaching which include: supportive teaching, parallel teaching, complementary teaching and team teaching (National Centre for Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995). Supportive teaching takes place when one teacher takes the lead instructional role and the other moves around the learners to provide support on a one-to-one basis as required. Parallel teaching takes place when two or more teachers are working with different groups of learners simultaneously in different parts of the classroom. Complementary teaching takes place when co-teachers do something to enhance the instruction provided by the other co-teacher(s). Team teaching is when two or more teachers plan, teach, assess and take responsibility for all the students in the room, taking an equal share of responsibility, leadership and accountability (Nevin et al., 2007).

The literature on collaborative teaching practices helped the authors decide to take a flexible teaching approach that involved all four forms of collaborative teaching models, in one way or another. The authors decided to revisit decisions about teaching and learning approaches on a weekly basis, taking into consideration session content, attendance and emerging classroom dynamics. In addition, when guest speakers led a session, the authors would assume the role of facilitators—asking questions, prompting student involvement, challenging ideas and so on. After each session, the authors (alongside guest speakers where and when appropriate to do so) reflected upon the effectiveness of their approach in relation to session content and student engagement. This required staff to engage in conversations that questioned and critiqued traditional practices (Hart et al., 1992; Odeh et al., 2010). Although such reflection is an important component of collaborative teaching practices, intended as a mechanism of support and personal growth, for the process to “work” a degree of trust and authenticity is required between and amongst those involved in the process. Without trust and authenticity, reflective practice (particularly critical reflective practice) could (and probably will) fall short of achieving its aims and ambition.

Pedagogical edgework (such as the creation of an organic curriculum and collective teaching practices) require a feeling and/or sense of authenticity between and amongst staff and students involved in the process. Indeed, it is the authenticity of emotion and experience that helps to create a dynamic community of practice (within a higher education setting) between a diverse group of people who have chosen to come together to think, learn and be challenged on a personal and professional level. This sense of authenticity is a

vital ingredient in the creation and development of a tight-knit community of learners as it facilitates and enhances the sense of commonality amongst and between participants, which subsequently creates a feeling of belonging:

“I don’t feel judged or anything. I’m free, to just learn and be myself. No messing about, no bullshit, just learn” (Participant 7).

As Learning Together progressed, I was struck by the varied and interesting contributions from different students and I feel that such a diverse group of people bring nothing but expertise and also a not-wholly conventional approach, which is wonderful to be a part of. (Participant 8)

“I feel like this is a safe space, away from work, to discuss how I feel” (Participant 9).

Strayhorn (2012) defines the concept of belonging as perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by and important to the group. Asher and Weeks (2014) offer a similar definition of belonging as a feeling of comfort and security based on the perception that one is an integral part of a community, place, organisation or institution. According to Cook-Sather (2017), feelings of belongingness have two key components: a sense of valued involvement (the feeling of being valued, needed and accepted in the system or environment) and a sense of fit (the person’s perception that his or her characteristics are shared with or complementary to those present in the system or environment).

Communities of practice, such as LT, facilitate deep connections between staff and students, which leads to enhanced learning and motivation amongst all involved in the learning community (Healey et al., 2014). Cook-Sather and Felten (2017) describe learning communities as liminal spaces within which partners engage in a balance of give and take. Developing a sense of belonging through relational processes underpinned by an ethic of reciprocity (Cook-Sather, 2017). Such spaces and opportunities nurture experiences and relationships that contribute towards a sense of belonging. Staff and students who participate in such communities, engage in a process of reciprocal reaching, that turn actual and/or perceived differences from divides into possibilities for more life-affirming human connection (Cook-Sather and Porte, 2017).

“I’ve made a genuine friend for life” (Participant 10).

Prior to working with probation, I was a prison officer for a number of years. In our session “does prison work?” it was difficult for me to listen to some of the criticism of the work that I did for many years. I know I strived to do a good job, but could we have done things better? It is only since working in the community with those subject to prison licences, that I have truly realised the impact of things like recall. And yet, only in recent weeks have members of parliament began to speak openly again about the impact of short term prison sentences, not just for the prisoner, but potentially their family, partners, children and employers. To what purpose does a 4-week custodial sentence serve? (Participant 11)

“Life in education doesn’t always go right—in no way am I comparing University students experience to being on license—but it can be confusing. The rules and expectations often change and are open to interpretation” (Participant 12).

The reciprocal reaching that takes place amongst and between students involved in LT may be described as a form of personal and/or professional edgework as they explore new boundaries, manage uncertainty and engage in discussions that they may not have experienced if it was not for their involvement with LT. The presence of reciprocal reaching—edgework not only helped to foster a strong sense of belonging amongst and between those involved in our community of practice, but helped to turn potential sites of division into means of cohesion. Rather than dividing members of the LT community, the authors found that dis-

cussions about “difference” (whether actual or perceived) provided a way in which students bonded, engaged in honest, authentic conversations about themselves as individuals (rather than students) and disclosed (for the first time) feelings of un-belonging in higher education. The reciprocal reaching–edgework that takes place between students involved in LT highlights how complex and multifaceted the notion of belonging within a higher education context actually is. Particularly within higher education institutions that are already occupied by a varied student population. As LT unfolded, and students (particularly those from the institutions postgraduate community) felt able to talk freely about their lived experiences, the authors learnt that there was, in fact, a sense of *belonging uncertainty* amongst all students involved in the initiative. Wilson and Cohen (2007) suggest that belonging uncertainty can create a sense of doubt as to whether one will be accepted by individuals in a social environment.

“People like me don’t belong in places like this” (Participant 13).

“I don’t think that I will like students” (Participant 14).

“I don’t know what it is about Learning Together but there’s something different about it (...) Its real life. It’s made me realise that I don’t fit into a box and I don’t care that I don’t” (Participant 15).

“I’m the first in my family to come to University, this is a big thing for me to even be here doing this” (Participant 16).

Perhaps naively, the authors believed that students who were new to the host institution would be more likely to grapple with belonging uncertainty given that LT was a completely new experience for them, taking place within an unfamiliar setting. In addition to the belonging uncertainty amongst students who were new to the institution, focus group data illustrated how belonging uncertainty was just as prevalent (if not more so) amongst students from within our postgraduate community.

At times, I felt excluded [*during mainstream study*]. I am not sure whether that’s my own insecurities because I’ve always been kind of, not fearful, but anxious about going into a classroom because of my background. When I am in class [*outside of Learning Together*] I feel like I’m just sat at the end of a table. I’m not an ex-offender or anything but I feel more like them, than an MA student. I study this area purely because of life experiences, not because I was academic or the brightest in the classroom but because of situations I’ve seen people go through. (Participant 17)

“In class [*outside of LT*] I feel like I can’t speak about my personal experiences without thinking how is he going to take that” (Participant 18).

I remember coming back after Christmas and someone said to me that they thought that I had left. There was nothing to motivate me, to get up in the morning, there was nothing that excited me. But Learning Together was a real motivator to get up and out of bed because I thought ‘right OK, if I am going to turn up to class on Wednesday [*for Learning Together*] then I am going to have to go to class on Tuesday because I can’t just show up on Wednesday. I enjoy my modules now. They all tie together but I never really realised how they all worked hand-in-hand before but this [*Learning Together*] because I wasn’t motivated to come to university. (Participant 19)

The presence of and reasons for belonging uncertainty amongst postgraduate students involved in LT illustrate how important it is for those working, studying and leading the higher education sector to engage in edgework. Although the findings are limited in breadth and depth, they hold the potential to illustrate how innovative pr-

actice within higher education are not only able to open up, but address and engage with emerging issues for the sector as it attempts to widen participation. Additionally, emerging findings raise three fundamental questions about LT initiatives (based within prison and community settings) that are typically unanswered or under-explored. Firstly, is the uptake of LT amongst students in higher education about more than we (as educators) realise or appreciate? Secondly, are higher education students who engage in LT seeking a sense of belonging and connectivity that higher education fails to provide? Thirdly, are higher education students looking for an alternative to mainstream pedagogical provisions that are more able to foster a sense of commonality amongst and between learners?

“I did criminology. He is a criminal [*brother*]. Same background. Raised the exact same way. It’s ironic that we are in these parallel worlds” (Participant 20).

I remember someone saying to me “you’re on the other side”. This was in the library when we were discussing the presentations and I was like, “well you don’t know me” and I told them that our worlds were probably pretty closer than you could ever imagine. (Participant 21)

Although LT may provide an opportunity for students to generate a sense of belonging and connectedness within the classroom and amongst those involved in the initiative, there is little to suggest that such feelings are transmitted beyond the classroom. Within the host institution and indeed, the higher education sector more broadly. Our LT occupies a small, discrete corner of one department within a local University. As the authors cannot extend the institutional reach and scope of LT, knowledge and understanding of the initiative remains somewhat limited. Within a higher education setting, this is a substantial obstacle for LT and its participants. Without an institutionally recognised framework or policy that all staff and students are aware of, there is a real potential for LT participants (who are not familiar with higher education) to fall through the LT safety net at some point during their studies:

Learning Together was nearly over for me before it begun. When I was asking the receptionist where it was, and she didn’t have a clue. She looked at me like I had two heads and wasn’t helpful at all. I nearly walked right back out again to tell you the truth. (Participant 22)

“I told them I was here for Learning Together ... in the end I just said that I was coming in to see you. They knew who you were, so they had that” (Participant 23).

Although the authors have engaged in numerous events to raise the profile of LT, we cannot ensure widespread staff “buy in” and/or support, nor can we create institutionally recognised policies, procedures and frameworks that support and encourage such endeavours. There are systemic complexities both within higher education and society that hinder the creation and development of LT, which result in a rather typical outcome. The feeling of un-belonging and marginalisation amongst students with criminal convictions. In addition to the archaic nature of higher education policy and practice, we must also recognise that LT initiatives within higher education settings are restricted, shaped and limited by the criminal justice system and society more broadly. Digital literacy amongst people with criminal convictions (particularly those with extensive experience of imprisonment) provides just one example of this.

The Centre for Social Justice Studies (2017) found that digital exclusion is felt more by individuals who are experience multiple social disadvantage. The growing centrality of digital skills and knowledge means that people, who are digitally excluded, will often be socially and economically excluded and so unable to fulfil their potential. Right from the beginning of LT, it became apparent that engaging students (with criminal convictions who were new to the host institution) in a meaningful way would require authors to diversify their practice and standard methods of communication. Many students (with criminal convictions who were new to the host institution) found emails and VLEs complex and tedious, which somewhat dampened their enthusiasm to regularly check email and/or participate in on-line discussion boards. This had a subsequent im-

pact upon the author's ability to communicate with some students between taught sessions and keep them engaged with university life beyond the classroom.

Although we continued to prioritise the use of our VLE, the authors made a decision to send a weekly group text to all students with lived experience of criminal justice. Initially, we planned to ring each individual on a weekly basis, but nobody would answer calls from a withheld number. Such experiences (and indeed, our reactions to them) were important learning curves for the authors as they illustrated the cultural power and authority assumed by both criminal justice and higher education policies and practices. For example, rules, regulations and standardised practices re: digital engagement within one system (the criminal justice system) can negatively influence how one negotiates and engages with another system (higher education). Yet no attempts have been made (until recently) to reflect and rectify such policies and practice. Indeed, a further example can be found within the academy itself and how homogenised communication has become between staff and students. With those unable to respond to such method deemed to be unable and/or unwilling to engage appropriately with higher education.

The emerging findings from LT illustrate the need for higher education staff to engage in more critically reflective practice. Given the emphasis placed upon reflective practice throughout the duration of LT, it is unsurprising to find that students involved in the initiative did not just reflect upon their own experiences and practices. They also reflected upon how the authors engaged with the cohort and presented themselves within and beyond the classroom:

"I noted that the lecturers are non-judgemental. Open responses facilitate confidence amongst the students and allow everybody to feel that their views and contribution are valued" (Participant 24).

"I think to be able to be a teacher [*on LT*] you have to have the experience and confidence to be able to teach" (Participant 24).

"[*name removed*] handles him well when he is on one. Trying to show off and that. You can tell they [*authors*] know what they're doing like, it's reassuring for us to watch" (Participant 25).

The aforementioned findings illustrate how initiatives such as LT provide an opportunity for those involved in higher education to engage in more reflective, person-centred, outward-looking practices. It would seem that innovations, such as LT, provide a stark contrast to current higher education policy and practice, which choose to reflect an economic conception of the University and reinforce a consumer model of student identity. Indeed, LT could help higher education reconnect with the classic idea of a University; found in the seminal works of John Henry Newman, Wilhelm Humboldt, Karl Jaspers and Michael Oakshott (Milburn-Shaw and Walker, 2017) that envisage the University as a place for the education of the whole person, rather than a provider of vocational skills and professional accreditation (Ibid). Although a return to the classic idea of a University may be welcomed by some, the ability of such ideals to be scaled up and integrated into a neoliberal higher education marketplace, at a time of great socio-political uncertainty, are questionable.

Conclusion

For the author's and staff involved in delivering the LT programme, the results have been extremely rewarding on both a personal and professional level, as we have witnessed the growth of individual students development and bonds being created among those who previously would have had little contact with each other. In developing this community-based model of LT, we sought to develop a new, innovative community of practice within the local criminal justice landscape. For practitioners, we hoped that it would provide a safe space to discuss work place issues and occurrences. For criminal justice service users, we hoped it would be a new place and space to practice and embrace a new and/or different identity to those forced upon them by society. For those students on our postgraduate programme, we hoped that it would enhance their experience of higher education and understanding of the lived experience of those subject to criminal justice sanctions.

Adopting edgework as an approach and conceptual framework to create inclusive, yet diverse learning spaces has helped to increase and inform the authors understanding of how people engage with higher education. It has opened up new lines of conversation with students about belonging and identity and allowed us, as academics, to engage in more frequent and genuine conversations about how they feel about higher education. Preliminary findings suggest that every lecturer who has been involved in the project has “thought differently” or “thought more” about the session that they delivered to LT students (Gosling, 2017). Although this is something that we are still exploring, the authors are left wondering what this means and whether such findings raise fundamental questions about how “we” as teachers or lecturers or academics, view, define and engage with those that we teach on a day-to-day basis.

The edgework that is associated with LT (in a higher education setting) supports conversations about “who” students are. How they came to be involved in higher education. Their motivations for doing so and rationale for continued engagement—particularly when a sense of belonging and affinity with the sector is lacking or challenged. LT may provide a safe, supportive space for students to engage in discussions and activities that support reciprocal stretching but such practices are the exception to the rule (in higher education and criminal justice more broadly) rather than the norm. This therefore means that those involved in the design and delivery of LT, particularly within a higher education setting, have a responsibility and indeed duty to manage expectations, incongruity and vulnerability to the best of their ability. This pedagogical brokerage extends beyond the day-to-day work with students involved in LT to include higher education institutions themselves and criminal justice services involved in LT.

Although there are similarities between higher education and criminal justice service provision, there are a series of cultural differences and competing agendas that one must navigate to ensure the creation and maintenance of a community of practice. For example, there were several occasions where criminal justice practitioners saw higher education as an inherently good rehabilitative opportunity for their clients. Whereas higher education practitioners, responsible for screening criminal convictions, did not hold the view that higher education institutions should, or could, be rehabilitative institutions. The cultural differences that emerged required careful navigation and negotiation, to ensure all interested parties maintained motivation and commitment to LT. In addition, it is also important to recognise that differing occupational cultures and priorities within Universities themselves can have an impact (both positive and negative) on the creation, development and growth of initiatives such as LT within a community setting. Furthermore, the abrasive properties of the criminal justice system combined with the standardised, bureaucratic nature of higher education creates a number of challenges as and when people with criminal convictions attempt to navigate “university life”.

For example, given that some students had spent considerable periods incarcerated where they would have had limited, or no access to technology, it is hardly surprising that engaging with the VLE is problematic. For LT to create a truly inclusive experience for all students in the community, we as academics need to give more consideration to how we (individually and institutionally) prepare students to develop these skills. It is also been the case that need for pastoral care has been much more intense as individuals embark on what can be a transformative but threatening personal journey. The capacity and capability of Universities to facilitate LT requires further consideration and development to ensure that LT within higher education settings are more than just a micro-community of learners for people with criminal convictions. The authors are currently working alongside key stakeholders within the host institution from departments such as admissions, outreach, student welfare and student governance to create institutional-wide support for both potential and current students with criminal convictions. In addition, the authors are working to create links with the host institutions foundation year programmes (a 12 month taught programme that provides a stepping-stone into higher education for individuals who do not have the qualifications to apply directly to a standard degree programme) for LT students who are looking to undertake a further programme of study in higher education. Although a welcomed addition and much needed step in the right direction, foundation years (within the host institution) remain limited in scope and choice. Providing a pathway into certain areas/disciplines within higher education only. Although specific and lacking in variety, foundation years within the host institution (at the very least), provide a pathway into higher education for many LT students. Although the creation of such pathways into higher education are positive, we must recognise that pathways out of higher education are just as important for LT students.

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Turning Gender Inside-Out: Delivering Higher Education in Women's Carceral Spaces

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Abstract: *This article is a critical reflection of the role of gender in the delivery of a higher education course based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme. Related concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, and intersectionality are discussed within the prison education setting. This reflection primarily draws on critical incidents from the experiences of the first three authors facilitating a higher education course in a women's prison in England. One major reflection is that learning in a group of "inside" and "outside" students, all self-identified women, who vary along the dimensions of age, class, ethnicity, nationality and sexual expression, presented unique dynamics. This included working with both collectiveness and difference, gender-aligned expectations about behaviour, and experiences of control, criminal justice and higher education. Additionally, all four authors' experiences of delivering various higher education courses under different prison-education partnership models in both men and women's prisons allows for comparison and reflection on the institutional reproduction of gender norms. These reflections point to the conclusion that, despite the strong presence of intersectional divisions, gender can become a uniting force when working with an all-women student group, fostering critical thinking and engagement with challenging structural issues. However, further reflection considers that being gender-conscious in the classroom should not be limited to all-women student cohorts, as this is exactly what may enable facilitators to tackle some of the issues produced by hegemonic masculinity in a mixed prison classroom.*

Keywords: *Prison education, gender, Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme, women's prison, England and Wales*

The carceral space, like so many others, is a gendered one (Carlen, 2002; Barberet, 2014). Some authors argue that women experience the 'pains of imprisonment' more harshly than their male counterparts (Matthews, 2009; Crewe et al., 2017). The recently launched Female Offender Strategy in England and Wales might represent a policy step towards recognition that outcomes of incarceration can be worse for women than men (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). Situated in these broader criminal justice conditions, this article aims to critically reflect on gendered themes in the experience of delivering Higher Education (HE) in carceral settings, drawing on the authors' collective knowledge and experiences of teaching HE courses in prison. Specific attention is given to a course built on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme model (known as Inside-Out), delivered inside a women's prison in England by the first two authors of this article, with support from the third author. Where relevant, the article also draws out comparative reflections on the delivery of a similarly modelled Inside-Out course inside an English men's prison where the third author was one of the facilitators. The first three of the authors have received training and are certified facilitators of the Inside Out Prison Exchange Programme, while the fourth author has delivered similar courses within differently modelled prison-university partnerships. The term "we" is used throughout to encompass the reflections of the four authors of this article.



The article begins by contextualising the operational setting, including discussion of the gendered nature of the prison institution. We follow with a short introduction to the Inside-Out model. Then, we discuss the value of critical reflection as both a method and a practice for advancing teaching and learning scholarship (Brookfield, 1995). In an attempt to disentangle some of the central issues which arose during the Inside-Out course delivery, we draw on critical incidents (Tripp, 1995) as illustrative examples that typify certain dynamics. We use these critical incidents as points of contention to unearth the gendered dynamics of prison classrooms. Alongside the central position of gender in the article, we refer to related concepts, such as hegemonic masculinity, sexism, heteronormativity, and intersectionality, as theoretical backdrops to our observations and reflections. It should be noted, however, that this paper does not set out to test any individual theory, nor is it based on a pre-determined research design and subsequent data collection. Rather, it is based on thematic and systematic recollection of our observations and reflections in the aftermath of teaching, with gender as the organising praxis. We specifically reflect on what can be learnt from being gender-conscious in the classroom. Through our observations and reflections, we suggest that, when consciously integrated into practice, gender can be a powerful tool to foster critical thinking and a uniting force in an environment otherwise rife with power differentials and intersectional divisions.

Gender and Incarcerated Women's Experiences

Driven by feminist efforts, criminology has recently seen an increasing amount of attention being given to the experiences of women involved in the criminal justice system. This gradual movement from the very margins of the field has meant that we now know more about the plight of the female carceral experience than ever before (Silvestri and Crowther-Dowey, 2008). Gender is, in Heidensohn's (2002) words, no longer neither invisible nor ignored. A consequence of this is the growing knowledge that gender is a relevant factor for the prisoner experience, challenging the longstanding assumption—related to the dominance of positivism in the field—that the particular (i.e. men's perspective) can be situated as the general (Naffine, 1997). This idea that masculine criminological theories can just “add women and stir” is, as pointed out by Irwin and Chesney-Lind (2008), deeply flawed because it neglects gendered realities of crime and punishment. Although some variations have been detected across different penal settings (Österman, 2018), studies have found that women report more negative prison experiences compared to their male counterparts (Matthews, 2009; Crewe et al., 2017). This is especially evident in areas such as psychological well-being, intimacy, autonomy/control, and loss of family contact (Crewe et al., 2017). The biographical experiences of women's pathways into prison cannot be divorced from these findings.

