Emancipatory Pedagogy in Prison: Participatory Action Research and Prison/ University Partnerships

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Summary: Increasingly, researchers, practitioners and policymakers in the fields of criminal justice, criminology and associated professional practices are realising their responsibility to consider their roles in reinforcing, mediating or dismantling the persisting power differentials that remain between those 'delivering' criminal justice interventions and those receiving them. What might appear as a 'lofty' and abstract ideal is, however, neither novel nor unique. Research and practice traditions which draw on 'lived experiences' of criminal justice in the co-production of knowledge, including Convict Criminology, are increasingly finding their way into mainstream policy, practice and academic research.

This paper draws from the North–South TOGETHER collaboration, which seeks to research and share with others on the island of Ireland transformative teaching and research practices in university–prison classrooms. Co-produced learning can dismantle the barriers between those affected by the criminal justice system and those who are not. We invite readers to consider how the methodological approach of participatory action research (PAR) can produce 'symmetrical reciprocity' in the relational field of research, while concurrently feeding into professional praxis, in our case as educators, but equally imaginable for those practising criminal justice in different capacities. We suggest that pedagogy emphasising relationship building, mutuality and conviviality, foundational elements of PAR, can produce more meaningful types of knowledge or 'evidence', transforming our individual praxis and reimagining design of the delivery of justice.

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Introduction

Despite efforts to reform prison institutions globally and embed the rehabilitative functionality of imprisonment, the violence of incarceration persists (see Scraton and McCullough 2008), with prisons in the UK and Ireland experiencing overcrowding, capacity issues, excess periods of confinement (or 'bang up'), and the deleterious effects of these issues (HMIP, 2021; HMIP, 2023; IPRT, 2022; PRT, 2022). In addition, the disproportionate criminalisation of specific groups relating to class, gender, race, nationhood and ability has illuminated the inequalities of a criminal justice system that over-polices and disproportionately imprisons specific populations (see, for example, Lammy, 2017; Joyce 2020), while egregious social harms perpetrated by those with power in society remain predominantly unchecked (Hillyard *et al.*, 2004; Canning and Tombs, 2021). For those 'outsider' professionals who work within prisons, such as partnering statutory and third-sector organisations and academics, uncritical practice can reproduce institutional prerogatives, compound the harms of imprisonment, and fail to create meaningful change for the prisoner populations we purport to aid. In conjunction with these structural concerns, many practitioners, researchers and policymakers are increasingly aware of the flawed nature of knowledge production that fails to centre the voices and needs of those with lived experience of criminal justice broadly, and prison in particular (see Harriot and Aresti, 2018, Grace *et al.*, 2022). A traditional lack of prisoner voice in both criminal justice research and statutory and non-statutory services has led to knowledge creation that privileges the professional standpoint, filtering knowledge through a 'privileged lens', which prioritises organisational viewpoint and understandings (Aresti *et al.*, 2016, p. 8).

Within the arena of prison-related knowledge production lies the prison–university education sphere. Traditionally, prison and university education have run along parallel but separate tracks. In the UK and Ireland, the Open University has a strong tradition of bringing tertiary level education into the prison site (see Earle and Mehigan, 2022). In recent years, the Learning Together model has striven to extend this foundation not just by bringing

third-level education to prisoners, but by bringing the prisoner standpoint into university education, using a format where university students are brought into prison to 'learn together' with people in prison (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016).

The US model of prison–university partnerships, the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (Inside-Out), has been developing this format since the mid-1990s, producing a pedagogical space where prison student-led learning enriches traditional university curriculum with the 'insider' perspective (Hyatt, 2009; Pompa, 2004; Pompa, 2013; Davis and Roswell, 2013). In 2019, both of these models arrived on the island of Ireland, with the Learning Together partnership between Queen's University Belfast and Hydebank Wood College, and the Inside-Out project between University College Cork and Cork Prison. These two projects have now united through the North–South HEA-funded Participatory Action Research project, 'TOGETHER', which strives to produce a unique user-led island-of-Ireland pedagogy, inspired by, yet distinct from, its respective UK/USA foundations and heritage.

The aim of this paper is to set the scene from which this innovative project emerges, laying out the landscape of lived-experience-based participatory methods and knowledge production and emancipatory prison education praxis. The first section will outline the development of the lived-experience lens broadly, and in criminal justice and prisons specifically. In the second section, the development of education in prisons and the heritage of Inside Out and Learning Together prison–university education partnerships will be explored broadly. Finally, the development of Participatory Action Research and emancipatory prison education praxis will be unpacked, as we explore the benefits for students, educators and practitioners, and for knowledge production more broadly.

'Nothing about us without us' – Lived experience of criminal justice

The shadow of the prison site looms over all interpersonal dynamics and practice within its walls, inserting unequal power dynamics and hierarchies of knowing. Alongside the structural issues that pervade the practice of third-sector and academic practitioners collaborating with prison institutions, these actors also increasingly recognise the problematic nature of traditional models of both service provision and knowledge production in this arena. Broadly, the ethics of prison research have historically raised concerns of coercion and exploitation, but equally, questions regarding respect, justice

and equal opportunity to participate in potentially beneficial research (Pope *et al.*, 2007). Within this, criminological research in prisons has traditionally been framed by a 'masculinist paradigm' (Gelsthorpe, 1990, p. 91), deployed through positivist approaches, which often 'invisibilises' the researcher and objectifies participants, rendering them powerless (Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013). This can lead to exploitation of research participants as their lives and experiences become reduced to 'sources of data' (Gelsthorpe, 1990, p. 93; Toch, 1967).

