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Visualising critical criminology: Participatory creative methods in criminological research within a university-in-prison learning partnership

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Abstract

Creative, emancipatory pedagogies have the power and potential to enhance teaching and learning while also subverting restrictive features of traditional prison education. Through presenting the findings from two prison-based criminology classrooms in Cork, Ireland and Belfast, Northern Ireland, this paper argues that using cross disciplinary, creative pedagogies can enhance a 'critical criminology' curriculum and bring abstract concepts to life in restricted classroom contexts. These classrooms, joined together under the HEA funded *North South Together ("Together")* participatory action research project, centred lived experiences, reflective learning and dialogic learning to foster a convivial environment for university-based students to study alongside classmates in prison. The application of creative practices in the classrooms subvert the 'hidden curriculum' of traditional prison and university education spaces through encouraging students to bring in their lived experience, sensory reflections, and mutual learning. Through creative group work projects, students co-produced artefacts that represented the theories and concepts studied throughout the semester. This paper analyses two pieces of artwork: a paper mâché volcano that represents the pains of incarceration and social control and collage artwork that represents stigma, labelling, and person-centred language. The analysis of these artefacts revealed three key elements of creative teaching and learning: (a) putting into practice 'emancipatory pedagogy' within challenging constraints of prison education classrooms, which allows abstract criminological concepts to come to life (b) producing civic space through the practice of conviviality and generativity across diverse learner groups and across institutions (c) subverting the "hidden curriculum" of contemporary social science and prison education classrooms.

Keywords: prison education, emancipatory creative pedagogy, critical criminology, hidden curriculum

Introduction

This paper presents findings from the HEA *North South Together ("Together")* Project, which is a university in prison learning collaboration between University College Cork (UCC) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB). *Together* saw two Irish Criminology classrooms, in Cork and Belfast, use creative approaches to pedagogy in a very particular setting: the prison education classroom where incarcerated students and university students learn side by side. Using these two classrooms as a case study, this paper explores the effects of using innovative approaches to pedagogy in prison university classrooms. Specifically, we argue

that creative practices enhance the emancipatory pedagogy underpinning university in prison partnerships and "Inside-Out classrooms" (Inside-Out Center, 2024). We posit that they are especially impactful when engaging within the institutional constraints of the prison and allow engagement with learners across a range of different previous educational experiences while providing inclusionary methods. We suggest that creative practices allow the sometimes abstract concepts of Criminology, such as 'stigma' and 'labelling' or 'pains of imprisonment', to be explored beyond 'traditional text'. Rather, they allow for, and actively encourage, sensory explorations of these concepts (Herrity et al., 2021) particularly from those with lived experience of criminalisation, marginalisation and imprisonment. In this vein, non-traditional modes of learning are given an opportunity to surface, privileging voices which are often silenced in Criminology and social science classrooms, both in universities and in prisons. We also argue that the use of creative practices in criminology classrooms, but particularly in Inside-Out settings, allows for conviviality and generative activity, which is ordinarily limited by institutional contexts such as the university social science classroom and even more so the prison education classroom.

The impact of creative pedagogical practices creates an opportunity for the expansion of civic space between these two institutions (Behan, 2015). We suggest that creative approaches to pedagogy in prison-based criminology classrooms can contribute to subverting the "hidden curriculum" (Jackson, 1968, p.34) that presents itself to students both in university and prison education classrooms. According to Jackson (1968), the hidden curriculum consists of implicit rules and norms in educational settings, shaped by pedagogy and power dynamics, even if they are not explicitly outlined in the curriculum. Rather than contributing to the production of "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1975) that fit into the neo-liberal logics of employability and skills training, the critical criminology Inside-Out classroom's creative exercises can provide opportunities for students to become "cultural producers of knowledge" (Giroux, 2022). This is particularly central to emancipatory pedagogies of our contemporary "image based" times, whereas Giroux (2022) argues, students "...need to learn not only how to read critically visual texts and the cultural apparatuses that support them, but also how to produce them" (Giroux, 2022, p.144). Throughout this paper, we consciously foreground Ivan Illich's radical pedagogy of conviviality (1970; 1973) over Paulo Freire (2005) as a deliberate act of radical remembering. Freire has been privileged since the 1980s primarily because his radicalism was easier to align with establishment educational reforms, rather than Illich's educational ideas, which were more along abolitionist lines and only began to reappear with a renewal of interest in emancipatory education during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Irwin, 2022).

Our paper proceeds with first providing some context to the two Criminology classrooms in Cork and Belfast, as part of which two selected visual artefacts discussed further below were created by students. Afterwards, we discussed how we conducted the research for this paper through participatory and creative research methods, mirroring the pedagogical approaches deployed in both classrooms. We suggest that these are particularly suitable when teaching *and* researching in 'total institutions' (Goffman, 1961) and with diverse learners. Following this, we focus on the analysis of two selected artefacts co-created by students in each classroom- a papier mâché volcano describing the 'pains of imprisonment' (Sykes, 2007) and a collage on the themes of stigma, labelling, and person-centred language. Combined with feedback from students and interviews with key partners and collaborators, our analysis demonstrates how creative approaches to pedagogy employed in the Criminology prison education classroom contribute to (a) putting into practice 'emancipatory pedagogy' within challenging constraints of prison education classrooms, which allows abstract criminological concepts to come to life (b) producing civic space through the practice of

conviviality and generativity across diverse learner groups and across institutions that do not often interact, (c) subverting the 'hidden curriculum' of contemporary social science and prison education classrooms.

