RESPONSE

Emotions in Pedagogical Practice: Relational Ethics and Collectivity Building in W2B

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ABSTRACT

Emotions and relationality can serve important pedagogical purposes. Paying close attention to the ways in which emotions are implicated in our pedagogical practice can aid in the development of connections with and between students, which contributes to fostering a sense of collectivity in the carceral classroom that encourages students to learn from and with one another. We situate this as a form of relational ethics, which we exemplify using the five R's (respect, relationships, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility) identified by Tessaro and colleagues (2018), and by drawing on our autoethnographic reflections and emotional experiences as Walls to Bridges (W2B) instructors and student alumni (both inside and outside). Adopting a relational ethics approach to teaching and learning enables us to better identify the fault lines in how students are taking up the literature that is being studied together in relation to their own histories and lived experiences, which can lead to 'teachable moments' that foster dialogical exchanges amongst students. By embracing relational ethics, we suggest that the W2B educational model has the potential to build collectivity amongst students and instructors that transcends the carceral classroom and continues to impact participants both personally and professionally, long after the course has ended.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the Walls to Bridges (W2B) post-secondary educational program has brought inside students (prisoners) and outside students (undergraduate post-secondary students) together in courses that are held in carceral institutions; students who successfully pass the course earn university credits. W2B is modelled after the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in the United States, but was adapted for the Canadian context by incorporating Indigenous pedagogy to emphasize experiential, dialogical,

and emotive learning processes. The first W2B course offered by the University of Ottawa (uOttawa) was given in 2018 by the Department of Criminology in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services and the Ontario provincial detention centre[1] where the course was held. Most W2B courses are held in federal penitentiary settings and the uOttawa course is one of the few that operates within a provincial institution. This environment presents many unique challenges, including the lack of typical classroom materials (e.g., computers, desks, writing utensils other than a golf pencil). The power relations that structure the university-prison partnership are also felt in the looming threat of inside students being removed from the course prior to completion due to institutional misconduct, sentencing and transfer to another institution,[2] or, more rarely, deportation orders. Despite these challenges, the uOttawa W2B program has been successful with students and educators reporting many positive outcomes, including personal growth and transformation (Kilty & Lehalle, 2018; Kilty et al., 2020).

Within W2B classrooms, course topics vary across disciplines. The uOttawa W2B course, which has been offered five times, focuses on the concept of 'Othering' and the divisive mentalities that operate in and through law, the courts, and the broader criminal justice system and which reinforce social division and exclusion. As one of the core goals of W2B is to foster inter-group understanding, compassion, and social inclusion as pathways toward producing more socially just and materially equitable communities, the course's aims and content reflect the program's larger goals. Through our experiences with uOttawa's W2B program, we have come to identify and appreciate the strengths of the W2B educational model as it mobilizes Indigenous pedagogy, promotes relational approaches to teaching and learning, and provides students and facilitators with an opportunity to centre emotions in the processes of teaching and learning.

This article draws on Freire (1970), as well as scholarship on "critical pedagogies of emotion", to explore how emotions and relationality enhance critical pedagogical practice in the carceral environment (Grosland, 2018; Zembylas, Bozalek, & Shefer, 2014). Drawing inspiration and understanding from feminist and Indigenous scholars (Ellis, 2007; Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984, 2002; Tessaro et al., 2018), we situate emotions as a key component of relational ethics that supports and promotes a positive learning environment. In the *Part I* of this article, we demonstrate how W2B models

the core values of relational ethics by mobilizing the five R's identified by Tessaro and colleagues (2018): respect, relationships, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. We maintain that adopting a relational ethics approach to teaching and learning enables course facilitators to better identify how students are taking up the literature that is being studied together in relation to their own histories and lived experiences. In *Part II*, we illustrate how centering emotions and relationality in pedagogical practice fosters a sense of collectivity that transcends the carceral classroom and can lead to 'teachable moments' that foster potentially transformative dialogical exchanges amongst students and facilitators.

To do this, we draw on autoethnographic recollections of our collective emotional journeys participating in and facilitating W2B courses, which each writing team member drafted and presented for an online symposium celebrating the W2B program's 10th anniversary in 2021. To produce these recollections, our writing team met collectively over Zoom in a series of brainstorming sessions to identify what guiding questions would structure our symposium presentation; once we determined the guiding questions, each member of the writing team drafted a narrative response for each question that they felt comfortable sharing orally at the symposium and in print for this article. This aspect of our team's writing process reflected the journaling exercises that W2B facilitators commonly use as course assignments.

Once the team amassed the rich autoethnographic recollections, we realized that time and space limits for the symposium and article would prevent us from recounting each team member's narrative for each guiding question. Therefore, the writing team met online to discuss and choose which narratives were most impactful for each question. The writing team also agreed that the first three authors would engage the literatures on emotions, pedagogy, and relational ethics to frame the article, using the team's collective autoethnographic recollections to exemplify key points. The article was circulated amongst the writing team for commentary, revision, and final approval on two separate occasions. Graphic artist Erica Bota from Fuselight Creation attended the symposium and created *Figure 1* as a visual representation of these narratives, which we present below to help readers visualize our experiences as W2B students and instructors.

