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Restorative Pedagogy in the University Criminology Classroom: Learning about Restorative Justice with Restorative Practices and Values

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Abstract: This paper explores the use of restorative practices and values to facilitate teaching and learning regarding restorative justice in undergraduate criminology curricula in England and Wales. Applications of restorative practice, inside and outside of criminal justice contexts, continue to progress and strengthen in the UK and internationally. Similarly, the provision of undergraduate criminology programmes at universities in England and Wales, and globally, has increased substantially in recent decades. Yet, limited research has been conducted regarding the way restorative justice is taught at universities, particularly in a UK higher education context. This paper draws on research which set out to examine the extent and form of restorative justice knowledge production and exclusion, in undergraduate criminology programmes in England and Wales. In doing so, the innovative and effective use of restorative practice pedagogically was exposed. Evidence presented in this paper was collected via seven semi-structured interviews with criminology academics working at six different universities, and three focus groups with undergraduate criminology students, each at a different university. By exploring perspectives of academics and students regarding the use of restorative practices and values to support teaching and learning about restorative justice, this paper argues that real-world contextualisation, collaboration, and experiential learning are key elements of restorative pedagogy within undergraduate criminology.

Keywords: restorative justice; restorative pedagogy; higher education; criminology; criminology teaching and learning

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1. Introduction

The application of restorative practices, inside and outside of criminal justice contexts, continue to progress and strengthen in the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally (Johnstone 2011; Daly 2016; Hopkins 2015). Similarly, the higher education sector and the provision of undergraduate criminology programmes at universities, in the UK and globally, has expanded substantially in recent decades (Giroux 2014; Bowling and Ross 2006; McLaughlin and Muncie 2013; Harris et al. 2019). Despite the progression of restorative justice, and the expansion of higher education, Deckert and Wood highlight "surprisingly little has been written on how the subject is taught within universities" (Deckert and Wood 2013, p. 70). The relevance of restorative justice to degree level criminology curricula, as well as evaluations, approaches, and reflections on including and teaching the topic in criminology and/or criminal justice degree programmes have been the focus of previous research by academics in the United States of America (USA) (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Kitchen 2013; Waltman-Spreha 2013; Gilbert et al. 2013; Stroup 2019) and in New Zealand (Deckert and Wood 2013). However, no previous studies have explored restorative justice teaching and learning in criminology across multiple degree programmes or in a UK context. Thus, this paper aims to add to discussions regarding restorative justice education in criminology by providing

evidence of restorative pedagogy in undergraduate criminology programmes at multiple universities in England and Wales.

This paper explores the use of restorative practices and values in facilitating teaching and learning about restorative justice in undergraduate criminology in England and Wales. It draws on findings from a larger project which critically examined the character of undergraduate criminology in England and Wales and the extent and form of restorative justice knowledge production within it. In doing so, the innovative and effective use of restorative pedagogy was exposed. By learning about restorative justice with restorative practices and values, students were given opportunities to develop critical thinking, interpersonal, and conflict management skills in unique ways. Evidence presented in this paper was collected via seven semi-structured interviews with criminology academics working at six different universities, and three focus groups with undergraduate criminology students each at a different university. By exploring perspectives of academics and undergraduate students regarding the use of restorative practices and values to support teaching and learning about restorative justice, this paper sets out that real-world contextualisation, collaboration, and experiential learning are central components of restorative pedagogy in this context. It argues that these approaches were successful not only in supporting learning about restorative justice, but also in helping students develop critical thinking and communication skills as well as transforming, the often rigid and harmful, learning and teaching structures in higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Restorative Pedagogy

Largely, the development of restorative pedagogy scholarship to date stems from two areas: restorative schooling (Hopkins 2003, 2012; Morrison and Vaandering 2012; Vaandering 2014a, 2014b; Morrison 2015); and education on restorative justice (Toews 2013; Pointer et al. 2020; Pointer and McGoey 2019; Gilbert et al. 2013). Restorative schooling not only involves the use of restorative justice practices in reaction to harmful behaviour or conflict, in many cases restorative values and principles are actively used within school communities to inform interactions and relationship building (Morrison 2007; Hopkins 2003). In this context, teaching staff are key members of, and actors in, the restorative community, embodying restorative approaches as well as encouraging them (Hopkins 2003). Hopkins suggests that "the restorative mindset inevitably impacts on pedagogy" (Hopkins 2012, p. 125). In this way, if education is taking place in an environment centred on restorative practices and values, and in which educators are guided by restorative values, such as a restorative school, this promotes that all teaching and learning activities, in relation to any topic, will likely involve restorative pedagogy. Secondly, the development of restorative justice education, in a range of contexts, has also shaped knowledge regarding restorative pedagogy (Vaandering 2014b; Toews 2013; Pointer et al. 2020; Pointer and McGoey 2019; Gilbert et al. 2013). In this context, restorative pedagogy refers both to teaching and learning about restorative justice, as well as facilitating this education in a restorative way (Pointer et al. 2020). Although the notion of restorative pedagogy may have developed slightly differently in different educational contexts, the key principles involved are largely the same.

Restorative pedagogy involves the facilitation of restorative practices and the infusion of restorative values and principles in educational spaces (Pointer et al. 2020; Gilbert et al. 2013). Toews (2013, p. 6) highlights, that for some, it is difficult to understand how education about restorative justice can be a form of restorative practice in and of itself. Yet Toews, similarly to other restorative justice educators and scholars, argues that restorative justice education is "a restorative practice that can lead to outcomes similar to those in other restorative practices such as victim offender dialogue" (Toews 2013, p. 6; Pointer et al. 2020; Vaandering 2014a, 2014b; Pointer and McGoey 2019; Gilbert et al. 2013). Developing, encouraging, and facilitating pedagogic approaches which incorporate values inherent to restorative justice and practices enable educational experiences and spaces to be shaped by such values (Vaandering

2014a; Pointer et al. 2020). The restorative values of respect, accountability, participation, self-determination, interconnectedness, nonviolence, particularity, humility, trust and transparency, and transformation are central to restorative pedagogy (Pointer et al. 2020, p. 14; Toews 2013, pp. 16–17).

