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Building Bridges Across Diversity:
Utilising the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme to Promote an Egalitarian Higher Education Community within Three English Prisons

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ABSTRACT

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme is a unique prison education programme that brings together 'Inside' (prison) students and 'Outside' (university) students to learn collaboratively through dialogue and community-building exercises within the prison walls. Challenging prejudices and breaking down social barriers, the programme provides students from diverse backgrounds with a transformative learning opportunity. Drawing on the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire and the teaching practice of bell hooks, Inside-Out instructors engage in 'teaching to transgress,' enabling students to understand experientially the ways in which every day and commonplace environments are shaped by privilege and inequalities. The programme was founded 20 years ago by Temple University criminologist Lori Pompa in collaboration with incarcerated men at Graterford State Correctional Institution in response to the racial injustice and mass incarceration that characterized the US criminal justice system. Durham University criminologists introduced Inside-Out to the UK in 2014, at three very different prisons: a men's category A (high security) prison, a men's category B (medium security) prison and a women's prison. A decade on the government's introduction of the Widening Participation agenda in higher education (HE), with levels of inequality in and access to HE, particularly within Russell Group Universities, is persistently high, Inside-Out challenges this lack of diversity in HE head on. This article explores how the Inside-Out ethos and pedagogy are powerful means through which inequalities rooted in gender, ethnicity and privilege can be exposed and challenged within the unique prism of the prison setting. Quantitative and qualitative data from three years of programme delivery across the three prisons will be drawn upon. The article will argue that the Inside-Out model can overcome social barriers and prejudices to embrace and celebrate diversity; support students to critically explore their own beliefs and identities; and go on to utilise this educational experience to foster social change on both sides of the prison walls.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Inequality, Inside Out, Systemic Bias

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INTRODUCTION

Inside-Out moves beyond the walls that separate us. In a more literal sense, it moves, actually, through the walls. It is an exchange, an engagement—between and among people who live on both sides of the prison wall. And it is through this exchange, realized in the crucible of dialogue, that [the walls that] separate us from each other – and sometimes, from ourselves – begin to crumble. The hope is that, in time, through this exchange, these walls—between us, around us, and within us—will become increasingly permeable and, eventually, extinct—one idea, one person, one brick at a time. All of our lives depend on it (Lori Pompa, Inside-Out founder, 2013, p. 7).

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme is a pioneering prison education programme that brings together 'Inside' (prison) students and 'Outside' (university) students to learn collaboratively through dialogue and community-building exercises within the prison walls. Challenging prejudices and breaking down social barriers, the programme provides students from diverse backgrounds with a unique opportunity to study together as peers and as equals behind the prison walls. Inside-Out is a very simple concept: people come together to talk about and wrestle with issues that are important to them. However, it is the setting in which classes take place, behind the prison walls, that makes it profound and for many participants, a transformative experience. Drawing on the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire (1996) and the teaching practice of bell hooks (1994), Inside-Out facilitators engage in 'teaching to transgress,' enabling students to build academic knowledge together while simultaneously learning experientially the various ways in which every day and commonplace environments are shaped by privilege, difference and inequality. Inside-Out emphasises the importance of developing dynamic, ethical and flexible partnerships between university and prison staff and students, explored further below, which then deepen the conversation about, and transform our approaches to, issues of crime and justice.

The programme was founded 20 years ago by Temple University criminologist Lori Pompa in collaboration with incarcerated men at Graterford State Correctional Institution in response to the racial injustice and mass incarceration that has characterised the US criminal justice system in recent decades. Durham University criminologists introduced Inside-Out to the UK in 2014, at three prisons: a men's category A (high security) prison, a men's category B (medium security) local prison and a women's prison. These three prison populations contrast markedly from each other and from Durham University – an elite higher education (HE) institution. Outside students consistently report that they consider the Inside-Out module to be 'life changing' and the highlight of their degree programme; whereas for Inside students, their increased confidence in oral and written skills along with a broader (re)igniting of the desire to learn are highlighted as key outcomes. Furthermore, both prisoners and prison staff report that the programme has a positive impact on prisoners and the wider prison environment.

A decade on from the government's introduction of the Widening Participation agenda in higher education (HE), with levels of inequality in and access to HE, particularly within Russell Group Universities, persistently high (Boliver, 2016), Inside-Out challenges head-on this lack of diversity in HE. At the same time, Inside-Out supports the recommendations of the recent Coates review of prison education (Coates, 2016) in that it provides for a small but growing number of prisoners whose educational needs currently are not being met within the prison estate.

This article explores how the Inside-Out ethos and pedagogy are powerful means through which inequalities rooted in gender, ethnicity and privilege can be exposed and challenged through the unique prism of the prison setting. We have gathered a range of qualitative and quantitative data from three years of programme delivery across the three prisons. This includes individual student evaluations, Inside and Outside group debriefs, students' reflective writing, facilitators' reflections and demographic data. With the permission of participating prisons, all students who engaged in the programme were informed that, with their agreement, anonymised evaluation data and reflective

writing would likely be drawn upon for research and evaluation purposes.[1] We have systematically analysed the student evaluation data from the programme, which we draw upon for this paper, citing Inside and Outside students throughout. The article will argue that the Inside-Out model can overcome social barriers and prejudices to embrace and celebrate diversity; support students to critically explore their own beliefs and identities; and go on to utilise this educational experience to foster social change on both sides of the prison walls.