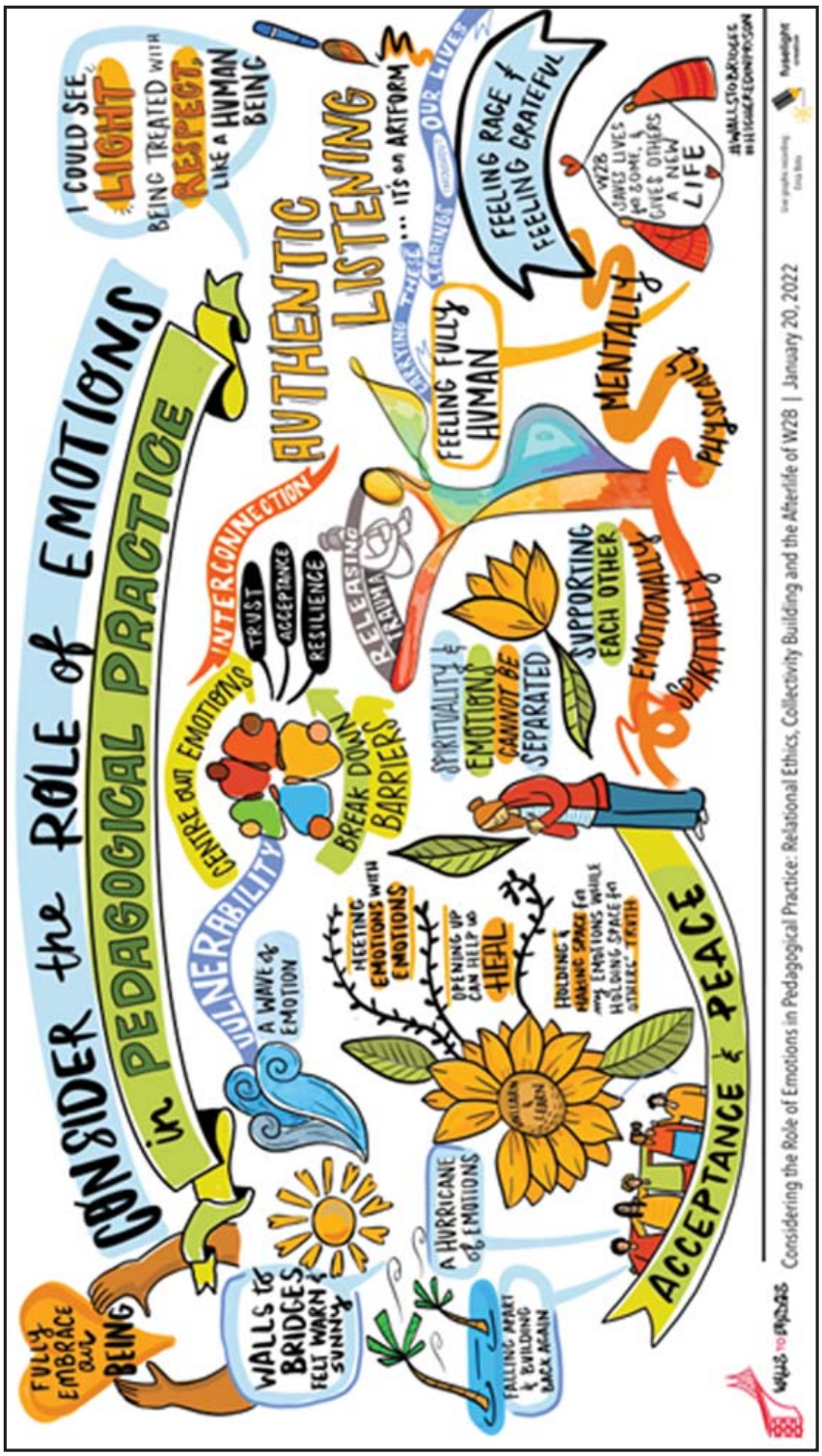

Figure 1: Graphic Drawing

PART I: EMOTIONS, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND RELATIONAL ETHICS IN PRISON TEACHING

Imprisonment is an emotionally charged topic. This is especially true for prison education programs, which tend to be highly politicized. Many politicians and members of the public think about prison education through the lens of the principle of less eligibility, which leads them to believe that because there are law-abiding citizens who cannot afford to attend college or university, prisoners should not have access to a "free" education behind bars (Rogers, 2008, p. 39). This position is hopelessly short-sighted considering that educational attainment is a significant factor that improves a criminalized person's chances for successful release and lowers their risk of recriminalization (Duguid, 2000; Novek, 2019, p. 58).

It is difficult to get educational programs like W2B off the ground due to the lengthy process of securing formal partnerships with correctional administrations and there are many structural, institutional, interpersonal, and emotional challenges associated with teaching in these environments (Fayter, 2016). Prison education programs are largely shaped by the daily realities of the institution, including lockdowns, intrusive scheduling routines, administrator concerns about prisoner mobilization, and hostile correctional officers. It is not uncommon for prison-based programs to experience delays or disruptions, or to be abruptly terminated by arbitrary changes in prison funding or policy (Fayter, 2016; Novek, 2019). One contemporary factor to consider is how the COVID-19 pandemic has become a justification for limiting such programs.[3]

Teaching in prison also leads to emotional challenges for instructors and students. For instructors, challenges may include teaching students with histories of trauma and witnessing trauma-processing (Novek, 2019, p. 58). For both inside and outside students, attending an educational program in prison can involve feelings of apprehension, nervousness, and the fear of judgement for being "privileged", "naïve", or "a criminal" (Graciela Perez et al., 2020, p. 41; Pollack, 2016a). W2B thus prioritizes a pedagogical approach that centres emotions and understands them as they are experienced wholistically within the body, mind, and spirit. Grosland (2018, p. 304) rejects the view that emotions are private, universal impulses that simply "happen to passive sufferers", instead viewing them as a

