Cultural Policy, Professional Ethics and the Public Good

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The paper discusses the professional implications and ethical limitations of instrumental cultural policy discourse, drawing upon data collected as part of a two-year study - *Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work* – funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, 2017-19, grant ref. AH/P009352/1). Led by the author as part of an AHRC Leadership Fellowship award, the *Instrumental Values* study is examining ethical dimensions of collaborative practice between museum and library sectors and partner agencies working in two priority public policy areas, including public health and wellbeing and prison education reform.

Focusing on ethnographic fieldwork with selected prison library case studies, the paper summarises **selected, indicative research findings** and **emerging discussion points** relating to the ethics of advocating a cross-government policy function for arts and culture, and the imperative to create more nuanced policy and practice narratives on the professional complexity of socially engaged, multidisciplinary cultural work.

Introduction to the *Instrumental Values* study

The Cultural Value and Public Policy[1] research programme at the Institute of Cultural Capital (ICC) explores the cross-sector instrumental value of arts and culture and the role and value of cultural organisations in responding and contributing to key public policy agendas in the UK. Research under this theme has primarily explored the relative impact and value of different cultural interventions for *collaborating* organisations and services. Projects include, for example:

- Evaluation of regional arts on prescription[2] programmes, assessing health and wellbeing outcomes for participants and the social value and return on investment for health commissioners;
- Complementary research on the efficacy of social prescribing[3] as a cultural commissioning model;
- Long-term research collaboration with a national museums service assessing the impact and social value of a museums-led dementia awareness training programme[4], including professional development outcomes for health and social care workers.

Through the process and practice and of doing this research, gaps in the evidence base and subsequent cultural policy debates were identified concerning the impact of cross-sector collaborative work on the cultural sector itself, including implications for professional identities, values and practices in cultural work. '*Instrumental Values: Professional ethics in collaborative cultural work'* was designed therefore to extend the ICC's research on instrumental cultural value, using professional ethics as a lens through which to develop knowledge and understanding of instrumental cultural work.

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of a Leadership Fellowship award and under a 'public policy' highlight notice (2017-19), the research more specifically considers ethical dimensions of collaborative practice between museum and library sectors and partner agencies working in two priority public policy areas, including public health and wellbeing and prison education

[1] http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/about/cultural-value-public-policy/
[2] http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=evaluation-of-creative-alternatives-arts-on-prescription-programme
[3] http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/?research=the-art-of-social-prescribing-informing-policy-on-creative-interventions-in-mental-health-care
[4] http://iccliverpool.ac.uk/crossing-boundaries/

reform. The project explores the transitional efficacy of museum and library sectors' ethical codes of practice when working in collaborative public policy contexts. Using a qualitative, ethnographic approach, sector-specific case studies are being developed focusing on museums working in health care settings and prison library services. The research ultimately aims to provide evidence-based guidance on shared codes of ethics in cross-sector cultural work, emphasising the relationship between professional values and the capacity of museum and library sectors to respond and contribute to cross-government public policy agendas in England.

Specific research methods include repeat site visits to six case study organisations (three per sector), including participant observation of day-to-day cultural work and participation in specific events and activities, along with research interviews and focus groups with prison library and museum staff, prison and health service staff and key collaborators and organisations from extended professional networks. Interviews with prison library staff for example have incrementally posed questions on career trajectories and experience in the sector, including perceptions of formal codes of ethics and their relevance to prison library work; the day-to-day experience of prison librarianship and relevant communities of practice; and the ethical challenges or implications of this particular, situated and collaborative type of work.

The public policy context

From a cultural policy perspective, this wider programme of research is inspired and informed by strategic developments and growing momentum in the culture and health movement. Such strategic developments include the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW), and the pivotal formation of national networks including the arts and health special interest group of the Royal Society for Public Health[5] and the Arts Council England-funded Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance[6]. We are starting to see similar traction in support for the arts in the criminal justice system[7], with policy agendas including prison education reform providing a platform for the advocacy of libraries, reading and literacy. The *New Prison Education System for Adults in England*[8] defines a specific role for the prison library, actively supporting 'the governor's learning strategy and agenda', which should encourage 'the use of libraries as places of calm and reflection, where study can be undertaken in a supportive environment without interruption'.

