Shafi, Adeela ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6265-5024 (2020) The impact of the secure custodial setting on re-engaging incarcerated children with education and learning - a case study in the UK. International Journal of Educational Development, 76. p. 102190. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102190

**Children's Education in Secure Custodial Settings:
Towards a Global Sharing of Effective Policy and Practice**

The impact of the secure custodial setting on re-engaging incarcerated children with education and learning - a case study in the UK

1. Abstract

As many as 90% of incarcerated children and young people enter the secure setting disengaged from education. The nature of the secure custodial setting compounds the complex and challenging needs of the children, though efforts to understand this are limited. This paper reports on an ethnographic case study in one secure children's home in England. Findings show that children can be re-engaged with education, relatively easily within a short space of time, given the right conditions. However, the secure setting was a defining feature, shaping the extent of this engagement. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendation made.

2. Introduction

More than a million children worldwide are incarcerated at any one time (UNICEF, 2008). In countries where the age of criminal responsibility is lower than the school leaving age, it means that children serving custodial sentences, like all other children, are entitled to education (United Nations Charter for the Rights of Children UNCRC, Article 28). This often creates a paradox, because it brings into sharp contrast the punitive and welfare elements of youth justice systems across the world (Goldson, 2019), where on the one hand, society aims to punish the child for breaking the law, but at the same time must provide welfare and education for the child as their human right. This tension is the subject of much debate and shapes the overall provisions for children in custody (Mclaughlin, Muncie, & Hughes, 2001; Muncie, 2008; Muncie, 2009; Case, 2015; Goldson, 2019).

The evidence suggests that experiences of education and formal learning for children who come into conflict with the law tend to be disruptive and unfulfilling (Cripps and Summerfield, 2012; Graham, 2015; Little, 2015). Many of them become disengaged and disaffected early in their educational careers (Ball & Connolly, 2000; Farrington et al., 2006; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Kirk & Sampson, 2013; Little, 2015; Graham, Van Bergen, & Sweller, 2015; *Author*, 2018). This is amongst a context of decline in overall student engagement in the last few decades, particularly in secondary schools in the Western world (Deakin-Crick, 2012; Fredricks, 2013) and which has heightened attention in this field. This decline is characterised by low achievement, high dropout rates and high levels of reported boredom (Newberry & Duncan, 2001; Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016). Children who offend tend

to have all of these characteristics (low achievement, high dropout rates and boredom) (Little, 2015, *Author*, 2019) with delinquency linked to being bored at school (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). This is alongside other disadvantages such as complex and challenging backgrounds, emotional and behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties placing them in a highly vulnerable position in society with heightened risk of reoffending. Seeking ways to re-engage children during custodial sentences is an important endeavour, not least because of their rights, but also for society in general. The research on the impact of incarceration on children's engagement with education and learning has not been explored and the literature which examines this from the perspectives of children is even more limited. This paper therefore argues that the impact of the secure custodial context is significant in terms of the dis/engagement of incarcerated children. This paper reports on an ethnographic case study conducted in a secure children's home in England with 16 children, designed to re-engage them with education and learning whilst in custody. The study found that it was possible to re-engage children in custody and relatively easily, given certain conditions. This has implications for policy makers and other decision makers on education for incarcerated children.

The paper begins with a brief exploration of the educational experiences of incarcerated children in Section 2 followed by an overview of the background and context of children in conflict with the law in Section 3. Section 4 outlines the study itself and Section 5 presents the findings from the two phases of research whereas Section 6 discusses the findings in relation to the literature and Section 7 concludes and looks forward by recommending what can be done to address some of the issues identified in this study. Firstly, it is important to define what is meant by dis/engagement as theoretical constructs.

1.1 Dis/Engagement

Engagement with education and learning is a key contributor to learning and academic success (Crick, 2012; Fredricks, Filsecker, & Lawson, 2016). It has protective benefits for behaviours such as truanting, substance abuse, and offending (Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Wang & Fredricks, 2014) and has consequently received an explosion of research interest in recent years (Fredricks, Filsecker & Lawson, 2016). Engagement has is a complex multidimensional construct consisting of three main components, the behavioural, the cognitive and the emotional (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). The emotional component has demonstrated to be a key predictor of behavioural engagement (Skinner et al, 2008; Li & Lerner, 2013). This is significant because emotions have been shown to be an important element in shaping how children in custody respond to education and learning (Author, 2019). More recently, a distinction has been made between the concept of engagement and disengagement (Earl et al, 2017; *Author*, 2019), indicating that these are not pole opposites of the same construct. This is evidenced by the different strategies needed for learners who are experiencing

low engagement compared to those who are disengaged (see *Author*, 2019). Disengagement can manifest in active and passive ways (Earl, et al 2017) in the same individual, indicating the complexity of disengagement and subsequent strategies to re-engage (*Author*, 2019). This study aims to understand educational experiences in an incarcerated context and particularly how this context may impact re-engagement. The principles of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems approach could help illuminate issues that may affect engagement not apparent in existing studies on education in custodial settings.

2 Educational experiences of incarcerated children

The number of children who offend that have dropped out of school stands at over 90% (Ministry of Justice, England & Wales, 2018) with young people entering custody having literacy levels equivalent to that of much younger children (Hopkins, Clegg, & Stackhouse, 2016). Up to 90% of 15-17-year-olds coming into custody have been excluded from school at some point and many have not been to school since they were 14 years old (Murray, 2012; Little, 2015). Incarcerated children and young people also have higher levels of learning disabilities (Chitsabesan & Bailey, 2007) at 23-32% whereas it is 2-4% in the general population (Hughes et al, 2018). These figures therefore suggest that the educational experiences of children in conflict with the law are poor which, coupled with additional difficulties, can make engagement with educational opportunities in custody challenging.

The lack of recognition and responses to the complex problems continue whilst incarcerated (Dowse et al, 2014; (Ungar, Liebenberg, & Ikeda, 2012) and the subsequent fragmented service (Lanskey, 2011; 2015) means that the education and training provided in a custodial setting does little to change the pattern. Little (2015) argues that time in custody is an opportunity to provide more positive educational experiences to help to overcome previous negative experiences. However, engaging disengaged children has to be an important first step in any intervention, be that in custody or in the community (Case & Haines, 2016). Acknowledging the importance of the secure custodial context and its potential impact on the children has to be a significant element of that.

