



**ON A WING AND A PRAYER: PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND  
THE PRISON LIBRARY**

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Abstract

Purpose

In response to instrumental cultural policy agendas in the UK, the paper explores the practice of collaborative cultural work in the criminal justice system through the lens of professional ethics in prison libraries. It seeks to balance narratives on the value of arts and culture in cross-government policy agendas with a nuanced consideration of the realities of such work in non-conventional organisational settings.

Research design and methodology

*‘Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work’* was a two-year empirical study (2017-19), including ethnographic fieldwork in three case study sites representing prison library services in England. Following a ‘communities of practice’ conceptual framework, research methods included participant observation of day-to-day cultural work and specific events; successive research interviews with library and prison service staff and volunteers; and interviews with key collaborating organisations from extended professional networks.

Findings

Data from three prison library case studies show consistent ethical implications relating to the extent of collaborative complexity in the field and its impact on participants’ emotional resilience; navigation of the prison regime by cultural workers; consequences for emotional labour and care in the field; and the re-negotiation of ethical boundaries and practices.

Originality

The research makes an original contribution to debates on the instrumental value of arts and culture via its intimate focus on prison libraries as microcosms of situated, truly integrated cultural work, both from a physical, organisational perspective and in their representation of a cross-policy function for arts and culture.

Introduction

Cultural policy makers in the UK have become increasingly focused on the instrumental value of arts and culture in recent years. This includes the cross-policy function and cost-effectiveness of arts and culture as a discrete form of Government spending, and the value generated for different public policy agendas including health and social care and criminal justice. More scholarly attention is subsequently being paid to both the measurement and articulation of cultural value in instrumental terms and to the ethical implications of appropriating arts and culture as a form of social justice and ‘public good’. In response, *Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work* – funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, 2017-19) – examined ethical dimensions of collaborative practice within and across museums working in health and social care settings (in the full study) and prison library services, which form the focus of this article.

The research complements and extends earlier work by the author on the increasing multi-disciplinary and collaborative contexts in which cultural work is undertaken. This includes for example research on public libraries and social inclusion (Anon for review), and on the value of museums in dementia care (Anon for review), which focused on the value and outcomes of such work for those accessing and participating in relevant cultural services. In undertaking this research, gaps in the evidence base and subsequent cultural policy debates were incrementally identified concerning the impact of cross-sector collaborative work on the *cultural sector itself*, including implications for professional identities, values and practices.

Other researchers in the cultural policy field have been critical of the ideological assumptions made by policy makers on the social value of arts and culture, and the subsequent advocacy claims made by its professional community (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008). More recently, particular attention has been paid to the implicit contradictions of such promotion of social value when there are persistent inequalities in who gets to work in, participate in and directly benefit from the cultural and creative industries (Brook et al, 2020). Before any true assessment of 'success' can be made regarding the cross-policy value of any cultural intervention, it is important to give equal attention to the practice-based characteristics and complexities of affective cultural work, and how these in turn inform any interpretations of success or social value. Through the lens of professional ethics, we can begin to question and explore the underpinning conditions, as far as they exist, of moral responsibility and public accountability in arts and cultural practice.

The article extends and reconsiders emerging findings from the *Instrumental Values* study, which were shared and debated during a research seminar – Cultural Policy, Professional Ethics and the Public Good – in collaboration with the Institute of Applied Ethics (IAE) at the University of Hull (summarised in Anon for review). Following a description of the ethnographic research process and its methodological rationale, research findings are discussed under key headings, including the extent of collaborative complexity in the field and its impact on participants' emotional resilience; navigation of the prison regime by cultural workers; consequences for emotional labour and care in the field; and the re-negotiation of ethical boundaries and practices. Ultimately, the article makes the case for more explicitly ethnographic and values-based approaches to research in the cultural policy field, questioning the real-world accuracy of technocratic measures of impact and value, and the authenticity and usefulness of claims to independence and objectivity in academic evaluation research with arts and cultural sectors.

