

Essay

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: Intersections between Feminism and Communication

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Abstract: This paper explores the intersections between feminism and communication in an Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program course that is cross-listed with Social Justice and Women's and Gender Studies. The paper focuses on the alignment of the Inside-Out curriculum with feminist pedagogical principles and explores, through the structure and content of the course, the ways in which these feminist principles interconnect with communication concepts.

Keywords: Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program; feminism; communication; pedagogy

1. Background of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

The origins of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program date to 1995 when Temple University instructor Lori Pompa took 15 undergraduate students to a Pennsylvania correctional facility where part of their visit included a one-hour discussion session with several prisoners, many of whom were serving life sentences.¹ As Pompa explains, “this conversation went places I had never experienced before—in prison, on campus, really anywhere. We talked of crime and justice, race and class, politics and economics—and how all of these strands were interrelated” (Pompa 2013, p. 14). At the end of the session, one of the panelists, a prisoner named Paul, suggested that Pompa bring students to the prison for weekly discussions throughout the entire semester (Pompa 2013, p. 14). Pompa pursued the idea and in 1997 developed the first Inside-Out course.² A Soros Justice Senior Fellowship in 2002–2003 provided her with the opportunity to replicate the program and develop an institute that would allow faculty from a range of disciplines to complete the Inside-Out training program and implement courses in their own campus communities.³ The Inside-Out Center website highlights the history and current status of the program:

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is an educational program with an innovative pedagogical approach tailored to effectively facilitate dialogue across difference. It originated as a means of bringing together campus-based college students with incarcerated students for a semester-long course held in a prison, jail, or other correctional setting. While those core Inside-Out Prison Exchange courses have been replicated across the United States and in multiple countries since its inception nearly 20 years ago, the program has expanded into a variety of other forms of educational and community-based programming. It also has grown into an international network of trained faculty, students, alumni, think tanks, higher

¹ See <http://insideoutcenter.org/history-inside-out.html>. The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. n.d. Available online: <http://insideoutcenter.org/> (accessed on 20 June 2018).

² See <http://insideoutcenter.org/history-timeline.html>.

³ See <http://insideoutcenter.org/history-timeline.html>.

education and correctional administrators, and other stakeholders actively engaged with, and deeply committed to, social justice issues.⁴

One of the central tenets of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program is that every student in the class is equal. The course brings together equal numbers of inside students (who are currently incarcerated) and outside students (who are enrolled at a local university); these students learn together as peers for the entire semester. Students, as Pompa explains, “participate in lively debate, rigorous coursework, and in-depth analysis of the larger society, as understood through the ‘prism of prison’” (Pompa 2011, p. 260). All students are expected to participate and share their observations about the course material in an environment that emphasizes mutual respect and reciprocity.

2. Impact of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program

The benefits and impact of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program have been well-documented (Davis and Roswell 2013; Howley 2013; Allred et al. 2013a, 2013b; Werts 2013; Hilinski-Rosick and Blackmer 2014; Maclaren 2015; Davis 2011; and Pompa 2011). As Simone Weil Davis states, “In student feedback from dozens of Inside-Out courses conducted around the country, again and again, both inside and outside participants use the word *transformational* (Davis 2011, p. 204). Influenced by experiential learning theories and the work of Paulo Freire, Pompa notes that the Inside-Out course is characterized by “[i]ntellectual understanding and analysis of issues combined with concern about and passion for those issues, propelling students—both inside and out—to recognize their potential as change agents, ready to take the next step in addressing a particular dilemma (Pompa 2013, p. 24). As part of this process, students are exposed to different perspectives and have the opportunity to think critically about what they are learning. They are positioned to apply this knowledge throughout the semester as they work collaboratively in small and large groups to complete activities, exercises, and projects. Ella Turenne underscores the power of this approach: “Small group work, which encompasses the bulk of project-based work, assists in fostering community and respectful dialogue. In creative ways, it allows students to work together toward a common goal, which often means having to exhibit a great deal of compromise, patience, and empathy” (Turenne 2013, p. 124). This “process of dialogue,” Turenne emphasizes, then “begins to transform into action” (Turenne 2013, p. 124). The Inside-Out community-based education model is exemplary and according to the Inside-Out website, over 30,000 students have taken Inside-Out courses in the United States and several countries.⁵

In this paper, I will discuss in more depth the Inside-Out curriculum model as a framework for the class that I teach, integrating throughout the ways in which communication concepts and feminist principles are demonstrated through the dynamics of the course.

