

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0120

L2 | Beaumaris 1

Chaired by Rachel Spacey

Thu 12 Dec 2019

15:00 - 15:30

Using a Pictorial Narrative Approach to Understand Aspirations of Higher Education Towards Diversion and Desistance from Offending

Debbie Jones¹, Mark Jones²

¹Swansea University, Swansea , United Kingdom ²Swansea University , Swansea , United Kingdom

Research Domain: Access and widening participation (AWP)

Abstract: It is often the case that people in a pattern of offending/at risk of offending find it increasingly difficult to stop the cycle. Indeed, the availability of appropriate opportunities to bolster aspiration are often minimal. However, studying within Higher Education can be a ‘hook for change’ providing positive development of personal agency. Yet, Higher Education can feel an unwelcoming place for those with a criminal record. Set against this backdrop, this paper draws on research carried out in Swansea, Wales that set out to explore the aspirations and barriers to accessing Higher Education with a group of individuals who were at risk of offending/reoffending. Specifically, the paper discusses one aspect of the project – the use of a Pictorial Narrative Approach to data collection and analysis. The paper showcases the Pictorial Narrative Analysis and reflects on the use of this method to draw some conclusions about how the method helped address the research questions; whether this method supported the philosophy of the project and brought about co-created data and community learning; and how creative analysis of findings can enable research to have a real world impact and support universities endeavours in the Research Excellence Framework Impact agenda.

Paper:

It is often the case that those entrenched in a pattern of offending or are at risk of offending find it difficult to stop the cycle. Factors, such as stigma, discrimination and other structural issues make it difficult to find opportunities that may bolster aspiration towards desistance and deterrence from offending (Ministry of Justice, 2010; Bottoms and Shapland, 2011). However, several studies have concluded that studying within a Higher Education environment can lead to a decrease in re-offending behaviour as Higher Education can be a significant ‘hook for change’ as it has the ability to provide positive development of personal agency and a widening of social networks which are key factors towards desistance (Lockwood et al., 2012; Runnell, 2017). Consequently, it might be argued that Higher Education should be considered as a useful approach for crime avoidance. Yet, despite widening access to Higher Education being a global endeavour (Evans et al., 2017), the Prison Education Trust (2017) point out that Higher Education can feel an unwelcoming place for those with

a criminal record. Indeed, when the notion of widening access was examined within a Welsh context, Evans et al (2017) found that despite a public and policy drive to widen participation and access to Higher Education in Wales, the internal culture and narrative can become 'entangled' and result in reinforcing the status quo of inequality and hierarchy at the expense of developing non-traditional student participation such as adult learners. Evans et al (2017) conclude that this is a particularly pressing issue and more needs to be done if greater equality and widening access is to be truly achieved across all demographics of society towards enhanced employability and life opportunities.

Therefore, set against this backdrop, this paper draws on exploratory research carried out in Swansea, Wales – funded by the Society for Research into Higher Education - that explored the aspirations and barriers to accessing Higher Education with a group of individuals who were at risk of offending/reoffending. The project sought to address the following questions:

- What are the aspirations of those at risk of offending/reoffending to study within Higher Education?
- What barriers/problems/challenges do those at risk of offending/reoffending envisage in engaging with Higher Education?
- What support would those at risk of offending/reoffending need to engage with Higher Education?
- How might Higher Education support diversion/desistance from offending?

It should be noted that the study was the first of its kind in Wales as it set out to examine the role of Higher Education within the context of prevention of offending/reoffending within a community setting. A key strength of the project is that it brought together academics, third sector and statutory agencies (who seek to support and divert adults at risk of first time offending and those seeking support with desistance from offending) and those at risk of offending/reoffending.

The study adopted an anti-oppressive approach and was underpinned by hybrid approach of participatory action and community engagement and learning. It worked with those at risk of offending/reoffending as partners and sought to empower and encourage aspiration by carrying out research through 'doing with' rather than, 'researching on' participants. Specifically however, this paper discusses one aspect of the project – data collection using a Pictorial Narrative Approach.

Offering a rich understating of crime and the criminal justice system, qualitative methods have become a mainstay of criminological research. Such methods can include narrative approaches which include interviewing, ethnographic and observational accounts. Indeed, as Sandberg and Ugelvik (2016) point out, 'story telling' is nothing new and is in fact a facet of our humanistic behaviours that helps us to make sense of the world we inhabit. However, as a scientific method, narrative criminology began to formally emerge during the 1950s and 60s through the work of scholars such as Sykes and Matza (1957) who used narrative methods to provide an understanding of the behaviours of 'juvenile delinquents'. Since that time, many cultural criminologists have adopted this narrative approach and in more recent years have started to explore the role of visual methods as a way to enhance knowledge and engagement with research; to provide a break with the taken for granted view of social reality; and to 'democratize' crime control (Francis, 2009; Brown, 2014; Carr, et al., 2015; Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016).

The use of narrative and visual methods was an approach that was utilised during this project. The

first stage of the project involved data collection through an engagement event with members of 'The Hub' a community project focused on reducing reoffending. The engagement events took the form of a focus group and enabled the participants to have an active voice in the direction the session took. The data collected during the 'events' was analysed using 'Pictorial Narrative Mapping' which has been identified as providing a holistic, nuanced account of the phenomena under study (Lapum et al., 2015). Moreover, whilst many studies have used creative means of data collection such as drawing, poetry or photography to enable those with limited confidence, linguistic or literacy capacity to participate fully (Glaw, et al., 2017), some have pointed out that not all participants have the capacity to be creative (Brown, 2014). Therefore adopting the Pictorial Narrative approach enabled the participants to vocalise their response whilst observing the analyst draw her interpretations of their views leading to immediate triangulation of data analysis– something that has been identified as bringing about increased trustworthiness of the findings (Glaw, et al., 2017).

This presentation therefore, will showcase the results of the Pictorial analysis and reflect on the use of this method to draw some conclusions about how the method helped address the research questions. It will also consider whether this method supported the philosophy of the project and brought about co-created data and community learning as it allowed those less familiar with academic research to see their responses in a visual format, providing both an empowering non-hierarchical experience and a cyclical process of rigour and validation. A final consideration of the paper is how creative analysis of findings can enable research to have a real world impact and support universities endeavours in the Research Excellence Framework Impact agenda.