Restorative pedagogy is new and developing, yet links closely to critical and feminist pedagogy as well as relational theory (Pointer et al. 2020; Freire 1970; Vaandering 2014b; Pointer and McGoey 2019; Llewellyn and Parker 2018). The transformative potential of restorative pedagogy as well as the attention it gives to relationship building, collaborative learning, and the equality of power in educational spaces aligns it strongly with the democratic, dialogical, and emancipatory principles of these more advanced pedagogic philosophies. Arguably, infusing restorative values within educational settings offers ways to overcome the common hierarchical power structures that exist when the teacher or lecturer is viewed as having authority and intellectual superiority over learners in the class (Luckner and Nadler 1992; Freire 1970; Pointer et al. 2020). In contrast to the "Banking" concept of education put forth by Freire, in which a teacher deposits knowledge into passive students (Freire 1970, p. 45; Barton et al. 2010), restorative pedagogy inherently facilitates relationship building and positions teachers and students as equals (Llewellyn and Llewellyn 2015; Pointer et al. 2020; Toews 2013). Indeed, Hopkins highlights that central to restorative pedagogy is continuous communication between teachers and students (Hopkins 2012, p. 125). In an educational space in which power hierarchies are removed and relationships and dialogue are centred, learning and knowledge production arguably become equal processes where the 'teacher' is also a 'student' and the 'student(s)' are also 'teacher(s)' (Pointer et al. 2020; Freire 1970).

2.2. The Purpose of Higher Education

Universities connect fundamental aspects of society: the state, the public, and the private sphere (Pucci 2015). As a result, universities hold an important social role by producing knowledge and in doing so creating regimes of truth (Foucault 1980; Giroux 2014). The production of knowledge within academic institutions is shaped by the power which circulates both outside and inside such institutions (Giroux 2014; Pucci 2015; Olssen and Peters 2005). Neoliberalism and advanced consumerism create distinct structural and practical dynamics for the higher education sector. Although these dynamics transform the purpose and values of universities by positioning them as economic market competitors and situates students as consumers, such dynamics also entrench neoliberalism into education itself (Maisuria and Cole 2017; Davies and Bansel 2007). As Harvey asserts "the academy is being subjected to neoliberal disciplinary apparatuses of various kinds [and] is also becoming a place where neoliberal ideas are being spread" (cited in Pender 2007, p. 14). Arguably, the 'knowledge economy' which has developed means that knowledge is now both an input to, and output of, social and economic processes (Brennan and Little 1996; Olssen and Peters 2005; Pucci 2015; Giroux 2014). Knowledge produced within the academy is informed by neoliberal capitalism and informs the progression of that same social and economic regime (Olssen and Peters 2005; Pucci 2015; Giroux 2014). In doing so, inciting "a battle over the soul of higher education" (Pucci 2015, p. 3).

The ever-increasing number of students attending universities, and the neoliberal forces orchestrating the sector, prompts questions to be asked regarding the purpose of higher education (Pucci 2015, p. 4). Although this question has been considered multiple times by employing a range of literature and theories, Pucci (2015) argues that currently there are two key perspectives, which offer conflicting answers, regarding the objective of university education. One side views education as emancipatory by providing students with knowledge of the social world, and their place within it, in order to supply students, as social actors, with skills and understandings that will enable them to engage with and transform society (Freire 1970; Giroux 1980; Pucci 2015; Davis 1998; Brookfield 2003). Giroux links the purpose of education back to that of classical Greece suggesting that education is:

> "Intrinsically political, designed to educate the citizen for intelligent and active participation in the civic community. [. . .] Thus, in this perspective education was not meant to train. Its purpose was to cultivate the formation of virtuous character in the ongoing quest for freedom". (Giroux 1980, p. 329)

Similarly, Maisuria and Cole highlight that the "Latin term 'universitas' means 'fuller' and 'wholeness' to describe the process of broadening horizons", highlighting that universities, in principle, are a means of developing an individual's mind and awareness of the world around them (Maisuria and Cole 2017, p. 607). Contrastingly, the second view of education recognises the purpose of universities as a means of driving economic development through the creation of highly skilled workers for the private sector (Pucci 2015). From this perspective, higher education is a way to indoctrinate among new generations the ideals and functions of neoliberal capitalism to enable related ideology and practices to perpetuate in economics, politics, and social relations, through individual workers and citizens (Giroux 2014). Giroux argues that universities are slowly dying as they are no longer a "center of critique, vital source of civil education, and critical public good", rather they are sites of neoliberal capitalist ideological, and practical, domination (Giroux 2014, p. 16; Heller 2016; Maisuria and Cole 2017). Values of participation, respect, self-determination, interconnectedness, trust and transparency, and transformation central to restorative pedagogy inherently provide opportunities for learning to be an inclusive, collaborative, and exploratory process. In doing so, supporting higher education to be about developing broad understanding, critical thinking, and agency, rather than being individualistic and oppressive (Pointer et al. 2020; Gilbert et al. 2013; Giroux 1980; Pucci 2015; Maisuria and Cole 2017).

2.3. Restorative Justice Teaching and Learning in Criminology

Criminology was first established around 1890, with the aim of replacing criminal anthropology, criminal psychology, and the sociology of crime with a specific discipline focused on crime and punishment (Garland 2011, p. 298). Many suggest that criminology was first established in Britain following the second world war as a specific discipline focusing on the relationship between crime and society (Bowling and Ross 2006; Garland 2011; Rock 2017). Garland argues that even in the 1970s, "criminology was still very much a newcomer" in Britain with only a small number of universities offering criminology modules and courses (Garland 2011, p. 299; Radzinowicz 1962, 1999). Since the first criminology courses were established in the 1970s, the number of criminology degree programmes has grown in the UK at an unprecedented rate (Garland 2011; Harris et al. 2019; British Society of Criminology Learning and Teaching Network 2019; Palmer 2020). Due to the growth of criminology, in terms of both teaching and research, it is increasingly "a point of intersection between a number of academic fields and approaches" and is concerned with a vast array of topic areas such as: criminal justice, causes of crime and deviance, criminalisation, penology, social control, governance and surveillance, crime prevention, victimization, youth justice, policing, crimes of the powerful, social control, environmental crimes, racism and racialization, and social harm (Bosworth and Hoyle 2011, p. 2; Bowling and Ross 2006; Garland 2011; McLaughlin and Muncie 2013).