language of social life that enables the human ability to communicate, find common ground, and even to collectivize – a point we return to later in this article. By centering emotional realities in the classroom, particularly with respect to subjects that explore experiences of social, political, economic, and cultural oppression, Grosland (2018, p. 301) postulates that students and teachers may feel more prepared to challenge oppression as they witness or experience it, both within the classroom and beyond.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) suggested that oppressed parties must be involved in their own liberation. He sought to increase students' critical consciousness (a process he called conscientization) to help them make sense of the ways that systems of power operate and impact them. Like W2B, Freire (1970) opposed the "banking model" of education that involves teachers transferring information to passive students and instead aimed to create more democratic learning environments in which students are situated as critical co-investigators who learn through ongoing dialogue. Independently organized prison education programs that reject the banking model thus have the potential to be exploratory, constructive, and oriented toward personal growth and transformation for students, in part because they do not work to control students through coercive practices and mandatory programming (Duguid, 2000; Scott, 2014, p. 402). As such, Novek (2019, p. 56) suggests that prison education programs like W2B are "a specific site of political struggle in the era of mass incarceration", and a way to raise social consciousness and offer intellectual opportunities to prisoners whose identities may have been consumed by the criminal justice system. To generate this kind of transformative potential, educators who teach in prison must think beyond the subject matter of the courses they teach by critiquing the systemic structures in which they are teaching and working, the teaching methods they use, and their attitudes and assumptions about their expertise.

We contend that relational ethics can enhance a critical pedagogy of emotion within the W2B classroom. Relational ethics values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness, including a responsibility to acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others (Ellis, 2007, p. 3). Relational ethics is also connected to Indigenous notions of ethics and a feminist ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2002), which centre the importance of context, interdependence, relationships, and responsibilities in terms of fostering ethical social relations (Morigii et al., 2020, p. 283). In the

classroom, working with emotion as a part of pedagogical practice requires mutual engagement, empathy, and empowerment to recognize and address power imbalances, and to engage with students wholistically by considering their mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional needs (Piquemal, 2004; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017, p. 86; Walker, 2015, p. 394).

The following subsections exemplify how relational ethics have been realized in W2B by mobilizing the five R's identified by Tessaro and colleagues (2018) – respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and relationships – which are opposed to the "Two P's" of "power and profit" that inform typical post-secondary pedagogies (Harris & Wasilewski, 2004, p. 133). Notably, the five R's are interconnected and not as easily separated as this paper may suggest.

Respect

For Tessaro and colleagues (2018, p. 133), respect refers to the need to recognize Indigenous cultural norms and values. It is about encompassing a wholistic worldview, rejecting hierarchies, and ensuring that cultural safety is practiced. To this end, W2B mobilizes Indigenous circle pedagogy (Pollack, 2016a) to ensure students have equal opportunity to participate in discussion. This approach also aims to educate students on Indigenous ways of knowing and is further supported by providing students with required readings by Indigenous authors.

Respect is also practiced at an interpersonal level within W2B. Students refer to each other on a first name basis and agree that outside students should not search their inside classmates online to learn the details of their arrest, which helps to ensure that inside students are treated as people and not according to their conviction. Students also agree to the general rule of not asking about the inside students' criminal charges. Perhaps the most impactful way that respect is demonstrated is by practicing authentic listening, which many students have suggested they are learning to do for the first time. Ikram shared what W2B taught her about authentic listening:

> Ikram (outside student): W2B showed me the true value and form of authentic listening. It's not just about passively taking in what others have to say. It requires listening with presence. With your whole self. It's about creating an honest human connection.

For Ikram, the form of authentic listening that was practiced in W2B paved the way for deeper and more authentic relationships. Inside students also often describe how mutual respect and authentic listening made them feel "fully human". In the first W2B cohort at uOttawa that Sandy and Jen co-taught, inside students referred to the class as "humanity Tuesdays", because that was the day the course was held. As illustrated in the graphic recording, one inside student echoed this sentiment as they stated that through W2B, "I could see light from being treated with respect, like a human being", referencing how mutual respect can provide meaningful support to someone experiencing difficulties and challenges, without attempting to "fix" or "save" them.

For W2B facilitators, respect is demonstrated by challenging power in the classroom and resisting the banking model. Facilitators join classroom circles rather than lecturing at the front of the room, while students help lead discussions and choose the topics they engage with for their assignments. Sandy spoke to feeling uplifted by the W2B learning process while Jen spoke to the benefits of challenging herself to revise her approach to pedagogy:

> Sandy (facilitator): My emotional journey with W2B makes me think about an ocean wave I want to surf on. The wave was difficult to get on for a while, then it was mostly uplifting but also it would bring me down sometimes.

> Jen (facilitator): My emotional journey was like a tsunami because the teachings washed over me and at first felt overwhelming. I was being pushed out of my comfort zone in terms of what I knew and did as a professor in the classroom. It felt like I had to rebuild from the ground up to think about my interactions with students and the way I set assignments in completely different ways. The power of the teachings was both illuminating (where I was faced with the need to unlearn certain beliefs and practices) and creative (where I learned new ways of being, doing, and thinking).

Notably, Sandy and Jen both experienced W2B as a nonlinear journey with many ups and downs; they found comfort and support in their friendship, and regularly communicated and checked in with one another both when they co-taught the first class, which continued in subsequent years when they facilitated the course alone.

> Jen (facilitator): Despite nearly twenty years of working as a university professor, I experience self-doubt with each new class I teach. Will I be an effective communicator? How will I connect with students from different backgrounds whose experiences might differ significantly from my own? I found comfort and calm through my relationship with Sandy, who was always there to walk beside me as I processed those feelings of anxious worry and the heaviness of some of our emotional class discussions. Checking in with each other after class exemplified a mutual respect and level of support that goes beyond mere collegiality.