3. Case Example

In 2009, following the completion of the Inside-Out training institute and a year of planning and coordinating, I offered my first Inside-Out Prison Exchange course with ten inside and ten outside students at a maximum-medium security women’s prison. I have now taught the course five times and anticipate teaching it in the future. My Inside-Out course is grounded in the discipline of Communication Studies and cross-listed with the Social Justice minor and the Women’s and Gender Studies major and minor. Ten joint class meetings are held inside the correctional institution; the other three meetings are held separately at the prison for inside students and the university for outside students. My course focuses on how language and images shape our perspectives, the role that stereotypes and labels play in our understanding of ourselves and others, and the ways in which we can resist (through communication practices) those negative representations. The structure of the course centralizes student voices through their participation in dialogue, decenters hierarchies of

⁴ See <http://insideoutcenter.org/about-inside-out.html>.

⁵ See <http://insideoutcenter.org/higher-education-partners.html> and <http://insideoutcenter.org/corrections-partners.html>.

power by equalizing power relations among students and between students and the instructor, and places value on personal and interpersonal experiences, which are then situated in broader social and political contexts. The academic content centralizes gender as the primary focus and intersectionality as a central conceptual framework through which we analyze both the readings and life experiences that are shared throughout the semester.⁶ In short, it is a course where students actively claim their education and raise consciousness about a range of topics and issues.

4. Curriculum

My course closely follows the overall Inside-Out pedagogical model, which is structured in the following way (Table 1):

Table 1. Course Schedule and Structure.

Week 1	Separate sessions for inside and outside students; Orientation to course, including guidelines and rules
Week 2	First combined meeting at the prison, including icebreaker activities, review of syllabus and program parameters, guidelines for dialogue and context, group discussion
Week 3	Separate sessions—debriefing, including thoughts and reactions to previous week's class, overview of criminal justice system, closing reflections
Weeks 4–9	<i>Weeks 4–9 focus specifically on readings, weekly themes, experiential activities, small and large group discussions; weekly themes are listed below</i>
Week 4	What are prisons for?
Week 5	Why do women commit crime?
Week 6	How does language shape our understanding of women in prison?
Week 7	How does the media portray women in prison?
Week 8	What are the realities for mothers in prison?
Week 9	What are the realities for formerly incarcerated women? What role does communication play?
Week 10	Group Project Work Day
Week 11	Group Project Work Day
Week 12	Group Project Presentations
Week 13	Closing Ceremony—final combined day for inside and outside students
Week 14	Final Debriefing (Separate sessions)

The content of the course also closely aligns with Inside-Out curriculum guidelines. The first three weeks of class reflect Inside-Out curriculum directives for effectively setting up the course and creating parameters that are conducive to learning. Week one includes separate meetings with both the inside and outside students. During each session, students are seated in a circle and introduce themselves, thus setting the tone for the combined classes that will follow throughout the semester. I also present a brief history of the Inside-Out program, followed by documents that must be signed by each student, including a waiver and the prison/Inside-Out rules and expectations. A prison official then meets with the outside students and discusses the Department of Corrections policies and parameters, particularly related to clothing and behavior. I follow with a review of the syllabus and course guidelines. Students complete an informational questionnaire, present some of their responses, and the remaining time is devoted to questions. Following this session, I meet with the inside students and facilitate the same discussion, with the exception of the prison security officer. Each group concludes with a closing circle, which is an integral part of the Inside-Out course structure. This particular week, each student is asked to offer a single word that reflects how they are feeling at the end of the first class, which immediately

⁶ The work of Freire that shapes the curriculum aligns well with feminist pedagogy. See Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970) See also Kathleen Weiler's "Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference" (Weiler 1991), bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks 1994), and Emilie Lawrence's "Feminist Pedagogy" (Lawrence 2016) at the Gender and Education Association's Feminist Pedagogy website: <http://www.genderandeducation.com/resources-2/pedagogies/feminist-pedagogy-2/>.

helps to foster a climate in which every student's voice is equal and valued. At this point, students are typically excited and anxious about their first combined class session the following week and there is recognition that their feelings are shared. The Inside-Out pedagogical approach during week one aligns with feminist pedagogical principles, as all students are positioned to direct the conversation with their responses, questions, and personal reactions.

