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Shafi, Adeela ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6265-5024 (2018) Re-engaging Young Offenders with Education in the Secure Custodial Setting. In: Children and Their Education in Secure Accommodation : Interdisciplinary perspectives of education, health and youth justice. Routledge, London, pp. 277-298. ISBN 9781138694408

Official URL: http://www.brownsbfs.co.uk/Product/Gallard-Diahann/Children-and-Their-Education-in-Secure-Accommodation--Int/9781138694392

EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/5327

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Routledge Book Chapter

Re-engaging Young Offenders with Education in the Secure Custodial Setting

Introduction

This chapter is based on a doctoral research study, completed in 2017, focused on understanding the nature of disengagement in young offenders, offering a way to re-engage them with learning whilst incarcerated. The research was an ethnographic study conducted in one secure children's home in England, conducted in three phases. Phase I consisted of exploring the educational experiences of 16 young offenders; Phase II consisted of 5 in-depth case studies, each comprising an authentic inquiry process designed to begin with an authentic interest from the learner and to connect to a useful educational outcome. Phase III aimed to understand how the secure unit could facilitate re-engagement with learning. In its entirety the research generated data from 45 interviews, observations and field notes with 16 young offenders, 3 teachers, 3 mentors, a head teacher.

Using 3 in-depth case studies from this research, this Chapter illustrates how re-engaging young offenders with education and learning whilst in custody can be transformative, given the right conditions. Re-engagement efforts need to respond to the nature of disengagement in young offenders which was found to be characterised by heightened and exacerbated emotions and shaped by their relationships with staff and peers. The Chapter begins by providing a background and context of the education of young offenders before outlining the research. A discussion of the conditions needed to be met for successful re-engagement, with a particular focus on the facilitators and barriers, is presented. This is followed by implications for practice, emphasising the need for flexibility in the structures of the secure setting which can result in considerable benefits for effective re-engagement.

Background and Context

Between 86% and 90% of young offenders have been excluded from school (Little, 2015) at some point and many (36% boys and 41% girls) have not been to school since they were 14 years old (Murray, 2012). Young offenders are also likely to have higher levels of learning disabilities (Chitsabesan & Hughes, 2016) with a prevalence of 23-32% compared to 2-4% in the general population (Hughes 2012). Additional emotional problems (Heinzen, Koehler, Smeets, Hoffer, & Huchzermeier, 2011; González, Gudjonsson, Wells, & Young, 2016)

behavioural problems (Young, Moss, Sedgwick, Fridman, & Hodgkins, 2015) and language and communication difficulties (Snow, Woodward, Mathis, & Powell, 2016) are also more prevalent in young offenders with comorbidity not unusual. Poor educational experiences coupled with these difficulties can make engagement with education challenging, particularly in a secure context which brings with it additional trials, not least the restriction of movement and loss of autonomy. However, engagement is a necessary pre-requisite for any 'intervention' (including educational interventions) to have a chance of success (Case and Haines, 2015; Prior and Mason, 2010).

Research in the UK and Europe on the education of young offenders in custodial settings is limited (Hart, 2015). The extant literature is predominantly from the US and tends to be based on a 'correctional' approach focused on evaluating specific interventions which look to improve, for example, reading or writing skills (Wexler, Pyle, Flower, Williams, & Cole, 2014). The assumption being that in correcting the 'deficit' the 'problem' is solved in an unproblematic way. However, such approaches represent a unidimensional view with little acknowledgement of the background or contextual challenges and how these can impact on the young offenders' ability or willingness to engage in educational opportunities.

The secure context itself is significant in this regard. By its very nature, it is designed to restrict and limit movement. The findings from this research have indicated it to be a defining feature in how young offenders perceive education at the secure unit (ahmed Shafi, 2017).

Why engagement?

Engagement is considered key to learning and academic success (Crick, 2012; Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016). It has protective benefits with regards to delinquent behaviours such as truanting, substance abuse, and offending (Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Importantly, engagement is a malleable construct responsive to teachers' or schools' efforts and thus an ideal point for interventions (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). However, teachers and practitioners report low engagement and disengagement as one of the biggest challenges of the Western classroom (Fredricks, 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Whilst it is difficult to draw direct causal inferences between engagement and offending, it is difficult to ignore when so many young offenders (over 90% in this research and that by Little, 2015) have dropped out of school due to disengagement.

Engagement with education and learning consists of three main components: behavioural, cognitive and emotional (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioural engagement is shown through, for example, attendance, completing homework and other tasks as well as complying with school rules. Cognitive engagement is demonstrated through for example,

asking questions, making connections or going beyond the information provided. Emotional engagement refers to feeling a sense of belonging, being a part of a group or having meaningful relationships within a learning context. Emotional engagement has been found to predict behavioural engagement (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008; Lee, 2014). However, there is an argument that agentic engagement should be a fourth component (Reeve & Tseng, 2011) which is indicated by learner proactivity in shaping one's own learning. This appears necessary because the other components (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) do not capture the individual learner's role in learning. A learner is not just reactive to a learning environment but proactive too. They bring to a learning context their own background experiences and knowledge which shape how they may decide to react. This is connected to autonomy, where a sense of autonomy is more likely to result in agentic engagement. This agentic aspect of component was critical in terms of learner empowerment within the 3 case studies explored in this Chapter.

