Public criminology in an acute setting and the development of an academic criminological career

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Abstract

This chapter reflects how participation in public criminological practice influenced my journey from undergraduate to doctoral study at Swansea University. It explores how the experience of learning criminology at a higher educational level fostered an interest in public criminology. It quickly became clear that youth justice especially can transform public education, empowering and supporting the powerless, the vulnerable, and those with often complex challenges. As Burawoy observes, students are the first public we face. My research has led to a process of self-reflection around notions of participation in the classroom, of shared experiences and a willingness to learn. Hearing young people talk openly about their futures, passions, and dreams is powerful. It opens the door to a shared community, one in which public criminology offers added value. The chapter concludes by focusing on critical reflections concerning public criminology. These include: the dialogical nature of public criminology; the potential for the academy to drive social change; how public criminology can empower and transform the lives of those it touches; and, importantly, how criminology as a discipline is about much more than crime or criminal justice – it is about foundational social values and hope for better policy and practice.

Keywords: Conscientisation, Criminological Publics, Public Criminological Practice, Pedagogy.

Introduction

In my formative years of university study, I was immersed in a pedagogical paradigm that emphasised the importance of social justice, and approaches which sought to engage in public dialogue rather than merely academics speaking to each other (Bellah et al. 1985; Loader and Sparks 2010). This inspired critical thought about the broader impacts of education and the potential power of learning to transform communities beyond the university, challenging inequality, enhancing education, and enfranchising those who often have no voice (Howes 2017). My understanding of public criminology was further influenced by practitioner engagement in a youth homeless hostel. Homeless hostels accommodate some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society with the aim of helping them to become independent, autonomous citizens (Mahoney, 2019).

The hostel residents were very much invisible, frequently denied a comprehensive education, and often powerless in broader social terms. Confronting these realities, I developed a positive approach to public criminology, which echoes what Freire (1992) refers to in his *Pedagogy of Hope* as the power of education, and the need for the academy to tackle critical social issues such as poverty and powerlessness in an applied manner.

Learning From Experience

My experiences can be broadly divided into three stages. Firstly, reading criminology at university: during this stage, my preconceptions about criminology as a discipline began to be dispelled. From perceiving criminology as something that might lead to a good career, I engaged with theoretical learning with a social justice emphasis, through teachers who often had a practitioner background. This shifted my perceptions, enabling a more critical view of the subject and its applications.

The second stage was more practical and occurred between my second and third years of undergraduate study. I undertook an internship with the youth offending service in Swansea and through that, began a process of exploring the potential impact of criminology in practice. Engagement with young people and practitioners within a pro-social justice Youth Offending Team (YOT) consolidated my emerging thoughts around public criminology, especially with marginalised young people and those who work with them. The final stage concerns the direct application of new understandings of public criminology. As I progressed from undergraduate study to postgraduate research, core principles of public criminology became embedded in my research, teaching practice, and philosophy. Reflecting on my journey, I believe this process of development and understanding of public criminology enabled me to grow as a criminologist before I considered it in a formal sense. It must be noted that I have changed names for privacy and have permission from all those involved for all quotes and life details circumstances to be used. All research has been completed ethically.[1]

Early Thoughts on Developing a Public Criminology Approach

As a university educator, I recognise that students are the first public we face (Burawoy 2008, p. 8). As a criminologist, I realise we must rethink the form of instruction and the means of delivering a criminological education (Gacek and McClanahan 2021). This has led me to self-reflection around notions of participation in the classroom, particularly with regard to youth justice. Witnessing undergraduate debate and discussion during my degree at Swansea sparked my interest in public criminology, and the ways in which those who were at the start of their academic journey could raise a debate in seminar sessions and have their ideas critiqued. Such critical exploration is fundamental to human interaction, and it is a flexible,

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1 The research went through the ethics process at Swansea University and was signed off by the ethics board.

adaptive pedagogical tool that allows students to engage critically with content (Roland et al. 2016, p. 3). Discussions around seminar questions, and the search for answers and understanding, inspired deeper critical thinking. As Burawoy (2008, p. 9) suggests, critical pedagogy is essential for students to become active, critical subjects rather than 'empty vessels to be filled with sociological truths.' A more public criminology, underpinned by eco-pedagogical empowerment, can aid both students and the wider public (Gacek and McClanahan 2021).

