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Enabling Student Participation in Course Review and Redesign: Piloting Restorative Practices and Design Thinking in an Undergraduate Criminology Programme

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ABSTRACT

Questions remain as to the utility of the data obtained through student feedback, and the extent to which students experience feedback processes as meaningful, and academics revise their teaching accordingly. This project piloted restorative practices and design thinking to enable active student participation (n = 25) in reviewing and redesigning a victimology course within an undergraduate criminology programme. It utilized restorative and design workshops to gather data and facilitate student-lecturer dialogue, and collaborative reflection and ideation. Aligning with the research on dialogue-based student feedback processes, students valued this process, articulated their learning experiences and the course's strengths and weaknesses in sophisticated ways, and co-created many practical, transferrable ideas to meet future students' needs. The project humanized participants, and aided the course leader's efforts to empathize with students, develop their courses, and reflect on their broader teaching and student support practices. This project is easily replicable in criminal justice and criminology programmes globally.

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Restorative practices; design thinking; student participation; feedback; criminology; victimology

Introduction

This article outlines the process and main findings from a recent project to pilot restorative practices and design thinking as mechanisms of enabling active student participation in reviewing and redesigning a course. This took place at Maynooth University in the Republic of Ireland, where the authors were either faculty or undergraduate students in criminology at the time of the project. Marder was Assistant Professor in Criminology, and designed and delivered LW380 Victimology: an optional, final-year course in the criminology undergraduate programme, on which this project is based. Vaugh was Assistant Professor in Design Innovation, and Principal Investigator with the Maynooth Innovation Lab (Mi:Lab) which seeks to embed human-centered design in Irish higher education (Vaugh, Brandes, Lynch, McNeill, & Brigham, 2018). Four co-authors (Dempsey, Kenny, Savage and Weiner) studied LW380

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and were hired as Research Assistants (RAs) to co-design and co-deliver this project. Two co-authors (Duffy and Hughes) were criminology students in the same cohort, contributing as RAs to the first author during their graduate studies the following year (as did Kenny).

Criminology is a burgeoning academic field in Ireland, with a proliferation of programmes and considerable growth in students, research, funding and academic positions (Hamilton, in press; Lynch, Ahmed, Russell, & Hosford, 2020). Lynch et al. (2020) estimated that between 900 and 1000 students enroll each year across the recently established criminology Bachelor's degrees, with Maynooth having the largest intake of new students by a factor of five, compared with its closest competitor (University College Cork). The Irish experience reflects the rapid expansion of criminology programmes globally, and raises universal questions regarding how criminology, as a discipline of study, can meet students' needs and prepare them to play a socially valuable role in their professional and civic lives (Bartels, McGovern, & Richards, 2015; Marder & Wexler, 2021; Stockdale & Sweeney, 2019). Academic criminologists also face the same challenges as other professionals regarding how to involve citizens in designing and delivering more effective and responsive public services (Boivard, 2007). As such, new conceptual frameworks and practical tools would be of value to help academic criminologists involve students in ensuring that teaching and learning in this discipline meets their needs.

Given the nascency of criminology degrees in Ireland, the level of discretion professionals enjoy across the Irish public sector (Hamilton, 2019), and the growing understanding and usage of design thinking and innovation in tertiary education (Vaugh, Finnegan-Kessie, Donnellan, & Oswald, 2020), Irish criminologists are well placed to experiment and innovate with their teaching approaches and materials. Moreover, prior collaborations between Marder and Vaugh helped them recognize conceptual and procedural similarities between their skillsets in restorative practices and design thinking, and a shared desire to use these to enable greater student participation in higher education.

The project operationalized restorative practices and design thinking as sets of principles and practices that enable dialogue, participation and co-production of insights and ideas to improve service provision. Restorative practices help professionals actively to build positive relationships with their citizens and colleagues, and to facilitate structured dialogue that permits both emotional expression and participatory decision making (Pointer & Giles-Mitson, 2020). The purpose of their use in this context was to inform the questions and structures of focus groups with students so that they felt comfortable expressing their views on the course, and were afforded an equal opportunity to do so. To this end, the project used a restorative "circle process" among the project partners and in student focus groups, as well as to structure experiential learning and reflection on the project's findings among Maynooth's criminology faculty. Similarly, design thinking incorporates both the processes that facilitate creativity in service user participation, and a series of principles that mirror those of restorative practices, emphasizing inclusive dialogue, collaboration and empathy building (Vaugh et al., 2020). The partners decided to combine restorative and design processes because of their shared goals of stakeholder participation in decision-making, and

because of the ability of the latter to support creativity in an ideation process underpinned by data collected through the former. In this vein, the project involved a design workshop, focusing on defining the problem and framing it from a human perspective, before collaboratively ideating solutions to the (reframed) problem. With funding from the Maynooth Centre for Teaching and Learning, Marder and Vaugh hired four RAs from LW380 to help plan the work, collect and analyze focus group data, and participate in a design workshop. The original plan was for the restorative and design workshops to take place in person. Shortly after the partners first met in March 2020, however, they were required to shift the project entirely online due to COVID-19.

This article begins by exploring the literature on student participation. The opening section asks why we may want students to participate actively in course design, contending that restorative and design methods can support this. The second section analyses the empirical research on student feedback, arguing that dialogic approaches are of greater value than questionnaires, if the purpose of the feedback is to improve universities' courses and teaching practices. Next, the article presents the current project. It describes the victimology course on which the project focused, outlining the datasets collected and the restorative and design processes used to structure students' involvement in the identification of problems and solutions. The article then explains the outcomes collectively determined, provides reflections on the research, and proposes the implementation of restorative and design processes across higher education. The findings suggest that lecturer-student dialogue, structured according to restorative and design principles, can enable students to provide elaborate feedback and ideate actionable improvements to courses. These processes also helped the lecturer understand students' needs and experiences, improve their materials, and reflect on their teaching values and approaches, while providing a meaningful, humanizing experience for all involved.