Engagement and motivation

Autonomy is one of the three key constructs in the psychological theory of motivation called Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan,1985; 2008; 2010). Autonomy refers to the extent to which one is able to express who they are and be themselves – a sense of empowerment. When autonomy is respected one is more likely to engage and be motivated intrinsically. The other two constructs are relatedness and competence. Relatedness refers to the person's need to feel a belonging or part of a group, to feel supported. Relationships being of special significance to relatedness. Competence refers to how capable a learner believes they might be in a particular task. The secure context, by its very nature, impedes these basic psychological needs, restricting autonomy, relatedness and competence. Self-determination theory is useful in understanding and explaining the psychological process of engagement.

Goldspink and Ray (2009) distinguished between autonomy and agency because autonomy refers to a condition and the extent to which it is granted within a context. In this sense, autonomy is an environmental context that is 'given' or presented, whereas agency is about the extent to which the individual themselves acts on the environment. This is useful in understanding the secure context and the interplay between autonomy and agency.

Disengagement

Recent research is beginning to focus on disengagement as distinct to simply low engagement because the characteristics of the disengaged differ from those who have low engagement. Earl, Taylor, Meijen, & Passfield (2017) distinguished between active and passive forms of disengagement, describing animated and disruptive behaviours as active disengagement whereas passive disengagement is characterised by non-responsiveness to

teachers and peers, refusing to be involved in learning activities. Earl et al this suggest that disengaged learners require different strategies for re-engagement. Given that young offenders are generally disengaged; this lends support to the idea of alternative strategies within a secure custodial setting.

Summary

The secure custodial setting for many is a final opportunity to re-engage young offenders with formal education (Little, 2015). Investing in the re-engagement of young offenders with education and learning whilst in custody could be transformative for them (Behan, 2014), especially as previous educational experiences have been negative (Ball & Connolly, 2000; Farrington & Welsh, 2007; Hirschfield and Gasper, 2011; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Little 2015). In doing so, young offenders can be empowered to be more proactive (or agentic) in navigating their own educational pathways as they transition back in the community. Lanskey (2015) found that those who were engaged and determined whilst in custody found it easier to transition back into the community and continue with education.

The Case Studies

Research which explores the actual experiences of young offenders is not plentiful. Therefore, the case studies in this research offered a unique insight into the extent and process of engagement (or not). Five case studies generated data from 29 interviews, observations and field notes and 3 of them are presented in this Chapter.

Authentic Inquiry

Authentic Inquiry was the means through which the young people were re-engaged. This was a process of inquiry, action and knowledge generation (Jaros & Deakin Crick, 2006). Authentic inquiry has been shown to appeal to disengaged learners because it is personal and authentic to them and they have the opportunity to achieve something tangible, such as a certificate or good mark for their work (Jaros & Deakin Crick, 2006). The aim is to connect the personal interest with an externally valued outcome and the creation of a poster, presentation, leaflet or other artefact is a key feature of authentic inquiry. For example, it might start with something like a particular place that is of relevance or importance in the life of the learner. Through the learning journey this can develop into a geography project or a tourist brochure for the area which can be assessed. In this way the personal is connected to the public and a connection is made between the learner and outwardly assessed goals. In doing so it connects the participant's own interest to formal education. This is a vital part of authentic inquiry as for many young offenders, the curriculum is so distant from their own lives that they see no connection between what they are interested in and what is

considered useful learning in school. Starting with the curriculum as it does in mainstream school has not been successful in engaging young offenders. Therefore, the opportunity to begin with an authentic starting point which is then connected to the educational outcomes has considerable value. In a sense, authentic inquiry reverses what tends to be the case in mainstream school, positioning the learner as the starting point rather than a curriculum. This is in line with the notion of disengagement being distinct where an alternative approach becomes necessary.

A further key element of the authentic inquiry is the role of a mentor. The mentor acts as a facilitator, enabling access to resources, posing questions, challenging when needed and supportive when needed. This supports emotional component of engagement through relatedness with the learning context - of which the mentor is an important part. For young offenders who have been shown to have had complex lives with limited stable and supportive relationships, this becomes even more central. Furthermore, the authentic inquiries offered a space within which the young person could express some autonomy - one of the 3 constructs in self-determination theory. In doing so, there is an opportunity to empower which can manifest in feeling competent (also significant according to self-determination theory).

Using authentic inquiry, it was possible to re-engage all the young offenders in the case studies, albeit to varying degrees. This was dependent on a range of conditions which are discussed in the next section. The cases of Jack, William and Andrea (see Boxes A, B and C) were selected for inclusion in this Chapter because they represented a range of the complexities that many young offenders may experience.

Jack

Jack was 16 years old and of White British heritage. He was the only young offender at the secure unit who had come from a mainstream school and a relatively stable family life. Jack had achieved some GCSEs at school. Jack was on long term sentence of 12 months for a sexual offence though no previous known offence.

Jack was described by teachers as mild mannered and sociable, rarely raising his voice or being physically aggressive. Jack was however, constantly dissatisfied with the secure unit, its system, the staff and lack of facilities. He was also dissatisfied with his weight gain which he attributed to the lack of healthy food available at the secure unit. Jack was very dependent on adult support and demanding of attention.

William

William was 16 years old and of African American heritage. Originally from the USA, his parents and family had come to settle in England just a few years ago. William's family had high expectations of him and William felt pressure to achieve the highest of grades. William was serving a sentence in excess of 12 months for aggravated burglary with no previous known offence.

