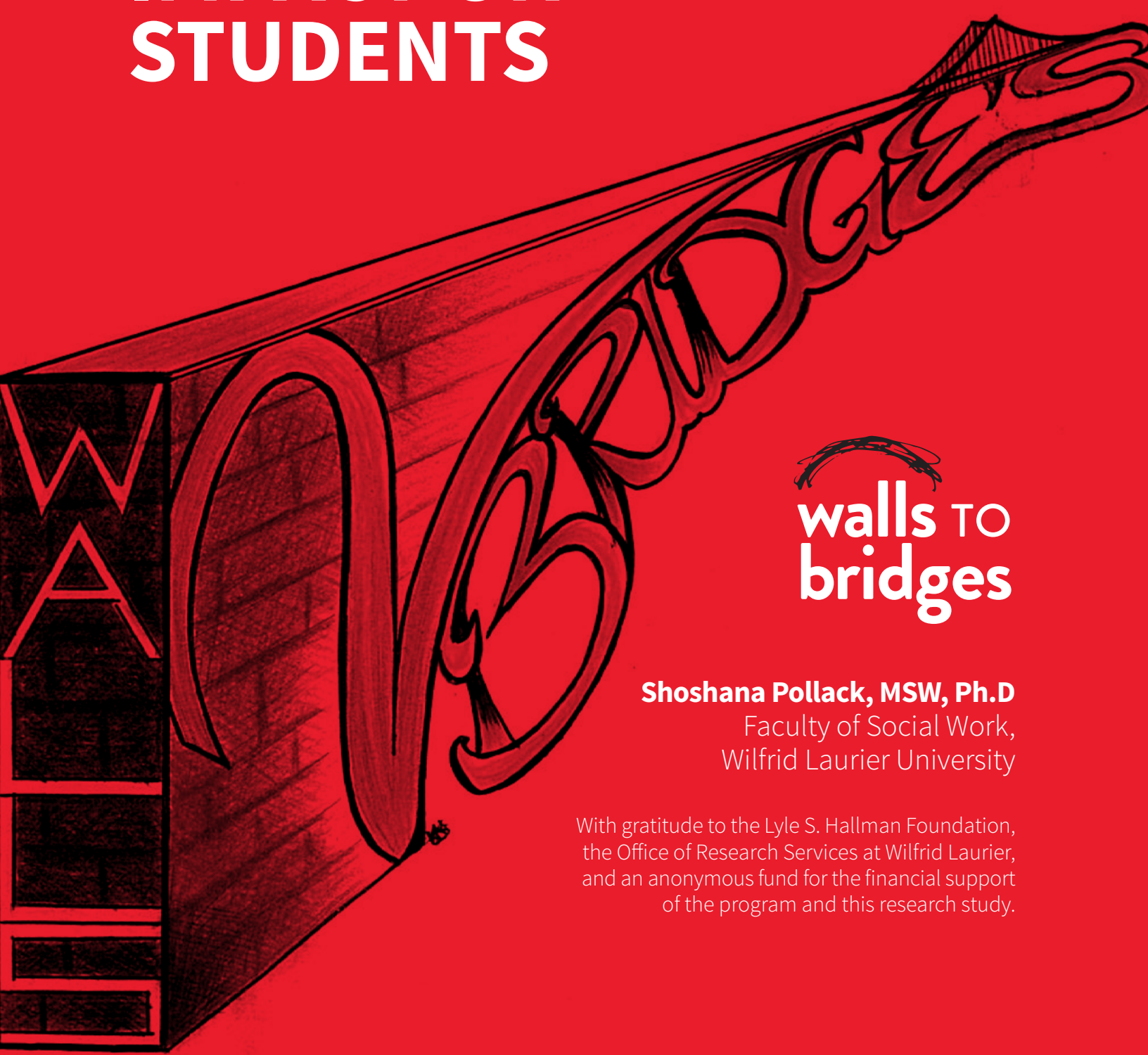


Report on the **IMPACT ON STUDENTS**




walls TO
bridges

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With gratitude to the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation,
the Office of Research Services at Wilfrid Laurier,
and an anonymous fund for the financial support
of the program and this research study.

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BACKGROUND

THE WALLS TO BRIDGES PROGRAM (FORMERLY INSIDE-OUT CANADA):

A Partnership between the Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work (FSW) and Grand Valley Institution for Women (GVI), Kitchener, ON

The first Walls to Bridges course was offered through the Faculty of Social Work (FSW) at Wilfrid Laurier University at Grand Valley Institution (GVI) in Fall 2011 as a pilot. In 2012, the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation began funding our program, allowing us to continue providing courses, to expand our course offerings across the university and other locations across Canada, to become the Canadian Instructor Training site for Walls to Bridges, and develop and locate the National Walls to Bridges office in the FSW at Wilfrid Laurier University.