Why enable student participation in course design?

Across all levels of education, professionals too often make decisions on behalf of learners, and practices facilitating active student participation in the design and delivery of learning remain on the margins. At the same time, a broad scholarly movement is critical of the position that formal education should be passively received, while activists across a range of sectors constantly develop and test mechanisms that enable greater citizen participation in service design. After exploring the core theorists supporting active learning, the research on youth participation in decisions affecting them, and the arguments for involving higher education students in curriculum design, this section considers how restorative and design processes can help achieve these goals.

Critical and democratic education scholars have long made a normative case for the active participation of students in their education. Most famously, Dewey (1916, as cited in Abdelmalak & Trespalacios, 2013) situates this belief at the intersection of education and democracy. He calls for a horizontal relationship between students and teachers to enable collaboration and expression, and ensure that the learning process

instills democratic skills and values. Separately, Freire (1993) states that, to avoid entrenching social inequalities, education should be active and empowering. Ideally, student-teacher dichotomies will disappear, and those involved in education will play both roles simultaneously. Knowles' andragogical framework (1984) represents a practical justification of active learning. This assumes that students are capable of self-direction and possess experiences that provide a rich context for their learning. As such, active learning is characterized by dialogue, by learner participation in decision-making, by the sharing of responsibility for learning objectives, and by respectful, collaborative and trusting learning climates.

Informed by this long history of critical scholarship, Bron and Veugelers (2014) summarize a five-fold rationale for student involvement in curriculum design. Normatively, students have the right to a voice in decisions that affect them. Developmentally, young people have the capacity to assume responsibility and operate autonomously in their education. Politically, power imbalances between teachers and students marginalize student voices, and justify the creation of opportunities for those in a more powerful position to listen to those with less power. Educationally, the process of participation builds students' capacities to contribute fully as citizens, and finally, curricula are of greater relevance to students if they play a role in their design. In a series of papers, Bovill and colleagues (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Bovill, Morss, & Bulley, 2009; Bovill & Bulley, 2011) advance these points in the tertiary context, asserting that collaborations between lecturers and students: enable both sides to gain a deeper understanding of their education; enhance students' engagement, enthusiasm and motivation; invigorate and energize teachers; and build empathy and strong relationships between teachers and learners. This reflects a growing evidence-base from fields including education, social work, criminal justice and democratic settings supporting the active participation of young people to improve their experiences, and the quality and outcomes, of the public services with which they engage (Gal & Duramy, 2015). For example, participation can develop competencies around self-esteem and resilience (Gal, 2017), encourage young people to comply with decisions they perceive to have been determined fairly (Hall, Pennell, & Rikard, 2015; Kohm, 2015), and facilitate them to contribute ideas and creative solutions that professionals would not consider, but which make services more likely to meet their needs (Bessell, 2015; Morag & Sorek, 2015). These findings should be of much interest to educators who believe that universities should support personal (as well as intellectual) development or who aim, but struggle, to maximize (voluntary) student engagement.

This research also aligns closely with restorative and design values and processes. In asking educators to "emphasize the facilitation of a space where all voices are valued" and adopt a more "participatory, individualized and collaborative" learning process (Pointer, McGoey, & Farrar, 2020, pp. 13-14), the restorative framework speaks directly to the goal of student participation. Restorative justice, from which restorative practices stem, is a criminal justice process in which offenders, victims and other persons with a stake in an offence or conflict are enabled to participate in responding to that offence. Both the underlying principles and the processes used to implement those principles (such as mediation in cases of conflict, and circles in any situation where there is a reason to structure a conversation in a participatory, relational,

equitable manner) have been adopted within educational institutions globally. While most restorative education work is conducted in primary and secondary settings, there is an emergent movement within tertiary education (Karp, 2015; Marder & Wexler, 2021). Restorative practices, like andragogy, promote the use of a circular structure as conducive to communication and involving students in determining learning needs and assessment methods (Gilbert, Schiff, & Cunliffe, 2013). Restorative methods of andragogy are particularly fitting in victimological education: most university students will have experience of victimization or offending (or both) in which they can situate their learning, if they are supported to participate actively therein (Cares, Williams, & Hirschel, 2013; Cares et al., 2019; Marder & O'Brien, 2020).

The design field has equal potential to support greater citizen participation in the provision of education and other public services. From its early origins as design innovation, institutionalized in the private sector as a mechanism of developing new products and services (Gruber, de Leon, George, & Thompson, 2015), design thinking has sought to identify the underlying principles of "human-centered design" that, like restorative practices, have applications across the public and third sectors. Design thinking is now increasingly recognized as an effective framework for engaging citizens in service and policy development (Gusheh & Powell, 2019).

The growth of design thinking reflects its nature as an inclusive decision-making process. For example, it enables interdisciplinary, creative, iterative and user-centered methods of problem solving (Clarke & Craft, 2019) which may not come naturally to large, bureaucratic and complex organizations (Bason, 2018). Design thinking aims to help embed these skills through accessible processes that encourage deep stakeholder engagement to understand and define challenges, and support creativity in identifying how best to tackle problems (Vaugh et al., 2020). Again, like with restorative practices, there is now a growing recognition of the role of design thinking in meeting service users' needs in both educational (Vaugh et al., 2020) and victimological (Erez, Jiang, & Laster, 2020) settings. Although it does not seem that restorative practices and design thinking have previously been combined in a project, the current project was underpinned by the recognition that both seek to encourage greater stakeholder participation in decisions around service design and delivery, and that they offered potentially complimentary methods to do so. Their potential to transform student participation is perhaps best understood with reference to empirical findings on the relative merits of traditional (i.e. written surveys) and dialogue-based forms of student feedback in universities.