### Research context, design and methodology

The concept of professional ethics is described by Lane (2017) as a relatively modern invention that has developed in tandem with the professionalization of a range of occupations and roles throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which do not have the historical gravitas of law or medicine. According to Durkheim (1957), 'special groups' differentiate professional ethics from other codes of civic morals through the 'legitimacy, autonomy and regulation of collective power'. Professional ethics are subsequently 'more developed, and the more advanced in their operation, the greater the stability and the better the organization of the professional groups themselves'. Banks and Gallagher (2008) describe professional ethics in practice as 'the norms of right action, good qualities of character and values relating to the nature of the good life that are aspired to, espoused and enacted by professional practitioners in the context of their work'.

As an example of Durkheim's legitimation and regulation of professional ethics in cultural professions, the Museums Association published a revised Code of Ethics for Museums in 2015, following a substantial public consultation with members. Described as the sector's social contract with the public, the code is structured around three core themes including Public engagement and public benefit; Stewardship of collections; and Individual and institutional integrity. Each theme includes a set of defined principles that should be upheld by 'museums and those who work in and with them' throughout their work. Under 'Public engagement and public benefit' for example, these include treating everyone equally, with honesty and respect, and supporting freedom of speech and debate. Guidance on upholding such principles includes ensuring editorial integrity, resisting attempts to influence interpretation or content by particular interest groups, including donors and funders and resisting bias in research undertaken by the museum.

Similarly, the UK's Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) launched a revised Ethical Framework during the *Instrumental Values* research period in 2018, following extensive consultation with members. The framework covers seven 'ethical principles' including human rights, equalities, and diversity; public benefit; preservation; intellectual freedom; impartiality; confidentiality; and information skills and information literacy. In various studies of consistent or 'enduring' values

across different organisational codes and consultations, definitive principles of librarianship include stewardship; service; intellectual freedom; equity of access; privacy; literacy and learning; rationalism; and democracy (Gorman, 2000; Hauptman, 2002; Koehler, 2015). In their study of the role and development of ethics and values in librarianship, Koehler (2015) questions the ‘endurance’ of such principles considering different social and environmental contexts, including the post-modern organisation and institutionalisation of the profession; development of information technologies and systems; and reinterpretations of the public value of libraries in the civic sphere. As such, it is timely to further consider the relevance and impact of instrumental cultural policy narratives and agendas on the endurance of core professional values and contemporary ethical practice in the sector.

The *Instrumental Values* research study adopted a ‘communities of practice’ (CoP) conceptual framework, drawn from the critical management field and studies of organisational learning, in order to “develop sector-specific case studies, working across multiple research sites, on the relationship between defined, sector-specific Codes of Ethics and those serendipitously developed between collaborating professionals and organisations as cross-sector communities of practice mature” (Anon for review).

CoPs are defined as ‘vehicles for situated learning’, which generate knowledge and share practices within and across a range of (physical and virtual) work-related and organisational spatial settings (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Gherardi *et al*, 1998; Amin and Roberts, 2008). An earlier review by the author of the literature on communities of practice (Anon for review) presented the concept as a valid multidimensional research framework for the study of collaborative cultural work. Dimensions of the CoP, including reflective practice, social capital, professional identity, tacit knowledge transfer, creativity and innovation are especially relevant to the study of multi-disciplinary cultural work. It was anticipated that applying these operational dimensions to situated forms of cultural work in prisons and health and social care settings would create deeply contextualised, original insights on the reciprocal benefits and ethical implications of *collaborative practice* itself.

Specific research questions and objectives – as described in the original research design (Anon for review) - were modelled on functional elements and indicators of effective CoPs, including:

- The extent of work assimilation across professional boundaries;
- Identification of shared repertoires, artefacts and symbols of collaborative professional learning;
- The social construction of embodied professional knowledge and skills;
- The articulation and representation of unique professional identities in creating collaborative ‘added value’;
- The reciprocal value of defined codes of ethics to collaborating professional communities;
- Each set within the context of public policy agendas and their influence upon developing cross-sector professional communities.