As of January 2015, 76 Masters of Social Work students from Wilfrid Laurier and 61 students from GVI had completed W2B classes. There were seven full-time professors (four in the Faculty of Social Work and two in the Faculty of Arts) and two Ph.D. candidates in Social Work trained in the W2B educational model. Once an instructor is trained in the pedagogy they can offer a course through their faculty or department. Students from both the university and the correctional facility apply for the course with a letter of interest. The instructor will then interview each qualified applicant and select approximately 20-22 students; with equal numbers of students from the correctional facility and from the university.

The courses offered through the FSW at the time of the study were: Diversity, Marginalization and Oppression (3 times); Families and Systems; Human Rights; and Gender, Race and Crime. This study focuses upon the impact on students who have taken Walls to Bridges courses through the FSW/GVI program.

METHODOLOGY

Students were interviewed about many aspects of their W2B experience. This report focuses on what they said about the impact of participating in the W2B program. For the purposes of this study, impact was conceptualized as the short and long term effects – relational, intellectual, emotional, attitudinal, institutional, and social – of participating in this program.

THE INTERVIEWERS: W2B ALUMNI

An immediate and significant outcome of the first W2B course at GVI in Fall 2011 was the establishment of the Walls to Bridges Collective (W2BC). Students from this first class decided to form the collective, whose vision and mission was to bring Walls to Bridges classes to greater numbers of people across Canada and to advocate for improved educational access for criminalized people. Meeting biweekly since January 2012 at GVI, this group provides a five-day annual training for university/college instructors and they collaborated on this research.

After receiving ethics approval from both WLU and the Correctional Service Canada, W2BC members (both incarcerated and non-incarcerated W2B alumni) received training in interview techniques, developed an interview guide, and began carrying out interviews with alumni in July 2013. Thirty-seven of the sixty-four students who had taken W2B courses were interviewed (16 incarcerated, 21 non-incarcerated). It took four months to receive ethics approval from the Correctional Service Canada, so unfortunately many of the inside students were released during the time we were awaiting approval and we did not have contact information for them.

I supervised the W2BC interviewers but did not conduct any of the interviews myself due to the potential conflict of interest presented by being both an instructor in the program and involved in the development of the Canadian program. Three outside alumni--two (formerly) inside alumni and one doctoral level research assistant-- conducted the interviews with W2B students in the community. Additionally, members of the W2BC (14 participants) engaged in 'dyad interviews' in which they interviewed each other about their experiences and the impact of participating in a W2B course.

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

W2BC and I worked together on developing an interview guide that would capture the myriad aspects of the W2B experience. Participants were recruited via email if they were living in the community and via the prison mail system at GVI. The interview guide, while semi-structured to allow freedom for respondents to speak of what was most important to them, was organized around three central areas:

1. The impact of the process (circle format, dialogue and critical reflection on scholarly texts and experience) and context (classroom in a prison setting) on student learning;
2. Student learning about power, diversity and privilege;
3. The impact on students' conceptualization of and engagement with communities (prison and/or outside community).

Please see the **INTERVIEW GUIDE**. A professional transcriber was hired to transcribe the interviews.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis methods were consistent with how W2BC has come to operate and with our goals of providing meaningful leadership and skill development within our collective at GVI. After transcripts were professionally transcribed, several of the collective members who had conducted the interviews analysed the transcripts and developed themes or categories of ideas that were emerging. We then engaged in a process of 'textual conversation,' whereby I also analyzed and identified themes in the same interviews, while also commenting on what the interviewer had identified as themes. We did this process for about 1/3 of the transcripts, co-analyzing the transcripts together in this way.

The second phase of data analysis involved two more collaborative processes. First, I identified broad themes that ran throughout all the interviews (e.g. Personal Impact on Students, Challenging Assumptions/Stereotypes, Social Justice, Community Building, Facilitation) and brought quotes from the interview transcripts associated with these themes to a W2BC meeting at GVI. The collective broke into small groups and discussed the quotes and themes, analysing together the meaning of the participants' words and developing and refining the themes and categories.¹

1. For further study details and findings please see Pollack, S. (2014). *Rattling Assumptions and Building Bridges: Community-Engaged Education and Action in a Women's Prison* in Balfour, G. & Comack, E. (eds) *Criminalizing Women: Gender and (in)Justice in Neo-Liberal Times (Second Edition)*, Halifax: Fernwood Press; Pollack, S. & Eldridge, T. (2016). *Complicity and Redemption: The Boundaries of Scholarly Gazing*. *Social Justice: Journal of Crime, Conflict and Social Order* 42 (2); Pollack, S. (forthcoming). *Building Bridges: Experiential and Integrative Learning in a Women's Prison*.