Student participation through feedback in higher education in practice

The literature presents a mixed picture as to whether traditional mechanisms of obtaining student feedback (such as questionnaires) produce meaningful information that influences teaching practices. However, there is support for the contention that forms of feedback that involve dialogue and participation can empower students to take ownership of educational design and help lecturers meet students' needs. These approaches reflect what Martens, Meeuwissen, Dolmans, Bovill, and Könings (2019) refer to as "participatory design" and "co-creation": academics collaborate with

students to “design and develop innovations that are tailored to the learners and context,” or to “intensify active engagement of students in the educational design process”, respectively (p. 1204).

Student feedback can be collected at the course, programme or institutional level, with its purpose ranging from helping lecturers evaluate and improve their courses, to assessing the overall student experience (Leckey & Neill, 2001). Many jurisdictions have seen industry-wide evolutions in feedback methods that mirror developments across the sector. For example, some have national surveys, enabling external audits of universities and programmes and their comparison in rankings or league tables (Shah, Cheng, & Fitzgerald, 2017). Seldom, however, are academics in a position to use these data to revise their own teaching materials and approaches accordingly. As Shah et al. (2017) conclude: “Limited case studies of good practice are published on how feedback from national surveys is systematically used by autonomous academics to revise curriculum content, assessments design, and teaching methods in a timely manner” (p. 124).

This project is concerned with feedback processes that aim to help lecturers reflect on their courses – what Richardson (2005) describes as “diagnostic” feedback to lecturers about teaching effectiveness – as opposed to that seeking to support audits or administrative decision-making (e.g. on promotions), or aiming to inform students’ decisions on course selection. The main goal of this type of feedback is to help lecturers reflect on teaching: to “refine their practice” and “develop as professionals” (Huxham et al., 2008, p. 675). In universities in most countries, this usually involves an end-of-course questionnaire that, using predominantly quantitative measures, asks students to report their satisfaction with, and attitudes towards, courses and lecturers (Richardson, 2005). “So dominant are questionnaires” as methods of obtaining feedback, Huxham et al. (2008) write, one can assume that “the terms ‘student ratings of teaching’, ‘student feedback’ and ‘student evaluation of teaching’ always refer to the collection and analysis of questionnaire data” (p. 675).

Despite their ubiquity, the empirical literature is pessimistic about questionnaires’ ability to improve teaching. First, their focus on satisfaction is problematic: results may be influenced by lecturers’ personality, gender and other factors unrelated to quality (Arthur, 2009; Peterson, Biederman, Andersen, Ditonto, & Roe, 2019), while intellectual growth can trigger discomfort that makes “satisfaction” an unreliable indicator of course quality (Richardson, 2005). Second, simplistic, quantitative information can be difficult for lecturers to interpret and breeds cynicism among those who assume that the results are contingent on irrelevant factors (such as gender), that students are unqualified to critique pedagogy (Arthur, 2009; Leckey & Neill, 2001), and that surveys are used to monitor and compare academic performance, not to aid professional development. Students are likewise cynical about evaluation surveys, as they rarely experience changes based on the feedback they provide (Shah et al., 2017). As such, surveys tend to be perceived by both students and lecturers as a “ritual”, rather than as a meaningful opportunity for engagement, reflection and change. Even for lecturers whose attitudes and values make them motivated to seek and engage with feedback (Arthur, 2009; Flodén, 2017), there is little guidance to support them to translate quantitative results into changes in their teaching practices (Eraut, 2004; Neumann, 2000; Richardson, 2005).

Correspondingly, most studies provide little evidence that student feedback questionnaires improve teaching quality or lead to changes in practices (Blair & Noel, 2014; Kember, Leung, & Kwan, 2002; Lang & Kersting, 2007; Richardson, 2005; Shah et al., 2017). For example, one study found that over 90% of lecturers report making no substantial changes to courses based on feedback (Nasser & Fresko, 2002). While Flodén's survey of lecturers provides notably different results – "student feedback is perceived positively by the university teachers, [has] a large impact on teaching and helps improve courses" (2017, p. 1065) – they did not triangulate their data by observing teaching or analyzing course content. In other words, the lecturers' assertions that they make changes based on feedback were not independently corroborated. Kember et al. (2002) found that questionnaires' inflexibility was conducive to judgment, but not to supporting innovation and development.

While the abovementioned research is generally cynical about the value of student surveys in improving university teaching, articles reporting dialogic, participatory approaches to obtaining feedback are more optimistic in their observations. For example, Brooman, Darwent, and Pimor (2015) evaluated two efforts to redesign a course, led first by the lecturer, before an additional process involved the students in focus groups. Whereas the lecturer-led redesign precipitated even lower attendance and attainment than before, the student influenced process reversed these trends and led to an increase in students reporting classes to be engaging and comprehensible. Moreover, the focus group data spoke to structural issues with the course and to students' emotional relationship with its delivery, yielding complex insights that were not identified through a survey. Hearing student perspectives enabled the lecturer to clarify expectations, align content, and modify their approach and materials in ways that reduced students' apprehension about learning, without affecting course rigor. Bovill et al. (2011) similarly found that "structured" dialogue helped academics clarify and communicate expectations, while nuanced solutions emerged through the sharing of perspectives. Huxham et al. (2008) studied feedback from around 500 students in seven departments, comparing surveys with focus groups and other mechanisms of feedback. They found that focus groups gave students more opportunities than surveys to discuss what they saw as most important to them, and to describe their emotional connection with courses, including the importance of social climate in contributing to their engagement and satisfaction.