Although the discipline of criminology is concerned with a large variety of intersecting fields and topics, and restorative justice is often viewed as an alternative approach to crime and justice because its values and aims are different to those of the dominant criminal justice system in the UK, arguably this makes its inclusion in criminology programmes important (Johnstone 2011; Pranis 2011; Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Stroup 2019). Many criminology and criminal justice scholars from the USA and New Zealand, have highlighted the relevance of restorative justice to criminology and/or criminal justice degree programmes (Stroup 2019; Deckert and Wood 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Britto and Reimund 2013; Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001). Largely, existing literature in this area concurs that restorative justice should be included in criminology and/or criminal justice degree programmes for three key reasons. Firstly, the increased use of restorative justice in criminal justice settings internationally (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto

and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Deckert and Wood 2013; Kitchen 2013). As Smith-Cunnien and Parilla state:

> "The most obvious reason for including restorative justice in a curriculum is that its influence on criminal justice policy and practice has grown to a point that students need to be made knowledgeable about it". (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001, p. 390)

Similarly, Britto and Reimund highlight that restorative justice has "evolved tremendously" in relation to all elements of the criminal justice system "including police, courts, corrections, juvenile justice, and conflict negotiation in a variety of settings" (Britto and Reimund 2013, p. 150).

The second common justification is the significance of restorative justice in developing critical thinking among students (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Deckert and Wood 2013; Stroup 2019). Existing literature highlights that studying restorative justice as part of a criminology and/or criminal justice degree not only "challenges students to think critically about key assumptions that underlie the current criminal justice system" (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001, p. 392). Further, by learning about the complexity of restorative justice in terms of theory, practice, and policy, and assessing related implications, students are supported to develop critical thinking skills (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Deckert and Wood 2013; Stroup 2019). Importantly, rather than the development of critical thinking skills being viewed as a pleasing by-product of criminology students learning about restorative justice, it is understood as a fundamental justification for the topic's relevance to criminology programmes (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001).

Thirdly, the positive impact that learning about restorative justice can have on criminology students' vocational prospects and abilities is a key justification for the topic's inclusion within criminology degree programmes (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Kitchen 2013; Stroup 2019). Knowledge and understanding of restorative values and practices can develop students' practical skills relevant to future careers in the "restorative arena" specifically (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001, p. 396), as well as in criminal justice practice and policy making (Stroup 2019; Britto and Reimund 2013; Kitchen 2013). Importantly, it is also noted that including restorative justice within criminology programmes supports students' personal growth as well as opening students up to new employment or volunteering interests and prospects (Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Kitchen 2013; Stroup 2019).

Gilbert, Schiff, and Cunliffe assert that "teaching restorative justice is 'different' from teaching in most university or college criminal justice courses" (Gilbert et al. 2013, p. 45). Restorative justice teaching and learning in criminology provides opportunities to think about crime and justice in different ways, compared to other criminological topic areas, and prompts the use of restorative practices and values within the learning process (Stroup 2019; Kitchen 2013; Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Britto and Reimund 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Deckert and Wood 2013; Gilbert et al. 2013). Restorative justice as a topic inherently offers opportunities to learn by doing, and for classroom dynamics to be guided in line with restorative values (Gilbert et al. 2013; Kitchen 2013). In doing so, restorative justice education in university settings contrasts with traditional academic educational approaches by encouraging learners to interact with the topic practically, reflect on their emotions, assess their personal values and assumptions, and draw on their personal experiences (Carson and Bussler 2013; Gilbert et al. 2013; Kitchen 2013). Therefore, restorative justice education in criminology, infused with restorative practices and values, arguably directly links to the emancipatory, democratic, and transforming purpose of higher education (Giroux 1980; Pucci 2015; Davis 1998; Brookfield 2003).

3. Research Methods

Findings presented and discussed in this paper are drawn from a larger project which critically examined the production, and exclusion, of restorative justice knowledge(s) within

undergraduate criminology in England and Wales. The project involved a multi-method, qualitative-dominant approach (Grønmo 2019; Johnson et al. 2007) to gather information from undergraduate criminology programme specifications and module outlines, criminology academics via semi-structured interviews, and undergraduate criminology students via focus groups. Information was collected and analysed in 2019/2020 through two phases.

Phase one was composed of a comprehensive scoping study to 'map' out the criminology curriculum within all undergraduate degree programmes offered in England and Wales (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, p. 22). Scoping involved content analysis of university websites, prospectuses, undergraduate criminology course outlines, and module descriptions. Phase two involved exploration of knowledges of restorative justice, and approaches to teaching and learning about the topic in undergraduate criminology, from the perspective of academics and undergraduate criminology students. In this phase, information was collected via semi-structured interviews with academics and focus groups were employed to gather the perspectives of criminology students. In total, 10 one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with academics and three focus groups were conducted with undergraduate criminology students.

Before data collection for this project began, ethical approval was obtained from the Cross School Research Ethics Committee at the university where the researcher was based at the time the project was undertaken. Although ethical issues or concerns were at no stage prohibitive to this project, the researcher constantly reflected on both procedural and situational ethics to ensure that ethical issues occurring from methods used were considered and mitigated (Tracy 2013).

This section begins by outlining the interview data which are drawn on in this paper as well as the approach to sampling and conducting interviews. Then, the process of participant recruitment and facilitation of focus groups is explained. Lastly, the approach used to analyse data presented in this paper is outlined.