There are smaller numbers of dedicated female prison establishments, both in England and Wales and globally, which not only means a wider spread geographically, but also that they need to cater for a more varied population (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). The *type* of training and support available is also important. A concentration on domestic and beauty training in female facilities has led feminist scholars to argue that prison is often utilised as a tool to *re-feminise* the female, adapting her to more traditional forms of femininity (Barberet, 2014). Illustrated for example, by beauty pageants held inside female prison institutions, Moral et al. (2009) argue that the incarcerated female body becomes a particular target for social control, aiming to re-educate the female prisoner into a suitable form of womanhood. Indeed, research has repeatedly found that women in criminal justice are judged on gendered ideals, including constructions of female “respectability” relating to factors such as motherhood, sexual conduct and lifestyle choices (Carlen, 1983; Hudson, 2002; Kruttschnitt, 1982). The female law-breaker is thus not only being judged as an offender, but also as a woman (Lloyd, 1995); the well-known “doubly deviant, doubly damned” argument (Heidensohn, 1996; 2002; Lloyd, 1995).

Situated in these broader gendered contexts of punishment, it is important—maybe especially so at a time when participation in education and other purposeful activities in prison, is reducing (Prison Reform Trust, 2017)—to also reflect on the carceral educational experience through the lens of gender.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme in a Women's Prison

The following discussion focuses primarily on a credit-bearing course delivered as part of a prison-university partnership between a female prison and a university in England. The course began with 22 enrolled female students¹, 11 of whom were incarcerated (referred to as “inside students”) and 11 of whom were undergraduate criminology students (known as “outside students”). Grounded in an embodied, critical and collaborative pedagogy (Fischman and McLaren, 2005; Nguyen and Larson, 2015), Inside-Out is a unique educational programme that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to study together with individuals who are currently serving time within a prison setting. The approach is based on a dialogic and peer-focussed learning model (Pompa, 2013)² and has, since its inception in the USA in 1997, proven to produce ground-breaking results and experiences for learners on both the *inside* and the *outside*.

While the particular challenges and rewards of delivering Inside-Out inspired programmes have been discussed in the North American context (Allred, 2009; 2013; Hyatt, 2009; Link, 2016; Maclaren, 2015; Pollack, 2014; Van Gundy, Bryant and Starks, 2013), much less is known about the British setting, as Inside-Out was only introduced to the UK in 2014. Moreover, reflecting that the vast majority of prison-university partnerships have been delivered within male prisons (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2018), these discussions have to date not focused on a female prison in England, nor on an all-female cohort of students. Hence, these deserve scholarly reflection.

Though the Inside-Out model is unique in its delivery and set up, universities have been operating in the prison estate of England and Wales for many decades, most notably through the Open University. However, recently there has been a proliferation of new and diverse prison-university partnerships. A recent study in countries across Europe and the US shows the breadth of diversity in partnership style, ranging from full degrees being offered in prisons, to informal mentoring by students at a university for those who are studying while incarcerated (Champion, 2018). Since the first UK Inside-Out partnership was implemented at the University of Durham in 2014, the rate at which new local partnerships have emerged has increased exponentially, with subjects and disciplines ranging from criminology and philosophy, to law and creative writing. In 2018, The Prisoners' Education Trust's PUPiL (Prison University Partnerships in Learning) network counted 54 current partnership projects across the UK (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2018).

Despite rising numbers of prison-university partnerships, access to further education and higher-level studies on the inside remains a challenge. In 2015-16, under the government funded OLASS³ educational contracts, a mere 100 learners in prison achieved a level 3 outcome (equivalent to an A level) in comparison to 26,600 learners achieving a level 2 (equivalent to a GCSE at grade A*-C). With no OLASS funded level 4 outcomes (equivalent to first year of HE), students in prison must seek higher-level studies themselves, outside the prison classroom (DfE and ESFA, 2017). Last year, the Prisoners' Education Trust funded nearly 3000 distance learning courses. However, with provisions such as these being made available overwhelmingly through correspondence courses, this study experience can be both isolating and challenging. Prison-university partnerships can offer more relational and dialogic learning spaces in ways that much existing prison-based provision cannot.

The reasons for delivering the Inside-Out course in a female institution was triggered by a shared concern between the first two authors of this article that there are lesser opportunities for incarcerated women to become involved in prison-university partnerships (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2018). This concern was combined with the second author's research and expertise working with women in the criminal justice system (Österman, 2018). That said, the original aim of the course was not to create a gender-specific group dynamic. Thus, recruitment on the outside was open to both female and male university students. However, no male students applied for the course—possibly reflecting the dominance of female students overall in the area of social studies (HESA, 2018). It is also worthwhile emphasising that all facilitators who were involved in the delivery of the course were female. Again, this was not intentional but accidental (although it may not be completely coincidental, as criminologists working on women and gender are, indeed, more likely to be female themselves; see Hughes, 2005). The all-female presence produced a particular dynamic in the group, which in turn shaped the course content and delivery. The use of all-female spaces is on the increase in the wider criminal justice field, where there is a growing consensus that a gender-specific approach is necessary for the development of effective policy and practice (Clinks, 2014; Ministry of Justice, 2018b).

On Reflection

Critical reflection has become increasingly formalised and established as a tool for both research and practice in education literature and beyond (see for example, Davis and Roswell, 2013; Fendler, 2003; Howard, 2003; Harrison, Lawson and Wortley, 2005). In particular, the work of Fook and Garner (2007) and their model of critical reflective practice, has brought this previously marginalised area further into the mainstream (Hickson, 2011). As is well evidenced in classic education literature (Mezirow, 1998; Smyth, 1989), explicitly or implicitly, facilitators aim to stimulate critical reflection in the classroom, regarding it as pivotal to students' learning.

After a period of occupying the proverbial "comfort zone", the practice of critical reflection has been revisited and resurrected in feminist scholarship, taking inspiration from Irigaray to critique the gendered nature of reflective practice in reproducing masculinist tropes (Galea, 2012), as well as highlighting the importance of embodied experiences (Leigh and Bailey, 2013). In her genealogical analysis, Fendler (2003) traces the origins of reflective practice through the work of critical scholars, highlighting its ties to feminist traditions. The authors share a strong sense of belonging to such traditions and endorse Larrivee's (2000) understanding of critical reflection as a process of merging "critical inquiry, the conscious consideration of the ethical implications and consequences of teaching practice, with self-reflection, deep examination of personal beliefs, and assumptions about human potential and learning" (p. 293).

Critical reflection is often accompanied by discussion of critical incidents (Tripp, 1995; Cope and Watts, 2000; Griffin, 2003; Bruster and Peterson, 2013) which, in our case, refers to reflection upon particular events in the classroom. For Griffin (2003, p. 208), a "critical incident provides a deeper and more profound level of reflection because it goes beyond a detailed description of an event that attracted attention, to analysis of and reflection on the meaning of the event". Identifying critical incidents allows us to ponder on the meaning of events observed in the classroom through application of the theoretical tools at our disposal. We can thus apply our understanding of gender, hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity, sexism, inequality and intersectionality to analyse what we observed in prison classrooms.

Incidentally, critical reflection is central to the Inside-Out programme and curriculum, imbuing every aspect of the learning and facilitation process, from classroom engagement and discussion to assessment. Posing a challenge to the dominant paradigm of individually-led academic learning environments, we believe that team-facilitating a course produces fertile ground for critical reflection. The opportunity to facilitate learning in a team, rather than solo, provides an otherwise generally absent space for collective exchange and reflection. As such, we found ourselves in ideal conditions to engage in such reflection and exchange. By developing this reflection in a structured fashion, through collaborative dialogue, discussion and writing among the authors, we aim to inform our current and future pedagogical thinking and practice, while also opening ourselves up for scrutiny and encouraging further debate in this area. Whilst we did not engage in any formal, structured journal-keeping, we did exchange notes via email and text messages after every session, alongside regular face-to-face meetings.

Howard (2003) argues that culturally relevant pedagogy is attuned with the practice of critical reflection in teaching. Accordingly, "teachers must be able to construct pedagogical practices that have relevance and meaning to students' social and cultural realities" (Howard, 2003, p. 195). The significance of this is twofold: On the one hand, this validates critical reflection as a worthwhile method to inform teaching practice and, to a degree, teachers' understanding of the implications of their practice. On the other hand, it ties critical reflection to a pedagogy that is attuned to students' lived experiences and understandings. Following Howard (2003), the authors of this article understand critical reflective practice to be both iterative and responsive; it responds to students' structural and intersectional makeup and to the broader social and cultural environment they inhabit. It thus facilitates the integration of content and discussion that is relevant to the particular student group. We elaborate on this throughout the article, specifically in terms of integrating gender in curriculum and activity development in response to an all-female student cohort.

In order to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of our students, the authors have not identified the particular partner institutions, and have not referred to individual students' contributions in classroom discussions. The authors have, however, referred to general similarities and differences in the classroom along

the central structural category of gender, but also age, ethnic background, nationality, sexuality and class. We have retained the categorisation, and distinction, between inside and outside students, given that this differentiation is foundational to the practices of the programme, reflecting existing power differentials as well as testing the egalitarian principles that inform it. Yet, the focus of this article is firmly placed on our reflections, and reference to classroom activities and discussions are offered specifically to contextualise such reflections.

On a discursive point, it is important to note the biological construct of “sex” (i.e. female and male) and the social construct of “gender” (i.e. woman and man) are often conflated in many societal institutions, including prisons, and the categories within gender and sex are presented as binary and definitive identities (Butler, 1990). For the purpose of consistency in this article, we use phrases such as “incarcerated women” and “female prisoners” interchangeably, as well as the phrases “male prisoners” and “incarcerated men” as synonyms. This choice of language is not meant to reinforce the gender/sex conflation, nor to marginalise the experiences of trans and gender fluid prisoners but is arguably an accurate reflection of how categories of gender (and sex) are understood and reproduced in the prison system. In this context, and arguably in mainstream, heteronormative culture, gender is largely presented as a dichotomous category. By referencing this dichotomy (and acknowledging the problematic usage here), we conceptualise and reflect on gendered experiences in a penal system that separates females from males and reinforces social and cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

The Learning and Teaching Experience Across Gendered Institutions

The following is an articulation of our discussions about delivering Inside-Out in different prison institutions. From a teaching perspective, delivering Inside-Out courses inside a prison setting was a challenge regardless of the type of institution, although some notable gendered differences occurred. Being a controlled setting, which limits freedom of movement at the very least, the prison classroom became a place of negotiation between freedom of thought and the types of constraints that are not typical of most HE environments. However, discipline and surveillance have, traditionally, taken different forms in women and men’s institutions. While Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity has been criticised as reductive (Demetriou, 2001), it is a useful tool for understanding the gender dynamics and the performance of masculinity in various spaces, including within the prison walls (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt, 2001). Hegemonic masculinity is understood in the current context as a collection of actions and ideological underpinnings of those actions that perpetuate the normative form of masculinity within the patriarchal design of gender ideals, including assumptions of heterosexuality and intrinsic aggressiveness (Connell, 1995).

During the men’s prison security training, photographs of various types of weapons that had been confiscated from offenders were showcased to the outside students. This was coupled with instructions to outside students on how to set off alarms and alert prison staff if needed; stressing a sense of threat of physical violence. As this was most outside students’ first introduction to the prison environment, the training signalled intrinsic expectations of hegemonic masculinity that would play out during the course. In contrast, the security talk for the course in the women’s prison focused primarily on the potential opportunities for grooming and manipulation by the incarcerated women towards the outside students, with only vague alluding statements about the potential for violence to occur. These differences in security talks typify gendered assumptions of risk and surveillance. Such differences were further evident in classroom dynamics and clothing surveillance, or lack thereof, as a risk management strategy underpinned by the dominance of masculinist, heteronormative expectations.

Heteronormative sexual tension and hegemonic masculinity in the classroom. One of the biggest differences observed in delivering Inside-Out in a men’s versus a women’s prison was the underlying heteronormative assumptions and associated sexual tension that reverberated throughout the delivery of the course in the male institution. While not assuming that the all-female group was exclusively made up of heterosexual orientations, sexual tension—and the management of it—did not play a role in the classroom. This presented a marked difference in our experiences of the classroom and its management. In line with the overall undergraduate criminology student body (HESA, 2018), most outside students who took part in the Inside-Out course in the men’s prison consisted of female undergraduates. This created a visible gender divide between inside and

outside students, with gendered heteronormative assumptions playing out in different ways and to varying degrees. Two examples in which hegemonic masculinity was exhibited in the men's prison include the dynamics of classroom behaviour and the clothing surveillance imparted on the outside students.

The performativity of hegemonic masculinity within the classroom manifested itself through verbose posturing by some inside students that were akin to disruptive school-age actions—that is, interrupting class discussion, throwing small items to get each other's attention, and engaging in side conversations. Such behaviours do, of course, exist in some contexts in more conventional classroom settings; however, this was experienced as amplified in the prison context. Although it was not strictly a case of all male inside students being disruptive and all female outside students attentively engaging in learning activities, the challenges of classroom control within the men's prison tended to be a manifestation of hegemonic norms of masculine verbosity as an expression of flirtation. It should be recognised that the underlying sexual tension between inside and outside students was bi-directional and largely operated within a heteronormative context. The enactment of such tension was, however, often initiated by masculine posturing. In consequence, in order to foster an environment conducive to collaborative learning, facilitators' attention and energy had to be directed towards managing these specific classroom dynamics, including monitoring behaviour between students above and beyond the group learning task at hand. Not only did this add an extra layer of work, but it was also an uncomfortable role for facilitators to assume, and one that arguably impacted on the ability to fully foster the ethos of transformative education. There was notably less classroom disruption in the women's prison. While the authors can only hypothesise about the role of gendered norms and sexual attraction, or lack thereof, within this, the different dynamics it produced resulted in observably distinct learning environments.

Hegemonic masculinity also appeared as an operational facet of the prison beyond the education wing. For example, prison staff in both the men's and women's institutions referred to outside students as 'ladies', and in the women's institution, this label extended to inside students as well. The underlying fear that the presence of a group of primarily young women inside the men's prison would cause disruption was communicated implicitly and explicitly by prison staff throughout the course. This aligns with the sexist rape culture narrative that heterosexual men are unable to control themselves around women (Harding, 2015). One way for the institution to enforce control over the underlying sexual tensions supposedly generated by women's presence into a controlled men's environment, was through dress. Dress codes, and the controlling of women's clothing in particular, is policed within and beyond prison environments (Montemurro and Gillen, 2013). In the men's prison however, outside students' dress was a central and gendered point of contention. In both the men's and women's prisons, inside students, like outside students, wore civilian clothes rather than a prison uniform. A "modest" dress code was implemented for outside students entering the men's prison, which included clothing that covered the body in a loose-fitting fashion. The surveillance of outside students' clothing was made through passing comments by prison staff, and reinforced gendered tropes of choices being equated with "appropriate" or "inappropriate" demeanour. Implementing a strict dress code was a way for the prison to manage the tension of our presence within it, and accordingly adhere to a system of gendered surveillance. In turn, this placed the facilitators in the extremely uncomfortable position of monitoring outside students' clothing. The facilitators were vocal about their opposition to this policing with both students and partnering prison staff.

The point here is not that inside students and prison staff all embodied one unified form of hegemonic masculinity, but that normative assumptions about expressions of masculinity impacted the gendered environment in which Inside-Out was delivered. The contention around dress codes and its policing was entirely absent in the women's prison context, reflecting the gendered and heteronormative assumption that, in an all-female environment, any concern of sexualised behaviour expressed through dress is not relevant.

An all-female group dynamic: emphasising collective sentiments, recognising difference The all-female cohort of the women's prison Inside-Out course created an opportunity to foster cohesion in the group based on a shared gender identity, encouraging the formation of a safe learning space. The importance of creating a safe space is well understood and embedded in the Inside-Out programme practice (Atiya et al., 2013), as facilitators are trained to instruct students to generate classroom guidelines through discussion and rectifying such guidelines in a dialogic and democratic fashion. Arao and Clemens (2013) identify this process as pivotal. In this regard, a safe space is not necessarily gender specific. However, a degree of familiarity with others by way of at least one shared identity, i.e. "being female", is likely to promote a sense of group

belonging. This chimes well with the previously mentioned trend in criminal justice policy and practice to promote all-female spaces, under the assumption that women will have experiences and needs that are specific, and that the environments that a male-dominated system produces may be ill-equipped to respond to such needs.

The course curriculum for the women's institution was initially developed by combining insights and activities from the Inside-Out instructor manual together with the facilitators' interests, research backgrounds, and experience. It was only when the cohort was finalised that an iterative process began to adapt the course to an all-female group, with gender as a prominent feature. This adaptation was deemed important, not only in terms of making the teaching and learning relevant to a UK prison context, but also—with the knowledge that women have been and continue to be slotted into a male-dominated system (Heidensohn, 1996)—to ensure that the curriculum was relevant to the female lived experience of incarceration, criminalisation and criminal justice. This was translated into the teaching and learning design in a number of ways, such as choosing poem readings that related to women experiences, as well as including topics that spoke to gendered issues, such as prostitution policy. Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal Woman" was for example co-performed by the entire group, with each student reading one line while sitting in a circle. Sitting in a circle to start and end each class is a central aspect of the Inside-Out ethos (Davis and Roswell, 2013). The experience of taking turns reading out a poem about unifying womanhood in this setting was especially powerful.

One of the sessions fell on International Women's Day, which provided an apt opportunity for incorporating discussion of women's rights in the classroom. As noted by Maher and Thompson Tetreault (2001), being gender-conscious in curriculum design promotes gender-consciousness in the classroom, and these women-specific aspects of the course did create a particularly cohesive atmosphere in the group early on. The Inside-Out curriculum and instructor manuals are blueprints developed in conjunction with "thinktanks", which are made up of former (predominantly male) inside and outside students and facilitators, in the spirit of knowledge co-production that underpins the programme. The curriculum blueprint does not include a focus on gender. However, this is neither prescriptive nor does it reflect the desires and ethos of the programme. In fact, in the 2013 edited collection "Turning Teaching Inside-Out", which collates various facilitators' reflections on their experiences of delivering the programme, Follett and Rodger (2013) and Heider (2018) directly advocate for the inclusion of feminism and feminist perspectives in the Inside-Out classroom. While recognising the value of this, we were at the same time conscious of the limitations of accentuating the notion of women as a homogeneous group. Indeed, the idea of a universal female standpoint has long been criticised for being a white, privileged, heterosexual, female perspective (Naffine, 1997). Difference is thus also important, stressing intersectional aspects of identity (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality, a term first coined by Crenshaw (1989), has in recent years become a prominent concept in feminist praxis. The impact of intersecting identities, and the implication of these identities in terms of accessing power and experiencing oppression, played out in the classroom. It was evident that different identities within the all-female group shaped perspectives, especially along intersecting variables such as race and ethnicity, age, sexuality, nationality and class. Crucially, students' distinct identities, framed by their own experiences of power, privilege and oppression, shaped their reactions and interactions with both the course and their classmates. The fact that the facilitators could promote cohesion through a shared gender identity aided the group to see commonalities early on, breaking down some barriers and producing a more interconnected learning environment. So, whilst "being female" was an identity experienced by all in the classroom, and thus emphasised by facilitators as a uniting factor, easing group cohesion, other identities were much more diverse and fragmented.

The gendered dynamics of morality: The Alligator River Story. The consequence of an all-female classroom space manifested in different ways. It produced an environment where certain gendered comments and jokes, often based on generalisations of male behaviour, became rather commonplace. An illustration of this was during an activity near the beginning of the course, when students work in groups on a story about a woman trying to reach her boyfriend in a different part of town, known as the Alligator River Story. In the story, in order to avoid life-threatening danger (i.e. being eaten by alligators), her only option is to rely on the men around her for transport. The help offered to her does not, however, come for free, as she will only be granted passage if she pays with sexual favours. The story is about categorising behaviour and discussing different moral responsibilities in a challenging scenario. This exercise was undertaken in both the women's

and the men's prisons, with many of the students (both inside and outside) expressing a sense of moral disdain toward the main female character.

Kennedy (1993) notes that, in contrast to the traditional idea of female-to-female support, women are often tougher on other women than men, which is suggested to be linked to different (that is, higher) expectations of women in general. Connected to wider gendered norms in society, women are commonly held responsible, by both women and men, for male transgressions. In the all-female group, comments such as 'that's just what men do' were expressed in various forms, often followed by laughter. There was a level of consensus in the room that it was natural for a man to try to gain sexual (but consensual) favours out of a woman if the opportunity arose. This was clearly underpinned by heteronormative, masculinist expectations. The comments indicated a shared experience of having had men "trying it on", which, in turn, opened an opportunity for discussion in the direction of patriarchy. However, the extent to which patriarchy was naturalised was evident in the group, as many students were focused on the issue of individual choice rather than the structural conditions that contextualised such choice. Yet, the shared lived experiences of being a woman facilitated an easily accessible route towards discussions of structural oppressions through patriarchal forces, which in turn effectively reduced the divides between inside and outside students in the female prison. Moreover, this particular reading of the story was enabled through a sphere of openness about experiences of gendered harassment, which were then situated in contemporary contexts. Importantly, these experiences cut across class, race, age, and nationality. With recent campaigns having highlighted the extremely high levels of "everyday sexism" (Bates, 2015) in the UK, it is unsurprising that the women in the group expressed shared experiences of this. While these discussions brought a sense of collectiveness and shared identity, as the debate moved on, it became evident—again highlighting the limitations of collectiveness through a single, unified shared identity—that there were definite divides in the group when judging the woman's role in the story.