Week two, the first combined session at the prison, is designed to establish a communal space where all students feel equally valued and the groundwork is laid for productive dialogue. Each student is directed to alternate their seating between inside and outside students, ensuring that inside students do not sit next to their inside peers and outside students do not sit next to their outside peers. In short, all students are immediately shifted out of their comfort zones and a potentially oppositional "us versus them" dynamic is avoided through the inside/outside balance of the circle. The circle is, as previously stated, an integral part of the program. "In that circle," Pompa explains, "everyone is equal—with an equal voice, and an equal stake in the learning process. Everyone does the same reading, writing, grappling with complex issues together, in a shared learning process (Pompa 2013, p. 16). During the first combined session, the circle is especially instrumental in breaking down barriers that could potentially inhibit course dynamics. With the alternating seating arrangement in place, we begin the class. Each student is directed to create a name tag, including only their first or preferred name, which will be used throughout the semester. The creation of nametags, and the use of first names in particular, is important not only in relation to getting to know each other. The practice also reinforces equity, as the correctional facility where I teach allows both inside and outside students to follow Inside-Out policy and use first names rather than last names or offender numbers.⁷ Moreover, each student and the instructor participate, dismantling hierarchies and underscoring the notion of equality. The short activity also alleviates the anxiety that most students feel at the beginning of this class session, as each completes a "hands-on" task.

We then shift to the Wagon Wheel, our first icebreaker, which requires outside students to move their chairs and create a circle facing outward. Inside students then form a second circle around the outside students, with one inside and one outside student facing each other. Each set of inside/outside partners has 90 seconds to answer an open-ended question, such as "One of my favorite movies is . . ." or "The thing I'm most proud of in my life is . . ." The activity is intentionally set up so that inside students rotate around outside students. As Steven Shankman notes, if the outside students rotated around the "stationary" inside students, "it could create the impression that the inside students are being made objects of the gaze of a group of tourists from the outside" (Shankman 2013, p. 145). The Wagon Wheel icebreaker consistently ranks as one of the top activities when students reflect on the course at the end of the semester. Pompa explains that the icebreaker "is a simple, nonthreatening, and nonintrusive way for people in the group to quickly meet one another" (Pompa 2011, p. 266). According to Turenne, icebreakers in the Inside-Out course also "allow for the gradual building of trust such a group dynamic requires (Turenne 2013, p. 127). Students indicate at the end of the semester that the Wagon Wheel (and week two in general) are particularly powerful because their assumptions and stereotypes are immediately dismantled with the realization that they share commonalities with their peers.

The remainder of the second class includes another icebreaker, a review of the syllabus and course parameters, brainstorming guidelines for dialogue and discussion,⁸ and approximately 15 minutes toward the end of class for each student to reflect on and share their interpretation of the following Dostoyevsky quote: "The degree of civilization in society can be judged by entering its

⁷ The preferred use of first names stems from the Inside-Out policy on semi-anonymity, which is designed to make it more difficult for students to keep in touch with each other during or after the semester and to protect both inside and outside students. In addition, as the handbook states, some students are uncomfortable sharing their last names with each other.

⁸ Typical examples from my class include: be honest and open, disagreeing is okay (and encouraged!), don't interrupt, don't be judgmental, and encourage and support each other. See also "(Davis and Roswell 2011)," in *Turning Teaching Inside-Out*.

prisons.” Following this discussion, each student is asked to mention, in one word, what they are feeling as a response to this experience.⁹ The second week of class is significant in part because it sets up the concept of “teaching itself,” which Gitte Verna Butin describes as the moment of instructional “surrender” where “students are free to lead the way their own way” (Butin 2013, p. 99). The alignment with feminist principles is evident, as the class session destabilizes hierarchies through student-centered icebreakers, the creation of name tags, and the use of first names, all of which foster connection and equality.¹⁰ Moreover, the final quote positions students for what is to follow throughout the semester: all students voices are to be valued and all students are expected to engage in and guide the dialogue each week. One of my students noted the impact of these practices when she was selected to speak at our closing ceremony: “Instead of segregated rows, we got a circle that no one was excluded from. Instead of a number we all got name tags . . . We got each other at face value. No stereotypes, hidden agendas, or judgment. A room filled with intelligence, respect, equality, and friendships no matter how brief the encounter.” The student’s quote speaks to the multifaceted dynamics at work in the class from the very beginning of the semester.