The process of engaging students in critical reflection demands perseverance and understanding that it takes time for them to begin to reflect on their knowledge and to share their ideas critically. In this context, they are invited to reject the notion of themselves as passive consumers of knowledge and to empower themselves to take charge of their own learning (Greek 1995; Clevenger, Navarro, and Gregory 2017; Gacek and McClanahan 2021). This connects to research around the idea of the student as producer, recently developed by Strudwick and others (2020; 2021a; 2022): with a focus on collaboration, undergraduates work alongside staff in the design and delivery of their teaching and learning programmes (Neary 2013).

Further examples are expressed through the partnership programme where academics took the role of a critical friend (Strudwick et al. 2022). Within this context, as critical friends, there was an acknowledgement of the dynamism between the services in the project, and collectiveness in practice, where the project team were able to use the critical friends as a supporting role, which is similar in stance to the engagement of critical reflection with young people in this research, working together to find positive outcomes. As a social science, criminology arguably differs from professional disciplines, in that there is greater freedom in determining the knowledge and skills a graduate should have (Hamilton 2015).

Currie, 2007 outlines the impact of research and the power of criminology outside the classroom as a mechanism for change and argues for assertive public criminology. This is defined as 'one that takes as part of its defining mission a more vigorous, systematic and effective intervention in the world of social policy and social action' (Currie, 2007, p. 176). This is where real learning takes place, through the empowerment of individuals to assert themselves in the classroom and inspire students to take that discussion further. This public criminology space is where policy and practice meet (Carrabine et al., 2009, p. 453). The inclusive and participatory dimension of this exploratory practice and engagement between the teacher and learner creates a setting for student empowerment to take place (see Allwright and Bailey 1991; Allwright and Lenzuen 1997; Allwright and Hanks 2009).

Understanding these theories of education and the benefits of peer learning is essential to this chapter. The next section looks at how this has enabled me as a criminologist to take theory out of the classroom and into practice.

Practical Understanding: Taking Theory Out of the Classroom

The second stage in my learning journey was my internship with the youth offending service in Swansea. Goode and Lumsden (2018), in their research into police forces in England, consider the 'enterprise university' and evidence-based policing. In Swansea YOT, the focus was similar to notions of enterprise on developing the YOT through research evidence; the research internship was exploratory rather than servicing the needs of the service. This approach emphasises the partnership between the local authority and the university, focusing on addressing local issues and drivers through local solutions, supporting the principles of community safety, and enabling diverse community elements to work together to find local solutions to local problems (Evans, 2016).

The police and related services such as youth justice and probation have a long history of being secretive and resistant to outside interference (Goode and Lumsden 2018). Brown (1996) explains the characteristics of police culture in terms of researcher positionality, divided into four parts; the most pertinent to this research is the fourth: 'Outside outsiders' which include most academics without any formal affiliation with police organisations' (Brown 1996). As Reiner, 2000 outlines 'outside outsiders' are most likely to experience the greatest barriers to both formal and informal access. Although there has been an acknowledged shift in recent years, with many police forces exhibiting a greater willingness to form partnerships with academics (Fleming 2012; Fyfe and Wilson 2012; Goode and Lumsden 2016), This has been referred to in the literature as the rise of pracademics, policing practitioners who merge into academics (Huey and Mitchell 2016; Strudwick 2021b).

A similar argument around pracademics can be made for work occurring within YOTs, with the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) making partnerships core to their Centre of Excellence approach, in tandem with their commitment to encouraging collaboration between the youth justice sector and the academic/research community (Youth Justice Board 2017).