2.1 Education in Youth Custody

Previous research has suggested that education and training in custodial settings (in Western settings) is fragmented and of a lower quality than mainstream schooling (Frolander-Ulf & Yates, 2001). 'Instructors' rather than qualified teachers are more likely to be employed as prison educators contributing to a marginal status (Garland, McCarty, & Zhao, 2009) and high staff turnover (Jeanes, McDonald, & Simonot, 2009). Staff do not always see the fruits of their efforts due to the transitional nature of prison (Sander et al, 2010) and thus teacher expectations can also be low (Houchins et al, 2009) with limited educational aspirations in the young people (Oser, 2006).

Much of the extant literature on education in custody (predominantly from the US) tends to be underpinned by a punitive ideology and a deficit/correctional model. The focus tends to be on evaluating interventions to improve specific skills, such as reading or writing (Krezmien & Mulcahy, 2008; Houchins et al 2009; Sandler et al, 2013; Wexler et a, 2014). A synthesis of reading interventions for incarcerated adolescents in US juvenile correctional facilities was conducted by Wexler et al (2014) who reviewed 16 studies between 1972 and 2012. The varying methodologies limited the number of studies, eventually consisting of 7 that employed an experimental or quasi-experimental design, 4 single-case designs and 5 single-group designs. Despite the 40-year timespan, much of the interventions were focused on behavioural control (managing behaviour and ensuring compliance to rules) rather than academic skills. Wexler et al's review found that interventions that involved, for example, peer-tutoring or small group interventions yielded better results in terms of their 'crime-reducing' effect. Interventions that were more targeted and explicit, either in terms of the overall aims or the needs of specific groups, had the greatest effect size. They also found that these academic interventions were similar to those shown to work in mainstream school settings. Based on these findings, they claimed that interventions that work in mainstream school should also be adopted in custodial school provision. Another review by Steele, Bozick and Davis (2016) of US studies also pointed towards the more personal approach to 'correctional education' as having greater success as do Behan (2014) and Knight (2014). Sfard and Prusak (2009) point to the importance of connecting to the learner's identity and lifestory.

The limited success of the specific 'interventions' suggests that it is too simplistic to assume that a reading intervention will yield positive results without consideration of context, the complex backgrounds or the additional educational needs, which means they often need further support above the intervention. Incarcerated children are unlikely to engage unproblematically with educational opportunities. Further, incarcerated young people are not similar to pupils in mainstream school as for many, school experiences have not been positive (Graham 2015, 2016; Little, 2015). Therefore, to suggest that doing yet more of the same and claim that it could be successful is questionable. Whilst Wexler et al (2014) and Steel et al (2016) demonstrated that interventions focused on relationships were more effective, the perspective of learners was notably absent in many of the reviewed studies. Understanding how incarcerated children can be re-engaged could serve to help tailor the education provision to meet their needs and interests.

Other research (also in the US) by Houchins et al (2009) found that the secure context itself was a barrier to learning. They identified how the chaotic nature of the secure education unit meant that it was difficult to provide a structure that facilitated learning. Other barriers included meeting the diversity of needs, educational experiences and the length of sentence. This study suggested that the

secure context should be a focus for intervention rather than a singular focus on a 'correctional' approach, which places the deficit within the learner. However, Houchins et al also did not include data from the children, although they surveyed the teachers. Therefore, in the light of limited research which focuses on children in custody, this current study focuses on the educational experiences of children as a voice absent from the already sparse literature.

3   Background and context

Most of the structures and forms of youth justice (and custody) in any given society reflect the dominant political and ideological debates of the time ((Goshe, 2015). This is often reflected in the age of criminal responsibility whereby the lower the age of criminal responsibility the more likely a jurisdiction is to take a penal view (Goldson, 2019). Ages of criminal responsibility range from 6-21 years across the world and this paper is focused on England and Wales where the age of criminal responsibility is 10 years. There are currently three main types of custody for children and young people, typically dependent on age; 10-15 year olds are placed in Secure Children's Homes (SCH) and over 15s are usually placed in Young Offender Institutions (YOI) or Secure Training Centres (STC). As children and young people in England and Wales must be in some form of education and training until 19 years, there is a Statutory Duty for custodial settings to provide 30 hours of education provision per week for the circa 1000 children and young people in custody. Whilst this number is a significant drop since the 2000s (around 3,000 in 2008) (Bateman & Wizgell, 2019) it means that those children receiving custodial sentences are convicted of the most serious crimes and the most persistent re-offenders with the most challenging and complex of backgrounds (Taylor, 2016).

## 3.1   Complex and challenging backgrounds

Studies and reports have consistently linked economic deprivation and the prevalence or risk of delinquency (Gottfredson & Hirshi, 1990; Farrington, 2007, 2016; Agnew, 2015; Kawalerowicz & Biggs, 2015; Rekker et al., 2015). Children and young people who offend are more likely to have parents who have been incarcerated (Farrington et al, 2016) and more likely to have been exposed to drugs and alcohol abuse (Manly et al, 2013). This leads to a higher prevalence of drug and alcohol misuse, higher rates of mental health problems and higher levels of learning difficulties (Kroll, et al 2007; Chitsabesen et al, 2007, 2016; Hughes, 2012; Hughes et al, 2015). Additional emotional problems such as anxiety and depression (Abram et al, 2003; Lader, Singleton & Metzer, 2000), behavioural problems (Pliszka et al, 2000; Young et al, 2015) and language and communication difficulties (Snow et al, 2016) are also more prevalent. There are higher rates of co-morbidity in the prevalence of these problems, which also tend to be related to disrupted attachments and other traumatic life events (Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Gudjonsson et al, 2014).

In sum, the short life of a young person who comes into conflict with the law can be fraught with complex problems both circumstantial and individual to them. It has been argued that incarceration is a punishment for circumstance rather than a crime since the complex backgrounds of children and young people who come into conflict with the law expose them to situations where they have limited choice or control of the life-paths they will follow (Arditti & Parkman, 2011).

