

What can we learn from Learning Together?

Exploring, embracing and enhancing
criminal justice-higher education
learning partnerships

Helena Gosling

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Foreword

This monograph is the 11th in the ICCJ series and as with all previous publications, we have encouraged the submission of work that critically reflects upon current issues and developments in community and criminal justice. Helena Gosling's work continues that tradition. In her ethnographic approach to researching the evidence for the efficacy and indeed, the critical importance of the *Learning Together* initiative, she outlines, analyses and ultimately provides a moving account of the bravery and tenaciousness of students with current or recent experience of the criminal justice system engaging in higher education.

There are many examples of initiatives whereby serving prisoners gain access to a variety of forms of further and higher education. However, as Gosling highlights, bespoke opportunities for people to participate in higher education beyond the prison gates are generally non-existent. This is disappointing in the light of the widening participation agenda championed by the New Labour government (1997-2010) to improve the number of university students from non-traditional backgrounds through targeted outreach initiatives and financial support. Indeed, the widening participation agenda claimed to pay attention to the very socio-economic and minority communities in which individuals with experience of the criminal justice system are overrepresented and also face significant institutional barriers.

The design and delivery of this approach to the *Learning Together* initiative is unique in that it works alongside local criminal justice service providers to create an educational opportunity (within a university setting – Liverpool John Moore University) for people who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system. In doing so, the discussion illustrates how a criminal justice-higher education partnership can be utilised to enhance both access to and experience of higher education amongst non-traditional students. Ultimately, it demonstrates that the barriers and fears of entering higher education are shared more widely than we might care to admit and that ultimately, the lessons learnt by this initiative can help educational institutions develop more nuanced and sensitive approaches to all student learning and student support. As Gosling reflects, initiatives such as *Learning Together* are able to create a unique educational interface that blur longstanding and conventional boundaries between the criminal justice and higher education sector.

Gosling draws on both pedagogical and criminal justice literature to provide a coherent framework within which *Learning Together* can be both understood on a practical level and theorised in terms of concepts that that will be familiar to many criminal justice professionals – desistance, reintegration and rehabilitation, reflective practice, belonging and edgework (Lyng 2005, Mawby and Worrall 2013). She also draws on different forms of personal evaluation of learning including the use of photo-visual presentations of experience that have been used successfully in describing and

explaining the experience of criminal justice supervision by its subjects (Fitzgibbon and Stengel 2017).

On a personal level, it is perhaps unusual for an editor to have been directly involved in a specific initiative that subsequently becomes the focus of their editorial responsibilities but I have witnessed at first hand the incredibly powerful combination of post-graduate students, local criminal justice professionals and current or recent recipients of imprisonment and community supervision learning together. It invokes immediate respect, not only for the academic and intellectual contributions of the individuals involved, but for the barriers and hurdles some students face before they can, with trepidation, place their student card on the electronic reader that allows them from the outside world into the academic institution.

Finally, the institution of Liverpool John Moores University and a range of its senior staff have demonstrated what can be achieved when traditional thinking about the role and bureaucratic controls inherent in university cultures are critically reappraised. The *Learning Together* initiative is a lesson in risk taking on many levels and as Gosling reminds us, innovative practice, responsible risk-taking and compassion can go some way to changing longstanding conversations about what it means to learn, and indeed belong, in a university setting

Steve Collett

Series Editor

Prologue

Professor Lol Burke

When the author approached me to discuss an idea she had for developing an innovative (and perhaps somewhat radical) learning programme, I have to admit that my first reaction was a mixture of intrigue and trepidation. Intrigued by the idea and the possibilities but apprehensive about the challenges involved. Helena had been influenced by the *Learning Together* network established by Ruth Armstrong and Amy Ludlow at Cambridge University and was keen to do something similar at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) where we are both based. Drawing on extensive experience of working in both prison and community settings, Helena identified an inherent dilemma for those with previous criminal convictions. Education has been identified as a pathway to rehabilitation and resettlement (Social Exclusion Unit 2002, Home Office 2004). However, there are limited opportunities – on a national and local level - for those with a history of involvement within the criminal justice system to access higher education. This may be due to their criminal convictions, confidence and self-esteem or lack of educational attainment in their younger years. Access to higher education remains a barrier to resettlement and re-integration despite it providing an opportunity for people with criminal convictions to connect with and learn from prosocial peers, strengthen their visions of an alternative lifestyle and improve their employment prospects. This is a widening participation issue because people with criminal convictions share characteristics that The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the government call ‘disadvantaged’ and are considered to be least likely to progress to university (Unlock 2018).

In an attempt to tackle this longstanding issue, since September 2016 under Helena’s leadership, we have offered a pioneering learning opportunity for people who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system to learn alongside postgraduate criminal justice students. *Learning Together: an introduction to Criminal Justice* consists of fifteen, 2-hour interactive sessions covering theory, policy and practice of criminal justice in England and Wales. Since its introduction, over 50 students (and some practitioners from local criminal justice agencies) have participated in the programme and it has guided several students with previous criminal convictions into higher education.

Helena’s work is a testimony to the transformative impact of higher education. She has developed an educational model that illustrates the benefits of co-operative learning; providing a working blueprint for similar initiatives to be established across the university and the higher education sector more broadly. The inclusive approach adopted has broken down barriers between those with lived experience of the criminal justice system, students, academics, and professional support services. Those of us who have worked alongside Helena on the programme can vouch that none of this would have been possible without her drive, enthusiasm and personal qualities.

In this monograph Helena charts the development of the *Learning Together* programme outlining both the benefits and challenges inherent in developing a learning opportunity of this type. However, it is much more than the story of how the programme has progressed. She provides a developed theoretically informed analysis of the educational needs of those individuals with criminal convictions and locates them within the broader desistance literature. Interspersed with the words of the *Learning Together* students, she vividly traces their personal journeys from *outsider* to *belonging* and their changed sense of identity from *offender* to *student*. In this respect this monograph should not only be of interest to educationalists but to all those interested in supporting the process of *going straight*.

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to write this monograph without the help and support of the kind people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give a mention here. I would like to express deep gratitude to my mum, Bernadette, and dad, John for their patience and unwavering commitment to grandparent duties. Above all, I would like to thank my beautiful baby boys, James and Daniel, for their love and laughter. You are, and always will be, my world.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Lol Burke. You are the salt of the earth and have made a difficult few years seem more manageable. Thank you, Lol. You are one in a million.

I would also like to thank the *Learning Together* family both within and beyond Liverpool John Moores University. With particular thanks to Sarah MacLennan, Ian Thomas, Marie Ward and Becky Williams.

To all students who have participated in *Learning Together* – thank you. Thank you for sharing a small part of your journey with us at Liverpool John Moores University. Together, we have created something special.

Finally, sincere thanks to Steve Collett and Emma Cluley for their ongoing support and guidance.

Helena Gosling

About the author

Helena Gosling is a Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice at Liverpool John Moores University. Prior to becoming an academic, she worked in the drug rehabilitation sector across community, residential and custodial settings. Helena completed a PhD in 2015 entitled *An invitation to change? An Ethnographic study of a residential Therapeutic Community for substance use*. The study offers a unique insight into the innovative design, delivery and intricate workings that take place in a residential Therapeutic Community. Conducted at a time of great change and uncertainty in the theory and practice of drug policy and service provision – as the implications of Payment by Results (PbR) in the sector takes hold – the study captures the tensions at work in realising in practice the theoretical ambitions of the Therapeutic Community and the very real challenges of reconciling increasingly commercial/business orientated decisions within public health models of thinking. Since completing the PhD, her main research interests are situated in the design, delivery and commissioning of innovation and alternative practice within and beyond the criminal justice system.

More recently, through her work on *Learning Together*, Helena has developed and extended her research interests to focus on ways in which higher education can work alongside current and potential students with experience of the criminal justice system in a more meaningful way. To date, Helena has published articles in a number of leading journals such as (but not limited to) *Criminology and Criminal Justice*; *Critical Social Policy*, *International Journal of Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* and *Journal of Prisoner Education and Re-entry*.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Education should be aspirational. It must offer a learning journey that is truly transformational and enables progression to higher levels.

(Coates 2016: 46)

The involvement of people with criminal convictions in higher education is anything but a new phenomenon (Connor and Tewksbury 2012). Indeed, there is a long British history of people in universities and prisons learning alongside each other that dates to the 1950s (Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). Although prison-university learning partnerships have occupied a small corner of the custodial landscape for a substantial amount of time, initiatives that take university students into prison to learn alongside serving prisoners are experiencing a significant revival, with the Coates Review (2016) identifying three prison-university learning partnerships as examples of good practice (an Inside-Out partnership¹ between the University of Durham and HMP Durham, a Learning Together partnership between the University of Cambridge and HMP Grendon and a convict criminology partnership between HMP Pentonville and University of Westminster). In 2017, as a response to the growing number of prison-university learning partnerships, the Prisoners' Education Trust launched *Prison University Partnerships in Learning*, colloquially referred to as PUPiL, to map, promote and support all forms of prison-university learning partnerships through shared experience, evaluation and expertise (Prisoners' Education Trust 2018a). At the time of publication, Champion (2018) had identified 35 prison-university learning partnerships within the United Kingdom (UK).

