

# Reasons and Roadmap for Integrating the Arts and Humanities into Criminal Justice Education

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**Abstract:** *In light of the need of building greater trust and improving service delivery on the part of criminal justice professionals, serious thought needs to be put towards promoting and developing empathetic responses of criminal justice students during training and education. The approaches towards training and education of criminal justice professionals, must also be adapted with an eye to their future conduct and the complexities of social issues they will encounter. It is argued that in order for future criminal justice professionals trained at university to provide a more empathetic and community-oriented service, the arts and humanities must play a vital supportive role. This paper is an analytical review of current findings in pedagogical research and practical implementation, drawing also from the comparative findings in medical humanities, with a view to supporting the arguments for integrating arts and humanities in the teaching and learning of criminal justice. The recommendations are to develop modules, seminars, assignments and guidelines for teaching methods into the criminal justice teaching curriculum, and also to provide support for additional academic and extracurricular activities in the arts and humanities as a part of the degree programme annual plan. The teaching and activities must be student centered and planned with their participation. Developing creative and reflective practices, including maintenance of reflective portfolios for empathetic and critical thinking in the formation of professional identity, is also recommended.*

**Keywords:** *criminal justice education, arts and humanities, teaching and learning*

## 1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, we can observe that the police-public relationship has soured, with increasing skepticism of the justice system, decreasing trust and respect to the profession, with the police often seen, whether correctly or incorrectly, as being unempathetic to the needs and feelings of the general public. While there are always positive examples of service and even heroism to counter the negative representations, there should also be some thought put towards how critical thinking and empathetic responses towards those they serve can be increased on the part of the police and of all officers in the criminal justice system and building up the positive actions and improved service delivery. It is argued that, since the criminal justice system deals with people in a vulnerable state, empathetic understanding of the human dimension is crucial for the operation of the system.

One of the methods of increasing empathy in service providers and professionals (and thereby resulting in increased satisfaction on the part of service receivers), that has been debated at some length is the use of arts and humanities in teaching and training. There is also the argument that the inclusion of arts and humanities into training and practice would increase professional satisfaction, competence and reduce overall dissatisfaction and 'burnout'

in one's profession. There is considerable literature on this topic in the area of 'medical humanities' (Zhou et al, 2021; Patel et al, 2019; Jeffery and Downie, 2016; Graham et al, 2016; Yang and Yang, 2013; Reilly *et al* 2012). The Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo has established a Department of Medical Humanities in 2016, also holding an International Conference on the Medical Humanities in 2018, and is a pioneer in this area in Sri Lanka and South Asia. However, in the field of law and criminal justice education this aspect of integration of arts and humanities into teaching and learning is not as widely or as officially accepted in Sri Lanka, neither is it as prevalent in research publications elsewhere, as the volume of research in medical humanities appears higher and more easily accessible.

Thus, this paper aims to highlight the importance of integrating arts and humanities into criminal justice education, in particular where the individuals will be trained as officers who will be directly involved in interactions with accused, convicted persons, victims, victims' families and the general public on a daily basis. There are several institutions teaching criminal law, criminology or criminal justice in Sri Lanka, which could benefit from considering the role of arts and humanities in their teaching.

There are some discussions that those who choose criminal justice may have a predisposition to less empathy than those who chose other fields of study and professions (Courtright et al 2005; Posick et al, 2014) which is an added reason for attempting to develop greater sensitivity and thoughtfulness in the approach to teaching and learning. Understanding others' narratives and the ability to articulate one's own experiences are both vitally important in a criminal justice setting (see Engel 2003; Ferguson and Musheno, 2000), as it is ultimately the ability for empathetic communication that can prevent disputes and/or lead to rehabilitation and reconciliation.

It appears clear that long-term engagement with students on arts and humanities can increase their empathy (Keena et al, 2018), and therefore it should be given due consideration in criminal justice teaching and learning.

## **2. Methodology**

In terms of methodology, this paper is an analytical review of current findings, drawing from the comparative findings in medical humanities, with a view to supporting the arguments for integrating arts and literature in teaching and learning criminal justice. Furthermore, practical implementation of integrating arts and humanities in certain degree programmes and courses are also discussed.