Female perspectives on gender roles and norms must not only be situated in wider societal contexts, but also in criminal justice specific settings. This is particularly relevant when interrogating female inside students' perspectives. For example, studies with women who have been involved in the criminal justice system demonstrate how they are commonly expected, by others but importantly also by themselves, to take on traditional caregiving roles in their families and communities (Leverentz, 2014). These roles are further reinforced by the criminal justice system itself, exemplified in how the vast majority of countries worldwide exclusively give rights to mothers to have children with them (during at least *some* periods of imprisonment); the only exception being the Nordic countries, where—aiming to address the system's re-production of gender norms—this right has been extended also to fathers (Barberet, 2014). Gender norms are thus produced and re-produced both inside and outside the system, with feminist authors arguing that the treatment of incarcerated women can be directly relatable to the level of female conformity to mythology (Kennedy, 1993). While no generalisations can be made from this small educational cohort, it is noteworthy to consider how the balance between traditional gender expectations and ideals were distributed across students, with more gender-aligned expectations about behaviours being expressed by inside students.

These viewpoints came through clearly in the discussion that followed. The story's development is key here: not having any other option, the female character decides to have sex with a man in exchange for his help, to reach her boyfriend. For this, the woman was held accountable by students, who showed rather punitive sentiment towards her compared to the men in the story, illustrated in negative comments around female promiscuity and that that was no way to "treat your man". In line with Kennedy's (1993) argument above, the point was made that the woman was the one with moral responsibility, not the individuals (i.e. the men) around her who made their help conditional on sexual favours. The inside students were more directly punitive towards the woman in the story compared to the outside students, reflecting more traditional gender ideals. Some of the outside students noted that the woman could have made a different choice, and asked why she did not find alternative means to cross the river, which elicited a facilitator-led discussion about resources and structural constraints, including how, in a patriarchal framework, a woman's main source of power/commodity if surviving independently is her sexuality (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004).

As a comparison, the alligator river story was also part of the curriculum delivery at the men's prison and elicited some similar, but also in some ways more normative, student reactions. Perhaps in part due to the pervasive backdrop of hegemonic masculinity within the prison setting, some inside students felt emboldened

to express strong views on the female character's actions that were embedded in patriarchal, gender-normative scripts of the virgin/whore dichotomy and so-called slut shaming (Fanghanel and Lim, 2015; Ringrose and Renold, 2012; Armstrong et al., 2014). A key aspect of the Alligator River Story picked up by both inside and outside students involves the physical violence inflicted on the boyfriend by another man, which occurs after the boyfriend rejects the main female character upon her revealing that she engaged in transactional sex. This aspect of the story provoked outrage from some students this man had "been done wrong" and crucially, this harm had been instigated by a woman. In the story, the woman is portrayed as doubly deviant; first, she deviates from heteronormative, sexual mores, and secondly, she incites a harmful criminal act in retribution. Though she does not inflict the harm herself, in line with the idea that women maintain their passive, demure "nature" even when complicit, she supports the man who does. And yet the structural constraints and gendered portrayals were not recognised by many of the students. This was also the case in the female institution, where both inside and outside students justified their judgement of the woman as immoral by criticising her stance and her response to the violent incident (the woman is portrayed as laughing at the moment of the assault).

Later in the course the same story was revisited, this time from the perspective of victimhood. In the women's institution context, the curriculum was reviewed with the particular group formation in mind, for example by providing reading material that specifically dealt with gendered victimisation and female-focused interventions. This time, when the Alligator River Story was revisited, rather than assigning blame, students were encouraged to think about who the victims in the story were. Students accordingly began to draw more apparent links between choice and structural constraints, enabled by appraising the concept of "the ideal victim" (Christie, 1986). In this context, the female character ceased to be perceived solely as an immoral agent and was reimagined by many students as a victim of patriarchy, whose agency was constrained by the socio-economic and cultural context in which she operated. The sequence of the curriculum is likely to be of relevance here, with this session falling in the later stages of the course, when the dynamics of patriarchy had been discussed through a range of themes. From the facilitators' perspectives, it was rewarding to see students making new links between the female's structural circumstances, choices and actions.

In the male institution, where discussions of gender and patriarchy were not explicitly part of the curriculum, the revisiting of the story fostered different debates. Some students in small group discussions identified the boyfriend as the main victim. Constructing men as victims of female sexuality developed into an impassioned discussion about sexual consent, double standards, and individual agency and choice. In response, the facilitators questioned whether the same reaction would be elicited if the gender roles were reversed (but assuming the same heteronormative dynamics), in an attempt to expose the naturalised patriarchal assumptions embedded in the storyline and in many of the students' reactions. The gendering of individual choice was a dominant narrative among students for identifying the most reprehensible character in the story, while emotional and structural considerations of the characters' choices in the story represented a minority voice in the larger group discussion. In this instance, there were not clearly affiliated reactions along gender (or educational) lines between inside and outside; most students interpreted and largely accepted the story through normative patriarchal discourse.

Class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and religion might play a role in shaping judgements. The tendency to uphold heteronormative values and gendered ideals might be more prevalent in certain social and cultural groups (Jackson, 2006), while the social and cultural capital available to question heteronormative and gendered assumptions influences judgements and positions in matters of female sexuality. Indeed, we know that the positive effects of the fight for women's rights are not equally distributed across society, but rather, a "certain kind" of women—often a combination of white, straight, cis gender, middle/upper class, educated, global north—are those who have reaped most benefits of this movement (hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1984). As an objective measure, undergraduate students' social and cultural capital is higher than people who are incarcerated. This should not, however, be taken as an automatic indication that all students hold critical views, though they are undoubtedly more likely to be presently exposed to them. Exposure to critical perspectives through involvement in education can aid students to challenge their views by providing them with tools to alter traditional narratives. Thus, it may be that plugging in reflections on gender and patriarchy throughout the course in the female institution enabled both inside and outside students to attain more critical views towards the end.

Bringing feminist debates into the classroom: The case of prostitution Reflecting the facilitators' expertise, as well as the curriculum development for delivery inside a women's facility, one of the weekly class topics—recognising its gendered nature (Ekberg, 2004)—related to prostitution policy. It was expected to be an intense session and it was therefore positioned late in the curriculum, to allow the group to “gel” beforehand. Additionally, the session specifically focussed on different policy approaches, to depersonalise the debate. This set-up worked well, and the debate that ensued was vivid but respectful. Reflecting the polarisation of feminist literature on prostitution (Bernstein, 1999; 2012; Ekberg, 2004; Frances and Gray, 2007), the session was set up as a two-sided debate; one representing the “Nordic model”, i.e. the criminalisation of demand while decriminalising supply, and the other the decriminalisation model, that is, decriminalising both supply and demand. Cultural affiliations and identity are relevant factors for this debate, and so is the anglo-phone societal context in which the course is situated. It is furthermore noteworthy that each side of the debate was represented by a facilitator who supported either the “Nordic/radical” or the “liberal” feminist standpoint of the argument. The session was initiated with a debate between the two facilitators, which was received with positivity from the students, who were asked to “take sides” in the debate through a physical barometer. Possibly reflecting the cultural make-up of the students, most coming from political economic contexts dominated by liberal values and ideals, most students “sided” with the liberal feminist standpoint. In individual and group reflections, students discussed their difficulties in choosing sides, stemming from the emotive nature of the issue. Among the issues cited, religion and religious affiliation appeared to conflict with underlying liberal values, rendering choice between the two standpoints more difficult. Another issue brought to the fore was that of taxation of sexual labour as clashing with a more extreme view of liberal citizenship underpinned by self-determination and minimal state intervention; all aligned with a neo-liberal state model. The groups were then given time to develop, from readings, their own arguments before another—this time student-led—debate commenced. This debate soon became rather heated, with many students being very vocal, while others choosing to stay silent.

The all-female dynamic of the group clearly came through in this session. Comments drawing on expressions such as “us women” when presenting arguments were commonplace, indicating a whole-group voice. While this did not imply agreement, it did connote a sense of collectiveness in the room. The shared identity in the room once again allowed for a more easily accessible route to gear discussions in the direction of feminist scholarship. However, the area of prostitution represents one of the most divisive areas of contemporary feminism, which again reminds us of a shared gender identity that is also intersectional. Despite the predominance of liberal values underpinning the cultural scripts of most people in the room, each student (and facilitator) came with cultural views derived from nationality, religion, ethnicity, age group, sex and sexuality, alongside personal experience and exposure to issues pertaining to prostitution/sex work. Many of the students claimed they had never thought about the issue of prostitution before, so they did not come with an existing view or alignment to a particular policy. Despite the existence and cementing of opposing positions in the room regarding policy solutions to the issue, there was agreement, as indeed there is within feminism and in the literature (Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2017; Scoular, 2015), that, whichever position on prostitution policy one endorses, prostitution remains the result of capitalist and patriarchal systems of unequal, gendered relations. This is testament to the value of gender as a unifying concept and lived condition, cutting across divisions and functioning well as an underlying theme throughout the course in this setting.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has offered a critical reflective account of the delivery of prison-university partnerships through the lens of gender, from the authors' collective and comparative experiences and perspectives. Discussing aspects of the delivery of two courses based on the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme, with special focus granted to one taking place in an all-female learning space, our discussion has reflected our observations and learning journeys. Utilising a critical reflective and collaborative approach, we have offered an account of how gender has come to influence and contextualise our experiences as educators operating in controlled and gendered institutions. By applying the lens of gender to these specific teaching and learning environments, we have developed our own understanding and practice while opening scholarly discussion and inviting scrutiny.

Drawing on illustrative examples as critical incidents, we have argued that gender norms and scripts are relevant factors for the partnership-style delivery of HE in both women and men's prisons. Gender norms are suggested to be institutionally re-produced as certain forms of masculinity and femininity are expected and encouraged in carceral conditions and beyond. These in turn come to influence classroom dynamics and discussions. Classrooms, and particularly prison ones, can too easily become micro-climates of traditional gender roles reinforcement. Hence, they must be actively situated in the macro-setting of patriarchal structures. Overtly integrating discussion of gender in the prison classroom is regarded as a strategy to disrupt such traditional micro-climates.

Higher education delivery in carceral settings provides a unique experience for facilitators. The opportunity to facilitate in a team brings with it the possibility to critically and collectively reflect and acknowledge the gendered dynamics operating within the system. Although differences across intersectional aspects of identity were evident, we have suggested that working with a women-only cohort afforded the possibility to experiment with curriculum development and delivery that aimed to foster cohesion in a group that is otherwise divided across a range of factors. Making gender central to the curriculum made it possible to promote gender consciousness in the classroom. Considering positive outcomes in hindsight, clear advantages of this are noted, including that the group came to see commonalities early on. These were predominantly found in the areas of common experiences of systemic discrimination and objectification of women. While many students did not at first conceptualise these experiences in terms of patriarchal structures, the discussions that followed allowed easier access into the framing of experiences within such structural conditions. Though we can only hypothesise about this, we believe that the voicing of these types of gendered experiences are unlikely to have taken place in a mixed gender group. As has been illustrated in the comparative examples offered throughout the article, the dynamics around sexual tension and flirtation in a mixed gender group are not only time-consuming to manage for facilitators, they are also instances of the way hegemonic masculinity can come to dominate the teaching and learning context. Manifestations of this embodied some of the exact issues around patriarchy that the female-only space enabled discussion of.

Going forward, we must continue to reflect on ways in which we can work with difference, as well as similarity, to encourage students' critical understanding of other key structural categories. As mentioned, it was not intentional to solely recruit female students for this course, and thus it will be interesting to re-visit these reflections in coming years, delivering the course to more mixed groups. It is relevant to emphasise that while gender was a useful shared identity to work with, it was not a force that overpowered all other intersecting identities, and inequalities, in the classroom. For this, we need to further develop ideas and strategies to foster unity and critical thinking beyond gender as a unifying force. And yet, critical perspectives on gender should figure in the curriculum not simply as a strategy to unify, but also as a strategy to disrupt masculinist, heteronormative tropes. Thus, active and critical engagement with gender in the classroom should not be limited to all-female student cohorts.

The rewards involved in delivering these courses are especially found in the "transformations" (Mezirow, 1990) we witnessed in the classroom setting. These were seen in both the men and women's institutions. Some outside students experienced a paradigm shift, moving from an "us" and "them" mentality before the start of the course, to an understanding of the shared humanity and the importance of power and privilege in shaping access and life chances to education and/or incarceration. For some inside students, the transformation came from interacting and excelling in a HE environment, with a new keenness for learning and seeing HE as something they are both able and interested to partake in. Although these transformations are quite common in these types of partnerships (Davis and Roswell, 2013), the personal experience of facilitating a course that can, as Inside-Out Prison Exchange literature notes, break down the walls that divide us, offers an unrivalled highlight for anyone who identifies as an educator. Added to this reward are also unique lessons about how gender operates and is performed in these settings. By sharing some of our reflections, we hope to encourage dialogue on how diverse institutions and learning environments are shaped by gendered scripts and practices, and how we can respond by making them manifest.

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Footnotes

¹ Due to factors outside of the programme's control, the total number in the end of the course had been reduced to 20.

² For more information, please visit www.insideoutcenter.org/

³ Offender Learning and Skills Service is managed by the Skills Funding Agency and acts to integrate education in the criminal justice system with mainstream academic and vocational provisions.

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“There’s More That Binds us Together Than Separates us”: Exploring the Role of Prison–University Partnerships in Promoting Democratic Dialogue, Transformative Learning Opportunities and Social Citizenship

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Abstract: *In this paper we argue that education—particularly higher education (HE)—has the potential to offer socially, economically and culturally transformative learning opportunities. Yet, for prisoners, the opportunity to engage in HE as active social citizens are often limited. Using a Freirean model of democratic, pedagogic participatory dialogue, we designed a distinctive prison–university partnership in which prison-based learners and undergraduate students studied together. The parallel small-scale ethnographic study, reported here, explored how stereotypes and “othering”—which compromise social citizenship—could be challenged through dialogue and debate. Evidence from this study revealed a positive change in “de-othering” attitudes of participants was achieved. Furthermore, participants reported growth in their sense of empowerment, agency, and autonomy—the cornerstones of social citizenship. Findings from this study contribute further evidence to the developing body of knowledge on the value of partnerships and dialogue in prison education. We conclude that policy makers, and respective institutions, need to work harder to establish prison-university partnerships, thus providing the space for dialogue—“real talk”—to take place.*

Keywords: *Prison–university partnerships, social citizenship, transformative learning, pedagogic participatory dialogue.*

Back in 2017, we contributed to an edited collection of essays and reflective pieces about what those at risk of offending, prisoners and ex-offenders needed to learn (Crane, 2017). Broadly speaking, the contributors—ourselves included—addressed this question with a sense of optimism about the power of education to be socially, culturally and economically transformative, irrespective of the setting within which learning takes place.

That such optimism could exist against the backdrop of a seemingly dysfunctional prison system bedevilled by negative media headlines of increased violence, poor mental health, high rates of reoffending, suicide and self-harm, might be received as counter-intuitive (Allison, 2017; Howgego, 2016; O’Hara, 2017; Syal, 2017; Toynbee, 2017). This is especially pertinent if one accepts that the concept of “prisoners as citizens” has become increasingly contested and the erosion of “rights” in a penal setting are debated—and often, legitimised—in a way that would be inconceivable for the majority of “law abiding” citizens (Easton, 2008, 2013; Scullion, 2018).

Driven by the principle of less eligibility,¹ the contested debate about “what prison is for” renders conversations about “transformative learning” largely at the periphery of policy. Consequently, a model of penalty that perpetuates the “othering” of this socially constructed group and rejects the concept of an assimilated life beyond crime has emerged. This penal model limits opportunities for prisoners to engage as “active social citizens”² either within prison or beyond the prison gate (see e.g., BITC, 2018; Coates, 2016; Murphy et al., 2011).

Prison education is arguably caught in the crossfire of such ideological presuppositions. Whilst prison



education has certainly risen up the policy agenda in recent years, the preoccupation has been with designing an educational framework that engenders positive employment outcomes and economic autonomy (MOJ, 2018). Notwithstanding the resourcing pressures faced by those providing prison education (PLA, 2016, p. 1), we argue the benefits of prison education must go beyond mere employability considerations. Accordingly, prison education can, and should, provide opportunities to promote “social bonds, identities and narratives” that are integral to one’s desistance journey (PLA, 2016, p. 1). One mechanism through which this can be achieved is to work in partnership with other education providers and institutions.

Despite a challenging penal environment, we posit opportunities exist for a paradigm shift in how learning is perceived and provided in prisons, with education provision being constructed in partnership with other education providers to enhance social citizenship, through a pedagogic model of democratic participatory dialogue. Behan (2015, p. 4) argued for prisoner citizenship to be considered around notions of “participation, co-operation, inclusion and potentially, identity transformation”. Accordingly, the primary focus of prison education in relation to citizenship and transformative learning needs to ensure the prison estate provides opportunities for “reconnecting and positively identifying with community and civil society” (Behan, 2015, p. 7).

In considering the current limited opportunities for such connections to take place, we designed a distinctive prison–university partnership³ of learning in which 22 students—10 prison-based learners and 12 undergraduate learners—were recruited to study alongside one another in a prison setting. The 10-week undergraduate-level course adopted a dialogic pedagogy to critically examine the concepts of criminal justice and social justice for social citizenship. Alongside this, we undertook a small-scale ethnographic study, exploring the extent to which the bringing together of different societally constructed groups could promote a demystification of stereotypes and “de-othering” of people whose worlds may not ordinarily collide.

Like Behan (2015, p. 11), we assert that partnerships between prisons and external institutions are critical to removing barriers that “prevent prisoners from contributing to their community while inside and hinder their reintegration into society after their release from prison”. As such, a key focus for this research was to explore the extent to which our educational partnership provided a framework for changing the narrative about prisoners, support social citizenship and in so doing, contribute evidence for a new model for prison education based on a pedagogic model of democratic participatory dialogue.

Literature Review

Social citizenship. Prison climates are inextricably linked to social climates. The interplay between criminal justice policy, public attitudes towards “crime and punishment” and the overarching political economy of the nation state are well documented (see Cavadino, Dignan and Mair, 2013). It is clear that the penal estate can be shaped by the determination—or otherwise—of politicians and wider society to embrace and implement desistance-focused interventions that seeks to break the cycle of othering.

Incarceration, by its very nature, fractures established community relationships and societal bonds. Despite commitment in law (see, for example, House of Lords ruling 1981: UKHL 8), there is a lack of consideration of citizenship and societal “connectedness” in contemporary British penal policy.

Imprisonment not only inhibits an individual’s empowerment and agency, it also fractures important bonds between prisoners and society (see for example, Crewe, 2011; Farmer, 2017; Joliffe and Hedderman, 2012). By not giving due consideration to citizenship, the notion of othering of (ex)prisoners is reinforced, despite strong evidence that pathways to desistance are “through ... relationships—within families, within communities, within the state” (McNeill et al., 2012, p. 10).

We argue that policy should actively seek to understand and redress barriers for prisoners to achieve social, cultural and economic “transformation” and the resultant relationship to identity, agency and personal narratives. This, we contend, can be achieved through the creation of partnerships with stakeholders outside the prison estate – and that education providers have a crucial role to play.

Developing policies that “build the capacity to participate of those who are commonly marginalized” (Scott, 2013, p. 334) presents particular challenges in prison, not least when the prevailing public narrative

endorses a “fear” of the unknown. Allport (1979) proposed that prejudice reduction, social integration and de-othering necessitates bringing different groups together to reduce “in-group” anxiety, and to facilitate a sense of predictability and control. However, penal policy actively undermines prisoners’ status as equal citizens, with communities discouraged from engaging with prisoners in any meaningful way (IPPR, 2016; O’Brien, 2011).

Successful “through the gate” outcomes can be achieved in societies that prioritise the collective “we” rather than “us” and “them” (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006, 2010; Lash and Urry, 1994). Prisoners incarcerated in institutions that adopt such approaches report experiencing more opportunities to protect their citizenship status (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; Lacey, 2008; Pratt 2008a, 2008b;). Similarly Behan (2015, p. 4) argued that “in dealing with the opportunities for prisoners to participate in their community inside and stay connected with society outside”, we need to move away from examining citizenship exclusively in the context of the social contract towards “considering it in the context of the social compact, the connections that bind us together as a society”. It is against this backdrop, that prison education generally—and prison-university partnerships specifically—have an important contribution to make.

Prison education as a site for transformation. As argued above, there is a lack of consensus on the purpose of prisons, and the same can be said for prison education. Indeed, the role, value and purpose of education generally, sits within competing philosophical positions.

Education provides a powerful framework of change for all members of society, being described variously as “transformative”, “life-changing”, empowering (Bourdieu, 1977; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Illeris, 2014; Mezirow 1991; Page, 2009). Accordingly, a specific purpose of prison education is for prisoners to become “transformed” by contributing to society economically through employment, and to be aware of their social responsibility as citizens.

The rise of globalisation demands “a more educated and continually [re-] educated workforce” (Jarvis 2007, p. 63) who are appropriately skilled to meet employment requirements. As the majority of prisoners are likely to re-enter mainstream society, government policies for prison education responds to and reaffirms this employment-focussed agenda. In parallel to this economic imperative, authors (for example, Freire, 1996; OECD, 1996; Street, 1995) argue those engaged in learning are better able to participate in, and take responsibility for, their communities as pro-active citizens.