The emancipatory critical criminology classroom in context

Both the Cork and Belfast classrooms are Criminology undergraduate classrooms, situated in prisons and modelled after international programmes, specifically the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme ("Inside-Out") and Learning Together, that bring outside students from partnering universities into the prison to study alongside incarcerated students (Pompa, 2013; Inside-Out Center, 2024; Armstrong & Ludlow, 2016). The UCC and Cork Prison course, "From Criminal Justice to Social Justice," is a 12-week BA criminology module delivered annually to second and third year criminology students and incarcerated students. The university students receive 10 credits for the course and the university has just completed micro-accreditation for the incarcerated students. Cork Prison is a closed prison for adult males from counties Cork, Kerry, and Waterford (Irish Prisons, 2024). The Queen's University Belfast course, "Reintegration after Prison," is delivered in HMP Hydebank Wood Secure College. HMP Hydebank Wood Secure College includes both a women's prison, Ash House, and a male young offender's institution for men between the ages of 18 and 21 (Northern Ireland Department of Justice, 2024). The course is a 20 credit third year criminology module for outside students and an accredited Open Learning module for the outside students.

The UCC and QUB courses were the first types of these partnerships on the island of Ireland. Access to third-level education for incarcerated students in Ireland is largely offered by the Open University (Costelloe, 2003) or is delivered by staff in prison education spaces without outside students present. The central concept of prison and university students studying side by side as equals has the potential to become one of the most impactful pedagogical cornerstones of such learning environments (Davis & Rosewall, 2013; Bumiller, 2013; Butin, 2013; Gray et al., 2019).

The Inside-Out praxis, which informs both classrooms, is influenced by 'emancipatory pedagogy', which can be understood as an umbrella term for a range of pedagogies of empowerment and liberation (hooks, 1994; Love, 2019; Giroux, 1983; Illich, 1973; Freire, 2005; Shor, 1992; McLaren, 2015). Furthermore, this approach to teaching and learning aims to be experimental and dialogical, using elements such as ice breakers, circle work, and collaborative group work (Butin, 2013; Pompa, 2013). This pedagogy "requires a negotiated curriculum based on authentic dialogue that values social interaction, collaboration, democracy, and self-actualisation" (Nouri & Sajjadi, 2014).

While it is not without limitations, research suggests that the pedagogy employed in these types of classrooms can lead to transformative educational experiences, in terms of the impact on participants' thinking, relationship building, and planting seeds for the questioning of systems of power and inequality (Butin, 2013; Pompa, 2013; Gray et al., 2019). This transformation is further enhanced by mutual dialogue, which can enable "deep-reaching self-transformation" that is "inseparable from the aforementioned social transformation", because participants can bring in their own personal expressions (MacLaren, 2015, p.372-3). The humanistic approach of Inside-Out and emancipatory pedagogy can "challenge the very origins of dehumanisation, which lie in cultural narratives that sustain separation or boundaries between human beings" (DelSesto & Sellers, 2022, p.667), making it a particularly apt pedagogy for prisons and other places of confinement. However, it is important to note that given the fact that these emancipatory

education programmes exist within the prison system, there are, by definition, limitations to their transformative nature. Specifically, as Bumiller (2013, p.186) highlights, “even the most transformative curriculum taught inside prisons pushes against, rather than fundamentally challenges, the academic conventions that define knowledge and learning within accredited institutions of higher education.” While our work- both teaching and research- aims to foster the transformative nature of the pedagogy employed in these prison education programs, we acknowledge the limitations and the need to be critical of the larger systems of power that these programmes exist in.

This is particularly pertinent in an Irish context, where we position its use as a counter-hegemonic 'tactic' of pedagogical resistance, which must be understood as co-existing with—and responding to—hegemonic neoliberalism, 'new managerialism,' and, increasingly, the algorithmic management of higher education (Whelan et al., 2024). This process has accelerated since austerity measures were introduced in 2009 as a consequence of the global financial crisis (Grummell & Lynch, 2016; Mercille & Murphy, 2017; Finnegan, 2020), entangling Irish higher education institutions in a web of challenging outcomes (e.g., economic and social precarity), while simultaneously promoting social justice issues and the advancement of engaged research between universities and community stakeholders.

In the academic year 2023/2024, the Cork and Belfast classrooms collaborated as part of the HEA funded *North South Together* participatory research action project (North South Together, 2024). The *Together* project collaborated with students to analyse how these classrooms can build empathy and mutual understanding between diverse communities. Among the participatory research methods employed, we collected empirical classroom data, including observations, reflective feedback forms, classroom evaluations, and conducted 10 research interviews. Think Tanks with previous classroom Inside students were held at the design stage of the curricula in both classrooms. The overall aim of the Together project is to co-produce a toolkit of best practice for prison-university education partnerships across the island of Ireland. In collaboration with ‘think tanks’, which bring together students after the semester ends in a voluntary capacity to work together on shared projects, the project team defined several pedagogical priorities and mirrored them in the deployed participatory and creative research methods used throughout the project. These included pedagogy emphasising relationship building, mutuality and conviviality, creative practices, sensory reflections, and the foundational elements of participatory action research (McNaull et al., 2023).