To contribute to public policy, criminological research must produce expert knowledge useful to policymakers (Wiles 2002). This is not just useful to researchers; the collaborative approach shown by Swansea YOT, such as working in a children-focused manner and listening to their views (Haines et al., 2013), enables the dissemination of information which assists policymakers and practitioners and informs young people. This approach has helped me develop my dissemination skills to broader public audiences.

To establish their academic credentials and professional careers, criminologists often specialise in narrow research areas, addressing their work to a primary audience of their peers

and students (Chancer and McLaughlin 2007) rather than testing their theories and concepts via wider audiences who may benefit from understanding the research. Knowing this, and understanding how public criminology can be delivered, led me to think about the value of translating theory into practice; that is, how to engage with theoretical understandings in a non-academic setting.

The internship was thought-provoking, as I recognised in practice all the implications, I had studied surrounding Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and the Crime and Disorder Act, of 1998. At this time, the youth justice system was undergoing major changes, including the removal of formal ASBOs and funding cuts to legal aid, meaning fewer people could access legal advice (Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act, 2012). Arguably, during this period, youth justice policy transitioned from 'costly criminalisation' to 'precautionary risk management' (Squires 2013). This required practitioners, many of whom had social work or social policy backgrounds, to demonstrate critical reflection. This was helpful to my understanding of the quasi-devolved system in Wales, part of a whole-system, person-centred approach to justice in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022).

As the move from practitioner discretion, the power or right to decide or act (Murdach, 2009) to risk-focused work continued, I could sense the practitioner's frustrations with discretion becoming less central in the system, which is in line with the wider literature on this matter (see Case, 2016). This period of working alongside practitioners allowed me to understand the realities of the theory I had studied truly. I developed my knowledge of criminological theories such as labelling theory, which proposes that deviance is that which is so labelled (Becker 1963), and maturation theory (Glueck and Glueck 1940), which argues that age is a significant factor in desistance from crime. This practical stage promoted my understanding of what these theories mean to the people who deliver services and to the young people they work with.

The connection between theory and practice is supported by Klein's development of the concept of 'knowledge democracy', which contextualises complex problems such as the criminal justice system (CJS) within public debate to emphasise the importance of recognising lay perspectives and alternative knowledge (Klein 2013). These perspectives bring about a shift 'from solely "reliable scientific knowledge" to the inclusion of "socially robust knowledge," dismantling the academic expert/non-academic lay dichotomy' (Klein 2013, p. 196). This is something criminology needs to adopt to develop as an inclusive, public-facing discipline. The final stage of this development is embedding these understandings in practice, research, and teaching.

Direct Application of New Understandings of Public Criminology

This final stage concerns the direct application of new understandings of public criminology, which emerged from public criminology in a youth hostel setting. These understandings were entrenched into practice as an early career researcher and a support worker working with young homeless people. My realisation of the need for a different model of pedagogy for public criminology took hold during this internship, and discussions and learning developed from an applied approach to public criminology beyond academia.

The reality was that talking to a young person about theories is complex and can be detrimental to relationship development if done in the wrong format; theories such as desistance, defined as the process of abstaining from crime by those with a previous pattern of offending (Farrall and Calverley 2006), labelling theory (Becker 1963), and the self-fulfilling prophecy, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton 1968, p. 477). Explaining these theories to a young person may seem appropriate, yet they may not understand the concepts. It could risk complete alienation, primarily for making someone feel uneducated.

At this stage of my career, I began actively taking theory out of the classroom into a public setting. This was often realised whilst discussing young people's stories and the impacts of the CJS. Conversations in the youth hostel got me thinking about how there was a gap between my knowledge and their understanding of concepts. This is where I understood it was possible to make a difference in children's and young people's lives. This was, after all, an introduction of ideas of formal, non-formal and informal education, the power of shared power within an informal education that is conversation-based and (in this example) young person-led.