While W2B facilitators must respond to the bureaucratic requirements of their university, such as assignment submission and evaluation, the design and structure of W2B aims to remain respectful of the context in which students are learning. Following Tessaro and colleagues (2018), after each course concludes Sandy and Jen discuss and revise course content and assignments considering student feedback with the aim of making them more culturally and contextually relevant. In practice, this includes setting articles written by current and former prisoners, and using assessment methods that are based on reflection, participation, and group activities rather than formal written exams. Sandy and Jen ultimately aimed to show respect in the classroom by valuing the experiential knowledge of all students, which is also key to building a sense of reciprocity amongst the class.

Reciprocity

As a practice, reciprocity can be used to frame course design so that it acts as a foundation upon which the relationships between teachers and learners are built to ensure that student voices are heard, and their needs and goals are accommodated (Tessaro et al., 2018, p. 135). W2B accomplishes reciprocity in part by incorporating a non-hierarchical approach to teaching and learning, which helps to foster a more supportive learning environment. For example, students work together in the first class to establish a set of rules that operate as an ethical code of conduct for the course. During this activity, facilitators and students build a sense of responsibility towards one another as they establish clear expectations and mutual obligations. Examples of the ‘Do’s’ include: greet everyone in the room, treat everyone with respect, be honest with each other and yourself, the “Vegas rule” (what is said in circle, stays in circle), and be respectful of people’s experiential

truths. Examples of the 'Don'ts' include: judge, interrupt, try to fix or solve someone's problems, hold back, engage in cross-talk, or talk *at* another circle member. As these rules are established at the beginning of each W2B cohort, the rules differ from course to course, allowing for an approach that is tailored to the needs and expectations of each group of students.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001, p.11) identify reciprocity in education as occurring when teaching and learning are approached as:

> …two-way processes, in which the give-and take between faculty and students opens up new levels of understanding for everyone. Such reciprocity is achieved when the faculty member makes an effort to understand and build upon the cultural background of the students, and the students are able to gain access to the inner-workings of the culture (and the institution) to which they are being introduced.

In W2B, students are encouraged to learn wholistically, including the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual parts of themselves. They write weekly journals to reflect on course discussions and readings, which they are invited (but never compelled) to share with the class to stimulate experiential learning. This activity invites students to reflect on both the intellectual and emotional aspects of learning, which fosters dialogue and reciprocity in sharing personal reflections. For some students, like Ikram and Abigail, embracing emotional vulnerability was a hard-fought battle. It required confronting both cultural and academic beliefs that call us to resist the intimacy that is essential to learning wholistically.

> Ikram (outside student): Culturally, I learned that emotions were to be housed in the innermost parts of ourselves – not to be shared freely. W2B was an unravelling of sorts. With each journal entry and class discussion, I gained the courage to show up and be wholly seen… and to wholly see others as a result.

> Abigail (outside student): Like many people, I used to push my emotions down, thinking that there were more important things to deal with. Interestingly, much of university life seemed to feed into this… And much of academic writing can be so void of emotion. It seemed as though learning was supposed to be a separate space. W2B really turned this way

> of thinking on its head for me. Not only was I able to engage with and understand the course material far better by holding space for the emotions of the inside and outside students, I also learned how to hold space for my own emotions and be honest with myself about how I was feeling.

As Abigail notes, academic traditions typically discourage emotional engagement. There are, however, physical and emotional barriers to learning in the carceral classroom beyond those typically experienced in a university classroom. Course facilitators are not able to hold office hours or provide after school supports for inside students and they need to be aware that prisoners may be at risk of violence if they show emotion on the inside (Crewe et al., 2014). In the name of fairness, Sandy and Jen did not hold office hours for outside students, but they experienced difficult emotions, including frustration, doubt, sadness and guilt when providing emotional support to outside students because they were limited to only doing so during class time for the inside students. Despite these constraints, Rachel shares how learning with one's whole self can lead to positive learning outcomes for inside students, including the development of trust, understanding, and acceptance:

> Rachel (inside student): In W2B classes and circles we bring our whole selves into the teaching and learning process, where we are encouraged to centre our emotions while respecting everyone's views. As an inside student at GVI [Grand Valley Institution for Women], this was initially very difficult for me since I was in a space where it wasn't safe to share our emotions… This helped breed trust, understanding, and acceptance, which ultimately facilitated our learning.

As Rachel's testimony reveals, when students feel supported, they can practice a way of relating to others and being in the world that is based on acceptance, understanding, trust, authenticity, and compassion, all of which are key elements denoted in *Figure 1*. Learner-centred spaces are grounded in principles of human connection and reflect an ethic of care, which acknowledges a shared sense of humanity and respect (Novek, 2019, p. 58). As Rachel further explains, creating and sustaining such an environment requires relationships built on trust that encourage teachers and students to learn with and from one another.

> Rachel (inside student): The prison environment is cold and oppressive, and prisoners tend to mask our emotions. The W2B classroom felt like a break from the stress of prison, providing an oasis of calm, while allowing us to bring our whole selves into the learning space. Centring our emotional experiences into the learning process facilitated a sense of connection and promoted my personal healing.

Rachel's narrative reflects the importance of wholistic teaching and learning that 'meets students where they are' (mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually), a point that is visually striking when looking at the graphic image. W2B classroom arrangements are structured to promote reciprocity and inter-group connection, which create emotional bonds that promote personal healing from past and ongoing traumas, and can help to ease the stress of imprisonment, at least for the duration of the class, by providing a safe space for emotional and thought expression, something that institutional rules and practices tend to inhibit in most carceral spaces (Crewe et al., 2014; Fayter, 2016; Kilty & Lehalle 2018; Kilty et al., 2020). Rachel elaborates on how W2B's wholistic and relational pedagogy supported her healing journey.