## **3. Discussion**

Various studies have analysed the relationship between empathy and criminal behaviour, and governments have sometimes implemented educational or social programmes on developing empathy for youth with a view to prevent criminal behaviour or for offenders to prevent re-offending (Trivedi-Bateman and Crook, 2021). There already seems to be a worldwide acceptance of the role of arts and humanities education for those already in the prisons and probation system, as a form of self-expression, preventing re-offending and as a rehabilitation strategy. In Welikada prison, training in arts including sculpting, traditional dancing, music, and singing are being encouraged by the rehabilitation officers of the prisons. Art exhibitions have been with the support of the Department of Cultural Affairs artist and instructors from the National Art Gallery, and sales of art works have been used for the Prisoner Welfare Fund. In 2018 there was an art competition and exhibition organized by the Commissioner of Prisons for inmates from prisons across the island. Arts and culture education was also something used in Sri Lanka in the rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers in Protective Accommodation and

Rehabilitation Centers (PARCs) under the “National Framework Proposal for Reintegration of Ex combatants into Civilian Life in Sri Lanka, Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights” (2009).

However, arts and humanities as part of training of criminal justice officers, is not something that is given sufficient attention and action, despite being something that has been talked of for several decades (see Halstead, 1985). Although not as widely done, integrating arts and humanities in the study of crime and justice is not a new idea. Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), considered as the founder of the Italian school of positivist criminology, became interested in the criminal anthropology during his work as a professor of public health and psychology. Lombroso was fascinated with the psychological insights gleaned from ancient Greeks, Dante and of course, Shakespeare. As biographers of Lombroso have pointed out, “The worlds of science and works of art, real-life delinquents and fictitious characters, primitive “palimpsests” scrawled by prisoners and canonical works of European literature are inextricably intertwined in the very fiber of Lombroso’s works.” (Hiller, 2012). More recently, Edward Sagarin, former president of the American Society of Criminology has expressed the view that criminologists have a much to learn from literature (Sagarin, 1980), and he himself was a published poet.

Arts and humanities are sources for students to discover experiences, analyse case studies and scenarios, question norms and procedures and understand historical context. It can be argued that studying language and literature, history and philosophy, would provide many useful skills for a criminal justice professional, that would lead to a more socially and historically aware, self-reflective and humane officer. It may also provide historical background, interpretive methods and analytical skills to improve our understanding of our legal system

and its implementation. It has often been said that it is through the arts and humanities that we can understand the life experiences of others who are different from us and who live very different lives from our own, and that a sense of community which respects diversity can thereby be created. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum also points out that the value of the arts is the “cultivation of sympathy” and that it is important to develop “a participatory type of education that activates and refines the capacity to see the world through another person’s eyes” (Nussbaum, 2010) It has been stated strongly that “For future law enforcement officers, engagement with the humanities is essential preparation for working together with people whose view of the world might be different than their own” (Byrne and Bezbatchesko, 2021). Officers would also be better able to grasp and respond to the multiplicity of perspectives in the scenarios that they would be faced with, and hopefully, chose more nuanced and sensitive responses. Furthermore, when there is such a structure of thinking and practice provided through education, it can be hoped that a student’s curiosity, imagination and empathic and critical thinking could become a practice of lifelong learning.

#### **4. Recommendations**

There are several different ways of integrating arts and humanities into criminal justice education, which will be briefly discussed below.

Some institutions in the United States have developed degree programmes which combine two disciplines, such as Northeastern University’s English and Criminal Justice, BA, which is taught jointly by their Department of English and School and Criminology and Criminal Justice; and the Humanities and Justice BA at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. This is not likely in Sri Lanka at present, but the content and methods of these courses are useful for Sri Lankan teachers and learners to know about.

Another method is to add a course module on 'criminal justice, arts and humanities' to existing syllabuses, or have a certificate course. It is also possible to have a series of workshops and seminars for credit, which go into depth on particular material, and also help to develop students critical thinking and creativity. Such activities could be designed to provide an opportunity for students to engage with material that reflects theories and practices in criminal justice that they study in their other course modules, and this has been suggested for several decades already, even if it is not yet mainstreamed (see Hirschel and McNair, 1982).