Through our discussion of Inside-Out at Durham University, this article will address the issue of diversity and inequality in prison education at two levels. Firstly, at the structural level, we examine the often-overlooked issue of diversity in levels of educational attainment in the prison population and examine the flaws inherent in a prison education policy underpinned by the delivery of basic literacy, numeracy and employability skills. Secondly, at the interpersonal level, we illustrate how Inside-Out invites students to explore issues of inequality and diversity through the use of a dialogic approach to learning and community building exercises, thereby addressing these issues in both the content and the process of prison education.

HISTORY AND PEDAGOGY OF THE INSIDE-OUT PRISON EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

Inside-Out fosters a transformative and collective learning experience underpinned by a critical pedagogical approach to learning and teaching. Cranton (2006, p. vi) defines transformative learning as 'a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better justified.' Many undergraduate criminology programmes in the UK incorporate prison tours providing students with the opportunity to learn about prisons and experience them first hand. Like Pompa, the founder of the Inside-Out programme, the authors felt uneasy taking students in to prisons to gaze down upon prisoners; for us, this was ethically problematic and had limited pedagogical value (Piche & Walby, 2012). The Inside-Out programme appealed to us because it offered students a deeper, more meaningful, experiential and egalitarian way of learning about and engaging with prisons. Importantly, it offered an educational opportunity for prisoners as well as university students to learn together in a manner that was mutually beneficial to the student residents on both sides of the prison wall.

The initial idea for Inside-Out came from a prisoner called Paul who in 1995 suggested to Pompa that she expand her one-off prison visits into a series of regular classes. After several years in development, Pompa piloted the first Inside-Out Prison Exchange Programme in 1997 which expanded to Graterford SCI in 2000. The Graterford alumni, including Paul, went on to establish a 'Think Tank'[2] that worked together with the Temple University team to develop Inside-Out into a now international programme through a network of US Instructor[3] Training Centres.[4]

The challenge Pompa and the Think Tank faced was to create a liberating learning space within a repressive context. This required a pedagogical approach that was distinct from the didactic methodology more often used in HE. Inside-Out thus answers Ridley's (2014, p. 20) call for an academic duty to encourage students to engage in 'challenging debates on the use of incarceration by offering alternative, more rigorous, observations on imprisonment and the overall consequences.' Relatedly, Inside-Out is not research, voyeurism or charity aimed at or about those in prison. Rather, the roots of the Inside-Out educational approach lie within the critical pedagogy of Freire (1996), bell hooks (1994) and the teaching practice advocated by Palmer (2007) who together argue that students are not objects that teachers do something to, rather, teachers should listen, ask questions, welcome students' insights and encourage them to always learn more. Thus Inside-Out strives to be education in its truest form – emphasising the Latin root of 'educere,' to draw out from within, rather than 'educare,' to train or mould (Craft, 1984). Teaching Inside-Out involves engaging in the process that hooks (1994) calls 'teaching to transgress,' that is allowing students to understand experientially the

ways in which our everyday environments are shaped by inequalities. An Outside student summarises this in the following reflection:

Regardless of our histories, cultures and our preconceptions, coming face to face proved to be exceptionally easier than I ever anticipated. The ease in which we formed bonds of friendship is a reflection that the human experience transcends prison walls; we proved that pain, suffering and division does not have to represent the criminal justice system but can incorporate our human capacity for compassion, connection and hope.

Inside-Out challenges students *and* facilitators. For students, it brings them in to settings and conversations that may be outside of their comfort zone. For facilitators too, we are required to step back from the role of 'expert' and to move outside our comfort zones, pedagogically and practically, recognising that we too can always learn more. The approach is non-hierarchical and non-didactic, unlike much traditional university teaching, with teachers as facilitators rather than lecturers. We must be 'teachers' who are '...not directive of the students, but directive of the process… As director of the process, the liberating teacher is not doing something to the students but with the students (Freire, 1996, p. 46).' Inside-Out involves a dialogic approach to learning, which fosters respect and co-operative activity, as recognised by this Outside student:

A dialogue amongst peers can be the greatest source of change in the world. The dialogues within the classes forced me to question my beliefs, some of which changed and others not, but in either case it was a powerful tool for growth.

Prospective Inside-Out facilitators attend a mandatory, intensive residential training course, spending a week learning about Inside-Out's pedagogical approach, ethical issues related to teaching in correctional facilities, how to create a safe learning space within an institution, security issues, facilitation skills and much more. In order to become facilitators, we learn many of the core exercises as 'students' and this process is crucial to understanding the importance of the experiential nature of the programme. An important component of the training takes place within a US prison and is facilitated by a Think Tank. Having incarcerated men – many of whom are serving life sentences without parole – act as co-facilitators with Pompa and colleagues is a powerful experience and results in issues of power and privilege being integrated into the content and delivery of the training programme throughout the week. Undertaking the training within a US correctional facility, where the vast majority are black and Hispanic men, co-facilitated by those same men, invites trainees to confront issues of diversity, privilege and racial inequality head-on and teaches us through example how to engage others to do the same.