> Rachel (inside student): Surviving past violence and the ongoing trauma of incarceration typically requires prisoners to bury our feelings and put-up emotional walls, which also act as barriers to healing since we do not feel safe to acknowledge or process these difficult emotions. W2B encourages us to learn with and through our emotions, creating a safe space to exhibit vulnerability and express ourselves authentically. The honest expression and acceptance of raw emotions – rage, grief, hope, and fear – in a W2B circle strengthened our relational bonds, building trust and solidarity rarely seen in carceral settings. The emotional safety and relational ethics I experienced through W2B enabled me to begin healing from my traumas. I felt safe to express my buried pain within a supportive community of people who could relate to my experiences, without fear of judgement or negative repercussions.

As shown in *Figure 1*, our writing team of alumni and course facilitators described reciprocity in a few ways – for example, "meeting emotions with emotions", "supporting each other", and "holding and making space

for my emotions while holding space for others' truth" – illustrating how reciprocity can create feelings of indebtedness to the connections forged through open dialogue and vulnerability. Alexis also reflected on the impact of creating space for emotions in W2B circles from his perspective as a course facilitator:

> Alexis (facilitator): I have received so much, learned so much from our circles. I've actually had my eyes well up and tears come out – without feeling a sense of shame or awkwardness that can sometimes characterize more traditional teaching environments, when displaying such emotions. It felt like the circle was gently pulling at me, making me want to give back and share, more and more. It felt like hierarchies broke down, like differences faded away, because it seemed like we could recognize each other in others' sharing. And the language was simply that of emotions. It felt like they both helped to understand what was said and not, but also unveiled something of our shared humanity.

Without reciprocity, the carceral classroom can become an extended arm of the prison that further immobilizes and oppresses prisoners (Novek, 2019, p. 58). Classrooms must build a sense of community and trust, creating space for dialogue, as well as the exchange of ideas and experiences. Like Freire, Novek (2019, p. 61) asserts that teaching must not be done *to* the incarcerated student, nor misconstrued as something done *for* them, but rather *with* them.

Relevance

For Tesarro and colleagues (2018, p. 137), pedagogy should be relevant to Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing, which means going beyond learning book content. To ensure relevance within W2B courses, learning must also be relevant to the carceral context and lived experiences of both inside and outside students. While the prison environment is inherently restrictive and oppressive, acknowledging this reality, mobilizing emotions in pedagogy, and valuing students' experiential expertise can begin a dialogue in which teaching and learning are co-facilitated. When students feel valued and supported, they can go on to "think critically, imaginatively, and with care" about their own positions, while staying open to other

worldviews and perspectives (Novek, 2019, p. 63). Aislinn demonstrates how circle pedagogy and authentic listening helped her reflect on her position and experience as the daughter of a formerly incarcerated parent, while allowing herself to remain open to other perspectives, even when they opposed her own:

> Aislinn (outside student and teaching assistant): During one of the first circles, an inside student shared his experience with addiction and how he struggled to maintain a relationship with his daughter. I felt consumed by guilt and grief knowing I was estranged from my father for similar reasons. I sat drowning in these emotions, and I remember thinking about the readings and how important it was for me to put my emotions aside and open my heart to my classmate's experience. By being mindful of my emotions, I was able to listen and reflect on both sides of my classmate and my own experience. That moment taught me the importance of taking space from my emotions, while listening to others to really hear the other side of the story. I left that circle ready to release the victim/offender dichotomy I had internalized and replace it with an appreciation for the plurality of truths that can exist in any situation.

For Aislinn, W2B helped bring knowledge back to life by way of sharing and learning through personal stories and experiences, and by learning with and from our emotional selves. Her experience demonstrates how traditionally 'negative' emotions, such as fear and grief, can be conducive to transformation and change (Moriggi et al., 2020, p. 290); for Aislinn, these feelings helped lead her towards a place of forgiveness in her relationship with her father. This example demonstrates the importance of respect and relationships as foundational elements for students to feel comfortable learning through personal stories and experiences, which serves as a strong reminder of the interconnectedness of the five R's.

Responsibility

Tessaro and colleagues (2018) invite us to think about responsibility in multiple ways in the context of Indigenous education, including a responsibility to uphold Indigenous ways of knowing, responsibility towards institutions such as universities and funders, and responsibility within

our relationships at the personal, familial, and community levels. W2B demonstrates responsibility towards upholding Indigenous ways of knowing by incorporating Indigenous circle pedagogy, readings from Indigenous authors, and mobilizing different group- and arts-based assignments and activities into the course design to support different learning styles and enable relationship-building. For example, Sandy and Jen have both used the youth book *I am Not a Number* as a set course reading and have found it to be one of the most impactful ways of sensitizing non-Indigenous students to the residential school experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The book is co-authored by Jenny Kay Dupuis, the granddaughter of a residential school survivor, about her grandmother's experiences.

W2B also demonstrates responsibility towards the local context by accommodating and adapting to learners, instead of expecting them to adapt to the traditional values of the university (Tessaro et al., 2018, p. 133). Some inside students have had negative experiences in the education system or have never taken a university-level course. In W2B, students are given opportunities to submit assignments in ways that best reflect their individual learning styles. For example, students are invited to submit their weekly journal entries as a traditional academic paper, poem or drawing that they explain in their own words.

Demonstrating responsibility to learners' unique needs within a carceral setting is nuanced by the "additional responsibility of meeting institutional needs and requirements" (Tessaro et al., 2018: p. 138). In addition to their responsibilities to students, W2B facilitators are responsible to the university, and must meet institutional requirements in terms of enrollment numbers and formal student evaluation structures, including assignment deadlines and grade allocation (Tessaro et al., 2018: p. 138). Similarly, W2B facilitators have responsibilities to the carceral institution, namely abiding by institutional regulations, policies, and practices. At times, prison staff can make this responsibility difficult to uphold. One minor example is what we refer to as "Timbit gate". In uOttawa's first W2B course, the institutional liaison, or "champion", permitted the course facilitators to bring a box of Timbits to each class, which was, strictly speaking, a violation of an institutional policy that prevents anyone from bringing food into the institution to share with prisoners. When the champion took sick leave, the facilitators were prohibited from doing so again by the staff member who took over the responsibility of admitting the class into the prison each week.

