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# Engaging Young Offenders with Education and Learning in a Secure Custodial Setting



Adeela ahmed Shafi

Findings from Doctoral Research Study 2017

# Introduction and Context

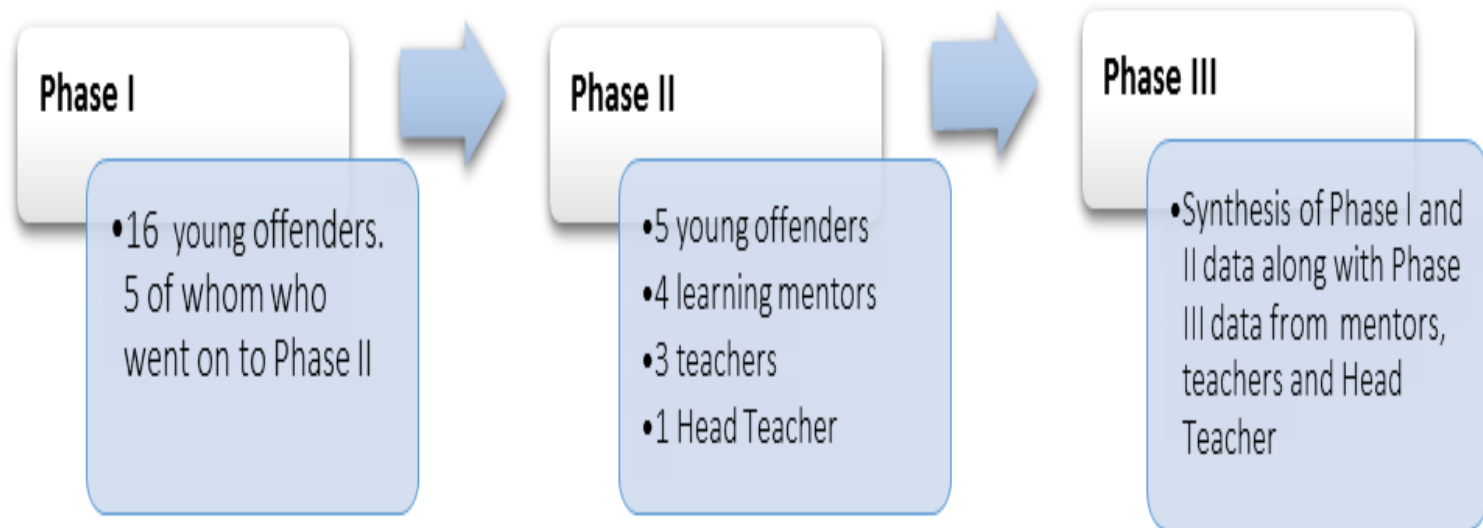
- Number of children in custody at an all time low
- Over 3,000 in 2008 down to just over 800 in 2017.
- However it means those in custody have some of the most complex needs and represent some of the most troubled young people in the UK
- Educational attainment is low.
- School dropout is high with almost 9 out of 10 young offenders having dropped out of school for 6 months or more before being incarcerated (Little, 2015)
- Complex family and socioeconomic backgrounds
- High prevalence of special educational needs 23% compared with 2-3% in the general population of young people (Hughes, 2012).
- Young offenders described as disengaged from education and learning.