William was described by teachers as a very able and a deep thinker. However, he had declined to take his GCSEs because he did not believe in them. William had dropped out of mainstream school and in lessons at the unit he was withdrawn, quiet, tired, sad. Whilst generally compliant, William did not engage with activities.

Andrea

Andrea was 17 years old, born in Britain though from a non-British background and multilingual in English, Czech and Polish. Andrea had been a victim of abuse, had a chequered educational history and, although undiagnosed, it was believed that she had a range of learning difficulties. Andrea was approaching the end of a 6-month sentence for robbery with no previous known offence.

Andrea was observed as challenging, aggressive, demanding and generally un-cooperative in lessons. Having been excluded from school without any GCSEs, Andrea had attended a PRU followed by time at a local college on a hair and beauty course. This was disrupted by her offence and subsequent sentence.

Jack's authentic inquiry

Jack agreed to participate in the authentic inquiry, initially attracted at the potential attention it might command from staff. Jack's topic was health and fitness – authentic because he was concerned about his recent weight gain and wanted to improve his fitness. He decided that he wanted to create a workbook on health and fitness and possibly present it to his fellow students to encourage them to increase their fitness and diet. There was a delay in Jack starting his authentic inquiry due to not being able to meet with his chosen mentor James, a member of the care staff. Jack remained committed to doing the authentic inquiry, despite initially engaging largely for utilitarian purposes, signifying sustained engagement. Jack also demonstrated agency and initiative in deciding his own topic.

Practitioners' Perspectives

The Science teacher had tried to mentor Jack, however, had to withdraw because Jack was not satisfied with her efforts. Jack did not feel that Science connected to his chosen topic associating the Science teacher with lessons and work - not related to his idea of developing his own fitness. Therefore, this mentoring relationship was not successful. Nevertheless,

when Jack did eventually do his authentic inquiry with his chosen mentor, he was able to relate it to Science in a way he had not done so in the earlier stages. A good relationship with the mentor emerged as an important facilitator.

Jack's mentor James, described him as enthusiastic and driven:

> *'Jack was really good and he had loads of ideas..., there was no "Oh can you write it for me?" which you'd expect to find probably on a day to day basis in the schools but I think because he's interested in it he was straightaway writing it down'.* (James, Jack's mentor)

This was almost the exact opposite to Jack's teachers, who described him as lazy and demanding. Ironically, however, this was also how Jack described himself with regards to learning in his very first interview.

> *'The same thing over and over again. It just gets boring […] Just like I said I haven't got the motivation, I'm too lazy.'* (Jack, first interview)

James indicated that the lack of time was a major barrier in the authentic inquiry. It resulted in limited access to resources such as the internet which led to frustration from both James and Jack. James reiterated what others had said: that due to being managed by the care staff team, it meant the Head of Education had little control over timetabling James and Jack together - other than an informal arrangement. This had been the source of Jack's earlier frustration and had it not been for Jack's enthusiasm for the topic, the authentic inquiry could easily have been abandoned.

Analysis

Jack's re-engagement with education during and following the authentic inquiry demonstrated that re-engagement with education and learning was not beyond the reach of even the most disengaged (or laziest) of learners. Despite Jack's dissatisfaction, resentment and dependency - given the opportunity, he was able to re-engage himself with learning. Jack's learning was characterised by his own passion facilitated by the authentic inquiry opportunity. Through this, Jack was able to reclaim some autonomy restricted by the secure context. In so doing, Jack was able to apply his competencies to other areas beyond the authentic inquiry such as becoming a young person's representative, indicating a sense of belonging or relatedness. The constraints of the secure custodial setting through its structures of line management had been barriers to engaging in the early stages. However, as the authentic inquiry served to connect Jack to his own competences, he was able to emerge as a confident and engaged learner indicating a sense of empowerment. Whilst the authentic inquiry cannot claim all credit for this, it seems clear that the opportunity re-connected him to learning which permeated his entire presence at the secure unit. Jack was developing into a confident and energetic individual who was campaigning for better nutrition

at the secure unit and had volunteered as a 'rep' for his fellow residents. This case demonstrated that engaging a young offender with education in a secure context is achievable and relatively quickly - once the conditions are right.

William's authentic inquiry

William's authentic inquiry also suffered a delayed start, primarily due to the lack of time available for him to identify a mentor. William's eventual mentor, Andrew, had volunteered himself. This self-selection shaped the authentic inquiry where Andrew led the entire process. It also meant that although William complied, he did not engage in the way that was transformative or meaningful as it had been for Jack.

> *'Andrew told me about it* [the topic] *but it's like okay because there's nothing else that's really like, as realistic so I just had to go for that one.'* (William, post authentic inquiry interview)

William response to the best and worst things about the process was:

> *'The worst thing about it? How do I phrase this? Not being able to pick on one [topic] because of what other people think.'* (William, post authentic inquiry interview)

This demonstrated that not choosing the topic nor his own mentor meant that William did not experience the conditions that enabled him to engage in the authentic inquiry. William did not say anything about the 'best thing'.