INTRODUCING INSIDE-OUT TO THE UK

Durham University's long history of engaging in prison education can be traced back to Stan Cohen and Laurie Taylor teaching sociology to men serving life sentences at HMP Durham in the 1960s, leading to their seminal study 'Psychological Survival' (1972). The Department of Sociology at Durham University has been delivering undergraduate modules in the sociology of crime and deviance since 1965, launching its BA (Honours) Criminology degree in 2007 and its MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice degree in 2011. Delivering the Inside-Out programme at Durham University required building and nurturing a dynamic partnership with the prisons in order to introduce transformative and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning within the prison setting. Following 18 months of intense planning and partnership building with two men's prisons nearby, Durham University criminology staff delivered the first Inside-Out course outside of North

America, at HMP Durham (category B) in autumn 2014 and at HMP Frankland (category A) in spring 2015, to student communities made up of equal numbers of 'Outside' (Level 3 undergraduate criminology) students and 'Inside' (prison) students. In 2016, following a request from the Minister of State for Justice and Civil Liberties, the programme expanded to the local women's prison, HMP Low Newton, at postgraduate level. Inside-Out is now delivered annually at all three prisons, with an Inside-Out alumni men's Think Tank established at HMP Frankland in early 2015 and similarly a women's Think Tank at HMP Low Newton in 2016.[5] Facilitated by the Durham Inside-Out teaching team and supported by prison staff, these groups meet monthly and engage in various Inside-Out related projects including Inside alumni designing and delivering an ongoing programme of Inside-Out workshops to prison staff at HMP Frankland.

The three prisons vary significantly and are also undergoing changes as a result of recent legislation (Prisons and Courts Bill 2016-17), including providing Governors with greater budgetary autonomy. HMP Frankland houses prisoners serving longer sentences and/or deemed a higher security risk (including a significant number of high profile prisoners); a growing number of prisoners aged 50+ years; and many with higher than average levels of educational attainment. In contrast, HMP Durham has a rapid turnover of remand and recently sentenced prisoners (resident there for on average five weeks) with an average educational ability of nine years of age. The population is diverse in terms of age, ethnicity and religion. HMP Low Newton is a closed women's prison and Young Offenders Institution, with women from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of educational attainment serving sentences of all lengths and security requirements. The number of women with significant mental health problems, experiences of victimisation and abuse, and complex backgrounds is significantly higher than the two men's prisons.

These prison populations contrast sharply with the student body at Durham University. Established in 1832, Durham is ranked 78th in the QS World University Rankings 2018 and is considered one of the most elite in the UK (Guardian, 2017). Of 18,000 students, 84 per cent are white, 60 per cent are privately educated (among the highest percentage in the UK, HESA, 2017) and the majority come from higher income families. In 2014/15, at faculty level, there were 14 per cent minority ethnic admissions into the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health and 5 per cent into the Department of Sociology. The picture contrasts markedly with the Inside students admitted to our Inside-Out classes who come from significantly more diverse backgrounds, 30 per cent of whom were BAME in the first three years of the programme.

Unsurprisingly, the criminology team faced a number of challenges in establishing and introducing Inside-Out, including securing full and equal university accreditation for Inside students for a module within a university degree programme usually requiring high A-level tariffs from applicants. However, in line with the programme's ethos of equality through education, it was essential for us to be able to deliver a programme that offered the same accreditation to all students on both sides of the prison wall.[6] It is a testament to the support for the programme among university senior management that not only do all successful students receive accreditation but that the Vice Chancellor or Pro-Vice Chancellor come in to each prison at the end of each term to distribute their Durham University certificates of attainment, in a moving celebration of academic and personal achievement. It would also not have been possible to establish the programme without the foresight, understanding and support from the prison Governors and Education Coordinators. While the Coates review (2016) paints a bleak picture for prison education nationally, at the local level the prisons we work with are committed to a holistically conceived model of prison education. However, they are constrained by the political, economic and security contexts within which they operate and therefore while Inside-Out is currently free at point of delivery to prisons and individual Inside students, this may not always be possible.

TACKLING DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY AT THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

UK Prison Context and History of Prison Education[7]

From the first formal prison education established by the Gaol Act of 1823, prison education has been framed as a moral enterprise, a programme for 'correcting delinquents' and a precaution in the interests of society (Foucault, 1988, p. 270). The recent Coates (2016) review has shed a spotlight on the current state of English prison education. The review found a number of failings and concluded that the importance of education in UK prisons had been lost. The recommendations aimed to 'put education at the heart of the regime, unlock potential in prisoners, and reduce reoffending (Coates, 2016, p. 6).' In recent decades there has been a move away from 'purposeful activity' towards academic and vocational training. This has been fuelled by the widely held belief that education is important to rehabilitation and desistance. A RAND Corporation (2013) meta-analysis of the impact of prison education programmes calculated that they led to an average 43 per cent reduction in recidivism. According to the Prisoners' Education Trust (2016, p. I) 'education has the power to enrich, change and develop people throughout their lives. Offering prisoners access to education improves their self-esteem and enables them to choose a more constructive way of life.' Hopkins (2012) found that education can positively impact on desistance, improve individual prisoners' sense of self-worth and benefit the prison regime. However, despite these findings, the Ministry of Justice only acknowledges that 'developing the skills and knowledge needed to enter the job market… *may* reduce the likelihood of reoffending (Ministry of Justice, 2014, p. 40).' The drive for prison education has resulted in large-scale investment and structural changes. However, prisoners in England continue to face a lack of opportunity and breadth in educational offer (Taylor, 2014), which is often dependent on the provision, management and culture within individual prisons.