Although prison-university learning partnerships are multiplying, current links between prisons and universities within the local community are not always strong (Coates 2016) - less than 16% of people leaving prison having education or training in place upon release (Ministry of Justice Information Release 2015). A meta-analysis conducted by Davies *et al.* (2013, cited in Champion 2018) found prison education programmes connected to the local community to be more effective in terms of reducing re-offending. With this in mind, Mukamal *et al.* (2015: 01) suggest 'our colleges and criminal justice agencies must break out of their silos and share a commitment to high-quality education for all students whether they are learning in prison or the community. Our policy makers must enable partnership and collaboration between education and criminal justice fields.'

¹ *There are various forms of prison-university learning partnerships guided by divergent aims, objectives and theoretical underpinnings. The Inside-Out programme began in the United States before expanding to the United Kingdom and other countries. It involves a rigorous academic module taught to prison learners ('inside students') and university learners ('outside students'). See <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/> for more information.*

Despite calls to align education and criminal justice services, there are still limited opportunities – on a local and national level – for people with criminal convictions to access higher education within the local community (Gosling and Burke, 2019). This may be due to unspent criminal convictions (Unlock 2018), limited confidence and self-esteem (Champion and Noble 2016), a lack of previous educational attainment (Prison Reform Trust 2017) and/or the presence of risk-averse bureaucratic university admission processes (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2013). All these factors can combine with a general lack of appetite (in comparison to our American counterparts) to create pipelines to university for people who have lived experience of the criminal justice system. Although the Secure Environments programme at the Open University help people serving a custodial sentence to access higher education, bespoke opportunities for people to participate in higher education beyond the prison gates are generally non-existent.

Until now, the UK higher education sector has largely failed to develop pipelines to university for people who have been and/or are currently involved with criminal justice services within the community. This has subsequently hindered opportunities, both directly and indirectly, for people with lived experience of the criminal justice system to connect with and learn from prosocial peers (Runell 2015), strengthen visions of a crime free future (Maruna *et al.* 2004) and improve employment prospects (Ministry of Justice 2018). This is a significant issue for the sector and society more broadly, providing a stark contrast to the inclusive rhetoric of the widening participation agenda (Gosling and Burke 2019). The widening participation agenda was championed by the New Labour government (1997-2010) to increase and improve the number of university students from non-traditional backgrounds through targeted outreach initiatives and financial support (Burke 2012) in an attempt to restructure the higher education sector based on the notion of equality (Armstrong 2008). In doing so, the widening participation agenda claims to pay particular attention to those who are from lower socio-economic groups and/or considered to have limited participation in schools and local neighbourhoods (Armstrong 2008). Research suggests that those who are at greatest risk of experiencing social exclusion as a result of factors such as poverty, lack of education, unemployment and/or being a member of a minority ethnic group are disproportionately likely to end up in the criminal justice system (Mair and May 1997, Smith and Stewart, 1998). It is therefore unsurprising to find that along with mature and first-in-family students, people with criminal convictions typically share characteristics that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and UK government call disadvantaged (Unlock 2018).

Despite the presence of a widening participation agenda, people with criminal convictions are typically under-represented in the higher education sector. This is primarily due to arbitrary and unfair admission practices (Prisoners' Education Trust 2018b). A recent social movement, pressuring organisations to 'ban-the-box' went

some way to rectify this longstanding issue, playing an instrumental role in a recent UCAS decision to remove the criminal convictions disclosure box from university application forms (Weale 2018). Although a step in the right direction, it is important to note that access to higher education will not naturally improve for people with criminal convictions (Gosling and Burke 2019). Rather than eradicating the criminal convictions screening process, UCAS have merely displaced the process. With responsibility now firmly placed at the door of each individual higher education institution (Gosling and Burke 2019). If the sector is to demonstrate a genuine commitment to widening participation, efforts ought to extend beyond seemingly positive rhetoric and socio-political discussions about access, towards a genuine attempt to engage with the complex, multifaceted issues that face people with criminal convictions who wish to engage in higher education. With this in mind, the forthcoming discussion will explore the design and delivery of a unique *Learning Together* initiative that works alongside local criminal justice service providers to create an educational opportunity (within a university setting) for people who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system. In doing so, the discussion illustrates how criminal justice-higher education partnership working can be utilised to enhance both access to and experience of higher education amongst non-traditional students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Transformational learning begins with a disorienting event which exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed and what has been experienced.

(Cranton 2002: 66)

Both criminological and educational theory inform the design and delivery of *Learning Together* (Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). In particular, there is a specific focus on what we know about stigma, marginalisation and the role of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice and what we know about desistance and what we know about how people can be best supported to engage with, and develop through, learning (Ludlow and Armstrong 2019). In an attempt to build upon this sentiment, the following discussion provides a concise over-view of the desistance literature followed by an insight into the role of higher education in the desistance process. The forthcoming section draws upon the desistance literature as a theoretical starting point given that *Learning Together* students are learning about, engaging in and/or bearing witness to the process of desistance. It is in no way an attempt to draw conclusions between participation in *Learning Together* and desistance from crime. Rather, it is an attempt to provide a theoretical base from which parallels between two typically distinct bodies of literature (from within the field of criminology and education respectively) can be drawn.

Desistance: An overview

In the early 1990s, Gottfredson and Hirschi claimed individuals who are more likely to commit a crime are often found to be impulsive risk-takers and exhibit low levels of self-control. As a result, they are more likely to act impulsively based on their feelings; take risks and engage in criminal activity. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) low self-control is the product of ineffective parenting where there are weak attachments between a parent and child; and in families where parents fail to recognise and correct their children's wrong behaviour. Although an important contribution to desistance studies, Gottfredson and Hirschi have since been critiqued by scholars such as Polk (1991) and Gibbons (1994), who suggest too much crime falls outside the boundaries of their definition for the theory to be generalised. Sampson and Laub (1993) went on to offer a theory of age-graded social control, which attempts to explain the development of criminal careers. The central idea behind this theory is the bond between an individual and society which, according to Sampson and Laub (1993), consists of the extent to which an individual has emotional attachments to societal goals and is committed to achieving them by legitimate means, believes the goals to be worthwhile and is able to work towards the attainment of such goals. According to Sampson and Laub (1993), individuals are more likely to participate in crime when this bond is weakened or broken. In addition, they argue that at various points in an individual's life course, formal and informal social institutions help to

cement the bond between the individual and society. For example, schooling, family ties and peer groups influence the nature of the bond between young people and their wider communities, whilst employment, marriage and parenthood operate in a similar way for adults. These institutions and the relationships between the individuals they encourage, help the formulation of social bonds, which in turn creates informal social controls. Avoidance of crime is the result of relationships formed for reasons other than for the control of crime. According to Sampson and Laub (1993), changes in an individual's relationship with these various institutions are an inevitable factor of modern life and as such are crucial to understanding criminal activity over an individual's life course. In contrast to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), who see low levels of self-control as an end to the matter, Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that levels of criminal propensity are open to influence and these influences are often the result of informal social control. Furthermore, unlike *rational choice* theorists, Sampson and Laub's approach enables one to view desistance as the result of a process, which stretches over time.

Giordano *et al.* (2002) also explored the significance of the bond between an individual and society as they examined how social influences and internal change contributed to an individual's decision to desist from crime. Unlike Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and Sampson and Laub (1993), Giordano *et al.* (2002) propose a reciprocal relationship between an individual and the environment to which he/she belongs, suggesting that desisters have not only established pro-social bonds but have also experienced cognitive shifts that have facilitated their desistance. In their cognitive transformation theory Giordano *et al.* (2002) introduced the concept of cognitive shifts as part of the desistance process. According to Giordano *et al.* (2002) the desistance process consists of four steps. The first step is an openness to change; the individual needs to realise that change is necessary and desirable and thus engage in a process of reflection and reassessment. Second is the exposure to a turning point or an opportunity to change. In this context, turning points can serve as a catalyst for change. The third step is an insight into the conventional replacement self whereby it is possible for the individuals to see themselves in a new role. The final step is the individual's transformation away from crime and a realisation that their former behaviour is undesirable (see also Colman and Laenen 2012). The first two steps focus on an individual's openness and willingness to change, whereas the third and final steps relate to the development of a new identity. According to Giordano *et al.*, (2002) individuals attempting to desist from crime need to have the ability to recognise and show their openness for turning points, which require the desire and ability to change.