Practitioners' Perspectives

Andrew was an enthusiastic mentor who was passionate about getting the young people 'skilled up' (Andrew's words) ready for release. As a member of the care staff, with limited involvement in education, the authentic inquiry meant he could be more involved. However, in William's case, this had proved counter-productive because it meant that the opportunity for the inquiry to be authentic was hindered. It resulted in William continuing to be passively disengaged and just 'going through the motions'. Andrew was coming to the process with his own aims and goals, which although well-intended, did not serve the purpose for William. This was evident in the response William gave to a question on the 'product' he had created as a result of his authentic inquiry:

> *'I didn't really see the end result because it's like Andrew, he did most of it, but for me I just did like most of the maintenance, look up all the research so he did all the creative stuff.'* (William)

Andrew was unable to detect that William was simply complying, demonstrating only a behavioural level of engagement. In response to being asked if the topic was William's choice, Andrew responded:

> *'The topic was perfect really, because at the end of the project, he [William] kind of realised what he likes'* (Andrew, William's mentor)

William was more suited to a mentor that stimulated and facilitated his thinking, like Jack's mentor had. Instruction was not suitable for William who needed greater stimulation for him to feel empowered enough to be agentic.

Although William rarely engaged in classes, a teacher identified one occasion when William had asked how the topic was going to help him:

> *'Because I do remember him saying to me "How does this shit help me?" and I said to him "Okay, let's look at it another way: how does it hurt you? That's perhaps what you need to think about". And we did actually have quite a dialogue about that, because he kept saying "But how does it help?" and I said "Alright, let's stop and think about life in general and wind back to before you did your crime. If you had said to yourself "How does this hurt me?" then you perhaps wouldn't have done it because if you knew that you were going to do that then consequences were going to be negative. If you pass your science GCSE nothing negative is going to come from it, potentially only positive and that's it. So stop asking how is it going to help, start thinking about "How is it going to damage me?'* (Teacher Interview)

This is an example of William attempting to engage. However, the conversation was taken in a different direction. Given William's beliefs about society and its institutions the conversation may not have encouraged engagement as he did not believe in exams. William had some strong political views, which may have been shaped because he had been exposed to different political systems in America and the UK. Taking the authentic inquiry approach, the teacher could have taken the opportunity of William's attempt at cognitive engagement to encourage him to search for the answers to his question himself. In so doing William could have explored the purpose of that particular lesson topic. It appeared that there were at least two known potential opportunities lost for engaging a learner like William: this incident in the lesson and the authentic inquiry itself.

Analysis

William had volunteered to take part, demonstrating a willingness to engage, however, William did not re-engage to the same extent as Jack. This was because William's mentor had emerged as a barrier rather than facilitator, resulting in William being disempowered further by the experience. The mentor had to be driven by the needs of the young person, highlighting the importance of relatedness and emotional engagement whereby a connection, even if it is just with one individual, becomes important. William's case demonstrated the importance of a mentor relationship which understands the young person. The authentic inquiry did not present conditions of autonomy for William and he was not able to express what he really thought or felt and so was unable to identify a topic of interest. It also showed how the structures of the secure custodial setting was not conducive in cultivating such a relationship. William had demonstrated that he was able and willing to

engage when the opportunity arose, however the conditions of the secure context did not facilitate this.

Andrea's authentic inquiry

Andrea was challenging, aggressive, demanding and generally un-cooperative. However, when Andrea agreed to participate in an authentic inquiry, she became quite excited, asking many questions – excitement is an indicator of emotional engagement and asking questions suggests cognitive engagement (Skinner et al, 2008). This was the direct opposite to teachers' reports who were convinced Andrea would not be willing to participate.

Andrea wanted to use the authentic inquiry to think about job and career prospects on her release. She wanted to produce a CV '*like the normal kids'* (Andrea's words) as her 'end product'. Andrea produced pages and pages of writing in the Red & Black notebook she was issued. Whilst much of the narrative lacked coherence and structure, reflecting teachers' reports of her communication and language difficulties, Andrea's work indicated a desire to use her multiple languages and experiences of trouble with the law to help other young people in her situation. This demonstrated behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement. However, Andrea regularly complained of how the staff never helped her. These complaints could have been interpreted as a request for help, but Andrea's challenging manner made supporting her especially difficult for the teachers.

Practitioners' perspectives

Andrea found identifying a mentor difficult as she believed nobody cared. When she did eventually think of a mentor, Emily, they never got to meet before the end of her sentence. Consequently, Andrea's authentic inquiry did not progress beyond her planning stage described above. The lack of a mentor was a serious blow to Andrea and her engagement was replaced with frustration, anger, despondency and a further sense of disempowerment.

> *'She* [Emily] *didn't help me with anything. Nobody even cares.'*

Andrea needed additional help in preparing her for release. She had seen the authentic inquiry as a chance to do this. The lack of help resulted in increased frustration and then a sense of despondency. Andrea attempted to conceal this disappointment by downplaying the work she had put in.

> *'It's only a notebook. It's only writing. It's not like I had a job interview and that. It's just that page I could write anything I wanted, but the thing is, like - there could have been something out of it rather than just doing like 13 pages of writing and then not doing nothing […] the plan was to go and have a look on the computer and see what jobs there are that would interest me. Obviously that hasn't happened so I just thought it was a waste. I haven't been bothered doing it again because I thought, 'what's the point?'.* (Andrea)

For the remainder of this interview Andrea spoke about her anxiety at being released and of being fearful of being back in the community, when as soon as she turned 18 all the support would be withdrawn. Andrea was feeling vulnerable and frightened. Engaging her with learning after this point was difficult.