INTERVIEW SAMPLE

Participant Demographics N= 37

Number of Inside Students	16
Number of Outside Students	21
Number of Inside students who had taken more than one course	6
Number of Outside students who had taken more than one course	1
Sentence length of Inside students	4.5yrs–Life
Female	37
Male	1
Aboriginal	1
Afro-Canadian	7
Caucasian	21
Asian	7
Level of education – Outside – In 2 yr MSW program	21 (N= 21)
Highest Level of Education – Inside – High school	2 (N=16)
Highest Level of Education – Inside – some undergrad or college courses	9 (N=16)
Level of Education – Inside – completed BA or College Diploma	3 (N= 16)
Highest Level of Education – Inside – unknown	2 (N=16)

FINDINGS

Participants in this study identified three broad themes related to the impact that W2B classes had on their learning and their lives. These are: i) dispelling stereotypes about the ‘Other’; ii) commitment to social action; and iii) the transformative effects of holistic learning.

1. “IT TAKES AWAY THE LABELS: SOME PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKE YOU THAN YOU KNOW”: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES ABOUT ‘THE OTHER’

Inside and Outside students had different expectations and motivations for taking a Walls to Bridges course, particularly related to each group’s specific concerns about how they would be regarded by their co-students. For inside students, the opportunity to take a university course was particularly attractive as there is very little access to post-secondary classes in Canadian jails and prisons. A significant barrier to accessing university classes is that prisoners are not permitted access to the internet and most university correspondence courses are online. Although at GVI there is access to correspondence courses through two Ontario universities that still allow ‘paper and pen’ versus electronic communication, subsidies are hard to come by and most students do not have access to resources to pay for these courses. All inside participants in this study said they applied for the Walls to Bridges course to continue their education – they were motivated by the fact that WLU provides a bursary for them to take the course, the idea of classes being ‘in person’ rather than correspondence, and by the idea of studying with ‘real’ university students from the community. Some students had college/university experience prior to incarceration and many did not. All Master of Social Work students said they were attracted to the experiential learning model of the classes and to the fact that they were going to learn about social justice issues and anti-oppressive theory and practice outside of the classroom and with people they assumed had lived experiences of marginalization and oppression.

Although inside and outside students came to the class with different types of motivations and goals, they did share a common concern that they would be judged or misunderstood.

They assumed that there would be differences that would divide the class in terms of those who are incarcerated and those who were not. Both groups expressed some concern that they would be judged by the other group – either for being ‘a criminal’ or for being ‘privileged’ and ‘naïve’. One outside student, for example, stated her concerns in the following way:

“I remember, I guess maybe being self-conscious or a little bit insecure. Like, what are they going to think of me, are they going to judge me? I guess the idea of privilege came to mind. You know ... I’m coming into this place every week, and I get to leave every week. What are they going to think of me because of that? Are they going to be like screw you, kind of thing, you get to leave?” - **COOPER**²

Inside students expressed particular concern that students from outside would think they were unintelligent and /or dangerous and that they would be regarded as ‘Other’. The following comments are illustrative of some of the initial concerns expressed by inside participants in this study.

“[I thought] they would all look down upon us or down upon me, and be like, oh she’s an inmate, or she’s not smart because she ended up in jail.” - **FRANCES**

“... laugh at me if I speak the way I speak, or they’re going to make fun of me ...” - **SUE**

“... most of us in the class figured that with the students coming in, the students would probably be like, white, middle-class students, coming in and looking down on us and judging us.” - **CHELSEA**

One of the main concerns raised by inside students is that the outside students would be studying and observing them as ‘criminals’, rather than relating to them as co-learners who are in prison. For example:

“... are they going to be here really to learn about the class, or are they just going to sit there and question our crimes and why we’re in here?” - **CHELSEA**

“... I felt that as an Inside student, I would be really observed. I felt that, even though the Outside students would have good intentions, they were kind of coming to watch us through a fish bowl and observe us.” - **HANNAH**

Jessica also employed the ‘fish bowl’ metaphor, stating:

“I worried that I would feel uncomfortable being looked at, like in a fish bowl kind of thing ...”

Interestingly, many participants said that their fears and stereotypes dissipated during the very first class, sometimes even before class began. An outside student, Shorty, illustrates an awareness of unconscious assumptions brought to the surface within a few minutes of being in the classroom together.