In terms of academic disciplines, both classroom syllabi in Cork and Belfast were broadly located within what can be described as ‘critical criminology.’ Critical Criminology challenges traditional notions of mainstream criminology and takes an intersectional look at the societal factors that impact crime and justice, foregrounding the political economy in the production of ‘crime’ (Long, 2015; Ruggiero, 2021). Each of the weekly topics interacted with, and in some cases built upon, the others, covering themes such as the pedagogy of the oppressed, education, language, stigma, labelling, the pains of incarceration and social control, gender and masculinity, reintegration and desistance, lived experience of the criminal justice system, and reimagining our future through transformative justice. Critical criminology can itself be contradictory and has evolved into various points of emphasis over the past decades (Ugwudike, 2015), but importantly challenges individualising narratives on crime and punishment, prioritising structural explanations to explain the impacts of crime and justice. Most importantly for the *Together* classrooms in Cork and Belfast, critical criminology allowed us to focus on the importance of centring lived experience in

the syllabus and pedagogical practice (Charlton, 1998; Toch, 1967; Earle, 2018; Honeywell, 2021; Aresti, Darke & Manlow 2023; Maruna, 2017), critically interrogate questions of power (Smart, 1976; Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Ruggiero 2018); conceptualise punishment as pain (Sykes, 2007; Warr, 2021; Dale, 2011) and think creatively around alternative futures to accountability and justice (Hayes & Kaba; 2023; Kaba, 2021; Herzing & Piché, 2024; Davis et al., 2022).

As recommended by the Inside-Out model, the final weeks of the Belfast and Cork classrooms were reserved for group work. Students formed small groups of four to five persons and chose a topic covered throughout the semester with which they wanted to engage further. The Cork Prison Education Unit is well known for its strong art-teaching and practice focus, exhibiting work annually on the former prison island Spike Island off the coast of Cork (Spike Island Cork, 2024). In addition, UCC's Centre for Adult and Continuing Education had already set up a partnership with the Cork Prison Education Unit in 2017 to deliver a non-accredited six weeks course in art history (Cooper & Cronin, 2021). This classroom, which still runs today, is facilitated by a UCC lecturer and a Cork ETB art teacher and employs a Visual Thinking model, which promotes critical thinking and conviviality. As a result of this existing partnership and foundation of collaborative arts in the prison education unit, students were given the opportunity to work with professional artists who supported the development of their projects. In Belfast, the last two weeks of the semester were spent working with two members of the Array artist collective on collage group work projects that explored the critical criminological themes of the semester and were not formally assessed. In Cork, students spent three weeks on creative group work, including a podcast production on the challenges of re-entry; a model of a three-dimensional stage, in which there are moving figures of various sizes and demonstrates the intricate layers of the prison system and the ways in which society responds to those who are in prison; and a paper mâché volcano reflecting on the pains of imprisonment. This case study will focus specifically on the paper mâché volcano from Cork and the student collages on stigma, labelling, and person-centred language from Belfast.