> *'How would you feel if you were in a secure unit, you were leaving in 2-3 days, you've got nothing in place, no house? You don't properly know exactly where you're going to live. You've got no money, you've got no National Insurance number, no birth certificate, nothing to sort myself out. I've never been 18 to know how shit runs when you're an adult, so how should I know? It's obviously going to be stressing. But they just don't give a shit.'* (Andrea)

Teachers reported that Andrea would abandon tasks without explanation and accuse them of not helping. Their assessment was that she had a short attention span, needy and with a desire to control:

> *'Andrea will appear keen on something, she will demand we do some particular task and then after … it could be ten minutes or it could be two days […], she will just say 'I am not doing it', abandon it, not interested. I think it is a mechanism of control for her'.* (Teacher)

However, Andrea showed that she tried to engage with lessons. Although teachers recognised Andrea had additional needs, they did not appear to connect these as a possible reason for abandonment of tasks. A second teacher reported having a good relationship with Andrea, due to giving her one-to-one attention and reflected how Andrea was responsive to the social environment.

When asked if the teacher had free reign on what she could to help Andrea's education, the teacher responded with.

> *'If I had free reign with her I'd wrap her up in cotton wool and take her home and protect her from all the bad people out there. I think I would take advantage of the fact that she was bilingual and try and get her to do something that… with her translating. I mean I say bilingual; I think she spoke more than two languages.'* (Teacher)

Teachers perceived Andrea's troubled childhood as having affected her ability to engage. However, interestingly, teachers did not attribute Andrea's lack of sustained engagement to the pedagogical features of the classroom of the secure setting nor their own teaching styles. In some ways it reflected the 'deficit in the learner' approach. The secure setting had exacerbated Andrea's emotions and her subsequent reactions. This had impacted on her ability to maintain engagement and the support she needed was not there.

Analysis

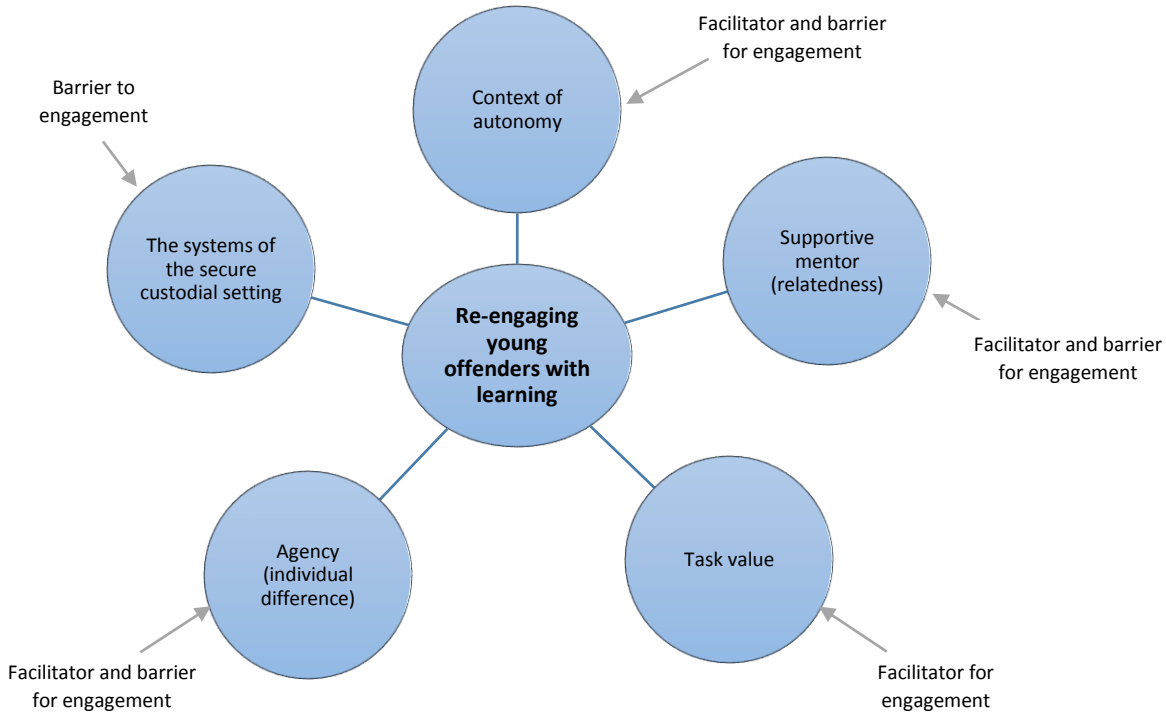
Andrea demonstrated when given the opportunity to engage, with the right support, she could have overcome challenges. However, the conditions within the secure context meant

capitalising on this was not possible. Andrea was aware of what she needed to do on release and wanted to plan for it, demonstrating her agency in being able to assess the usefulness of the authentic inquiry to her. It offered her an opportunity to be autonomous, be herself and use her skills to her benefit. However, she was continually frustrated at the perceived lack of support indicating the importance of relatedness. This contributed further to her frustration, disappointment and fear because in some ways her competence or ability to do something for herself was compromised. The secure context had been a barrier to continued engagement in the authentic inquiry despite Andrea showing initial engagement.

The Conditions

The case studies demonstrated the range of ways in which each young person had approached and engaged with their authentic inquiries. The overall finding was that authentic inquiry had the potential to re-engage even the most troubled and disengaged of young persons, though not all were successful to the same extent. Engagement was subject to a number of facilitators and barriers within the secure context and it became clear that certain conditions needed to be met for successful re-engagement. A range of facilitators and barriers were identified. The diagram below illustrates these.