Other experiments similarly indicate that lecturers and students positively experience both the process and outcomes of enabling participation in design. Using a "learner-centered approach", Abdelmalak and Trespalacios (2013) involved graduate students in making decisions about course textbooks, content, classroom processes, and assignments. This was received well by students who reported an increased sense of responsibility for, and motivation to engage with, their learning. The instructor likewise felt better able to meet students' needs. Bovill (2014) studied three courses in Ireland, the US and the UK where students were hired to design a virtual learning environment, collaborate with lecturers to improve a course, and design course content, respectively. The staff reported an array of benefits across the sites, ranging from increases in classroom participation and in the quality of student work, to better staff understandings of students' capacity to participate in learning design and provide

pedagogically suitable feedback and ideas. Even studies in which the expression of grievances initially dominates staff-student dialogue seem to have positive results if students ultimately become involved in identifying solutions (Carey, 2013).

Many further articles promote dialogic methods, including focus groups, as better ways of understanding student experiences and perspectives, and meeting students' needs, than *via* written surveys (e.g. Hand & Rowe, 2001; Lang & Kersting, 2007; Mandouit, 2018; Shah et al., 2017). Despite the potential for restorative practices and design thinking to structure this work, however, academics are yet to report combining or incorporating these practices into course feedback.

The current project

The project was divided into three phases, which took place between April 2020 and April 2021. Phase 1 piloted restorative practices as a mechanism of involving as many students from the course as possible ($n = 25$) in an initial round of data collection. After the RAs analyzed these data as a group alongside those collected *via* a survey, Phase 2 piloted design thinking, using a design workshop to capture, make sense of, and make actionable, insights gained in Phase 1. The project partners, including the four RAs, attended this. Phase 3 was dissemination, involving a workshop to share the findings with other academics who taught within the criminology programme. While Marder's department (Law) housed the programme, many departments provided core and optional courses, although there were no structures in place to enable lecturers from different departments collaboratively to discuss the programme or to reflect on their teaching. The group initially planned to deliver all three phases face-to-face, but the entire project took place online because of the public health restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The course: LW380 victimology

LW380 Victimology is an optional, final-year course in the autumn semester for Maynooth University undergraduate students who major or minor in criminology. The university introduced criminology as a three-year degree in 2017/18; finalists in 2019/20 were the first graduating cohort, so all third-year courses were delivered for the first time that academic year. Maynooth University also had the highest proportion of socioeconomically deprived students of any Irish university the year that this cohort began their degrees (Higher Education Authority, 2019), and developed peer-led activities to support student engagement (Vaugh et al., 2018; Weiner, 2021).

Out of 133 final-year criminology students in 2019/20, 78 studied victimology. The course involved 24 hours of contact time, with two hours of lectures weekly over a 12-week semester. Six of these hours – Lectures 6 and 11-15 – consisted of guest lectures from academics and victim service providers. Assessments included a mid-term essay of 3000 words and a two-hour terminal exam, each worth 50% of the overall mark. For the essay, students could opt to write either four, 750-word reflections about the four guest lectures of their choice, or a more traditional 3000-word essay about recent Irish developments in victim law and policy.

Aside from the guest lectures, victimology was divided into two parts. First, approximately one-third of the 24 lectures dealt with theoretical considerations around the social construction of victimhood. The remainder considered laws, policies and research pertaining to victims' needs and experiences of criminal justice. Lectures were designed to be participatory: all classes incorporated multiple opportunities for student discussions, using both "pair and share" techniques and Socratic methods, in which the group were posed questions for the purpose of deconstructing, identifying and exploring the underlying assumptions of different positions. Regularly, the discussion was so lengthy that materials designed to be delivered over one hour required two or more hours. Indeed, the course was devised with this possibility in mind: four of the 24 planned sessions were designed to be expendable, and were ultimately skipped as time for discussion was prioritized.

In the final (i.e. 24th) lecture, following a discussion on exam preparation, the lecturer asked the students, in small groups, to discuss the course contents, assessments and guest lectures, before feeding back to the whole group. Students overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the course, and provided a small number of suggestions for its development. For example, it was agreed that students would benefit from more space to write about each guest lecture (i.e. to write three, 1000-word reviews, rather than four at 750 words each), and that the lecturer should be clearer in stating that they genuinely did not prefer students to select this option over the traditional essay.

Despite a general willingness to engage in this *ad hoc* feedback session (and otherwise to engage in class discussions throughout the semester), however, an end-of-course online survey for the students received few responses (n = 2). Having built a good relationship with that cohort over two years, and given that LW380 was delivered for the first time, Marder was keen to seek more feedback on their teaching practices and materials. They sought and obtained funding to use their restorative practices training – and their collaborative relationship with Vaugh – to achieve this.

Piloting restorative practices and design thinking: the process

All students who studied LW380 Victimology in 2019/20 were offered the opportunity to participate in Phase 1 (n = 78). These students were emailed a request to sign up to one of four, two-hour, online sessions. In total, 32% of students (n = 25) attended a workshop (out of 29 who initially registered). These students were given information sheets and consent forms which explained the purpose of the sessions. To pilot restorative practices, these sessions utilized a process known as a "circle process" to structure the dialogue. This involves a facilitator asking a series of questions, to which each participant has an opportunity to respond in turn. The facilitator (the lecturer) began by explaining the ground rules: participants cannot interject until their turn, and nobody is required to speak at any time (that is, one can pass). Two RAs attended each circle to collect data through observation and notetaking and to facilitate the second part of the session, during which the lecturer would leave the room to allow participants to speak in his absence.