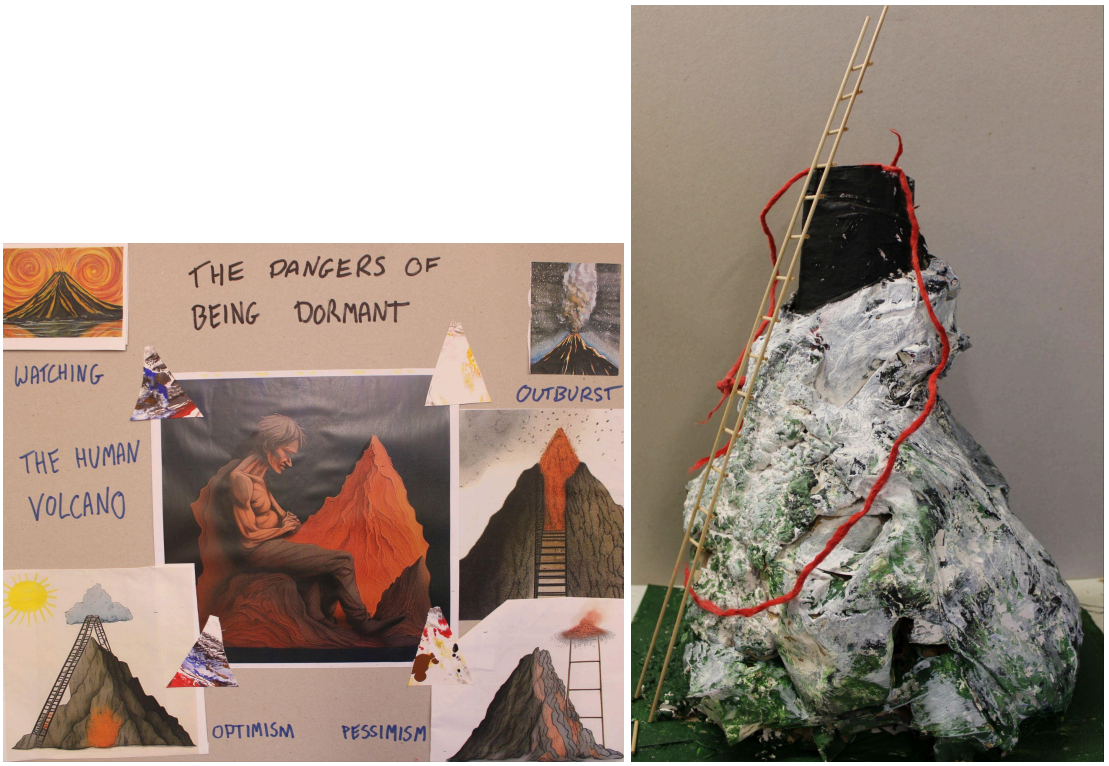

Figure 1. "The Dormant Volcano," Inside-Out classroom, Education Unit, Cork Prison, Cork City.

The images of "The Dormant Volcano," includes a photo of a brainstorming collage that includes magazine photos and drawings of a volcano. It also includes an image of a green and white paper mâché volcano that has a red thread and wooden ladder.

"The Dormant Volcano," created by students in Cork Prison, symbolises the intense pains of imprisonment that can build up for someone over time – constantly threatening to erupt, but unable to due to the consequences that can be faced in prison and society. As pictured above, students started with a collage style vision board outlining what the emotions they wanted to capture including "watching, outburst, optimism, and pessimism" which depicted "the human volcano." This brainstorm was then turned into a paper mâché volcano that included a ladder and red thread, representing lava. The ladder comes down from the neck of the volcano and is missing some steps, creating large gaps from one step to another, with the gaps becoming larger the closer the ladder becomes to the ground. This represents the difficult, and often unpredictable, journey someone may go on when in prison, transitioning from prison to society, and managing the many pains that come with contact with the justice system. Additionally, the threads coming out of the neck of the volcano are attached to pieces of paper that represent the pains of incarceration and social control that the students identified, which were pulled out and read aloud during the presentation.

Figure 2. Collages, Learning Together classroom, Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre and Prison, Belfast

These photos are of two different collages that have images, writing, and painting related to the themes of stigma, labelling, and person-centred language.

The two collage works were created by students in Belfast that explored the topic of stigma, labelling, and person-centred language. In the first collage, the group collated negative labels that are often associated with incarceration and represented them in red paint, associating them with stigmatised terms such as "convict, felon, criminal, druggie, addict, unemployed, scumbag, and homeless." When looking at the image, these painted words overshadow the other labels and photos. In contrast to these stigmatised labels, snippets of magazine images are used to represent the whole magnitude of identities beyond these stigmatised labels which are mostly overlooked in public discourse of prison impacted persons. These images depict family, home, pets, marriage, children, nature, and happiness. Additionally, there are words pasted onto the page from magazines including "safety, beauty, good life, the future, exploring, leisure", the hopeful labels of future life outside prison. The second collage also used words and images from magazines. They split their collage in two sections, one side entitled "good" and the other entitled "bad." In this project, the labels are kept completely separate from each other but make up two halves of a whole page. The "bad" section included terms such as "failed, toxic, convict, killed, lonely, poisoned" and phrases such as "have you heard…". The "good" side of the page included both terms such as "wellbeing, love, pretty, loving, fresh, victory" along with images of shooting stars, depicting the often contrasting and oversimplified ascriptions associated with imprisoned persons. In the remainder of this article, we will demonstrate how cross-disciplinary collaboration between disciplines - in this case Critical Criminology and Visual Arts - can foster critical and emancipatory teaching praxis.

Collaborative and participatory teaching within institutional constraints

Throughout the project, we envisioned the classroom site as a location of peer produced knowledge and solutions for emancipatory changes. To do justice to this, we planned and conducted our engagement as a participatory action research project. This required a balance between working with students as both learners and co-researchers, paired with working within a prison education context, which provided challenges and tensions. Prisons are characterized by deficits in communication and transparency, as well as a lack of control over outcomes (Prison Policy, 2024; Shammas, 2017). Specifically, the challenges faced in delivering education in prison—highlighted during empirical data collection—include limitations in accessing educational resources, constraints on access to the prison and classroom that result in limited time with students, and the difficulty of balancing the demands and restrictions of the prison institution with those of the university (North South Together, 2024). This is underscored in literature on these types of educational programmes, which highlight institutional challenges of teaching and organising research in prison, such as difficulties working with prison officers and officials (Draus & Lempert, 2013), limitations on accreditation of the courses offered (Link, 2016) and creating meaningful partnerships with institutional partners (Leon & Perez, 2018). Furthermore, within the realm of prison research, there are challenges and risks related to exploitation of those in prison via the research done (Gelsthorpe 1990; Toch, 1967). Similarly, within prison university partnerships, a challenge is ensuring that university involvement does not simply deliver a 'service', as there is a risk that 'service' can become an exercise in patronisation (Pompa, 2013). This would mean that university prison partnerships would produce exactly what they "eschew", with particular focus around the risk and issues with power dynamics if participants see themselves as "separate" from each other (e.g. the outside university students holding power over the inside prison-based students) (Pompa, 2013, p.17).