Ethnographic criminological researchers have aimed to move beyond positivist, objectivistic quantitative research through research methods grounded in the experience of reality (Adler and Adler, 1998), yet even these approaches can 'sidestep any suggestions of connectedness' between researcher and participant (Jewkes, 2011, pp 63–4). Equally, feminist researchers highlight the discomforts of traditional criminological research endeavours, emphasising the need to be participant centred, to deconstruct power differentials through non-hierarchical practice, to address ethical concerns of exploitation and disempowerment of marginalised populations, and to frame participants not as subjects but instead as knowledge agents (Carlen *et al.*, 1985; Gelsthorpe, 1990; Bosworth, 1999; Malloch, 2000; Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Renzetti, 2013). Central to this practice is the aim to reduce the distance between researcher and those researched, breaking through the professional barrier with empathy, honesty, self-disclosure, research, support and advocacy (Gelsthorpe, 1990; Bosworth *et al.*, 2005; Leverentz, 2014; Renzetti, 2013).

However, despite efforts to overcome ethical issues of criminological research to produce more participant-centred practice, discomforts remain regarding ownership, benefit and exploitation of prisoner narratives. Criminologists run the risk of becoming 'successful pimps, selling dramatic accounts of crime and criminals' (Ferrell and Hamm, 1998, p. 4). As Hans Toch (1967, p. 74) ponders, even the best intentioned researchers ask something 'that is unreasonable and unfair', becoming 'at best … supplicants, and at worst, invaders demanding booty of captive audiences' through requests for 'a fellow human being to bare his soul'.

The output of these intimate details of lives lived can result in silencing and misrepresentation of marginalised groups by academic researchers and policymakers – outsiders – via 'oppressive knowledge production' characterised by pathologisation, paternalisation, oversimplification and 'extractive exotification' (Yarbrough, 2020, p. 58). Rather than producing beneficial change,

Yarbrough's participants identified 'criminological knowledge production as an important cause of social inequality', producing harmful policy consequences (2020, p. 59). Piché and colleagues also challenge 'the idea of the academic as an authorized knower of prisons and jails' (Piché *et al.*, 2014, p. 450).

Despite a proliferation of participatory research methods and co-production in recent years, researchers with lived experience can find themselves doubly marginalised in this process. First, by the oppressive intersecting structures that feed into criminalisation and imprisonment, and second, in the academic arena 'where their contributions to knowledge are seldom recognized' (Piché *et al.*, 2014, p. 450). This has led to a movement to challenge the idea of 'what it means to "give voice" in criminology', in a move instead towards 'privileging the standpoint of prisoners' and dismantling the dominance of 'the academic as an authorized knower of prisons' (Piché *et al.*, 2014, p. 450).

More broadly, academic, statutory and non-statutory actors face criticism from service-users questioning the development of policy and knowledge creation 'in their name'. Across the fields of health, mental health, disability and recovery, activists and advocates have instead been calling for 'nothing for us without us', a recognition across sectors that those with lived experience of social issues need others not to speak for them but instead to create space for them to use their own voice to create change. Charlton (1998), in his foundational text on the disability rights movement, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, describes liberatory aims of disability activists to take control over their narratives and futures, reclaiming their power from oppressive paternalistic institutional responses.

This call for self-determination has also emerged in the arena of addiction, where William White (2000) outlines a 'new recovery movement', aiming to resist structures which turn service-users into 'helpless victims of the system' and instead create a paradigm shift towards service-user centrality in the social policies that impact on their lives. This entails 'joining together to achieve goals that transcend … mutual support needs' and 'advocating for the needs of addicted and recovering people' (White, 2000, p. 5). Sex-worker advocates have similarly mobilised collectively to resist the criminalisation and stigmatisation that negatively impact on their lives, demanding that 'our voices be heard, listened to and respected … we condemn those who would steal our voices and say that we do not have the capacity to make decisions or articulate our needs' (Dziuban *et al.*, 2015, p. 40). Meanwhile, the collectives 'Mad in America', 'Mad in the UK' and 'Hearing Voices Network Ireland' critique medicalising and pathologising biomedical responses to

mental health issues, resisting their oppressive and harmful impact and empowering service-users to reframe their narratives (see Watson, 2019).

For those delivering services in the criminal justice system, failure to prioritise the needs and experiences of those who are experts in imprisonment – prisoners – can lead to practice that does not address the distinct issues prison populations experience, instead working to reproduce the professional gaze of the institution and partners. This can be an explicit process, with certain voices marginalised on the basis of discrimination and intersecting structural oppressions, or as an implicit outcome of capacity/administrative issues and a reliance on embedded practice which excludes the prisoner voice (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021). That said, the value of service-user involvement in criminal justice is increasingly acknowledged, with formerly imprisoned people and those in prison recognised for their potential to use their experiences to help and inspire others as 'wounded healers' (Maruna, 2001; LeBel *et al.*, 2015; Maruna, 2017). Utilising the voices of 'experts by experience' has been pioneered by organisations of the penal voluntary and penal reform sectors, leading to their insights informing policy and implementation (Clinks, 2017; PRT, 2020; User Voice, 2023a).

Within prison and probation, services that utilise prisoner experience in the form of peer-mentoring programmes are increasingly prominent (Buck *et al.*, 2022), with 92 per cent of criminal justice mentoring in England now delivered by peer mentors (Buck, 2021). One example of this is the Samaritans Listener scheme, which has been running in England since 1991 and in Ireland since 2002. This scheme trains prisoners to provide emotional support to those suffering from distress and suicidal ideation within the prison community (Jaffe, 2012). Participating in criminal justice practice can be a positive and rewarding experience for peer participants but can also have negative outcomes where implementation is 'exclusionary, shame-provoking and precarious' (Buck *et al.*, 2022, p. 822).

Organisations that centre lived experience in their practice can inadvertently end up diluting and silencing the user's voice, and can fail to facilitate their inclusion in knowledge production or policy direction (Aresti *et al.*, 2016; Harriott and Aresti, 2018). Harriot and Aresti set out a call for action to challenge prisoner 'voicelessness', citing the tradition of prisoner-led organisations such as Groupe d'information sur les prisons in France and KROM in Norway, which provided a model for prisoner activism and a platform for the prisoner voice (Harriot and Aresti, 2018). This tradition is continued in the UK with the prisoner movement hosted by the Prison Reform

Network, the Prisoner Policy Network, working to 'shape policy, affect delivery of services, and build grassroots confidence in self-determination' (Harriott and Aresti, 2018, p. 40).