2. All names are pseudonyms chosen by the study participants

“But when I actually walked into that first class and everyone flooded into the classroom, my first thought was that they were teachers – that they were teachers in the prison. So that goes to show what my judgments actually were.” - SHORTY

The first class of each W2B class is structured to begin to build connections and allow students to experience each other in a relatively lighthearted way. Through experiential activities, such as the Wagon Wheel icebreaker, a popular icebreaker used by group facilitators for team-building (e.g., The International Association of Facilitators <http://www.iaf-world.org/index.aspx>), students meet each other in a fun and non-threatening way. All participants identified this class and the icebreaking activities as pivotal to breaking down barriers and dismantling stereotypes.

The classroom format and teaching method in W2B classes is very different from conventional university teaching. Based upon key principles of Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, classes draw upon notions of wholeness, embracing lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, particularly in regard to experiencing oppressive social structures. Further, the classroom dynamic is one in which all participants – students and instructors – are considered to be both teachers and learners, thus reducing traditional educational hierarchies about who is a legitimate ‘knower’. The hierarchy is further mediated by a classroom format that includes ‘circle pedagogy’, a method of sharing perspectives and ideas that draws from Parker Palmer’s Circle of Trust and from indigenous learning circles. Integral to circle work is a process that allows each student to respond to the question/topic without interruption. Each student is given the time and space to share what s/he wants about the issue without people responding with questions, challenges, etc. Moving around the circle, each student responds one by one. The circle format contributes to building a non-competitive classroom and to creating space for people to express themselves in whatever way they wish. As Aboriginal educator Jean Graveline (1998) writes:

CIRCLE AS PEDAGOGY.

Builds Community.

Listen Respectfully to learn what the needs are.

Gives everyone a sense of worthiness

Being valued ... Listened to ... Respected.

Circle as Pedagogy

Brings Healing.

Strengthening the Individual ... In-Relation to the Community.

Strong role models Inspire others to Grow and Change.

“A search for dominance free forms of interaction.”

Challenge the dichotomies between Knower and Knowledge

*Reason and Emotion.
Build bridges between School and Community.
Personal healing and professional development.
Healing and teaching.
Heal and educate the Community ... not only the Individual.*

Participants' responses about circle work in the W2B classroom resonate with Graveline's poem. For most participants, with the exception of those who were Aboriginal, the circle was a new learning modality. Students highlighted the equalizing impact that work had on the learning environment and the significance of having the opportunity to hear a diverse set of opinions without fear of reprisal or judgement.

"... a freeing principle of the circle is that you don't have to feel like you're being singled out or put on the spot in any way. I found that the Walls to Bridges circle experience was incredibly empowering because it accounted for those power dynamics." - CAITLI (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

"No one's better than anybody else ... We were all learning from each other. There was no one person that was like, okay I'm the boss. Nothing like that. It was all equal. It was everyone had their chance to speak and say their opinion on how they felt about the readings or what they had learned or if they had researched something. I really enjoyed it. I'm already going to be judged. I have a criminal record ... For the people that are from the outside coming in, and for them to be able to look at us in, like, not under any kind of lens – that was really cool." - JESSICA (INSIDE STUDENT)

"I felt that, having the circle format, I was able to listen to different people and learn from different people. And there's still the leader and sort of setting the format, but it really opened up to everybody as teachers and everybody as learners, and I really liked that." - BETH (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

When talking about their experiences of how stereotypes and assumptions were challenged, the dominant theme arising in the interviews was the idea of being connected or feeling a connection.

"Any fears or stigmas we might have had were brought down. As an Inside student, I didn't feel like the Outside students were staring at us, like an exhibit in a zoo. They just saw us as other students. They didn't know anything about our cases. They didn't know anything about why we're here. We're just other students working on the same program and discussing the same world issues. It was very liberating to feel a part of the world still – connected, even though we're behind." - FRANCES

Feeling connected resulted in the dismantling of various labels and categories that tend to divide people from each other. Inside students for example, started to see themselves as equally capable of completing a university course and to view outside students as also having experienced social, economic and personal challenges. An inside student, Chica, for example,

stated that initially she assumed that outside students “don’t even know what I’ve been through. Nobody’s even walked a quarter of a mile in my shoes,” but throughout the course she discovered that we “are more alike you than you know.”

Similarly, some outside students reflected on the commonalities they shared with some of their inside classmates and the realization that their own life trajectories could have also led them into conflict with the law. For example, Caitli states that she realized that:

“... for the first time [I saw myself] as someone who could quite easily be incarcerated, you know, at the drop of a hat... and I really was able to see it for the first time from the perspective of people inside, living in that system. It was life-changing.”