3.2 The importance of context in education and learning

The complex and challenging background of incarcerated children and young people indicate the significance of context, consistently shown to be vital for a young person's education and learning. The bio-ecological (ecosystems) model established by Bronfenbrenner (1979) revolutionised the study of human development by focusing on context and has been applied across a range of disciplines including psychology, biology, education and criminology. Its major feature included the concept of a range of nested systems centring around any individual or organism. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) seminal bio-ecological model of human development highlights this and its major feature is the concept of a range of nested systems around an individual or organism, with the most proximal system having the most direct and immediate influence (see Figure 1): the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem (and a later added chronosystem).

*Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979)*
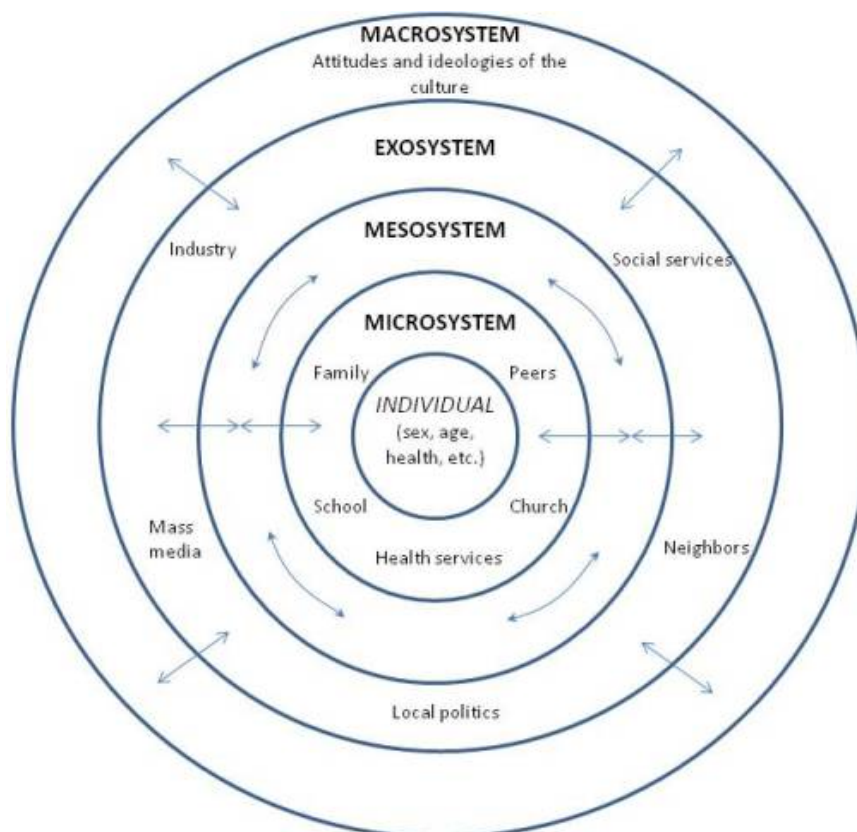
In terms of education, the microsystem is concerned with the immediate (social) environment in which a child is situated with the most direct impact on the child. The microsystem includes parents, siblings, friends, teachers, extended family – all those with whom the child has immediate, direct and day-to-day interactions. The mesosystem involves the interaction between those actors who are in the microsystem but interactions may not necessarily involve the child directly, though still have an influence on them. The macrosystem is further away from the individual and includes the wider community, such as school, church, community, local authorities – some would also include socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture and other features of the wider environment that have an influence on the meso and microsystems. The child is not likely to have direct interaction with the macrosystem. The chronosystem refers to the time and historical era within which a child is living and how that impacts on their life. For example, the impact of technology in current times very much shapes the child's interactions at the micro, meso and macro levels. Using the bio-ecological model enables the examining of the immediate secure custodial environment but allows recognition of wider contextual factors. The microsystems for a child in custody would include other children in custody, the care staff and the education staff. In the UK context, families would not be part of the microsystem of a child serving a custodial sentence, but in other places such as Spain or Finland, this would be different (Hart, 2015). The mesosystem would refer to, for example, interactions between the care/education staff and other agencies within the youth justice system. The macrosystem would refer to the wider cultural system, policymaking and political landscape that shape what happens in the custodial setting.

4   The Study

An ethnographic case study using interviews, participant observations and field notes were the main sources of generating data, over two phases (see Figure 2). The research site was one of the fourteen SCHs in England and Wales and housed up to 24 boys and girls at any one time. The SCH had full provision for 30 hours of formal education with dedicated Maths, English and Science teachers, instructors for vocational subjects and extra-curricular activities, as well as a full-time Head Teacher. Care staff were responsible for the day-to-day care of the children as well as security, administration and management.

Figure 2 Phases of research
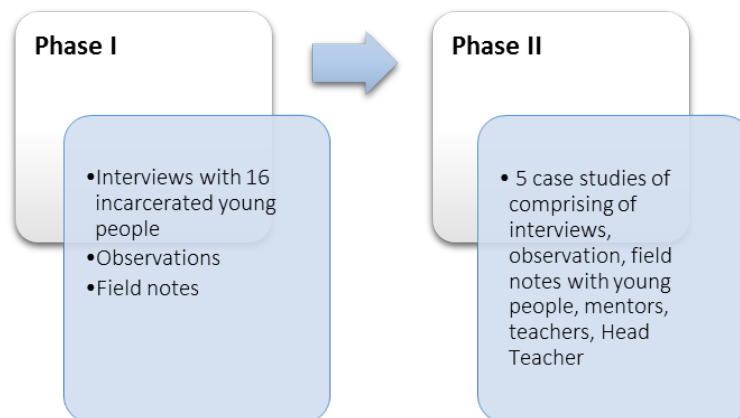
Phase I was designed to glean the educational experiences of incarcerated children both prior to incarceration and whilst serving their sentence. Sixteen children participated in this phase. Five of these went on to Phase II as case studies whereby each participant was involved in an authentic inquiry (AI) intervention as a means to re-engage them with education and learning. AI is pedagogical tool that has been helpful for disengaged learners (Jaros & Deakin Crick, 2007; Deakin-Crick, 2012). It starts with a concrete place, object or experience that is important to the learner. Mentors, selected by the participants, play an important role in facilitating the AI. Through the AI process learners produce, for example, an artefact, in the form of a poster, presentation, artwork, essay or poem relevant to the curriculum. AI connects the learner's interest with formal education, providing a framework for data collection at various points. Interviews with three teachers, four mentors and the Head Teacher also informed the case studies findings and are reported elsewhere (see *Author*, 2018a). There were a range of methodological and ethical considerations that were specific to young offenders in custody due to their 'doubly vulnerable' (Moore & Miller, 1999) status and are discussed in a separate dedicated paper (*Author*, 2018b). Data from both Phases informed the findings reported here, which focus in on a specific new finding related to the secure custodial context. Data were analysed using NVivo software employing Braun and Clark's (2013) thematic analysis. This process resulted in several overall themes, producing a complex arrangement of codes representing the data. The number of references to a theme and the number of participants that referred to them were used as an indicator of the strength of a theme.