It aligns with Freire's work, giving young people the tools and space to understand, grow and develop an ongoing process of empowerment to create critical agents (Freire 1970). This was very much a youth work setting, youth work being a distinct educational process adapted across a variety of settings to support an individual's personal, social, and educational development (National Youth Agency, 2022). Youth work operates through a process of shared power, participation by free choice, and ultimately a greater sense of agency for the young people involved. There is a developing evidence base on the effectiveness of its contribution to other professional arenas, such as social work and youth justice (Ofsted 2015; Atkinson et al. 2007).

Youth work as a concept is a way of working with young people in all their diversity. It means different things to every volunteer, youth worker, youth work manager and policy maker (Batsleer, Davies & Popple, 2010). When we reflect on what is central to youth work, it must be recognised that it was originally called 'youth leadership' (Batsleer, Davies & Popple, 2010). Youth work and leadership are seen as a positive step forward, given the importance of collaboration and the student as a producer.

My teaching philosophy reflects on empowerment and a youth work approach. How often are those with lived experiences consulted? There is a need to re-imagine public criminology

around youth work, towards approaches which are person-centred, which empower young people (Department of Education, 2011), and which are informed by values that include 'Young people opting in, voluntarily, creativity and reflection, respect, equity, diversity, independence' (Department of Education, 2011, p. 2). As outlined by the National Occupational Standards, 2019 (NOS), which are defined as statements of the standards of performance individuals must achieve when carrying out functions in the workplace (NOS, 2019), the aim of youth work is to enable young people to develop holistically, looking after the whole person and their needs (YJB, 2008). Building on this, the Youth Work Strategy for Wales (YWSW, 2019) outlines the flexibility of youth work underpinned by distinctive values; this is one of its greatest strengths. It is not confined to a single setting or context and is thus a robust approach for empowering young people to use their voices and be heard (YWSW, 2019). It is in this culture and setting that my reflective research was developed.

This process was about sharing power and working together; rather than the dynamics of a typical educational environment, there were no barriers or status, just people conversing around lived experiences within a system (Blueprint Writing Collective 2022). This meant applying a teaching lens to criminology to explain and comprehend the mechanisms of the CJS, what the different agencies mean, and how they work. The link between ideas and implementation in youth work settings commenced with informal conversations with young people who had clear distrust towards public services and, in particular, the police. It is widely acknowledged that trust and confidence in the police are weaker among younger people than among adults (Flexon et al. 2009; Hurst, Frank & Lee-Browning, 2000; Hinds 2007; Sindall et al. 2017). This has been explained with reference to their greater use of public space and consequently heightened contact and conflict with the police (Loader 1996; McAra and McVie 2005, 2010).

An integral part of my process was unpacking predetermined notions of what the police and the wider CJS aim to do. Understanding these narratives, and talking about the real, deep-rooted reasons for this dislike of the police and public services, served as foundational discussions for educating these young people through a public criminology lens. This offered the potential for co-production between academics and young people engaged in education, intending to reduce future offending, and influencing public education programmes in bringing about changes to policy and practice (British Society of Criminology Learning &. Teaching, 2021). This was due to the relationships of trust, mutual respect, and shared power I created, starting with their lived experiences.

When I was able to explain my role and my experience in terms of research and understanding of criminal justice and how powerful knowledge can be (Schieman and Plickert 2008), young people began to approach me in a more inquisitive manner, which is where the ideology became a reality. Although these young people struggled with writing and reading English, they did have a strong ability to communicate their ideas through their voices. Even though they may not be able to communicate in traditional education settings, their voices are of the utmost importance (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; McLeod and Roulstone 2011).

Embedding this public criminology style into my work as a practitioner required the adoption of an informal classroom in the front room of a youth hostel in South Wales, akin to circle time (see Morrison et al. 2013, p. 433). Each week we discussed an element of the CJS, employment opportunities, or youth work. We reflected on past experiences and our shared future goals; many related to having a family, working in a stable career, owning a house, and the materialism of youth (trainers and clothing being key). This informal classroom (see Rogers 2014) was the bedrock of my public criminology approach to pedagogy.