To try to address these challenges as effectively as possible, we formulated a "statement on ethical practice and principles of care" (North South Together, 2024), inspired by the Walk Create Project. (Walk Create, 2021). Drawing on ethical principles developed by feminist and global South/indigenous scholars, (Fals Borda, 1999; Freire, 200;, Wilson, 2008), our guidelines committed to prioritising care, compassion and solidarity with people in prison; seeking to reduce stigma and harms associated with imprisonment. We explicitly formulated our goal as mutual liberation, for both educators and students, through education inside and outside prison walls and building connections across divides to humanise the criminal justice system and evolve society's responses to harm and wrongdoing. The project — both in its teaching as well as research aspects — also committed to centering the lived experiences of all actors as expertise, aiming to break down binaries in knowledge production. These ethical principles were informed by the recognition that structural oppressions and intersectional marginalisation underpin imprisonment (Wilson-Gilmore, 2022).

To put these principles into practice, we collaborated with student 'think tanks' in both Cork and Belfast, to develop elements of the curriculum. From September to December 2024, we conducted classroom observations and collected reflective feedback forms from students after every class to unpack their expectations, learning moments, challenges, and any other insights they wanted to highlight. Additionally, we conducted interviews with facilitators, artists, and prison education unit staff involved in the classrooms. As a result of this participatory nature, more creative teaching and learning practices were built into the curriculum design both North and South. This empirical research data informed the analysis of the creative

artefacts for this case study. In addition to ethnographic classroom observations conducted by researchers in Cork and Belfast, students agreed to share their coursework as an additional data source for the project, which will influence the development of an all-island emancipatory prison education partnership toolkit. In total, we collected 205 reflective feedback forms, 128 classroom artefacts, and 125 reflective essays from 47 students both North and South.

While we were aware that using students' classroom work could have potentially skewed their learning experience, this risk was minimised by the participatory nature of both the classroom and the research project. Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 1999; Fine & Torre, 2021; O'Neill, 2001; 2010) focuses on integrating the voice of lived experience into the conception, design, implementation and dissemination of research projects, which in turn- transforms 'research participants' into co-producers of knowledge (Schubotz, 2019). Key principles of PAR include democratic participation, recognising the lived experience of social issues as knowledge, and creating collaborative space to allow experts by experience to participate in knowledge construction and generativity (Billies, et al., 2010; Lenette et al., 2019; McNaull et al., 2024). Additionally, in line with the ethos of Inside-Out, the facilitator of the course acts as a tutor and a collaborator, promoting mutual learning across all participants and collaborating directly with students as co- producers, thus changing the power dynamics of the classroom (Pompa, 2013).

Furthermore, the research ethics of our project were embedded in every step of the classroom teaching. Each week, students co-created in small groups, showcasing their unique learning perspectives through creative exercises that encouraged them to integrate concepts from the literature with their lived experiences and critical reflections. This integration was expressed through visual maps, presentations, and discussions. Equally, the ethical implications of visual practices, which remind us that both the production as well as the analysis of visual artefacts- in our case study the student collages and paper mâché artwork - are always embedded within entangled hegemonic discourses and power relations (Sontag, 1971; Brown & Carrabine, 2017). To stay attuned to this awareness, we built reflective exercises into the classroom, providing ongoing reminders both for researchers as well as students that visual methods, power relations and researcher positionality can be combined into a conscious effort in producing counter-hegemonic research, allowing researchers to 'write' visual ethnography differently (Gariglio, 2015).

In addition, we adhered to the usual ethical considerations, including informed consent, safeguarding participants' identities (except in cases where disclosures indicated harm to self or others), maintaining confidentiality regarding project data, and anonymizing findings when disseminating results. At every stage, we provided opportunities for consent to be withdrawn, anonymity to be waived and co-researchers to have their participation fully attributed and cited in outputs - an ongoing conversation as the project develops generativity. We will now turn to the analysis of the two sets of group work artefacts- the above pictured collages and paper mâché volcano- produced by students in Belfast and Cork in order to analyse (a) how creative practice in these classrooms can fill abstract criminological concepts with life, surfacing and privileging voices that are often silenced, appreciating lived experience and supporting non-traditional modes of learning (b) how conviviality and generative activity can create civic spaces despite the constraints of the prison university education classroom and (c) how creative practices can contribute to subverting dominant forms of the 'hidden curriculum' that often characterise university and prison education classrooms.