# Research Questions for Phase I

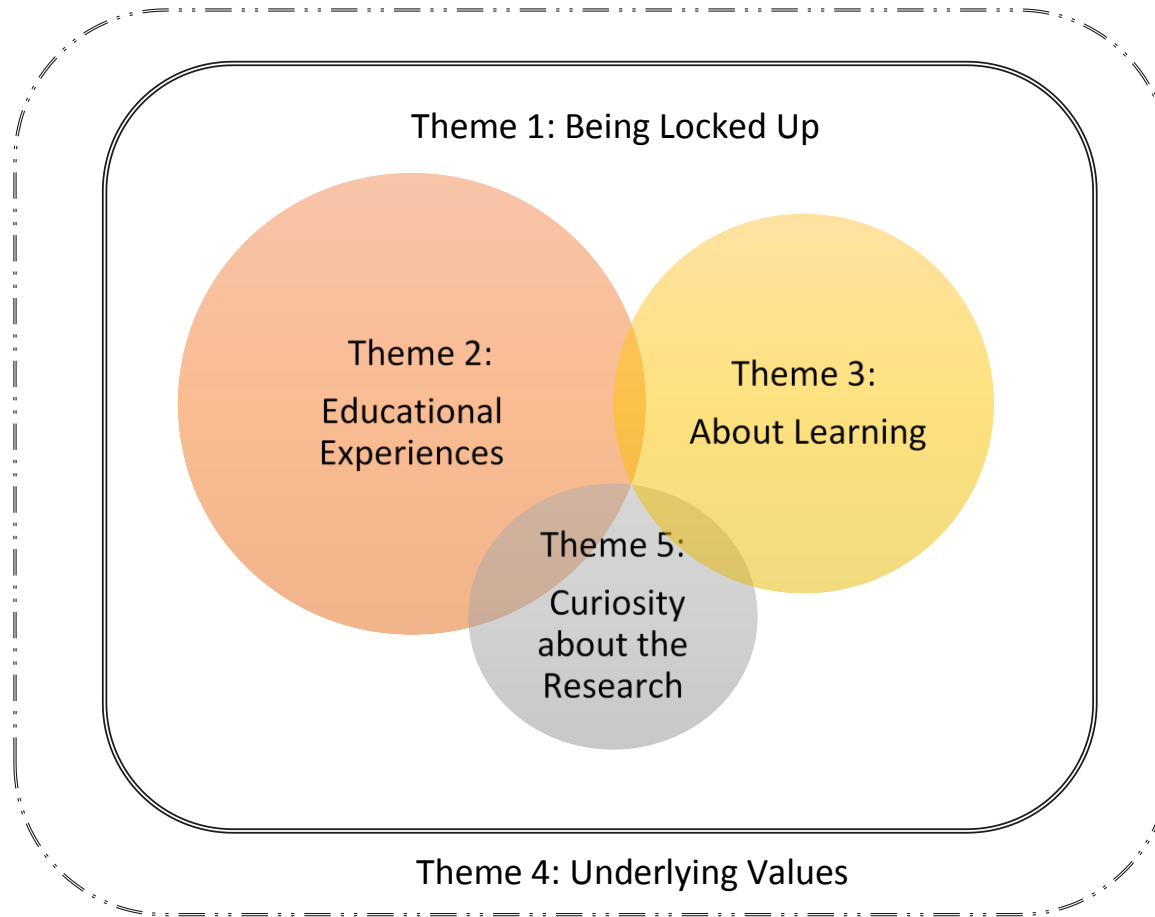
1. What are the educational experiences of young offenders? How do they perceive education and school in relation to their own lives?
2. In what ways do young offenders view themselves as learners?
3. What is the nature of dis/engagement in young offenders? What are the facilitators and barriers of engagement in young offenders in a secure custodial setting?

# Methods

- Ethnographic Case Study in one secure children's home in England
- 16 young offenders participants in Phase I



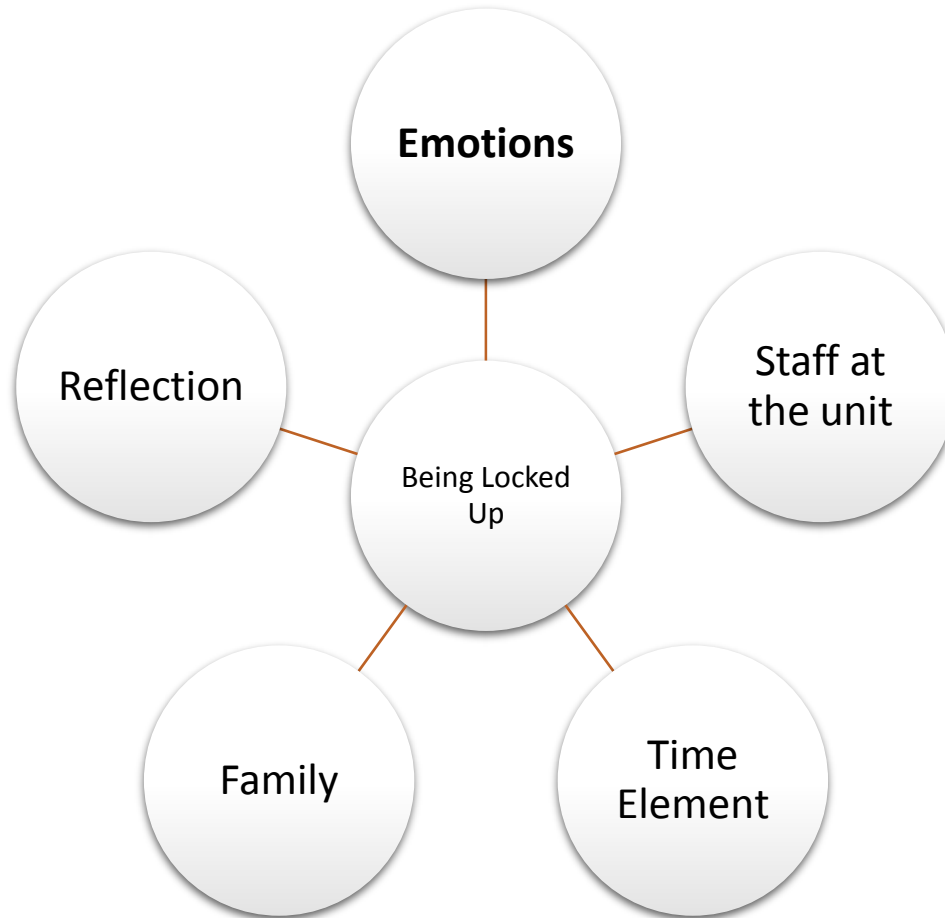
# Phase I Educational Experiences within the secure education setting