3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

This paper draws on seven semi-structured interviews with academics who at, or prior to, the time the interviews took place designed and/or led a module focusing on restorative justice offered as part of the undergraduate criminology degree programme at their respective university. Most of the academics interviewed worked at different universities; however, two academics were based at the same university. Thus, the seven academics involved in this study who designed and/or led undergraduate criminology modules which focused on restorative justice were from six different universities. Notably, not all interviews conducted as part of the larger project are drawn on in this paper. Academics who participated in the larger project either designed and/or led criminology modules which specifically focused on restorative justice or designed and/or led criminology modules which did not focus specifically on restorative justice. This paper includes evidence from interviews with academics who designed and/or led criminology modules which specifically focused on restorative justice.

Purposive sampling was used to identify academics relevant to take part in the research. Academics who led restorative justice modules as part of undergraduate criminology programmes were identified via information collected in phase one of the larger project. As phase one of the project found that ten undergraduate criminology modules focused on restorative justice in England and Wales, the seven academics from six criminology programmes involved in this study represents the majority of academics leading focused restorative justice modules in undergraduate criminology. Academics who designed and/or led the other four focused modules identified were contacted, but either did not respond, the module was no longer being offered on the respective programme, or the relevant academic had left that institution.

Academics were contacted in the first instance via contact information found on the university website where they worked. In most cases, it was possible to obtain this information. However, when such contact details were not found, initial contact was made

with the leader of the criminology degree programme at the respective university, who then put the researcher in touch with the individual academic staff member. Of the seven semi-structured interviews, five were conducted in-person, on campus at the university where the respective academic worked, and two were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. The same interview schedule was used in all interviews. The schedule was made up of open questions that encouraged the specific experiences and views of each participant to guide the discussion. Interview participants were asked about the focused restorative justice module which they led and/or designed, their experience of delivering the module, as well as their own interest and experience of restorative justice.

3.2. Focus Groups

This paper draws on three focus groups with criminology students from three different universities. All focus groups included students who had previously studied a focused restorative justice module as part of their undergraduate degree in criminology. Academics who agreed to take part in interviews were asked if they would act as gatekeepers for focus group recruitment. Such academics shared a poster, in a digital format, about focus group participation with students who had studied the focused restorative justice module which they led. The focus group recruitment poster included information about the project, an outline of the purpose and organisation of focus groups, and the researcher's email address which students interested in being involved could contact to express interest in, and organise, participation. This approach to recruitment was identified as appropriate to avoid breaches to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), that would have occurred if student contact information was shared with the researcher. Given that this was a small-scale study, it was not possible to ensure that the sample of students who took part in the focus groups was representative. Nonetheless, by using a purposive sampling approach, the views of ten students who had studied three different focused restorative justice modules as part of three undergraduate criminology programmes in England and Wales were collected.

Notably, further focus groups with students who had studied restorative justice as part of their undergraduate criminology programme at other universities, were planned. However, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the corresponding national 'lock-down' announced in the UK on 23 March 2020, when data collection for this project was taking place, it was not possible for the additional focus groups to be carried out.

In total, ten students were involved in the three focus groups: 'Focus Group 1' was composed of two participants who were in the third year of their degree and had studied the optional restorative justice module in the first semester of their third year; 'Focus Group 2' composed of two participants who were both in the second year of their degree and had studied the optional restorative justice module in the first semester of their second year; and 'Focus Group 3' involved six participants that were in the second year of their degree and had studied the core restorative justice module in the first semester of their second year. In focus groups, students were asked about their experience of the restorative justice module they had studied, what restorative justice meant to them, and their views on the relationship between restorative justice and the criminal justice system.

3.3. Data Analysis

Audio recordings from both interviews and focus groups were transcribed and then analysed thematically. Specifically, reflexive thematic analysis was employed because it is an effective method to produce inductive data-driven analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis was identified as being particularly relevant to this project due to its applicability for "research seeking to understand people's subjective experiences or perspectives" (Braun and Clarke 2022, p. 225).

4. Discussion of Findings

This section presents and discusses findings from the project regarding the key elements of restorative pedagogy which existed across all criminology modules that focused

on restorative justice considered within this research. Firstly, the use and impact of resources to provide real-world contextualisation of restorative practices within modules is discussed. Then, the approaches used to design restorative justice modules to enable collaboration between everyone in learning spaces, as well as students' perspectives on these approaches, are explored. Lastly, examples of ways in which experiential learning of restorative practices was enabled within modules are discussed.

4.1. Real-World Contextulisation

Central to restorative justice teaching and learning in undergraduate criminology was real-world contextualisation of the concept using methods such as relevant videos, documentaries, case studies, and guest speakers. Academics involved in this project, who designed and/or led modules focusing on restorative justice, highlighted that they used a range of approaches to contextualise restorative justice as a tangible practice applied in various real-world situations and contexts. Most academics interviewed reflected on their aim of designing their respective module in a way that would link restorative justice theory and practice by using real-life examples to "*bridge the gap between the conceptual and the actual*" (Interview 7). This was accounted as being vital in overcoming the abstraction of restorative justice, often experienced by students who were unfamiliar with the concept theoretically or practically, as well as enabling participatory learning. As one module leader explained, multiple techniques were used to contextualise restorative justice as a real-life practice for students:

> *"One of the things that I was actually trying to do with the restorative justice module was getting them to think about ideas but in a much more practical context. You know because they were really interested in the practices like, they were just trying to . . . there was something concrete you know. So I used to show them videos of conferences taking place, and I would work from these very concrete things that they could see quite clearly, rather than starting off from abstract ideas and then trying to get them to think about the application".* (Interview 6)

The propensity within all the restorative justice modules to consider multiple real-world perspectives on the topic was notable. Attention given by all module leaders to this highlights a shared aim, however unconscious, of contextualising restorative justice practically, enabling students to develop tangible awareness. Arguably, the common understanding of restorative justice being different or alternative to the traditional or dominant criminal justice system (Zernova 2016; Zehr 1990), as well as being a concept and practice which students often have misconceptions about (Waltman-Spreha 2013), incited those teaching restorative justice to strongly evidence it as a real practice. Regardless of the rationale, commitment to substantiating theory with real-world practice was central to every restorative justice module. Thus, indicating that approaches characteristic to restorative justice teaching and learning in criminology higher education focus on encouraging students to relate meaningfully with various real-world applications and experiences of the practice (Britto and Reimund 2013).