Within prisons and probation, the UK organisation User Voice was set up and is led by those with lived experience of criminal justice. Running since 2009, it aims to democratise criminal justice institutions through the formation of prison and probation councils, which create the framework for prisoners and probationers to voice issues and effect change in their environment (User Voice, 2023b). More broadly, the organisation and its councils work across systems to produce policy reports and recommendations on issues affecting prisoners, such as the impact of spice, neurodiversity and COVID-19 on prison populations (User Voice, 2016, 2021; Queen's University Belfast and User Voice, 2022). These models counter the traditional professionalised lens, which produces much policy and procedure in criminal justice settings, instead ensuring practice that has a foundation in prisoner knowledge and agency. To date, no similar comparable organisations or initiatives have emerged in the Republic of Ireland.

For academic researchers concerned with the politics of traditional forms of knowledge extraction from marginalised groups, two frameworks for response have emerged. One framework for platforming the 'user' standpoint in criminal justice is the development of 'convict criminology', which is the strand of the criminology discipline led by those with lived experience of prison and criminal justice institutions (Toch, 1967; Earle, 2018; Honeywell, 2021; Aresti *et al.*, 2023). It platforms the views of experts by experience within criminological theory and reasoning, holding the potential to provide intimate insights into the loss of liberty, the lived experience of imprisonment and punishment, alongside 'finding freedoms, earning privileges, expulsion from society … and most of all, the transcendent potential of teaching and learning' (Earle, 2018, pp 1513–4). Convict criminology has been instrumental in 'changing the way in which crime and justice are researched', serving to 'breathe new life into the traditional classroom or research enterprise' and instrumental in transforming the discipline into something 'defensible as an academic area of study' (Maruna, 2017, p. 16).

More broadly, Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see O'Neill, 2001 and O'Neill *et al.*, 2004) is a methodology utilised across multiple fields, focused on integrating the voice of lived experience in research conception, design, implementation and dissemination (Schubotz, 2019). PAR aims to transform 'research participants' into co-producers of knowledge (Schubotz, 2019).

Participatory methodologies have developed 'in the trenches' of social movements (Fine, 2013, p. 688), particularly in the global south where participatory 'people power' was foundational to social justice and labour movements and a key aspect of emancipatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, 1999; Illich, 1973).

With academic origins in the 'action research' of psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946), 'participatory research' was adopted across disciplines, with the Participatory Research Network set up in the field of education in 1977 (Hall, 1981). PAR is based on principles of 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 (Billies *et al.*, 2010; Torre *et al.*, 2012; Lenette *et al.*, 2019). In this way, as a participatory methodology, it holds the potential to address authentically power imbalances and hierarchies between researchers and groups being 'researched', using collective endeavour to produce fundamental social change that can transform lives and social situations (Hall, 1981; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Wadsworth, 1998). More broadly, through provision of academic rigor to liberatory endeavours, PAR can be emancipatory, changing communities, society and reducing socio-political inequalities (Billie *et al.*, 2010; Fine, 2013; Lenette *et al.*, 2019).

Within criminology, while the discipline has been slow to adopt PAR principles (Haverkate *et al.*, 2020), innovative, creative examples have been emerging including O'Malley's game design with women in Limerick Prison (2018), Harding's photovoice research with women's centres in England (2020), and Jarldorn and Deer's poetry research with former prisoners in Australia (2020). More recently, Haarmans and colleagues have used PAR to explore Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) pathways in the male estate of HMPPS (2021), while Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and User Voice (2022) collaborated to uncover the prisoner experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the USA, PAR methodologies have a longer history in prisons, predominately at the nexus of prison–university education partnerships (see Fine *et al.*, 2001; Fine *et al.*, 2003; Fine, 2013; Fine *et al.*, 2021; Payne and Bryant, 2018). PAR is particularly powerful in the prison setting, where the prison walls can obtrude knowledge production and inflict hierarchical ways of knowing. Utilised, it holds the potential to activate the 'distinct and critical' knowledge of incarcerated people (Farrell *et al.*, 2021), reducing power differentials to produce more authentic findings (Haverkate *et al.*, 2020) and allowing their lived experience of policy and procedure implementation to affect material and system change.

Education in prisons – pedagogy inside

Overview of prison education in Ireland and Northern Ireland

To understand better what is meant by emancipatory practices in prison education, it is important to outline some of the main features of prison education across the island of Ireland. What constitutes 'prison education' and how it is organised varies by jurisdiction (Warner, 2002, p. 1). Traditionally in the Republic of Ireland, work training is provided by prison officers and internal prison staff, whereas prison education services are typically delivered by external educational agencies, which focus on non-vocational training (Warner, 2002, p. 1). Specifically, the Irish Prison Service (IPS) has partnered with the Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) to deliver education within the prisons, ranging from Basic Education to Third Level programmes (Irish Prison Service, 2019, p. 1). In addition, the Open University (OU) has delivered third-level education in Irish prisons (Costelloe, 2003).

In Northern Ireland, prison education is encompassed within 'Learning and Skills', which includes a focus on literacy, language and numeracy skills, and employment training (Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2022). Prison education is delivered in partnership between the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College (Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2022). Furthermore, NIPS supports those who are interested in pursuing higher-level education while incarcerated, which is often provided by the Open University using a distance-learning style of teaching (Department of Justice, Northern Ireland, 2023).