Farrall and Maruna (2004) went on to suggest that people who have desisted from crime have a desire to feel good about themselves and take pride in their new roles and pro-social identity. They found that when desisters found themselves praised and trusted by others it led to increases in self-esteem. Thus, desistance, on an emotional

level, is as much about a change in feelings as it is about a change in behaviour, family ties and employment. Farrall (2002) tracked the desistance of 199 individuals to explore the significance of personal and social circumstances. He found that desistance was related to each individual's motivations, as well as the personal and social contexts in which various obstacles to desistance were addressed. He went on to suggest that criminal justice interventions should pay greater attention to the contexts in which they are located, considering social circumstances, as the medium through which change may be achieved. Building upon the work of Farrall (2002), McNeil (2009) went on to suggest that desistance is produced through the interplay between individual choice and social forces beyond the control of any one individual. McNeil (2009) argues that persistent lawbreakers have limited social capital. They damage ties to friends and family thus forcing them to rely on illicit and criminal networks, which damages their prospects for desistance (Webster *et al.* 2006, McNeil and Whyte 2007). Beckett Wilson (2014) developed this sentiment and went on to suggest desistance is a process in which the balance of licit and illicit social capital differs.

Although the term desistance is contested and critiqued, scholars recognise three forms of desistance: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary desistance is characterised by a period of short-term, crime-free lulls. Secondary desistance is a process by which an individual assumes a role of 'non-offender' or 'reformed person' (Farrall and Maruna 2004). It is associated with a re-organisation, by the desister, of who they are and what sort of person they wish to become, involving the construction of a positive identity and change in the way in which people see themselves (Laub and Sampson 2003; Bottoms *et al.* 2004, Farrall and Maruna 2004). The term tertiary desistance is utilised to highlight another aspect of desistance necessary for long-term change; the recognition by others that one has changed and sense of belonging (McNeil 2016 cited in Nugent and Schinkel 2016). In an attempt to extend the current discussion, the following section will provide a concise over-view of the literature surrounding desistance and higher education.

Higher education and desistance

The Social Mobility Advisory Group (2016) suggest university transforms lives. Going to university leads to new ways of seeing the world, to new horizons and networks, and to significantly enhanced job opportunities. According to Darke and Aresti (2016), university holds the potential to open up a range of opportunities and prosocial life choices, with higher education providing a form of collateral that can be used as currency to negotiate stigma, commonly experienced by people who have lived experience of the criminal justice system. The transformative potential of higher education is immense and whilst it would be naïve to consider this in isolation to other important factors, including meaningful relationships, significant ties to family and/or significant others and employment, higher education has the potential to open up a

range of opportunities and pro-social life choices. Research suggests that much can be gained when formerly imprisoned people pursue formal education, particularly at college or university (Maruna 2001, Holzer *et al.* 2003, Maruna *et al.* 2004, Tewksbury and Ross 2017). This is because the perceived and/or actual acquisition of social capital, through educational attainment, holds the ability to (re)attach individuals to conventional values and aspirations (Zgoba *et al.* 2008, Ford and Schroeder 2010, Lockwood *et al.* 2012 and Runell 2017).

Tewksbury and Ross (2017) suggest that working with students who have experience of the criminal justice system has many/all of the characteristics and challenges associated with working alongside any other student, as well as some specific aspects that arise directly from the label and experience of the criminal justice system. What is required is a refocus of expectation whereby the higher education sector becomes more culturally competent through a recognition of the different psychological, social and educational backgrounds that students bring with them to campus. Despite strong support for higher education as a tool of rehabilitation (Steurer *et al.* 2001, Kim and Clark 2013, Hall 2015), the means by which students with criminal convictions are supported in academic environments has been largely neglected and under-researched (Tewksbury and Ross 2017). Although the sense of belonging is a crucial component of both the desistance process (McNeil 2016) and student experience (May 2011), there is limited insight into how students with criminal convictions negotiate their experience(s) of higher education. With this in mind, the following section will draw upon material from education studies more broadly to illustrate why the concept of belonging is important for students engaging in higher education.

Belonging in higher education

Belonging is a significant concept as it helps us better understand personal and academic development, connections individuals have with their environment and the changes that take place within it (May 2011). As it requires a complex, highly personal interaction with the environment (Araujo *et al.* 2014) the academic sphere is an important site for nurturing participation and engendering a sense of belonging (Higher Education Academy 2012). Kahu and Nelson (2017) suggest that a student's sense of belonging is developed and nurtured within the educational interface; a dynamic space that is different for each student involved in higher education (Edwards and McMillian 2015). Kahu *et al.* (2013) suggest that the educational interface (and indeed the notion of belonging) is a variable state, influenced by a wide variety of student and institutional factors, combined with the socio-political context within which the educational interface is situated. Traditional higher education students bring economic, cultural and social capital, valued by higher education institutions, that is indicative of power (Thomas 2012). For those whose knowledge, experience and capital are not equally valued by higher education institutions, a sense

of sociocultural incongruity (Devlin 2011) and alienation (Mann 2001) can develop. This is a particular concern for non-traditional students (those from disadvantaged and under-represented social groups) as the limited overlap between individual lived experience and the context of higher education means university life can be more challenging (Kahu and Nelson, 2017).

Fostering a sense of belonging is a highly complex process that involves identity and power struggles (Lea and Street 2006). This is primarily because students engage in an ongoing transformation of being that requires a navigation of difference between a student's personal culture and the practices of the academy (Barnett 2007). Emerging research suggests that building a sense of belonging amongst and between students is one of the most crucial tasks to face the higher education sector (Ahn and Davis 2016, Hughes 2017, Hellmundt and Baker 2017, Supiano 2018). Yet the mechanisms that facilitate one's sense of belonging and engagement are still to be clearly and concisely articulated (Kahu and Nelson 2017). This oversight requires urgent attention as feelings of alienation and isolation can arise from systems of inattention that ultimately have an impact on student engagement and achievement (Ern and Drysdale 2017, Naik *et al.* 2017). Meeuwisse *et al.* (2009) conducted a cross-institutional study across four Dutch universities to examine the role of belonging on student success. The study found that if students feel that they do not fit in, their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they are more inclined to withdraw from higher education early. Kahu and Nelson (2017) went on to suggest that belonging should be described as a student's connectedness to an institution, staff and other students. By drawing upon Bourdieu's (1986) theory of habitus, one can illustrate how the notion of belonging is related to the degree of fit (real and/or perceived) between an individual's habitus and that of the institution. Recognising one's sense of belonging in terms of fit also aligns with key developments in higher education. That is, the idea that the student body are to be seen as partners in the teaching, learning and assessment process (Xerri *et al.* 2018).

The literature upon which this review is based illustrates how desisting from crime and cultivating a sense of belonging in higher education are profoundly personal and social processes (Best and Laudet 2010, May 2011, Coleman and Laenen 2012, Araujo *et al.* 2014). These processes require a degree of reflexivity in order to progress, fit in and acquire a sense of belonging (Giordano *et al.* 2002, Thomas 2019) resulting (in theory at least) in social, personal and/or educational transformation (Giordano *et al.* 2002, The Social Mobility Advisory Group 2016). Establishing the aforementioned parallels between criminological and educational literature provides a way in which criminal justice and higher education institutions can begin to think about how, in theory at least, initiatives such as *Learning Together* are able to create a unique educational interface that blur longstanding and conventional boundaries between the criminal justice and higher education sector.

Chapter 3: An Over-view of Learning Together (beyond the prison gates)

There is little interest in understanding the pedagogical foundation of higher education as a deeply civic, political and moral practice.

(Freire 1996 cited in Giroux 2010: 715)

Learning Together was originally co-produced by Drs Amy Ludlow and Ruth Armstrong from the Institute of Criminology (University of Cambridge) and governing staff at HMP Grendon and aimed to provide an opportunity for university students to learn alongside people serving a custodial sentence. The purpose of the initiative is to promote learning amongst and between people who, ordinarily, would not have met or had the opportunity to learn from one another through the co-creation of learning spaces within custodial environments (Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). Through *Learning Together*, communities of learning develop that hold the potential to fill gaps and address deficits in current education provision in prison whilst simultaneously challenging the exclusivity that surrounds the educational experience of many university students (Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). In 2018, members of the *Learning Together* network conducted a data collection exercise that aimed to establish the scope and remit of the network. The findings reveal a network that recognises and celebrates diversity in terms of geographical location, partnership working and delivery style, whilst working collaboratively within the broad framework of a common vision, mission and set of values (Just Is: *Learning Together* 2018). At the time of publication, 587 students were studying as part of the network across 31 *Learning Together* courses delivering a diverse range of subjects within and beyond criminology (Just Is: *Learning Together* 2018).