Despite the importance of sharing food to build connection, something that is emphasized in W2B training, the facilitators were forced to abandon this practice due to responsibilities toward the prison.

Finally, W2B courses often foster a sense of responsibility amongst learners to become engaged community members, something Tessaro and colleagues (2018) contend is an outcome of critical pedagogy and wholistic learning strategies that encourage students to learn with and through their emotions. Aislinn provided one example of how W2B cultivated a deeper sense of responsibility towards her community:

> Aislinn (outside student and teaching assistant): I left W2B feeling a lot of conflicting emotions. Seeing how such a violent system can do so much harm and rip families apart, I left with a lot of rage. I hoped to mobilize this rage into action, and I left with a renewed commitment to minimize the harms associated with criminalization and imprisonment, and to keep families together in the community.

In Aislinn's case, her growing sense of responsibility towards the community was deeply connected to her emotional journey throughout W2B. Mobilized by the feelings of anger and injustice she felt when the course ended, Aislinn was also driven by a sense of commitment to the connections she built with others in the course. Like Aislinn, many of uOttawa's former W2B students became more committed to social justice action after taking the course, a responsibility that is deeply connected to the next R, "Relationships".

Relationships

W2B builds on Indigenous education principles that foreground relationship development as a core way to create a supportive, engaging, and respectful learning environment, which Routledge (2009) contends is a form of decolonization in pedagogical practice. As Piquemal (2004) notes, these principles exist in contrast to western traditions that value false ideas of objectivity and the separation of reason and emotion. Within W2B, relational engagement occurs in multiple ways, including group-based activities (e.g. icebreakers and tableaux), as well as through circle-work and journaling exercises that emphasize respectful and inclusive dialogue, emotionality, experiential learning, and shared inquiry (Kilty et al., 2020, p. 97). This approach encourages students to be vulnerable and "hold space"

for others to express themselves at their own pace and without evaluation or judgement, which is difficult to do in the highly surveilled and constrained environment of the prison. Ikram shared how she came to appreciate the space W2B creates for vulnerability:

> Ikram (outside student): I fell in love with the process of meeting emotion with emotion, vulnerability with vulnerability. I found it to be a dignified experience and integral to authentically connecting with everyone.

Another outside student, Michael, illustrated the importance of relational engagement, and how vulnerability and peer support can help us to learn with and from our emotional selves as we move through traumatic experiences:

> Michael (outside student): During one of the classes, I dealt with the death of a young adolescent in my community who was good friends with my little brother. I hadn't realized how much his death and funeral affected me until I started sharing my experience. I usually try to disconnect from my emotions. Still, an inside student had already prepared tissue paper for my inevitable tears (I saw her do this, but told myself I wouldn't cry in front of my classmates and professors, plus I hate crying). Yet there I was, unable to contain myself. My vulnerability opened the floor for others to share similar traumatic experiences, with death/funerals and much more. I learned that releasing our emotions allows us to begin healing, receive support, and create connections.

Ikram's and Michael's experiences demonstrate the important connection between emotionality, authenticity, relationality, and support, particularly with respect to grief and loss. While W2B plans for relationship building in many ways, we found that the significance of these relationships was greater than expected. As Abigail (inside student) stated: "W2B felt like a safe space for me to be fully human with my classmates. I knew they would listen without judgement to my own experiences with othering, so I was able to open-up emotionally". Students carry these teachings into their personal and professional endeavours beyond the carceral classroom. In what follows, we consider our efforts to create a collective model to maintain the relationships built within W2B and to continue supporting each other after the course concludes.

PART II: BUILDING COLLECTIVITY THAT TRANSCENDS THE CARCERAL CLASSROOM

Research on the Inside-Out program (Graciela Perez et al., 2020) and W2B program (Kilty et al., 2020) suggests that learning together as equals and peers, and learning wholistically with our minds, bodies, and spirits helps students to break down social stigmas and stereotypes, which is essential work should you wish for meaningful inter- and intra-group bonds to emerge and flourish. Enabling dialogue, demonstrating respect for differences, and recognizing mutual commonalities generated growth and development in ways that went beyond the four walls of the carceral classroom, as these practices came to alter and shape how, both facilitators and students, carried themselves and engaged with others outside this setting. By embracing relational ethics and incorporating active consideration of the role emotions play in pedagogical practice, W2B demonstrates how certain educational models have a greater potential to build a sense of collectivity amongst students and instructors that can transcend the carceral classroom and positively impact participants personally and professionally, long after the course has ended.

Mobilizing critical pedagogy and a relational approach to ethics enables the dissolution of preconceived notions that students hold about university-level academic study and their respective abilities to complete this work, criminalization and imprisonment processes and practices, and the different forms that carceral and state oppression can take. Importantly, these preconceived notions and stereotypes are replaced with a deeper sense of intellectual curiosity, inter-group understanding, empathy for vulnerable groups, and compassion for marginalized people. For example, one student alumni described his W2B experience in the following way:

> Michael (outside student): My emotional journey in W2B was more like an earthquake. It felt like my foundation had been unsuspectingly destroyed, leaving me to question my unconscious biases and preconceived notions about the Canadian carceral system, and realize the merit of learning through emotions. My participation in the course allowed me to destroy the old (perspectives and understandings) and make room for the new.