A key challenge for prison education is encouraging prisoners to participate in the education provision, particularly if they feel “forced” to participate or perceive they have little realistic possibilities of obtaining employment in the future. In the absence of economic meaning prisoners may approach educational with some ambivalence (Illeris, 2004).

Furthermore, the societal positioning of prisons and prisoners—their invisibility—leads to a suggestion that providing educational opportunities in prison is largely one of rhetoric rather than a meaningful exercise in supporting rehabilitation and transformation. Indeed, Braggins and Talbot (2003) reviewing educational provision in prisons, concluded that significant cultural changes across the whole prison system were required if meaningful educational outcomes were to be achieved.

Nevertheless, there is a global commitment to the idea: Purposeful prison education can—and should—contribute positively to a prisoner’s rehabilitation and subsequent opportunities to limit recidivism (see, for example, The Council of Europe, 1990; United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, 2015).

The premise—and funding streams—upon which prison education is offered has a clear agenda; to provide prisoners with opportunities to engage in education that aligns with economic imperatives, within the boundaries of public opinion for prisoner’s ongoing societal positioning (Hodgson and Spours, 1999). Consequently, over recent decades prison education has prioritised supporting prisoners to achieve, as a minimum, a level of education which enhances their employability, i.e. mathematics and literacy capability, and thereby providing increased employment potential post-release (DBIS, 2011; DIUS, 2006; HMGov 2005; HMGov, 2006; MoJ, 2010; SEU, 2002). Accordingly, there has been limited focus in the policy discourse on providing educational opportunities for prisoners linked to a shared societal ambition of social citizenship, or higher-level learning, such as undergraduate degrees. As a result, the potential of prison education to contribute to the

development of positive personal narratives and identity transformation—elements of social citizenship—have been eroded in the current prison education offer.

Recognising individuals with limited education are most likely to become further marginalised and excluded from society, we argue that policy initiatives around prison education should incorporate strategies to develop active social citizenship, as well as economic capability. Such an approach would enable prisoners to become better prepared to participate and contribute fully—socially and economically—in society upon release, breaking cycles of economic disadvantage as well as social exclusion. Despite an ongoing interest in, and commitment to, the provision of education in prisons by repeated governments in England (see, for example: Cameron, 2016; Coates, 2016; DBIS, 2011; Gove, 2015; HM Gov, 2006; HM Gov, 2016), prison education continues to be largely ineffective (Wilshaw 2015), failing either to enhance employability or reduce recidivism. Explanations for such disappointing conclusions include a lack of funding, a lack of prisoner commitment to or interest in prison education, an unimaginative curriculum, and a lack of investment in the prison education workforce.

In an attempt to reimagine prison education, a review was commissioned by the then Minister of Justice, Mr Gove in 2015. The Coates (2016) review of prison education highlighted the perpetual woeful state of prison education in England and Wales, but importantly, provided a “blueprint” for the reinvigoration of provision and delivery of education in prisons for the future. Her 31 recommendations provide a strong argument for education in prisons to be the axis upon which all other activities within a prison are crafted.

Responding to Coates, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ, 2018, p. 3) drafted a detailed reform plan that aimed “to ensure prison [education] can prove to be a pivotal, positive and permanent turning point in their [prisoners] lives”. Establishing a consistent education offer across the prison estate evidences a renewed commitment to ensuring prisoners obtain relevant skills and qualifications for employment upon release. Embedded into this commitment is a recognised need to ensure the offer “responsive to individual’s needs” (MOJ, 2018, p. 5). This provides timely opportunities to ensure the prisoner education curriculum provides space for learning opportunities across all levels, meets economic imperatives but, also importantly we argue, social citizenship imperatives.

Going forward, prison education, and prisoner educators, need to provide learning opportunities that are purposeful (in relation to employment) but are also mindful of social responsibility and citizenship opportunities.

This study sought to explore how a prison-university education partnership could contribute to this agenda. Adopting a critical participatory dialogic philosophy, within a partnership framework, we sought to explore whether social citizenship could be enhanced, social stereotypes challenged or dispelled, and an interest in education for positive self-transformation could be developed, by bringing together two groups who may not generally interact.

The theoretical framework of Freire provides a useful lens for this enquiry. Freire’s philosophy of democratic education through participatory dialogue (1970) provides educators with a radical pedagogic approach to the design, development and delivery of learning opportunities. Describing education as a *system with purpose*, Freire, (1970), argued for educators to be clear of their responsibility when contributing to the provision of education. Arguing that education as a system was inherently dichotomous, he contended that education systems are often constructed to ensure domestication of its citizens—resulting in the reproduction of a social order, within an ongoing domination and oppression of people. He argued for an alternative approach to education—one that could be constructed for the purposes of liberation of its citizens—with a focus on emancipation and freedom, working towards participants recognising their humanity.

Freire (1970) was critical of traditional approaches to learning arguing they provided little more than a process of “banking” knowledge, with little opportunity to understand or make sense of this knowledge. Such oppressive and authoritarian pedagogic approaches attempts to control thinking and action (Freire, 1970) resulting in a “culture of silence” which limits the development of ones consciousness of individuals’ position in, or contribution to, society. He advocated for a critical pedagogic approach to education, based on student-teacher dualism, that enables participants to develop new understandings through a co-construction of knowledge. Such dialogue leads to a space for *critical consciousness* and emancipation. By engaging in

dialogic education individuals are provided with opportunities for freedom from oppression and the agency to enact meaningful change, offering individual hope. Education then, Freire argued, has the potential to liberate people and be transformative—but only if approached in this way (Freire, 1993).

In this study we used Freire's theoretical framework for education both as a pedagogic approach for the delivery of our Learning Together programme, but also as a lens to explore the research findings.

The Learning Together Programme: Prison-University Education Partnership

In bringing two socially constructed groups together in a learning space, our prison–university partnership programme aimed to challenge societal thinking through dialogue—real talk—allowing and encouraging the development of a critical consciousness. We developed the programme with a focus on dialogue, necessitating the construction of relationships between facilitators and learners, and learners from different institutions. The content of our programme—a consideration of the intersections between criminal and social justice—encouraged collaborative working and actively promoting a reconsideration and reframing of one's own agency and power within societal structures. Furthermore, space was provided for participants to reflect on their own capacity to create a new sense of self—offering transformational potential—a critical consciousness. These themes have subsequently been drawn upon for data analysis and discussion of findings.

Methodology

This small-scale, qualitative research project was an ethnographic enquiry into the lived experiences of education for participants of a unique prison-university education partnership: a Learning Together programme. The evidence from this project will add to the growing narrative about the transformative role of partnership education within the penal estate particularly in relation to stereotyping and labelling. By bringing together two, arguably, distinct and diverse groups of students: undergraduate HE students and prison students, we investigated the following research questions:

- To what extent can a shared learning experience challenge societal perceptions of socially constructed groups?
- To what extent can a shared learning experience be transformative, influence identity and (implicitly) notions of “citizenship” and reinvigorate legitimacy?

All participants of the Learning Together programme were invited to participate in the research project that paralleled this programme.

Ethical applications, built on BERA (2011/2018) guidelines, to both the higher education and prison institutions, as well as the national prison ethical committee, were sought and granted.

During the initial introductory session of the Learning Together programme, students from both institutions were provided with detailed information about the research aspect of the course. Following a full briefing and discussion, students could elect to provide informed voluntary consent to participate in a one-to-one semi-structured interview upon completion of the course. However, all students could fully participate in the Learning Together programme, without the necessity to participate in the research project. In total 19 interviews were completed (Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) n. 10, HE n. 9). As recording devices were not permitted within the prison estate, field-notes were taken to document the interviews. The collected data was then coded and analysed thematically.

In order to protect the identity of all research participants, we have applied a simple referencing model to field-notes; this referencing system distinguishes between prison and university students. This was intentional—not to preface one voice over another, but rather to value and give space to all voices in the research. It is important to recognise that the data presented in this article is only a small selection of data.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this small-scale study are presented thematically in order to explore how prison education could be reimagined through a framework of partnership and critical pedagogy, within a lens of transformativity.

Identity

Illeris (2004, 2014) argued that education provides opportunity for the transformation of one's identity in three distinct ways—"progressive, regressive and restoring and collective". The extent to which respondents reflected on how they felt the Learning Together programme had influenced their identity was demonstrated in the data in distinct ways. The data from this study aligns closely with education offering progressive identity transformation. However, it was evident that for some, education within the penal estate has created a regressive identity, contributing to their current "identity-state".

Participant's described a sense of agency within the learning space, highlighting the value of a dialogic approach to the provision of learning opportunities, and the potential to influence the ways in which different societally constructed social group can be reimagined, indicated in the field notes below:

"LT [Learning Together]—never have an opportunity to speak with people—'education is education' ... great to share platform—'air of normality' to the process of education" (HMP 4) and

"I left with a very different perspective of prison" (HE 10).

A key areas of focus was whether a short programme of learning could challenge how individuals saw themselves and others. The field-notes below highlight how participants reflected on social constructs and how they came to position themselves within them:

"Divide—social barriers; didn't feel like 'good little prisoner'" (HMP 3).

"You sometimes forgot they were in prison at some points in the course ... this was a real surprise to me" (HE 2).

"They're not bad people; just people that have made bad decisions and that is not how they are portrayed in the media" (HE 7).

The data indicates that both groups who inhabited the learning space became increasingly aware of how societal constructs determined not only how they viewed themselves, but also how they saw and positioned themselves within society. There is evidence—in HE 7's comment for example—that there continues to be a reflective ongoing othering of the social groups but also an increased awareness of social citizenship and individual responsibility and accountability.

The reflections are closely associated with the extent to which individuals felt oppressed or empowered within their respective institutions, and the degree to which they were able to develop any sense of freedom, exemplified in the field-notes below:

LT—people from the prison "in power":

The point of LT was for us to learn in a learning space without the "prison" guard watching reminding you—you are prisoners; when students spoke—powerful support, prisons like to remind us—know your place—you are prisoners. (HMP 6)

"LT—felt different to other education courses, open your heart, open your door, feelings, identities, social standing." (HMP 2)

The comments above demonstrate the potential for educational programmes within prison to make positive contributions to transforming how individuals see themselves within society. It is evident that identity is not fixed; engaging with education that provides a space for thinking beyond employability determinants and qualification outcomes, can contribute to a more progressive identity which can support enhanced social and situational consciousness. Whilst employment driven outcomes are important components of prison education, noted in the new MOJ (2018) strategy, there is real value for governors to consider programmes in partnership with communities beyond the prison institution. Such programmes provide opportunities to challenge socially constructed perspectives of each other, and real opportunities for enhanced social citizenship. By involving people from partner institutions who—as future graduates—may well become the employers of the future, the opportunities for de-othering of prisoners as they re-join the employment market cannot be underestimated, nor can its value or capacity to achieve a more inclusive, equal society.

Education

Culture. Educational is largely provided in a society to support its social, cultural and economic growth and prosperity; the provision of education within the penal estate mirrors this ambition to some extent. Prison education is provided within the theme of “purposeful activity” and, as such, sits alongside other activities, for example vocational workshops and employment opportunities. Whilst there is an expectation that all purposeful activities attract a similar “payment”, amounts can differ; thus, influencing whether prisoners chose to engage in educational opportunities. In order for prisoners to participate in some types of purposeful activity, they are required to achieve a minimum level of education. Such criteria can have consequences for the motivation with which prisoners approach education. The majority of education in prisons can be described as ‘formal adult education’ (Rogers, 2003, 2004), largely qualification bearing. The Learning Together project delivered here can be described as “informal adult learning” as there was no accreditation attached to the programme. The value attached to prison education is a further contributing factor to a prisoner’s attendance at, and engagement in, education. If prison education is a peripheral activity in the day-to-day activity of a prison, rather than a “whole institutional” endeavour, the extent to which prisoners are enabled or encouraged to participate can be compromised and what Freire (1970) describes as a “culture of silence” can prevail. Whilst some prisons do provide opportunities for prisoners to undertake paid work for external organisations, the chances for prisoners to undertake any activities in partnership—and alongside—participants from external organisations are rare.

Freire (1970) argued the role given to education by a society highlights the political position of education—as either a tool for liberation or domestication—with all members of society contribute to this positioning, often unknowingly. In designing this Learning Together programme within a Freirean philosophy, we were ambitious to support a liberating pedagogy that principally challenged culture and worked to support “the creation of a culture appropriate to the life of people in control of their work and social world” (Walker, 1980, p. 131), recognising that such a pedagogic approach—enshrined in dialogic theory—can elicit cultural action, offering learning as part of one’s transformative potential.

The data extracts from our Learning Together programme participants, below, highlight their reflections—on prison education, on partnership and on learning alongside others. What is interesting to observe is the cultural assumptions that can be constructed and legitimised through the objectification and labelling of different groups of our society, resulting in the construction of a mythical social ordering and hierarchy.

Our prison learners articulated a thirst for a culture of “normality”—to be able to talk and interact with others; interestingly for our higher education learners, there was reflection on a system that seemed to have lost touch with a key purpose of education as an opportunity for individual, institutional and societal transformation:

“Prison education—‘horse to water’ can’t make those learn who don’t want to; LT education experience—people wanting to learn, share ideas, having opinions, have a space to speak and listen—right to have a view.” (HMP1)

It was a bit depressing to see how the education needs of these guys [prisoners] are often overlooked. How are we ever going to achieve better rehabilitation outcomes if we don't focus on education? I just don't think there's enough focus on rehabilitation. When they do get offered education, it's more to tick a box and to bulk up their files and to say they're more of a low risk. (HE7)

And

Future of prison education—I hope it changes; it needs a massive re-evaluation ... it's just not “fit for purpose”. There're just not the courses available that people are interested in.... I think because people have the attitude of “lock em up and throw away the key” this feeds into how we feel about prisoner education, they don't deserve that. So it's more about mind-sets that it is about money. Hopefully the younger generation can get past this. (HE7)

Power. Education is a powerful political tool—or weapon—within which society can be emancipated or oppressed (Freire, 1970). Through a process of conscious reflection, education can become a space or action for freedom, providing an opportunity to transform one's reality. The data extracts below exemplify the important role learning in partnership can have in illuminating the political power and position of educational opportunities, providing a space for reflection and action:

“LT—gaining an insight into our place in society—wished someone had explained earlier—learning not that much different as anyone else—aspiration to be the same—prison record—just one more hurdle.” (HMP 5)

“Prison education—surprised how little voice they have; resistance to say anything and be *honest*” (HE 10)

Change. One of the key purposes of any education system is to invoke a change. For adult education the purpose of learning opportunities has historically provided chances for inquiry and development, via formal and informal routes. Increasingly in England and Wales the opportunities for prisoners to engage in learning opportunities without associated accreditation has become increasingly limited as evidenced in the policy discourse of the last couple of decades (see for example Coates, 2016; DBIS, 2011; Gove 2015; HMGov 2006; MoJ 2010, 2018; OLASS 2016). The political climate associated with prison education is one dominated by economic imperative, associated with rehabilitation. Indeed, Gove (2015) stated that “education in prisons must be overhauled to reduce re-offending and make prisoner more employable”. Subsequent reviews of prison education (Coates, 2016, MoJ, 2018) highlight the importance of prison education to prisoners' capacity to increase their qualifications, and influence their potential to become employed upon release, thus increasing their likelihood not to reoffend. However, such views of education—and prison education in particular—miss several key points—as highlighted in the comments from our Learning Together students below:

“Open opportunities—doing this LT has made me more interested in course—in what I could do.” (HMP1)

“Officers need to have a better understanding of the value of education.” (HMP 10 [PS])

Education is about learning about yourself – that is how identity change happens. At the same time, I realise that there are other things that are important, but I think that what LT has done is broaden my understanding of what education is.... there should also be flexibility on what prisoners want as well because there's a minority that go into prison very well educated with degrees, so what's the point in them sitting there doing English and Maths?... We should focus on the basics for those who can't read and can't write, and there should be more options for those that are already educated. (HE 4)

“LT—breaking down barriers—participation to tell other people; platform makes you realise you can see prison as a campus—educate or educate yourself. In your mind you are not in prison.” (HMP 4)

The motivation associated with learning must be considered. Without a whole organisational, and societal approach—to the value of learning and its potential, just providing courses delivers only missed opportunities. Learning in partnership and through critical dialogue, creates opportunities for all participants to engage in critical reflection, to become conscious of their own situations: their societal positions; and to reflect on how such perspectives become a lived reality. However, this is not enough. All members of society need

to take some responsibility for creating a more equal society. Key values of the Learning Together partnership were not only to energise participants to embrace learning opportunities through dialogue but to demonstrate how society constructs or limits opportunities, particularly in relation to reintegration of prisoners into mainstream society.

Institutional Considerations

In considering the opportunities for this shared learning experience to be transformative, the role of the institution(s) cannot be overstated. The sociology of prison life has been the focus of much academic interest, particularly in the intervening years since Goffman's (1968) seminal work on institutional living.

Whilst we patently could not remove the prison walls and other physical manifestations of prison life, we were keen to create an environment that talked to Amin's (2002, p.960) "micro-publics of social contact". Accordingly, a critical question was the extent to which the institution promoted—or mitigated—opportunities to "break out of fixed patterns of interaction and learn new ways of being and relating" (Amin, 2002, p. 959).

Powerlessness. From a HE/HMP learner perspective, Learning Together brought sharply into focus the routinized nature of prison life, and how a lack of agency can impact on a prisoner's "moral career" (Goffman, 1968) and opportunities for emancipation (Freire, 1970). Most notably—and despite being a "flagship" learning programme within and beyond the prison—there were several occasions where Learning Together sessions were severely curtailed due to problems with daily movement and/or prison "incidents". As several HE learners noted when reflecting on how the programme had changed their own perceptions of the prison regime:

It [delayed prison movement] just sends out a message that staff don't really care about these guys. Where's the respect ... for their agency and control of their lives? In the prison, it is the smallest things that can mean the most ... time especially. (HE4)

It's just such a shame about how institutionalised they [prisoners] are, so when we couldn't go in for the session, I was really upset about that. And when I spoke to them about that the following week, they were like "it happens"; ... that's their reality. (HE7)

Unfortunately, the Learning Together recruitment process within HMP seemed to reinforce the lack of agency, power and—by implication—citizenship; barriers that prisoners felt daily. One prisoner learner noted that: "Up until the point that you and [teacher] met us in the library a week before, I had absolutely no idea what Learning Together was about" (HMP7).

Conversely, the shared experience of Learning Together seemingly empowered learners and normalised learning, in spite of the institutional barriers and domains of powerlessness identified throughout the research:

"It's [LT] a break from the routine and humanises prisoners a bit more" (HE7).

"[What I liked about] Learning Together was that it was not condescending. [Facilitators and HE learners] spoke to us like human beings and dealt with us like normal. Felt comfortable; felt like going to a normal University" (HMP6).

"When I was doing Learning Together it didn't feel like I was in prison for that day" (HMP8).

Censorship. Coming just three years after the so-called "prison book ban" was overturned by the High Court (BBC, 2015; Prison Reform Trust, 2014), it is appropriate that Learning Together should be con-

sidered in the context of institutional censorship. As the Prison Reform Trust (2014) suggests, any overt manifestation of censorship that goes beyond ordinary day-to-day security considerations, “strike(s) at the heart of the idea of prison as a place of fairness, decency and rehabilitation”. Freire (1970) would no doubt have serious concerns about the way in which censorship perpetuates a “culture of silence”. Accordingly, we were keen to understand how Learning Together was impacted by the broader censorial framework (if at all).

Some context is important here. In dialogue with the prison, it was agreed that for security reasons, two of the ten prison-based learners on Learning Together would be members of prison staff. Despite the sound rationale for this intervention, the inclusion of prison staff in the learning space led to a number of reflections of self-censorship:

It's quite distressing about how many [prisoners] don't seem to have a voice. [prison staff] definitely stifled the conversation at times; I don't think the HMP guys felt they could always express themselves in the way they wanted, because it might go on their file or jeopardise their application for other education courses or whatever.(HE7)

Difficult to voice opinions when prison staff were there. Shot down or told that my opinions were not allowed and that we were “drama queens”. I definitely think we wanted different things from it [LT] than prison staff. (HMP7)

One might speculate how this latter comment aligns with Allport's (1954) assertion that for Intergroup Contact to be meaningful, there needs to be a commitment to common goals and for individuals to come together on the basis of “equal status”. Because the institutional objectives were—perhaps understandably—not always aligned with the learner objectives, it appeared that the presence of prison staff as learners impacted in the engagement with content that talked to the lived experiences of those in the “total institution”.

Despite this, there was a recognition that after the first couple of “introductory sessions” there grew an equality of aspiration between HE and HMP learners:

“The prison needs to do a better job of providing these opportunities, even though it is costly, it is important that we address this” (HE3).

Any barriers between the two groups of students, were quickly broken down. I was really surprised at the openness of the students ...; I felt that they wanted to understand rather than judge. [and] we were all on this journey of understanding together. (HMP3)

Otherring. Closely affiliated to agency, power(lessness) and censorship, are issues of othering. Restrictions on citizenship, agency and autonomy become easier when individuals are de-individualised and “othered” as a homogeneous group.