Prison education in the Republic of Ireland is informed by the Prisons Act, 2007 and the Prison Rules, 2007, which 'set out the various conditions in prisons in Ireland, including: admission, registration, accommodation, visiting rights, health, discipline, education, etc.' (IPRT, 2023b). In addition, the Irish Prison Service's *Joint Education Strategy 2019–2022* outlines far-reaching and ambitious aims of the prison education service to 'deliver a high quality, broad, flexible programme of education that helps people in custody cope with their sentence, achieve personal development, prepare for life after release and establish an appetite and capacity for life-long learning' (Irish Prison Service, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, the Prison Education Taskforce, which is made up of government department representatives, statutory agencies, and formerly incarcerated individuals, aims to 'ensure education and training opportunities are available to prisoners' in the Republic of Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2023). The taskforce met in May 2023 to

determine a 2023 work plan focused on 'apprenticeships and retrofitting' and 'greater alignment across the prison education and training services and tertiary provision', with a focus on securing post-release employment (Government of Ireland, 2023).

The Northern Ireland Prison Service, on the other hand, is governed by the Prison Act (Northern Ireland), 1953, Treatment of Offenders Act (Northern Ireland), 1978, and the Prisons and Young Offenders Centres Rules (Northern Ireland), 1995 (Department of Justice, Northern Ireland, 2010). In 2011, following an independent review of prison conditions, the Northern Irish Government set out to reform the prison service to become more 'efficient, compact, and focused on reducing offending' (Butler, 2017, p. 1). Following these reforms, the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, 2014 led to the transformation of Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre (YOC), a restrictive facility with limited educational services, into a secure training college with professional educational partnerships delivering services with individually assessed learning plans for students (Flanagan and Butler, 2018). The partnerships highlighted above, between the Northern Ireland Prison Service and Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College, were implemented in 2015 as a result of these reforms (Butler, 2017). Furthermore, the strategic framework, *Prisons 25 by 25*, identifies 'learning and skills' as a priority, with the focus on providing 'development opportunities focused on preparing individuals for release with the skills needed to make a positive contribution to society'" (Northern Ireland Prison Service, 2022, p. 14).

In addition to state-specific policies and frameworks, penal education policy across the island is influenced by international standards and guidelines, which include the Council of Europe's European Prison Rules, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (2015), known as the Mandela Rules, and the Council of Europe's 1989 Recommendations for Prison Education (Gray *et al.*, 2019). The European Prison Rules were developed by the Council of Europe and 'set out standards on the management of prisons and the treatment of people in prison'. Rules 28 and and 106 state that people should have 'access to comprehensive educational programmes', while Rule 103 states that education should be incorporated into individual sentencing plans (Penal Reform International and the Council of Europe, 2023, pp 83–4).

Furthermore, the Council of Europe's recommendations on Education in Prison (1989) state that those in prison should have access to the same quality of adult education inside the prison as they would in the community (1). This

demands a 'wide ranging perspective' of education that looks at the needs and development of participants, resulting in diverse educational opportunities that look at the whole person (Warner, 2002, pp 32, 33). However, while there are thus policy imperatives in place to underpin the delivery of prison education, the provision and quality of education within prisons is not guaranteed and often varies by country. This is often linked to the attitudes and perceptions that society holds towards incarcerated individuals. Typically, the more punitive a society is, the less likely it is that developmental education will be valued and delivered in prisons (Costelloe and Warner, 2014, p. 179).

Third-level education and Prison–University Partnerships

Access to third-level education in prisons across the island of Ireland has traditionally been delivered via distance-learning programmes, with the Open University (OU) being one of the largest providers of this service (Costelloe, 2003, p. 5). The OU was first established in the United Kingdom in 1969 by Royal Charter, with an aim to make education accessible for all people via distance learning and no prior entry requirements (The Open University, 2023). The OU's official mandate of 'promoting educational opportunities and social justice by providing high quality education to all' quickly led to a radical reputation (Earle *et al.*, 2021, pp 71–2). Furthermore, the mandate in the charter of promoting 'education well-being of the community generally' resulted in the provision of prison education (Earle *et al.*, 2021, p. 72).

In 1972, the OU first began delivering education in Northern Irish prisons in Long Kesh Detention Centre, where many who were political prisoners were being held without trial (Earle *et al.*, 2021, p. 77). As mentioned above, the OU continues to be the main way in which prisoners in Northern Ireland can access third-level education. In the Republic of Ireland, the OU began delivering education in prisons in 1985 and, for a period of time, 'the OU was the sole provider of degree level courses taken by Irish prisoners' (Costelloe, 2003, pp 5–6). In 1976, the OU took its provision of education in prisons further by introducing a Summer School that brought outside students to study alongside the students in prison (Earle *et al.*, 2021, p. 77), but this did not become an embedded model.

Collaborations between prisons and universities have become more prevalent in recent years (see Prisoners' Education Trust, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2019). There is a range of different typologies of collaborations between prisons and universities, such as: 'inside and outside students studying together in prison, professors teaching and mentoring in prisons, outside students teaching/

mentoring inside students, inside students studying at university on day release, digital and distance learning' (Champion, 2018, pp 9–14). These programmes aim to foster knowledge exchanges to 'encourage active participation and nurture dynamic processes of self-realisation' (Gray *et al.*, 2019, p. 7).

Furthermore, these collaborations can contribute to 'wider social change', such as empathy among diverse participants, increased support for penal policy reforms, access to degree-level education for those affected by the justice system, reintegration, and greater awareness of the systemic factors that have an impact on social issues (Gray *et al.*, 2019, p. 7). Partnerships between universities and prisons can vary depending on the area of the study, length of the programme, and the participants involved (Prisoners' Education Trust, 2019, p. 14). According to the Prisoners' Education Trust, partnership types can include seminar-style programmes, reading groups, mentoring schemes, creative collaborations, placement schemes, and international modules such as Inside-Out (US based) or Learning Together (UK based) (2019, pp 4–5).

Across Ireland, a number of collaborations between prisons and universities have emerged in recent years. Since 2017, University College Cork (UCC) and the Cork Prison Education Unit have collaborated through teaching different aspects of visual thinking in a convivial learning environment, so that students learn to use creative expressions, allowing them to reflect on their experiences of incarceration and their desistance journeys. This work culminates in an annual summer art exhibition on Spike Island in Cork harbour (Cooper and Cronin, 2022).