In every focus group, students highlighted that real-world examples of restorative justice being applied practically in various contexts were important to their learning experience. Similarly, all students expressed that a focus on examples of concepts in practice were not common in other criminology modules. Experiencing a rounded, real-world, view of restorative justice helped students to understand the concept practically for two key reasons. Firstly, it visually illustrated to students the actual elements of restorative practices, and impacts that such processes could have, rather than just thinking about it in theory. For example, one student stated:

> *"I quite liked the flow of it [the restorative justice module] and how the teaching was, it was very different. I think the videos were really important as well because it talked about . . . instead of looking at a piece of paper and going, well this is how it's meant to be, but when you're seeing the lady come face to face with the guy who'd raped her, I think it was . . . you don't expect it to flow smoothly as what it did. I think obviously the mediator*

> *was there, but I just thought . . . I had a lot of admiration for the victim because it's a big thing to do"*. (Focus Group 3, Participant 2)

This student, like many others that participated in this project, noted the difference in the learning experience they had as part of their respective restorative justice module in comparison to other modules on their degree programmes. Arguably, evidencing that facilitating learning about restorative justice requires that class structures and content inherently take a different approach to common pedagogic approaches in higher education (Gilbert et al. 2013). Rather than asking students to intake knowledge placed upon them by their teacher and only view a topic in the way their lecturer understood it, restorative justice modules encouraged students to make meaning and knowledge for themselves by engaging with real-world narratives and experiences of the concept practically (Freire 1970; Pointer et al. 2020). Further, from the student reflection above it is evident that this teaching approach and the use of real-world examples via videos encouraged them to meaningfully contemplate the practicalities of a restorative dialogue and question preconceived ideas they had about the application of restorative justice (Waltman-Spreha 2013; Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001).

Secondly, watching videos of restorative justice encounters made the topic, and the victim(s) and offender(s) involved, relatable to students supporting reflexive and rich learning. As one student explained, seeing a real-life example of restorative justice illuminated the human emotions involved in what is often presented academically as a complex theoretical process:

> *"Yeah, I think on this module particularly we had to watch a documentary, like a short film about it, so because we've seen it happening, we haven't just been taught about it, to watch this thing and then comment on it, the whole time I was watching it I was thinking, 'what would I say if I was in that position?', 'how would I feel if I was in that position?', so yeah you can definitely relate, because you think, 'what if that was me?', 'would I be able to do that?', 'would I not be able to do that?'; I don't think you can ever know unless you are in that situation, but you can definitely relate to it"*. (Focus Group 2, Participant 1)

This student reflection emphasises the practical and humanising value that videos and documentaries of restorative justice encounters can offer to their learning experience. Arguably, restorative justice education supports that the learning process does not only involve typical or traditional academic approaches, such as reading academic texts and discussing theoretical perspectives, it also includes engagement with students' emotions (Gilbert et al. 2013). Being given spaces within classes to see and hear from individuals actively taking part in restorative justice practices clearly encouraged students to relate emotionally to the topic (Morrison and Vaandering 2012; Llewellyn and Parker 2018). Similarly, learners having time to reflect on their emotions and understandings of restorative justice, following watching examples of its application in a real-life context, is fundamental to teaching and learning restoratively (Pointer et al. 2020; Llewellyn and Parker 2018; Carson and Bussler 2013).

All modules which focused on restorative justice were deliberately designed to link theory with real-world examples of practice. Although in some cases this was completed mainly via videos and/or case studies, the majority involved a mixture of various videos, case studies, documentaries, and guest speakers from the field. The common reasoning for this was to encourage students to think practically about restorative justice in different contexts, and from different perspectives. For example, one restorative justice module leader explained the importance of students getting to hear from and speak to practitioners to develop practical awareness and understandings:

> *"So, we're bringing in you know different practitioners from different organisations and different settings to talk about actually how they apply this stuff in that context. So we have people talk about sexual violence and the use of community circles for sex*

> *offenders, we've got people that come in and talk about RJ in schools and how it's used".* (Interview 7)

Providing opportunities for students to hear from practitioners and people with lived experiences of restorative justice, and criminal justice, in a variety of contexts, clearly supports students to engage in critical reflection of restorative justice and its application. Learning to view the world from multiple standpoints helps to offer a view of the complexity and interconnectedness of social relations and justice processes (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001). Refusing to provide an isolated view of restorative justice, either from a single angle or only using academic evidence, arguably mitigates the fragmentation of reality common within higher education (Freire 1970; Barton et al. 2010). In doing so, students are exposed to authenticity and to viewing knowledge as something which is unfixed. Offering multiple experiences of restorative justice, from the lecturer and people from outside of the university, arguably indicates that knowing is not "the property of the teacher" and that it is a continuous process of discovery (Freire 1970, p. 53). Illustrating through guest speakers and other real-life examples, that there are multiple ways of knowing and that criminological concepts are engendered by real people, thus stimulates authentic and imaginative inquiry (Freire 1970; Young 2011; Llewellyn and Parker 2018). Although the use of practical, real world, examples are arguably not unique to criminological modules that focus on restorative justice, the extent to which this approach was used within such modules was significant and impactful.