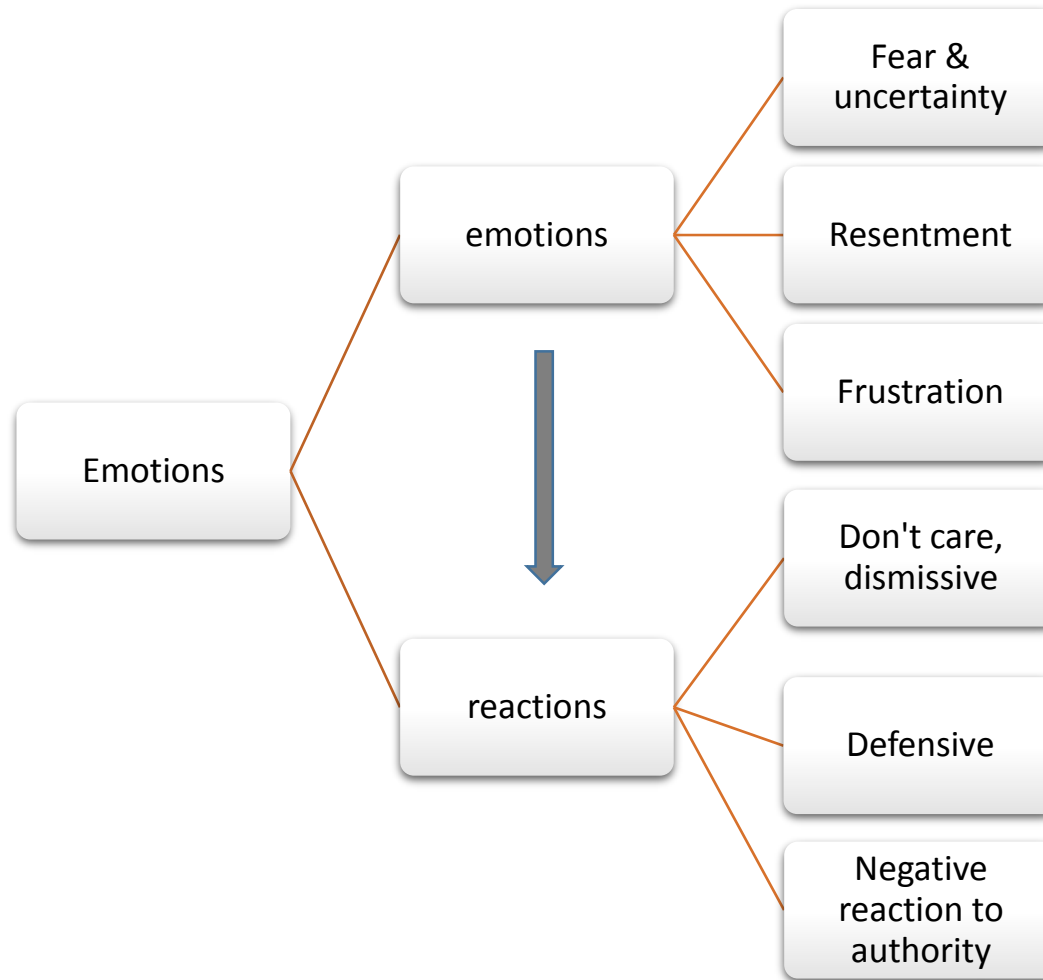
5 Key inter-connected themes emerged about how young offenders perceived education:

- In the secure setting
- In mainstream settings
- In general

# Being Locked Up



# Role of Emotions



Emotions were closely connected to interactions with peers and staff in custody.