A growing body of research looks at a new 'hybrid' model for youth justice in settings of social and educational work that locate a social pedagogical approach within a youth work delivery framework (Williamson and Conroy 2020). Such a model reflects a 'Children First; Offenders Second approach' (Case and Haines 2015); this is the approach I took during my internship at Swansea YOS.

Youth work is a valuable practice, but those whom most need support are often the hardest to reach (Coussée 2009). Much of it is targeted towards groups like those not in education or training, those with mental health needs in partnership with schools, and young people living in lower socio-economic areas. More than a decade of austerity measures and subsequent cuts to youth work services has led to a sharp rise in poverty and inequality across the UK (Smith 2023). Much like the residents of the hostel where this research took place, low-skilled young people, often from low-income families, and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds are often lumped together under the label 'vulnerable young people', and their voices are often under-represented (Coussée 2009; Cunningham and Rious 2015).

Often, the relationship-building work of getting to know young people is characterised by risk; risk management is embedded so deeply in the system that the term 'love' can ring alarm bells. Across Europe, work with young people is dominated by high-profile safeguarding measures, risk assessments and necessary child protection legislation and vetting procedures (Williamson and Conroy, 2020). Love, or talk of love, is deemed to be unprofessional in the UK (Williamson and Conroy 2020), yet my contention here is that we should be able to say that we love our young people and that we reach out to them. As Freire proclaims, it is the 'fighting love of those convinced of their right and duty to fight and denounce and announce' (Freire 1998, p. 42). The eighteenth/nineteenth-century Swiss educator Pestalozzi claimed that 'Love of those we educate is the sole and everlasting

foundation in which to work. Without love, neither physical nor intellectual powers would develop naturally' (in Smith 2009, p. 123).

One of my first shifts with a young person was in the hours immediately after his release from custody following a burglary. He came into the living room of the hostel raving about what he had done – the bravado of spending the night in custody. The other young people were asking questions about whether he had any trouble or got into any fights. He shrugged this off: 'Nah, don't get any trouble in Cardiff, do I? My dad is locked up still, so he said; he's my son he's safe' (Cam, age 16). However, when the dust had settled and the others had gone to bed, he sat in the front room and started to ask questions about what would happen next. On reflection, he was worried about his future and what his license meant. We called the probation worker together the next morning, worked out when he needed to be available and what his bail conditions were, studied the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) website and looked at his legal options. This was my first realisation of the power of informal public criminology.

Part of this process of developing lived experience into public criminology awareness was navigating the CJS for young people and understanding what, for example, it means to ask for legal advice. This ensured they had an appropriate adult, understood their lived experiences of the court system, and included interactions with the police, addressing how it made them feel. A setting for discussion with young men in this example involves much bravado around violence, sexual behaviour, and machoism, which is common to research in this area (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley 1999).

Public criminology was effective in this situation because Cam was at first able to access and navigate these sites because I could mentor him and explain an expression of the importance of youth advocacy; however, in the second instance, he did he express interest in acting for himself; consequently, there needs to be a broader public education for young

people in the actualities of the justice system, this is an example of public criminology in action.

Gravy and Eggs: The Reality of Abject Poverty

After developing a rapport over several weeks with Cam, we managed to discuss and reflect on his life and what had led him to this point. During these conversations, one thing really pulled at my heartstrings: Cam asked whether he could have the leftover gravy in the fridge and whether I could help him scramble some eggs for his favourite meal. After some inquiry, Cam disclosed that one of his fondest memories of home life with his father was eating Bisto gravy and scrambled eggs. Reminiscing about the good times spent with his father when he was not in prison, I realised this young person was significantly misunderstood. He was willing to learn and enjoy the good things in life; these were so much more important than the labels he had been given. I began to draw up a plan of informal mentoring for Cam, one in which he discussed his dreams and aspirations moving forward. This, after all, was a young person who had not been asked about what he wanted to do but rather told what he must not do.