Other outside students expressed similar realizations, including an awareness of how social processes can lead some women into conflict with the law:

“... all of those women in there, that could have been me. There are so many various different ways in which the trajectory of our lives can put us in that place. So just having that understanding and that knowledge, I feel like was one of the biggest things I walked away with from the class.” - NELLY

“And it really hit me that if circumstances in my life were tweaked slightly, that I could very much be on the inside. It struck me – the commonality. Not the difference, but how alike everything was, and how connected I was to the entire system of it all.” - ALEX

“... many times, especially through the relationships that I built, I thought to myself, wow if I had gotten caught for x-y-z actions, I could have very well been in someone else’s shoes, and I could have very well been incarcerated. So those degrees of separation that I think society tells us need to be there, were absolutely blurred.” - RACHEL

“... if there was one thing in my life that was different, like one minor thing, it could quite be possible that I could be inside. - SHORTY

In summary, one of the key impacts of taking a W2B class on both groups of students was the relational and intellectual connections made between two groups of students who are not normally considered ‘peers’ and the development of a learning community between and across these differences. The notions that the class “takes away the labels” and that “some people are more like you than you know” were common sentiments expressed by participants in this study. The personal connections and teaching pedagogy was identified as central to the process of becoming aware of and dispelling stereotypes and misconceptions that prevent authentic connections between those who are outside and incarcerated peoples.

2. COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ACTION

One of the central themes that emerged in the interviews with students was that taking W2B classes ‘opened my eyes’ to local and global issues related to inequalities and social justice. The courses taken by participants in the study were Social Work courses which generally include topics and themes related to justice, equality, and social change. While some students did reflect on what they learned from particular course content, for the most part it was the class process itself that produced a new or renewed commitment to social action. A strong theme throughout the interviews was the idea of ‘taking action’ or ‘being part of the solution’ towards reducing social inequalities. Particularly striking was the sense expressed by many students that their new awareness of various forms of local and global social inequalities led them to feeling ‘accountable’ for making change in their own communities (whether the prison community or the ‘free’ community). For some students, feeling accountable was expressed in regard to the criminal justice system.

“I can honestly say I didn’t know this [how prison life is] existed. And you’re starting to wonder, how can I make things better? How can I not be a part of the problem? How can I be a part of the solution? ... I have the opportunity to change so many things when I leave this place (prison)... It’s just an eye-opener.” - BECCA (INSIDE STUDENT)

“I think that I have a greater awareness now of what some of the issues are in prison systems. I have a greater interest when I hear things in the media or in the news when I see issues come up that are related to incarceration, related to criminal justice. I just have a very new sense of investment, of interest, and passion really about trying to be part of creating more social justice.” - CAITLI (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

Many students articulated a commitment to working towards alleviating marginalization and engaging in social change efforts. Students frequently used the word “community” to refer to a sense of interconnectedness, accountability, and shared purpose that they felt evolved through the class. Students expressed the significance of building “a community in an unlikely place with unlikely people” (Maline) and spoke of how the classroom experience rippled out into other communities (like the prison or workplace) of which they were a part. One central ripple effect was that students said they felt responsible and able to work towards social change in their various settings; that they could have a ‘voice’ and the ability to break down other types of barriers placed between people. Rachel, an outside student, stated that she has never “felt like I was really connecting with anyone” and “never got that true feeling” until taking a W2B class, which “really has taught me to feel what it’s like to be in a community and how important that sense of community is for social justice.”

“What is my role in trying to either alleviate oppression or in perpetrating oppression? You know, what responsibility do I have? ... Not only what responsibility do I have, but how can I convert that into action?” - ALEX (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

“... it gave me a new perspective on not just what I knew in here, but what was going on outside. It even helped me to start watching the news more, because I started getting ... It felt like I was more involved in being able to watch the news and wanting to change this. Or I felt like this wasn't right or what can we do to make this better?” - CHELSEA (INSIDE STUDENT)

“ ... [We were] having a conversation about community accountability and lots of hopeless feelings about the way power is misused in our society... I remember one of my Inside classmates just saying, you know, ‘we have to be the ones to hold them accountable, and we have to hold each other accountable. Like, it's up to us’ ... It was kind of like one of those light bulb moments that no one's going to ... It's our responsibility.” - MICHELLE (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

In summary, participants said that the course content and process of creating a community fostered a sense of personal accountability and commitment towards challenging social inequalities. Students who were incarcerated felt enough trust and confidence in the outside students to share with them some of what they were experiencing as criminalized and incarcerated women. The ‘lived experience’ aspect of the courses dovetailed with course content and allowed students to analyse and reflect upon the larger social dynamics and structures that influence people’s experience of the criminal justice system. The sense of community that outside students experienced and the dialogue with their incarcerated peers, not only educated them about criminal justice issues but enabled a broader understanding of how lived experienced (their own and others) is shaped by social inequalities. The shared goal of both students (and instructors) of learning and talking across social barriers was an additional aspect of how community was created. The resulting sense of community provoked a collective sense and commitment toward social justice and action.