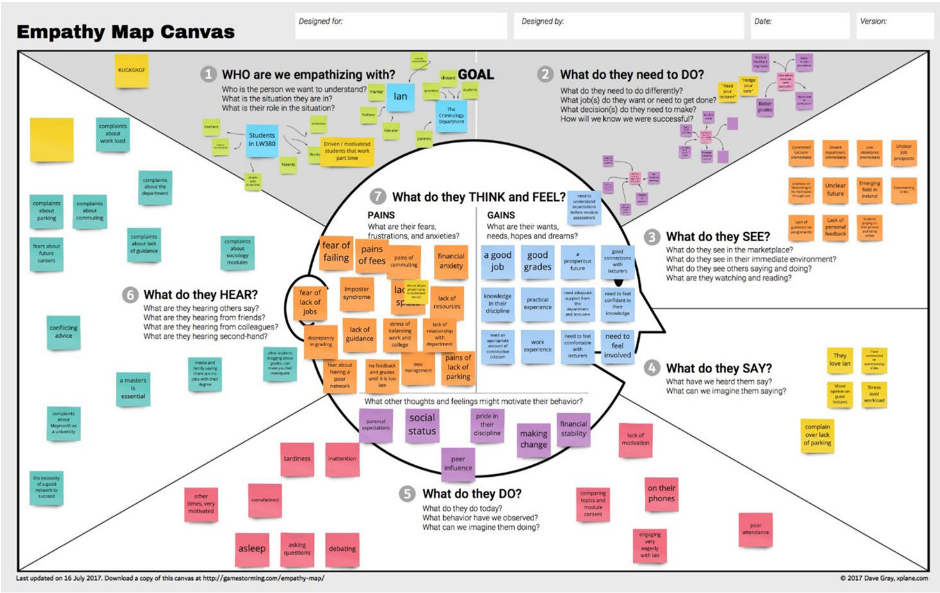

Figure 1. Empathy map (design workshop, Step 1).

Circles start with a "check-in" question, allowing participants time to get used to the format and to get to know each other – a "relationship building" phase. In this case, two general questions asking how each person was (conscious that the COVID-19 pandemic recently began) preceded several questions pertaining to the course: how did you find the course overall? Was there anything that we should continue/stop/start doing? If you could add, change or develop anything about the course's content, topics, the materials or the way it was taught, what would it be? Several circles were followed by open discussions, asking if anyone agreed or disagreed with what was said.

At this point, the lecturer left the room and the RAs took turns to ask the final questions in a circle format: was there anything else you found positive about the course? Is there anything else that could be improved about the course? Have you any further ideas for changes to the teaching style, content or materials? The lecturer then returned to ask participants for their views about the circle as a mechanism of obtaining feedback. After the four sessions, the RAs met to discuss these data and review the survey responses (n = 13), before all the partners met to consider the emerging themes and collectively plan the second phase of the project.

For Phase 2, Vaugh facilitated a design thinking workshop that aimed to help capture, make sense of, and make actionable the insights and understandings gained from the data collected. This involved a half-day, four-step workshop, using the online design tool Miro. All six project partners participated, with the RAs, who studied LW380 themselves, encouraged to take the lead.

Step 1 employed an "empathy map" (Figure 1), a visual framework that puts participants "in the shoes" of those with whose needs they are concerned (in this case, victimology students). The empathy map helped the group organize the data, using several categories: what does the student see/hear/do/say/need to do? What do they

Barriers and enablers

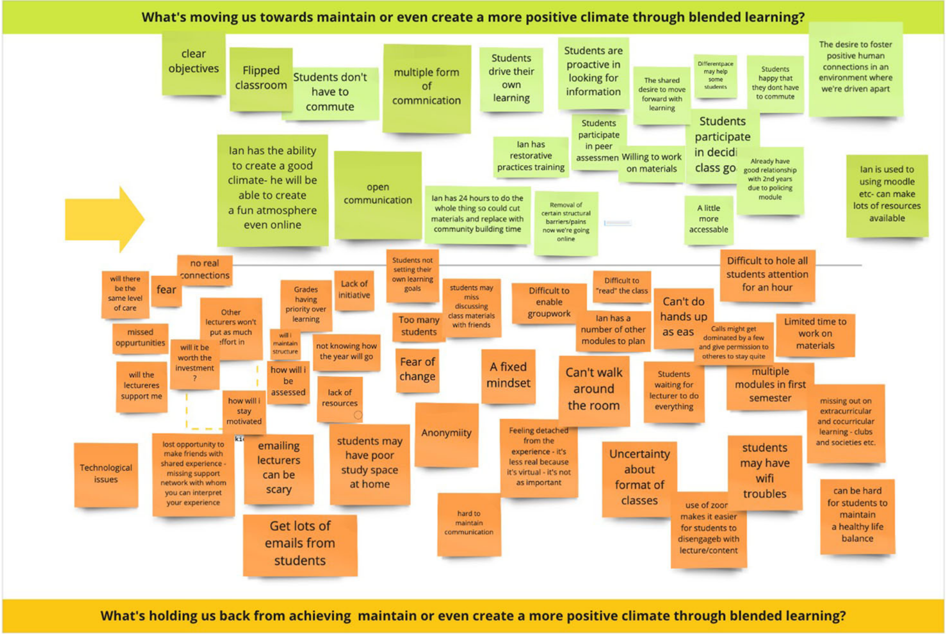

Figure 2. Enablers and barriers exercise (design workshop, Step 3).

find painful/want to gain? These kinds of questions are central to design thinking, the philosophy of which includes spending time dwelling on the precise nature of a problem, before considering the solutions (Vaugh et al., 2020). Design processes use empathy and data to develop themes, before reframing these as questions.