The concept of embodiment is also relevant to our understanding of the Inside-Out course and its intersections with feminism and communication. Pompa explains that the “circular seating and emphasis on listening opens up new avenues of engagement between students, leading to an interpersonal as well as intellectual experience” (Pompa 2011, p. 267). She goes on to state that “[i]deally, these transformations merge embodied experiences with heady intellectual inquiry” (Pompa 2011, p. 267). For example, the meanings of freedom can be unpacked and complicated, as outside students are temporarily and physically confined within the walls of the prison and inside students may experience a newfound intellectual freedom through the exploration of personal experiences in the context of broader academic concepts (Pompa 2011, p. 267). Butin also speaks to the relevance of embodiment and the ways in which it “manifests itself in the place-based specificity of being in a physical space of constraint” (Butin 2013, p. 100). She explains:

During class, the constraint applies to the whole group. The moment when the outside students prepare to leave the constraining space, by contrast, is at first awkward for everyone. On numerous occasions, however, the inside students took the lead in acknowledging the moment. In doing so, they changed it from what could have, using the post-structuralist feminists’ vocabulary, been a voyeuristic desire to learning about the “Other” into an opportunity for shared reflection (Butin 2013, p. 100).

This notion of embodiment reflects feminist pedagogies that value the personal, which in this case entails the individual and simultaneously communal “personal” encounter of being equal participants during the class, yet at the end experiencing that moment of awkwardness about which Butin writes. In my course, especially during week two, there has consistently been a moment at the end when students seem unsure about how to proceed. In a typical college classroom, students would pack up and leave, each at their own pace. In this context, however, there is uncertainty that I believe is rooted, at least in part, in the physical space and the recognition that course parameters are no longer in place. In my class, like Butin’s, inside students often take the lead in leaving the room. This act of agency on the part of those who live in the constraining space is powerful, as they acknowledge, through this initiating action, their familiarity with the space and their return to the constraining environment that is their home. This act and these types of moments reinforce the powerful nature of the course

⁹ The language and class format are drawn from the Inside-Out Curriculum Handbook, Session 2, pp. 1–8.

¹⁰ Butin explores and addresses challenges to critical theory that are relevant to the Inside-Out program. She states: The Inside-Out pedagogy responds in complex and challenging ways to the stances of critical theory and poststructuralist feminism in philosophy of education. The pedagogy shares the critical theorist’s call for transformation, empowerment, and the finding of one’s voice; yet this teaching mode does so by taking into account the poststructuralist feminist critiques of critical theory in regards to issues of empowerment, student voice, power structures, and voyeurism” (Butin 2013, p. 101). Butin further identifies the teacher as facilitator as one aspect of this dynamic.

itself in establishing equality, as our separate departures bring us back to the reality that beyond the parameters of the classroom, the inside students remain in prison and the outside students leave the facility and experience the freedoms that have been taken away from their inside peers. These personal, embodied experiences offer opportunities for critical reflection, especially when understood through the framework of academic concepts and content. When I went through the training institute, I still remember leaving Graterford Prison after our first session with the Inside-Out think tank. The physical act of walking away from the facility, knowing that my “inside” think tank peers were still constrained within its walls, created within me a sense of cognitive dissonance. In this context, we were for a time equal, but yet we were not. This physical, embodied experience still facilitates my thinking on the purpose of prisons, the meanings of freedom, and my own privileged position. Outside students have shared similar reactions as we walk toward the gatehouse following the end of our class sessions. Likewise, inside students have also revealed that they reflect on this dynamic.

Following the pivotal class session during week two, students meet separately during week three so that we can debrief the previous combined session and address any concerns or issues prior to the following class. I also provide an overview of incarceration, including statistics on women in prison and the introduction of intersectionality (i.e., the dynamics of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, religion, and nationality) in relation to crime and incarceration.

Because we have a shorter, 14-week semester, my course readings are integrated into weeks four through nine. Weeks four and five reflect the Inside-Out curriculum and I have continued to use the handbook’s guiding questions and class activities. I have added an emphasis on gender, and each of these two class sessions provides context for students who may not be familiar with the ways in which (1) our understandings of “prison” have shifted and changed over time, which then impacts the ways in which women experience incarceration, and (2) the factors that bring women to prison. M. Kay Harris underscores the importance of understanding the treatment of women in prison, which, she argues, is grounded in conceptions of gender that have resulted in notions of criminality and experiences far different from men (Harris 1998). As Mara Dodge also explains, an analysis of the “interactions of gender, race, and class” reveals the ways in which women in the past were deemed “improper, immoral, or disreputable” in the context of prevailing norms of “respectable” womanhood (Dodge 2002, p. 4). These topics are discussed in class and the following week we focus on the factors that bring women to prison, which again centralizes the study of gender.¹¹