3. HOLISTIC LEARNING: “IT’S NOT EVEN WHAT I LEARNED – IT WAS WHO I BECAME.”

Students’ responses about the transformative impact of taking a W2B class were striking in terms of the far-reaching effects of a one semester course. They spoke of the impact on their self-esteem, sense of belonging, family relationships, personal agency, attitudes, and their behaviour. The circle pedagogy and learning from each other’s personal life experiences were key factors leading to personal growth that went beyond the classroom context itself. A repetitive theme through the interviews, from both inside and outside students, was the idea of ‘finding a voice’.

“I felt encouraged and I felt respected, so it made me very comfortable very quickly, and I was very surprised. I felt my voice grew. Like, every class I went to, I had more to say, and I felt comfortable saying it. Whereas, in previous university settings, I rarely spoke and rarely put up my hand, you know what I mean? I was afraid of that competitive aspect, so a lot of things went unsaid. And I never really voiced my opinion.” - HANNAH (INSIDE STUDENT)

“I learned a lot about myself. I learned how important it is to be present. I learned to trust my own voice and that it’s okay to express my voice. I learned about all kinds of assumptions that I carry and how that inevitably will impact how I interact with the world, and how the world interacts with me.” - RACHEAL (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

The reduced hierarchal relationships between students and between students and facilitators created a space in which students were able to reflect not only on the subject matter but on their own place in the world, assumptions and ways of relating to others.

“I mean better, just like, honing on skills that in a normal university environment would have never promoted within myself, because I thought well, I’m not writing the way they want me to write, and I’m not answering the way they want me to answer, there is a right answer to this. They encourage that here. They encourage that kind of diversity. I realized that this really helped me as a person. It’s not even what I learned – it was who I became.” - CAITLINE (INSIDE STUDENT)

The notion of ‘bringing our authentic self’ permeates circle work and W2B classes. Students stated that the non-competitive environment and the integrative or holistic nature of the learning – weaving together personal experience, academic theory, and emotions – facilitated a deeper learning experience than in conventional classrooms. Similar to the idea expressed above by Caitline, other students alluded to the notion that these classes fostered a space “to be a human, rather than to be like an intellectual brain” or was ‘relationship-based rather than content-based’ leading to a sense that their learning was a holistic process.

“...you did the academic work kind of before class, but then actually in class was connecting ... kind of drawing a link between the academics with what’s real life. And people’s personal experiences, and their emotions, and what they’ve lived through.” - GRACE (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

“... we had to present ourselves with a certain level of honesty and integrity. The classroom environment was particularly different and it explored how we could be more human while presenting our ideas.” - JOSE (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

Student’s emphasized the significance of being permitted to bring their full selves into the classroom, drawing upon knowledge that comes from lived experience as well as from academic texts.

“... if I hadn’t had my own experiences to apply them to, I may not have understood the concepts, because it was very different.” - BARBARA (INSIDE STUDENT)

“ We all have differences in us. That’s just the way we are made up – our life experiences, our genetic make-up, culture, religion, sex – all the isms you might want to think of, we’re all different. This type of learning experience embraces those differences. It doesn’t highlight them and it doesn’t make them an ugly thing. It just makes them something that we have and something that we bring.” - CHICA (INSIDE STUDENT)

The comments in this section reflect the sense that the W2B pedagogy is holistic and non-competitive and mixes ‘book learning’ with ‘street smarts’. Students who had or were taking courses on university or college campus felt their ‘voice’ was valued in the W2B classroom because they did not have ‘regurgitate’ back material that the professor presented and were encouraged to think carefully about their own opinions and assumptions, where they come from and how they have developed. Students said that the circle format, which involves listening quietly and carefully to each person’s words, revealed so many different perspectives, experiences and ways of seeing and knowing which they felt fostered a nuanced and deeper understanding of the course concepts than do lectures and power points. Further, the ability to draw upon lived experiences and explore these with their peers within the analytical framework of the course, was considered ‘transformative’.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WALLS TO BRIDGES CLASSES

Participants also had recommendations for improving the program. These fell into two broad categories: i) instructor facilitation skills and ii) enhancing access to this type of educational modality.