5   The Findings

5.1   Phase 1 – Educational Experiences

The themes from Phase I were labelled as (i) Being Locked Up; (ii) Educational Experiences; (iii) About Learning and (iv) Underlying Values. *Being Locked Up* emerged as a defining theme, shaping how participants perceived their educational experiences during incarceration and before. The relationships between the themes are presented in the figure below.

Figure 3 Themes in the data
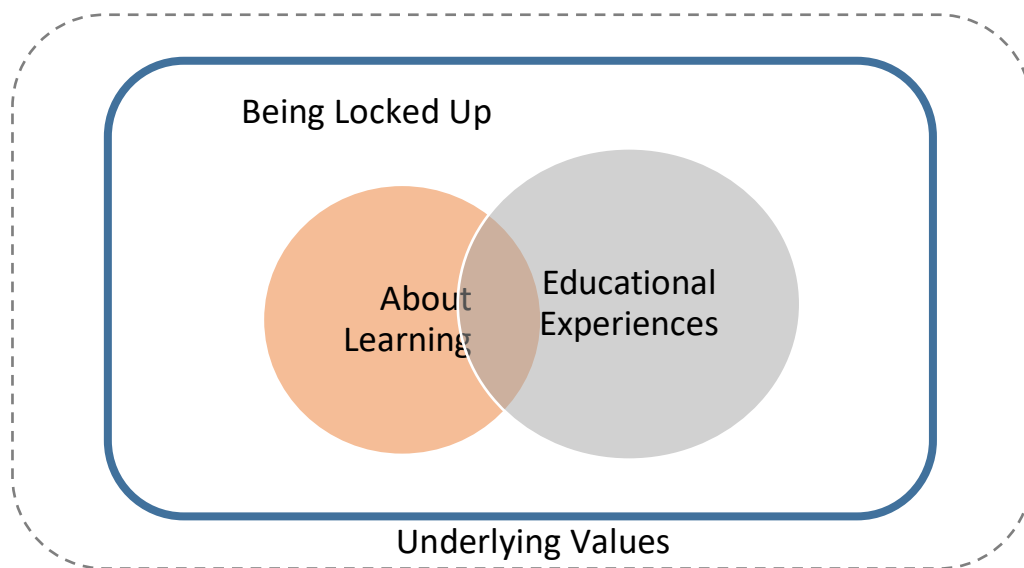
5.1.1   Being Locked Up

Being Locked Up (represented by the solid line in Figure 3) shaped how participants responded to learning opportunities and situations. The data within this theme are 'unpacked' in Figure 4 below as a thematic network (Attride-Stirling, 2001) where 'organising themes' are presented clockwise around the 'global theme' in order of quantitative reference. Whilst qualitative content was the focus, quantification offered a useful way of ordering the information and in understanding the strength of a particular theme.

Figure 4 The theme of Being Locked Up
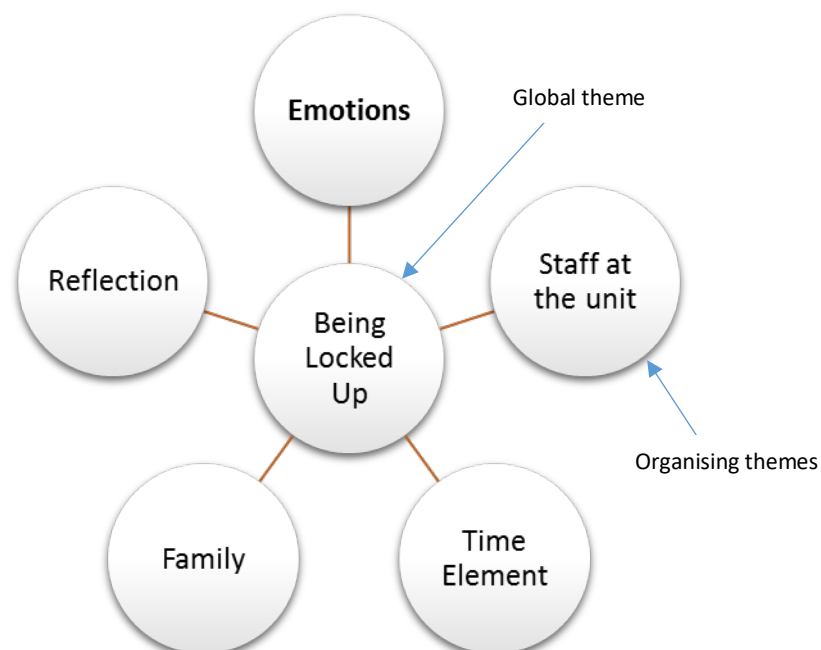
5.1.1.1 Emotions

The organising theme of emotions was by far the strongest in number of references (46 from 11 participants, making up almost a third of all references to the global theme of Being Locked Up (161 in total). This indicated the impact that being locked up had on the emotions of the children. The data showed that these emotions impacted the other (organising) themes, shaping interactions with staff at the unit, how they thought about time, their family and the degree of reflection. The following quotes reflect some of these connections.