Feminist criminologist Barbara Owen identifies several gender specific pathways to prison for women, including various forms of abuse, challenging and disordered experiences at home, and disordered experiences related to street life (Owen 1998). Lori Girshick also highlights the “disorganized” and “chaotic” dimensions that often characterize women’s lives prior to incarceration: “Low-paying jobs resulting from deficient schooling, low self-esteem from childhood abuse and lessons learned in school, drug addiction encouraged by peers, and abusive adult relationships all combined to limit life options” (Girshick 1999, p. 51). Again, the assigned readings explore the ways in which conceptions of gender have shaped the nature and function of prisons in the United States, along with the ways in which women experience incarceration. The integration of gender decenters the more common public emphasis on the mass incarceration of men and instead shifts attention to women, who comprise the fastest-growing prison population in the United States.¹²

During weeks four and five, we continue to complete exercises and activities that centralize student voices and promote dialogue about the issues under discussion. For example, we begin the

¹¹ For multi-faceted discussions focused on gender dynamics and incarcerated women, see, for example, Solinger et al. (2010). On page six they write: “The explosive growth of the female population in jails and prisons reflects pervasive gender mandates in U.S. society and women’s continuing subordinate social and economic status. The overrepresentation of people of color and poor people within the prison system reflects deeply entrenched forces of institutional racism and class prejudice in the society.” See also Lawston and Lucas (2011). The book’s title, *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists*, encapsulates the range of artistic and written contributions.

¹² See, for example, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>.

fifth week with the Alligator River Story, which functions as both an icebreaker and an introduction to the factors that bring women to prison. Students are presented with a short story and they must then reach consensus and rank the characters from most to least reprehensible.¹³ They then discuss their findings with the class and identify central themes that emerge from the story. Dominant themes typically align with theories of criminality that reveal tensions between individual choice and structural constraints, which also connects well with an exploration of gender assumptions. For instance, Abigail, one of the story's five characters, initially refuses a riverboat captain's proposition that she "consent to go to bed with him" if he takes her across the river to see Gregory, her lover. She later changes her mind after her friend Ivan refuses to help her. The captain then "fulfill[s] his promise to Abigail and delivers her into the arms of Gregory" but Gregory "cast[s] her aside with disdain" when he finds out about this "amorous escapade." These story elements suggest adherence to conventional gender norms; in this case, a woman exchanges sex for a favor that will allow her to see the one she loves, yet once she allegedly participates in the act, he casts her aside. Several questions related to gender inform the discussion: To what extent is Abigail's decision a "free choice"? To what extent is she constrained by societal gender assumptions? Was the exchange of sex for a favor her only option? To what extent are all of the characters constrained by societal gender assumptions? What are the consequences and implications? Again, these questions closely align with feminist theories and theories of criminology focused on the interconnections between individual choice and broader institutional forces. As Shoshana Pollack notes, teaching Inside-Out courses inside women's prisons (and also exploring topics related to gender) potentially "opens up a space . . . in which the personal engages with the structural" (Atiya et al. 2013, pp. 111–12). This type of exercise introduces students to the feminist notion that the personal is the political.

After the Alligator River Story dialogue, we shift to the readings and students share their general thoughts and reactions, followed by passages or quotes that shed light on women's pathways to prison. The session concludes with a 15-minute reflection on the following quote: "Crime is a problem, but it is also a symptom of a much deeper social problem, a societal dysfunction in which everyone one of us, by omission or commission, plays a part," which again invites students to explore the connections between the personal and the structural. I then close the session by asking each student to share one word that comes to mind when they hear the word "crime". With this broader contextual framework in place, we then transition during the next four weeks to questions focused more explicitly on communication and the role that language and images play in shaping our understanding of incarcerated women. Again, the experiential nature of the course and its emphasis on dialogue centralizes student voices, decenters authority, and provide students with a space to reflect on and direct the conversation. Moreover, all of the weekly readings feature concepts, theories, and historical context that offer a critique of broader societal norms and structural constraints. For example, who is positioned to define "criminal" behavior? How have assumptions about "criminal" behavior shifted and changed over time, especially in relation to gender assumptions? How and why did prisons originate? Who decides what the purpose of prisons will be and how have those assumptions shifted and changed over time? What is the impact on women? The work of Kenneth Burke provides a useful

¹³ The story reads as follows: There lived a woman named Abigail who was in love with a man named Gregory. Gregory lived on the shore of a river. Abigail lived on the opposite shore of the same river. The river that separated the two lovers was teeming with dangerous alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory. Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed out by a heavy flood the previous week. So she went to ask Sinbad, a riverboat captain, to take her across. He said he would be glad to if she would consent to go to bed with him prior to the voyage. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to get involved at all in the situation. Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad's terms. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory. When Abigail told Gregory about her amorous escapade in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside with disdain. Heartsick and rejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tale of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was overjoyed at the sight of Gregory getting his due. As the sun set on the horizon, people heard Abigail laughing at Gregory.

guide in these discussions, particularly the concept of “terministic screens,” which helps students understand the ways in which reality is a social construction.