Whilst there were numerous examples of institutional othering throughout the duration of Learning Together, the most obvious manifestation relates to an incident that took place on the morning of the “celebration event”⁴ whereby HMP learners were informed that—due to security concerns—they would be required to wear green bibs as a way of differentiating them from HE learners. For the whole cohort this request represented an attack on the fundamental ethos of Learning Together (as described earlier). As a consequence, HMP and HE learners threatened to pull out of the celebration event and only after some rather tense dialogue, did the prison rescind their request.

As outlined in the quotes below, the fallout from what was colloquially known by the students as “bibgate” morphed into something more positive; it certainly went some way to reinforcing the bond between learners and a sense that the celebration event had the potential to act as a “status elevation ceremony” (Lofland, 1969 in Maruna et al., 2006). Moreover, it arguably allowed HMP learners a degree of agency and power that they were unfamiliar with in the prison setting:

“The one thing I was really happy about was the solidarity with the bibs” (HE7).

“Bibgate for me was ... a power struggle. After everything we had talked about in Learning Together, we weren't going to be told what to do” (HMP7).

“Bibgate reinforced my view that for the prison the Celebration Event ... was about ‘how can I use this event for publicity and self-aggrandisement’?” (HMP3).

Equally, however, there was a sense that the short-term “victory” might have longer-term consequences:

“Regarding the celebration event and our resistance to wearing the bibs, all I kept thinking was that we're gonna pay for this” (HMP8).

There are clear parallels here with labelling theory (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951). In line with Meisenhelder's (1982) observations (Meisenhelder, 1982 in Maruna et al, 2006, p. 273), that “not only must a person accept conventional society in order to go straight, but conventional society must accept that person as well” the value of Learning Together—including the celebration event—is that it appears to play a role in the “de-labelling” process:

“Learning Together was genuinely great because it helped the prisoners see that we valued them as individuals on the same path on the same level in that learning space” (HE10)

That said, we should be careful not to fall into the trap of assuming that the de-labelling impact of Learning Together extends beyond the short-term and “through the gate”. As several LT learners noted:

We go back to our lives, they go back to the same monotony which is to some extent co-ordinated by somebody else. I wonder what they think now; do they think that LT was just a tick box exercise for us? (HE11)

Learning Together took my mind off the outside world; nice bit of escapism Back on the house block, it was the “same old, same old” and you realise that the way that staff treat you and that hasn't caught up. (HMP3)

There was also a strong sense that despite the de-labelling potential of Learning Together, this was unlikely to negate wider populist anti-prisoner sentiment. In line with this thinking, what became apparent was the HMP learners' rejection of any prison “branding” on the Celebration Event Certificate,⁵ with what some saw as a commercialisation of the learning experience:

“We heard a lot of negativity from the lads...I think it was [X] who commented that he didn't want a great big [HMP] stamped on his [*Learning Together*] certificate; they felt that in some way that disadvantaged them” (HE9).

Societal Perceptions and Penal Populism

Othring thrives in environments where stereotypes are perpetuated—and unchallenged—through formal and informal communication channels. Clearly, influencing and re-shaping this narrative is a key concern for anyone interested in penal reform.

HE Perspectives. It is not unreasonable to assume that second year undergraduates—particularly those studying Criminology—would have developed an intellectual resilience to the worst excesses of penal populism (Pratt, 2007). Yet, the research clearly demonstrated that many of these stereotypes persisted prior to Learning Together:

I used to think “they're all criminals, they're all on a holiday camp”, but I've definitely changed my attitude full circle on this. It ... made me realise what it actually means to lose your liberty. Everyone is like “holiday camp”, but imagine having to ask every time you wanted to go to the toilet, or to fill up your drink? Every time there was a setback, they were frustrated ... they were just sat in their cell waiting to go to Learning Together; it's all about their lack of agency. (HE3)

From a HMP learner perspective, the stereotypes were less pronounced, although a common fear to emerge was the pre-conceptions of the HE students:

I had no pre-judgements of the Uni students.... I was more uneasy about being in a room of new people and a fear of being judged and labelled as 'just a guy in prison'. So yeah, it was more about what they were thinking about me and how that would make me feel. (HMP7)

Recognising the power of stereotypes, our underlying philosophy when designing Learning Together was that sessions should be delivered in a way that enabled learners to engage in conversations that encouraged personal insight. The hope was that by the end of the course, both groups would—through a sense of connectedness and co-operation—have a better understanding of one another, which in turn would reduce stigma and prejudice. Moreover, drawing on the Freirean (1970) model of democratic, pedagogic participatory dialogue, there was a recognition about how de-labelling—in spite of penal populism—might help promote emancipation and critical consciousness in the educational setting.

The power of Learning Together is arguably its' potential to deconstruct—and positively reconstruct—"labels" in a way that empowers all of those involved in the learning process. In short, we were keen to explore how education—Learning Together—might help contribute towards influencing the stories we tell ourselves, and ultimately how we might shape society for the better. There was some evidence that aspects of "personal growth" had materialised over the course of the Learning Together programme:

I think it was important for people in prison to realise that they can have conversations as a student, as a human, not as this label of an inmate. I think that they were equal in that room and could be who they wanted to be, say what they wanted to say without it going against them. (HE2)

"I was so surprised about ... how there was much more that bound us together, rather than separated us" (HE4).

Away from the opportunity to challenge one's own individual "confirmation biases" (Plous, 1993) in relation to prison and prisoners, Learning Together also appeared to have provided learners with the intellectual space for wider considerations of penal policy and social justice:

I think [participatory dialogue] has meant that we now know what needs changing and how to change it; it's just whether there is the political will to bring about this change. The biggest problem is that we have all these policy papers and strategies for change and none of it gets put into practice.... And even the HMP students from [x] agreed with that; and they have first-hand knowledge about how none of this stuff gets put into practice. It's like the university saying they were going to make all these changes for students, but they never get around to doing it; imagine what response you'd get from the students? But it's not that bad for students as uni is just a small part of our lives; for these guys in the total institution this is their lives, so any delay or false promises has a massive impact. (HE5)

Cultural "rippling". Whilst attitudinal shifts identified in the previous sub-section are encouraging, it would be naïve to think that Learning Together can—by itself—simultaneously eradicate embedded prejudices and stereotypes and promote unrestricted critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). Interestingly, there was some evidence of institutional bias persisting. As the quote below demonstrates, for some HE learners, there was a belief that the prison hosting their Learning Together experience was unrepresentative of the wider penal estate, and that their experiences were unlikely to be replicated elsewhere:

You can see from walking through the grounds how nice the cell blocks are and how much better this [prison] would be compared to somewhere like Winson Green where you're locked up for 23 hours. So no, there's no comparison. I don't think you could ever do Learning Together in somewhere like Winson Green and I think you'd struggle to get people to apply. I think I'd be on edge the whole time somewhere like that...but then again, maybe that's my own stereotype; I've never been in there. (HE7)

Like others engaging in prison-University partnerships, we recognised that social institutions—particularly prisons and Universities—to some extent reflect social power and wider inequalities. We were keen that Learning Together should transcend these social barriers and in the words of Freire (1970), to provide opportunities for individual hope. The anticipation was that all learners would take their experiences back into their respective institutions and start to shape the conversations amongst peers with regards to education, citizenship, human rights and social/criminal justice. In other words, the hope was that Learning Together would not only transform individuals, but to some extent, institutions as well.

Although this small-scale study did not uncover any notable institutional paradigm shifts, there was some evidence from respondents of a minor “rippling” impact of Learning Together. Principally, this effect was felt most acutely amongst family and friends, but also to some extent back in the prison itself:

At first, [my mum] was a bit worried, but coming on the celebration event and listening to me has changed the way that she thinks.... When she walked in the room [celebration], she didn't realise who was who and I think that she was really interested when she spoke with some of the students we worked with. She was “I'm so glad I came and it has really made me think differently about the prison system”. (HE2)

It's changed me because I feel very much that I want to be more of an advocate, more of a voice for what goes on in prison...I feel passionate about trying to influence a small change wherever I can. (HE10)

“Loads of people asking about it [LT] at work and on the wings. Shared readings with other prisoners. Appetite for other people to be involved” (HMP1).

Ultimately, as one HE learner powerfully commented, the experience of Learning Together has absolutely been transformative—as visualised by Freire (1970)—and that in the final equation:

“it is our generation who have the opportunity to change the way that prisons are run and how we view education in prison” (HE7).

Conclusions

In this paper, we have argued that education opportunities within the penal estate—particularly higher education (HE)—have the potential to offer social, economic and cultural transformation, with positive outcomes for enhanced social citizenship, economic opportunities and, perhaps more importantly, for individual empowerment, agency and autonomy.

The small-scale qualitative, ethnographic study, reported here explored how stereotypes and othering could be deconstructed and subsequently reconstructed through dialogue and debate.

In considering the transformative potential of participating in a HE programme for citizens whose worlds would not ordinarily connect, evidence from this study demonstrates that a positive change in de-othering attitudes, towards and between, those who participated in the programme were established. Overlaying this, there was further evidence of growth in participants' sense of empowerment, agency, and autonomy – cornerstones of social citizenship.

We conclude the paper by arguing that policy-makers, and respective institutions, need to work much harder to establish prison-university partnerships, providing the space for real talk to take place and social citizenship to grow into active citizenship. By promoting better co-operation and understanding between prisoners and “outside communities”, we add to the burgeoning narrative of the transformative role of education within penal settings for social, economic and cultural prosperity.

Through the Learning Together programme, students were both challenged—and able to challenge—the social narrative that prevails around prisoners, and provides opportunities for individual self-reflexivity and agency (Vaughan, 2007).

The findings from this research reveal that by engaging in Learning Together, participants described a sense of freedom—they felt distance from the social institutions they inhabited and were able to explore how the systems contributed to their lived experience. Such experiences, whilst brief, led to a critical consciousness, and provided opportunities—through dialogue—to explore how social groups come to make assumptions and hold beliefs of other groups. Recognising a sense of how stereotypes of groups can be constructed—othering—allows for the process of demystification to commence. Bringing together two often disconnected groups can, we suggest, contribute to a reconstruction of a less judgemental, more equal narrative.

Learning Together when delivered within a Freirean philosophy of critical pedagogy and dialogue has much to offer prison education. However, this programme—and others like it, such as the Inside Out programme (see Davis and Roswell 2013) sits outside the prison education system. Whilst all Learning Together programmes are offered in a partnership arrangement, through prison and university partnerships, very few offer higher education credits, and all are delivered outside of the standard prison education offer. All of the programmes offered to date in England do not, in fact, include prison education staff, and the delivery of prison education has not adopted this pedagogic approach to their delivery. It will be important, going forwards, for governors to embrace Learning Together programmes within a “whole organisational” approach, embedding such opportunities for all those working and living in the penal estate. A new paradigm for prison education in England and Wales is now upon us. Under the new MOJ (2018) strategy governors will have the power to commission education programmes that meet wider societal employment and education ambitions. Learning Together as a programme offers real transformative potential for all those involved.

At a time when penal policy can be considered to be increasingly punitive (seen, for example, in increased sentencing tariffs) and resources increasingly stretched, the provision of education in prisons has been re-examined. The recently published *Education and Employment Strategy* (MOJ, 2018) presents a new era for prison education, which is firmly rooted in a drive to work with prisoners by provide pathways to employment, requiring the development of strong partnerships with employers. The value of any initiative that breaks down the barriers between prisoners and the wider community should not be underestimated. However, such partnerships should similarly be expected for education providers. The findings from this research demonstrate the value of such partnership that, built on a philosophy of critical pedagogy, result in change for all participants—in terms of agency, legitimacy and empowerment.

In creating a vision for the future, we are now taking this opportunity beyond the boundaries of these two institutions and developing opportunities to broaden the scope for such interactions. We aim, using Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL), to take this ideal beyond the gate and into communities in the next stage, and we are looking forward to working with students in the *open* estate.

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Footnotes

¹ Whereby the treatment given to a prisoner should not be greater than that provided for a member of the lowest significant “social class” in free society (Sieh, 1989).

² Although a contested term, in this context, we are defining citizenship as the political, civil and social rights and obligations that play a role in developing and supporting an equality of status in an identified community (Marshall, 1950). These rights by implication have the potential to engender greater human agency and autonomy, whilst concurrently challenging embedded power structures.

³ Learning Together partnerships provide higher education opportunities for people in criminal justice

and HE institutions to study together, and learn with and from each other through dialogue and the sharing of experience (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016).

⁴ As previously mentioned, our *Learning Together* programme was built on the philosophical base of Freire (1996)—participatory and dialogic; and principles of informal adult learning (Rogers, 2003). As such, no formal summative assessment was incorporated into the design of the programme. However, students were invited, as part of the final celebration event, to share and reflect upon the content of the programme through the development of a group presentation, which was delivered to internal/external stakeholders at a final celebration event. The 'graduating' students had the opportunity, not only to present the key aspects of their learning, but also their personal reflections of this innovative and unique project.

⁵ The Learning Together course was neither accredited nor embedded as part of the standard prison education offering and as such the certificate represented the only academic representation of taking part in the programme.

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Learning Desistance Together

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Abstract: *Drawing on self-report data from a Learning Criminology Inside initiative bringing together BA Criminology students from the University of Manchester with prison-based students from a category C resettlement prison, this article will consider the process of studying desistance “together” in this collaborative setting. It will discuss the complexities of facilitating an external University course in a category C resettlement prison and illustrate how many of the expected and observed behaviours of both sets of students and staff involved reflected themes common to research in reintegration and desistance. The experience of taking part in a prison-based university level course incurs setbacks, as does desistance, and to overcome these, subjective and structural elements similar to those identified in research around desistance from crime are required. Consequently, while discussing desistance, students (and staff) were also practicing elements of it, especially internal factors such as self-determination and persistence and structural factors in terms of support. This paper will also show the possibilities of learning desistance together for both traditional university-based and prison-based students, including, contact with people who can see the new version of “self”, a support system, and ideas for new pathways to follow.*

Keywords: *Desistance, prison education, learning together*

I think it's true that to in order to change for the better, you must first make the decision to change yourself and sort of embrace a new, more positive self. It's desistance in the making! Mufasa doesn't think anyone can change because he is yet to decide to change himself. Joe believes people can change because he believes he can change.
—Bonnie, *University-based student in weekly reflective diary*

The University of Manchester's Learning Criminology Inside (LCI) initiative began in September 2017 with 22 university-based and prison-based students studying a course titled From Imprisonment to Rehabilitation. This 3rd year optional unit on the University of Manchester's BA Criminology programme, created some years earlier but previously delivered only on campus, covers a variety of research and theory regarding prison reintegration and desistance from crime. The topic is popular among traditional university students, especially those with an interest in working in rehabilitative endeavours, but has particular meaning for the prison-based students who were often a few weeks or months away from their own release and reintegration process.

The Learning Criminology Inside course was intended to be educational for all participants, of course, but in no way was this designed as a rehabilitative project. That is, the intention was not to challenge criminogenic thinking or facilitate good lives. The project sought to allow prison-based students exposure to a university classroom environment (an experience almost none had ever had) and to allow university-based students exposure to a prison environment (an experience none had ever had). The assumption was that this



exposure would help the participants expand their understandings of the world and themselves, which we argue is a good thing in itself. At the same time, there is a growing body of theory that suggests this crossing of boundaries can create an opportunity for personal and/or collective growth and development that could be related to transformations like desistance from crime (see e.g., Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016; Behan, 2014; King, Measham & O'Brien, 2018; Szifris, Fox & Bradbury, 2018).

In this sense, there is a parallel between the subject matter discussed in the course (primarily, “desistance from crime”) and the unusual design of the classroom intervention itself. This is not to say that the intervention was a rehabilitative one, however, as desistance is not the same thing as *rehabilitation*. Indeed, from its origins, the concept of desistance was understood as denoting the opposite or at least a stark contrast to rehabilitation (as the students learned on the course). Over the past 70 or so years, “rehabilitation” has come to be understood as a top down process, something “done to” or at least “with” an individual (see Ward & Maruna, 2007). Prisons or probation officers are often said to “offer,” “deliver” or even “do” rehabilitation, as in “E Wing will be doing rehabilitative work from 3 to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays.” The same cannot be said about desistance. Although, like rehabilitation, the word “desistance” refers to the process of sustaining from criminal behaviour, the latter word was initially created to describe those people who “spontaneously” desisted without any form of formal treatment. That is, one either is rehabilitated by the system or else they desist “on their own” (although these old conceptions have long been challenged in desistance research, (see e.g., Maruna, 2001; Maruna et al., 2004). Although such a distinction is largely fictitious (no one changes “on their own”), it remains the case that professionals cannot “do” desistance to someone else, the term refers to a person’s own pathway or process, external and internal.

This paper highlights the role that shared education initiatives might potentially play in these desistance journeys, illustrated with examples from our pilot initiative. Equally, we highlight the impacts the intervention had for university-based students, many of whom said they felt they changed as much or more than the prison-based students during the course. The complexities of delivering education in a prison setting are highlighted and we demonstrate how, through negotiating the challenges of being involved in a course on desistance, students (and staff) were also practising elements that have been found to feature in the desistance process. We conclude that voluntarily taking part in shared learning opportunities such as this can help (both prison-based and university-based) students better understand desistance through an experiential process.

Desistance and Education

Research has found that participation in higher education in prison can potentially be a transformative experience for those in prison (Clark, 2016; Duguid & Pawson, 1998; Pike & Adams, 2012; Wilson & Reuss, 2000) although evidence is limited by practicalities. Czerniaski (2015) highlighted the difficulties of identifying evidence to support any relationship, a process which is further complicated by the complexities of tracking people once they have been released into the community. Thus, although evidence has increasingly indicated the potential for University-level education (and particularly programmes involving collaborative, rather than distance learning) to positively impact on desistance, higher education has not been fully considered in terms of desistance (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016; Pompa, 2013).

The process of desistance is rarely linear or straightforward, and most people going through it experience peaks and lows (Laub & Sampson, 2001). Most theorists agree that the process of change is multifaceted and encompasses a complex interplay between structural-role changes (e.g., Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993) and subjective-agentic changes (Burnett, 1992; Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Gadd & Farrall, 2004; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). Taking part in prison-based education can potentially impact on all of these factors related to desistance from crime.

From a structural perspective, social control arguments contend that through education people can become more bonded to society and can access new networks of people and new routines (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). This provides opportunities for people to “knife off” their past and distance themselves from the causes of crime and criminal environments (Laub & Sampson, 2003; but see Maruna & Roy, 2007). Taking part in learning with university students offers those in prison access to more people (social capital) (see Farrall, 2002).

Education also might provide individuals with an opportunity to perceive an alternative future for themselves (Behan, 2014; King, Measham & O'Brien, 2018; Szifris, Fox & Bradbury, 2018), a key aspect in many more subjective formulations of desistance (see Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). Subjective reformulation of identity and autobiography has been found to be a key aspect in the process of change (Giordano et al., 2002; King, 2012; Maruna, 2001; Rungay, 2004), although there has been debate about whether this has to be through an intentional shift in identity (Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) or whether social processes allow this shift (Giordano et al., 2002). Education can give people a new script and identity away from their offending or prison identity. Further, if recognition from others is important for internalisation of a new identity (Gadd, 2006; Maruna, 2001) then educators and fellow students can potentially provide this. LCI and other Learning Together courses provide a unique opportunity for new identities to be formulated, and feed into the desistance process.

Research on adult education in general (focussing on basic literacy) has shown that the most benefits to the learners themselves involve increases in self-confidence and self-image, rather than the improvement in knowledge (Charnley & Jones, 1979; Warner, 2016). This holds true at the prison level too according to Forster (1990), in relation to people studying at university level in several UK prisons and Cleere (2013) researching people in education in Irish prisons, who found an emphasis on changes in personality and attitudes, confidence and self-esteem, cultural change, and being valued as students rather than "prisoners". Cleere (2013) found a link between prison education and increased levels of social capital and pro-social bonds. Hughes (2009) and Reuss (1999) found that a new sense of identity was a motivating factor for participating in education in prison and similarly Wilson (2007) found people in prison went to education to maintain their outside identity.

Stern (2014) cites extensive US research evidencing that participation in education in prison is associated with reductions in recidivism by significant amounts; this pattern appears more marked the higher the level of education. Similarly, Davis et al. (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of prison education studies in the USA and concluded that inmates who participated in education had less chance of returning to prison. Ford and Schroeder (2010) considered education and offending over the life course using longitudinal data in the USA and found that involvement in higher education was associated with less offending in adulthood and that the protective effect of higher education was stronger for individuals who were more delinquent during adolescence. More recently, Bozick et al. (2018) aggregated 37 years and 78 pieces of research in the USA and found that those who took part in education in prison were 28% less likely to recidivate. Similarly, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) (2013a) in the UK found that reoffending rates decreased by approximately two fifths when individuals took part in distance learning courses (a wide range of academic and vocational courses were included). Czerniawski (2016) urges caution in interpreting these findings, considering the substantial issues of selection bias, and questions how certain we can be that it is conclusively education that is the key catalyst for any change as numerous other factors are certainly involved in these outcomes.