Bringing abstract critical criminological concepts to life via creative practices

Through the usage of creative practices in the *Together* project classrooms, lived experiences, which are central to critical criminology, allowed students to bring abstract theoretical concepts to life in the classroom and in their projects. Among the themes studied, students looked at the 'pains of imprisonment', which Gresham Sykes developed in his now iconic ethnographic study of a maximum-security state prison in New Jersey, USA (2007). Sykes' work formulated that the core pains of imprisonment include the losses of liberty, goods and services, relationships, autonomy, and security (Sykes, 2005, p.65). To connect students with their own but also more contemporary perspectives on these 'pains', students were encouraged to focus on their sensory reflections while accessing education in a prison and reading about other people's lived experience in prison. Students read the work of two scholars with lived experience, including Joseph Dale (2011) and Jason Warr (2021). In his prison diary (2013), Dale recounts his own prison experience including the pains of missing family milestones, the isolation in prison, and how "little things add up" in relation to the deprivation of liberty (Dale, 2011). Warr (2021) detailed the deep sensory experiences of trappedness while being incarcerated. Afterwards students worked in groups to creatively map their sensory experiences of pain and control throughout their daily lives- be it in prison or outside- with a focus on highlighting sensory descriptions.

During the end of the semester group projects, one student group selected the pains of imprisonment and social control as the theme of their project. The group worked together to discuss what these pains meant to them individually and they decided to develop a piece of artwork to express to viewers the personal experiences of the hidden emotions of imprisonment. The 'dormant volcano' was chosen by them to represent the hidden pains building up inside incarcerated individuals with limited legitimate avenues to reflect on, express, and manage these emotions while in prison. During their presentation at the graduation ceremony, each group member pulled a piece of paper out of the middle of the volcano and read out the adverse experiences and feelings associated with incarceration that can build up while behind bars. Through their artwork, students brought to life what Sykes (2007) theorised as the pains of imprisonment, using their own experiences of suffering. These included being defined by a "bad thing" they had done, the loss of freedom, the pain of "not being able to see my sons grow up," and "the pain in my children's faces from not being able to see their father." While the volcano focused on the inside students' experiences of pain, both inside and outside students worked together to conceptualise the emotional toll and anguish related to incarceration and social control, thus creating a powerful experience of co-production, empathy, and understanding. One student reflected on the volcano project: "I believe the volcano is a good representation of the pains of incarceration and how prisoners have to keep a lot of personal issues bottled up if they want to serve a successful sentence. This is a lot easier said than done." Through this exercise, pains that were initially theoretical were made personal and presented in a way that could bring along additional community members. The interactive element presented during the graduation served as a catalyst for meaningful discussions, fostering empathy and understanding among all participants beyond the readings and theories. Guests of the graduation ceremony could hear pins drop when inside and outside students 'performed' the volcano project together, leaving a lasting image of mutual understanding and support rather than distant analysis, which often characterises other Criminology classrooms.

Another theme that was explored in both classrooms North and South was the theme of "Language, Stigma, Labelling, Delabeling." In this class, students engaged with texts by Cox (2020) and Bamenga (2021) to explore the importance and case for using person centred language. Cox (2020, p.5) argues in favour of

person-centred language because “it is a generally destigmatizing approach to people who face innumerable consequences—politically, socially, and psychologically—as a result of being affixed with a label that identifies them as ‘criminal.’” Furthermore, Bamenga (2021), who has lived experience of the criminal justice system, argues that labels such as ‘offender’ are designed to keep people ‘in their place’. In the same vein, Ellis (2020, p.1) writes that derogatory labels such as inmate, animal, convict are “all terms devoid of humanness which identify us as 'things’ rather than as people.” During the lesson, students engaged in creative exercises, including an activity in which each student had labels on their heads that they could not see and had to treat one another based on their assigned label. Afterwards, students reflected on how they felt being treated based on a label and how they felt treating others based on labels, which brought another element of personal experience to the texts.

In Belfast, two different collage groups explored the topic of stigma, labelling, and person-centred language. The theories and sentiments highlighted in these texts were underscored by the collages on language and stigma. With an emphasis on the main arguments of the two class readings, and after discussing their own experiences of labelling and stigma, students decided to make the negative labels stand out, representing the way that stigma may overshadow the other elements of a person's life when they leave prison.

Throughout the discussions during the semester when exploring the content for stigma, labelling, and person-centred language, many students spoke about how the labels society gives them have a negative impact on their lives and how they feel that they are much more than those labels. This idea comes to life in both collages where the negative labels exist alongside the complex realities and magnitude of being human that are visualised. Furthermore, much of the discussions also spoke about how despite the positive attributes and other elements of humanity people hold, it rarely, if ever, cancels out the negative labels and stigma that society attaches to incarceration. Through having darker and more depressing images for the side of “bad” or stigmatising labels, the students brought to life the theories highlighted above in the text about the implications of negative stigma and labelling.

This student’s reflection on the experience of working on the collage and creative group work, demonstrates well how creative and visual practice supported the learning process of abstract concepts:

> Through creating a group piece we were all able to truly expand our knowledge and gain a visual representation of stigma and labelling and what each group member recognises and interprets the topic through/ as a result of previous learning together classes overall leading to the execution or a collage piece visualising displaying both the good and bad concepts and interpretations for women in prison placed within society. (QUB Reflective Feedback Form Week 8)

Another student shared that they found the creative group work “.... really interesting to connect and understand both individual and group concepts of topics such as stigma, labelling means of/for desistance.” (QUB Reflective Feedback Form Week 8) This feedback from students both North and South reinforces the ways in which the creative and visual group projects made abstract concepts more concrete, while also demonstrating the ways in which the process of this learning reinforced convivial spaces and generated new knowledge via collaboration.