In 2019, the 'Mountjoy Prison and Maynooth University Partnership' launched, with an aim for Maynooth University to deliver a variety of educational programmes within Mountjoy Prison such as a storytelling exchange with both university students and incarcerated students, lecture series within the prison, and research projects (Maynooth University, 2023). In 2019, academics from UCC and QUB developed emancipatory prison education partnerships with Cork Prison and HMP Hydebank Wood in which degree-level courses are delivered for both university students and students in prison. Influenced by international models, the UCC and QUB courses are among the first types of emancipatory educational partnerships on the island of Ireland that enable community-based outside students to study alongside prison-based incarcerated students for ongoing, semester-long modules.

The Cork module is based on the US Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, which was supported in its set-up at UCC by Durham University's Inside-Out Programme (King *et al.*, 2019), and is the first Inside-Out programme in

Ireland. The course, 'From Criminal Justice to Social Justice', is delivered by UCC's Department of Criminology and Sociology and explores contemporary issues in criminology around the topics of criminal justice and social justice, in both an Irish and international context. It is a 12-week second/third year BA Criminology module that is delivered to approximately ten undergraduate criminology students and ten incarcerated men in Cork Prison.

The Belfast programme is affiliated with the UK-based 'Learning Together' model and is delivered by QUB's School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work in HMP Hydebank Wood Secure College. In addition to delivering a class with both inside and outside students, the course, 'Reintegration after Prison', focuses on theory and research around prisoner resettlement and desistance. This course is unique in that it is delivered to both men and women inside Hydebank prison, learning together in the same classroom. Furthermore, it is the only opportunity for Hydebank residents to experience a face-to-face university class and learn alongside university students. To place these Irish programmes in a larger context, it is important to explore the foundation of the respective models that have influenced emancipatory prison–university partnerships across Ireland to date.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

Inside-Out is a US based, internationally applied, prison–university partnership model that brings together university-based students with incarcerated students in a semester-long, college-level course delivered inside a prison. Developed in 1997 by Lori Pompa, a Criminal Justice professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Inside-Out is an 'educational program with an innovative pedagogical approach tailored to facilitate dialogue across difference' (Inside-Out Center, 2023). The programme was first founded after Pompa took a group of undergraduate students to the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution for a tour, and an incarcerated participant suggested that they develop a longer seminar series for community-based students and incarcerated students (Pompa, 2013). The first official class, 'The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Exploring Issues of Crime and Justice behind the Walls', was delivered in 1997. Since its formation, materials and criteria have been developed, which has allowed for the replication of the programme across the United States and internationally (Inside-Out Center, 2023).

In 2002, when Inside-Out expanded to Graterford Prison, the students developed 'think tanks', which created space to keep discussions and collective learning going beyond the semester-long module (Pompa, 2013,

p. 4). A key output of the initial think tank was a training framework to make a national model for implementing Inside-Out beyond Pennsylvania. As a result, all Inside-Out instructors participate in a formal training process, which includes a week-long, 60-hour intensive training that involves meetings inside a prison with think-tank participants (Pompa, 2013, p. 4). To date, over 15,000 students have gone through the programme across North America (Davis and Rosewall, 2013, p. 1) and instructors have been trained to deliver Inside-Out in the UK, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand (Inside-Out Center, 2023). In 2014, the first Inside-Out programme outside North America was delivered in the UK as a partnership between Durham University and HMP Durham (King *et al.*, 2019) and as highlighted above, the UCC module is the first Inside-Out programme in Ireland and also includes a think tank in Cork Prison.

From the outset, Pompa (2013) stressed that Inside-Out is not meant to be charity, advocacy, activism or research. Rather, it is an educational programme that aims to bring about social change through the creation of intentional, collaborative learning spaces (Pompa, 2013). Practitioners and proponents of Inside-Out have described it as the 'embodiment of transformative education', designed in a way that promotes experiential learning (Butin, 2013, p. x). Furthermore, they have argued that Inside-Out 'is rooted in reciprocity, dialogue, and collaboration' (Davis and Rosewall, 2013b, p. 3). In these spaces, the instructor's role is more of a facilitator, 'encouraging ongoing dialogue and collaborative work' in a space in which all participants are equal learners (Pompa, 2013, p. 239).

An inside student, who helped develop some of the first Inside-Out courses, reflected on how Inside-Out was different from any other college course he had ever taken and noted the experience of constructing 'knowledge organically through the dynamics of shared dialogue' during the class (Perry, 2013, p. 40). While the core of Inside-Out is prison–university partnerships, the programme has grown to include 'an international network of trained faculty, students, alumni, think tanks, higher education and correctional administrators, and other stakeholders' committed to social justice issues (Inside-Out Center, 2023). The Inside-Out model of emancipatory prison education partnerships has influenced the development of similar models farther afield, such as Learning Together in the UK.

Learning Together

Learning Together is a UK-based prison–university partnership that, similar to Inside-Out, brings together university students to study alongside students in prison for a degree-level class over the course of a semester (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016). The programme was founded by Dr Ruth Armstrong and Dr Amy Ludlow in 2014, with a pilot partnership between University of Cambridge and HMP Grendon (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016). According to the founders, Learning Together is inspired by 'the diverse forms that university and prison partnerships can take' and 'seeks to build upon the long British history of mutual learning and participatory research in prisons' (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, the founders recognised that while opportunities for mutual learning between incarcerated students and community-based students were becoming more common in other regions, such as the US, they were less prevalent in the UK (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, p. 10).