Michael's narrative illustrates how traditional educational models can fail to promote critical thinking and dialogue, that being confronted with a different pedagogical approach has the potential to destabilize pre-existing beliefs (Fayter, 2016; Pollack, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2019), and that emotional engagement is essential to this process. Michael further stated:

> Ironically, it took me spending time in jail to begin breaking free of my emotional incarceration. The W2B pedagogy taught me that my emotions have value in educational and professional spaces – I can use them to connect with peers, learn through a subjective lens and transform my environment.

As aforementioned, W2B classes mobilize different pedagogical exercises to build group connection. Circle pedagogy promotes authentic listening, patience, and 'being in the moment' (Graveline, 1998; Palmer, 2004; Pollack, 2019). Authentic listening means listening without judgement and with an open heart (see *Figure 1*). Circle practices help structure W2B as a collectivity building pedagogical model – a way to promote social inclusion and cohesion amongst a disparate group of students despite their varying life experiences and social contexts (Pollack, 2014, 2016a, 2016b). Michael and Rachel illustrated how emotions are central to this process as they reflected on their W2B experiences:

> Michael (outside student): My eyes were opened to the horrible conditions that prisoners must endure while incarcerated. I never realized how bad it was until I got into [the detention centre]. They are treated as less than human for mistakes that any of us could have made. In many cases, we are all one bad day away from being incarcerated. My biggest takeaway from the course is the importance of building bridges with people, regardless of their background and perceived social standing. The wisdom we can acquire by listening to each other's lived experiences is invaluable. We have to break the social barriers between us and support one another emotionally, spiritually, physically, etc. Breaking these barriers is the best way to grow as individuals and as a society.
>
> Rachel (inside student): Using our emotions in the W2B classroom enabled us to break down barriers by being vulnerable, allowing us to see that others

> share similar emotions and experiences. By centering my emotions and truly listening to the other students, I began to understand diverse perspectives and connect with people I never would have spoken with.

Alumni narratives clarify that teaching and learning through and with our emotions strengthens the relational ethics approach that structures W2B pedagogy. We suggest that this connection between emotions and relational ethics is what enables the transformative praxis that sees students developing collaborative and leadership skills that facilitate the expression of voice (Pollack, 2019), for it is only when students feel safe that they can express themselves emotionally and open themselves up for relational connection with strangers. Given this, it is important to note that inside alumni participating in various W2B programs consistently identify the W2B classroom as a safe space that improves their conditions of confinement and overall carceral experience (Pollack, 2016a, 2016b).

W2B alumni from uOttawa also report that the course made them more compassionate, open to their own and others' vulnerability, and better able to identify, think and engage with their emotions and feelings – something that correctional programs aim to do, but which many prisoners find contrived and coercive, rather than sincere or authentic (Fayter, 2016; Schlosser, 2015). For inside students, W2B can help with the reintegration process by challenging the negative self-perceptions that criminalization and imprisonment encourage. As Rachel shared, W2B allowed her "to feel fully human, rather than simply an inmate".

> Rachel (inside student): Connecting with people who understood what I was going through as a criminalized woman, and being valued for my thoughts and experiences while inside an oppressive system, was essential for my healing and community re-entry.

For outside students, one of the most important lessons learned through W2B pedagogy is the value of authentic listening, the memories of which Aislinn describes as "a benchmark" for her relationships and "what it feels like to truly listen and be heard, trust, and feel supported". Ikram and Abigail also described the impact of authentic listening on their personal and professional lives.

> Ikram (outside student): Through my work with vulnerable and marginalized people, I discovered that authentic listening is a really important part of meaningful advocacy... and that what I learned in W2B does have a place in this new world. People are more than just legal problems with legs. In listening authentically, and recognizing and honouring the humanity of others, I've found that I'm better able to develop relationships, build reciprocal trust, and equip them with strategies to bolster their own voices. Authentic listening has made me a better person, and most definitely a better advocate.

> Abigail (outside student): I think one big takeaway from the course was that I became a much better listener. In my other courses, I was always the first one to raise my hand, excited to share my ideas. But each week in W2B, I had to confront that I was taking space away from people with lived experience, who were rarely given opportunities to share their stories on the inside. So, I learned to turn toward, and to focus on what was being said and holding space for that, rather than focusing on my ideas and how I was going to respond. This is absolutely the most important aspect of my job today, and I am so grateful to W2B for teaching me this critical lesson.

These narratives exemplify the transformative power of learning with and through emotions (as a core value of relational ethics) in terms of how students understand their roles in the post-academic world of professional employment. Referencing their respective work with legal clients and Elizabeth Fry Society[4] service users, developing authentic listening skills facilitated both Ikram's and Abigail's abilities to "build reciprocal trust, and allow folks to bolster their own voices", which are essential tasks for successful advocacy work.

Finally, alumni acknowledge the benefits of developing community-based W2B collectives to preserve the relationships that were cultivated during the course. The collectives also "remind us that the issues discussed in class and the injustices spoken about by both inside and outside students are still ongoing, there is still a lot of work to be done" (Abigail, outside student). Unfortunately, it can be quite challenging to create and maintain W2B collectives in the community. As other entries to this special issue attest, active community-based W2B collectives have been successfully developed in both Toronto, Ontario and Abbottsford, British Columbia. For Rachel, the Toronto collective eased her transition from prison to

the community and helped give her the confidence to continue her post-secondary education.

> Rachel (inside student): My engagement also provided me with the confidence to return to academia and pursue a PhD. My W2B colleagues offered support and encouragement, and it was through my collective work that I met my doctoral supervisor and committee members. The values and principles I learned have assisted me with my current teaching and research responsibilities. I definitely would not be where I am today without W2B.