Such active lobbying and organisation from within the sector therefore has arguably advanced public and political discourse concerning an integrated, cross-policy function for arts and culture, creating a marked expectation that (public sector in particular) arts and cultural organisations can and perhaps *should* contribute to wider, cross-government public policy objectives, including health and wellbeing agendas.

This becomes particularly rhetorically powerful when aligned with public health strategies and policies to support more preventive, community-based care agendas. Emphasising the social determinants of health and wellbeing (Marmot et al, 2010), greater attention is being paid, particular at the local authority level, to asset-based approaches to healthier

[5] https://www.rsph.org.uk/membership/special-interest-groups/join-our-arts-and-health-group.html
[6] https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/
[7] https://www.artsincriminaljustice.org.uk/
[8] https://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/data/PLA/MoJ%20Market%20Engagement/ITTD%20Part%20A%20Appendix%2013%20TOM.pdf

communities (GCPH, 2012) and ensuring that all government departments are contributing to health-based outcomes via *health in all policies*[9] (HIAP) approaches to policy-making.

Following his recent speech advocating arts-based social prescribing, Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock is being applauded for his investment in preventive health policies, with his interest in arts and health being attributed to his former post within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. The speech described a specific role for libraries as socially prescribed community assets, with ambitions to "connect even more libraries to GP surgeries and primary and community care services, and increase training for librarians on social prescription referrals, then we could reach even more people, and make libraries even more vital and valued to their local communities" (Hancock, 2018).

Whilst the momentum behind culture and health and the supporting evidence base on such outcomes continues to expand, to be sustainable however, this requires a sophisticated degree of integration and collaboration across multiple layers of policy-making, sector governance, administration and professional practice (APPGAHW, 2017).

Prison library case studies

The paper will focus upon fieldwork with three selected prison library case studies, as microcosms of situated, truly integrated cultural work, both from a physical perspective and in its representation of a cross-policy function for arts and culture. The research has used the prison library's contribution to prison education reform as its policy-led starting point, but it has been possible to observe the library's role and function in meeting multiple priorities and objectives in the criminal justice system, including prisoner mental health and wellbeing and other more nuanced aspects of the rehabilitation process.

A degree of stratified sampling was used in approaching prison libraries to take part in the research, through an attempt to engage state prisons run by Her Majesty's Prison Service (HMPS); private prisons run by contractors including Serco; both men's and women's prison services of similar categories; and an appropriate geographical spread (England only). The libraries chosen can also be described as 'reputable' services (e.g. award-winning), which was another deliberate sampling strategy in order to start from an established position of 'effectiveness' and subsequently use the research to understand the underpinning collaborative contexts and conditions for such successes.

Prison library case studies include:

- HMPS-run category B/C men's prison, opened in 1887, East of England (capacity approx. 800). Library run by [county] local authority.
- Privately-run (Serco) category B men's prison, opened in 2012, South-East London (capacity approx. 1,300). Library run in-house.
- HMPS-run closed category women's prison, opened in 1962, North of England (capacity approx. 500). Library was run by local authority; recently sub-contracted to commercial education services provider.

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-wellbeing-local-growth-adopting-health-in-all-policies

Communities of Practice research framework

The research has adopted a 'communities of practice' (CoP) conceptual framework, drawn from the critical management field and studies of organisational learning, in order to develop sector-specific case studies, working across multiple research sites, on the relationship between defined Codes of Ethics and those serendipitously developed between collaborating professionals and organisations as cross-sector communities of practice mature.

CoPs are defined as vehicles for situated learning, generating knowledge and sharing practices within and across a range of work-based and organisational spatial settings (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Gherardi et al, 1998; Amin and Roberts, 2008). An earlier review of the literature on communities of practice (Wilson, 2014) presented the concept as a valid multidimensional framework in which to investigate collaborative cultural work. It was anticipated that applying such a framework to situated forms of cultural work in prison and health care settings would create original insights on the reciprocal benefits and ethical implications of collaborative practice to cultural professionals and key public services, especially in relation to the articulation of cultural value in public policy agendas.