Learning Together is influenced by Freire's 'vision of education as the practice of freedom', and therefore seeks to 'establish locally adapted learning communities in collaboration with students' (Ludlow *et al.*, 2019, pp 25–6). Furthermore, there are five core values that lay the foundation of the Learning Together programme: 'equality, diffuse power, a belief in potential, connection through shared activities and the individually and socially transformational power of togetherness' (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, p. 11). Learning Together classrooms aim to be experimental and dialogical, and ensure that everyone in the classroom is a student 'learning with, from, and through each other' (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, pp 10–1). Through co-creating transformative learning spaces, participants can 'engage with knowledge in ways that are both individually and socially transformative' (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, p. 10).

In addition to the delivery of degree-level modules within the prison for inside and outside students, Learning Together has also developed a Learning Network, which includes universities and prisons collaborating on learning partnerships and best practices, and responding to emerging needs (Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016, p. 10). Since 2014, over 40 universities and prisons across England and Wales have joined the Learning Together Network (Ludlow *et al.*, 2019, p. 25). Furthermore, in 2016, Liverpool John Moores University expanded Learning Together beyond the prison walls for individuals with personal or professional experience of the criminal justice

system, including individuals on probation, to study with university students in a similar model (Gosling *et al.*, 2020).

Armstrong and Ludlow (2016) argue that there are opportunities to learn more about the impacts of Learning Together, and other prison–university partnerships, including the individuals who participate but also the institutions and communities associated with the programme. It is important to note some discontinuation and pauses in the delivery of Learning Together that have impacts on the overall scale and scope of the model. In 2019, during the five-year anniversary celebration of Learning Together, there was an attack on delegates at the event by a former inside student, which tragically ended in the death of two Learning Together staff and the former student (Armstrong, 2022a). This resulted in the halt of Learning Together in many places across the UK and the official decision to discontinue the programme at the University of Cambridge. As Armstrong reflects, 'there can be no recovery from such devastation, but lessons can be learned and good can be salvaged' (Armstrong, 2022a). Following on from this event, Ruth Armstrong has worked with criminal justice and academic practitioners to develop a framework for evaluating Learning Together and ensuring that best practices are in place for delivery and evaluation (Armstrong, 2022a).

An additional blow to the delivery of these programmes was the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the withdrawal of in-person delivery of Learning Together in many sites. However, the Learning Together class with QUB and Hydebank Wood continued throughout the pandemic. Outside students video called into the prison classroom, which allowed them to build community during an isolating time.

The Learning Together and Inside-Out models transform what prison–university education partnerships can be, building community across diverse spaces and dismantling traditional top-down models of learning and knowing. However, the models do not come without cautions. Bumiller (2013) argues that Inside-Out programmes run the risk of complicity with the institutional power they consider themselves to run counter to, if the learning within these classrooms does not observe the harmful forces of both the academy and the prison setting. Focus on 'what' is taught can awaken 'students' common-sense notions about power and legitimacy … [and] the uncertain foundations of taken-for-granted rules and institutional norms' (Bumiller, 2013, p. 183). Meanwhile, Gray and colleagues argue that the 'how' of teaching must centre 'transformative pedagogical practices at their heart' to ensure that these models fully harness their potential (Gray *et al.*, 2019, p. 7). The next section

unpacks these ideas on the 'what' and 'how' of the Together classroom, fusing PAR methodology with the prison classroom to discuss what truly emancipatory prison praxis could be.

Key principles: Participatory action research (PAR) and emancipatory prison education praxis which inform the TOGETHER collaboration

Togetherness through difference: symmetrical reciprocity and conviviality

This final section offers initial reflections on some principles of practice that are considered central to both PAR and emancipatory prison education praxis. Without wanting to preclude the outcomes of the TOGETHER project and the all-island prison–university partnership toolkit, which will be co-developed with prison and university students over the next twelve months, we consider these principles as informing the ethos of the TOGETHER project/collaboration. These principles, which will now be discussed in turn, include dialogical research and teaching practices that prioritise the formation of authentic and non-hierarchical relationships; the focus on unearthing subjugated or 'disqualified' types of knowledge; and lastly teaching and research practice that is anti-oppressive and embodied, using the senses and emotions, in forging human connections across social difference and paying attention to their effects on research findings.

Both the emancipatory prison-education classroom as well as participatory action research put an emphasis on collaborative practice, where encounters in the research or classroom setting are designed so that 'trust can emerge as a relational good' (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019, p. 133). Relational good, that which is produced by members of a collective 'to generate a relationship from which benefits derive for all those who participate in it' (Donati, 2019, p. 238) is a core aspect of the emancipatory prison classroom. The establishment of relationships that encourage trust is arguably important in any type of interpersonal setting, but particularly so in low-trust environments, such as prisons, and in spheres that are dominated by power differentials. Learners or research participants are enabled to engage in dialogue with each other and, across perceived social differences, to explore together ways of learning or researching collaboratively. Importantly, the relational good here is understood as an ethical practice in itself, rather than as an instrumental mechanism to harvest research findings, achieve preconceived learning outcomes or produce learning artefacts.

The social distance between college students and prison students or academic researchers and imprisoned persons is usually quite large. Informed

by their joint emancipatory praxis from the Global South, both the emancipatory prison-education classroom and participatory action research seek to bridge this social distance by establishing a 'symmetry in social relations' (Fals Borda, 1999, p.16). To achieve this symmetry, the traditional hierarchy between teacher and student and between researcher and research participant, the expertise of the 'instructor', 'researcher' or criminal justice 'professional' or 'expert' is de-centred. Rather, the focus shifts towards dialogical praxis and the collaborative enterprise in the particular research and classroom setting that becomes the site of knowledge creation (Freire, 1970/2005; Ludlow and Armstrong, 2016; Pompa, 2013).

According to Freire (1970/2005), dialogical praxis is a commitment to dialogue that is based on mutual respect and care, including the capacity to reflect critically on one's own positions and beliefs, as well as a commitment to act jointly as a result of this dialogue. This is both particularly relevant and challenging in prison-education and prison-research settings, where the upholding of relational power differentials is built into the very design of the social practice of imprisonment, and it takes time, thoughtfulness and effort to overcome these challenges. Equally, traditional classroom structures in universities can reproduce hierarchy and be infused with institutional prerogatives.