Figure 1 Facilitators and barriers to re-engagement with education in a secure custodial setting



A clear distinction between these was not always possible for 2 reasons: firstly, because a facilitator could also become a barrier, depending on the conditions. Secondly, because the conditions were all inter-connected and inter-dependent. The discussions below illustrate these.

A Context of Autonomy

A context which enabled the young person to feel they could express themselves in terms of their own interests and choices featured as important for re-engagement in all the case studies. The secure custodial setting is designed to restrict individual autonomy, in terms of its physical structures and freedom of movement. The authentic inquiry provided a space within this context through which the individual could be autonomous. A context which enabled autonomy acted as a facilitator to re-engagement, empowering the learner to explore a task or topic that had value. Together, these acted as facilitators, enabling barriers to be navigated and overcome. Having some autonomy in an otherwise restrictive space was vital in re-engagement with education and learning as was illustrated in the case of Jack. Jack felt empowered through a sense of autonomy and was therefore motivated enough to be able to pursue the task and deal with the barriers even within secure context. However, a key to this was the relationship with the mentor (discussed in the section below).

The case study of William illustrates how a lack of autonomy can be a barrier to engagement. William did not feel he was able to express or be himself within the authentic inquiry which was led by his mentor. Consequently, William was not able to find the task to be of value or be agentic. Because he did not experience these things he was unable to negotiate the barriers of the secure context.

Autonomy seemed a necessary condition in order to enable agentic engagement as put forward by Reeve and Tseng (2012). Jack, when empowered by the conditions of autonomy was agentic in his authentic inquiry. He was able to navigate the challenges and maintained his engagement to permeate through to other aspects of his life at the secure unit, such as becoming a ‘rep’ and campaigning for better quality food. William, however, did not experience this autonomy and consequently demonstrated little agency, other than what he had shown when he was introduced to the idea of the authentic inquiry. The opportunity had appealed to him, but in practice it emerged as more of the same prescriptive approach that he had disengaged him from education and learning. In this way, autonomy presented as a barrier and a facilitator and this was linked to the mentor.

Supportive mentor

A supportive mentor emerged as an essential facilitator. Mentors were instrumental in creating the conditions of autonomy through their support in encouraging the young person

through questions or discussions. They were also vital in enabling the access to resources, such as the internet, books or stationary and time to engage in their authentic inquiry. When successful, the mentor acted as a guide, facilitator, critical friend and advocate whilst at the same time enabling the individual to be autonomous and agentic. This was evident in the case of Jack whose mentor James undertook all the characteristics of what could be described as an effective mentor.

However, the mentor could also be a barrier as illustrated in the case of William and Andrea. With William, the mentor emerged as a barrier because he needed a mentor who provided William more autonomy. On the other hand, Andrea would have benefitted from the extra support and direction. This demonstrates that a good fit between mentor and mentee was necessary if the mentor was to be a facilitator rather than a barrier. The case studies also showed how the mentor too is an active agent with their own experiences, aims and passions which are expressed within the relationship. These can be the source of the facilitating or the barrier as was the case with William.

These cases indicate the importance of relatedness in self-determination theory and how this is an important psychological need. In a learning situation, the mentor can create the conditions where the learner feels respected, valued with a sense of belonging and connection. In so doing, it connects to the emotional component of engagement. Emotional engagement has been shown to predict behavioural engagement (Skinner et al, 2008, Lee, 2014). Therefore, a supportive mentor can be a key facilitator (or barrier) to re-engaging the young offender in learning, stimulating emotional and behavioural engagement through autonomy and relatedness.

Task value

This is a term associated with the expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983). It is based on the degree to which one expects to succeed (expectancy) and the value one places on the task itself (value). In the case studies task value was an important element of the authentic inquiry, represented by the topic selected and the 'end product' produced. Both of these had to have value for the individual to engage. However, task value alone was insufficient. For example, Andrea had task value for her topic, however, the lack of a supportive mentor meant that the resources and support she needed for continued engagement were absent. Consequently, the engagement was not sustained. On the other hand, task value was a key driver for Jack, who persisted with insisting on time with his mentor in order to complete his task. However, this also showed how task value needed to be coupled with at least one other facilitator in order for it continue. In Jack's case this was his own agency.

When a task has value, there is greater chance of cognitive engagement. Within the case studies, the starting point was authentic to the learner and therefore had some intrinsic value. But the task also needed to have an expectancy of success. If this was diminished, then the task value would be reduced. This is connected to the competency need in self-determination theory because if one does not feel they can succeed in a task, then it does not meet this need. For example, Andrea abandoned her interest in the authentic inquiry topic and other lessons because her expectations of success tended to diminish. In doing so, this impacted on her competency needs. Thus, task value has an important role to play as an initial 'buy-in' to engagement but can lose its effect if the other conditions are not met which is why it can also present as a barrier.

Agency

All participants demonstrated agency by agreeing to participate. However, agency was demonstrated to varying degrees. For example, William engaged with the authentic inquiry at the compliance/behavioural level only whereas Jack demonstrated agency to the degree that he was in the driving seat of his authentic inquiry using his learning to benefit not only himself but other young people at the secure unit. This showed how agency was influenced by an individual's temperament and shaped how the individual negotiated the barriers. Jack's persistent (and demanding) manner had acted as a facilitator. However, for Andrea, her temperament had been a barrier in accessing the support she needed and William's laid back manner had meant that his mentor was able to drive the authentic inquiry in a direction that was not Williams.