This article focuses upon data drawn from ethnographic fieldwork with three case study prison library services, as microcosms of situated, truly integrated cultural work, both in terms of their physical location on the prison estate and in their representative embodiment of a cross-policy function for arts and culture. The research used the prison library’s contribution to prison education reform as its policy-led starting point in its original design, but fieldwork also highlighted the library’s role and function in meeting multiple service objectives in the criminal justice system, including prisoner mental health and wellbeing and other more nuanced aspects of the rehabilitation process (Anon for review). In this context, the author/researcher adopted ‘modes of ethnographic intervention’ described by Hauge (2021), including ‘organizational development’ through an interest in informing future professional practice in prison libraries, and ‘intervening description’ through an interest in providing an objective commentary on cultural policy discourse versus the reality of cultural work in the field.

A degree of stratified sampling was used in determining case study sites and inviting prison libraries to take part in the research, to include state prisons run by Her Majesty’s Prison Service (HMPS); private prisons run by contractors; both men’s and women’s prison services of similar categories; each in

different geographical locations across England. Reputable prison library services (e.g., award winning) were purposefully targeted, where possible, to start from a relatively established position of service effectiveness and subsequently use the research to understand the underpinning collaborative contexts and conditions for such successes (Anon for review). Prison library case studies include:

- Library A - HMPS-run category B/C men's prison, opened in 1887, East of England (capacity approx. 800). Library run by [county] local authority.
- Library B - Privately run category B men's prison, opened in 2012, South-East London (capacity approx. 1,300). Library run in-house.
- Library C - HMPS-run closed category women's prison, opened in 1962, North of England (capacity approx. 500). Library originally run by local authority, sub-contracted during the research to a commercial education services provider.

Specific research methods used across the full study included repeat site visits to selected case study organisations, including the three prison library services described above and throughout the article. These included participant observation of day-to-day cultural work and participation in specific events and activities (e.g. reading groups), along with successive research interviews and group discussions with prison library staff and volunteers, prison service staff and key collaborators and organisations from extended professional networks. Interviews with prison library staff for example have incrementally posed questions on career trajectories and experience in the sector, including perceptions of formal codes of ethics and their relevance to collaborative cultural work; the day-to-day experience of relevant communities of practice; and the ethical challenges or implications of such situated and collaborative type of work (Anon for review). Data consists of extensive field notes and interview transcripts where it was possible to record conversations off-site.

An ethnographic, qualitative approach was essential to capture the complexities of the relationship between policy, ethical codes of practice and the lived experience of cultural workers, and to add authority and authenticity to the research via the collection of detailed, autobiographical professional narratives (Riessman, 1993; Robson, 2002). Rigorous discourse analysis of professionals' social construction of their worlds enables a greater exploration of the 'pragmatic function of language' and how talking translates into doing (Wood and Kroger, 2000). An ethnographic methodology furthermore enabled an in-depth, observational consideration of the *situatedness* of collaborative practice and its ethical implications, inspired by situated learning theory as a central principle of communities of practice research, which is described as learning through goal-directed activity in the situation where the learnt or acquired knowledge is to be deployed (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Billet, 1996).

## Summary of key findings

A summary of key findings, drawn from thematic analysis of field notes and interview data, is presented below under the following headings:

- Collaborative complexity and emotional resilience
- Navigating the prison regime
- Emotional labour, care, and the prison librarian
- Re-negotiating the ethics of collaborative practice.