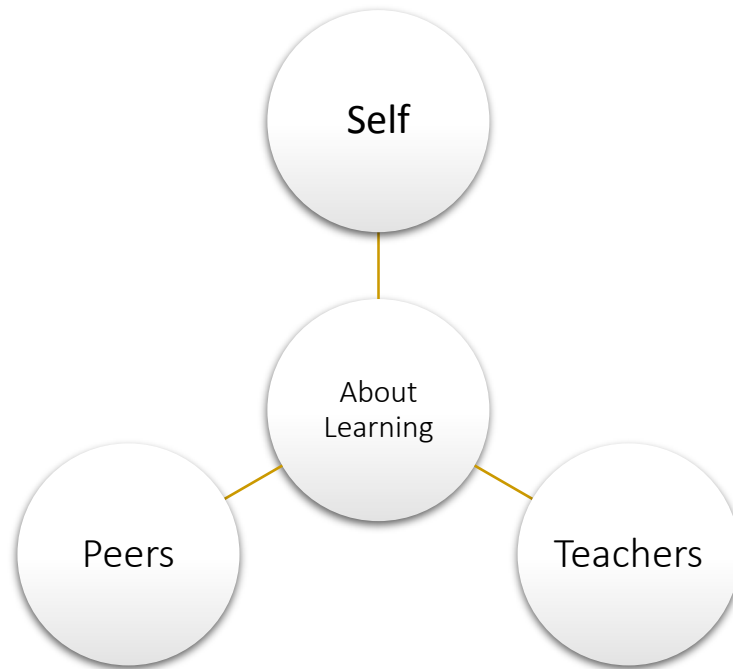
These very much shaped their emotions

Emotions also impacted on the learning of the young offenders.

This theme was connected to the Self in the About Learning theme



# About Learning



Keeping face and protecting one's emotions was important, including when learning

'Yeah I just go yeah... Give up sort of, thing and obviously you act out because you're trying to hide the fact that you just gave up.'  
(Jamie, aged 15)

Young offenders were very much aware of themselves and how they impacted others as well as how others impacted on them during learning.

# Underlying Values

In the eyes of society, those who break the law perhaps are perceived as not sharing the same values (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011).

Participants seemed to have 'conformist values' (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011) and traditional values on education and family life).

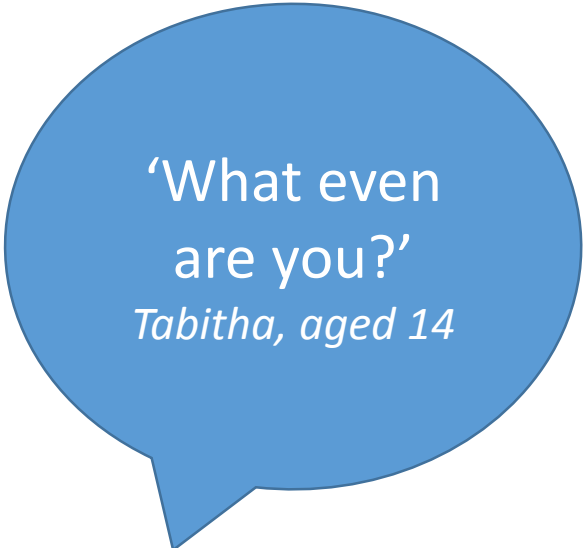
*I hope to be like you know have a job. Not too sure what in, you know. I don't know possibly a house, misses....and having everything you know... you know everything sorted... your house but yeah I mean that's what I want for now. Just having basics like... Yeah like normality.'*

*(Josh, aged 17)*

# Curiosity

The young offenders were curious about the research and me.

This suggested a level of engagement and interest in the new and novel



'What even  
are you?'  
*Tabitha, aged 14*

*'Why do you do what you do then?  
Why do you come into secure units  
and that?'* (Jack, aged 14)

# Conclusions from Phase I

- The secure context was a defining feature in how young offenders assessed not only their current educational experiences in the secure unit, but also their previous educational experiences
- This Phase reflected the challenging backgrounds and educational experiences of young offenders
- Young offenders were described as disengaged from education and learning
- Young offenders valued education, though struggled with school as an institution



Phase II findings demonstrated that the nature of disengagement in young offenders was distinct.

Responding to this made it possible to re-engage them whilst at the secure unit.

# References

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