Step 2 involved a vote (in which each participant could vote five times) regarding the most important data points within the empathy map. In a discussion on the results, five themes emerged: class climate/discussion; assignments; guest lectures; material presentation; and time management. The group developed three questions based on the themes, which begin with the phrase "how might we". The questions selected were: how might we maintain a positive class climate in the move to online learning? How might we ensure that all the topics are covered, while having enough time for class discussion? How might we make assessments accessible for students? Following another vote (with five votes per person again available), the first question was selected for analysis, and the group undertook an "enablers and barriers" exercise to identify what helped or hindered efforts to maintain or create a more positive climate in a blended learning environment, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2).

Three key issues emerged from a further vote on the most important data points resulting from the "enablers and barriers" exercise: that students prioritized grades over learning; that it was difficult to enable group work online; and that the lecturer had several modules to plan and redesign for online delivery in the forthcoming semester (autumn 2020). Again, they reframed these themes into questions to guide an ideation phase:

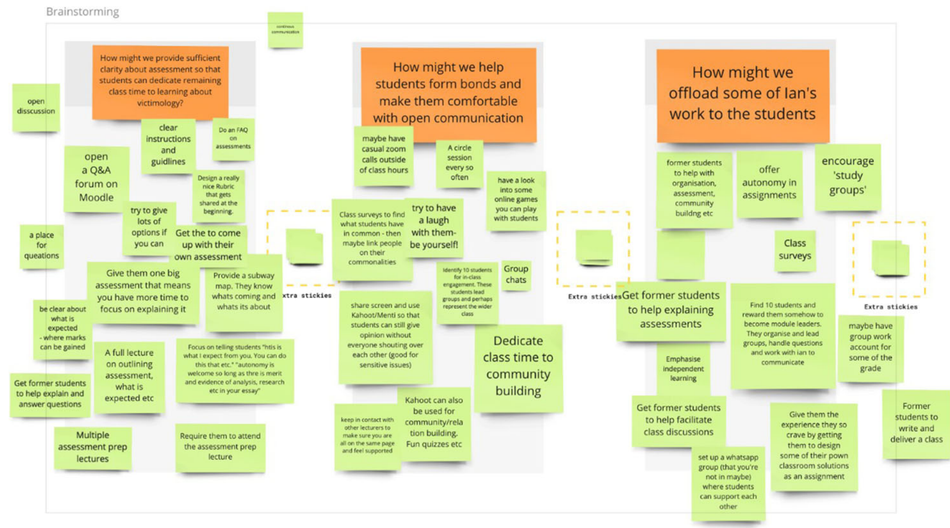

Figure 3. Brainstorming exercise (design workshop, Step 4).

- How might we provide sufficient clarity about assessments so that the students can dedicate the remaining class time to learning about victimology?
- How might we help students form bonds and be comfortable with open communication?
- How might we offload some of the lecturer's work to the RAs?

The final step was to ideate and rank possible solutions (Figure 3).

The RAs then met to develop a draft implementation plan. Upon presentation of this draft plan to the lecturer, the group jointly agreed a final plan, with 20 actions to which the lecturer felt they could commit, including several for which the RAs agreed to provide practical support. The next section describes and rationalizes these commitments and considers their implementation.

Twenty commitments: rationale and implementation

The twenty commitments fell under four broad categories: assessments and guest lecturers; lecture slides and materials; community building and participation; and miscellaneous (Table 1).

Commitments in the first category reflected data that the guest lectures were valued, but that their content could be better aligned to that of the adjacent lectures, and the assessment could be changed to allow for fewer, longer reports – although the option of a traditional essay should be retained. This reflects the need for a logical and coherent rationale to, and connection between, lecture order, course contents and assessments, as per the pedagogical concept of constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011). These will be implemented in the first academic year when it is possible to deliver the course fully in person (hopefully, in 2022/23), as wholesale revisions were made to courses for online delivery in 2020/21 and blended delivery in 2021/22, disrupting plans for assignments and guest lectures. The other two commitments

Table 1. Twenty commitments.

Category	Commitments
Assessments and guest lectures	1. Maintain guest lectures but better align the timing and topics with class content 2. Maintain assessment linked to guest lectures but revise to allow students to write fewer, longer pieces 3. RAs to draft an FAQ for assignments 4. RAs to draft options for assignment questions for next year, and to review drafts of final questions
Lecture slides and materials	5. Revise slides so they are divided more evenly between topics and documents 6. Reduce the number of slides per lecture and words per slide 7. Indicate slides that relate only to in-class discussion 8. Revise warning at the start of the course to emphasize the goal of validating students' feelings 9. RAs to draft a slideshow based on an existing lecture to help lecturer reflect on the design of materials 10. Identify a wider variety of media with which students can engage between classes (e.g. videos and podcasts) 11. Work with RAs to develop a video to support students with researching for assessments
Community building and class participation	12. Take steps to maintain positive class climate in online teaching during COVID-19 from the start of the course and through software enabling participation 13. Integrate time for community building and discussion throughout the module 14. Adopt a structured approach to community building and class participation, such as games and quizzes 15. Bring RAs into a class to speak to students on a topic to be determined 16. Ask students for input into guest lecture selection
Miscellaneous	17. Communicate the central importance of class climate to the lecturer's colleagues 18. Review literature and concepts in this area 19. Find ways to involve past students in course review 20. Organise restorative practices training for RAs