### *Collaborative complexity and emotional resilience*

The first key finding relates to the complex practice of collaboration in the field, its varying degrees of success, and subsequent impact on cultural workers' emotional resilience in the sector. The range and volume of collaborating organisations; the integral supporting role of third sector and voluntary organisations; and the range of 'life-course' professional skills and experiences held by community members reflect this trend. By way of example shared during the IAE seminar discussion (Anon for review), the prison library based in the East of England (Library A) leads an award-winning, weekly Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) group for prisoners with dementia. The prison librarian



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(employed by county council library services) runs the group in collaboration with a group of volunteers from a local church-based charity. The group sessions take place in a HMPS prison, but on a dedicated health wing that is sub-contracted to a commercial provider, meaning that four different types of organisations are effectively working together. With regards to collaborators’ prior professional experience, the prison librarian had previously worked as a mental health nurse. Similarly, two regular volunteers from the church-based charity organisation had a wealth of clinical professional experience, having worked as an NHS nurse and psychotherapist prior to taking retirement. In discussing their role as a volunteer in prisons, the former psychotherapist somewhat poignantly commented on their moral obligation to “give something back” in retirement having been professionally trained in the NHS.

Across all prison library case studies, a core group of charitable organisations and volunteer groups underpins many examples of effective, reputable cultural work in prisons, as per the therapeutic work with prisoners with dementia described above. These include for example The Reading Agency; The National Literacy Trust; Prison Reading Groups and Give a Book; The Reader organisation based in Liverpool; the Shannon Trust; National Prison Radio; and Storybook Dads. Other examples encountered throughout the research include a London-based charity providing legal advice to prisoners, who were running a drop-in session during a visit to the private men’s prison participating in the study. There is a wealth of collaborating organisations therefore, routinely working with prison libraries, each having an impact on the values underpinning their work and its value to prisoners.

This creates risks however in seeking to maintain ethical standards within and across the CoP, when working with and as volunteers without the same levels of responsibility and accountability as paid members of a workforce or of the host organisation. Those working as volunteers for example commented on their work and contributions not being taken seriously sometimes by prison officials, which could adversely affect confidence and morale. At the same time, there were numerous examples of projects and activities stalling or being problematic due to the unreliability of volunteers. Where collaborative projects involving volunteers work well however, this is a source of great emotional resilience for library staff, who then invest enhanced trust in and dependence on successful collaborative relationships. Equally, staff reflected on feelings of disappointment and guilt when collaborative projects fail, having “let the lads down” (interviewee). This reflects the risk taken in collaborative endeavours that rely on trust in something being achieved through the collaborative process that would be otherwise unachievable, and faith in collaborators’ willingness and ability to contribute (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Such risks inevitably disrupt the stability of the ‘special’ professional group, as espoused by Durkheim.

*Navigating the prison regime*

On a day-to-day basis, navigating the prison regime presents the most significant professional and ethical challenge for library staff, requiring a high degree of work assimilation across prison processes and procedures and tenacious promotion of libraries’ unique value to that system. Statutory expectations and responsibilities of prison libraries are defined by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (formerly National Offender Management Service (NOMS)), under Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 02/2015. The document explains ‘the processes for the provision of a library service in prison establishments to support prisoner resettlement, rehabilitation and purposeful activity’, emphasising provision that supports literacy and reading for pleasure. Mandatory actions for prison Governors include ensuring that prisoners’ statutory entitlements to library provision are met, including access to books and audio-visual materials on a weekly basis for a minimum of thirty minutes, including when unable to physically visit the library.

In reality, there is widespread variability in the meeting of statutory requirements across the prison estate. The National Foundation for Educational Research conducted a review of the implementation of a new Prison Library Specification (as part of the Offender Learning and Skills Service) in 2006. The research highlights a number of challenges in implementing changes and meeting associated targets, linked to operating within the prison regime, including variation in how the library is viewed and valued within individual prisons; communication issues between library service providers (usually Public

Library Authorities) and Offender Learning and Skills Units; and variability in other prison circumstances (White *et al.*, 2006). This creates implications for professional identities, skills, and training of prison library staff, and for the ethos of library services when required to meet specific (more formal) educational objectives and outcomes.