Students reflected on opportunities to hear from practitioners as helping them to better understand the intricacies and multiple perspectives of restorative justice, and criminal justice, which exist in practice. Reflecting on their experience of attending a restorative justice conference as part of their module one student stated:

> *"It was interesting. Basically, they were all restorative justice practitioners within the field that they worked in and they were just—I think it happens every year—they were just coming together to discuss what they'd done in that year previously, successes or not successful. I think there was one thing that massively stuck with me, there was a disagreement between . . . one woman was saying with domestic violence people were being treated as victims and not providing them with restorative justice opportunities because they were a victim because it may harm them more. Then someone else was saying, actually what's a victim, and you're taking that away from them? It was really interesting to see these professionals still battling between things we'd discussed in the workshop, so it was nice to see it in practice. It was an eye-opener".* (Focus Group 2, Participant 1)

Students having the opportunity to interact with individuals in the fields of restorative justice, and criminal justice, overcomes the notion that there is only one definition or one way of knowing about a topic. It appears to remove the dynamic of the lecturers understanding of restorative justice being the only one which exists, and which students must passively take on (Freire 1970). Instead, through exposure to a range of real-world perspectives, including that of the lecturer, students are expected to participate in making meaning about the topic from all of the angles shown to them. Multiple perspectives are arguably particularly important in the context of restorative justice, as the subject matter is complex and impacted by various factors (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Johnstone and Van Ness 2011; Daly 2016). By giving students the opportunity to understand and assess various real-life viewpoints, the meaning of restorative justice is not imposed on them, as they are given space to examine multiple perspectives and to think critically about the application of restorative justice in practice. Indeed, individual students are free to explore the intricate realities for themselves and make meaning beyond official, hegemonic, narratives arguably often placed on them by the academy (Barton et al. 2007; Willis 2012; Pucci 2015; Giroux 2014).

4.2. Collaboration

Attempts to remove power imbalances between lecturers and students within classes were often reflected on by academics who taught focused restorative justice modules. In interviews, all academic staff, when discussing module delivery and activities, used the term '*we*' repeatedly. Evidencing that lecturers did not see themselves as separate from students, and that module structure focused on collaborative learning. This was commonly viewed as important to enable learning through meaningful, yet informal, discussion and debate. Although in most modules a mixture of lectures and workshops were used, structuring classes to be discussion-focused was commonly viewed as important. For example, when explaining the use of both lectures and workshops in their restorative justice module, one academic stated:

> *"Yeah, we try to discuss, we try to participate, the sessions tend to be very informal, in the spirit of restorative justice, encouraging participation, debate, often people disagree, but it tends to be a very nice debate"*. (Interview 5)

Collaborative learning, via discussion, participation, and debate, was important to the delivery of all restorative justice modules. This approach was deemed to be "*in the spirit of restorative justice*" (Interview 5). Indeed, collaboration and communication between all members of a classroom community is extremely important in restorative justice education and restorative pedagogy (Pointer et al. 2020; Gilbert et al. 2013; Hopkins 2012). Using restorative values to guide the learning environment and the educators' approach arguably helps students engage practically with such values during the learning process (Pointer et al. 2020; Toews 2013). Active enablement of collaboration in various forms within restorative justice education situates the student and teacher synonymously as learners and givers of knowledge, positioning all involved with an equal voice and encouraging every individual to share their views and experiences (Freire 1970; Toews 2013; Pointer et al. 2020).

The power imbalance created by the traditional lecturer/student relationship, causing 'banking education' (Freire 1970, p. 45), was something that most module leaders deliberately tried to overcome when designing lesson structures in order to support the removal of demographic divisions and promote the principles of inclusivity and mutual respect. Restorative justice classes predominantly taking the format of workshops, rather than formal lectures, helped to remove power imbalances within the classroom by positioning the person teaching as facilitator, rather than a lecturer. In doing so, promoting that learning and knowledge production is a process of investigation immersed in dialogue, humanisation, and collaboration (Freire 1970). When discussing their approach to structuring classes, one module leader emphasised the importance of their role as a facilitator of discussion, rather than a lecturer, when teaching restorative justice:

> *"And so you know, that kind of element is really really important, and the kind of group work and the facilitating discussions and their ability to feel safe with me, but also to challenge what I'm saying . . . and to go actually I don't agree with what you're saying, then that's fine . . . great, well tell me more about that . . . how does that work? You know . . . and trying to facilitate that environment whereby people feel . . . safe"*. (Interview 2)

As highlighted in the above quote, creating a safe environment focused on relationships is central to teaching and learning restoratively (Vaandering 2014a; Morrison and Vaandering 2012; Riestenberg 2007; Toews 2013). The creation of safe learning spaces, centred on trust and respect, links clearly to restorative values and restorative pedagogy regardless of the topic being considered. Arguably, infusing these values within spaces where restorative justice is being explored and assessed by criminology students is particularly important to ensure students feel able to ask questions, engage in debates, and evaluate how restorative justice links to their own values and experiences (Carson and Bussler 2013; Toews 2013; Gilbert et al. 2013). Indeed, lecturers facilitating safe dialogic learning spaces, rather than 'depositing' information into students, as in the case of the traditional 'banking' style, positions learning as a process (Freire 1970). Discussions and debates around restorative justice, in which everyone's perspectives and ideas are equally

valid, develops a situation in which teachers and students are partners learning together, and from each other (Freire 1970). Arguably, this overcomes the notion of restorative justice, when being taught academically as part of a degree, as being a fixed concept removed from human life and perspectives (Gilbert et al. 2013).