Accessing Higher Education in the UK Prison System

Unlike elsewhere in Europe, the UK approach to education in prison has meant that funding for Higher Education (HE) in prison is limited and there are numerous reasons why eligible prison-based students would be discouraged from applying (Coates, 2016; Czerniawski, 2016). People in prison over 24 years old who wish to study higher education have to self-fund or apply for an Advanced Learner Loan (similar to a Student Loan), and many in prison may be reluctant to apply for such a loan knowing that they might be transferred to another establishment and unable to complete the course, or because they do not want more debt on release (Coates, 2016). Further, funding restrictions mean that only individuals within 6 years of release qualify for such loans (Coates, 2016; Darke & Aresti, 2016). Czerniawski (2016, p. 204) argues that the OLASS guidance on such loans "disincentivise[s] prisoner aspiration and demand for higher level courses". At the time of writing, the Prisoner Education Trust (PET) can only fund access courses, rather than degree level modules and Coates (2016) called for a change in this policy in her review. Further Darke and Aresti (2016) expressed concern over the lack of advice, information and assistance with applications for HE provided by prisons. Recent changes to funding in prisons have resulted in Governors having increased discretion over their budg-

ets for education which has the potential for positive impact such as increased variety of education providers and content (Beard, 2017).

The European approach to education in prison is holistic and rights based, holding that the role of education in prison is to develop the whole person, and that people in prison should have access to a wide curriculum (Council of Europe, 1990). In the UK this rhetoric has not become a reality for a number of reasons. Firstly, the conflicting priorities of the purpose of prison means that security is often prioritised over education (Czerniawski, 2016). Further, in UK prisons, the person in prison is often symbolically and practically framed as an “offender” first (for example, in *Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment* (HM Government, 2005) and as a student or citizen only secondarily (Costelloe & Warner, 2014). This prioritisation results in a focus on education for the purpose of addressing offending behaviour rather than learning per se (Costelloe & Warner, 2014). Through the Transforming Rehabilitation¹ agenda (MOJ, 2013b), education and rehabilitation have become more central to reducing reoffending due to the importance placed on the relationship between education and employment (Czerniawski, 2016). Costello and Warner (2014, p. 177) argued that much employment-focused “education” views education as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. This is not in line with the way that learning is conceptualised in the field of adult education or indeed prison education as understood by the Council of Europe. The importance of focusing on education, regardless of its link to employment can be linked to desistance theory which has informed strength-based approaches to rehabilitation, such as the good lives model², which favour individuality and building on people’s strengths (Ward, Mann & Gannon, 2006; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

Models of rehabilitation influenced by desistance theory, such as these have been slow to be embraced in England and Wales. Rather, a more “authoritarian” approach to rehabilitation has remained (Behan, 2014), which seeks to mould the offender into a pre-determined pattern of thought to ensure conformity (Rotman, 1990) and focuses on managing and removing problems and problematic behaviour. While academics and some policymakers have called for holistic approaches in both education and rehabilitation, a holistic model has yet to be adopted in either (Behan, 2014; Costelloe & Warner, 2014). Behan (2014) argues that adult education in prison should involve critical thinking and that anthropocentric models of rehabilitation are also about self-discovery. The approach to rehabilitation should be about desistance but it is not. The approach to education should be about learning for learning’s sake but it is not. The development of prison-university partnerships has sought to address these incongruities, and also to provide opportunities for higher education that are not dependent on independent study, and involving the opportunity for additional positive effects such as widening support networks and co-production of knowledge (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016).

There have been a growing number of courses across the UK since 2014 offering students from inside prison and from universities the opportunity to learn together in prison. The first such course was the Inside-Out programme run by the University of Durham, which is based on a model from the United States and has been running since 1997 (for example, see King et al., 2018). The University of Cambridge established Learning Together in 2015 with HMP Grendon. Both the Inside-Out and Learning Together models of prison-based learning see university-based and prison-based students as equals (Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016; Darke & Aresti, 2016; Pompa, 2013) where “everyone involved is seen as having something vital to offer in the learning process” (Pompa, 2013, p. 129). There are now over 30 prison-university partnerships in the UK (PET, 2018). The subjective evidence presented in this paper is based on the first such project at the University of Manchester.

Learning Criminology Inside

The Learning Criminology Inside pilot study involved 22 students (10 university-based students from University of Manchester and 12 prison-based students) studying the course unit “From Imprisonment to Rehabilitation” together over 12 weeks, beginning in September 2017 in a category C male resettlement prison in the North West of England. A risk assessment was carried out and approved by both the Prison and University, a Memorandum of Understanding developed and signed by both parties and University and ethical approval was sought and granted for both the teaching and research aspects of the project. National Research Council approvals were also granted.

The pilot began with an introductory session where students got to know each other and ground rules were mutually agreed. For the following 10 weeks, university-based students attended lectures and prison-based students listened to a podcast of that lecture and once a week the two sets of students had a seminar together in the prison for approximately 90 minutes. Here they debated and discussed topics led by different university staff (the authors) and guest speakers from a range of organisations, including criminal justice, Non-Governmental Organisations and academics from the University of Manchester and other institutions (such guest speakers also feature in the University-based lectures on the unit). University-based students and staff travelled to the prison together every week in a mini-bus which provided opportunities for both discussing pre-session issues, debrief and potentially increased participation given the distance to the prison. In the final week, there was an end-of-course celebration where all students received a certificate for taking part in, and contributing to, the course. This celebration event also featured a guest speaker from an organisation specialising in peer mentoring for people exiting the criminal justice system³ and music written and performed by one of the prison-based students. Student learning was assessed with an examination in January 2018 and a required coursework assignment of 3500 words. For the coursework assignment students had to choose a group of people being supervised in the criminal justice system and critically analyse the evidence for and processes by which this group are managed in prison and/or the community.⁴ Those who passed the course received a further certificate for successful completion of the module. A reference was provided to all prison-based students which outlined their participation and achievement in the course.

Methodology

This analysis is based on data collected during the pilot of the LCI course. With funding from the University of Manchester's Centre for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Learning (CHERIL), this research sought to explore the change mechanisms and intermediate impacts associated with this prison-university partnership for prison-based students, university-based students, university staff and prison staff. The research also aimed to increase understanding of the processes in the prison-based learning sessions that facilitate positive impacts on university and prison-based students. The research design was mixed-methods and participant-orientated, aimed at understanding the subjective perspectives and reactions of student and staff participants as the project progressed. As all of the authors were involved at some level in the teaching or delivery of the module, this is a self-evaluation study with all of the biases inherent in such work. The goal was to better understand and improve the process and delivery of the module. In the spirit of "Learning Together", we are seeking to learn from our experiences with the initial pilot session in a systematic fashion.

All students taking part in the prison-based learning were asked to complete a survey before, and on completion of the course. The survey had been designed previously by academics (Ruth Armstrong and Amy Ludlow) at the University of Cambridge and had been adapted from scales measuring characteristics associated with good learning outcomes and reflective of aspects that research suggests are important to desistance from crime. There were four focus groups with university-based and prison-based students taking part in groups separately (one before the course started and one at the end of the course). The university-based students and prison-based students were interviewed in separate groups to allow frank conversations about any issues they might have of learning with the other set of students. This enabled evaluation of the whole course and the opportunity to identify change in these attitudes. *Reflective diaries* were completed by university and prison-based students each week. These diaries helped to determine what the impacts of taking part in the course were on the students and ensured an evaluation of the course at the micro week by week level. The students were asked to think about what parts of the sessions they had enjoyed, and any elements that had challenged them, upset them, or surprised them. The reflective diaries were not part of the assessment as is the case on some Learning Together and Inside-Out courses. University staff also completed a *reflective diary* on the weeks that they taught on the course in the prison. These captured some of the impacts on university and prison-based students and staff but also on themselves as representatives of the University. Short semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of prison staff, with a range of grades and responsibilities, at the end of the course. The aim of these was to see how the course benefitted the prison and how it could have been improved from the prison perspective.

The Research Associate on the project attended every session as a "Participant as Observer" (Fetterman,

1998; Gold, 1958). Notes were taken during the sessions and typed up as ethnographic notes. These included notes of people's comments throughout the sessions both directly to the observer or in other conversations, and observations of behaviour, body language, levels of input, and who was talking to who. This led to detailed description and rich data creating a high level of insight into the learning in practice. Participant observation has been criticised for being overly subjective because of the impact of the researcher's beliefs; it may be only what the observer thinks is important that is recorded (Johnson & Sackett, 1998). Secondly, participant observation may cause observer bias with the presence of the researcher influencing actions (Spano, 2005). Issues of subjectivity and observer bias were recognised in the analysis although every attempt was made to be as systematic and transparent as possible in the recording of data (Johnson & Sackett, 1998). Further reflectivity in the observer's ethnographic notes was important as this helps to understand any biases/influences (Cosgrove & Francis, 2011; Davies & Francis, 2011). Observer bias can also be reduced by rapport between the observer and the observed as negative effects are not determined (Spano, 2005). A mixed methods approach also helped address these issues as it enabled triangulation of the data (for example comparing ethnographic notes with the reflective diaries from that session) (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989).

To ensure all student participants fully understood what they were being asked to do and that consent was informed, presentations about the research were given providing information verbally (as well as written information) about the purpose of the research element of this initiative (Noaks & Wincup, 2004). In terms of voluntariness, it was made very clear that participation in the research was not required for those taking part in the course. To emphasise this the students were asked about research participation at a separate time to the course recruitment and were given the option to withdraw from the research element at any point. All prison and university-based students consented to taking part in the research.

All participants were promised qualified confidentiality, in that we would not tell anyone directly what they had told us but that there were certain things that we would report back to the prison for purposes of avoidance of harm and for the security of the prison (Martin, 2000). As an ice-breaker in the first LCI session at the prison, students worked in groups to choose their own pseudonym to be used in publications (including throughout this paper) and presentations associated with the research, and fed back their assumed name and the reason for their choice.⁵

The large amount of detailed qualitative data was analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytic process was facilitated by computer-aided data analysis software (NVIVO version 12). The thematic analysis used both a deductive and inductive approach. Before starting the analysis, the research team had identified the aim of considering the data in relation to desistance and therefore desistance themes were pre-determined and sub-themes were developed within these from the data, thus reflecting a top down, or deductive approach (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). At the same time, a bottom-up, inductive approach was also taken, whereby themes emerge from the data without pre-conceived ideas (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Data was free-coded into quite narrow categories, and then combined with others to create larger themes (e.g. Confidence, Enhancement of Learning) and sub-themes within them. The quantitative data from the pre and post-surveys was analysed using SPSS. These were limited on the basis of the small numbers although it is hoped that in continuing delivery of the programme, these data can be aggregated and analysed with future data to draw findings with increased statistical power.

While there were many important findings from the research, this paper will concentrate on the desistance related findings.

Findings

The findings from the research are structured below around desistance-related themes. Importantly, the focus of this research is not the experience of desistance (but rather of the experience of studying desistance). We have no long-term outcome evidence that any of the participants in this research (prison-based or university-based are desisting from crime). As such, this choice of thematic framing is intended to highlight the parallels in the two processes. That is, our analysis incorporates evidence from the research element of the course and explores how these findings link with the desistance literature being studied on the course. Firstly, the social factors (such as relationships and support) will be considered and then the paper will move on to co-

consider subjective, agentic factors linked to desistance (hope, self-efficacy and identity). The discussion also documents some of the challenges encountered in establishing and running the LCI programme. This impacted on students and staff in various ways and enabled the identification of strategies used to overcome these challenges, ultimately leading to links to the desistance process in terms of overcoming obstacles using different means, for example, support networks. We also provide self-report evidence of the positive impacts that taking part in the course had on students.

Respect: Relationships, Support and Social-Bonding

In their feedback, both university-based and prison-based students focused on the importance of feeling respected in their interactions with other students on the course.

They [prison-based students] said they really appreciated that we weren't defining them by that one thing they did that got them in there, so I think it was good not to ask them what they did [to end up in prison]. Even though some of us found out eventually, that wasn't the big, massive thing. That wasn't the main thing we wanted to find out. We wanted to find out what they wanted to do afterwards, where they are going after this and how they are going to motivate themselves. (Meg, a student from University Post Course Focus Group)

One of the main impacts of taking part in this course for the prison-based students was being treated as an ordinary student on the course. One prison-based student said it was "good to have normal conversations with normal people using normal language and not prison language" (Ethnographic notes). Another said, "Thank you for not looking at us like criminals on TV" (Ethnographic notes):

What I enjoyed the most was interacting with the university students—it made a nice change from speaking to criminals that moan all the time. It gave me a bit of normality and kept me sane.... I suppose the social aspect of it, I know we said we have met new people, but being in an environment that feels a little bit more normal than just daily prison life, that was nice to be able to do twice a week. (Geoff, a Prison-based student)

The main thing is the sense of normality. They are spending time with a circle of people whom they would never normally mix and you are bringing a different age of person into custody who give skills and life experiences to the learners. Normality that is bespoke focuses and engages people to be their self and find themselves in a prison system that is very controlled. (Prison staff interview)

As Armstrong and Ludlow (2016, p. 226) have argued, "if people within and without of prison know one another individually, attitudes towards ex-prisoners in general may soften", and so these interactional relationships may have a wider impact as university-based students talk to others about their positive experiences. The result may be more people seeing people who have been to prison as human beings:

This experience was unique because we were all students. The status between us was equal ... the authority was not present, and this was really important and why I think we all got on well. As students, we learned together and got to know one another as friends" (Bonnie, a University-based student)

Delivering this programme in a resettlement prison made this ability to practice normality even more timely for the prison-based students. The prison-based students were generally nearing the end of their sentences or time in closed prison conditions and were therefore soon due to have conversations and interactions with the general public. Many of the prison-based students spoke about how different conversations are on the wing to normality as "even though the jail is full of adults it doesn't mean you can have an adult conversation you know what I mean" (Mufasa, a student from Prison Post-Course Focus Group) and so it is important to have time out of the prison mindset.

Some of the prison-based students spoke about negative peer groups that had been instrumental in their offending. The university-based students recognised a realisation that to successfully desist the prison-based

students would need new peer groups. The prison-based students need separation from negative influences and courses such as LCI help prison-based students to realise that they can develop relationships with other types of people such as students and people not involved in criminal activity:

Meg: obviously they are only hanging around with other prisoners in the prison, that is the only group they can associate with but if we show them that they can associate with us and we welcome them just as much as anyone else to bring a positive change into their life then that is a really important thing. (University Post Course Focus Group)

Research on desistance frequently focuses on the role of agency and subjective change (see below), but social and personal contexts are also crucial to understanding desistance (Farrall, 2002; Farrall & Calverly, 2006) and this includes a person's peer group (Warr, 2002; Weaver, 2016). The ability to expand social networks beyond those with whom people have historically had frequent contact with assists with the availability to increased avenues of support as well as allowing the individual to see themselves in a broader variety of ways. According to desistance theory, this then could conceivably feed into the process of redefining their identity through expansion and diversification of social networks in the future.

During the course there were many examples of support within the relatively constricted confines of the LCI project. These include prison staff supporting university staff, prison staff supporting prison-based students, prison-based students supporting each other, and prison-based students and university-based students supporting and helping each other.

I remember him [prison-based student] just one week was the transition from youth to adult and he just clicked with that because he had done both so he knew and I was talking to him about it and he was like "I don't know what I am going to say to the group" and I was like "you have just said so much" and he was like "can I say that?" and I was like "yes" and that is what they want you to say and he was like "oh it is that easy" and I was like "yeah you say what you think". (Clyde, a student from University Post-Course Focus Group)

During the course, the prison-based students experienced many problems, external to LCI. There was one week in particular when the prison-based students turned up to take their exam and all but one of the men were feeling very upset and preoccupied about other things going on in their lives. While unable to offer any solutions, the RA offered support by listening to these issues and being empathetic. Their fellow prison-based students also offered support and advice. One prison-based student commented that one of the impacts of the course had been making friendships within the jail (among other prison-based students) and therein providing an additional source of informal support.

Overall, the support that was seen during LCI was both formal and informal. Whereas traditional providers of formal support involve professionals, especially around rehabilitation, treatment and reintegration, informal support (from friends, family, and acquaintances) is seen as being equally important in the desistance literature (Farrall, 2002). It is clear that other students on the LCI course fall under the "informal" support heading, whereas prison staff fall under "formal" support label. It was less clear where university staff fell in the LCI pilot, as we were perceived as authority figures, with responsibility for course organisation, but were also understood to be operating outside of the prison institution. This blurring of formal and informal networks potentially increased the networks of support perceived as available to prison-based students and allowed them to consider the nature of their own identity within those networks.

Confidence and Self-Efficacy

A further impact of taking part in LCI was the realisation by students, particularly prison-based students, that they were capable of achievement and tenacity, proving that they were able to complete an education programme. There was a growth of confidence in their own abilities throughout the course. This, as with desistance in general, was not always a linear process and some students had peaks and troughs in confidence during the course.

After being worried about being forced to speak, Neil (prison-based student) spoke towards the end of today's session. On the way out he seemed really pleased at himself for speaking saying "I contributed today, it was wrong but I did say something" (Ethnographic notes)

We finished the course by completing an assessment with multiple choice and short answer questions and I can honestly say that I will miss the Learning Criminology Inside course and all of the people that I met while doing it. I am yet to find out my mark for my essay and assessment and whether or not I have passed, but either way, completing the course has given me a sense of achievement and the realisation that I can work outside of my comfort zone, and for that I will forever be grateful ... It showed me that I can see things through to the end, erm even when, like I said, times get hard I suppose, it showed me that I suppose if I do try I can do something, complete it. (Joe, a Prison-based student)

“I felt it sort of allowed some people to realise that they can do certain things that they just didn’t think that they could.” (Clyde, a University-based student)

The prison-based students did achieve. Only six students completed the course (the resettlement status of the prison affected attrition more than the research team were able to anticipate) and four of these completed the coursework but all passed and performed as well as the university-based students. One student was re-categorised and moved to a cat D prison halfway through the course. He asked whether he could continue with it and this was enabled by working with the education department at the new prison. He completed both assessments. These achievements were recognised by the university staff and students. Armstrong and Ludlow (2016, p. 225) state how “educational research shows how peoples’ mindsets influence their capacity to learn and change. Mindsets are, in turn, influenced by surroundings. Where potential is recognised to be malleable and there are opportunities for growth, people are more likely to be able to change in the desired direction”. By definition, completing a university level course potentially enabled the students to alter their own perception of their capacity to learn and to change. Capability to change in one aspect of their lives facilitated the opportunity to achieve elsewhere. As Shapland and Bottoms (2011) found, people have to be able to perceive a new future to be able to move towards it. A number of prison-based students began re-imagining their futures and began aspiring to further and higher education on release.

Code 22 (Prison-based student) told me that he is really interested in studying for a music degree when he leaves prison. He said that this has been driven by taking part in our course. When he started Learning Criminology Inside he enjoyed it and decided he wanted to do a degree and decided that if he could cope with our course he would study music on release. (Ethnographic notes)

Yeah, I reckon I would smash a university course to be fair, I think I might try and do one when I get out and I probably wouldn’t have thought about doing one before I done this so it was good for me. (Mufasa, a student from Prison Post-course Focus Group)

Although these are purely aspirations and do not necessarily reflect actual outcomes, desistance research has found that individuals who were able to desist from crime had high levels of self-efficacy, meaning that they saw themselves in control of their futures and had a clear sense of purpose and meaning in their lives (Maruna, 2001). This possible future in education was not forced upon anyone and this agency is important, given the findings among desistance writers that self-motivation should be respected (McNeil et al., 2012).

As well as changes to how students saw themselves there were also changes in attitudes to the other group of students. University-based students desisted from seeing people in prison as stereotypes and taking part in LCI challenged what may have initially constituted an ‘us and them’ binary for some of the university students. As well as altering university-based students’ perceptions of prison-based students, this shift may also have facilitated a greater understanding of pathways into offending as something that can impact on anyone, given a specific context:

Taking part in this course broke the stereotypes I had of prisoners. I thought all of them would be threatening, physical and not interested in taking part. In fact, they were completely the opposite of all of those things. I realised that prisoners are exactly the same as us, the students, except they have made some bad decisions in their life. Some of them were the type of people I would be friends with day to day which surprised me (Matthew, a University-based student in Post Course Survey)

When reading from textbooks the idea of prisoners and offenders used to be so abstract (and like a cartoon image) but now I have an idea of how what I am reading really applies to people I've met as they are the people that spring to mind and bring it to life. (Meg, a University-based student in weekly reflective diary)

Identity

Many of the findings discussed so far, particularly regarding interactions with others, illustrate how support and self-efficacy can be strongly linked to how a person sees themselves and their identity. They can impact upon identity directly and indirectly both of which have significant implications for desistance.

The process of being treated as a human being and as a fellow student has crucial links to social bonding and helped to create the supportive networks discussed above. This process is also linked to an essential element of desistance theory—"identity". Taking part in Learning Together courses like LCI enables prison-based students some time away from their prison identities and provided reminders to them of alternative identities such as being a student or just a member of the public. There was a notion of finding oneself in education, especially for those who had been students before prison.

"Shadow said the session had relaxed him but that he was used to talking with students as he had been to college" (Ethnographic notes)

University-based students also reflected on their own future identities, and taking part in the course made them eager to work with people who had been in prison in the future mainly in the capacity as probation officers.

"Enhancement of Learning" emerged as a major theme in the data, and in relation to desistance, the prison-based students valued learning about the processes they were thinking about or actively going through. This seemed to help them reflect on themselves and their own desistance; they had thought it would be easy to leave the "offender" identity behind once they left prison but the content of the course helped them to understand that the process is much more complex, will require support and may not be linear.

Joe: "I kind of felt that I would have desisted from crime from near enough the moment that I got arrested but it has shown me that it is not going to be easy, it has taught me a lot of stuff how the theory works in terms of desistance so it has just given me a clearer understanding I suppose of what it will take to live a crime free life."

Emily: "So, you have a more realistic view now?"