The educational ability of those entering the prison system is usually very low, with half having the literacy skills of an 11-year-old (Prison Reform Trust (PRT), 2016). Many have had negative experiences of education at school level, with 59 per cent having regularly truanted and 42 per cent having been permanently excluded from school, in comparison with less than 1 per cent of the general population (PRT, 2016). Almost half (47 per cent) have no qualifications in comparison to just 15 per cent of the general population. Unsurprisingly, the key focus of educational provision within prisons in England and Wales has been to provide core numeracy and literacy opportunities up to Level 2.[8] Consequently, the educational offer to prisoners is basic and restricted, rarely offering higher-level study options (Coates, 2016; Owers, 2007; Wilson, 2010). Despite this focus on prisoners gaining basic level qualifications, in recent years the number of people achieving Level 1 or 2 qualifications has plummeted and prison education standards are deteriorating (PRT, 2016). Within a national educational system renowned for inbuilt structural inequality at all levels, men and women within prison receive an even worse offer.

England and Wales have the highest rate of imprisonment in Western Europe, rising by over 80 per cent in the last 30 years, to approximately 85,000 (PRT, 2017). The challenges of an already ageing prison population are compounded by those serving 'life trashing sentences' (Simon, 2001) as indeterminate sentenced prisoners. England and Wales have a prison population serving increasingly long sentences issued by the courts, up over 30 per cent in the last decade (PRT, 2016). For example, the average minimum length of a life sentence for murder rose to 21 years in 2013 from 12.5 years in 2003 (PRT, 2016). The impact of such long or indeterminate sentences can be severe. Indeed, one of our Inside students, reflecting on the devastating impact of lengthy sentences or 'death by incarceration' in class, said that he would 'prefer a death sentence to a life sentence of over 15 years.' Consequently, there are likely to be a wide range of issues that impact on a prisoner's ability to engage in learning.

Higher Learners

The UK has an expanding prison population with growing numbers of men over 50 years old and serving long sentences who may quickly exhaust the basic education available to them. At a high

security prison like HMP Frankland, where most of the men will be held for long periods, it is not uncommon to find that many arrive with higher level qualifications and/or will have exhausted the limited educational opportunities on offer to them within a few years. For those prisoners serving lengthy or indeterminate sentences, many tell us that there are few opportunities for intellectual stimulation contrasted with their unquenchable thirst for knowledge and for opportunities to debate issues of importance to them. One of our Inside students in this age category commented of Inside-Out how:

At a time when I was filled with personal doubt and scepticism, I found mental stimulation in a subject I'd previously dismissed. This could end up defining the next decade of my life.

Levels of participation in higher learning courses by prisoners are depressingly low with only 100 prisoners across England and Wales engaging in courses that are fully at Level 3 and only 200 prisoners achieving a Level 3 qualification (AS and A-Level equivalent) via mainstream prison learning, one third of the number of a year earlier (Skills Funding Agency, 2016). According to the Prisoners' Education Trust (2012), only 1 per cent of the funded curriculum in prison is at a higher post-secondary level. Consequently some of our Inside students reported previously studying for qualifications well below their existing educational ability and attainment, despite their pleas to study at a higher level (Taylor, 2014). In addition to the rudimentary learning offer available to those serving long sentences, many Inside students also commented critically on the style of delivery and approach. Inside students talked about feeling patronised by prison-based teaching staff, being 'treated like a child,' and have criticised what they see as a dysfunctional system which often fails to engage with prisoners as adult learners. For example, one of our Inside students explained:

For many of us, prison education can be forced and monotonous, motivated by attendance and not achievement, yet we have found the Inside-Out programme to be engaging and enriching.

It is important to understand these perceptions within the broader context of a learning environment where, for most, attending education classes is compulsory. Moreover, the high proportion of prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties, with many undeclared, mean that teachers are required to respond to a highly complex and diverse group of learners. The differentiation of attitudes, behaviours and social skills, together with the constraints of the prison regime, levels of funding available, risk factors and movement within the estate can often determine the 'control' measures within the traditional prison classroom. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the more able and disciplined prisoners – those who tend to apply for the Inside-Out programme, are critical of the prison-based teaching they experience.

We consistently find from our evaluation data that the Inside-Out programme offers a learning space and educational opportunity where prisoners feel valued, respected and treated as an equal. Prisoners frequently comment on Inside-Out providing them with a feeling of being 'normal,' being treated as an 'individual' and a 'human being.' Evaluating his experience of the programme, an Inside student explained how much prisoners value that sense of normality:

The opportunity to feel like I was back in an everyday 'normal' situation, with different faces talking about different experiences and situations, means more than you could know in here.

The following extract is taken from a closing ceremony speech delivered by an Inside student on behalf of his fellow Inside students and is illustrative of these findings:

We have come together in a circle for several weeks now, ten of us swept out of sight of society because of our dark past and a dozen bright young things of the future. By committing to the Inside-Out programme we embarked on a learning process together. We learned about ourselves and we learned about you. We have confronted our fears of commitment, failure, humiliation that you might look down on us or make us feel stupid. And we have emerged on the other side feeling better about ourselves and each other.