Discussion between all class members, in an equal and collaborative way, was empowering for students. The majority of students highlighted that they enjoyed not passively listening to a lecture and got a lot more out of discussions. One student expressed that the alternative approach to teaching in restorative justice classes was effective and welcomed: "*I enjoyed it [the restorative justice module] because it was a different approach, because before it's like lecture, lecture, lecture, lecture*" (Focus Group 2, Participant 1). Similarly, when comparing the collaborative workshop structure to traditional lectures another student stated:

> *"I think having the different elements of it—rather than just having a three-hour lecture—it was group work and talking to people about it and I did really enjoy that style of teaching"*. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1)

The process of actively learning through discussion and collaboration with others was clearly something students found effective and different to other modules they had studied as part of their degree. Creation of a largely power neutral class, by disrupting the normal lecture style, helped to make learning enjoyable and productive. Facilitation of collaborative and largely unformal learning spaces within criminology classrooms focused on restorative justice, supported students to discuss, debate and reflect on their ideas and perspectives, ultimately enabling critical thinking skills to develop. This dynamic of students and teachers as partners and mutual learners is key to enabling critical thinking (Freire 1970). Principally, because it signals to students that their opinions are just as valid as the teacher and offers more opportunity to explore ideas. Thus, allowing students opinions to be validated and for them to inquire and make meaning for themselves about restorative justice, rather than understandings being imposed upon them. Similar to the use of real-life examples, collaborative learning mitigates understandings being placed on students from above (Gilbert et al. 2013; Hopkins 2012). In doing so, developing perspectives, awareness, and understandings by interactively exploring restorative justice through dialogue and collaboration with others in the class.

4.3. Experiential Learning

Engagement with various real-world examples of restorative justice and a focus on collaboration and dialogue were both important elements of restorative pedagogy in criminology higher education. These approaches, common to all focused restorative justice modules, were deliberately designed to enable students to relate to restorative justice as a real-world practice rather than only an academic concept and instill restorative values within learning spaces. However, in some modules, experiential learning was enabled to further support students to learn about restorative justice in a restorative and practical way. Indeed, learning activities which allowed students to experience restorative practices and values, in some way, were viewed as important by most lecturers who participated in this research. Restorative experiential learning, facilitated within criminology higher education about restorative justice, included activities such as: role play of restorative justice encounters, sharing circles, and restorative problem-solving tasks.

Prominently, restorative practice in restorative justice classes took the form of sharing circles. Restorative circles, used in various ways both in justice and educational settings, provide opportunities for stakeholders to share and discuss conflict, problems, perspectives, and/or ideas (Coates et al. 2003; Morrison 2007; Vaandering 2014b). The use of restorative circles in educational environments involves all students and teachers/facilitators sitting physically in a circle form to enable a sense of community to be created, prompt and structure discussions, as well as instilling collaboration, relationship building and inclusivity within learning spaces and processes (Toews 2013; Gilbert et al. 2013; Pointer et al. 2020). Some modules included sharing circles a few times in the module, however in other cases sharing circles were facilitated at the beginning of every session throughout the

course of the module. Participation in sharing circles had a considerable impact on students understanding of restorative justice. As one student explained, rather than just thinking about the importance of communication, and the views of others, it was something that they experienced and therefore understood more meaningfully:

> *"I think my favourite thing [about the restorative justice module] was we did check-ins every week, every morning, and to start with I was petrified, I wasn't really listening to what other people were saying, I was so nervous about what I was going to say. But by the third week—so [name of module leader] would ask us something—and we'd go round, pass the ball round, and say how we're feeling, I really like to see how that was applied in our lectures, so what we were learning we could see it, we could feel it a bit more".* (Focus Group 1, Participant 2)

Although in the statement above, the student highlights that weekly class sharing circles did end up being their favourite part of the restorative justice module they studied, they note that initially it was a daunting activity. The physical space created by the circle process is very different to traditional lecture or seminar spaces in higher education (Kitchen 2013). Coupling this change to the class setting with the realisation that every person will be invited to contribute to the circle discussion is understandably frightening for students who are unfamiliar with the practice. Nonetheless, as evidenced by the student quote above, sharing circles are extremely valuable in developing understandings about restorative justice (Gilbert et al. 2013; Kitchen 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013). Indeed, the use of circles in restorative justice education encourages participation, creates safe learning spaces, and encourages students to relate meaningfully and practically to curriculum content (Gilbert et al. 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013).

Several restorative justice modules incorporated the use of problem-solving circles. There were two key ways that problem-solving circles were used in criminology modules focusing on restorative justice. One approach was the use of a problem-solving circle to arrange the structure of physical shapes. The aim being to help students understand the importance of everyone's ideas being considered and experience the key restorative justice principles of empowerment, problem solving, and participation. One module leader explained facilitating a circle in their class, with blocks of Lego in the middle, going round the circle one by one, with each person having the chance to arrange the blocks the way they liked. Continuing to go around the circle, in silence, until everyone had agreed on the structure which was created. On finishing the activity, a group discussion was had regarding:

> *"What's the relevance to restorative justice, why are we doing this, what have you learned from this exercise? So, they make some very good observations, how this is a participatory model, everybody gets a chance, they are all equal, nobody forces a decision, as a teacher I'm participating in the circle, I also get the chance to make my own rearrangements, but I don't tell them when to stop. You often get one or two people who continue rearranging the structure when everybody else has already finished, and usually they don't, these people don't like the other person they are with and we have a discussion, is this about Lego or is this something much bigger? So, techniques like that, I think they help understand some concepts, and experience some key principles of restorative justice".* (Interview 5)

Posing students with problems, asking them to explore their own behaviours and propose responses to issues, emphasises key elements of restorative justice to students. Given that criminology students are often not aware of how restorative practices work prior to studying the topic, experiencing a problem-solving circle for themselves enhances their understanding in a way that reading or hearing about the practice would not (Gilbert et al. 2013). Learning from experience enables students to develop an understanding for themselves about restorative practices by reflecting on their contributions, observations, and emotions during the experience (Pointer et al. 2020). Arguably, by experiencing and participating in restorative circles during classes, students can develop skills and awareness of how to apply restorative practices and values themselves within

settings beyond the university classroom (Gilbert et al. 2013). This is of particular relevance to students studying for a degree in criminology as they are likely to go on to work in criminal justice settings or other human services (Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Stroup 2019; Britto and Reimund 2013; Kitchen 2013).