1. INSTRUCTOR FACILITATION

Most of the suggestions for improvement related to instructor facilitation in regard to achieving a balance of providing structure and information while also allowing sufficient space for students to guide the process. Several students employed poignant metaphors to describe how they see role of the instructor:

“I think of the instructor almost as the bass player in a band ... they’re kind of the one that’s there to kind of smooth over the edges, the glue that keeps everyone together, but at no time are they the rock star of the show.” - CAITLI (OUTSIDE STUDENT)

“[The instructor] was like the Sherpa of the group....She was there to facilitate, but she never interjected wherever she didn’t need to. ...a person with expertise, a person that was there to share her knowledge.” - CHICA (INSIDE STUDENT)

In order to help achieve the balance of being a ‘Sherpa’ or a ‘bass player’ students suggested the following:

- Strike a balance between creating structure and activities for the class and leaving lots of space for students to take ownership and leadership over class process.
- Create opportunities for student to co-facilitate, e.g. ask for volunteers to think of an activity to deal with the readings, facilitate class discussion, lead an ice breaker, open or close the circle.
- Make sure you intentionally cover the readings in an active way.
- Do ice breakers for at least the first 3-4 classes to help with class cohesion and bonding.

- Have a strategy for managing time in the circle.
- Be sensitive to how much reading is required and provide readings of various kinds – e.g. poems, prose, theory, first person, academic research for different learning styles and educational backgrounds.
- Get more Indigenous professors teaching these courses.

II. INCREASE ACCESS TO WALLS TO BRIDGES COURSES

Students also recommended that W2B increase access to this type of teaching model both inside and outside of correctional institutions.

- Make W2B classes more accessible to more people by holding them in other sites such as hospitals, high schools, old age homes, psychiatric care facilities, shelters
- Hold a forum in the correctional institution or facility and involve staff to illustrate what the program is about and how the pedagogy works

... whether it'd be personal workers, or PWs, or parole officers, or the people who teach the programming ... having them be part of it, so that they can kind of grasp different ways of learning. Because they can apply this tool to anything that they do. This is a different way of talking to people, a different way of listening, because a lot of these people don't have a good grasp of active listening.

- Create opportunities for students to continue similar work together in the community e.g. develop reading groups, put on workshops, engage in advocacy work
- Lobby the government to fund the programs to spread across all jails and prisons in Canada

INTERVIEW GUIDE

To help us better understand the impact of Walls to Bridges teaching on students we would like to ask you some questions about your experiences in the Wilfrid Laurier Walls to Bridges class that you took. Your reflections will help us evaluate student learning and assess what is working well and what could be changed in regard to the teaching model.

EXPECTATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

1. Thinking back, what motivated your interest in taking an Walls to Bridges course?
2. What ideas did you have about what it might be like having inside and outside students studying together in a prison?
3. Students W2B classes have their first class of the semester separate – inside students meet alone with the instructor and outside students do the same. Can you describe what it was like for you the first time the whole class came together? What feelings, thoughts and experiences did you have during that class?

WALLS TO BRIDGES PEDAGOGY

1. Walls to Bridges classes are not run like conventional university classes. Can you describe your experiences of working in a circle format? What was it like for you to be in conversation/dialogue within this format? (Probes re: dehierarchized pedagogy)
2. In what other ways did the structure and format of the course impact your experience?
3. What did you learn from engaging in a dialogue in this particular way?
4. How did you perceive the role of the course instructor?
5. How does trust get established in a W2B classroom? When can trust get ruptured?

6. Walls to Bridges classes encourage all students to take responsibility, along with the facilitator, for the classroom experience and learning. How did your classroom experience reflect this?
7. Can you reflect upon a moment or moments during which you experienced some discomfort? What happened? What was the impact?
8. Can you describe a classroom situation or conversation that strongly affected you? (Probes: what was it that was so impactful? How did you respond?)
9. All W2B classes involve a collaborative class project. Can you describe what this was like for you personally? What were some of the challenges? What did you learn from this collaborative project?
10. Walls to Bridges is called experiential learning. This means students reflect upon the interaction between what they are reading in the assigned texts, their assignments, and the actual experience of being in the class. What was it like for you to personally experience many of the concepts and topics you were studying?

PRISONS AND UNIVERSITIES

1. Prior to taking a Walls to Bridges class, what kinds of experiences and/or opinions did you have about prisons and incarcerated people? Can you describe ways that your opinions may have shifted from taking W2B class and why this might have happened?
2. Prior to taking a W2B class, what kinds of opinions about universities or university students did you have? Can you describe ways that your opinions may have shifted from taking a W2B class and why this might have happened?
3. What did you learn or experience in regard to ideas about ‘difference’ and ‘sameness’ by taking a W2B course?