However, despite often inspiring Inside students to continue with their studies, Inside-Out is not a silver bullet. For some students the programme is agonisingly brief, lighting a spark for a select few and even then not providing the full university degree experience that many would like.

More generally, prisoners who want to access courses above Level 2 are faced with the challenge of identifying and securing funding to do so (Taylor, 2014). In 2012, the funding arrangements for Level 4 courses changed and were no longer funded by the public purse. Consequently, under the current OLASS (Offenders' Learning and Skills Service) funding arrangements not a single prisoner in England or Wales is studying at Level 4 or above (Skills Funding Agency, 2016). Any prisoner wishing to study at Level 3 or above must fund themselves, usually by obtaining an Advanced Learner Loan. Consequently, unsurprisingly, the number of prisoners taking Open University courses has fallen considerably (42 per cent) since this change (in 2011/12), with just 1,036 enrolled (Coates, 2016). Prison learners face huge uncertainty in taking out such loans, they risk not being able to complete the course (if released or transferred) and leaving with larger debts than when they entered prison (Coates, 2016). Furthermore, prisoners, like learners outside prison, are unable to receive a second student loan, so those who already have a student loan cannot undertake further study while in prison, and there are currently no loans available for postgraduate study (Coates, 2016, p. 4.14). Even if willing to take out a loan, prisoners with over six years until their earliest release date do not qualify. As a result, we have a growing section of the prison population serving long sentences who are excluded from engaging in education.

A significant number of our Inside students are serving lengthy sentences (up to 35 years) and we have found that these individuals are less likely to require basic education and literacy classes. Instead, they have the ability and desire to study at a higher educational level.[9] This finding is supported in the recent review of prison education: 'they face years of wasted time when, through HE study, they could have been developing skills and attitudes to become valuable members of the prison community (Coates, 2016, p. 41).' This makes the alternative provision of HE opportunities such as Inside-Out all the more important for UK prisons. In contrast, we found greater, though still limited, opportunities available at the women's prison. For example, one Inside student currently pursuing an Open University degree started her sentence unable to read and write. [10] Another found Inside-Out to be so transformative that she has since started a foundation course with clear and achievable plans to continue on to a degree programme:

I have enjoyed every element of the Inside-Out course. It has provoked great thought and discussion in an open and honest forum. It has given us all the opportunity to learn together and from each other. Although only temporary, friendships have been forged in an environment that is difficult and challenging. It's not the end of the learning journey, only a stepping stone along the way.

Based on our experience, there is certainly demand for higher-level educational opportunities within prison and the focus on basic literacy and numeracy conceals the vast untapped potential locked behind bars. This is reaffirmed in the Coates review. Various studies have demonstrated the motivation of prisoners to undertake education for a number of reasons, not just to gain qualifications, including to improve their self-esteem and self-image, occupy their time, improve their prospects and because they had a thirst for learning (Taylor, 2014). James (2009) argues that 'education in prison is the last bastion of rehabilitation. It is the only area in a prison where the prisoner is seen as

a student, a learner and an individual with specific needs first – and an offender second.' Illustrating these points further, an Inside student commented that:

The power of transformation is not to be underestimated. The Inside-Out programme represents an academic portal between the realms of lost generations, bound by deep depths of despair, and the limitless oceans of possibility enjoyed by the free mind. Transition of thoughts and ideas between time and space crumble the restraints of captivity and knowledge becomes a unifying source of self-worth.

This is also repeatedly echoed by Outside students who gape in surprise on first encountering the abilities, eloquence and insights of their Inside classmates and take great inspiration from them. For example:

The Inside-Out programme, for me, cuts to the heart of my criminology degree. It is founded on principles of equality, compassion, debate and a desire to improve the criminal justice system. I have had my eyes opened by the men we learnt alongside, as well as my Outside classmates, all of whom demonstrate thoughtfulness and a passion for change. In the words of a poem we were read, we are a 'unique reservoir of experiences,' which has been reflected in the dynamic and engaging conversations that have taken place.

There is an established history of higher level educational provision in UK prisons, including through the introduction of the Open University to prisons in the early 1970s. However, there is very little research on the impact of HE more broadly in English prisons. Notable is Reuss' (1999) ethnography of long-term prisoners studying higher education in a maximum-security prison which found some change in prisoners, with education seen as a form of empowerment, although this change was difficult to articulate. Duguid (2000) found that change in prisoners' attitudes, values and behaviours occurred most effectively when directed by 'outsiders' focusing on education rather than therapy or coercion. An Inside student, categorised as a 'revolving door prisoner', said:

As a criminal my mind set is prison is rubbish, crime pays and justice is harsh. However, during the programme I've heard all other opinions from people on both sides of the fence, from all over the world and all walks of life. It has been really interesting to see the way my mind set has changed.

This is frequently echoed by the three prison Governors who cite Inside-Out as having a major impact on the individuals who have participated. Furthermore, they describe the wider impact that Inside-Out has had on prison culture, permeating out on to the wings, in to the prisoner-staff working groups, and across the prison, from potential future Inside students to the staff who see and hear us come in to their workplace every week.