Creative practices to support conviviality in the prison university classroom

We propose that creative and visual practices in the Critical Criminology prison university classroom, guided by an emancipatory ethos, can foster conviviality and promote a sense of community and mutual learning. Borrowed from Illich's idea of conviviality (1973), we understand the concept as creating a relational praxis and reducing the distance between educators and learners, and between prison and university students by creating environments of 'joyful gatherings', (Peyrefitte, 2021) and 'convivial learning,' emphasising participatory decision making and collaboration (Illich, 1973; Peyrefitte, 2021; McNaull et al., 2023). 'Conviviality' can also be conceived in terms of dispositions, or 'tools' (following Illich, 1973) in order to resist totalising logics of identity, but to approach subject-hood as a myriad of distributed potentialities (Noble, 2013; Back & Sinha, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016; Berg & Nowicka, 2019), lending itself particularly well to emancipatory prison-university education classroom contexts.

Empirical data gathered through classroom observations, student feedback forms, and reflective essays demonstrate an intentionally created environment that fostered such joyful learning, community, and collaboration. This is particularly important in recognizing the contrast of the emancipatory classroom compared to other spaces within the prison, an institution often categorised as a place of control, limitations, and harm (Fassin, 2016). Sensory observations from several weeks of ethnographic observations noted the difference between the atmosphere of the *Together* classroom compared to the rest of the prison throughout the entire semester. Specifically, the classroom was observed as being warm - marked by laughter, friendly greetings and loud conversation, safe sharing, familiarity building over time. This was in stark contrast to the coldness of the rest of the prison, such as going through security or walking through the corridors, which were marked by short, sometimes harsh, interactions with prison officials, lack of conversation, and tension in the air. We argue that this type of convivial learning was developed not only by the ethos of and building blocks of the *Together* classrooms highlighted above, but also through using the creative methods and projects in this case study. This is evident in the process of making, creating, and learning together demonstrated in the group projects and collage work.

The impact of convivial co-production is underscored in work by Giroux's (2022) thoughts on pedagogy of resistance, in which he argues that students becoming 'cultural producers', rather than consumers, is emancipatory and transformative in and of itself. Through the group work projects, which were scaffolded by a semester of convivial and emancipatory pedagogy, students had the opportunity to work together and co-produce creative representations of the criminological themes explored. Building in collaborative and creative elements into the curriculum meant that the classrooms' soundscape was always layered with laughter and vivid conversations, causing other prison students and staff to take nosey looks through the window of the classroom door. The use of creative practices in the classroom both fostered conviviality and created civic space for generative learning in the classroom where students engage as equal participants in the civic sphere of learning (Behan, 2020). This is particularly important, because "civil, political and social rights are circumscribed with a sentence of imprisonment," (Behan, 2020, p.1283).

The warmth, conviviality, and emancipatory environment that marked the semester, was further demonstrated in the empirical data from the weeks specifically dedicated to group work. During one group work session for example, a group of three students (two outside and one inside student) were laughing so hard about something they were talking about, that they had tears in their eyes, leading one student to

comment: “We’re very funny today aren’t we”. Similarly, during one of the arts-based sessions, it was observed how students were bouncing ideas off each other and discussing how they could take on different elements of the group work project and how they could support one another.

The convivial nature and generative activity highlighted in student feedback and observations was underscored in stakeholder interviews. An artist who worked with students in the Belfast classroom shared the ways in which the students' understanding and enthusiasm for the project developed through the process of creating. Specifically, they stated “you could see at the start they were a bit like ‘what is this’? What are we doing? And then like…they were getting into it properly” while creating the collages together (stakeholder interview 1). Furthermore, in relation to the benefits generated from having a tangible artefact of their learnings to be displayed, they stated “people were genuinely delighted when we put the work up on the wall as well. So that's always a pleasure. And I really think that it was so noticeable” (stakeholder Interview 1). This interview reinforced that the benefits of the creative group work were not just in the making of the art itself but also generated new skills, confidence, and experience in presenting the work to their fellow students.

Furthermore, the benefits of the use of creative practices were not limited to students alone. Through bringing creative practices into criminology classrooms, there was an interdisciplinary element introduced and collaboration between criminologists, educators, and artists. For example, one arts teacher who has been working in prisons for some time shared that the collaboration on these criminology creative projects led to critical new learning. Specifically, in a stakeholder interview, they stated the benefits of the opportunity to “learn from the criminologists and learn a kind of a new language, but also learn a new way of looking at material that maybe I've taken for granted or maybe looked at only in one dimension.” (stakeholder interview 2). Additionally, a criminology lecturer involved in the project shared that working with art teachers on the creative projects has become a strength of the programme as it shifts and enhances the learning in the classrooms (stakeholder interview 3).