It is also noteworthy, however, that when conditions of autonomy were not present, there was greater opportunity agency, as in Jack's case, suggesting an interactive relationship between an environment which fostered autonomy and consequently agency. This is relevant in the secure context in which autonomy is restricted. In restricting autonomy, agency is also restricted. For young offenders who are described as disengaged with learning, fostering conditions of autonomy in order to facilitate agency could be an important endeavour. This reflects the point of Ray and Goldspink (2009) who distinguished agency and autonomy.

These case studies demonstrate that autonomy relates to creating conditions of empowerment (e.g. through the mentor relationship). However, agency refers to the extent to which the individual will use those conditions to self-direct their energy to their own defined goal. Jack demonstrated harmony between autonomy and agency and was able to navigate the challenges including those imposed on him by the secure context. However, William and Andrea did not experience the conditions of autonomy which could have facilitated agency.

Barriers due to the secure context

The secure context had considerable impacts on the young people. These manifested in generating and exacerbating emotional reactions which had an impact on behaviour (ahmed-Shafi, 2017). Given that emotional engagement predicts behavioural engagement (Li and Lerner, 2014; Lee 2014), the secure context presented significant barriers for engaging in the authentic inquiry. In addition to the impact on emotions, the nature of the secure context also impacted on practical aspects in terms of time with their mentor and access to resources to conduct their inquiry. In all cases mentors were selected from the care rather than education staff. Therefore, the biggest barrier here came from difficulty in being timetabled to be with their mentor and for their mentor to be able to arrange access to resources. In the case of Andrea, this barrier had resulted in the authentic inquiry not even getting off the ground. For William, not being able to identify a mentor resulted in the mentor self-selecting themselves which then led to an authentic inquiry with limited authenticity.

Both these cases and others within the research demonstrated how the organisational features of the secure context, compounded by the locked and secure nature of this environment presented as a barrier to re-engaging young offenders with education and learning.

Implications for Practice

The opportunity

The opportunity for autonomy that the authentic inquiry presented is an exciting space through which to re-engage young offenders with learning. It offers an alternative approach to the model that has already failed for them in mainstream and other alternative school settings. The secure setting is also less wedded to the attainment culture found in mainstream schools and thus has a unique opportunity to be innovative in their approaches. For many young offenders it is very possible the final time in statutory education and is thereby and vital window in which to re-engage them.

Described as disengaged with learning and education where the nature of their disengagement is distinct, characterised by heightened emotions with relationships being of particular significance (ahmed Shafi, 2017), they are less likely to respond to ‘more of the same’ type of approaches as those used in mainstream settings. Thus, alternative ways of re-engaging young offenders is vital and this research shows that when alternative methods are used, re-engaging them can be relatively easy and within a short space of time, providing the conditions are met. This research has shown that embedding authentic inquiry as an integral and essential part of, for example, the induction process to the secure context,

could be an important move in re-engaging young offenders with education and learning on arrival at the setting.

The realities

In reality, the locked environment of a custodial setting presented significant challenges for education. Education within the secure context was organised in classrooms, core subjects, a formal school day and dedicated Head of Education (like mainstream school). Although the class size was based on a ratio of 1:4 in recognition of the additional needs of students, this was where the similarity with mainstream school ends.

This is because young people who enter the secure estate are disengaged with education and learning; classrooms are comprised of mixed age and mixed ability resulting in considerable pedagogical challenges for teachers, especially when they have to deliver lessons to learners with little knowledge of previous attainment or ability. Further, there was no stability in the classroom composition as young offenders arrived and left at different times with different lengths of stay, compounded by the nature of some offences which prevented learning with particular resources. Added to this is the need to organise the class according to who was getting along with who. This catalogue of issues heightens the challenges for teachers who may have no specific training to meet the needs of such learners, made yet more difficult with the high staff turnover at secure units (Jeanes, McDonald, & Simonot, 2009).

The management structure, divided along the lines of care and education, with their own particular set of agendas and outcome measures also increased inherent problems of the secure setting. This added to the complexities and impacted on the authentic inquiries which required collaboration between care and education. The authentic inquiries were located within education but needed the co-operation of the care staff and flexibility in the structure of the secure unit in order to cultivate the conditions to facilitate engagement. In all cases, the structures of the secure context presented challenges. Although some of the young people were able to use their agency to navigate these structures, most yielded to them. For William and Andrea, the structures ‘stifled’ the initial glimpses of agency they had shown. Only Jack had been able to successfully navigate these, possibly because he had a longer sentence and therefore had time to persist, but also because of his own individual agency. The management structures of the secure unit also structured relationships. Being line managed by different departments had meant that coordination had proved difficult - the impact of which had been felt in all cases.

For the authentic inquiries to facilitate re-engagement with education and learning, a more systemic, co-ordinated approach within the entire secure unit to inter-connect the teachers,

mentors and the young person would be required. This would enable staff and young people to form those much needed relationships necessary for empowering young people for re-engagement with education and learning.

The irony

The greatest irony is that despite knowing the circumstances and situations of the young offenders, the aim is still to continue to try and fit them into a (mainstream) model that has simply not worked for them. Indeed, the situation is exacerbated because this time they are locked up. The distinct nature of disengagement in young offenders and requires a different approach which recognises this and the context they are in.