Specific research questions and objectives were modelled on functional elements and indicators of effective CoPs, including:

- The extent of work assimilation across professional boundaries;
- Identification of shared repertoires, artefacts and symbols of collaborative professional learning
- The social construction of embodied professional knowledge and skills;
- The articulation and representation of unique professional identities in creating collaborative 'added value';
- The reciprocal value of defined codes of ethics to collaborating professional communities;
- Each set within the context of public policy agendas and their influence upon developing cross-sector professional communities.

INDICATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Collaborative complexity in the cultural Community of Practice

Collaboratively speaking, the prison library-led community of practice has proven to have a very complex constitution. This is reflected in the range and volume of collaborating organisations; the integral supporting role of third sector and voluntary organisations; and the range of 'life-course' professional skills and experiences held by community members. By way of example, the prison library based in the East of England leads an award-winning, weekly Cognitive Stimulation Therapy group for prisoners with dementia. The prison librarian (employed by county council library services) runs the group in collaboration with a group of volunteers from a local church-based charity. The group sessions take place in a HMPS prison, but on a dedicated health wing that is sub-contracted to a commercial provider, meaning that four different types of organisation are effectively working 'together'. In this case, the prison librarian, prior to taking up their current post, worked as a mental health nurse. Similarly, two regular volunteers in the group have a wealth of clinical professional experience having worked as an NHS nurse and psychotherapist prior to taking retirement. In a particularly poignant moment of reflection on their role as a volunteer in prisons, the former psychotherapist commented on their moral obligation to "give something back" in retirement having been professionally trained in the NHS.

The positive reputation of the Cognitive Stimulation Therapy group for prisoners with dementia was one of the reasons for approaching this particular prison library service to take part in the research. Through conversations and engagement with the full sample, it is clear that a core group of charitable organisations and volunteers underpins many examples of effective, reputable cultural work in prisons. These include for example The Reading Agency; The National Literacy Trust; Prison Reading Groups and Give a Book; and The Reader; the Shannon Trust; National Prison Radio; and Storybook Dads. Other examples include a London-based charity providing legal advice to prisoners, who were running a drop-in session during a visit to the private men's prison participating in the study. There are a whole wealth of organisations working with prison libraries, each having an impact on the values underpinning their work and its value to prisoners.

Referring back to the research questions listed above, there is considerable work assimilation across professional boundaries in the cultural community of practice. On a mundane level, there is a certain vernacular appropriation of prison life in the language used to describe prison systems and regimes in particular. From a professional practice point of view, there are more challenging examples of work assimilation that go 'above and beyond' conventional cultural work. This includes the fact that librarians are key holders and will often escort groups of prisoners to and from the wings, particularly if there are no officers available. Another more ethically complex example is the formal requirement of librarians as prison staff to comply with Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork procedures, whereby immediate reporting action must be taken for any prisoner deemed to be at risk of self-harm or suicide. This requirement reflects the reality of prison life and enhanced moral responsibilities of its full workforce in keeping people safe.

As such, the 'repertoires, artefacts and symbols' of collaborative learning in the community of practice invariably relate to the value of its work to prisoners in relation to their safety and wellbeing and to the health and wellbeing of the community of practice itself. Whereas conventional 'symbols' of collaborative learning in homogenous cultural communities of practice would be the cultural 'products' (e.g. exhibition; film; performance), in this context, cultural objects and activities (e.g. books and reading) provide the medium through which other objective are met. Often these objectives are short-term and blunt – "if we give them something to do for 30 minutes, then they're not fighting or self-harming". Similarly, there is a complete lack of judgement and selectivity in the type of books used for example in reading groups and author visits, with an acceptance that prisoners "like crime fiction".