> '…wouldn't you find it annoying if you were f*ing locked up all your b*tard day? (Tabitha, aged 14) (Being Locked Up)

> 'Staff just dock points for jokes…it winds me up' (Cameron, aged 14) (Staff)

> 'Just knowing you've got to be here for like a really long time and then… Like I'm 16 now obviously like it's just the end of my teenage years isn't it?' (Jack, aged 16) (Time)

> 'Just long is all I really think about. I try not to really think about this place.' (Wayne, aged 14,) (Time and Being Locked Up)

> 'It's hard knowing that like going from like your family, what you call it? What you call it…family environment, coming to somewhere you don't know, somewhere like this' (Will, aged 16) (Family and Being Locked Up)

> 'Well, it's the best place I could be at the moment but I'm obviously not happy' (Jeremy, aged 15) (Reflection)

5.1.2 Educational Experiences

The overall theme of educational experiences referred to experiences primarily within the secure setting, but were notably shaped by mainstream and other educational experiences prior to incarceration. One of the key findings that surfaced was how participants distinguished between education as a way of learning and potentially bettering oneself whereas school was a means to deliver education. However, education and learning was considered boring where boredom was not just a static event but connected to 'messing about'.

> 'I just always wanted to mess about or just not be there because it's just really boring.' (Jeremy aged 16)

Despite reporting mainstream school experiences as boring, there was a sense of nostalgia about mainstream school. It was considered higher quality with more structure, boundaries, support and greater opportunities for learning - the 'gold standard' of schooling and as Andrea (aged 17) described '…for normal kids'.

> 'Like, I regret, like, massively you know, leaving mainstream school'. (John aged 17)

Reflecting on their educational experiences at the secure unit, themes that arose were labelled as a lack of structure; no point being in school; a lack of support for education at the secure unit; restrictions on learning; lack of activities with one participant who made reference to enjoying lessons. These are presented in <mark>Figure 5</mark> below (the brackets refer to how many participants referred to the theme and the number of references made).

Themes under Educational at the secure unit
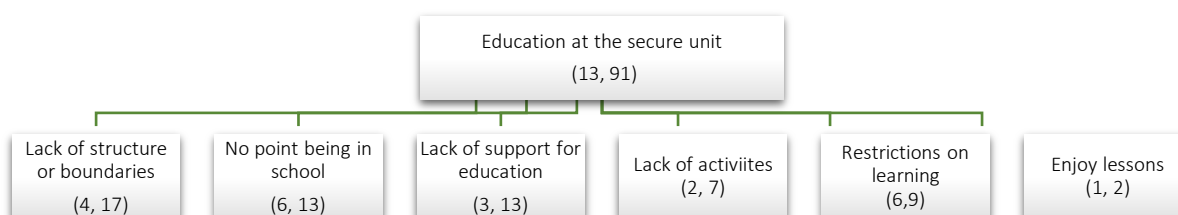
Although participants were of compulsory school age, attending lessons was voluntary and it was not unusual for pupils to stay in their rooms during the school day or return to their rooms when they wanted. In some respects, being able to refuse the education contributed to the perceived lack of structure and boundaries within the school at the secure unit. It was interpreted as a lack of support for education, thereby reducing its value.

> 'Sometimes they don't even bring you to school. They'll just leave you or let you stay in your room' (Andrea, aged 17)

There was also further reference to the quality of education provided. Participants seemed to value structured lessons and lack of choice, even if they did not like complying:

> 'Obviously here education is not really education – it isn't really the best quality. You know, so you just… don't really do much. So before I can go in there I know that I'm not really going to engage in stuff, just to sit down' (Josh, aged 17)

Josh and other participants, indicated in several ways that more structure in lessons and firm boundaries were what defined quality.

> 'You'll come in lesson and they'll go, 'What do you want do?' and you'll be like, 'What have you got?' and they'll be, 'Oh we're doing such and such, and if I can't do those, they'll just say, 'Oh just do some drawing or something.' (Andrea, aged 17)

> 'In the out [referring to mainstream school] it's more obviously normal kids, so you're more likely to learn there. (Josh, aged 17)

The above point suggested that Josh (as others) does not see himself or the other children at the secure unit as 'normal'. The perceived lack of support for education, lack of structure and boundaries

or restrictions on learning in many ways adds to this perception. Given these perceptions, the children considered education at the secure unit to have little value.

> 'Just me not being bothered, if I am tired or I think do I need to know this? So I won't do it.' (Salem, aged 16)

> 'I'm not doing this school for f…king no reason. What's the point?' (Tabitha, aged 14)

Particular activities were prohibited for certain children due to their offences, meaning other students were also denied the opportunity.

> 'The negative things for me would be in what we can do because of where we are, and we get risk assessed for certain things because certain kids have – their crimes interfere with that. So, if we had an arsonist we couldn't get out the Bunsen burner and some science stuff or if we had someone that stabs people we couldn't get out sharp like cutting or in art you use those tools. So there's limitations on everyone.' (Jamie, aged 15)

Interestingly only one participant made reference to enjoying school at the secure unit and it was included to provide a contrast.

This main theme demonstrated that education provision at the secure unit had little value because it lacked quality, structure and opportunity and not for 'normal kids'.

5.1.3   About Learning

Three basic themes emerged from the global theme About Learning, labelled as: Self as a Learner, Teachers and Peers, which are shown in the thematic network in <mark>Figure 6</mark> below.