Secondly, some modules incorporated problem-solving circles to evidence the multiple contexts to which restorative justice is relevant. Rather than only asking students to consider problems in relation to criminal offences, "*mundane examples*" (Interview 7) of everyday problems were often used to evidence the multiple ways harm can be caused and experienced, as well as the relevance of restorative practices in an array of contexts. For example, one module leader explained:

> *"They [facilitators] ran a problem-solving circle with an issue they had with their housing or something like that. And we went round the room, and everybody gave potential solutions. But you know, that sort of applied thing because not only is it great, it's a great experience but then you know but it's a really nice way for them to not just hear how or see someone explain this kind of stuff. But to participate in it is really impactful".* (Interview 7)

The use of everyday examples of conflict arguably offers a view of harm as something which is not confined to criminal incidents, and instead illuminates that conflict and its resolution take place throughout society (Young 2011). Arguably, this is important to knowledge production regarding restorative justice, as often understandings of restorative practices focus on communication between victims and offenders of crime, rather than also exploring various forms of conflict and harm or considering the wider structural factors which impact individuals and conflict resolution (Dyck 2008; Vaandering 2010). Further, considering everyday issues within a problem-solving circle encourages students to think about how they deal with problems in their own lives potentially informing their behaviour as social actors within their various social roles and future careers (Carson and Bussler 2013; Kitchen 2013; Stroup 2019).

5. Conclusions

This paper has explored the approaches and perspectives of academics that designed and/or led restorative justice modules within undergraduate criminology programmes, and the views and experiences of students who studied such modules, at multiple universities in England and Wales. It has evidenced that real-world contextualisation, collaboration, and experiential learning are central elements of restorative pedagogy in criminology higher education about restorative justice. In doing so, this paper provides empirical evidence, from multiple criminology programmes in a UK context, of restorative justice teaching and learning in higher education which adds to growing scholarship regarding restorative pedagogy (Toews 2013; Pointer et al. 2020; Pointer and McGoey 2019; Gilbert et al. 2013) and restorative justice teaching and learning in criminology specifically (Stroup 2019; Deckert and Wood 2013; Carson and Bussler 2013; Britto and Reimund 2013; Smith-Cunnien and Parilla 2001; Waltman-Spreha 2013).

This paper has shown that restorative justice focused modules in criminology programmes share distinct pedagogic approaches. Real-world contextualisation of restorative justice via videos, documentaries, case-studies, and guest speakers overcomes the abstraction of the topic, which can often occur when using traditional academic approaches (Gilbert et al. 2013; Waltman-Spreha 2013). Creating learning spaces for students to watch real-life restorative justice encounters and/or hear from practitioners and individuals who have engaged with restorative processes supports them to relate to the topic and make meaning for themselves about restorative justice. Further, providing opportunities for students to experience restorative justice through the facilitation of sharing and problem-solving circles in classes enhanced students awareness and understanding of restorative practices. Although, students at times accounted finding participating in circles daunting or challenging, due to being unfamiliar with the practice, these experiences had a positive impact on students and their learning about restorative justice. Findings discussed in this

paper, show that all academics who led criminology modules focusing on restorative justice designed the content and structure, as one academic expressed, "*in the spirit of restorative justice*" (Interview 5). By facilitating collaborative and safe learning spaces, centred on trust, respect, and relationship building, academics enabled restorative values to guide all teaching and learning taking place within restorative justice modules (Toews 2013; Pointer et al. 2020). Although infusing restorative values throughout learning spaces and contexts is fundamental to restorative pedagogy, this paper argues that this is particularly important in the context of criminological education which often involves considering and debating emotive, sensitive, and contentious topics.

By focusing on providing and discussing empirical evidence of key elements of restorative pedagogy when applied within undergraduate criminology modules focusing on restorative justice, it is recognised that this paper has some limitations. There are further, and important, discussions relevant to the ideas presented here such as the challenges for academics that come with facilitating restorative pedagogy in higher education, a more detailed pedagogic comparison with criminology modules that do not focus on restorative justice, and deeper consideration of the educational and personal value that learning restoratively has for criminology students. However, unfortunately, these considerations were beyond the scope of this paper and are intended to be explored in future work. As highlighted earlier in this article, this project would have benefited from engagement with a larger number of undergraduate students via additional focus groups. Thus, a key area for future research is consideration of students' experiences and perspectives of restorative pedagogy. Another clear limitation of this paper, and the larger project which it is drawn from, is its focus on only criminology higher education. As scholarship and practice regarding both restorative justice education and restorative pedagogy continue to develop, in various subject areas and contexts, there are many opportunities for future research in this area. Exploration of restorative justice education and/or restorative pedagogy in the context of other higher education disciplines and systems as well as degree levels would be valuable to the field.

Ultimately, this paper has evidenced that, not only is restorative justice a topic relevant to criminology, but restorative practices and values are pedagogically effective in criminological teaching and learning. Facilitating real-world contextualisation, collaboration, and experiential learning within restorative justice classes inherently encourage power-neutral learning spaces where students and educators can learn with and from each other. In doing so, supporting that learners do not have knowledge imposed upon them, but rather have various opportunities and ways to develop understandings about restorative justice for themselves. This paper has evidenced that restorative pedagogy inherently counteracts harmful power structures and knowledge reproduction processes, which are prominent in neoliberal higher education, and instead aligns fundamentally to the emancipatory, democratic, and transformative purpose of higher education (Giroux 1980; Pucci 2015; Davis 1998; Brookfield 2003). Arguably, enabling critical thinking and transformation, through restorative pedagogy, is particularly important in criminology education because of the disciplines subject matter and the potential for such graduates to make meaningful and positive change in social and criminal justice settings (Stroup 2019; Barton et al. 2010; Stockdale et al. 2021). Yet, given the problematic conditions of higher education currently, facilitating learning with restorative practices and values is relevant and important to higher education regarding all subjects. Facilitating collaboration, real-world contextualisation, and experiential learning, grounded in restorative values, is arguably important in all higher education to act against learning being individualised, uncritical, or harmfully conventional and instead enable learning which is explorative, transformative, and emancipatory.

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