To create relational praxis and in order to reduce the distance between educator and learners and prison and university research collaborators, we are borrowing from Illich's idea of conviviality (1973), where 'convivial learning', i.e. learning in 'joyful gatherings' (Peyrefitte, 2021), emphasises participatory decision-making and collaborative explorations of justice within and beyond the third-level classroom, paying particular attention to often unheard voices. From our experiences of both the Inside-Out and Learning Together classrooms, it is the creation and sharing of convivial moments – be it through what might appear like mundane tasks such as ice-breakers or creating visual posters, or through small group work – that provides opportunities for dialogue and reciprocity (Peyrefitte, 2021). This can reduce the social distance between inside and outside students, teachers and learners, and researcher and research participants.

This also resonates with McNeill and Urie's (2020, p. 9) reflections on their collaborative action research on reintegration through song-writing, where they point out that the collaborative process itself was most instructive: 'Crucially, from a research perspective, we were beginning to learn that making things together (whether songs or food or events) was generating

new knowledge and new insight; and that these co-creative practices changed the dynamic and quality of our engagements with one another and our learning together' (McNeill, 2015). Activating the practice of conviviality as part of our research and teaching praxis might also inspire others to 'think beyond some of the more neoliberal imperatives that govern academia today and shape our sociological craft' (Peyrefitte, 2021, p. 1195), and possibly also some other practices in the criminal justice field that are informed by an audit and accountability culture.

In the context of the unequal distribution of punishment in our societies, our emphasis on symmetrical reciprocity and collaborative practice does not, however, mean that all fundamental differences are collapsed in the emancipatory prison-education site or PAR process (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019, p. 133). In fact, some would argue that no research or collaborative method could ever describe accurately or sufficiently some of the 'anguish of incarceration and the torments of a first night in prison' (Fassin, 2017, p. 297) or other experiences of marginalisation. Quite to the contrary, the emancipatory prison classroom and participatory action research seek to utilise our 'differential suffering' as an opportunity to 'facilitate connection' (Miller, 2022, p. 291) and to 'create a togetherness in difference' (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019, p. 133), building a community of collaboration and learning across prison walls – rather than providing services or 'helping' imprisoned persons. This qualitative shift is crucial in the TOGETHER project and means that everyone is actively involved in processes of learning, reflection and growth.

Legitimating subjugated knowledge

As was outlined earlier, the emphasis on the 'lived experience' as a crucial source of knowledge has increasingly found its way into criminology and is central in both PAR and emancipatory prison-education contexts. It is worthwhile teasing this out in a little more detail and thinking more deeply beyond what can sometimes manifest as tokenistic practice. Fals Borda (1999, p. 16) reminds us that the 'careful, human touch of "vivienca" as "life-experience"' opens up the possibility to 'listen to discourses coming from diverse intellectual origins conceived using a different cultural syntax'. The emphasis on 'lived experience' is then not only an ethical practice of unearthing often unheard or marginalised voices, but it also demands empathetic and diverse modes of engagement, knowledge gathering and analysis.

The emphasis on lived experience provides a bridge and an opportunity for people from very different walks of life – university students and prison

students, researchers and research participants – to explore jointly a particular social problem or engage jointly in learning. Importantly, to ensure a symmetry of relationships, careful attention has to be placed on pedagogical and research practices that are based on mutuality, rather than a one-sided confessional practice. For example, while prison students have often suffered disproportionate disadvantages in deeply unequal societies, university students have to grapple with the institutional power of the neo-liberal university. This offers opportunities for jointly reflecting on the deeper forces at play affecting everyone – if also differentially.

Discussing the value of PAR in prison research and education settings, Fine and Torre describe it as an 'exquisite and elegant design for gathering up, legitimating and broadcasting subjugated knowledges' (Fine and Torre, 2006, p. 261). The emphasis here on 'legitimatisation' and 'broadcasting' is particularly important given the absence of the collective voice of incarcerated persons. Prisoner voice is, particularly in the Irish context, treated in quite limited ways – rarely in consultations that affect prisoners' lives, mostly as part of legal or psychological research, and with a few exceptions (see, for example, O'Malley, 2018), much less so in ways that allow us to understand the depth or minutiae of the prison experience.

Engaging in reflexive, slow, and meaningful teaching and learning in prison education and research contexts means that we can understand more empathetically, and in all their diversity, some of the concerns that are central to students in prison. This is also particularly important as neither learners nor imprisoned persons can ever be described as a homogenous group – a pressure we all sometimes succumb to when we are audited for our various successes as professionals – be it in education or in correctional services. However, on the contrary, participatory and emancipatory praxis *demands* the inclusion of 'dissenting voices, narratives of critique and perspectives from dropouts' (Fine and Torre, 2006, p. 263). Subjugated knowledge, in this sense, refers to more than amplifying silent or unheard voices; it means engaging with the manifold nuances and uncomfortable truths.

The collaborative praxis of PAR and the emancipatory prison-education classroom also means that beyond the usual 'gathering up' of 'evidence' – be it research findings or learning outcomes – the very process of convivial collaboration itself aims to 'legitimate' and 'broadcast' *how* collaboration is enacted in the education or research context. Together, peer researchers or students decide how they want to communicate to a wider public the learning from their joint endeavours.

Informed by feminist epistemologies of knowledge production and collaboration, both PAR and emancipatory prison-education settings seek to challenge 'modes of dissemination, engagement and knowledge production in the feminist tradition' (Peyrefitte, 2021, p. 1195). As such, particularly artistic practices that activate different modes of learning and exploration, and which engage both producers and audiences as 'sentient beings' (McNeill and Urie, 2020; O'Neill, 2009; Peyrefitte, 2021) lend themselves to communicating to a wider audience the experiences and views on punishment or learning in prison settings. This seems particularly pertinent when we consider that communicating concerns around crime and justice to a wider public is important for shaping progressive politics and system change (Maruna and King, 2008).