We have attempted to develop an Ottawa-based W2B collective, but the fact that we hold our courses in a provincial detention centre has seriously hindered our efforts. Many of our inside students are in the detention centre awaiting trial or sentencing, after which they are transferred to institutions in other regions and may not return. Many of our outside students also leave the region following graduation, which makes maintaining connection difficult. While we can keep in touch with outside student alumni through email and other online platforms, this does not work for alumni who remain incarcerated and do not have access to the internet.[5] Alumni report that losing touch with inside students creates feelings of sadness and disconnection; for outside students this can lead to feeling as though they are letting their inside classmates down and to thus to feelings of indebtedness or failure in terms of ensuring reciprocity in our relationships. Despite these concerns, we wish to highlight the silver lining that can come from finding "meaning out of those lost connections":

> Aislinn (outside student and teaching assistant): In a way, saying goodbye to classmates and not knowing whether I would ever see them again, prepared me for other losses in my life. A few weeks after finishing W2B, my father died. So much of what sustained me through that grief were the lessons I learned from my classmates in W2B. I remembered their words, their stories, and their resilience, and I was able to find some degree of acceptance and peace.

While Aislinn provides a very personal example of finding meaning from losing touch with her W2B classmates, her narrative poignantly relays the emotional and relational potentialities of W2B.

CONCLUSION

A look at the graphic image presented in *Figure 1* allows us to "see" the importance of certain core emotional experiences to W2B pedagogy, including releasing trauma and healing, feeling both acceptance and vulnerability, and feeling peace and support. Each of these elements are encompassed in the concept of care. Over the course of our respective W2B teaching and learning experiences, our writing team members came to realize that Walls to Bridges is, in fact, a lived experience of care ethics in practice.

The fact that there is no universal definition of care ethics is, as Morgan (2020) explains, more of a benefit than a disadvantage. She lists the key components of any care ethics approach – all of which were crucial to each one of our Walls to Bridges participants: "a relational and intersubjective approach to morality; a heightened sense of responsiveness to the other; and the importance of place and context" (Morgan, 2020, p. 26). If we understand care ethics as "a form of intersubjective relationality experienced emotionally and affectively in a way that heightens responsibility between the self and other and necessitates considering context and history as well as place and location" (Morgan, 2020, p. 8), we can begin to see how W2B courses are structured through this form of relationality. This interpretation of care ethics certainly resonates with the pedagogical approach set out by the Walls to Bridges program, where emotions are recognized as contributing to both experience and knowledge development. For us, our emotions became a kind of moral compass through which we strive to build bridges and connections with and between students by way of empathy.

Why is empathy so important? We suggest that this is because W2B students and facilitators share Morgan's (2020, p. 2) stance:

> At a time when emotional resources are running low, there is a need to recast what it means to care, with the aim of generating a productive movement against the rise of value fundamentalism globally – embraced in mantras of "good and evil" and "us and them".

While Morgan examines care ethics in relation to the current immigration crisis, care and relational ethics helped us to reframe the penal crisis as the

consequence of a missing or lacking relationship between care and justice. Historically, care has been understood as belonging to the personal and private sphere of loved ones, while justice is seen as belonging to the public sphere of politics and reason (absent emotion). While care implies emotions, justice has traditionally been conceived as something that is attained in the absence of or as separated from emotions.

In the space of our W2B classroom, we have seen the potential that care and relationality have to foster inclusion and to transform our understandings of justice. For the critical thinkers that comprise our writing group, this program fits into the framework of care as contestation of the problematic socio-political norms that Morgan identifies. By giving value to emotions through the 5 R's, each course felt like an act of contestation of the way our legal system works. In an oppressive system, where incarcerated folks are perceived as Others and are often denied agency, we refused to reduce them to passive subjects to care *for*; instead, we reciprocally cared for one another. By doing so, we challenged the penal system's understanding of human agency. In closing, we join Morgan's call to recognize the importance of reincorporating emotions as central features of rationality and agency, and to reconnect care and relationality to the very concept and principles of justice, in the hopes of contributing to the widespread contestation of ineffective criminal justice policies and practices that shore up oppressive institutional structures.

ENDNOTES

1 Per the details of the memorandum of understanding between the University of Ottawa and the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, we are prohibited from naming the detention centre in any publications or media work.

2 In Canada, provincial detention centres house individuals convicted of summary conviction offences who are sentenced to two years less a day, as well as individuals who are awaiting trial or sentencing.

3 At the time of writing, we have not yet been permitted to commence a new W2B course.

4 Elizabeth Fry Societies are local NGOs that assist criminalized women with housing, programming, and other services post-incarceration.

5 We have engaged in sustained letter writing with a few inside students and always offer this as an avenue for maintaining connection.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Sandra Lehalle (Sandy for most) is Associate Professor at the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa. When she is not facilitating

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Rachel Fayter is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa where she holds a SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship. She completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in community psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. While incarcerated at Grand Valley Institution for Women, Rachel engaged in the Walls to Bridges (W2B) prison education program and has been active in the alumni collective since 2014. Since her return to the community, Rachel has been advocating for prisoner rights and social justice-oriented policy changes through publications, panel discussions, public education, and media interviews. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *Citizenship Studies*, and *Canadian Psychology*, along with various book chapters. Rachel's doctoral research focuses on the strengths and resiliency of criminalized women despite histories of trauma and imprisonment, and documenting how prison policies and practices actively inhibit solidarity and asset-based coping among women.

Ikram Handulle completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Ottawa, where she studied conflict studies and human rights. During the fall semester of 2018, Ikram participated in the Walls to Bridges course, which was a transformational experience that reinforced her commitment to social justice and ultimately led her to pursue a legal education. Ikram is currently a third-year JD Candidate in the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto. As a student caseworker at Downtown Legal Services, Ikram is directly responsible for handling the case files of low-income clients in Toronto. Ikram wholly intends to use her legal education to address systemic barriers in the access to justice.

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