Insider Accounts of the Move to the Outside: Two Young People Talk about their Transitions from Secure Institutions

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Abstract

Young people who have experienced secure institutions as a result of engaging in offending behaviour are particularly vulnerable to negative life outcomes (including unemployment, poor education, mental health difficulties and social exclusion). This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of young people's accounts of transition from secure institutions highlights the importance of listening to young people's perceptions of this key lived experience. Multiple semi-structured interviews using a task-based activity approach were used to elicit rich, thick descriptions of individual perceptions of transition. This article focuses on interpretations of two young people's expressed perceptions of their own transition to prompt dialogue between disciplines about implications for policy and practice.

Keywords

accounts, perceptions, voices, young people

Introduction

Research focusing on direct experiences of young people transitioning from secure institutions often refers to the fact that their voices are rarely elicited (Lane et al., 2002; Tam et al., 2007) and that they are seen as powerless as a group (Freed and Smith, 2004). This area of research was relatively neglected, particularly in the United Kingdom. This article focuses on listening to the voices of two young people in order to illuminate both their potential, and their vulnerability, in desisting from offending behaviour and to contribute to professional discussions regarding support for this vulnerable group of young people. My professional motivation to understand young people through listening to them is shared within criminological and social science research and practice. For example,

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researchers continue to critique and further develop understandings of desistance for young people (Murray, 2009) and tools (such as the ASSET) for managing young people who offend (Webster et al., 2006). These critiques centre on the complex and changing nature of the needs of young people who engage in offending behaviour. This article discusses my interpretation – as an Educational Psychologist (EP) – of individual accounts of transition within the context of existing literature. This focus on the voices of two young people might generate dialogue between disciplines about talking with, and listening to, young people as they experience transition, and what this could mean in terms of their future engagement with, or desistance from, offending behaviour (Fitzpatrick, 2011). In order to generate dialogue around the concept of desistance, the article aims to present a set of ideas, methods and literature that may be less familiar to readers than more established literature in the field of criminology.

Vulnerability of Young People Involved in Offending Behaviour during Transition

> Young people involved in crime tend to bear many of the characteristics – and have many of the needs – that are typical of young people with special needs or who are vulnerable to disadvantage and social exclusion. (Ryrie, 2006: 9)

Although Ryrie wrote this predominantly on the basis of his experience (working as an EP within a multi-agency team), it is supported by a large volume of research documenting the specific vulnerabilities of young people involved in offending behaviour and their similarity to other vulnerable groups. It is well-established that, as a group, they are more likely to be from poor and minority communities and return to these (Sullivan, 2004), and to have been in care or had experience of care (Hurry and Moriarty, 2004). They are more likely to have mental health problems (Harrington et al., 2005), a history of substance abuse (Youth Justice Board, 2008), and/or a brain injury (Williams et al., 2010). Such young people are less likely to be engaged in education or employment (Bullis et al., 2002) and therefore more likely to be described as having learning difficulties, low attainment and persistent absenteeism (Altschuler and Brash, 2004).

Within the vulnerable group of young people involved in offending behaviour, there is an even more vulnerable group: those who have experienced custodial sentences (Goldson, 2002). The experience of custody is thought to prohibit psychosocial maturation (Steinberg et al., 2004), decrease resiliency (Stephenson, 2005), interrupt the development of an attachment and engagement with education (Youth Justice Board, 2006) and dissociate children and young people from their families and pro-social peers (Sullivan, 2004). These descriptors of enhanced vulnerability provide a social justice motivation to research children and young people both in, and leaving, custodial institutions (Hurry and Moriarty, 2004).

Young People's Transitions and Voices

A significant literature review conducted by Spencer and Jones-Walker (2004: 89) in the United States concluded that 'relatively little… research has critically examined the process of re-entry….'. Abrams et al. (2008) similarly comment on the limited amount of

research on transition within child welfare research. Contemporary reviews, such as Anthony et al. (2010), also reflect on the lack of recent research focusing on children's and young people's needs pre- and post-transition. They also comment on the importance of providing holistic support to meet these complex and changing needs. This is supported by the implementation of processes to support clearer planning and assessment of needs for transition using the 'ASSET' assessment tool in England and Wales (Youth Justice Board, 2008). However, Webster et al. (2006) have problematized practitioners' use of the ASSET due to the aforementioned complex and changing needs of young people involved in offending behaviour. Despite such efforts, therefore, there is a gap in the knowledge base about the process of transition for young people involved in offending behaviour.

Previous studies on transition are of mixed quality and rigour and cannot always be generalized. Some larger studies (for example, Bullis et al., 2004; Lipsey and Wilson, 1998) indicate the importance of education in promoting positive outcomes for this vulnerable group. Bullis et al. (2004) conclude that engagement in education or employment within the first six months post-release is predictive of engagement in work or school a year later, but this finding has not been conclusively replicated (for example Andrews et al., 1990). Education is an important protective factor with regard to resilience (Buchanan and Fluori, 2001; Youth Justice Board, 2008), but this should be interpreted as part of the complex picture of ecological and interactional factors associated with offending behaviour (Altschuler and Brash, 2004).

As indicated above, research focusing upon children and young people involved in offending behaviour needs to represent the complexity of this phenomenon. Studies such as Sullivan's (2004) research 'youth perspectives on the experience of reentry', and Inderbitzin's (2009) work on the 'reentry of emerging adults', use qualitative methods to look at the complexity of transition from the perspectives of young people. However both studies are limited by the omission of audit trails and interview schedules, heterogeneity within small samples and overgeneralization of findings. What is needed is a variety of research projects focused on transition from different disciplines, in order to identify best practice whilst keeping children and young people themselves at the centre of research.