Such courses would usually prioritize the criminal justice subjects and have readings to complement the themes and develop understanding of them, but not go into depth on the analysis of this other material itself.

Of course, a more balanced approach, where both the chosen material and the criminal justice themes are given due weight can also be designed. At the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, their integrated teaching of criminal justice and literature has topics on civil rights using Sophocles' *Antigone* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The intention is to use the engagement with these kinds of texts to think about ongoing social injustices and inequities, and to reflect on the role of criminal justice professionals within society. Currently, Prof. Jeffery R. Wilson, of Harvard College has a research and teaching project on 'Criminal Justice and the Humanities' that looks at Shakespeare plays which have representations of crime and justice (*Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Titus Andronicus*), through the lens of criminology, and discusses how criminologists have used Shakespeare to build theory. He works on online courses and seminars, as well as reading groups and Harvard's creative writing programme.

If Sri Lankan institutions plan on learning from these examples to create opportunities for criminal justice students to develop their skills

and empathy, it is recommended that modules, seminars or material for integration also include Sri Lankan material that is suitable for our local context and familiar to some extent with our students. At the Faculty of Criminal Justice, KDU, which cooperates with the Sri Lanka Police College for planning student activities, we were informed that Hollywood films such as *Zodiac* (2007) and *Seven* (1995) have been used for a while to critically discuss police procedure with students and this was done in 2022 as well, for our students. Many Sri Lankan films deal with issues of crime and the justice system, such as *Haarlakshaya* (1971), *Dadayama* (1983), *Dharmayuddhaya* (2017) and *Paangshu* (2021), which could be added to the list. It could be useful to have a recommendation list and a film library, and a film club to encourage critically engaging with such media. In terms of novels and short stories, songs and poetry, Sri Lankans have access to materials in Sinhala, English and Tamil as well as translations and subtitled works from many other countries.

There have to be thoughtful choices made in line with the guidance for the use of these materials and the overall intention of developing empathy and nuanced and critical engagement with the social issues. It should be noted that there is also a difference of either making recommendations for students to access on their own time and making the material part of teaching itself, and if it is to be made part of the teaching, the connection with the intention must be made clear by the teacher. It must also be warned that certain choices in arts and humanities may result in the opposite of empathy and can also contribute towards developing prejudices and harmful attitudes towards others. Thus, the end result and critical perspectives should be always kept in mind by the academics preparing materials and resources, as well as the students.

Another method that can be easily integrated into existing curriculum in Sri Lankan universities is to have a personal reflective

portfolio as a component of the course, where the student can reflect on their ongoing engagement with the arts and humanities in the context of the formation of their identity as a criminal justice professional. This has generally been recommended as helpful for the human and professional development of individual students. As discussed by Zhou et al (2021) in the context of medical doctors, encouraging the keeping of portfolios of reflective entries and accounts of critical incidents and inter-personal interactions will also be useful for subsequent research into the relationship between reflective writing and empathy formation of professionals. As noted by Liu et al (2016), in an analysis of 8 studies, there was a “uniform increase” in empathy (and prevention of empathy decline) among medical students through such writing assignments. This is also supported by a more recent study by Artoli et al (2021). Further studies in the context of criminal justice students appears necessary, to confirm if the results follow the same pattern.

## 5. Conclusion

The approaches towards training and education of criminal justice professionals, must change, with an eye to their future conduct and the complexities of social issues they will encounter. In order for future criminal justice professionals trained at university to provide a more empathetic and community-oriented service, the arts and humanities must play a vital supportive role. It is recommended to include a guideline of teaching methods into the criminal justice teaching curriculum and also to provide support for extracurricular activities such as clubs, societies and participation in and organization of relevant academic seminars, workshops and conferences as a part of the degree programme annual plan. The activities must be student centered and planned with their participation. Common guidelines based on best practices in the relevant field can be provided by the teaching staff or visiting scholars, such as how to conduct textual analysis or film analysis in an

academic and thoughtful manner. Developing creative and reflective practices, including having reflections, portfolios and critical thinking in student assignments is another way of integration.

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