Although the *Learning Together* initiative is delivered primarily throughout the custodial estate, it has become a springboard for promoting inclusive learning environments both within and beyond the prison gates (Gosling 2017). Since September 2016, Professor Lol Burke and this author have designed and delivered the first and only university-based *Learning Together* for males and females who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system to learn alongside postgraduate students from the host institution. It is the first *Learning Together* (based within a higher education institution) that actively works alongside local criminal justice services to create a community of practice populated by local people with academic, professional and/or lived experience of criminal justice. Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest a community of practice consists of a group of people who share a craft or profession. It can evolve naturally due to participants' experience of a particular area or be deliberately created with the goal of gaining knowledge related to a specific field of study. Communities of practice are formed by and for people who wish to engage in a process of collective learning (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). It is through the process of sharing information and lived experiences within the group that members learn from each other and have the opportunity to develop both personally and professionally (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Learning Together within the host institution consists of 15 two-hour sessions, taught across the academic year from October to April. Each taught session explores a contemporary penological issue through a series of accessible questions such as ‘how do we explain crime and criminality’ and ‘why do people stop offending.’ Although flexible, the programme aims to engage no more than 20 students per academic year. Approximately ten from the postgraduate community (from within the host institution) and ten from local criminal justice services (including practitioners and service users). Each year, the author actively over-recruits participants from the local criminal justice community due to the attrition rate (2-3 students drop out per academic year). All interested parties must apply via a bespoke application form that explores an individual’s motivation for participation, hopes and fears. Applicants from outside of the institution are also required to complete a criminal convictions screening form, co-created by Professor Lol Burke, Dr Helena Gosling and Marie Ward (Head of Legal and Student Governance). All applications with unspent criminal convictions are considered at a bespoke criminal convictions screening panel that aims to mirror institutional policies and practices whilst at the same time creating a process that is transparent and progressive. This process is rooted in discussions about applications as people, with qualities and potential rather than a catalogue of criminal convictions with a name (Gosling and Burke 2019).

Figure 1: Student numbers

Academic year	MA Criminal Justice students from host institution	Criminal Justice practitioners from local community	Criminal Justice service users from local community	Total number of <i>Learning Together</i> students
2016/2017	15	2	16	33
2017/2018	10	1	9	20
2018/2019	8	2	11	21

Learning Together aims to create a safe space for criminal justice academics, students, service users and practitioners alike to come together and form a unique community of practice whereby scholarly activity, life events and professional experience are recognised, applied and practiced within and beyond the classroom (Gosling and Burke 2019). As *Learning Together* has grown and developed within the host institution, course co-creators have recognised how community engagement as a pedagogical framework holds the ability to reduce cultural distance between academic researchers and the communities in which they work (Gosling and Burke

2019) whilst at the same time enriching learning and strengthening communities (Rubin *et al.* 2012, Power 2010). Community engaged pedagogy embraces a form of experiential education that encompasses both curricular and co-curricular activities, where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as both students and teachers seek to achieve real objectives for the learning community as well as a deeper understanding of skills for themselves (Brandy 2018). It provides a way in which academic insight and lived experiences can be integrated to create organic teaching and learning opportunities whereby students, staff and community services are all educators, learners and generators of knowledge. Community engaged pedagogy is an important tool for *Learning Together* (within a university setting) as it provides a way in which the traditions, norms and expectations of the academy can be stretched and diversified to reduce sociocultural incongruity (Devlin 2011) and alienation (Mann 2001) amongst and between traditional and non-traditional students.

As *Learning Together* has grown and developed within the host institution, course co-creators have witnessed an increasing number of students, originally from the local criminal justice community, express a desire to continue their studies. With this in mind, the author is currently developing a unique pipeline to university for students who successfully complete their *Learning Together* journey. Although in its infancy, the pipeline has already supported six *Learning Together* students to apply for a foundation year degree and a further five to apply for postgraduate studies within the host institution. To date, all applications have been successful, with students securing a place on their chosen study path. In addition, the author is currently working alongside senior managers within the institution from admissions, outreach and governance to develop institutional policy and strengthen pastoral practice for students (both current and prospective) with criminal convictions.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Learning the practice of reflection is fundamental because it allows people to engage into a thoughtful relationship with the real world and gain an awake stance about ones lived experience.

(Mortari 2015: 01)

The author conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study of one situated *Learning Together* initiative - within a university setting - over three academic years (2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19). Given the infancy of the initiative, combined with the fact that this is the first of its kind, the author was keen to capture and learn from all participants' experience of *Learning Together* (including her own). The inductive nature of ethnographic fieldwork combined with the fluidity of not having to begin with a precise research question (Charmez, 2006), appreciation of unstructured data (Lett 1990, Barnes 1996) and emphasis on the continuous interplay between data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990, Dey 1999) allowed the author to build reflexivity into the teaching, learning and research process. Reflexivity is an important tool for any ethnographer as it invites dialogue with readers about the worth of interpretation and explanation (Lichterman 2015). It also allows ethnographers to recognise that they are unable to put their own knowledge of the social world to one side in the hope of achieving objectivity because both the researcher and researched tend to draw upon the same resource(s) to establish meaning (Glynis 2003). Ruby (1980) suggests that in order to be reflective, researchers must systematically reveal their methodology and indeed, themselves, as an instrument of both data collection and generation. In doing so, reflexivity allows the ethnographer to create a balance that dissolves the traditional distinction between the ethnographer as a theoriser and participants as passive data (Bakhtin 1981, Bruner 1993). To increase the plausibility or rigour of ethnographic research, Glynis (2003) suggests that a researcher should include a reflective account in their final reports. With this in mind, the author has integrated her reflections, thoughts and insights into the forthcoming findings section.

During the first year of *Learning Together* (within the host institution), the author relied upon informal discussions, participant observation and reflective practice as sources of data. After each discussion, observation and/or *Learning Together* session, the author would record noteworthy events and points for further consideration as field-notes (usually within a 24-hour period). Such sources of data, particularly within the criminal justice and higher education sector, are typically untapped and overlooked despite their ability to help practitioners and educators alike understand and learn from people's experience. The author invested a lot of time and energy in such endeavours, spending time before and after class with the student cohort whilst actively making time within the working week to engage in reflective practice. Students enrolled on the *Learning Together* programme were required to engage in reflective practice through the creation of a reflective journal. To pass the module,

students must write a 500-word reflective account each week that explores their thoughts, feelings and experiences of higher education. At the end of the course, eight students provided consent for their work to be included in the research as data.

During the second year of *Learning Together*, the author continued to collect data from informal discussions, participant observation and reflective practice. In addition, the host institution provided a small pot of funding so that two *Learning Together* students could undertake a paid internship with the author, one day per week, over a period of four months. The aim of the internship was to provide an opportunity for students to design and deliver a one-off focus group with their peers to explore experiences of higher education (Gosling and Burke 2019). During the second year of *Learning Together*, the author changed the assessment strategy from reflective journals to group presentations, in an attempt to alleviate concerns displayed by some of the previous students about writing. Although all students rose to the challenge of group presentations, the author as well as students who had engaged with both the first and second round of *Learning Together*, felt that reflective diaries were more suited to the values and ethos of the initiative within the host institution. As students had displayed concerns about writing rather than the task itself, the author decided to reinstate the use of reflective journals but change the way in which students are required to reflect upon their experiences.

During the third year, students could choose to submit either a written reflective account, a visual reflective account or creative reflective account. Written reflective accounts require students to write a 500-word reflective entry after each taught session. Visual reflective accounts require students to submit a photograph or image, accompanied by a 50-word summary to explain their thoughts, feelings and experiences of each taught session. Students were also given the opportunity to submit a creative reflective account. To submit a creative reflective account, students were required to attend a weekly creative response class (directed by Sarah MacLennan) to support the production of poetry, short stories, flash fiction and creative non-fiction in and around themes that are important to them and their experience of higher education. At the end of the course, four students gave permission for their creative reflective account to be included in the research as data. Seven gave permission for their visual reflective diaries to be included and a further seven gave permission for their written reflective accounts to be included.