This variation in service provision was noticeable during fieldwork, linked to the different funding and governance models represented across the three case study sites. Library A, as a service provided by the county-level local authority alongside its public library network, has the hallmarks of a statutory library service including service-level agreements that fit with the county library services' strategic priorities and values. These include a health and wellbeing agenda that has enabled and supported the prison library's work with life-serving prisoners with dementia, as discussed above and below. Housed on a Victorian prison site in an annexe of a residential wing, the physical library space is also resonant of a small, community-based branch public library service. In contrast, Library B forms part of a separate building dedicated to educational services. These include state-of-the art facilities, including print and textile workshops that are often showcased by the private business providers as an example of contemporary, rehabilitative prison services. The library space itself is similar or comparable to those provided in further education sites, with an equal emphasis on study and reading for pleasure. During one visit for example, three young men were using the restricted IT facilities to prepare for a driving theory test and to learn a language (French). Library C was much more symptomatic of the current operational realities of statutory library services after a sustained period of fiscal austerity measures, as it was transitioning from being a local authority-run service to being delivered by a sub-contracted private educational provider. This involved a period of no or limited access to library services as new staff were recruited.

Due to the complexity of collaborative practice involved, there is considerable work assimilation across professional boundaries in the prison-based cultural community of practice, which subsequently affects the provision of and access to library services. On a mundane level, there is a discernible vernacular appropriation of prison life by library staff, including for example in the language used to describe prison systems and regimes. To a non-acclimatised researcher, this was noticeable and unusual at first but something that became more familiar and relatable as the research progressed. From a professional practice point of view, there are more challenging examples of work assimilation in prison libraries that arguably go 'above and beyond' conventional cultural work. This includes the fact that librarians are key holders and will often escort groups of prisoners to and from the wings, particularly if there are no officers available. This responsibility was acutely felt during fieldwork, with the researcher's presence adding an extra logistical responsibility in that library staff could not leave them alone at any point. During a visit to Library B for example, the researcher had to accompany the librarian to a wing to escort a group of men to the library for a consultation with a visiting legal services charity. During the same visit, the librarian had to ask another member of the prison education team to stay with the researcher in the library after he and the attending officer were required elsewhere. From an ethnographic perspective, this created a constant frisson of anxiety and self-awareness, including guilt at creating an extra burden for library staff, who must be hyper-aware of security, risk and vulnerability at all times.

Returning to the study's core research questions, the 'repertoires, artefacts, and symbols' of collaborative learning in the community of practice therefore invariably relate to the value of its work to prisoners in relation to their safety and wellbeing and to the health and wellbeing of the community of practice itself. In more homogenous cultural communities of practice, conventional symbols of collaborative learning would be the cultural 'products' themselves (e.g., exhibition; film; performance). In our contextual sites of study here, cultural objects and activities (e.g., books and reading) provide the medium through which other objectives are met. Often these objectives are short-term and blunt – "if we give them something to do for 30 minutes, then they're not fighting or self-harming" (interviewee). Similarly, there is a complete lack of professional judgement, selectivity, and quality control in the type of books – or cultural repertoires – used for example in reading groups and author visits, with an acceptance that prisoners "like crime fiction" (interviewee).

Bowe (2011) reflects on the extent of professional accountability that exists in prison libraries when working with 'disaffected' service user communities with diverse needs, situated in complex structural environments that are continually subject to legislative change. Another more ethically complex example is the formal requirement of librarians as prison staff to comply with Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork procedures, whereby immediate reporting action must be taken for any prisoner deemed to be at risk of self-harm or suicide (Anon for review). This is a stark example of the heightened tensions in prison life, and enhanced moral responsibilities of its full workforce, in keeping people safe. As such, the operational challenges and requirements highlighted above form part of a complex package of both professional and moral obligations for prison library staff.