<mark>Figure 6</mark> *About Learning*
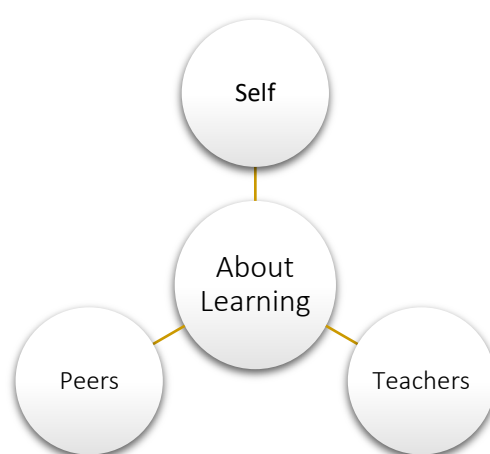
Interestingly, the themes all related to the social situation, itself shaped by the context rather than learning material, subject or topic. Eleven participants talked about their own interests making 46 references, suggesting awareness of interests rather than an aimlessness. However, what was absent was the sense of any planning of what to do with that interest. The lack of support in planning and

channelling interests into something meaningful can be a reason for not engaging in education (*Author* 2014).

> 'I don't know. A bricklayer or something. Mechanic or something like that.' (Cameron, aged 14)

Findings showed that participants were able to articulate their interests but further support was needed to channel the interest into something productive.

5.1.3.1   Self as a learner

References to self were made by 13 participants 94 times, placing the self as quite central in the learning process. There were 124 references by 14 participants on the perceived barriers to learning. These were put into themes and labelled as Messing About, Challenging Tasks, Not Seeking Support, Non-Persistence in Tasks and Not Asking Questions. These themes demonstrated how the young person was well aware of themselves as a learner, their barriers to learning and their facilitators. For example, messing about was a term coined by the participants themselves and referenced 40 times by 11 participants, corroborated by field notes and in-class observations. Messing about is a reflection of active behavioural disengagement (Fredericks et al, 2004; Earl et al, 2017), characterised by animated behaviours. The 'messing about' often resulted in a disrupted lesson for all and with only 4 pupils in a class, it was easy to disrupt and disintegrate a class within minutes. They often linked it to when they felt bored or if a task was challenging and risked revealing limitations, then they would mess about to cover it up.

> '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)

This shows how not revealing a perceived weakness was important and that messing about was a strategy for dealing with this. In so doing, the young person was in control of the 'messing about'.

5.1.3.2   Teachers

Teachers were considered important with 75 references from 11 participants and indicated they were quite dependent on teachers.

> 'Because if the teacher gives you positive comments: you can do it, come on. It makes you think you can, even if you can't. It makes you do it.' (Andrea, aged 17)

A perceived lack of attention or support from teachers easily led to annoyance and resentment often due to the other challenges, such as (undiagnosed) learning difficulties (Hughes, et al, 2012) which meant that they needed additional support.

However, reference to teachers who went beyond 'the call of duty' were well remembered and held in high regard.

'He [teacher] helped me through a lot of problems. I committed a lot of crime, and he stopped me from coming here earlier. I would've come here on maybe four or five occasions. Quite serious crimes, but he stopped me.' (Damian, aged 14)

Teachers had an important role to play in learning and the relationship was crucial. If it was successful it could cultivate learning, but if unsuccessful contributed to the challenges. This connected to the importance of emotions in engagement (Fredericks et al, 2004). Relationships with teachers (and consequently the learning environment) presented a key point of intervention as well as a protective factor against disengagement (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005).

5.1.3.3 Peers

Peers were referenced 65 times by 13 participants, placing this organising theme almost as important as teachers (75 references by 11 sources) when considered against the number of references. The role of peers in learning was two-way.

'Peers can work both ways. They can help or they can disrupt.' (Damian, aged, 14)

The data reiterated how the social context and the relationships within it were important in the learning of children with custodial sentences, reinforcing Fredericks (2004, 2014; 2016) notion of emotional engagement.

5.1.4 Underlying Values

In the eyes of society, those who break the law perhaps are perceived as not sharing the same values (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011). Questions were designed to explore the underlying values to understand participants' views on life, the future and the purpose of education. Understanding underlying values could contribute to developing strategies for re-engagement with learning.

Data showed that participants seemed to have 'conformist' or traditional values on education and family life. For example, getting a good education was considered important to obtaining a good job which then contributed to getting a home and building a family – with more than one participant mentioning a mortgage.

'Yeah… because if you have a good job then you feel largely good'.

When prompted on what a good job was, Will replied:

'Working in a bank.'

William believed in the concept of education to get a 'respectable' job, which contributed one's self esteem. Almost all participants saw themselves in stable family lives, relationships and jobs in just 5 or 10 years into the future. This revealed much in terms of their concept of time where 5 or 10 years was so far in the future that it was bound to be dramatically different and quite aspirational.

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 basics like… Yeah like normality.' (Josh, aged 17)

'In ten years' time I'll be 24…uh… I don't know. Kids, wife, good house, good money. Loads of things.' (Wayne, aged 14)

These contrasts with the findings of Oser (2006) which suggested that young offenders have low aspirations. On enabling them to imagine the future, aspirations were not so limited, though the parameters were determined by their idea of 'respectability'. This was most likely because a wider range of possibilities which life might hold were not evident to them.

5.2 Phase II – Case Studies

Phase II of this study analysed the data across all five case studies (Jeremy, Jack, Bradley, Andrea and William) for themes emerging as a whole. This Phase demonstrated that it was possible to re-engage all participants with authentic inquiry within a relatively short space of time, however the secure context and its regime had caused significant barriers for completing the AIs. It connected back to the theme of being locked up which shaped how participants responded to learning opportunities. For example, Jeremy (aged 16) eventually withdrew from his AI due to lack of access to resources, despite his initial excitement. For Andrea (aged 17), the lack of time with her mentor led to her eventual withdrawal, also despite her initial engagement. William (aged 16) too suffered a delayed start due to not being able to have time with his mentor. Jack (aged 16) was also delayed for the same reason, though his own persistence enabled him to continue - as was the case with Bradley (aged 14). It is noteworthy that Bradley and Jack completing their authentic inquiries was largely down to their own determination and a positive mentoring relationship, which enabled them to navigate the structural issues.

The nature of the authentic inquiries meant that choosing one's own mentor was important. This however, resulted in challenges in terms of staffing and timetabling. This 'structural' issue impacted on the communication and collaboration of care and education staff in facilitating and communicating the authentic inquiry. It also impacted on the young person's communication of the authentic inquiry with teachers thereby isolating its benefits. The lack of collaboration between the different lines of management were apparent in all the different perspectives from all Phases and was shown to illuminate the 'tensions' between care and education staff.