Although the ability of the arts and creativity in criminal justice settings to improve well-being and interest in learning has been documented (see National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance 2019), little is known about how such methods can be utilised to better understand and indeed, communicate the learning experience amongst students in higher education with lived experience of criminal justice. The author was keen to introduce the concept of creativity into *Learning Together* to push boundaries

and engage in genuine conversations about what the university experience looks and feels like to those who have experience of the criminal justice system. In addition, given the varied and often negative experiences (and perceptions) of education, the author was keen to ensure all *Learning Together* students felt engaged with at least one of the assessment options. Fitzgibbon and Stengel (2017) discuss the role of photovoice (a research method which involves providing research participants with cameras to photograph their experiences and understandings of the phenomena of study) in criminological inquiry. Building upon this work, the following discussion utilises imagery from *Learning Together* students as a method of *pedagogical inquiry*. Anderson (2016) suggests that imagery can carry stories across barriers of language, culture, space and time and as a result, is one of the best, most accessible mediums to raise awareness around social justice issues. It is important to note, that the imagery included throughout the forthcoming discussion provides a visual representation of how pedagogical inquiry is a profound, social justice issue.

Data from the one-off focus group (n = 3) and written reflective accounts (n = 15) has been transcribed and subject to thematic analysis via NVivo - a software programme used for qualitative and mixed-methods research (Kent State University 2018). As NVivo typically works with unstructured text, the author felt this was an appropriate way in which to make sense of a large body of unstructured data and generate significant themes for further discussion. Through NVivo, the author conducted a word frequency analysis (including a search of most frequent words and a search of most frequent stemmed words) to uncover three over-arching themes: reflection/reflexivity, belonging and identity. In addition, the author created a word cloud to represent, in a visual format, the results of the word frequency analysis (Figure 2). All methods of data collection and analysis obtained unconditional approval from the host institutions research ethics committee. Although the author drew upon informal discussions and participant observation to inform and complement field notes, such material has not been cited within the forthcoming discussion. Full informed consent has been obtained from students whose work, comments and opinions have been quoted (verbatim) throughout the forthcoming discussion. As you will see, to conclude each quotation there is a participant number, set of initials and date (for example, Participant 1, FG, 2016). Every student who gave consent for their material to be included in the study has a participant number to protect their identity. Each quotation includes a set of initials that locates the original data source. *FG* stands for focus group. *WRA* stands for written reflective account and *VRA* stands for visual reflective account. To conclude, each quotation includes the year from which the data was collected.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

Education...is eminently political because it offers students the conditions for self-reflection, a self-managed life and critical agency. Pedagogy in this sense connects learning to social change;...

(Giroux 2010: 336)

Reflective practice is the heartbeat of *Learning Together* within the host institution. It helped students to narrate their experiences (both past and present) and express feelings (both positive and negative) about the future. As the forthcoming findings suggest, reflexivity helped students to embrace commonality, negotiate difference and make sense of the unknown, which contributed towards the creation and indeed maintenance of a unique intellectual milieu both within and beyond the classroom. According to Trow (1968), an intellectual milieu is created by a group of people who share specific intellectual interests and discuss them together recurrently in special places. It is within these milieus that some of the most important work of a college or university goes on, as they involve recurrent interactions about shared and differential interests. The process of shared reflexivity highlighted a series of poignant issues amongst *Learning Together* students, typically situated in discussions about belonging and identity:

Given the nature and intention behind Learning Together, I knew that at some point I would be likely to reveal at least some details about my background. I am quite open about this and in the right context am happy to discuss in detail. But, we all make judgements all of the time – about almost everything. That’s just the reality of the world we live in. Ideally, I would prefer people to judge me for the person I am and my relationship with them. However, and whilst it is by no means all of the time, far too often I am negatively (and repeatedly) judged because of my offender status and the nature of the offence and subsequent prison sentence. This is complicated by my claim of innocence and fight against the conviction, however I recognised that much of the emotions and concerns I felt stemmed from these repetitive negative experiences. This is unfortunately a deeply embedded reality for me and the potential reaction from others is always a cause for concern (Participant 1, WRA, 2017).

This quotation illustrates how although people were keen to share their lived experience of the criminal justice system, there was an air of caution when doing so. This apprehension was reportedly due to a fear of judgement in relation to the status that society has imposed upon people who had been and/or were currently involved in the criminal justice system. The term *master status* was coined by Everett Hughes to indicate a characteristic, which from the perspective of other people, is a primary identifying feature of a given individual (Van den Scott and Van den Hoonard 2016). A *master status* has exceptional importance for one’s social identity as it often shapes a person’s entire life. It has the greatest impact on identity and appearance to others that individuals usually organise their lives around it, as it becomes their main social

identity. For those who have been processed through the criminal justice system, labels such as ‘lawbreaker’ and ‘(ex)offender’ become an all-encompassing, *master status*. So much so that one’s ability to see themselves as anything other than, or different to, this *master status* is lacking. As the above quotation illustrates, this leads to uncertainty about one’s ability to belong and fit into wider society, which leads to self-judgement as well as judgement of others. The master status imposed upon many *Learning Together* students had a profound impact upon how they saw themselves and how they made sense of new experiences (such as going to university) - the majority of students who were new to the host institution, believing university was not a place for them. The sense of unsuitability amongst students who had lived experience of the criminal justice system was palpable, able to invoke mixed feelings about higher education:

I thought university would be a bit like Harry Potter. Yano [sic] with all the big tables, capes, hats (...) and words that you can’t say (Participant 2, WRA, 2018).

Today was the day I had been dreading for a few months. I have never been so nervous in my whole life. I just didn’t know what to expect (Participant 3, WRA, 2019).

The fear of the unknown amongst students who were new to the host institution not only had an impact on how they perceived university and their ability to fit in but how they made sense of their lived experience in an academic context. Students were reassured that sharing lived experience was not a prerequisite of participation in *Learning Together*. Rather, choosing to disclose personal insight of the criminal justice system was a gift that could be given to fellow students, as and when one felt ready to do so. As the forthcoming quotations suggest students with lived experience of criminal justice found certain subjects difficult to negotiate for a variety of reasons. Although integrating lived experience into the intellectual milieu of *Learning Together* is a fundamental component of the initiative, bearing witness to the academic landscape, which ultimately grounds a highly personal journey into a series of theories and research outcomes, can be bittersweet for students; harbouring the ability to create both positive and negative feelings:

This was a session that I was looking forward to having had what might be described as extensive and significant experience of the prison system. Its impact on me has been dramatic, significant, and life changing – and will continue to be so. I acknowledge that my situation has had a similar impact on many others close to me, including family and friends. I also acknowledge that it has also impacted on the wider local community, and not least of which there has been an impact on the alleged victim and those close to them (...) the impact for everyone is magnified in light of my continued stance of innocence of any crime. Words are actually wholly inadequate to describe intimately the situation accurately without that lived experience. It is perhaps

understandable that the prospect of this session for me raised many memories, questions, and concerns (Participant 1, WRA, 2017).

If someone has experienced something, then they are going to feel more strongly than someone who hasn't experienced it. My own experiences definitely have an impact on how I view things, sometimes I feel like my own views and feelings over rape and sexual assault can cloud my judgement and be my sole focus. Which is just a coping mechanism really, but on the other hand, I think no these are serious, life changing, devastating crimes and I should be looking at how the justice system sees them (Participant 4, WRA, 2019).

Meeuwisse *et al.* (2009) suggest that if students feel they do not fit in, their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they are more inclined to withdraw from higher education (see also Cotton *et al.* 2016, Kuh *et al.* 2006, Richardson 2007 and Thomas, 2011). This, combined with the presence of uncertainty and insecurity amongst students who were new to the host institution, meant pastoral care alongside active attempts to help students engage with the wider academic community (within and beyond the host institution) were important components of *Learning Together*. The author sought to make herself available as much as possible for students who were new to the host institution to prevent programme withdrawal (due to feeling like they 'don't belong' etc.). Being available as and when a student knocks on your office door, in crisis, in need of reassurance, in turmoil, in a highly emotional state or completely over-joyed is difficult to promise and indeed, manage. The sense of openness, fluidity and approachability that surrounded our approach to pastoral care (working with students beyond the confines of taught sessions) was vital to maintain the interest of the student and their ability to participate in the programme. For many students, the non-judgemental 'listening ear' provided by higher education (and those within it) was a new experience, that was to be savoured at any given opportunity. Managing the availability of a 'listening ear' amongst lecturers involved in *Learning Together* was, however, a complex process characterised by teamwork, patience, skill and endurance. Upon reflection, it would seem that such endeavours provided an impromptu opportunity for the author to engage in ad-hoc discussions about 'university life' with *Learning Together* students. During which, it became apparent that the learning process (particularly the critical exploration of a subject that many of our students live and breathe on a day-to-day basis) holds the ability to both directly and/or indirectly push and pull people towards personally and professionally challenging places that one may not have necessarily explored if it were not for the programme. Bearing witness to multiple and varied experiences of pedagogical push and pull brought into sharp focus just how profound and ingrained feelings of unsuitability and fear were amongst each cohort – with many students drawing upon such feelings to frame their initial experience of university and make sense of this new beginning - a chance to start again, become

something different and ultimately make some kind of change to their current lifestyle. This sense of ‘newness’ and ‘becoming’ went on to invoke a real sense of anticipation and hope amongst students that university could, and indeed would, provide a transformative experience of some nature:

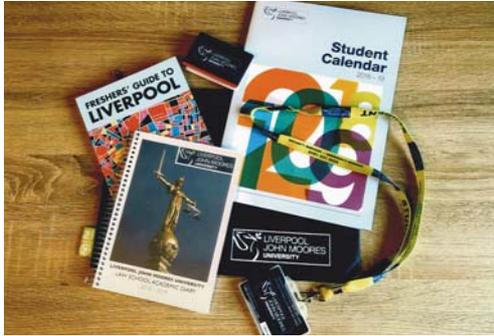
This is all-new to me but then again, so is going to jail and getting a criminal record at the age of 52 (Participant 5, WRA, 2019).