### *Emotional labour, care, and the prison librarian*

Care emerged as a defining shared value and abiding principle for prison librarians and collaborators, including care for one another and the prison community, and practising carefully (particularly for women) in morally challenging custodial environments. There is evidence for example of how professional practice is socially constructed and sustained within the CoP through careful navigation of the prison system ("keeping people onside") and the ways in which the cultural CoP supports, cares for and nurtures itself through critical reflective practice (Anon for review). Library A's group for prisoners with dementia is a useful example. CST is an established psychological therapy based on the principles and benefits of group interaction, focusing on using group activities to stimulate cognitive engagement 'in the moment'. The group running the sessions apply a set of principles to their organisation and just as significantly, to their support of one another. A typical session involves meeting off-site to plan the session beforehand, including activities and allocating roles and responsibilities within the group; travelling to the prison together, and once the session is over, regrouping to review the session. During a fieldwork site visit, this took place in the café run by ex-offenders just outside the prison grounds. The review includes evaluation of the session, including levels of engagement from participants and what worked well or could have perhaps been done differently. They will also reflect on their own experiences of the session, including any individual anxieties or concerns.

When taking part in one of the full CST sessions during fieldwork, the depth of feeling experienced by staff and volunteers delivering the programme became particularly palpable during the 'de-brief' meeting. This included empathic reflections on the deteriorating health of one elderly participant, and how other group members were responding to that. This caused further reflection on the realities of dying in prison and providing what is in effect palliative or end-of-life care. The mood for this part of the conversation was inevitably sombre, and notably in stark contrast to the group's demeanour when delivering the session itself, which had been remarkably upbeat and hopeful. As an ethnographic observation of the personal and emotional effort that goes into this form of cultural work, it had a profound impact on the researcher's own feelings towards undertaking research in the field and ethical responsibilities entailed (discussed in more detail below under 'Discussion points and conclusion'). Further to the points raised above about prison library staff's attention to risk, security and vulnerability, time spent with this group also exposed the extent of care that is practised for one another and extended members of the community of practice, including the researcher herself. During the debrief discussion, this included mindful questions about, and subsequent reflections on, her own contribution to the session with prisoners, how she had felt throughout the session and the group's responsibility towards her.

In this context, the 'situatedness' of integrated cultural work is especially important, linked to enhanced experiences of emotional labour in communities of practice operating under different circumstances. Burkitt (2014) describes emotional labour and professional 'feeling rules' in the nursing sector, for example, as the "collective management of the situation in which people become affected, rather than the management of emotion as an individual act". As such, "different communities of practice in different settings [develop] their own emotional culture and ways of dealing with patients and relatives" (in the nursing example). This is also uniquely relevant in criminal justice settings, where "the instrumental and administrative processes of criminal justice are the visible workings of the system, but of equal importance are these emotional processes, or 'underground emotion work' undertaken by



practitioners which remains largely suppressed, invisible and unacknowledged” (Knight, 2014). Liebling (2004) states that “the emotional tone of prison life is raw, real and distinctive”, and “the emotional climate within an organization... will impact on perceptions of one’s treatment. It is, if you like, part of the moral climate”.

Such ‘underground emotion work’ was particularly evident amongst women in the *Instrumental Values* study. The experiences of women working in and with prison libraries reflect very particular ethical challenges and practices, both in relation to consciously managing their own behaviours and rationalising the behaviour of others towards them. Women working in men’s prisons reflected on how their female identity can help or potentially hinder their engagement with prisoners and (male) prison staff through our discussions (Anon for review). Women library staff and volunteers frequently commented for example on how the men address them as ‘Miss’ and are unfailingly courteous overall, which helps them to engage the men in library activities but is obviously quite a dated and contrived interpersonal experience. Similarly, a group of women volunteers and librarians working together described how male officers on the wing ‘probably’ see them as “daft women coming in to do fluffy things” (interviewee), but that they have admittedly used this to their advantage in gaining regular access and a relationship of relative trust with prison staff. This results in considerable amounts of reflection on compromise and risk in being a woman doing this kind of work, as what may be interpreted as courtesy and casual indifference in one such context would arguably be inappropriate and potentially harmful behaviour in another.