5.2.1 Teachers' perspectives

As part of the data collection for Phase II, teachers were asked to consider how they might re-engage children if they had free rein with planning education. Data referred to constraints and the unmet needs of the children.

5.2.1.1 Practical constraints

Lesson objectives and the limitations of the secure custodial setup were highlighted as constraints, particularly lessons with four learners in a classroom but with very basic knowledge of their previous attainment. Classes were usually of mixed ability and mixed ages bringing with it a medley of previous educational experiences. Compounding the pedagogical challenges were the behavioural challenges of individual learners and a continually changing class composition, based on who the children and young people were getting along with on that day. This uncertainty made planning lessons exceptionally challenging and meeting the needs of individual learners particularly difficult. It was notable that teachers attributed learner disengagement to a range of factors but neither of these referred to themselves as teachers.

5.2.1.2 Unmet needs

Teachers were aware of the unmet needs of their pupils, psychological and emotional. Teachers also believed that pupils needed to be challenged in accordance to their ability. However, the education setup did not have enough resources to meet individual needs.

Teachers also indicated that learners needed space to explore and reflect, but did not agree that learners should be able to return to their rooms on choice. Rather, school should reflect mainstream school where the expectation of learning and behaviour are high. The children also indicated that lessons should have greater structure and clear aims.

In summary, it seemed that the teachers did not feel empowered in attempting to address the needs of children, indicated by the absence in discussing their own role within this. This data also indicated how teachers themselves felt constrained by the secure context.

5.2.2 Head Teacher Perspective

The Head Teacher perspective enabled insight from a leader's perspective into the challenges and issues of education in a secure custodial context. The following thematic network in Figure 7 summarises the global themes that emerged from this data.

Figure 7 Thematic network of the global themes from the Head Teacher data
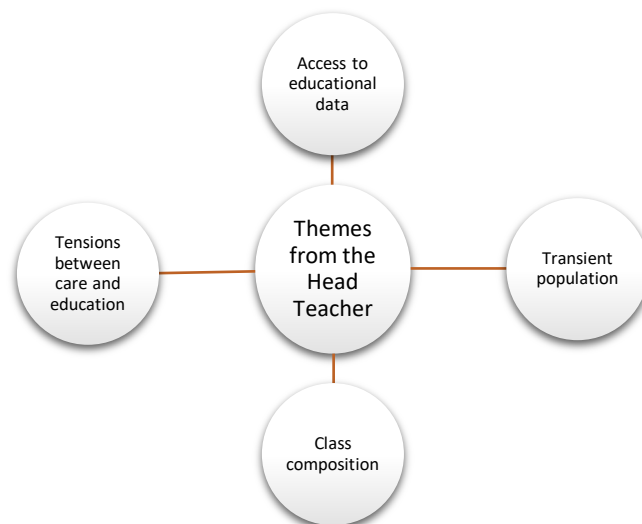
5.2.2.1   Access to previous educational data

Rarely did a young person arrive with any education information and the first few days were spent testing and assessing current ability level, risk assessment and group interaction. For this, the young person was placed in 'Induction' session where there was no formal education, thereby shaping early educational experience (and expectations) for the young person at the secure unit.   This impacted on the young person's early educational experiences at the secure setting and as we saw in Phase I data, shaped behaviour and interactions.

5.2.2.2   A transient population

The very nature of a secure custodial setting is that the population is transient. The average length of stay at the secure unit was 107 days. When combined with the challenges of accessing previous educational data, it made providing a coherent and consistent educational experience at the secure unit especially difficult. The Head Teacher pointed out that it was difficult to set goals in terms of gaining accreditation for the young person due to the uncertain nature of their stay, for example, the prospects of early release or movement to another secure unit. Further, the prospect of ensuring that provisions were made for completion on release were also slim. This made planning for the young person to make meaningful use of the time at the secure unit challenging.

This data highlighted how the secure unit is impacted upon by the decisions (or indecisions) of external agencies. In other words, the secure unit context is dynamic, ever moving and changing with many (internal and external) causal powers at work.

5.2.2.3   Class composition

Each class consisted of four learners of mixed ability and mixed age and often up to four years behind their schooling. Thus, to facilitate learning in the best way possible, the Head Teacher organised the classes according to the relationships between the children and then (if and when possible) based on stage, age and ability.

> *'It's trying to get the balance between their social needs, and immaturity, and their educational needs. So, here, we always group young people by how well they get on. They're not grouped by age or ability.* (Head Teacher)

The problem with this arrangement was that, who a young person was getting along with varied day-by-day, week-by-week, further complicated by newcomers. Combined, this contributed to an instability in the class compositions making lesson planning difficult. Data from Phase I indicated how the continual change in composition was perceived as contributing to the lack of structure of lessons. This demonstrated the unique complexity of the issues inherent within the education unit within a secure custodial setting.

5.2.2.4 Tensions between care and education departments

Care staff would often be required to be on hand to support education staff in lesson, for example, if a young person had particular risks or behavioural issues, a lesson required additional support or simply to transport children from a lesson back to the residential areas. The Head Teacher referred to some of the tensions that arose between care and education staff as a result of this. Parallel lines of management meant that the care staff were making decisions which could directly contradict those of the education staff. For example, the care staff could be present in a lesson when a young person may not be co-operating. The care staff may then decide to remove the young person without consulting the education staff who, through some other means, could have involved the young person in a group activity. The removal of that one young person could mean that the group activity was disrupted or cause other learners to also want to exit; hence, the lesson could easily dissolve into chaos. The Head Teacher indicated that during the school day, the education staff should be able to make the decisions relevant to education with care staff playing a support-only role. However, in practice this did not happen.

This further contributed to perceptions of a chaotic and disorganised, poor quality education at the secure unit. The Head Teacher believed that this added to some of the inherent challenges of the education a transient population with a range of ages, stages, abilities and educational needs. Added to this the previous educational experiences that the young person brought with them, painted a grim picture of the issues facing the Head Teacher in running an education unit at a secure custodial setting.