Concerning maintenance of ethical standards within and across the CoP, there are some risks involved when working with and as volunteers, in not having the same levels of reporting, responsibility and accountability as paid members of a workforce or structured organisation. At the macro level, policy agendas as previously described have a mostly enabling function, in creating opportunities to strategically position the work of prison (and public) libraries with wider agendas, including local authority public health campaigns and sector-led initiatives including national universal offers[10]. Stakeholders outside the immediate CoP (e.g. Head of Library Service) mostly recognise and discuss this however.

[10] https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/universal-offers

Care and emotional labour in the cultural Community of Practice

There is evidence of how knowledge is socially constructed within the CoP through careful navigation of the prison system ("keeping people onside") and the ways in which the cultural CoP supports, cares for and nurtures itself through critical reflective practice. Again, this is best explained using the Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST) group for prisoners with dementia as an example. CST is an established psychological therapy based on the principles and benefits of group interaction. Although reminiscence therapy activities can be included in the weekly programme, the focus is on using group activities to stimulate cognitive engagement 'in the moment'. The group running the sessions apply the same principle to their organisation and support of one another. The group meets off-site to plan the session beforehand, including activities and allocating roles and responsibilities within the group. They then travel to the prison together, and once the session is over, regroup to review the session in the café run by ex-offenders just outside the prison grounds. This review includes evaluation of the session, including levels of engagement from participants and what worked well or could have perhaps been done differently. They will also reflect on their own experiences of the session, including any anxieties or concerns.

In this context, the 'situatedness' of integrated cultural work is important, linked to enhanced experiences of emotional labour in communities of practice. Burkitt (2014) describes emotional labour and professional 'feeling rules' in the nursing sector as the "collective management of the situation in which people become affected, rather than the management of emotion as an individual act". As such, "different communities of practice in different settings [develop] their own emotional culture and ways of dealing with patients and relatives" (in the nursing example). This is especially relevant in criminal justice settings, where "the instrumental and administrative processes of criminal justice are the visible workings of the system, but of equal importance are these emotional processes, or 'underground emotion work' undertaken by practitioners which remains largely suppressed, invisible and unacknowledged" (Knight, 2014). Liebling (2004) states that "the emotional tone of prison life is raw, real and distinctive", and "the emotional climate within an organization (or a family) will impact on perceptions of one's treatment. It is, if you like, part of the moral climate".

As cultural communities of practice generate and sustain profoundly situated codes of practice through shared values and emotional experiences of working together, how can they be carefully integrated into more representative, ethical frameworks for instrumental cultural work?

Professional ethics, values and virtuous cultural work

The field of professional ethics is a relatively modern invention that has developed in tandem with the professionalization of a range of occupations and roles throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which do not have the historical gravitas of law or medicine. According to Durkheim (1957), 'special groups' differentiate professional ethics from other codes of civic morals through the legitimacy, autonomy and regulation of collective power. Professional ethics are subsequently 'more developed, and the more advanced in their operation, the greater the stability and the better the organization of the professional groups themselves'. Banks and Gallagher (2009) describe professional ethics in practice as 'the norms of right action, good qualities of character and values relating to the nature of the good life that are aspired to, espoused and enacted by professional practitioners in the context of their work'.

Lane (2017) argues for a transformation in the understanding of professional ethics, which represents a shift away from prioritising responsibilities to clients or employers, to a more expansive articulation of the role and moral responsibilities of the professions in initiating global change for the greater public good. Conventionally, there are three levels of ethical engagement with the 'social whole', ranging from an individual's acts and practices within the existing constraints of their given role; ethical frameworks and codes of practice set by the profession itself; and then a 'third order' of public accountability. It is this third order that requires greater attention in the study and practice of professional ethics, to generate 'the initiatives needed to achieve a sufficiently sustainable society'. As Lane argues, expertise does not equate to the 'last word' on a profession's role in and responsibility to society.

As an example of the legitimation and regulation of professional ethics in cultural work, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) launched a revised Ethical Framework[11] in 2018, following a substantial consultation with members. The framework now covers seven 'ethical principles' including human rights, equalities and diversity; public benefit; preservation; intellectual freedom; impartiality; confidentiality; and information, skills and information literacy. In various studies of consistent or 'enduring' values across different organisational codes and consultations, definitive principles include stewardship; service; intellectual freedom; equity of access; privacy; literacy and learning; rationalism; and democracy (Gorman, 2000; Hauptman, 2002; Koehler, 2015).