Other uniquely gendered experiences of cultural work occur in women’s prisons. Heightened feelings of empathy and emotional connection can occur for example between female prison library workers and volunteers, and prisoners linked to their experiences of separation anxiety from family; of having or caring for young infants on mother and baby units; and at the opposite end of the scale, experiences of ageing in prison and the menopause. Again, this was acutely observed during a reading group session in Library C, with a group of four women prisoners, a volunteer reading group coordinator and prison librarian (both women). The group had been reading a contemporary novel by a woman author, about relationships and parenthood in an urban setting. Reflecting typical group dynamics, the atmosphere had been subdued and polite, with one prisoner making the most active contributions to discussion in response to the text. When the conversation turned to one passage concerning an adult character’s relationship with her own mother, this triggered a much more engaged and inclusive conversation, with both prisoners and facilitators sharing their own personal, familial experiences and how these have impacted on their own attitudes and aspirations towards motherhood. This was a moving moment that showed explicitly the therapeutic value of prison library activities, and in particular, moments of genuine solidarity and affinity between different groups of women.

Conversely, other moral challenges attached to work in men’s prisons have revealed themselves through research conversations, particularly concerning the ways in which attitudes towards or feelings about sex offenders are articulated and, in some cases, repressed, leading to a heightened consciousness of risk, safety and moral compromise when working with vulnerable prisoners, which has to be ‘controlled’ on site. This results in additional practices of self-care in relation to how women library staff and collaborators reconcile (or not) their professional experiences ‘through the gate’ with family, friends, and wellbeing activities.

### *Renegotiating the ethics of collaborative practice*

Although all prison library staff participating in the research expressed an awareness of CILIP’s ethical framework and its earlier iterations, professional sector codes are of little practical relevance in day-to-day prison library work. For library professionals working in such contexts, it is often a fine-balancing act between upholding the values of librarianship as a cultural profession and maintaining a ‘place’ in the prison system. Discussions revealed the difficulties for example in upholding principles of intellectual freedom and equality of access to information, when books and reading materials are heavily

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censored in prisons and access to information is so limited to begin with (e.g., no access to internet). One volunteer working for a literacy charity organisation, for example, described the challenge of “[needing] to be compliant, neutral and empathic versus a strong inclination to be subversive and try to stimulate more critical thought – it can be difficult to square that circle” (interviewee). Research on the information needs of prisoners using prison learning centres (Canning and Buchanan, 2018), shows that prisoners have a broad range of information needs, many of a sensitive nature, particularly those related to coping with crime and punishment. Many needs appear unmet, particularly those related to health and rehabilitation, through reluctance to seek information and guidance through issues of trust and stigma.

Any reflexive analysis of own ethical practice by research participants mostly related to personal, moral standards of ‘right and wrong’ rather than any adherence to professional standards. As such, the research was subsequently steered towards a more ‘virtues-based approach’ to understanding ethics in integrated professional environments, including a consideration of shared *moral* qualities and virtues amongst practitioners, rather than occupational traits and practices (Banks and Gallagher, 2008). In this context, the research found that cultural work across the prison library case studies is more discernibly informed by personally held moral values; political ideology and orientation; other professional training and development; faith and religious beliefs; and ‘life-course’ values connected with formative social and cultural experiences (Anon for review). As researchers in health and social care, Banks and Gallagher (2008) comment further on organisational trends towards integrated services and inter-professional working, and the potential for ‘ethical tensions’ between collaborating services with particular sets of values, codes of ethics, organisational cultures and systems. As cultural communities of practice create and work within profoundly responsive ethical codes, through uniquely situated shared values and emotional experiences of working together, how can these be more carefully integrated into representative, relevant and useful ethical frameworks by professional governing bodies?

Lane (2017) argues for a transformation in the understanding of contemporary professional ethics, requiring a shift away from prioritisation of clients or employers to a more expansive articulation of the role and moral responsibilities of the professions towards the ‘greater public good’. Conventionally within the professions, there are three levels of ethical engagement with the ‘social whole’, ranging from an individual’s acts and practices within the existing constraints of their given role; ethical frameworks and codes of practice set by the profession itself; and then a ‘third order’ of public accountability. Observing collaborative prison library work in practice helps to shape our understanding of this ethical ‘third order’ of culture-led interventions in the criminal justice system. When asked to describe the main ethical challenges experienced in their work, research participants invariably referred to operational issues within the prison estate, including for example recurring staff shortages on the wing and persistent low morale within the wider prison workforce. Professional cultural work for the ‘greater public good’ therefore arguably happens *in spite* of situated prison systems, structures and regimes. This requires a spontaneous tenacity from prison library workers and volunteers that stretches beyond conventional skills and competencies defined by the profession of librarianship.