Anti-oppressive practice and embodied knowledge production

As outlined above, neither Inside-Out nor Learning Together is a project that advocates for prison reform. Nevertheless, both programmes are very much committed to an ethos of social justice and critical inquiry (Pompa, 2013; Armstrong and Ludlow, 2016). Quite contrary to education and training that is focused on making students labour-market ready and shaping them into productive citizens (see Bumiller, 2013), this anti-oppressive ethos to pedagogical practice means that the TOGETHER classroom focuses not on 'transferrals of information' (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 79) but '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, 1970/2005, p. 34). In both emancipatory prison education and PAR, we are neither searching for authoritative truths nor believing that these truths could or should be transmitted through education. Rather, and concurrent with taking seriously the 'lived experience' of everyone involved, the focus is placed on challenging the existing status quo in our respective communities and life worlds and collaboratively exploring opportunities for social change.

Given the highly marginalised status of the majority of persons ending up behind bars and the educational disadvantage most have experienced (IPRT, 2012, 2022; Jones *et al.*, 2022; PRT, 2022), the emancipatory ethos to education is of particular significance. Both the PAR element of the TOGETHER project and the educational toolkit to be developed will be a collective enterprise between researchers, educators, and prison and university students North and South. Through its participatory praxis, the TOGETHER toolkit

wants to contribute to 'social critique, social justice and democratization' (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019, p. 133).

This is particularly relevant when we think about our own professional roles and the potential risk of reinforcing existing power differentials and hierarchies. Rather, we are interested in contributing to collective endeavours that can, through critical thinking and collective enterprise, think about 'how things might be otherwise' (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019, p. 132). While we take seriously the wish of all of our students and research participants to secure their personal aspirations in life, we are hoping that we are, at the same time, equipping them with the critical-thinking skills necessary to change more than their own or their families' lives, but to consider their role as social-change agents in society more broadly.

Finally, both the emancipatory prison-education classroom and PAR lend themselves to paying attention to thinking, writing and reflecting in ways that transcend what are essentially 'disembodied and necessarily asocial ways of knowledge production' (Miller, 2022, p. 286), particularly in our contemporary criminal justice cultures, where we are on the continuous search for evidence-based practice and sensory ways of knowing and sharing are undervalued. As social scientists, we have become accustomed to consider 'the mind and the body – and, by extension, scientific and partisan thought' as 'different things', and social scientists often undertake every effort to 'ensure distance from their own passions and the passions of the people they study' (Miller, 2022, p. 284). However, these 'scientific' forms of knowledge production are considered as 'disembodied and necessarily asocial' (Miller, 2022, p. 284) in radical black or feminist epistemologies and are not conducive to educational or research praxis that is inclusive, convivial and empathetic.

The importance of integrating 'sensuous knowing' into our research praxis has also been highlighted by O'Neill who, reflecting on her participatory research practice with migrant women, combining arts-based methods and ethnographic research, has termed this practice as enacting a 'politics of feeling' (O'Neill, 2009, p. 290). In criminology and criminal justice research, the sensory turn has arrived only relatively recently, but importantly also encourages us to 'account for these multifarious sensorial experiences and their effects' (Herrity *et al.*, 2021, p. xxiii), particularly when we research places or processes of social control – and as we claim spaces of education in prison institutions. This also chimes with the demands of reflexivity in emancipatory pedagogy and reminds us that as both researchers and educators or criminal justice practitioners 'we need to understand our own lives as perceived

through our bodies in order to understand the lives of the people we care for' (Miller, 2022, p. 286).

Conclusion

As this paper has outlined, the urgent task of centring the voices of those with lived experience of prison, in criminal justice policy, research and education, is gathering pace and prominence. However, 'utilising' the 'user voice' without careful ethical and methodological underpinning can result in practice that remains superficial at best, and exploitative and extractive at worst (see Buck *et al.*, 2022; Buck *et al.*, 2023; Harriot and Aresti, 2018; Yarbrough *et al.*, 2020).

This is equally the case for pedagogical endeavours. As discussed in the second section, prison education has developed globally over recent decades with the advent of prison–university partnerships directed towards forging connectivity between the university and the prison site. The Learning Together and Inside-Out models are the most salient manifestation of this partnership, with the academy transported into the prison for mutual learning to occur. However, the transformative nature of these efforts is not a given, with the 'what' (knowledge) and 'how' (learning) necessitating close consideration for a truly emancipatory classroom to emerge (Bumiller, 2013; Gray *et al.*, 2019).

In this paper, we suggest that the fusing of PAR and prison–university education models can realise the aims and principles of these efforts. Through pedagogy infused with intentional 'ethical care', the harms of institutional power and hierarchical frameworks can be, if not eradicated, then perhaps neutralised by honest reflective practice. The aim of enacting symmetry, conviviality and reciprocity is an essential aspect of dismantling these hierarchies, lest prison–university models replicate the extractive features of traditional research methodologies, creating a division of subject and voyeur in the classroom.

The situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) of the inside student in a prison classroom is integral to enhancing the criminology student's understandings and perspectives of criminal justice implementation from the perspective of those at the receiving end. However, let us not forget that Foucault's (1980) concept of subjugated knowledge brings to our attention not just the content of knowledge but the political purpose, effects and outcome, enabling emancipation of the insider viewpoint to challenge institutional discourse

(Bacchi, 2018). To that end, as discussed, anti-oppressive pedagogy is a key aspect of the emancipatory prison classroom, ensuring that content and methods do not reproduce and reinforce harmful constructions of criminal justice reality, but instead allow subjugated and critical knowledge to challenge, dismantle and reconstruct the world view. To this end, the PAR principle of creating social change that is directed towards ideals of social justice (Fine, 2013), holds the capacity to enrich prison–university classroom partnerships to produce not just emancipatory praxis, but also the promise of transforming the life-worlds of the collective and all those within.

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