6   Discussion

This research sought to understand the educational experiences of incarcerated children and young people and aimed to re-engage them with education and learning. The key findings indicated that:

- the educational experiences of children and young people serving custodial sentences are characterised by boredom, disengagement and school dropout, reflecting the findings of

previous research. Delinquent behaviour is often reported to stem from boredom (Newberry & Duncan, 2001) and according to Skinner and Pitzer (2012), boredom is an expression of disengagement.

- children and young people in custodial settings demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of themselves as learners, how they responded to learning materials and interacted with their peers and teachers. This is a new finding which has not been reported in previous research.

- authentic inquiry offers a process through which disengaged children in this secure custodial setting could be re-engaged with education and learning (when certain conditions were met). In the literature successful interventions were those which had a personalised element to them in terms of connecting to the individual learner (Wexler, 2014; Steel et al, 2014; Behan, 2014; Knight, 2014). The authentic inquiries built on this notion by providing a learning opportunity, which connected to learner identity and lifestory through something that was meaningful to them (Deakin-Crick, 2012).

- the secure context had a profound effect on the educational experiences of the children and young people in this study. Its structures acted as a barrier to facilitating engagement with learning with regards to managing emotions and relationships with peers, teachers and care staff. It is possible to draw upon the competing priorities of the youth justice system as a whole in order to explain this and the tensions within the UK youth justice system that fluctuate between a penal and welfare approach (Mclaughlin, Muncie, & Hughes, 2001; Muncie, 2008; Muncie, 2009; Case, 2015; Goldson, 2019). These tensions and competing priorities may have contributed to a less than integrated approach 'on the ground', where there are different 'lines of management' for the different aspects of the secure estate for children and young people.

Both phases of this research pointed to the secure unit and its structures as presenting particular barriers to engaging children with education and learning. These included barriers at the organisational and the (youth justice) systemic level. The organisational level referred to the organisation of the secure unit, or in Bronfenbrenner's terms, the microsystem as it refers to how staff were organised into either care or education staff, thereby creating separate lines of management. These created barriers for effective collaboration across the education and care staff which emerged through Phases II and III of the research. This refers to the mesosystem, which refer to the interactions between actors in the microsystem that impact on the children. The systemic level, which can be interpreted as the macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model, referred to barriers created by the wider youth justice system which affect how the custodial setting interacts with other agencies or systems. An example of another such (wider) system is the education system where the lack of educational

data shapes what happens when they enter custody as well as onward placement on release back into the community.

These organisational (micro, meso) and systemic (macro) aspects acted as barriers by affecting participant perceptions of education at the secure unit and thereby their engagement with education whilst there. However, these barriers, particularly organisational (microsystem), also present as an opportunity within which changes could be made at a local institutional level, which could have a genuine impact on re-engaging participants with education and learning at the secure custodial setting. Moreover, such changes could be made to existing provision.

7   Education in custody: a way forward

Even within the contemporary punitive and risk factor based environment of a custodial setting (albeit in an SCH which is considered the least damaging), it was possible to re-engage even the most disengaged children with education and learning. This was despite previous negative educational experiences and the range of 'risk factors' they may be exposed to. This research has shown how disengaged children in a custodial setting can be autonomous and agentic when given the opportunity and provided the right conditions and engagement strategies. Particularly, enabling children the space in which their own identities and lifestory (Sfard and Prusak, 2009) are valid, significant and important, there is a reaching out to their underlying values for education and their futures. In taking such an approach, it is possible for youth justice to align with, for example, children's rights as articulated in Article 12 of the UNCRC that refers to respect to the views of the child. It takes us towards a rights-based, child-friendly and child-appropriate youth justice.

The barriers and constraints featured significantly with regards to genuinely facilitating re-engagement, however, these did not obscure the willingness of participants to engage. Given the rhetoric within the risk factor paradigm which in many ways reduces the hope for incarcerated young people, this offers further opportunity for a child friendly youth justice approach. It demonstrates that, given the right conditions, children and young people want to engage and are willing to take opportunities when offered. This study provides an understanding of how disengagement can be addressed even in the most challenging of settings and calls for further research in this area.

Fostering facilitating relationships between staff and children can help counter the impact of emotions exacerbated by the secure custodial setting (the micro and meso systems). In the light of the findings, it is recommended that policy makers acknowledge that even children and young people who offend are active agents in their own learning, despite their previous experiences. It is important to ensure that education within the secure setting is responsive to impact of the constraints of the secure custodial context on re-engagement by:

(i) Creating an enabling environment for facilitating relationships to develop. Organisational structure of the secure unit should be arranged to foster the development of relationships and support the emotional and psychological needs of young people in the custodial setting (microsystem). For example, exploring the separated lines of management and ways of increasing collaboration and communication (mesosystem) could be advanced within the existing organisational structures.

(ii) Offering training and professional development for teachers and care staff in ways to address the specific educational needs of the young people. Staff felt ill equipped to deal with the educational needs of children and young people, often reporting the constraints of the secure context as contributing to these. Training could help equip staff with the skills needed to be responsive to the need to develop facilitating relationships and to be sensitive to the emotional component of disengagement (mesosystem).

These inter-connected recommendations, which attend to the organisational barriers and the training needs of staff, would contribute to supporting the re-engagement of young people who offend with education and learning. A further policy recommendation would be to encourage a unit-wide culture to re-engage and re-connect young people who are serving custodial sentences to the curriculum as a key aspect of their induction to the secure unit. This could be an integral part of the induction process with the potential to –re-engage the children as soon as they arrive at the secure unit. This makes it more inclusive of those with shorter sentences and sends a clear signal of the culture of education at the secure unit. It also indicates that the child and their own interests, experiences are valid and important.

In sum, this paper argues the importance of assessing the microsystems of the secure custodial setting and the broader contextual system in order to understand the nuances, which shape and drive how children may be re-engaged with education whilst serving their sentences. This has policy implications with regards to how policymakers envisage the aims of education in custodial settings and how to ensure that time in custody has the potential to be truly transformative for children who have had challenging educational experiences.

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