The course content focused on communication has evolved to reflect a sharper emphasis on social construction, including the language, images, stereotypes, and more nuanced realities of incarcerated women. To this end, weeks six to nine explore questions related to these topics. The Inside-Out pedagogical format still structures each class session, including collaborative small and large group discussions, exercises, and activities. We still sit in a circle, alternating between inside and outside students, and conclude with the closing circle. Weekly questions and themes, however, reflect a more explicit disciplinary emphasis on the ways in which language and images shape our perspectives and the power of the media to direct our understanding of women in prison. One of our readings, criminologist Dawn Cecil’s “Looking Beyond *Caged Heat*: Media Images of Women in Prison,” demonstrates the intersections between criminology and communication. Cecil explores representations of incarcerated women in “reality-based” programming, including “documentaries, news magazine programs, and talk shows” and argues that women in prison are portrayed through three primary frames: violence, sex, and “bad” motherhood (Cecil 2007, pp. 305, 321). Students explore these gendered representations of women and link them to Burke’s concept of terministic screens, which holds that “[e]ven if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (Burke 1966, p. 45). The frames to which Cecil refers function as terministic screens or “lenses” through which we are invited to understand incarcerated women. As selections and deflections, these screens are never all-encompassing and may function to reinforce stereotypes. Because nearly 80% of women in prison are mothers and nearly 60% have children under age 18,¹⁴ we also compare the stereotypes that Cecil explores to the more nuanced experiences of mothers in prison, many of whom were primary caretakers prior to incarceration. These comparisons bring us back to the critical question of who is positioned in our society to “name” and categorize groups of people in particular ways, which entails discussions about institutional power and alternatively, the power of self-definition as a feminist form of resistance.

The power of self-definition is explored during weeks six and nine. As an example, required readings during week nine focus on the realities of formerly incarcerated women, including the challenges they face upon reentry, and the role that communication plays in these dynamics. One of our assigned articles is Tina Reynolds’s “A Formerly Incarcerated Woman Takes on Policy,” which highlights the various ways in which feminist communication practices, such as sharing one’s story and self-definition, can invite connections with audiences and challenge negative, simplistic stereotypes. Reynolds explains how she recognized the power of defining herself “beyond the prison experience” and later co-founded WORTH (Women on the Rise Telling HerStory), which works to “change the public perception about ourselves, our children, and our community in order to create positive policy changes” (Reynolds 2010, pp. 455, 457). In addition to these communicative practices, the final group of readings also features the importance of educating the public about prisons, rebuilding relationships with children and other family members, and advocating for policy changes related to housing and employment, all of which are related to the study of communication.

During weeks four to nine, students are required to write three thesis-driven analytical papers that address the overall question for the week, using relevant quotes from the assigned readings to support their claims. In addition to the readings previously noted, required books have included Jennifer Gonnerman’s *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett* and Christina Rathbone’s *A World Apart: Women, Prison, and Life Behind Bars*, along with both scholarly and mainstream articles that explore the weekly topics. These readings offer a more nuanced and complex understanding of the challenges that incarcerated women face, along with their achievements and successes, thus

¹⁴ See, for example, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-asharedsentence-2016.pdf>.

countering more simplistic and stereotypical portrayals of women in prison. Students also write three reflection papers throughout the semester, focusing on their observations of and reactions to class experiences and discussions. They also write a more extensive final reflection essay that is due on the last day of class.

The culminating class assignment is a group poster project designed to challenge stereotypes and reflect more accurately the experiences of women in prison. I revised the group project assignment prior to my second course offering so that it would encapsulate the communication-based focus on how language and images shape our understanding of incarceration and incarcerated women. In this way, the group project provides another example of the ways in which feminist principles have shaped my course. Students are divided into five groups comprised of two inside and two outside students. Each group is required to (1) design a poster that challenges stereotypes of women in prison and/or reflects the realities of women who serve time; (2) collaboratively write a paper that explains and justifies their poster choices and support these points with evidence from the assigned readings; and (3) present their poster to the class. Posters must feature one overall idea and include only a minimal number of words. In addition, posters must look professional; to this end, I have enlisted the assistance of a campus lab that provides guidance throughout the process. Some groups use the lab only for printing purposes, as students often have artistic ability and design the images themselves. Others create a sketch of their poster and the lab then locates the images and brings their ideas to life. Aside from these general parameters, students have creative freedom, again reflecting feminist pedagogical principles as students are positioned to draw from their experiences, situate those experiences in a broader context, and apply what they have learned throughout the course.