Although all prison library staff were aware of CILIP's framework and earlier iterations, sector codes as far as they exist are of little relevance and resonance in day-to-day prison library work. There has been some discussion as part of the research of *organisational* values and principles (e.g. county library authority and universal offers) and how these give an applied ethical structure (of sorts) to prison libraries.

In reality, cultural work 'for the greater good' arguably happens *in spite* of situated systems, structures and certainly the prison regime, in a dogged pursuit of the elusive 'third order' of professional ethics. This requires a spontaneous tenacity that is beyond conventional skills and competencies. Prison library staff and collaborators constantly refer to the stressful and challenging experiences of the prison regime, which are described as the main ethical challenges of the job. This includes constant staff shortages on the wing and persistent low morale within the wider prison workforce.

It is often a fine-balancing act between upholding the defined values of librarianship as a cultural profession and maintaining a 'place' in the prison system. It is difficult for example to uphold principles of intellectual freedom and equality of access to information, when books and reading materials are heavily censored in prisons (understandably so) and access to information is so limited to begin with (e.g. no access to internet). The ethical challenge therefore in using culture as a public service is in the "need to be compliant, neutral and empathic versus a strong inclination to be subversive and try to stimulate more critical thought – it can be difficult to square that circle" (interviewee from extended CoP network/charitable organisation).

Any analysis of ethical practice by research participants is mostly self-reflective and relate to personal, moral standards of 'right and wrong' rather than macro-level professional standards and responsibilities. As such, the research has been steered towards a 'virtues-based approach' to understanding ethics in integrated professional environments, including a focus on shared moral qualities and key virtues amongst practitioners (Banks and Gallagher, 2008). In this context, cultural work across the prison library case studies is more discernibly informed by personally held moral

[11] https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ethics

values; political ideology and orientation; other professional training and development; faith and religious beliefs; and 'life-course' values connected with formative social and cultural experiences.

Gendered ethics in cultural work

The experiences of women working in and with prison libraries reflect very particular ethical challenges and practices, both in relation to consciously managing their own behaviours and rationalising the behaviour of others towards them. Women working in men's prisons have reflected on how their female identity can help or potentially hinder their engagement with prisoners and prison staff through our discussions. Women will frequently comment for example on how the men address them as 'Miss' and are unfailingly courteous on the whole, which helps them to engage the men in library activities but is obviously quite a contrived and imbalanced interpersonal experience. Similarly, a group of women volunteers and female librarians working together have described how officers on the wing 'probably' see them as "daft women coming in to do fluffy things", but that they have used this to their advantage in gaining regular access and a relationship of relative trust with the staff. This results in considerable amounts of reflection on compromise and risk in being a woman doing this kind of work, as what can be taken as courtesy and casual indifference in one context would arguably be inappropriate and potentially harmful behaviour in another.

Other very specific issues of gender occur in cultural work in women's prisons. Women's experiences of separation anxiety from family; of having or caring for young infants on mother and baby units; and at the opposite end of the scale, experiences of ageing in prison and the menopause, are causing heightened experiences of empathy and emotional connection between female cultural workers and prisoners. Conversely, other moral challenges attached to work in men's prisons have revealed themselves through our research conversations, particularly concerning the ways in which attitudes towards or feelings about sex offenders are articulated.

EMERGING DISCUSSION POINTS

Culture for the 'public good' versus 'good' cultural work

Despite dominant political narratives on the social value and public good of arts and culture, the sector in many ways does not practice what it preaches. There are for example persistent structural inequalities in cultural work, concerning who gets to work in cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in the first place. CCIs are widely heralded as the fastest growing economy in the UK, with government figures indicating that the sector provides 6% of all UK jobs, with total employed in the sector up 5% from 2015 compared with growth of 1.2% in the UK workforce as a whole. 34.5% of people in all jobs in the CCIs are self-employed (DCMS, 2017). At the same time, academic studies are highlighting wide-ranging inequalities concerning access to the creative industries and a resulting lack of diversity in the cultural workforce, with a notable gender and class 'ceiling' in the CCIs. Research by O'Brien et al (2016) found that some 43% of people working in publishing, 28% working in music and 26% in design come from a privileged background, compared with 14% of the population as a whole. Women make up just 24% of film, radio, TV and photography employees, and earn, on average, an estimated £5,800 a year less than men doing the same work.