Figure 3: Untitled



This picture represents the Redmonds Building and the sense of belonging that this [Learning Together] has given me (...) Taking part in something bigger, something more, a new journey of self-improvement' (Participant 6, VRA, 2019).

Being a part of learning together is a way of me fighting back against my ex and the system (...) I've been at a crossroads in my life recently and lost a hell of lot the last few months, but I feel like I've come away from learning together today feeling like I'm finally on the right path. After today's session, I already feel that I want to come to university full time in September. I've always put off coming to uni because I thought I was too old and not clever enough but the thoughts about uni have come and gone so much over the years and my recent situation has only pushed me further and encouraged me to want to come to uni full time (Participant 4, WRA, 2019).

Figure 4: Untitled

Something as simple as being given this pack made me feel really good, part of something more, part of a new journey (Participant 6, VRA, 2019).

The above quotations illustrate how education can be a site of both transformation and resistance. Existing literature highlights the transformative potential of higher education, particularly for those with lived experience of the criminal justice system (Maruna 2001, Holzer *et al.* 2003, Maruna *et al.* 2004, Armstrong and Ludlow 2016). Yet little attention has been invested in how higher education can provide a site of resistance for those who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Field and Morgan-Klein (2010) define student-hood as the way in which learners think of themselves, including the extent to which they develop an identity as a student. The findings presented here illustrate just some of the ways in which students involved in *Learning Together* saw student-hood as an act of resistance. By virtue of being involved in *Learning Together*, students (with lived experience of criminal justice) felt that they were proving to themselves and others that they could not only go to university but also thrive as a student. Wearing a student lanyard within and beyond their university building and identifying as a student, not 'lawbreaker' or '(ex)offender' was subsequently, an act of resistance in itself.

Figure 5: Making friends in the dark



It seems like a dark and lonely coffee break outside a university building, however, it represents a space that I socialised with newer students to LJMU for the first time (...) We all stayed an additional half an hour to meet with each other each week, even though it was cold and dark. I took this photo as I felt it was a moment I didn't want to forget. Little did I know it became a weekly meet up spot that has been the highlight of my Learning Together experience (Participant 7, VRA, 2019).

To create an opportunity for students to engage in an educational endeavour that facilitated both acts of transformation and resistance, the author (alongside others involved in the design and delivery of *Learning Together*) had to embrace the unknown. From the inception of *Learning Together*, within the host institution, the author described the initiative as a liminal space on the periphery of higher education and criminal justice practice (Gosling and Burke 2019). This was primarily because the initiative did not neatly fit into mainstream higher education or criminal justice service provision. Rather, it operated on the margins of both sectors. Although the host institution and partner criminal justice services perceived the initiative as an inherently 'good thing' there was, in the beginning, a lack of clarity surrounding what a university-based *Learning Together* could achieve. This ambiguity allowed the author (alongside Professor Lol Burke) to embrace a fluid approach when creating and developing *Learning Together*, utilising students' experience of the programme in real time to steer and direct the initiative's evolution. Although insightful, attempts to adopt such a flexible approach were challenging. Upon reflection, it would be fair to say that the author readily embraced both personal and professional uncertainty as she embarked upon her *Learning Together* journey; simultaneously negotiating discussions about innovative practice and risk management.

Although this was an intellectually stimulating position to be in, creating and developing a new initiative, within a higher education setting, meant that the author had to take steps and risks that extended beyond the remit of typical day-to-day duties (Gosling and Burke 2019). Existing literature on community-engaged pedagogy provided a way in which the author could make sense of emerging efforts to reduce the socio-cultural distance between academic researchers and their local community. In order to build upon this theoretical insight and make sense of endeavours to bring together local criminal justice and higher education providers, the author drew upon the work of Lyng (2005) who devised the term edgework to explain why people take risks as part of leisure activities. Edgework is a socio-psychological concept that understands voluntary risk taking as a temporary escape from social boundaries. Edgework is not a theory of crime per se. Rather, it is a concept of the sociology of risk to define the search for and/or experience of physical or psychological borderline experiences. Risky actions are therefore, understood as an escape from the obligations imposed by rationales and restrictions. In other words, going right to the edges of acceptable behaviour, challenging the rules of what is acceptable and exploring the edges that exist along cultural boundaries.

According to Lyng (2005), edgework (as an activity primarily carried out in leisure time) is a compensatory antithesis to the everyday, permeated by bureaucracy and economic constraints. Albeit in a different context and for different reasons, Gosling and Burke (2019) identify with the notion of edgework in their pursuit to create a *Learning Together* initiative within a university setting - working on the edges of traditional practice in higher education whilst at the same time exploring cultural boundaries between the host institution and local criminal justice service provision. In using the phrase, pedagogical edgework, Gosling and Burke (2019) provide a way in which stakeholders and interested parties can make sense of responsible risk-taking whilst communicating how initiatives, such as *Learning Together*, are able to work at the periphery of institutionally recognised practices. Gosling and Burke (2019) coined the term pedagogical edgework to illustrate how educators can embrace uncertainty and begin to explore cultural boundaries between the known and unknown. According to Rooijen (2018), taking risks is imperative for achieving innovation in higher education. It is also particularly helpful when attempting to solve differences in ideas and making informed decisions (Koh *et al.* 2015). During the process of risk taking, a level of personal, pedagogical and professional uncertainty arises (Dewey 1916). The term pedagogical edgework can subsequently be utilised as a point of reference. As a way in which individuals can work together to confidently, explore vulnerability and uncertainty.

Although existing literature recognises that teaching is an inherently emotional practice, there is relatively little research into the role of emotion in the classroom (Frenzel *et al.* 2016). This may be because emotional responses are often constructed

as irrational responses ‘beneath the facilities of thought and reason’ (Ahmed 2004: 03) and as a result, are something to be regulated and repressed (Sutton and Wheatley 2003). Connelly and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) suggest that little is known about how emotional experiences are shared in the classroom even though scholars are increasingly recognising the importance of ‘difficult knowledge’ (Britzman 1998) and discomfoting emotions (Boler and Zembylas 2003). A pedagogy of discomfort acknowledges that discomfort is not only unavoidable but also necessary when teaching about social injustice (Boler 1999). Through encouragement to move beyond comfort zones, learners can be challenged to question the hegemonic worldviews that underpin the unequal societies in which they live (Zembylas 2015) and engage in a process of life-long learning.

Figure 6: Untitled



My most significant picture is of the court room in the crown court which was the last room I saw as a free man with no convictions (...) The first time I walked in and sat down made me realise this is not the place I want to be (Participant 5, VRA, 2019).

Managing a pedagogy of discomfort requires a degree of *reciprocal reaching* (Gosling and Burke 2019). The reciprocal reaching that takes place amongst and between students involved in *Learning Together* is a form of edgework as they are encouraged to explore boundaries, manage uncertainty and engage in discussions that they may not have experienced if it was not for their participation in the initiative. Engaging in the process of reciprocal reaching not only helped to foster a strong sense of belonging amongst and between students but helped to turn potential sites of division and

separation into means of cohesion (Gosling and Burke 2019). Rather than dividing, discussions about difference (whether actual or perceived) provided a way in which students bonded, engaged in honest, authentic conversations about themselves as individuals (rather than students) and disclosed (for the first time) feelings of un-belonging in higher education. The reciprocal reaching that takes place between students highlights how complex and multifaceted the notion of belonging within a higher education context is, particularly within higher education institutions that are occupied by a varied student population. Perhaps naively, the author believed that students who were new to the host institution would be more likely to grapple with belonging uncertainty given that *Learning Together* was a completely new experience within an unfamiliar setting (Gosling and Burke 2019). However, as the forthcoming quotation illustrates, belonging uncertainty was just as prevalent amongst students from the institution's postgraduate community.