Joe: "Basically yeah, I think that is a good way to put it... I just thought to myself that I have got good enough reasons to do it [desist], but it has shown me that although I have got good enough reasons to do it and I have the support networks that it is still not going to be as simple as that, it is not going to just be a straight path to desistance but I think because I have a good understanding of that I think I will be more prepared for the journey ahead" (Prison Post Course Focus Group)

Mufasa: "Yeah, you are just trapped aren't you, when I leave jail everyone I know either wants drugs or can sell you drugs so you are just trapped aren't you and you just need to be trapped between different kinds of people rather than those kinds of people ... hard though" (Prison Post Course Focus Group)

These kind of cognitive changes have been found to be very important in the process of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002), in particular in the development of new life "scripts" for engaging with the world (Rumgay, 2004). This can be applied to the 'student' identity and other non-offending identities assumed by the prison-based students during this intervention.

In both the pre- and post-course surveys the students answered the same set of statements about their personality responding to a question asking to what extent each statement was like them on a Likert type scale (e.g., I show enthusiasm). Across all 24 measures the post course results showed fewer people thinking the statements were like them. This was especially noticeable for "I get to work right away rather than procrastinating"; "I pay attention and am good at resisting distractions"; "I am always well prepared" and "I invigorate

others” with people falling from the “very much like me” category to the “somewhat like me” and “unlike me” categories. While there are many potential explanations for this, it can be argued that that taking part in the course gave all the students a more realistic view of themselves in a similar way to the prison-based students understanding of desistance described above. It made them think about their character and gave them insight into this, especially in areas that they might not have known much about before and so they were testing things that they had not previously tested for example, being prepared and procrastination. The university-based students had also been placed in an environment which they had never encountered before and, despite their achievements and academic ability, the uncertainty and challenges encountered throughout the programme may have revealed to them their relative inexperience in many areas of life whilst at the same time firming decisions for many of the students of their wish to work with people that have been through criminal justice processes in some way in the future.

Overcoming Obstacles

There were many challenges in running LCI sessions. These were mainly prison related. Working in prisons always has its challenges, but the last few years have been particularly trying in British prisons.⁶ This project started at a time of critical staff shortages in the prison which necessitated a curtailed regime where only certain wings were unlocked at any one time on a rotating basis, meaning that some of the prison-based students were locked down throughout the morning or afternoon session. This project included prison-based students from a variety of wings and those who were not on wings being unlocked at the times of the two weekly sessions struggled to attend, particularly in the first few weeks. These men reported that the prison staff were not aware of the project and so unwilling to unlock them.

In these earlier sessions it required persistence from the prison-based students to get unlocked and from the university staff to ensure those who had not arrived had the chance to attend.

On the third time I went to see [member of education staff] she was there and she was about to phone E wing when there was a knock on the door. It was Neil – he was very annoyed and frustrated that he has to fight to get unlocked and has to be brought over separately “like a child”. At least he caught me in the act of trying to get him over which we explained to him.
(Ethnographic notes)

There were some examples of prison-based students being proactive to make sure that they and other students from their wing were unlocked to attend.

Mufasa: “The loudest people get heard innit so at half 1 when they were letting him [Joe] out I would be at the door me shouting out of the door and then they would come and open me.”

Rose: “But obviously not everyone is going to be like that.”

Mufasa: “I’d come down off the landing and I’d tell them to open them two [Geoff and Jeremy] up and then the amount of times I would come and they’ve just not bothered opening up them two” (Prison Post Course Focus Group)

There were also full prison lock downs and unanticipated wing lock downs which severely affected the running of the course. This, and delayed starts to sessions due to chasing students, meant that those delivering the sessions had to be flexible and change the content of sessions to ensure that all topics were covered, and to ensure that the learning could happen in the time available. This was especially important for university-based students who were in their final year of their degree. As mentioned above, flexibility and adapting to changes are important skills to have when adopting to new identities (Rumgay, 2004).

A further prison-based issue was the conflicting priorities of those with trusted jobs in the prison such as working in the staff canteen towards their barista qualification, or working in the visits hall. These jobs were important to the prison-based students but so was the course. Therefore, they had to balance relationships with their work supervisors, education staff and commitment to the LCI course. Although burdensome, this juggling of priorities around education and work reflected a very common real-world scenario (indeed, at least one university student also had a catering job and related to the prisoners having to balance this work commitment with their studies).

Some of the academic content of the course materials and the social science terminology represented a challenge for some students, especially the jargon word “desistance”, which was unfamiliar to both university-based and prison-based students. However, no student allowed this to be a barrier to their learning, persisting with reading and discussions with other students to develop their understanding:

I am happy I have seen it through because a lot of times I wanted to give up on it basically as I was finding it difficult, I still do to be honest, but I was glad I was able to have the persistence to just keep coming back and trying basically. (A student from Prison Post-Course Focus Group)

The dual responsibility of university staff for issues of security and course facilitation also represented a challenge. These role conflicts can be explained with reference to the incongruity of learning in a prison environment (Crewe, Bennett & Smith, 2014) and the difficulties for university staff that were teaching but also in a position of responsibility for maintaining the agreements set out between the prison and university. An agreement was made with the prison that a member of the teaching team would be trained in key and radio work so that the group members would not need to be constantly escorted or supervised in the weekly sessions. University staff were responsible for getting the university-students to the teaching room and for ensuring the gates were opened at the appropriate times to receive and discharge men to and from the teaching room during “prison movements”.⁷ This relative freedom of movement in the prison provided numerous benefits. Only one prison-student commented on the dual role of the university staff, as people in prison are used to seeing civilians carrying keys, especially education staff. The member of university staff did however report feeling uncomfortable with the responsibilities around prison movements, especially when having to count the prison-students out of the teaching room as this does not fit easily with the notions of treating the two sets of students as equals. While experienced with keys, the university staff member trained on the radio was not initially at ease with this aspect. The member of staff sought help and support from prison staff in this regard and this seeking of support was witnessed by all of the students on the module. The transparency in this allowed them to understand the necessity of university staff carrying keys and a radio without which they would have been more dependent on prison staff and may not have been able to run the course due to resource issues.

In attending and participating in this course, the students (and staff) had to demonstrate persistence, resilience, and self-determination (Turner, 2017). They had to be persistent to make sure they attended. They had to be resilient if they missed a session due to prison-related issues and they had to begin to believe in their own ability to do well in the course. Similarly, the university staff (and to some extent the prison staff enabling the course) had to be persistent and resilient against all the barriers to continue to enable the course to happen. As one prison-based student said to a member of the university staff, “I’ll give you something, you never give up”. Self-determination has been linked to support and personal contexts (Turner, 2017). It is easier to be persistent and resilient when you have people supporting you, which the students who took part in LCI had more of for the duration of the course. Watching the university and prison staff performing skills needed for desistance (persistence, flexibility and resilience) is also important for the university and prison students as a form of pro-social modelling (Kirkwood, 2016). Research on probation work has acknowledged the importance of pro-social modelling in people under supervisions achieving positive outcomes, while acknowledging it cannot address all the issues some people will face (Trotter, 2009).

Conclusion

The LCI initiative and the concurrent research element gathered a considerable amount of subjective evidence from all participants—including university-based students and indeed staff participants as well—before, during and after the completion of the pilot course. These data were not intended to represent any sort of formal outcome evaluation, and indeed no information is available nor is there plans to collect data regarding the actual long-term outcomes (desisting or otherwise) of course participants. So, this was not a study of desistance nor recidivism reduction. Nonetheless, in the extensive feedback, we found clear evidence suggesting benefits of taking part in the course for prison-based students, but also very much for university-based students and participating staff (including the authors). Interestingly, considering the subject matter of this intervention, these benefits seemed to align nicely with the various theories associated with desistance research.

Meeting people in prison helps university-based students ‘desist’ from stereotypical views they had of

what an offender is and helped them understand the theory more by learning from people going through the process. This is important as many of these students explicitly said they anticipated future careers working with people in prison and on probation.

Learning criminology together appears to offer prison-based students the possibility of a new identity (even if only restricted to the confines of this intervention), contact with people who can see a new version of “self”, elements of a support system and ideas for new life pathways. The course allowed prison-based students a space to develop non-criminogenic identities, time away from being merely a “prisoner” and to feel like a “student”.

Importantly, such benefits were measured only in the very short-term (upon completion of the pilot course), and the course represented only a small part of their incarceration experience (two half-days per week for a semester). Thus, any potential benefits of such an intervention need to be understood in that far more powerful and influential institutional context in which they took place. Not only were the prison-based students studying inside a “total institution”, but they were doing so at a particularly difficult time in the history of the prison service of England and Wales. As enthusiastic as all of the learners were regarding desistance as a theory, the actual practice is going to be enormously difficult and we are not so naïve to think that this will be the long-term outcome for all or even most of the participants.

Nonetheless, the numerous inherent challenges of taking part in a prison-based university course—even just physically getting to sessions and dealing with difficulties over course content—provided some addition, important opportunities for growth and the development of resilience. The experience of taking part in such a course incurs setbacks, as does the pathway to desistance (Laub & Sampson, 2001). To overcome these setbacks (in both the course and the process of desistance) subjective and structural elements fundamental to the desistance from crime are required. Consequently, while discussing desistance as a subject, students (and staff) were also practising elements of it, including both internal factors such as self-determination and structural factors such as social bonding and support.

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Footnotes

¹ Transforming Rehabilitation was the overhaul of post-sentence provision in the UK, including the privatisation of many services such as interventions and the day to day management of those people assessed as low and medium risk (see Burke and Collett, 2016).

² See Ward, Mann and Gannon (2006) for a full discussion of the Good Lives Model

³ See <http://www.communityled.org.uk/> for further information

⁴ The prison-based students were given the option to write fewer words and those who wanted/ had to handwrite their essay were given a limit of a number of sides of A4.

⁵ Students chose their own pseudonyms for this research.

⁶ “Benchmarking” was introduced from 2013 and this sought to reduce the cost of public sector prisons and establish a rehabilitative culture (Farooq, 2014). One major result of this has been a reduction in the number of full-time prison staff (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2015).

⁷ Prison movements are allocated times in the prison regime when people in the prison are allowed to move freely from their wings to their place of activity or vice versa.

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Needed Specialists for a Challenging Task: Formerly Incarcerated Leaders' Essential Role in Postsecondary Programs in Prison

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Abstract: *U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1967 Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice called for a massive increase in teachers prepared to assist in the delivery of academic programs for incarcerated people. "Substantial subsidies are needed to recruit needed specialists," they wrote, "and to provide them with the training required to make them effective in their complex and challenging task." Half a century later, the persistent educational deficits and need for empowering postsecondary academic programs in prisons across the United States and the world are being addressed by a wide range of responses from specialists in higher education, corrections, and research. Too often overlooked, however, are the perspectives of those specialists whose expertise comes in part from lived experience: directly affected people leading successful and meaningful interventions in rehabilitation and reentry. This paper examines the development and administration of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, an in-prison college program run and staffed primarily by its own formerly incarcerated graduates. The importance of foregrounding the voices of directly affected people by placing them in positions of true leadership and authority—not merely as symbolic gestures or tokens—in Hudson Link's program design and implementation is explained. Finally, the paper explores the impact of lived experience on managing and teaching in the program, as well as strategies for academic partners looking to best support interventions led by those who are closest to the problem and, in turn, closest to the solution.*

Keywords: *Prison education, prison-college programs, prison education administration*

In November of 2017 the three authors of this article met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to participate in a roundtable discussion at the 41st Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology, the theme of which was "Crime, Legitimacy and Reform: Fifty Years after the President's Commission". The "President's Commission" refers to United States President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1967 Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration: a group of 19 lawyers, educators, law enforcement officers, social workers, and others who had been appointed to study the American criminal justice system and make recommendations for its improvement. As practitioners involved in the delivery of higher education in prisons, we were curious to read—and eager to respond to—one of the commission's recommendations in particular: the call for a massive increase in teachers prepared to assist in the delivery of academic programs for incarcerated people. "Substantial subsidies are needed to recruit needed specialists," they wrote, "and to provide them with the training required to make them effective in their complex and challenging task" (1967, p. 175). Our panel in Philadelphia explored the ways in which lived experience could and should be privileged as a source of expertise when recruiting these specialists. The commentary found herein comprises content developed through that panel and subsequent discussions.



The fifty years since these recommendations were made were tumultuous for prison education in the American correctional landscape: After the fairly widespread implementation of higher education in prisons across the country, the majority of these programs were dissolved after 1994 legislation rescinded incarcerated students' eligibility to receive federal tuition grants. Persistent educational deficits in the nation's prisons along with increasing awareness of and active resistance to the causes and consequences of mass incarceration (National Research Council, 2014) have since led to a wide range of responses from specialists in criminal justice, higher education, and research.

Too often overlooked in these responses, we believe, has been the expertise of specialists with lived experience: directly affected people leading successful and meaningful interventions toward rehabilitation and reentry. Though the value of "credible messengers" (Austria & Peterson, 2017) has become more commonly understood and accepted in the world of prisoner reentry and alternatives-to-incarceration, the influence of such messengers often remains lacking in the space of postsecondary education in American correctional institutions.

This paper, co-authored by three practitioner-activists in the education-in-prison space, explores the impact of lived experience on the work of leading, managing, and teaching in postsecondary programs in prison. Our reflections and experience are rooted in work done over the last two decades by incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, along with their allies, at a small nonprofit organization called Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison in New York. Founded inside Sing Sing Correctional Facility in 1998, Hudson Link is now one of the oldest continuously operating programs of its kind in the United States.

We begin with a brief history of Hudson Link's founding and development, and its context in a broader tradition of informal teaching and learning inside American prisons. This is followed by reflections on the impact of lived experience on the work of managing in-prison postsecondary programs, teaching inside prison as a formerly incarcerated person, and being involved in the release and reentry component that is now included in many such efforts here in the United States. Our hope is that this article will encourage academic institutions and others administering educational programs to include directly affected people in the work they do with currently and formerly incarcerated students, so we end with a list of suggested actions for those looking to do this.

A Note on Authorship

It has been suggested to us by our dear friend Dr. Mary Gould that transparency and reflexivity about authorship is essential to the honesty and integrity of a contribution such as this one. With that in mind, we want to briefly share the authors' backgrounds as well as the process of putting this article together.

Dr. Lila McDowell, Development Director at Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, convened and moderated the original roundtable session at the ASC Annual Meeting in Philadelphia and invited the presenters who would sit on that panel. Her original DPhil research on the experiences of incarcerated men pursuing undergraduate degrees with Hudson Link (see McDowell, 2012) informed the framing and contextualization of ideas developed first during the ASC roundtable session in Philadelphia and then further during this article's drafting process. Dr. Samuel Arroyo, the first Hudson Link alumnus to earn an EdD, is the former Program Director for Hudson Link; it is primarily his experience that we draw on in discussing the impact of formerly incarcerated people on the management of in-prison postsecondary programs. Jorge Diaz, also a Hudson Link alumnus, has served since his release as an instructor for accredited Hudson Link classes at Sing Sing Correctional Facility; it is his experience that we draw on in discussing the role of lived experience in the work of teaching incarcerated students. All three of this article's authors have worked in a professional capacity in reentry services, and it is these experiences that we draw on in reflecting on the importance of including directly affected people in the process of reentry and reintegration of incarcerated students back into society after release.

All three authors agreed on goals and distribution of labor before beginning the writing process. We hope the resulting work reflects the kind of productive collaboration that can be achieved between formerly incarcerated scholar-activists and their allies. In recognition of the diverse but equal contributions of knowledge and perspective to the work of this piece, authors have been listed in alphabetical order.

Background and Historical Context

Universities, whose presence was once commonplace in American penal institutions, left prisons across the United States in the mid-nineties following President Clinton's passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. One provision of this crime bill was that it rescinded incarcerated persons' eligibility for Pell grants, a federal form of financial aid that was the primary funding mechanism for institutions of higher education active in prison education. In New York, the loss of federal funding was compounded by the additional loss of state funding, as then-Governor Pataki took away incarcerated students' eligibility for Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) grants (Correctional Association of New York, 2009). The withdrawal of postsecondary institutions from prisons in New York mirrored a national trend: It is estimated that by 1996 the number of college-in-prison¹ programs operating nationally dropped from approximately 350 to less than a dozen (Fine et al., 2001).

Many of those people who were incarcerated in New York during the early-to-mid-nineties remember witnessing a dramatic shift in the atmosphere of prisons across the state: Even those who were not enrolled in college programs before legislation shut them down remember the increased violence and heightened sense of hopelessness that pervaded New York's correctional facilities following the loss of positive programming. A group of men at Sing Sing who had earned their degrees before the loss of Pell grants, led by incarcerated activists John Valverde and John Mandela, reached out to religious volunteers and outside academics for help bringing college—and hope—back to the facility. It was through these efforts that Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison was founded in 1998 (McDowell, 2012). The program drew on the model developed by incarcerated women at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, who used the prison grapevine to share their play-book with the men at Sing Sing, and was implemented with the support of the facility's administration.

The Hudson Link Model

To understand the critical function that Hudson Link plays in the execution of in-prison college programs, it is important to understand its model. Hudson Link is not a college or university itself, nor an entity managed by correctional administrators. Instead it is a third-party facilitator who:

- works with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to identify prisons where higher education programs are most likely to be successful;
- finds local partner colleges to offer accredited, degree-granting undergraduate coursework inside of prisons;
- recruits, selects, and prepares students to succeed in this coursework, consistent with DOCCS policies regarding disciplinary infractions and other criteria;
- evaluates any prior educational experience and analyzes what credits students still need in order to earn a full degree;
- selects the courses that will be offered by the college partner each semester to move the greatest number of students toward that degree;
- purchases and manages all necessary books and supplies;
- coordinates the completion of DOCCS' required paperwork related to security clearance for educational materials as well as instructors;
- helps recruit and maintain rosters of instructors to teach at each facility;
- serves as academic advisors and guidance counselors for students;
- identifies and trains particularly promising incarcerated alumni to serve as clerks who perform a vital administrative support function to the program from the inside;
- supports released alumni during and after their release and transition back to the community;
- fundraises to cover the cost of instructors, books, classroom supplies, and staff to coordinate each site as well as alumni efforts so that these programs run at no cost to the partner colleges or the prisons.

¹In this article the American usage of the word "college" is employed interchangeably with "undergraduate education" or "undergraduate institution", depending on context.

Just as President Johnson's commission described, these are indeed complex and challenging tasks that require intimate knowledge of prison procedures and administration, the idiosyncrasies of the correctional environment, and the ways that incarcerated allies on the inside—without whom our program could not run—can be empowered to provide essential program support as part of their prison-sanctioned work assignments.

Using this model, Hudson Link has grown over the past twenty years from one class of sixteen men at one facility to a student body of over 600 male and female students at facilities across the state. Most unique about the program is the fact that it is run and staffed primarily by its own formerly incarcerated graduates; more than 60% of Hudson Link's overall staff are formerly incarcerated and most are also Hudson Link alumni.

It may be hard to conceive of a degree-granting college program put together by a group of incarcerated people who had no funding, no government support, and little connection to the outside world. But we are sure that it comes as no surprise to anyone who has witnessed the resourcefulness, ingenuity, and motivation of incarcerated students. Those of us who were students in these programs, know the hunger for knowledge that exists behind the walls, while those of us who have been teachers know the unique drive and stamina that incarcerated students show in the pursuit and achievement of their goals.

The truth is that while higher education is tremendously valuable and transformative, the pursuit of formal academic degrees is just one incarnation of a larger tradition of teaching and learning that has existed within American correctional facilities for decades. One needs only to look as far back as the late seventies and early eighties to see unofficial, prisoner-led learning cooperatives such as the *Non-Traditional Approach: Resurrection/Conciencia* (NTA) study group movement that existed in men's prisons across New York State. Diaz shared during the roundtable discussion in Philadelphia about participation in NTA, where he was taught that in order to change one's destructive behavior, one has to change their mindset—to challenge and replace their criminogenic thinking patterns with positive, pro-social thoughts and beliefs. The content of these groups, taught by other incarcerated men who acted as facilitators and mentors, mirrored the cognitive behavioral models that are so often seen today in evidence-based recidivism reduction programs.

This teaching and mentoring demonstrated another tenet of NTA: "Each one teach one". In prison, for those individuals who were conscious agents of change, the practice was to reach out and pull up those who were in search of knowledge and help them along the way. This is something still practiced today, both personally and professionally, by those of us who followed in our NTA teachers' footsteps.

Hundreds of allies without personal lived experience of incarceration have contributed to the reinstatement of prison college programs over the past 25 years, and much of the progress in this field could not have been made without their willingness to marshal their human, intellectual, and financial resources. All three authors of this article come to our work with the belief that currently and formerly incarcerated people must collaborate with those from outside the walls to break the cycles of intergenerational poverty, mass incarceration, and institutional racism. What follows are reflections on some of the contributions that directly affected people are particularly equipped to make to the prison education and reentry space.

Relationship building. Relationships are imperative in the work of providing accredited undergraduate education in prison. In our experience it can be more comfortable for incarcerated students to share the struggles or challenges they are facing with someone who has sat in their seat and already knows what life is like from their vantage point. In his time as Program Director, Arroyo found that students who were struggling academically often had an easier time opening up to him or a formerly incarcerated member of his staff than they did to their professors or in front of their classmates, with whom they may not have felt safe expressing vulnerability.