Creative practices and subverting the hidden curriculum

As a final point in this article, we suggest that creative approaches to pedagogy in prison-based criminology classrooms can contribute to subverting the “hidden curriculum” (Jackson, 1968, p.34) which are unspoken rules that present themselves to students both in university and prison education classrooms. The hidden curriculum can have both positive and negative effects - such as the cultivation of an environment of conviviality, mutual learning, and respect or at the opposite end, the upholding of hierarchical and transactional environments of learning (Jackson, 1968, p.35). To consider the ‘hidden curriculum’ is particularly useful in the context of prison-university classrooms. The prison itself can be thought of as “a source of unintended natural learning” (Borges et al., 2017, p.154), by definition conveying the identity of ‘prisoner’ over alternative identities, whereas prison education classrooms arguably try to counter these limiting messages, at least in the Irish context, emphasising the ‘adult learner’ identity (Warner, 2018). Equally, the physical design and confines of a prison and prison education classroom are also imbued by the messaging of the ‘hidden curriculum’ (Hibbert & Wright, 2023, p.418). In addition, both prison and university classrooms in contemporary Ireland, despite some nuanced variations, are largely shaped by neo-liberal education frameworks, emphasizing employability, transferable skills, and apprenticeship-style learning (Warner, 2018). Irish prison education has distinguished itself by its foundations in adult education

(Costello, 2013), however it hasn't been untouched by the neoliberal turn either, resulting in a shifting focus ".... from citizenship and community to skills and performativity." (Glanton, 2023, p.788). Similarly, third level education has been infused by a neo-liberal "anxiety" of measurement (Holland et al., 2016) filtering into all aspects of programme development, teaching and learning.

While this point would need to be teased out in more detail in further analysis, the use of creative practice in the critical criminology prison education classroom, supported us to offer an alternative environment to the neo liberalization of education, both in terms of pedagogies as well as teaching content/curriculum. For example, as can be seen from students' creative group work projects discussed in this article, the focus was placed on critical readings of individualising rehabilitation narratives dominating criminal justice discourse as well as readings critical of prison, punishment and the stigmatisation of people behind bars.

Through analysing the data collected and applying creative thinking methods, it became evident that the emancipatory, creative nature of these classrooms led to a more nuanced, deeper understanding of critical criminology topics explored and a new educational experience. As a result of the different ways of teaching and learning that were employed in the *Together* project classrooms, students shared that they felt that this was more inclusive than other educational experiences. For example, one student shared "Usually I struggle to talk in a classroom but this environment lets me feel comfortable to be involved in discussions and present in the group work." Whereas another student said, "Out of all the classes I've been in throughout all of my school experience, this one felt the easiest to speak up in and share my input without the fear of being judged." Speaking more generally about the experience of doing creative group work and collages, one student shared

> All groups were able to bring their own thoughts and opinions towards the artwork based on the chosen topic. Everyone allowed each other to discuss and provide opinions, ideas and thoughts freely with the aim of coming to an equal group decision. For example when selecting cut outs for my group piece I noticed that we sought the approval and relevance from the group as a whole before sticking it down. (QUB Reflective Feedback Form Week 8)

These quotations demonstrate the ways in which the hidden curriculum of emancipatory education and critical criminology created new educational experiences for students. Rather than contributing to the production of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1975) that fit into the neo-liberal logics of rehabilitation, employability and skills training, the critical criminology Inside-Out classroom's creative exercises provided opportunities for students to become 'cultural producers of knowledge', which is central to a 'pedagogy of resistance' (Giroux, 2022).

Concluding reflections

As this case study highlights, the *Together* project brought together two prison-university classrooms and multiple academic disciplines to amplify historically excluded perspectives on prison-university education and co-develop, with students, an all-island approach to convivial pedagogies. This work has elucidated the tensions and challenges of teaching and learning within spaces of penal power. Yet, through participatory and creative methods, we have shown how creative, interdisciplinary approaches can counter traditional education models and carceral logic.

Although emancipatory pedagogy espouses freedom (the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wishes) this 'freedom' is partial for both inside and outside students because 'freedom' is conditioned and qualified through entanglements within neoliberal totalising institutional structures such as the prison and the university. We have shown in this article how the collaboration between educators across different academic disciplines - critical criminology and visual arts - carries the potential for classrooms to raise awareness of these entanglements, allowing disciplined subjects - including both teachers and learners behind bars and universities - to build truly meaningful emancipatory strategies together.

As part of the process of cross-disciplinary collaboration, we faced challenges prevalent in prison education contexts such as inside students being moved to other prisons, controlled and time-limited access to classrooms. As a result, we had to adjust our initial plan to fully integrate visual practices with the critical criminology syllabus. Given the constraints of existing syllabi, we opted for a middle ground, incorporating sensory, visual, and creative thinking practices as supplementary tools to enhance students' understanding of criminological theories. This approach not only alleviated pressure on the arts teams at Cork Prison and HMP Hydebank Wood but also prepared students for collaborative creative work in the final weeks of the semester. Nevertheless, we believe our approach has advanced cross-disciplinary teaching and fostered mutual dialogue between disciplines, institutional contexts, and learners, in line with the spirit of emancipatory education.

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Together Project Website: https://www.northsouthtogether.com/

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