At times I felt excluded [from postgraduate studies], but I'm not sure whether that's my own insecurities because I've always been kind of, not fearful, but anxious going into a classroom because of certain backgrounds that I come from (...) I do feel like I'm sat at the end of the table kind of thing. So, when I go into the classroom for Learning Together, and I'm not an ex-offender or anything, but I feel more like them than an MA student (Participant 9, FG, 2018).

Belonging uncertainty amongst students from the postgraduate community within the host institution illustrate a need to recognise and work towards supporting students who have indirect experience of the criminal justice system. Research suggests that the primary purpose of a prison sentence (or indeed any sentence handed down by the courts) is to punish someone who has broken the law (The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice 2015). However, given the practical, financial, social and emotional effects of imprisonment, a custodial sentence can also have a punitive consequence for family members. To date, the higher educator sector has largely failed to recognise that students may have indirect experience of the criminal justice system. This over-sight provides a stark contrast to calls from the European Commission, who suggest higher education must play a part in facing up to Europe's social and democratic challenges. This means ensuring higher education is inclusive, civic-minded and connected to the community (European Commission 2019):

Me and my brother are very different, I did Criminology, he's a criminal. Same background, raised the exact same, it's ironic that we are kind of in these parallel worlds. I wasn't necessarily academic, but I got the grades because I didn't want to be a statistic from my area (Participant 9, FG, 2018).

The debate moved onto how children follow in the footsteps of their parents with history of criminal behaviour, with some sharing how their children have gone down the same road that they did and they find it difficult to steer them away from crime and so blame themselves. This is something I feel passionately about, coming from a deprived background with a parent who was in and out of prison in my early years, not only effected by early school years but as I got older I realised that was not the sort of behaviour I wanted to maintain (Participant 10, WRA, 2019).

These quotations illustrate how indirect experience of the criminal justice system influenced a student's decision to apply to university and choice of subject area. In an attempt to become more civic-minded and connected to the community, the higher education sector should not only enhance access to university for people with criminal convictions (direct experience of the criminal justice system) but, engage in an active attempt to provide tailored support, guidance and opportunities for those who have indirect experience of the criminal justice system. If education is to be truly transformational, we, as a society, must engage in more nuanced discussions about student's personal and professional motivations, experiences and aspirations both before and during their journey through higher education. Recognising and indeed working with those who have direct and/or indirect experiences of criminal justice will subsequently, go some way to develop our understanding of the emotionally complex nature of higher education.

In addition to students with direct and indirect lived experience of criminal justice, there are also those with professional experience of the criminal justice system. From the inception of *Learning Together* (within the host institution), both the author and Professor Lol Burke were keen to ensure practitioners from the local criminal justice community were involved in the initiative. The programme supports self-referrals from practitioners across prison, probation and third sector organisations within the local community. The experience and craftsmanship offered by practitioners throughout the duration of *Learning Together* is invaluable, helping to nurture, supplement and guide discussions about contemporary frontline practice. In addition, the reciprocal reaching that takes place between students from 'different sides of the fence' (so to speak) cultivates an honest, grounded critique of criminal justice policy and practice that goes some way to help students crystallise both personal and/or professional views on emerging penological issues:

The discussions made me question some of the perhaps lazy assumptions I make. My views are based on the experience of working in prisons for over 20 years. However, I'm aware that I have a lot of anecdotal knowledge, a lot of local knowledge, but I don't have an over-view, nationally. I certainly don't have opinions and views that are based on evidence-based research (...) I would like to be able to link up my thoughts, ideas and experience to a wider rationale – i.e., I know that in the past I have discussed

prison work and experiences with [name removed] and she has been able to put these views into a broader, more valid context (Participant 11, WRA, 2017).

Throughout the two hours I started to consolidate some of my rather nebulous and unformed views. Having a distance and being surrounded by people talking about the topic of crime and criminality I realise that I have become a little lazy in thinking about the many aspects of crime and the criminal justice system and have tended to fall back on subjective, personal experience (...) I realise that the more I think and talk about crime, the less I actually know (Participant 11, WRA, 2017).

Although practitioners were not particularly vocal during classroom discussions, their reflective accounts (both written and visual) highlight an unequivocal willingness to engage in reflective practice: learning through and from experience, towards gaining new insights of the self (Boud and Fales 1983, Boud *et al.* 1996, Jarvis 1992 and Mezirow 1981). Scholars suggest that reflective practice involves examining assumptions associated with everyday activities. It calls for practitioners to become self-aware, critically evaluating their own responses to situations (O'Hara 2011, Dewey 1998). The aim of reflective practice is to transform a situation in which obscurity, doubt, conflict and disturbance is experienced, into a situation that is clear, coherent and settled (Dewey 1998). According to Lyons (2010), reflective inquiry is the foundation of professionalism. This is because frontline professionals need to 'think well' when working with people who have been involved in crime (O'Hara 2011):

Prior to working with probation, I was a prison officer for a number of years. In our session 'does prison work?' it was difficult for me to listen to some of the criticism of the work that I did for many years. I know I strived to do a good job, but could we have done things better? It is only since working in the community with those subject to prison licences, that I have truly realised the impact of things like recall. And yet, only in recent weeks have members of parliament began to speak openly again about the impact of short-term prison sentences, not just for the prisoner, but potentially their family, partners, children and employers. To what purpose does a four-week custodial sentence serve? (Participant 6, WRA, 2019).

Despite being surrounded by 'criminals' for a large part of my life I realise how difficult it is for me to stay balanced and logical when I am exposed to the despair that is rife in the criminal justice system. I am unable to totally distance myself from an emotional response to the terrible things I see in prison and this consequently has and does affect my ability to be fair, balanced and logical (Participant 11, WRA, 2017).

Figure 7: Untitled



I am currently a case manager so to hear other students express critical thinking in relation to what we do was difficult at times (...) and yet I agreed with most of what was said (Participant 6, VRA, 2019).

Greene (1997) suggests that in addition to thinking well, reflective practice requires professionals to be 'wide-awake'. According to O'Hara (2011), best results are obtained when we are challenged to use our imagination and consider what can be achieved when we understand behaviour in the context of place, time and social structures. The findings presented throughout this section illustrate how the intellectual milieu of the initiative provides an opportunity for students (particularly those from the local practitioner community) to not only reflect upon their craft but enhance their criminological imagination. The criminological imagination addresses how we gain our knowledge about crime and justice and how the criminal justice system (in its broadest sense) uses this knowledge in criminal justice policy and process (Barton *et al.* 2006). Rather than focusing on an individual who is involved in crime, the criminological imagination tries to understand the social and economic contexts that produce not only crime, but responses to it:

I'm also aware that since I was last a student, I have become less adept, less comfortable theorising and discussion hypothetical situations. Even though I understand why the exercise is useful I now think that working in a prison environment has probably done something to my tolerance levels and definitely made me more cynical. I suppose I'm saying that I am more interested in outcomes than I used to be and more intolerable of myriad, hypothetical and meanderings (Participant 11, WRA, 2017)

Figure 8: Untitled



This picture represents a probation officer, three magistrates, police and ‘criminals’ (...) I put the Lego pieces together to represent social constructionism. If it is possible to construct a criminal justice system, then it is possible to deconstruct it and make it better (...) Notice the faces of the police are clear cut and well presented but the faces of the ‘criminals’ are unshaven and angry’ (Participant 6, VRA, 2019).

Schon (1987) suggests that practitioners, who receive encouragement to think carefully about what they do, while they do it, learn in a more profound way. Figure 5 provides just one example of how a student, who is also a case manager for a local probation service, utilised their criminological imagination to deconstruct a taught session on social constructionism. Developing one’s criminological imagination requires a degree of emotional labour, particularly amongst and between students from the local criminal justice practitioner community. Reflecting on the way in which people regulate and use their emotions in their work has become a significant area of study in recent years (Knight *et al.* 2016), yet little attention has been invested in how people make sense of the emotions of practice in a pedagogical sense. In addition to helping current practitioners expand their criminological imagination, *Learning Together* created opportunities for ‘practitioners of the future’ to reflect upon their current attempts to engage with the local provision of criminal justice. In addition, the process of reciprocal reaching saw students from within the postgraduate community make numerous attempts to draw parallels between their experience as a student and the lived experiences of those who have been directly involved in the criminal justice system.

I hope this will make me a better practitioner one day. I come into this with a very narrow idea of Criminal Justice and the people involved in it but really opened up a world to me. I feel I have a better understanding of the complexity now (...) I think it has made me more considerate, empathetic and open (Participant 12, WRA, 2017).