IMPACT ON SELF AND COMMUNITY

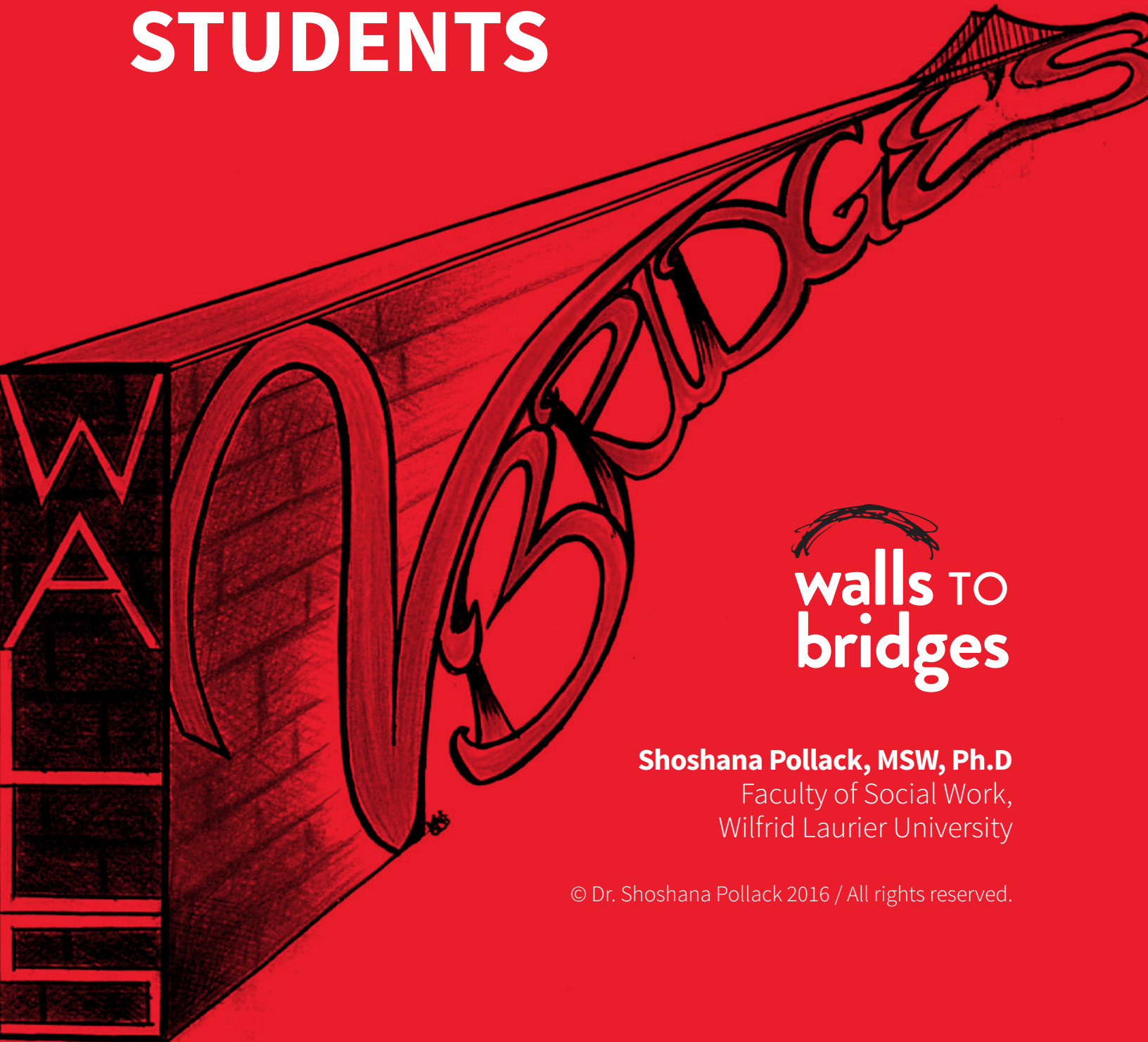
1. Please talk about any ways that your involvement in W2B may have influenced your understanding of community and social justice.
2. Walls to Bridges teaching is often referred to as ‘transformative education.’ Can you comment on this idea of W2B being transformative? (probes: what does it transform? How does this happen? Are there personal and social facets to the transformation?)
3. Now that X months have passed, reflecting back can you see ways in which you continue to

be influenced or impacted by your W2B experience? (Probes: impacts on sense of self or agency?; impacts on engagement in community? approach to work or those with whom they work?)

CONCLUDING

1. Do you have any thoughts about ways the learning experience of a W2B could be enhanced?
2. Is there anything else you would like to add that I have not asked?

Report on the **IMPACT ON STUDENTS**




**walls TO
bridges**

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