The group assignment, through the creation of the poster, is designed to impact audiences beyond our classroom, as posters are displayed in campus departmental offices and showcased during the University's Social Justice Week events. What follows is a brief description of three sample posters that were featured in the Winter 2013 Inside-Out Center newsletter.¹⁵ See images in the supplementary file.

"Dear Mama" highlights the number of women in prison who are mothers and encapsulates the various challenges that are part of pregnancy, parenting, and prison life, along with opportunities that are beneficial to mothers and children, such as the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars Program, which at one time had been offered at the prison where I facilitate the class. An outside student drew the image of the pregnant woman with shackles on her hands and the cards were drawn by the child of an inside student. The inclusion of the card allowed for "real" voices to be heard and for personal experience to be placed in a broader context.

"Truths" is designed to dismantle the "us versus them" stereotype and show that differences are minimal between the free and the incarcerated. The poster challenges the simplicity of drawing a line between "good" people on the outside and "bad" people on the inside and challenges us to think in more complex ways about labelling. The shadowed woman bridges the yin and yang and invites identification among all women.

"Television" illuminates the ways in which the media creates misrepresentations of incarcerated women, and the ways in which those words and images become harmful to those on the inside and outside. Drawn by an inside student, the faceless woman shielding herself from the press signifies the invisibility and dehumanization that the incarcerated often feel. The left side of the poster features an authority figure who is taking away the woman's child, directing attention to the challenges that mothers face while incarcerated. While the images of people are depersonalized and gray, the faceless woman has a vibrant, red heart, which symbolizes her humanity. The flag in the background portrays the ideal of freedom, especially freedom from judgment.

¹⁵ See http://www.insideoutcenter.org/PDF_newsletters/Winter2013_Newsletter_color.pdf. The language used to describe these posters is drawn from my write-up for the newsletter, which was based on student group presentations and their collaborative papers. These posters were chosen because they have already been featured in a public context.

Again, the culminating poster project provides an opportunity for students to reflect on and apply what they have learned throughout the semester and design a message that challenges often simplistic and potentially negative representations of women in prison. Aside from the general assignment parameters, they have creative freedom to focus on what they choose and design it the way that they deem to be most appropriate and effective. In short, students have the power to work collaboratively as equals and “claim” their education.¹⁶

The final combined session, which features the closing ceremony, is held during the second-to-last week of the semester and is one of the most powerful yet challenging class meetings. As Pompa states, the closing ceremony includes “administrators from the school and the correctional facility, to mark the achievements of the class” (Pompa 2013, p. 15). Melissa Crabbe further explains these dynamics: “inside and outside students speaking movingly (without being coached!) about the power of the community they have experienced in the classroom, their sense of connection to each other, and their gratitude toward the administrators who make the experience possible (Crabbe 2013, p. 32). The structure of this final, combined session is two-fold.¹⁷ The formal closing ceremony is held during the first hour of class and the program features the instructor’s welcome and introduction, a speech presented by an inside student (chosen by the outside students) and a speech presented by an outside student (chosen by the inside students). The Director of Education also speaks, and I typically schedule remarks from our College Dean and the Social Justice Program Director and/or the Women’s and Gender Studies Director. Each speaker is limited to three minutes, regardless of rank or position (again, fostering equality) and we then present certificates to each student in the course, followed by refreshments. Students display their posters at the event and those in attendance have time to talk with them about their creative work.

The second part of the class session is focused on our private closing exercise, without guests. Prior to this class, students submit a paragraph that addresses what the course has meant to them and the impact it has had on their lives. I compile their responses and present each student with the booklet. A student designs the cover and I also include small versions of the five posters created by the groups. After students have had the opportunity to read through the booklet, we shift to the most challenging part of the course: saying goodbye. The week before, students have been asked to think about how to process the end of the course and I ask them to talk about what each of us can do to help ourselves say goodbye to the group. We follow with a discussion about the group project and the impact it could potentially have in the future. Students share their responses and I then ask the final wrap-up question: what will you take from this experience into your life? Pompa underscores the power of the final combined class session: “At closing ceremonies, so moving and significant, there is quite a bit of mourning that happens, but it is mourning for more than just the relationships; it’s for the loss of the liberating space itself” (Pompa 2013, p. 205). The final combined class session is always bittersweet, as students have learned together as peers and found that regardless of their backgrounds and experiences, they were able to foster connections and treat each other with dignity. “In a most unlikely setting,” Pompa explains, “Inside-Out provides a space of liberation, a place where each person is recognized and celebrated for the unique contribution that he or she brings to the whole . . . In this shared space, we can be who we are, say what we know, and call forth the best in one another” (Pompa 2013, p. 275).