I feel my participation in this programme has vastly helped improve my relationship with the individual I support as a befriender. I have learned to have a more open mind towards certain aspects of rehabilitation and resettlement. I have found this to be very effective in our relationship as it really helps to give the participant a sense of achievement as well as learning something new that they look forward to attending every week (Participant 10, WRA, 2019).

Figure 9: Untitled



Probationary is such a confusing 'piece of art' (...) in many ways the game mimics the confusion of student life. So many pathways, options, so much to consider (...) Life in education doesn't always go right – in no way am I comparing university students experience to being on license by the way – just the confusion. The rules and expectations often change and are open to interpretation (Participant 14, VRA, 2019).

This was quite a frustrating but interesting session as there were no right answers to the complex questions and I feel this relates to some of the issues in society in terms of Criminal Justice (...) This session left me within a lot of unanswered questions (Participant 12, WRA, 2017).

Figure 10: Untitled



This was taken in a coffee place (...) It's a bit of a gimmick but they give you a timer which tells you when your tea has infused (...) I thought it captured a lot of what me and some others were discussing in the first session which had themes of 'waiting' and 'delays' in terms of how the justice system can be so slow (...) Students (...) are bound by deadlines and alarms so we can relate to a lot outside of that too (Participant 13, VRA, 2019).

The reciprocal reaching that took place between *Learning Together* students provided an opportunity for individuals, who ordinarily would not have met, to engage with their own, as well as others, personal and/or professional experiences beyond the confines of traditional pedagogical boundaries. Bringing such a diverse collection of people together, within a university setting, meant that more focus and attention was invested in discussions about belonging in higher education and what it means to be a student. During a focus group, students from the institution's postgraduate community attempted to explain 'student-hood' and university life to interns (students with lived experience of the criminal justice system) leading the discussion. Although the findings are not explicitly linked to their experience of *Learning Together*, the quotations below include a series of sentiments and experiences that – albeit in a different context – were commonly referred to by those who had personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system.

I feel like with uni, you have to fit a mould (...) That's what it makes you feel like. If you don't fit within the box, then there's something not quite right with you (FG, 2017).

I'm here because society has made me believe that I need to be here because I can't just walk off the streets where I come from and go into the kind of work that I want to do because I don't have letters after my name. I am relatable. I've seen the oppression that criminal justice brings. I've felt the emotion. So, for me, I'm only here because society has made me feel like I have to be (FG, 2017).

It's like you've dumped people from a very early age, like from five years old, and you've put them into this system and throw all this knowledge and information at them, but you haven't taught them how to process it. You haven't trained them how to utilise that in real life (...) That for me, is where education has gone wrong, its literally input, input, input (FG, 2017).

Students who had extensive experience of higher education utilised similar terminology and phrases as those who had lived experience of the criminal justice system to describe and indeed, make sense of two separate (but seemingly interconnected) sectors: higher education and criminal justice. Mann (2010) suggests that it is possible to view experiences of alienation as arising from a particular social condition in which students now find themselves - a condition in which there is a greater focus on performativity and functionality, as well as a greater focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Managerialism has become so pervasive that it has infiltrated every eventuality of human existence (Klikauer 2015, Deem *et al.* 2007) from the higher education sector to the criminal justice system. The parallels in experience that can be drawn between the criminal justice system and higher education sector are under-researched and largely ignored. It is therefore, anticipated that the discussion presented throughout this monograph will go some way to open a more honest and indeed meaningful conversation about how the two sectors can work together to enhance the lived experiences of those involved in their machinery. The findings presented here provide a tangible example of *how commonality can be found in difference* and how responsible risk-taking can provide a way in which longstanding 'traditions' can be challenged as well as an opportunity to accommodate partnership working that supports dynamic practice within and between two cornerstones of modern society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Over a period of three academic years, ethnographic data was collected to *explore* the experiences of staff and students, from within one situated university, who took part in *Learning Together*. A series of themes in and around *reflexivity*, *belonging* and *identity* have been discussed to illustrate how criminal justice-higher education, learning partnerships can *embrace* uncertainty (and cultural difference) to create a bespoke educational opportunity that is able to *enhance* access to and experience of higher education for those who have personal and/or professional experience of the criminal justice system. Adopting edgework as an approach and conceptual framework to create inclusive, yet diverse learning spaces has helped to increase and inform the author's understanding of how and why people (particularly those with criminal convictions) engage with higher education. Gosling and Burke (2019) suggest that the edgework associated with *Learning Together* (in a university setting) supports conversations about *who* students are, how they came to be involved in higher education, their motivations for doing so and rationale for continued engagement – particularly when a sense of belonging and affinity with the sector is lacking and/or challenged. In addition, the edgework required to make initiatives such as *Learning Together* work hold the ability to shed light on the presence and impact of *pedagogical push and pull* amongst students (and staff) – regularly visiting challenging places and negotiating points of tension and strain. This is not to say that such experiences do not exist beyond the confines of *Learning Together*. Rather, it is an observation, albeit simple, that innovative practice, responsible risk-taking and compassion can go some way to changing longstanding conversations about what it means to learn, and indeed belong, in a university setting.

The title of this monograph opens with a question: *What can we learn from Learning Together?* For me, this initiative provides a vehicle through which the unknown can be embraced and acknowledged to bring about change. *Learning Together* has provided more than an opportunity for students and staff within one situated university to engage in a though-provoking educational activity. It has created a discrete site of resistance, between two separate but inter-connected sectors, that (albeit from a grass-roots perspective) challenges the current status quo. As *Learning Together* is situated within a university (as opposed to a custodial setting), the author is able to engage senior managers, from across the institution, in discussions about how people with criminal convictions access and experience higher education within the host institution. Such conversations have not only helped to demystify the ambiguity which surrounds *institutional processes*, but provided an opportunity for various people from across the institution, to come together and think differently about the issues facing potential and indeed current students with criminal convictions (within and beyond *Learning Together*). In addition, such lessons have reiterated a need to engage in more honest conversations with students – from across the board – about their experiences of higher education. As the previous discussion highlighted, such endeavors highlight just how prevalent and indeed present, the

criminal justice system actually is amongst students who do not declare a criminal conviction when they apply to university. Whether people like it or not, higher education and criminal justice are sitting side by side in contemporary western society.

Initiatives such as *Learning Together* are working with this longstanding familiarity and unapologetically championing those who have remained, and/or continue to remain in the shadows. It is through such celebration that change is being achieved and recognised. Although a step in the right direction, the socio-political climate that surrounds such endeavors are seemingly stuck in a time warp. Chris Millward, Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students, claims:

We've improved opportunity by widening access to higher education, but we are a long way from equality of opportunity. There are substantial gaps between under-represented groups and other students at every stage of higher education (...) Achieving this equality of opportunity is not just important for individuals to unlock their potential. It is also important for a cohesive and just society. Success will depend on how universities and colleges work with schools and employers and how they support students through all stages of the lifecycle (...) It will be judged ultimately by whether there is a significant reduction in the gaps we see for access to, success in and progression beyond higher education. (Office for Students 2019)

Although Millward draws upon the longstanding positive rhetoric of the widening participation agenda, we are still to see any ambition to work alongside criminal justice services in an attempt to provide *equality of opportunity* amongst all members of society- individuals who have direct experience of the criminal justice system are likely to possess some, if not all, of the characteristics that the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and UK government call disadvantaged (Unlock 2018). In addition to lacklustre rhetoric, Millward fails to exhibit any desire to take new (but informed) risks when it comes to widening participation for people with criminal convictions. This is despite the fact that we, as a sector, are aware that without taking bigger risks in admissions we are always going to exclude students who did not get a head start in life and have limited cultural capital due to entrenched inequality (Straughan 2019). Although the recent UCAS decision to 'ban-the-box' has merely displaced (rather than eradicated) the criminal convictions screening process for potential university students, we, as a sector, currently occupy a unique position. With responsibility for criminal conviction screening now firmly placed at the front door of each institution, the sector could embrace this unique moment in time, be bold and take bigger risks that could subsequently result in real change throughout the sector.

Breaking away from arbitrary and ill-informed processes towards a genuine commitment to provide transformative educational experiences for all, would go some way in helping the sector to become more civic-minded and representative of

the community to which they belong. The findings presented throughout this monograph illustrate how the creation and maintenance of a criminal justice-higher education learning partnership has been built upon the willingness of one local university and criminal justice community to engage in *reciprocal reaching*: drawing from within each sector's pool of expertise and experience to negotiate the unknown and take responsible risks. Although the findings are lacking in generalisability, they do go some way in opening up a conversation about how the higher education sector could work alongside (potential and current) students with criminal convictions in a more inclusive, open-minded fashion if it were to work closer with local criminal justice providers.

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