Data across the full *Instrumental Values* study, including case studies on museums working in health and social care settings, substantiate the need for a shared values base across collaborating sectors. Writing on the social work of museums for example, Silverman (2010) has previously observed that ‘museums must expand or revise their existing code... or move swiftly to adopt or develop related documents that are appropriate for the social work in which they have engaged’. To this end, next steps for the research programme include development of an international online training programme for professional ethics in multidisciplinary cultural work, based on *Instrumental Values* research data, for gallery, library, archive and museum (GLAM) sectors, covering topics including Navigating ethical boundaries across sectors; Organisational culture and values; Emotional labour and the ethics of self-care.

## Discussion points and conclusion

The ethnographic experience of undertaking the *Instrumental Values* study has encouraged careful re-consideration of the role of academic cultural policy researchers, and our ethical responsibilities in narrating the social value of such important but demanding cultural work. This includes remaining mindful of the wider political contexts in which we are operating. Unavoidably, health and social care services have experienced increasing pressures as a direct result of austerity-driven fiscal policy in the UK. Austerity measures have been distributed unevenly across government departments, creating differing levels of impact across different groups of society, with budget cuts being acutely felt by local government with real implications for public services (Hitchen, 2019). Arguably, notions of the integrated public sphere, especially in relation to essential public services, have been born of necessity rather than choice, with increasing demands on third sector and charitable organisations to fill the gap left by reductions in core services. Previous research on community engagement work in the museums sector (Morse and Munro, 2018) for example, discusses evolving ‘practices of care’ through a greater sense of networked allegiance with wider social care services, with an emphasis on cultural organisations providing an alternative to gaps in provision created by austerity measures.

Thus, when researching professional ethics in particular, “... ethnographers as social scientists need to recognize that they are workers, and that the concepts and theories that they have applied to other domains of labour apply within the scholarly workforce” (Wellin and Fine, 2007). For cultural policy researchers, this exposes the need for a more values-based approach to cultural value research. On a personal level, the author is indebted to participants in the *Instrumental Values* study for their time, generosity, wisdom and care, particularly as a researcher new to the prison environment. The same levels of care and courtesy should be afforded to scholarly representations of their work, requiring a balance between ‘independent’ academic research with necessary objective, critical distance and more connected, empirically engaged research to understand the practice-based nuances of cultural work that has real (social) value. This inevitably leads to certain subjectivities, both in delivering an honest appraisal of the work under consideration and in balancing our own emerging care for this work and our research partners (Anon for review). Research on ethnographic practice itself advocates the value of emotions in the field as ‘valid sources of understanding’ (Tallberg *et al*, 2014) and of “using emotions as important methodological tools that should be used as part of the methodological and analytical process” (Knight and Zempi, 2020).

There is a bigger responsibility for those instrumentalists interested in economic value and cost benefit to reframe narratives of cost-effectiveness that seek to position arts and culture as ‘cheaper’, community-based alternatives to statutory public services. With reference to the sheer scale of voluntary work and assimilation of other roles and responsibilities in the field, affective cultural work in criminal justice and health and social care settings is likely to be ‘cost-effective’ when much of it is unpaid and involves doing the work of other professionals. The truth is that third sector organisations need just as much infrastructural support as any other and it is vital to acknowledge the various forms of investment that *people* delivering cultural projects make in their work. In reality, people give infinite amounts of their own time, energy, commitment, care and emotional resilience. Ultimately, in considering the value created by instrumental cultural work, policy makers also need to acknowledge the true costs of making a difference, and the real-world investment required.

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