There has been little synergy so far between the parallel narratives of 'economic growth' and 'public good' in cultural policy debates, creating missed opportunities to explore 'whole system' wellbeing,

equality and productivity in the CCIs. How can cultural work in the 'public good' translate into more opportunities for more people to actually work and make a reasonable living in the sector? The notion of a 'reasonable living' once working in the sector is equally important as access to the sector to begin with. What constitutes 'good work' for those undertaking cultural work for the 'greater good'? The most virtuous people have tipping points…

Precarity in cultural work is another major issue, as reflected by the proportion of self-employed workers in CCIs. Where paid work does exist across case studies used in the *Instrumental Values* study, it is usually part-time, low-paid and in many cases involves fixed-term contracts. The 'precariat' don't have an occupational identity; do work for little or no recognition or protection; are the first class in history whose educational profiles are not matched by appropriate employment opportunities; and subsequently face "a life of chronic economic insecurity" (Standing, 2016). Instrumental cultural work in criminal justice settings in particular is emotionally challenging, underpaid (if paid at all) and wholly dependent on the inherent good will of people undertaking it. This is unethical and unsustainable.

Policy agendas for integrated, instrumental cultural work need to address:

- Greater synergy between 'growth' narratives in the cultural and creative industries and on the social/instrumental value of arts and culture;
- Creating better, more equal employment opportunities and more peer-led, inclusive, socially-engaged cultural work;
- Ensuring that work is paid to minimum living standards;
- Working with professional training bodies to manage complexity, risk and wellbeing in challenging work environments;
- Making codes of ethics, where they exist, representative of the full spectrum of relevant cultural work and collaborative practice.

Cost, investment and value

Thinking back to the public policy contexts described at the beginning of this presentation, what are the ethical implications of cultural work being positioned as a cost-effective alternative to other state-funded interventions? The recently announced government 'strategy for tackling loneliness'[12] provides another example of political appropriation of cultural work, that promotes a 'community response' yet ignores the damage done to the cultural sector and other statutory public services by austerity measures:

> "The strategy highlights the value of; inter alia, libraries, museums, public transport, parks, and high streets in combating loneliness. Yet, in the course of the last 10 years, almost 500 libraries have been closed, 64 museums, 134 million miles of bus routes have been lost, parks budgets have been reduced by an average of 40%, and more than 12,000 high street outlets have closed. Further cuts have also decimated children's centres, youth

[12] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/750909/6.4882_DCMS_Loneliness_Strategy_web_Update.pdf

> services, day care centres for the elderly, community centres, and support programmes for young parents, carers, those with mental health issues, addicts, and survivors of domestic abuse amongst many others." (Stenning and Hall, 2018).

The third sector – crucial to instrumental cultural work – is equally under-resourced and in need of infrastructural support. Representation and advocacy for third sector organisations working in criminal justice settings exists via the membership organisation Clinks[13], but many grassroots charity organisations operate on a day-to-day, hand-to-mouth basis with no real structural home. This creates problems for asset-based policies (e.g. social prescribing), which depend on clear referral pathways and networked knowledge of what assets exist.

There are also issues of replicability when projects and programmes are promoted as best practice examples to follow. Successful collaborative projects take years to form, build and grow, and have many complex layers, even at a micro level, as in the case of the Cognitive Stimulation Therapy group for prisoners with dementia. Although this programme would almost certainly be described as 'cost-effective' (it needs minimal financial support), it constitutes a considerable long-term investment in terms of the multi-disciplinary skills, experience and expertise of team members and their high levels of personal commitment. In considering the value created by instrumental cultural work, policy makers also need to acknowledge the trues costs of making a difference.

[13] https://www.clinks.org/

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