During the final week, each group of students meets separately and processes the entire experience. At the end of each semester, many inside and outside students note, in their final reflection papers and during our final discussion and dialogue, the positive impact of the course on their lives. Their words speak to the power of human dignity and the power of fostering connections and communication

¹⁶ See Adrienne Rich (1977), “Claiming an Education”.

¹⁷ My final combined session closely follows the Inside-Out format, including structure and content. Some of the language is also borrowed from the Curriculum Handbook.

between groups of people who might otherwise never encounter each other. Their words also speak to the power of Freire's inspiration and the feminist ideals that shape the course.

5. Conclusions

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange course is one of the most rewarding teaching experiences that I have had in my years as a faculty member. One of the most fulfilling aspects is facilitating student growth and transformation. Students demonstrate throughout the semester the recognition of their own prejudices and stereotypes, along with the realization that they have the capacity to change themselves and encourage change in others. This type of change is revealed through reflection papers, comments during class discussions, informal conversations before and after class, and conversations after the semester has ended. This process of self-awareness and transformation is related to broader discussions on what it means to be human. Turenne explains the core power of the Inside-Out course, which, she emphasizes, "push[es] students—both inside and outside—to see the humanity in others, in turn challenging them to be critical about societal norms and stereotypes" (Turenne 2013, p. 129). This type of "reordering and reorientation of perspectives" is fostered in the Inside-Out classroom, as Howley notes, "because learning happens as a function of relational growth" (Howley 2013, p. 118). In short, the process of becoming more self-aware (and more fully human) is generated through the dynamic of bringing two groups together that might not otherwise encounter each other. Fostering dialogue, respect for differences, and recognition of shared commonalities is in some ways akin to studying abroad and experiencing a different culture. In this case, the new culture is not another country, but instead a prison/college classroom that provides a space where individuals from different contexts and backgrounds can come together as peers to debate and discuss various issues, thus generating new perspectives on the subject matter. The course generates self-awareness in part through these interpersonal dynamics and in so doing, facilitates the process of being human.

In addition to facilitating and observing student growth and development, I learn and grow as well. The nature of the course itself, taught inside of a prison, is always a reminder of the privileges that have generated opportunities in my life, along with the recognition that with privilege comes responsibility in trying to create positive change. "Had I been born in different circumstances," as Jessie Rodger explains, "I could very well have been an inside student rather than an outside student. The assumption that those who commit crime 'deserve their punishment' or have a 'choice between right and wrong' dissolved" (Follet and Rodger 2013, p. 138). Rodger experienced the course as a student, but the impact that she describes is applicable to instructors as well.

Another powerful component of the course is the way in which it puts feminist pedagogical principles into practice. First, the instructor's capacity to "let go" is significant as it allows students to claim their education and do the work that the class requires. The "letting go" process also decenters power and hierarchies between students and the instructor, and between the two groups of students. Power is also shifted and hierarchies are dismantled within the prison space, as inside and outside students are treated as equals and expected to take the lead in activities and dialogue. Second, collaboration is a key feminist principle and relates directly to communication, as this process exemplifies what can transpire when power is decentered and students with different life experiences find ways to work together and find common ground. The dynamics of this course demonstrate what can transpire when students are heavily invested in each other, committed to listening to and learning from those with different perspectives. Third, the interplay between the personal and political is powerful in this course, and is experienced physically, emotionally, and intellectually. A range of varied responses, perspectives, and feelings is generated through the physical and emotional reactions to the constraining yet liberating space within the prison, the emotional responses to the dialogues, readings, and activities, and the intellectual growth that transpires throughout the process of connecting life experiences to abstract concepts and theories. Finally, the power of self-definition emerges through dialogue, assignments, and exercises. Students recognize that labels and stereotypes affect all of us and they explore the extent to which our perspectives are shaped by broader forces.

They also recognize their power to shift and change the ways in which groups of people are labelled. In short, students recognize their capacity to initiate change. When these feminist principles are integrated and combined with the focus on communication, powerful lessons about language emerge.

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