TACKLING DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY AT THE PROGRAMME LEVEL

The next part of the article will explore how Inside-Out engages with diversity and challenges inequality at the interpersonal level, through key elements built in to the pedagogy, content and delivery of the programme. Delivering an educational programme within a prison necessarily means that a number of inequalities have to be addressed. The challenge of developing an egalitarian higher education community within prison can only be met by building an ethos of genuine equality in engagement within the classroom setting. According to bell hooks (1994, p. 207):

The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness

of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.

The success of Inside-Out in this regard is evident in how quickly the Outside students develop a keen sense of the inequalities faced by their Inside classmates in prison and the societal judgments meted down on them. For example, an Outside student was shocked to realise that a prison officer had assumed it was an Inside student who had upset them when they came out of an Inside-Out class looking emotional rather than it relating to the content of the class. Another Outside student noted of their classmates that:

… those in prison are often seen as a number but this experience has broken down that stereotype giving us all an identity and an equal right to learn from and with each other.

Various studies have demonstrated how an educational space in prison can be a more positive environment than the rest of the prison; being described as an 'oasis' (Braggins & Talbot, 2003); a 'third space' for transforming prisoners into students (Wilson, 2007); and an 'emotion zone' (Crewe et al., 2014) – a caring space allowing prisoners to show their emotions and giving temporary respite from the reality of imprisonment back on the wings. Educational environments in prison can offer 'a narrative of hope, a positive setting where the relationships with educators and fellow students has the potential for building positive ties to support an individual constructively (Clark, 2016, p. 40).' However, as Pompa (2013, p. 132) points out, 'it is an interesting, albeit ironic, twist that we are able to create a space of freedom within a context that is often the antithesis.' O'Sullivan (2017, p. 47) found that spaces where communication through dialogue and debate was possible were important to supporting learning and growth; but that these spaces needed to be emotionally and physically safe. The men involved in her research talked about Inside-Out as providing just this. An Inside student from the first programme we delivered at HMP Durham described the atmosphere within the Inside-Out classroom in this way in his evaluation:

Today I was greeted with a huge 'boom' of excitement and a gigantic flow of positive energy. I was totally speechless, I felt as though I had walked into a university lecture room … it felt like everyone in the room was important to one another and in some way we all merged together to become one person.

A fascinating, unexpected and yet worrying finding from our Outside students' evaluations was that many thought the Inside-Out learning environment was a 'safer space' than their regular university classrooms. Away from the pressurised and competitive nature of an elite academic seminar room, Inside-Out, despite being located inside a (sometimes maximum security) prison, is perceived by our Outside students as a less threatening space to learn in than our university. Students feel able to speak up and want to share their thoughts and perspectives. As one Outside student explained:

When I was warned that this course would be potentially 'life-changing' I was initially sceptical. However, this was before I realised how much I would be able to open up to a group of people within such a short period of time. Prior to this course I was always reluctant to speak up in class, and more often than not regarded researching and reading for seminars especially tedious – because I did not enjoy the competitive atmosphere.'

From initial recruitment through to graduation, Inside-Out engages with individuals in a way that seeks to level the playing field within the constraints of the prison estate. A mirrored recruitment strategy requires all prospective students to write a letter of application, be interviewed by the facilitators and then obtain security clearance. For Outside students there is a protracted multi-stage

vetting process followed by a three day mandatory training course. Outside students are consistently shocked by the derogatory language used by some prison officers to describe inmates and are often frightened by the outlandish cautionary tales and threats to their safety that they are regaled with. Such comments also contrast with the humanising language and genuine respect afforded by the Governors, senior prison staff and other prison officers that we work with. This provides a valuable insight into the embedded nature of societal disregard for prisoners. Experiencing perceptible levels of anxiety ahead of their first class in prison, outside students describe their subsequent surprise and relief about how kind, genuine and intelligent their new inside classmates are:

Inside Out has been a whirlwind of emotion from the beginning, from nerves to excitement to anger to joy. Before going in I was ignorant to the prison system; my head was filled with skewed perceptions that were encouraged by the media. Now I am changed. I can see the injustice the Insiders face, the segregation they feel and most importantly, I have seen the destruction of individuals due to the confinement of prison. This destruction is devastating when you are exposed to the capabilities these men are clearly unaware of. The most significant thing for me from the module is that these men are labelled as criminals – a danger to society – yet they are some of the kindest individuals I have ever met. I have felt more at ease with these men than I have with many people on the outside; they haven't judged me and they haven't been rude.

Through the mirrored recruitment process we also attempt to establish that recruits have broadly similar levels of educational ability by requiring an estimated minimum Level 2 educational assessment, equivalent to age 16. While recognising that this excludes the majority of the prisoners, it enables the programme to operate as a genuine HE module and allows all students who successfully complete the module to receive equal Durham University accreditation. Outside students are told at their initial orientation session that the learning journey will be one of collaboration and co-operation with their Inside classmates. First names are used throughout the programme, which protects the identity of everyone involved and reduces the temptation for Outside students to conduct internet searches on Inside students. Individual offending histories of any students are not the focus of the course; Inside-Out instead acknowledges that people are more than the crimes/actions they may have committed. The programme is about learning from and valuing each other as humans and building knowledge collectively.