were quickly implemented. The RAs produced a two-page FAQ that the lecturer provided students across all his courses in 2020/21, and came up with suggestions for assignment questions, some of which were adopted for the next year's assessments. These commitments reflected the data that suggested that students felt intimidated by assignments, and had similar questions year on year, many times per year. The RAs saw this as something with which they could help by providing a student perspective, and as evidence of a need for expectation clarity in relation to assignments. Their feeling that students would benefit from added explanation and reassurance on assessments led to a decision to make this the topic of their talk to the following cohort (commitment 15). As such, soon after the first assessment was published in 2020/21, the RAs attended a lecture to speak to students about how they would have approached it. This fulfilled a conclusion from the design workshop that the RAs would lead on certain commitments. The RAs also helped plan and record a video to support students with research for assessments, which was uploaded to all the lecturer's courses (commitment 11). It was viewed by 121 students in 2020/21, and will be made available and signposted to students in future years.

The next category of commitments related to lecture slides and materials. Students reported feeling overwhelmed by the volume of materials provided, and that it was difficult to discern what was most important, or which slides to use for exam study. In implementing these commitments, the lecturer reduced word counts by 19% per slideshow and 26.9% per slide. Slides featuring only images increased from 2.4 to 4.5 per hour of lecture, and slideshows were revised so that each pair of lectures was

represented by a single document. This reflected the ability of focus group data to reveal students' emotional connection with materials: long, dense slideshows caused anxiety for students who sought to study from them or who missed a class. The RAs also helped find relevant podcasts, allowing students to learn between classes without increasing their screen time.

Finally in this category, the warning delivered at the start of victimology – that it involves in-depth discussions on sexual and domestic violence and other such subjects – was revised based on feedback. Whereas the lecturer assumed that the goal of this was to help students decide whether to take the course, students informed him that this should also be designed to validate any feelings which emerged from the content. This reflects literature that warnings can help inform victimology students to consider how to approach the course and recognize the impact of victimization (Alison, Franklin, Fisher, & Bostaph, 2019). As such, contrary to politicized representations, the effective use of 'trigger warnings' in victimology aids, rather than hinders, participation, showing students that the lecturer recognizes their lived experiences and is willing to provide them with support if they require it (Carter, 2015). Here, student feedback helped the lecturer understand the purpose of the exercise and develop their approach in ways that the literature suggests will enhance trust and participation.

The remaining commitments related mostly to community building and participation. The lecturer had assumed that much of the feedback would relate to students' enjoyment (or otherwise) of specific topics covered and/or to ideas for new or different topics. However, the circles involved virtually no discussion about the topics or content covered. Instead, aside from the aforementioned feedback on assessments and materials, virtually all feedback related to students' positive feelings about the atmosphere (or social climate) within victimology, which they commonly related to their willingness to participate in in-class discussion. Hence, as noted above, a core question emerging from the design workshop related to how they might find ways to enable participation and build a strong sense of community through online teaching, as Ireland was to continue with the emergency pivot to online education for the 2020/21 academic year.

The RAs helped the lecturer explore in-class participation tools (e.g. Menti), and consider how Microsoft Teams, the software that would be used to deliver live, online classes, could enable in-class participation. Part of the goal was to structure participation and community building so it was both intentional and time-bound. This involved the use of quizzes and votes using MS Teams, and the introduction of community-building and norm-setting activities in early classes, including co-creating community guidelines in the initial lecture. Some commitments also spoke to involving students in determining how to meet their needs across the programme. For example, the lecturer and RAs designed and delivered a seminar for the criminology faculty relaying the importance of social climate, and the relationship between trust and participation, in their data. The lecturer also identified ways to involve students in their teaching work on an ongoing basis, using departmental placement schemes to hire two groups of three students the following year to review pedagogical literature, redesign elements of other courses, and design peer-to-peer support materials.

Reflections and conclusions

The restorative and design processes enabled students to participate actively in identifying the stronger and weaker elements of the course and to deliberate, select and implement actions that responded to gaps and concerns, and that built on students' positive experiences. They also helped the lecturer reflect on their teaching and consider how best to support students in the wider learning process. Through a restorative process, one-third of course students expressed their experiences of victimology with enough detail and clarity that the lecturer and RAs (who were also students from the course) gathered insights as to how better to meet future students' needs. Participating students overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with the circle process when asked, commonly stating that it gave quieter students an opportunity to contribute, encouraged students to express perspectives that they might otherwise perceive not to be important enough to articulate, and permitted them to build on others' comments. Circles were characterized as respectful and unintimidating, improving on Carey (2013) whose use of traditional focus groups made some students feel obliged to speak, but uncomfortable when doing so.

The design phase of the project moved the team towards co-creation: the design workshop and the process of negotiating and implementing commitments provided the RAs with substantial leadership to identify, select and implement outcomes. This signifies the complementary nature of the restorative and design frameworks: the former enables equal participation in the articulation of needs and experiences, while the latter promotes creativity and collective action in making sense of these data, aligning priorities and ideating solutions. Restorative practices and design thinking have different strengths. When used in tandem, they can enable active student participation in both providing feedback and in establishing how best to action that feedback.