Teachers did demonstrate acute awareness of the needs of the young people and recognised the need for different approaches. However, even at an individual level they did not feel able to respond to them, citing the constraints of the secure setting as the problem. In many ways, this research presented moments of frustration where to an observer, it seemed obvious what the young person needed, however none of the professionals seemed to be responding in a way that appropriately addressed the situation and in some cases actually worsened a situation. For example, teachers recognised that Andrea needed lots of help and support, but still attributed her behaviour to misconduct as opposed to a reaction to the continued mismatch of her needs with the support offered.

Teachers and practitioners usually enter such a profession in their desire to 'make a difference'. However, somewhere along the journey, the original passion perhaps wore down, perhaps because of the challenges of the secure setting, the young people themselves or maybe a sense of disempowerment at not being able to 'make the difference' in the way envisioned. Whatever, the reason, the outcome was that staff were not as responsive to the needs of these young people - instead trying to fit them into the structures of the secure context, thereby exacerbating some of the issues.

It was notable that no participant in this research selected education staff as their mentors. It suggests that teachers were not viewed as being interested in what the young person might want to learn about It further demonstrated the dis-connect and disengagement between young offenders and formal learning.

Teachers need to reassess their crucial and valuable role in re-engaging young offenders, perhaps acting more as mentors as a practical application of their 'teacher identity'.

The lost opportunities

These issues were also apparent in the case studies. For example, with William there were several lost opportunities to engage him. Neither the teacher nor the mentor took the time to understand William as an individual, who he was, why he thought the way he did. Had they

done this, they would have found that given the opportunity to explore what he wanted to, William could have excelled. This potential was clearly demonstrated in William's first interview, the teacher interviews, observations and field notes. Instead, William was further exposed to the same hegemonic thinking that he was challenging in his mind. Therefore, in many ways, his lack of re-engagement was not entirely surprising. William's case illustrates the need to develop relationships comprised of trust rather than relationships defined entirely by the roles imposed by the secure custodial structures. Introducing William to the idea of being able to explore his own thinking through the authentic inquiry ultimately felt unethical because the promise was unfulfilled – ultimately serving to reinforce his negative views of society.

Potential was also evident in Andrea who was described by staff as difficult and hard to manage. When given the opportunity, Andrea demonstrated that she could be re-engaged and relatively easily. However, again, it was evident that the time taken to understand Andrea and her goals, fears and aspirations was absent. This resulted in frustration and anger on the part of Andrea, expressed in her difficult behaviour. Even when a teacher recognised this, opportunities to try and develop a relationship were not taken, but instead difficulties were accepted as an inevitable feature of the secure context. The authentic inquiry offered hope, but which was also unfulfilled, representing another time when Andrea felt let-down. This was one of the many ethical challenge posed in researching within this environment and with this particular participant group.

Jack was similarly described as lazy, however as he seized the opportunity to take on the authentic inquiry, it was immediately evident that he was energetic and motivated. It could be that as Jack had been the only young person who had come from a mainstream school and situated within his family, he perhaps had not yet become as disillusioned with people letting him down.

The potential

This research has highlighted the importance of relationships for young people who are incarcerated, removed from their homes, family and familiarity. Adding this to the difficulties and challenges described earlier in this chapter, makes for grim reading. This work, however, demonstrated that young people in custody can be re-engaged with education and learning when given an opportunity and with the right conditions. It demonstrates that young people continue to have hope despite the circumstances and will respond to opportunities if they are perceived as genuine.

Whilst authentic inquiry is not a silver bullet, it does offer several gains in addition to re-engagement with education and learning. For example, ascertaining educational levels

earlier through the authentic inquiry, rather than a battery of tests as is currently the practice. In so doing, by the time the young offender enters the 'school' at the secure setting, they are in a better position to engage, have formed a relationship with their mentor and teachers. In turn, they will have greater knowledge of their educational level in order to maintain a measure of continuity in their education. These early relationships could also play key roles in managing the emotions which were shown to be heightened within the secure context. Emotions and relationships characterised the nature of disengagement in young offenders (ahmed Shafi, 2017). The relationships at the secure unit had the potential to either exacerbate or manage heightened emotions. Thus, understanding and responding to these are an important aspect of successfully re-engaging young offenders with education and learning.

Conclusions

There is considerable evidence that young offenders' experiences of school and learning is disruptive and unfulfilling. It suggests that education in secure settings must do more than simply their minimum legal obligations of education. Time in custody is an ideal space to provide an engaging high quality, relevant and meaningful education provision before transitioning back into the community. Young offenders recognise that education carries the prospect for change and demonstrate willingness to engage when given the opportunity.

The insight from these individual case studies of young offenders in a secure custodial setting is a breakthrough in new knowledge. Findings showed that re-engaging even the most disengaged learner within a relatively short space of time was possible, thereby representing a vital opportunity within the secure context. However, there are conditions that need to be met in order to foster this and include the need for a task to have value, to provide space for autonomy, to enable agency, for there to a supportive mentor and for the secure context to be facilitative in terms of its institutional structure. However, changes to the systems within the secure unit and staffing arrangements are needed to enable the authentic inquiries to really benefit those who undertake them. These changes could be implemented within existing structures of individual secure units without the need for mass financial investment in resources. In so doing, relationships between staff (care and education) are brought into sharp focus in terms of the importance they have in supporting the management of emotions. Emotions and relationships emerged as crucial elements in the nature of disengagement in young offenders. Attending to these creates the conditions which foster re-engagement with education and learning.

Notes

This Chapter describes the findings from all Phases of the research, using the 3 of the 5 case studies from Phase II as illustrations. For further information on the research see this Research Briefing or contact the author on ashafi@glos.ac.uk

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