Inside-Out has one distinct security rule that,[11] along with a comprehensive raft of guidelines for conduct, have resulted in Inside-Out operating for 20 years in a wide range of countries, correctional facilities and cultures without any security incidents of concern. All students understand the necessity of this rule in order to ensure a safe and nurturing environment and to protect the programme and those involved. A 'no contact' rule prohibits contact between Inside and Outside students away from the classroom environment for the duration of the programme, including letters, emails and visits.[12] We have found that the 'no contact' rule intensifies the learning experience, channelling energies into classroom group discussions. As one Inside student noted:

… the fact that we may well never meet one another again means that we have to value what we have done here. We have to ensure that this programme and the good it does continues long after we have gone.

There are a number of 'signature' pedagogical components of Inside-Out, which together combine to characterise Inside-Out as a pioneering prison education programme. Firstly, and importantly, the programme was initially conceptualised and designed in collaboration with members of the Graterford Think Tank. Instructors are trained experientially by imprisoned men and taught to approach the learning experience as 'facilitator' rather than 'teacher'. The programme is underpinned by a

pedagogical approach rooted in the philosophies of Freire, hooks and Palmer – it is transformative, transgressive and egalitarian in ethos with an emphasis on dialogue focused learning. Consequently, learning takes place via community building exercises and experiential activities designed to illustrate and explore key concepts and theories. One of the first tasks set is for students to establish their own guidelines for dialogue within the classroom. Classes begin and end with students and facilitators seated in a circle and throughout the class. Group projects are an important feature of the programme where students consolidate their collective learning and community building through group work exploring 'real world' topics. Assessment is based on reflective papers (that integrate readings, class observations and personal reflection thereby allowing the inclusion of those with disrupted education and lack of degree level essay writing experience to participate in degree level assessments on equal merit). The end of the programme is marked by a closing ceremony where the achievements of the class are celebrated.

The Classroom

On the surface it is learning about 'Issues in Criminal Justice' but in reality it is so much more than this. It has had the potential to break down barriers, barriers which otherwise could still be sky high. I have witnessed individuals' confidence grow, their personalities shine and their faults accepted. I cannot think of another environment where I have witnessed all these occurrences at once and where I myself have felt so comfortable in sharing parts of my life which were appropriate to discussions (Outside student).

Inside-Out is team-taught with approximately 24 students meeting together weekly for a three hour class within the prison and engaging in the same readings, assessments and discussions that prioritise the collective building of knowledge through dialogue. Students sit in a large circle in alternate seats so each Outside student sits next to an Inside student. The handshake greeting and seating make a powerful statement about our common humanity and foster a shared sense of equity: students have an equal voice and stake in the learning process. In this circle and in small groups we critically discuss topics such as penology, victimology, drug policy and theories of crime and criminal justice.[13] Using community-building exercises, collaborative problem solving and group work, we grapple with issues together; everyone is a teacher and a learner, creating knowledge together. Crucially, this approach enables us, as facilitators, to expose and then break down barriers and prejudices as illustrated here by an Outside student:

Inside-Out changes how you think about prison, crime, laws, drugs, and most importantly, how you view those people 'inside' who are so often demonised, labelled, and discriminated against in our society.

We have observed how engagement grows and dialogue deepens week by week as anxieties and concerns are diminished. Both sets of students express suspicion and stereotyping during their initial orientation sessions and some doubt each others' motives for engaging in the programme. The anxieties and nervousness are thus palpable when Inside and Outside students meet for the first time, often not able to stand close to one another or make eye contact. For approximately two thirds of our Outside students this is the first time they have set foot in prison; for many Inside students it is their first opportunity to engage with 'members of the public' since being sentenced, which for some was decades earlier. As the weeks pass by we witness fascinating exchanges as students not only work through group formation processes but learn about themselves and each other. We also observe how the Inside-Out learning space becomes defined by everyday conversations between mixed groups of Inside and Outside students, most noticeable during the tea break and at the end of class. Freire (1996) has argued that education can provide a 'new awareness of selfhood' that can transform an individual

and society, which allows the student to 'begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves' and to take the initiative in transforming society. The programme and the reflective essays they are assessed on invite students to reflect on these classroom dynamics. Many students tell us this is a new and powerful experience for them and they consider it to be a transformative (learning) experience. An Outside student explained their personal transformation in this way:

The Inside-Out programme is a course like no other. Whilst a lecture or a book can only offer a glimpse into the issues in criminal justice, Inside-Out provides a real life situation, an insight into the lives of those who have first-hand experience. It has a unique atmosphere with emotional, enthusiastic and exhilarating discussions that have challenged my understandings of what it means to be a human being. In doing so, the barriers of 'us and them,' the power dynamics of the group were diffused, allowing us to defy popular perceptions, stereotypes and prejudices. Inside-Out has redefined me as a human being and in the process it has reinforced my decisions for the future.

The power of the programme to break down barriers is often acutely felt by the Inside students who are constrained by the walls that surround them. An Inside student captures this sentiment in the following extract:

I can now understand that people's perceptions are based on third-party portrayal. Simply talking to people can quickly change that perception and make us human again. The majority of barriers we have we create ourselves in our mind. They don't need taking down because they are simply not there. We just have to see that.