This is where the connection between Freire's 1970 work on the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the present day becomes a reality. Giving young people the tools to understand, grow and develop (Prowle and Hodgkins 2020) rather than crushing views that may be unconventional, and grasping where these views have stemmed from, is the first part of the puzzle. It is then about encouraging them to make informed decisions on their own future; children's rights are a significant part of this (UNCRC 1989). As Freire observes, education is an ongoing empowerment process to create critical agents (Giroux 2021).

Criminological Education

Criminology is a respected field of study but still has intrinsic problems. The discipline should foster learners who engage and try to comprehend what they are doing and could do within society, and in this way, create opportunities for social justice (Reisch and Garvin 2016). After all, teachers must understand that education will bear fruit only if it is a cooperative effort (Nauert 2017). Education plays an essential role in producing a new generation empowered to solve the real problems in our society (Idris et al. 2011). From the time of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1516), it has been understood that a nation's main hopes lie in the education of its youth.

The link between this philosophy and its implementation in a youth work setting began with informal conversations with young people who had obvious scepticism and distrust towards public services, particularly the police. Assertions such as, 'I hate the police and everyone associated with it' (Matt, age 19), and 'All they do is take from us; I don't trust them' (Iggy, age 18) were commonplace.

This distrust needed to be unpacked and understood, and a fresh approach was needed because there was no curriculum addressing 'What do we think of XYZ and what does it mean to us?' 'What do we understand about XYZ' involved discussion with explanations around the CJS: a brief history, mission statements, resources, group reading, and thinking about the philosophies of bodies such as the police. Unpacking their thoughts and understandings each week enabled these discussions to take place in a holistic environment. The process ended with changes in reflection and outlook for these young men, with comments such as 'Do you know what I would love to teach others about how to avoid the decisions I made in my life' (Matt, age 19).

They were growing and learning, understanding both the systems they were involved with and other people's views of their circumstances. This comprehension and deeper

thinking are the reality of applied public criminology, giving real agency to young people and empowering them to become more than the label that they were given. These are amazing, talented young individuals who have made poor choices in a system in which they do not fit; they are not the young offenders they have been demonised as. Developing my pedagogy by studying Freire (1970) was integral to this. Those who advocate for a pedagogy of teacher education argue that it should involve a knowledge of teaching about teaching and a knowledge of learning about teaching and how the two influence one another (Loughran 2008, p. 180). These young people influenced my practice and my understanding.

This emphasis on bridging the gap between teaching and real-life settings (Herrington and Herrington 2006) is even more important within a youth hostel setting, working with young people who may not be familiar with traditional education methods or who may have struggled with traditional pathways through school learning (McLarty and Moran 2009). Addressing issues around class sizes is key to this, but with only six people in the hostel, this was never an issue and focus, and attention could be given to the residents.

McLarty and Moran identify the potential for disengaged young people to become re-engaged in learning, which is delivered in local community sites such as youth centres and community projects (2009, p. 15). This is where the opportunity to engage with young people in a hostel setting has such potential as a form of learning informally in a holistic environment.

A significant part of developing this pedagogy involves facilitating students' voices. There is robust evidence that giving serious consideration to students' voices can generate highly effective pedagogy (Husbands and Pearce 2012). Hearing young people's voices involves more than just listening to what students have to say; it explores the potential benefits of consulting with them, involving them in decision-making, and listening seriously

to their stories and experiences. These are essential steps to developing education (Niemi, Heikkinen and Kannas 2010, p. 139).

To hear young people talk about their inability to read and write—which meant they would just agree to things or get angry because they simply did not understand—was harrowing. But we cannot expect young people to fit into the outdated box of the class-focused British justice system. This style of conversation was their culture; in this context, culture means the shared stocks of knowledge, values, ideas, and systems of meaning that are held collectively and manipulated by social actors in the daily construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Understanding their terminology and then ensuring that the terminology that I used in teaching sessions was public-focused and understandable to a layperson was paramount.