From the lecturer's perspective, vast benefits emerged from the participatory process. The RAs had the ideas for the FAQ, assessment support video and other commitments, and led on their development. The project provided motivation and information that enabled the lecturer to reflect on how students experienced their lecturing materials, pedagogical tactics and assessments, as well as their experiences of the course generally. This correlates with Brooman et al. (2015), insofar as dialogic feedback mechanisms permit students to express such emotions as anxiety and frustration, and to connect these to specific, resolvable issues with course structures. The lecturer's assumption that feedback would focus on content was quickly disproved as student involvement led the project in a different direction than anticipated. Again, as in Brooman et al. (2015), the lecturer began with a narrow understanding of 'a curriculum' as the course's content and delivery, but this perspective evolved as the lecturer empathized with students over the project and came to understand the need to address the wider "process of facilitating better engagement for learning" (p. 664). This opened further avenues for pedagogical learning, with concepts including situated learning and relational pedagogy emerging from literature that the lecturer explored after observing that class climate was as or more important to participating students as was the content.

From the RAs' perspectives, the project helped break down the traditional lecturer-student boundaries within higher education. The process was humanizing and

developed empathy in both directions, giving students a sense of the range of academic responsibilities beyond lecturing, and illustrating the time and effort required to optimize the learning experience. The work itself was experienced as valuable and empowering, providing practical skills in data collection and analysis, and in both restorative practices and design thinking. Moreover, involving students improved their confidence and motivation to engage with academia. It reduced feelings of "imposter syndrome" by demonstrating that their experiences should be central to the process by which higher education overcomes its ongoing challenges and performs its core functions. The findings show that lecturers can entrust and support students to lead on changemaking, and that feedback processes can be used to mitigate the strains of undertaking a degree, while maintaining its intellectual rigor.

One question emerging from this research is why students were so willing to engage in this process, when the student survey response rate was so low. One theory is that, knowing the lecturer would attend and listen, students felt that the restorative process would most likely result in change, and therefore was worth their time. When used in response to conflict, the restorative process aims to enable those responsible for harm to be held directly accountable to those harmed. Analogously, students might feel that the more a feedback mechanism permits them to hold lecturers directly to account, the more worthwhile (Huxham et al., 2008). McLeod (2011) notes that opportunities for "student voice" should involve expression *and* recognition. Surveys might only permit the former, whereas a reciprocal dialogue, involving both speaking and active listening, places the onus on the listening (and more powerful) party to demonstrate that they will change based on what they hear. This mirrors Lundy's model of participation (2007), which asks professionals to give young people an *influential audience*, as well as a *space to express their voice*, when enabling their participation. Students may see feedback as futile if it seems like nobody is listening or nothing will change.

An important limitation of this paper is the absence of feedback from students who studied victimology the following year. This prevents us from drawing clear conclusions about the impact of the changes made. These data were not collected partly because of time and resource constraints, and partly because the learning environment changed so dramatically in the intervening period due to COVID-19, that it would not be possible to separate the effects of the pandemic from those of the project. Richardson (2005) and Brooman et al. (2015) are among those lamenting the resource intensity of student feedback mechanisms involving qualitative data. Yet, this work demonstrates that, with a small amount of funding, students can conduct much of the data collection and analysis themselves. This has both the instrumental advantage of reducing the academic workload, and the normative benefit of giving students a greater role in the process. Moreover, similar activities could be done periodically at the programme- or year-group level. A university or department seeking to implement a similar project need not conduct the full suite of activities herein every year, for every course. For example, restorative practices and design thinking could be used to involve students in existing programme reviews. This could close the "feedback loop" if it includes students in the early years of their programme and lecturers who teach advanced courses (Shah et al., 2017).

Another option would be to train student representatives in these skillsets, permitting them to run restorative and design workshops with students, and feed the findings back to teaching staff. This would decrease the resource intensity of the process – unlike the RAs engaged in this project, and rightly or wrongly, student representatives are typically voluntary (i.e. unpaid) positions, while such an approach would not require lecturers' attendance at each workshop. Of course, if we hope to implement dialogic feedback processes at scale (and sustainably), we must consider the resource implications of different available options. Yet, the opportunity for lecturers and students to speak and collaborate directly might enhance students' willingness to participate and lecturers' ability to understand, and inclination to act on, feedback. Experiments with different approaches can enable further assessment of the extent to which the benefits observed herein are contingent on dialogue. Meanwhile, institutions could train lecturers in these skillsets, enabling them to use restorative and design techniques during any in-class time already (or potentially) set aside for feedback.

It is also probable that participating students were not fully representative of their cohort – students who attended the lectures regularly were overrepresented in the focus groups – while the success of this work could have been context dependent. Ireland's less marketized and managerial higher education may be conducive to these collaborations: the lecturers may be less likely to feel undermined by student feedback when they enjoy full responsibility for quality assurance in their courses (Arthur, 2009; Bovill, 2014; Bovill et al., 2009). However, the resources and commitment required are not insurmountable, especially given the potential to publish the study's findings, and the need for academics (like all professionals) to dedicate more time to reflecting on our practices, and considering how to involve the citizens for whose welfare we are responsible in processes that aim better to meet their needs. Higher education must respond to calls for greater participation in designing public services, and social scientists must meet the high expectations we place on public sector professionals (such as those working in the criminal justice system) we study. Yet, we often fail proactively to listen to our service users and familiarize ourselves with the literature indicating the most effective teaching (and feedback) strategies (Hamilton, 2013). This is why the project is of such relevance to criminologists: it is not tenable for those engaged in criminological education and research to expect research-based, needs-focused practices from criminal justice practitioners, but to omit to adopt this approach in our own (education) work.

Whether the specific outcomes of this project are transferrable to other courses or not, they directly addressed the needs of the course to which they related. Thus, they illustrate the potential of restorative practices and design thinking to transform student feedback processes. Feedback is an inevitable part of higher education. The question is whether we structure feedback in a way that corresponds with research evidence, and which is meaningful for students and lecturers alike.

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