Inside-Out enables students to identify, discuss and challenge issues of inequality but also to work collectively to overcome them. The experience thus becomes a unifying one, where diversity is valued and celebrated. Inside students, too often used to taking orders and having their voices ignored, find this particularly important:

For the first time, in a long time, I felt I had a voice and that my opinions and feelings were valued.

Similarly, another Inside student commented that:

Together there has been great strength, unity, respect and encouragement. All powerful adjectives I know, but only used because they are not commonly found in prisons.

We have found that Outside students, surprised at the possibility of overcoming such seemingly huge differences, value this as a unique experience:

Seeing the Inside students each week is a liberating experience. We have all grown as a group together and have become a class as a whole. They are my peers, not prisoners. I have been astounded by the knowledge the Inside students have. Going into the module I was afraid that it would be impossible to work together because of our differences, especially in academic knowledge, but how wrong I was. You really do learn together each week.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The course teaches you about fundamental lessons in humanity, but most importantly, how every single person will always have the potential to achieve something you would never expect of them.

People matter, their voices matter, and it is not enough anymore to pretend we do not understand this simple concept; otherwise eventually we will all undoubtedly lose (Outside student).

Despite the pioneering work of Inside-Out and the positive impact it can have on students' understanding of power, inequalities and privilege, we are mindful of the practical difficulties and humanitarian challenges inherent in the Criminal Justice System. Ultimately, Inside students remain in prison after class and are locked back in their cells, while Outside students can leave and return to friends and family. Inside-Out is not a vehicle for prison reform and cannot be considered a 'silver bullet' for solving problems in the criminal justice system, or even addressing the broken education system within prisons. It does, however, a crucial role to play in bringing together individuals whose paths would ordinarily never cross, to do something fundamental and amazing; to learn from and with each other, to recognise their differences and challenge the inequalities that shape their lives. This is recognised in the Coates review, which cites Inside-Out as a beacon of good practice (Coates, 2016). The misery of, and frustration with the criminal justice system and prisons is confronted, most often leaving students with a desire to engage in change with the world that surrounds them. Inside students are politically attuned to the criminal justice system and educational developments and frequently see Inside-Out as one way of engaging positively and calling on those in the Criminal Justice System to do more. Despite prolonged and severe cuts to the UK public sector, new prison legislation marks an opportunity to invest in prison education and address some of the inequalities discussed in this article, although we recognise that this can only partially mitigate for the non-attendance, exclusion, neglect and consequent lack of educational attainment of children in lower income areas suffering multiple deprivation resulting in a 'school to prison pipeline'. An Inside student summarises this argument in a recent closing ceremony speech:

At a time when public perception of prisons is at an all-time low, there is a real opportunity to build from here. Prison education can strive for the upper echelons. It is the challenge for prison governors to use their new autonomy to affect a change in attitudes and promote social inclusion. We all have a responsibility to our local community and to each other, and some of those in prisons would love to drive this forward. I personally wish the general public could see this side of prisons and less of the current divisive propaganda.

Full scale and structural investment in prison education at all levels and across the UK is crucial not just for the men and women currently incarcerated in UK prisons, but also for those on the other side of the walls.

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ENDNOTES

1. We draw on teaching-related data in this paper (evaluation documents, debriefs and staff/ student reflections). Ethical approval was granted from Durham University and permissions to use this data were requested from students and prisons in advance with guarantees of student anonymity. Therefore, we were not required to apply for NOMS ethical clearance as this does not constitute an independent empirical study of prison staff or prisoners.
2. A Think Tank is a group of incarcerated and community participants predominantly comprised of Inside-Out alumni and staff who meet regularly at a prison and act as an advisory group to the local Inside-Out programme, as well as developing their own workstreams.
3. The term 'Instructor' is used within the US context to denote those who successfully complete the mandatory training programme and can deliver Inside-Out. Throughout this article we use the term 'facilitator' in the UK context as we feel this better reflects the non-didactic approach of the programme.
4. Over the last twenty years, the programme has grown into an international movement with over 100 prison and university partnerships, 800 trained instructors and 30,000 alumni across the globe. Co-author Fiona Measham was the first European to complete the training, in 2013. For more details see: http://www.insideoutcenter.org/
5. The team have also helped develop an Inside-Out network across the UK, supporting other universities and qualified facilitators to establish programmes at Teesside, Kent, Leeds, Plymouth, Salford and London.
6. Inside and Outside students receive 20 credits at Level 3 and 30 credits at Level 4.
7. The UK Criminal Justice System and prisons operate under three different jurisdictions: England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This article draws on literature relevant to England and Wales.
8. Level 2 education in the UK is equivalent to compulsory secondary, GCSE grades A*-C, O-Level A-C or other comparable qualifications.
9. Up to a quarter of Inside students at HMP Frankland each year are already studying for, or have obtained either in prison or before prison, a university degree and are therefore already studying competently at undergraduate and postgraduate level.
10. This student commenced her OU degree before 2012.
11. Sex-offenders are no longer excluded from Inside-Out programmes. However, we have not been able to include sex-offenders on any of our programmes on the request of the prisons involved and Durham University.
12. Contact between students can occur after a module has ended, for example, if Inside and Outside alumni meet again through Think Tanks, conferences and other alumni activities.
13. There are a number of Inside-Out programmes currently being delivered in the USA that focus on non-criminological disciplines, such as creative writing, philosophy and physics.