This relationship building extends not just to students but also to correctional administrators, with whom a strong rapport is essential. One might think that those who used to be under the custody and control of corrections officials would be hard pressed to cooperate with them in facilitating empowerment through academic work; however, we have found the opposite to be true. Arroyo, Hudson Link's Executive Director Sean Pica, and the majority of men and women who have served as Hudson Link academic coordinators over the years began their relationships with today's correctional leadership team decades ago, when these superintendents and commissioners were new officers. Rather than play to the adversarial roles expected of us, we

find that most officers who knew our formerly incarcerated staff as young people in their custody are proud of their transformation and pleased that we still come back in to help others make the same changes in their lives. The willingness on both sides to work together toward a productive partnership has made it possible for Hudson Link to grow and flourish as it has.

Our positive and productive relationships with corrections are built not only on personal history but on the knowledge of and respect for security procedures that come as second nature to those previously under the rule of those procedures. Understanding the structure, hierarchy, and areas of purview of various correctional administrators, being accustomed to the timeline on which corrections can work and make program-related decisions amidst a number of competing priorities, and knowing instinctively how to comply with facility rules that may be unfamiliar to outsiders all make for smooth relationships with our correctional partners.

Role modeling. One of the most important functions that formerly incarcerated activists serve in the college-in-prison space is that of a role model. Arroyo and Diaz both recall men they knew inside (“mentors, though I did not have the language to call them mentors back then,” Arroyo explained in Philadelphia.) who encouraged them to go to school when they did not yet believe in the value of formal higher education or their ability to complete it. They recall that the men who pulled them into the classroom were leaders amongst the population at Sing Sing, which lent weight to the pedestal on which they placed education and the amount of respect they expected others to show for it. “The men I looked up to inside revered education to such a degree that they demanded complete commitment and devotion from all students,” Arroyo shared during the panel. Having learned the most about the value of education from other incarcerated men, those who went through these programs now feel compelled to serve as role models for those who come behind.

Formerly incarcerated educators and activists working behind prison walls are also in a unique position to prepare students for the reentry process. Students anticipating release have questions about what transition is really like: challenges they will face, potential pitfalls to be aware of, how to successfully complete parole, how they will be received when they have to explain their background during a job interview. People who have succeeded in that transition themselves represent walking, talking models of the transformative and lasting power of education and the possibilities that lie on the other side of the wall.

Maintaining standards while navigating nuance. Demanding high standards from college programs and the students who participate in them carries on a long tradition of expecting and striving for excellence in the educational space. Diaz, who facilitated and taught a wide variety of classes on the inside including HIV/AIDS Education, Health Education, and Conflict Resolution, shared in Philadelphia that he knew when he returned post-release as an instructor for the Hudson Link program that he would have to come prepared:

Many of the men in those classrooms read enough to be experts on topics that attract their interest. So, I learned early on that if I was going to do a presentation, I had to make sure I had all the facts. As an incarcerated facilitator and now as a college instructor I know one thing for certain: there is always someone in the prison classroom audience who is widely read and incredibly knowledgeable on the topic presented, and if I falter or provide inaccurate information I should prepare to be humiliated. With that in mind I make sure I am well versed on any subject matter I plan to present.

This experience is echoed by so many educators who work with incarcerated scholars and have to ask students to hold their questions on material that has not even been assigned yet until later in the semester.

Arroyo affirmed these sentiments in reflecting on his personal commitments to program management: As an incarcerated student I did not want to be involved in a college program that was not equally rigorous to what I would have attained on an outside campus. I had a desire to transform my life in a way that was not just meaningful to me, but to my family, my community, and the world of academia. I believed that maintaining our program’s academic standards was paramount to a successful rehabilitative process.

One way in which formerly incarcerated people can make a significant contribution to the work of program management is navigating nuance while maintaining these high standards. Practitioners with lived experience may be able to see potential in students that is not obvious to those with a different frame of refer-

ence. Arroyo shared his experience working with one correctional administrator who was prepared to approve nineteen of the twenty students Hudson Link had recommended for entry into the next year's cohort. The one they planned to reject, he said, had been in prison for two decades and had a file two inches thick with disciplinary write-ups. "I looked at that file and I saw myself," Arroyo said. "I saw the men who I initially respected because of the chaos they caused—and whose own transformations were what convinced me. I too could change." Arroyo pointed out that the student had been free of disciplinary tickets for an entire year, which is one of the criteria for applying to the Hudson Link program and something one would never have imagined possible given this applicant's otherwise storied institutional record. "If he was allowed into the classroom", Arroyo argued, "who might follow him? What younger men might be looking to him to set an example?"

As testament to New York correctional administrators' forward-thinking willingness to trust the instincts of formerly incarcerated educational practitioners in evaluating student potential—and to the importance of relationships as outlined earlier—that twentieth man was ultimately admitted to the program, where at the time of this publication he is excelling academically and thriving socially.

Healed people heal people. We have heard a phrase used with increasing frequency in the social services field over the past few years: "Hurt people hurt people." While we applaud the acknowledgment of the role that trauma plays in subsequent antisocial behavior, we prefer a strengths-based approach and propose instead that *healed people heal people*. A huge part of the contribution higher education in prison makes is the formation of community—communities of people who have in many cases caused harm, experienced the justice system firsthand, worked to find more positive ways to navigate the world, and searched for a way to give back. By staying involved in the work of bringing people through the justice system from harm to healing, these communities of formerly incarcerated people and their allies turn into networks of friendship, employment opportunity, and mutual empowerment. As directly affected practitioners, there is nothing more gratifying than gaining a new sense of self and using this progress to help others become the best version of themselves. As allies, there is nothing more rewarding than witnessing, supporting, and learning from this process.

Calls to Action

It would never be our position that formerly incarcerated people are the only ones who should be at the helm of prison education efforts in the United States and across the world. Rather it is our hope that after reading this article, practitioners of higher education will feel encouraged to seek out and privilege the contributions of formerly incarcerated people on an integral level in the work that they do both inside and out of prison. With that in mind, we present three calls to action that we believe will move the needle away from token inclusion and toward genuine agency and empowerment. Rather than offer a laundry list of "shoulds", we frame these as a set of commitments that we strive to honor.

- **We include currently and formerly incarcerated people in positions of real leadership and authority.** While it has become much more common to see formerly incarcerated people included in college-in-prison work, even in initiatives led by elite universities, we still notice that their participation is often limited to frontline direct service positions such as case management. In our work at Hudson Link we commit to rethinking the traditional roles that directly affected people have played, identifying additional roles to which they can bring their expertise—such as program management, teaching, and board service—and making sure that we are providing the professional development they need to succeed in those roles. We do this because we know it to be effective, transformative practice.
- **We work with correctional administration to make it possible for formerly incarcerated people to go back into the prisons we serve.** Over twenty-one years offering college inside prisons, Hudson Link has often been called to help other states replicate the work we do. Our first two pieces of advice are always the same: Identify incarcerated leaders who will help build and develop your programs from the inside, and build the relationships you'll need with your correctional administrators to make sure those leaders are able to participate fully in the work both during and after their incarceration. More than 60% of Hudson Link's staff, including those who go back into prisons to work directly with our students, are formerly incarcerated; some have even undertaken their jobs while still on parole. Our relationships with allies in the

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision have made this possible

- **When evaluating candidates to serve as professors in our programs, we value “inside” teaching experience.** Hudson Link instructors are employed directly by our college partners, and must be hired through the standard adjunct instructor hiring process. Some of our strongest and most skilled teaching candidates are those whose teaching experience comes from classes they taught on the inside, as Diaz has described above. These educators may not have formal teaching evaluations from their students, which the traditional hiring process expects. So we have committed to working with our college partners, who do the actual hiring, to evaluate potential for teaching roles in the absence of formal evaluations.

We ultimately land in agreement with the conclusion that the President Johnson’s commission came to more than 50 years ago: education in prison is complex, and we need highly trained specialists to execute on the challenges this task presents. We encourage the field to think more broadly, and perhaps more creatively, about what those specialists might look like, and about what kinds of expertise should be considered valuable in the process of recruiting them. Formerly incarcerated practitioners’ formation of relationships with students and correctional administrators alike, their ability to serve as role models, the high standards and expectations they bring for educational quality, and the empowerment gained by helping to heal others are all contributions that may transform the effectiveness and long-term impact of educational programs on the inside.

We leave readers with one final thought: We teach best what we most need to learn. It is a responsibility formerly incarcerated activists share with their allies to remain perpetual students of our field, learning always to be adaptive and use our unique talents in ways that meet the demands of our students, our correctional institutions, our universities, and our communities.

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“It’s About Whose Voices Matter and What That Means”: Reflections on Insider/ Outsider Status in Prison Classrooms

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Abstract: *Based on the author’s experience of teaching on a higher education project in two English prisons—one for men aged 18–30 and one for women aged over 21—the article considers how critical reflection on prison norms encourages authenticity and respect in the classroom. These elements provide a foundation for students to negotiate conflicting subject positions and meanings and build critical thinking skills. Both prisons and universities are risk averse and bound by structured approaches to risk and authority that may impact the development of such relationships. The author reflects on how conflicts and collaboration in both classrooms were mediated through the her status as a former prisoner, and how that offered opportunities to disrupt notions of expertise, authority and authenticity in productive—if sometimes uncomfortable—ways.*

Keywords: *Prison education, University–Prison Partnership (UPP), Critical Reflections*

Education and training in English prisons focuses predominantly on basic skills and vocational training (Coates 2016) and is often of poor quality. In 2018, 54% of prisons’ education provision was rated as inadequate or requiring improvement (Coffey 2018). Attempts to reframe education as rehabilitative (Champion and Noble 2016) are reflected in the emergence of University–Prison Partnerships (UPPs) (Prisoners’ Education Trust, n.d.). This article draws on the author’s experience teaching UPPs in two prisons, named Woodfield and Lowsight¹ and includes reflection and research-based observations throughout. Motivation for participating in UPPs varied between prison and university learners, and indeed the prison and university. For prison learners, a classroom that offers “higher” education can be a site of resistance just as university can be (Pathania 2018). Resistance could be as subtle as calling each other by their first names (as prison staff often refer to prisoners by surname).

While the US has an established tradition of taking college students and trainee teachers into prisons (Dell’Angelo 2014; Armstrong 2015; Dreisinger 2015), “co-learning” between university and prison students is relatively new in the UK.² This novelty, coupled with the reformative objectives of prison education, means UPPs risk complicity in sustaining carceral ideology and the “improvement” of students through participation in higher education (Armstrong 2015). Uncritical reproduction of carceral norms may be part of that complicity. For example, prisons usually require prisoner learners to have completed basic skills to the highest available level.³ Universities, understandably, accept this as a measure of ability and interest but gaining these qualifications is fraught with obstacles. Education routinely pays less than other work (Coates, 2016), classes are often cancelled, and results are not always recorded so programmes have to be repeated. In frustration, many give up. By upholding this measure of basic skills, universities can unwittingly replicate the exclusion of standard prison education.

The Course

The course was designed by the author and aimed to introduce social science through action research,



over twelve weekly sessions. Twenty learners—ten each from the prison and the university—were invited to explore the role of expertise and power relations in the prison and the classroom and develop their critical thinking skills. Learners would deliver their findings as a presentation to an invited audience of prison and university staff and family members. Prison students would have the option to complete an Extended Project Qualification, which could support an application to college or a foundation degree. There was no basic skills requirement, and the course was designed to accommodate a wide range of skills, including verbal and visual assignments. The course was developed and delivered by the author and included sessions with practitioners and academics, many of whom had been imprisoned. Prison students were enrolled at the library and could request books in their own name. All were given university branded stationery, pens and bags. This was intended as practical—prisons do not usually provide pens or paper for learners to use outside the classroom—but it contributed to a connectedness within the group. The following section includes reflections on the course at Woodfield and then Lowsight.

Reflections

HMP Woodfield (According to Field Notes From December, 2016)

Today's session begins with a discussion on "being strange" (Morris 2016). The class is a mixture of undergraduates (mostly female and one male) and prisoners (all male). They come to be known as "the girls and Steve" and "the boys".⁴ It's the first day and the desks are arranged in a horseshoe. The boys have spread out so that when the girls and Steve arrive, they sit between them. The atmosphere is friendly and polite. We set out some rules for the group—the boys suggest "listening, respect for each other and no sexual banter". The girls and Steve ask that everyone participates. My rule is that all words are permissible, except "offender".⁵ The boys nod in agreement, although it means little to the girls (although Steve gets it, having been in prison himself).

The university students have been briefed on prison rules and conduct, including not sharing personal information—not writing their surnames on the attendance list, not talking about where they were from or asking such questions of prison students. This unravels on the first day at Woodfield. Explaining the rule to the group, the prison students point out my surname on the course materials. The boys were known, to staff and each other, by their surnames. Furthermore, the prison students will be enrolled with the university to enable them to borrow from the library and access education support on release. They ask "what do you think we're going to do with your surnames?" creating an immediate tension. Uncritically maintaining the rule would detract from the value of co-learning and from the aims of the course—and so begins twelve weeks of questioning everything.

I had never intended to tell "my story", but it quickly feels dishonest not to—after all we are here to learn—together—about the complexities of human knowledge and experience? I share it in a session on "what is expertise?" Later Simon tells me that it mattered to him that he could talk to me "on a level". Amir says it shows him that you can still achieve things after being in prison.

The research topic is prison education and how it might be improved. The boys are lively and engaged. At times they lack the vocabulary to dissect ethics or reflexivity (although so do the girls) but once explained they provide copious examples from prison life. I steer us away from too much "prison talk" because I want the classroom to be a refuge from it, a space that is different from the other prison classrooms the boys have told us about. Admittedly this is difficult to maintain when the door is unlocked and thrown open mid-way through the session, an officer bellowing "toilet!". The end of the session is much the same, boys hurried out, slow leavers threatened with sanctions. Travelling home each week, I reflect on the hopelessness of a learning space from which some students are herded aggressively, to be locked in on arrival to the wing. Then one week, the students surprise me. They no longer want to produce research that might benefit the prison. They have, in their own words, become critical thinkers and they want instead to make a statement about everything that is wrong with the prison system, from their experience. This means there might be nothing to show for twelve weeks' work, but I wanted them to question everything. I meet with prison staff and Louise, my manager. Louise is worried that not producing a report means we won't be invited back. She thinks a statement might seem confrontational, political even. I feel proud that the students have taken this path - I wanted them

to question everything. Prison *is* confrontational, it *is* political. It sounds glib but this is the students learning the pen is mightier than the sword. Isn't that why we're doing this? Prison staff want to remove someone who they think is too influential, but I argue for him to stay—he is influential, but removing him will turn the group against the project.

HMP Lowsight(According to Field Notes From October 2017)

New prison, new students - inside and out. Lowsight holds women over 18. 60% of the inside students and all of the outside students (all women) are under 25. With no *boys* we're no longer *girls*—the students made that clear.⁶ In time we lose one student to open prison, one to a cookery class (she gets to eat what she cooks, who can compete with that?) and one to the pressure inside her own head; at the start of a life sentence, it's too much.

Instead of setting a rule about personal information, we discuss as a group what is and is not acceptable. We agree that asking personal questions should be avoided, but sharing is ok if the person is comfortable. We also agree that confidentiality in the room is important.⁷ This time I tell my story at the start. It resonates but not always in ways I anticipate. One day, Adaeze says angrily “we're not all middle-class white women who got done for drink driving”. That's not me so why do I feel it so personally? As at Woodfield, there's a lot of prison talk, but here the women are mainly concerned with the intersection of criminalisation, race and gender. Few of them know women who have been in prison (although some know lots of men who have). They feel their otherness and we talk often about what it means to be a woman. The prison students seem concerned with letting the university students know they are the same as them. They needn't worry, there are many similarities, deeper than the “same area” connections of Woodfield: Two students from the same Somali tribe, shared experiences of being in care, or excluded from school, of racism or of being raised by lone fathers and finding their own femininity. Although different from them in many ways—older, white—the fact that I share the experience of both university and prison disrupts expectations, and that somewhat dissolves other barriers.

Later, Adaeze tells me about another prison-university partnership she is part of. The class is more formal and structured than ours—she prefers that in some ways. A university student in that class tells her their training included “not sharing personal information”. Adaeze finds this insulting and uncomfortable, it makes the classroom feel like jail whereas our class feels like outside.

Discussion

UPPs are couched in terms of breaking down barriers, finding common ground between people of different backgrounds and creating the potential for individual and social transformation (Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). Prison classrooms can be sites of safety—an “island” where teachers are not aware of offences and students can be themselves (Nichols 2017). Students at Woodfield and Lowsight would disagree—many found education infantilising and dull. They wanted more choice, opportunities to gain recognisable qualifications and more interactivity with teachers and other students—to work in groups. They wanted to be challenged, and to have the chance to challenge others' perceptions of them. The classroom as a nexus between prison and university is a particular dialectical space where the overarching goals of each institution are in tension. The space is held by dialogue among and between students and teacher. Questioning norms together—even in such mundane ways as talking about where we were from, or referring to ourselves as women, not girls—and creating solutions was a way to make education more fulfilling. This author is not alone in having lived in prison as well as teaching there, nor in using her experience to contribute to scholarship (Earle 2014; Honeywell 2018; Reisz 2017) but the effects of a prison-experienced teacher in prison are under-explored.

A teacher with experience of imprisonment disrupts conventional prison (and university) norms of legitimacy and requires governors and administrators to be open-minded. Universities are perhaps even more cautious than prisons about academics with convictions (Earle 2018, 2011) and the support of the university provides an example to prison (and indeed university) students about what is possible for themselves and for others. It is a challenge to the stigmatisation of prisoners and the framing of them (us) as in need of reformation. In that way it somewhat guards against the risk of the university replicating this formulation. Self-disclosure

is key, but it's not enough to simply announce it; as Adaeze pointed out, not every prisoner has the same story. "Lived experience" is not inherently valuable, it is simply another tool in the pedagogical toolbox. I was more comfortable with conflict, with "failing" to produce a report, than university colleagues, more familiar with the reasons why a prospective student may not have a level 2 certificate. Criminalisation and imprisonment are stigmatising, and the resultant spoiled identity (Goffman 1963) arguably makes us aware of our incompleteness. Awareness of incompleteness, says Freire, is a necessity of an authentic approach to education (1970). The (inevitably flawed) attempt to be fully human is sometimes uncomfortable—sharing information about ourselves, accepting that our carefully designed programme may not realise its aims, these are uncomfortable positions, especially for a teacher, someone usually positioned as an authority figure. A prison classroom creates its own discomforts, but then again, a university can—perhaps should—do the same. Supporters of prison-university teaching talk up the benefits to students: breaking down barriers, questioning assumptions. I suggest that teaching outside of our comfort zone is at least as valuable.

In challenging the norms—and being heard—prisoner students felt respected, and in turn showed respect to each other and the space. In Woodfield this included an absence of arguments, fights or "incidents". Students reported this as unusual—especially as they had not known each other before the course began—and the staff confirmed it. Was it just that the students who attended were well behaved? Not necessarily; several were described by staff as "challenging and disruptive" and two were on basic⁸ for most of the course.

Conclusion

The author's commitment to a learning environment that does not "feel like jail" was influenced by personal experience of both prison education and higher education and the resultant belief that learning should be empowering. This commitment came alive when the boys at Woodfield decided they no longer wanted to write the report on education because "why should we do something for them?" After heated debate and discussion with the girls (and Steve), they decided instead that they would write a statement and present it at the graduation event. This was not entirely unproblematic; the university and prison administration were concerned that this threatened the success of the course. As a group we negotiated a solution—the students would present their statement, but would also talk about how they experienced the course. This included surprise at their own intelligence, a desire to study further, a new understanding of the constraints they faced, and a recognition that university might just be a place for them. Three students applied for foundation degrees, and the course is now a regular part of Woodfield's education provision, with two original students as mentors. At Lowsight, two students applied for deferred entry to degree programmes.

The success of any educational setting is determined by the relationships between those who facilitate and participate in it. Boundaries can protect and support participants but uncritical acceptance of received wisdom around mutual self-disclosure can hinder the possibility of real learning. The author's status as a former prisoner acted as a catalyst for questioning the nature of risk and authenticity and enabled learners on both sides to think critically about imprisonment and their own futures. The process of criminalisation and imprisonment create a double consciousness, where an individual is forced to see themselves through the eyes of others. That is not to say that teachers without lived experience cannot achieve the same effect, but that they must consciously find ways to disrupt rather than reproduce prison and university norms of whose voice matters and what that means.

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Footnotes

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

² Although there is a history of academics going into prisons to teach (Cohen and Taylor 1972; Armstrong and Ludlow 2016).

³ Level 2 is roughly equivalent to the level students have attained on completion of compulsory education in England and is the highest level that can be obtained in prison, without external funding.

⁴ These terms are theirs, for they are of course, not boys, or girls, but young men and women. In another context the terms might be insulting, but here they seemed to create a sense of community.

⁵ The term offender, once preferred as softer than convict or prisoner, has become tainted with managerialism and exclusion, positioning crime as the entirety of a person's being, cementing them as different from others. As the "official" label it also has authoritarian overtones that the boys recognised but that the girls were unaware of. McNeill and Weaver have argued that language itself can frustrate desistance from crime (although they continue to use the term offender). Banishing it was intended to signal that the classroom was a place of equality.

⁶ Women in prison are often referred to as "girls" by staff, which might have contributed to the Low-sight students' disdain.

⁷ Excepting a disclosure that indicates at risk of harm, which would be shared appropriately.

⁸ The lowest privilege level.

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