Unfortunately, media attention and rather hasty piecemeal policy responses, such as the Knife Crime Prevention Orders (2021, KCPOs / Knife Crime ASBOs), can be seen as knee-jerk reactions which put vulnerable young people at risk (Prison Reform Trust 2019). They have resulted in an upsurge of authoritarian populism that rests on the scapegoating of despised others. Affluent sections of society appear to be afflicted by fear and resentment (Tiffen 2019; Wright 2017), characteristic of what Cohen terms a moral panic (Cohen 1987). Meanwhile, young people have become increasingly isolated and marginalised. Many have, at best, a limited stake in society and, in turn, are often not trusted or even feared by their wider communities (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley 1999). A shift away from this rhetoric is needed; public criminology can do this by unpacking the labels and demonstrating the power of community.

Opportunities for young people dealing with these subjects to talk freely in a relaxed educational environment are not an everyday occurrence, albeit they very much should be. So many of the young people I worked with described themselves as 'stupid' or 'thick' (Matt,

Marvin, age 17 & 18) when they are more streetwise than people twice their age. Their lack of educational attainment does not equate to stupidity. Once you give young people the platform to speak and get their points across, and they realise their voices matter, the empowerment is liberating; an example of this was when I supported Iggy, aged 18, to the job centre when given the chance and space to discuss his future plans and goals Iggy was proud of his will to learn music and go back to college and study.

Understanding a layperson's informal knowledge is a key element of public criminology. This becomes evident when trying to make a point in an academic research article. People are the experts in their own lives (Clark and Statham 2005), but their voices are often not given value, whether in everyday life or when expert opinions are sought. As Jones (2002) argues, changes in state benefit structures, housing, education, and training have created an extension of childhood. Realising young people's potential is paramount to this; it poses questions about whether there is a new social contract of education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021, UNESCO).

Children face significant social, economic, and environmental challenges driven by accelerating globalisation and faster technological development (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018, OECD). At the same time, these changes give us new opportunities for human advancement. It is important that young people are at the heart of these developments.

Concluding Comments

This chapter has focused on my critical reflections concerning public criminology. These include my understanding of the dialogical nature of public criminology, drawing on my practitioner engagement in a youth hostel. The youth hostel residents were very much socially invisible, frequently denied a comprehensive education, and often powerless in

broader social terms. But the application of public criminology came to the forefront of my comprehension and deeper thinking when it became apparent that young people were learning and understanding, in this manner, comprehension of the systems they were involved in. These young people had real agency and were empowered to become so much more than the label that they were given.

The potential for the academy to drive changes in society by taking criminology out of the university classroom, having a vision, and comprehending what research-led teaching means outside academia, can make it a mechanism for progress. My reflections are about sharing power and working together beyond the classroom, aside from barriers and power status, just people communicating about their lived experiences. None of this research would have been possible without the voices of those involved, their real lived experiences and their minds open to discussing emotive topics with resilience and sensitivity. The young people who took part in these sessions have grown from this experience, as have I, and I sincerely wish them all the best with what the future holds.

A final and crucial reflection from my research is that criminology as a discipline is about much more than merely crime or criminal justice. It is about foundational social values, and hope for better policy and practice. As a discipline, it can empower and enfranchise some of the most powerless and vulnerable. However, often, criminology misses the point when it comes to research. There is frequently a policy shift from doing things 'with' young people towards research 'on' them (Williamson and Conroy 2020). Criminological research commonly focuses on understanding poverty, class issues, and drug and alcohol misuse, but—as outlined in this chapter—those with lived experiences of these issues are often not consulted. We need to re-imagine public criminology through youth work approaches which are person-centred and empower young people. This is why I have argued for a fusion of social pedagogical approaches within a youth work delivery framework.

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