For young people involved in offending behaviour, the process of transition may represent a crossroad between paths to mainstream engagement or a continued cycle or offending behaviour and custodial sentences (Harrington et al., 2005). The need to listen to the views and thoughts of young people is acknowledged in local policy documents which include aims for the Youth Offending Service to 'listen to and document the views of children and ensure they are heard… to work in partnership with children' (Youth Offending Service, 2007a: 2). Moreover, the importance of listening to young people's voices is highlighted in a range of international standards, including the Office of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) (articles 12 and 13). Young people are the primary stakeholders in the youth justice system (Sullivan, 2004) and, as such, they should be key agents in evaluating its effectiveness (Unruh, 2005). Some researchers further emphasize that taking account of young people's views may illuminate unmet needs, for example bullying within the secure estate (Champion and Clare, 2006; Youth Justice Board, 2006). All of this provides a strong impetus for eliciting and

listening to young people's perspectives and perceptions about transition and offending behaviour.

Phenomenological Approaches to Investigating Young People's Perceptions of Transitions from Secure Institutions

Phenomenological approaches focus on 'understanding the meaning their psychological and social worlds hold for respondents' (Smith et al., 1995: 5). Such approaches attempt to interact with an individual's perception of a lived experience and to describe or analyse the researcher's own conceptualization of that perception. Given the complexity and subjective nature of young people's transition experiences, some research has adopted a phenomenological stance. For example, Champion and Clare (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 young males involved in offending behaviour and concluded that:

> … the extent to which young offenders use their sentence as a time for reflection and re-evaluation, and the extent to which they are able to reconnect successfully with their physical and social milieu, implement changes planned during the sentence, and adopt new roles and lifestyles all interact in influencing how the young offender responds following release. (Champion and Clare, 2006: 95−96)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is:

> … a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms. (Smith et al., 2009: 1. See also Langrdridge, 2007; Moran and Mooney, 2002)

In my (EP) research into the transition experiences of young people being discharged from a young offenders institute (YOI) I focused on their perceptions and the meanings that they attributed to this process. I used IPA because I perceived transition to be a key lived experience for these young people. Three semi-structured interviews were completed with each young person (aged 15−17 years). Repeat interviews were applied as IPA assumes that perceptions are located in specific moments of time and space (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is some evidence that many young people in penal detention have communication difficulties (Bryan et al., 2007), and require both support and time before they begin to trust adults (Flowers, 2008). Furthermore, repeat interviews within IPA research (Bramley and Eatough, 2005; Flowers, 2008; Shaw et al., 2003) provided an opportunity to focus on transition as a process rather than an event (Hart, 2009; Youth Justice Board, 2008; Youth Offending Service 2007a, 2007b). Additionally, task-based activities were piloted and developed with the young people using techniques employed in EP to assist young people to express their perceptions and experiences (Conolly, 2008; Harden et al., 2000; Punch, 2002).

Over time, I built good rapport with the young people and the research provides one example of an EP approach to eliciting young people's voices and it is hoped that it might

provide a platform for increased dialogue and shared interpretation across disciplines (Fitzpatrick, 2011).

Results and Discussion

For present purposes, particular emphasis is placed upon how two young people (Jason and Harry − pseudonyms) reflected upon their own experiences of transition. Jason was 16 years-old and described an extensive history of offending behaviour including theft, burglary and assault. He had previously adopted a leadership role within a peer group of prolific offenders engaged in burglaries. Harry was 15 years-old and did not disclose the specific offence(s) for which he was sentenced to custody.

Extracts from individual interviews are presented alongside interpretations of their potential significance in communicating the young people's experiences of transition. Interview numbers are provided at the end of each extract to indicate the timing of each expressed perception. Similarities and differences between the two young people's accounts are highlighted by exploring key psychological processes expressed within their descriptions of transition: goal-directed approaches; self-efficacy and identity development.

Listening to Jason

1. Adopting a goal-directed approach to transition. Sullivan (2004) observed that adopting an adult outlook with clear goals of financial independence had supported some of his participants to achieve positive transitions. In line with this, Jason's goals were to reconstruct his identity from offender to apprentice joiner, and to adopt a paternal role within his family. This paternal role included providing for and parenting his younger brothers. The following extracts are examples of his frequent articulation of these goals:

> I hope I start work as a joiner for a few years. Eventually build a business up. Obviously it would be small and then it'd be bigger. And as soon as you get a profit you can make it even bigger. Just all about it's just right techniques innit? Like getting your name out there. Getting your company name out there and stuff. It's competition, it's what it's all about innit? Being competitive. (3)

> So. I mean a job as well it's not just to earn money though it's like me family support me but I need to support me family you know. (3)

> I mean to help, don't get me wrong she's [mother] got a couple of members of family who she can rely on and that. I can tell when she's struggling for money like I can just tell. Just you don't, she doesn't even need to say nowt. So if I can help her I can help. Just one of them days when you can tell she's struggling. Just give her a hand out. Even if it isn't giving her cash in hand, if it's just going to buy some milk or bread or summat. Some food for the twins or summat you know what I mean? (3)

Literature about goal-directed behaviour has highlighted the role of planning towards goal achievement (for example Gollwitzer et al., 2005). Throughout interviews Jason empha-sized the importance of college and his employment in joinery in enabling him to become

a non-offender. By the time of the third interview he reported that he was back in college, at the top of his class, working towards his joinery qualification. The achievement of this goal appeared to have been enabled by planning within the secure institution:

> Yeah. I'm going straight into college once I get out…. The week I get out obviously I've got to go see him and that to tell him what's happened… and then I'll hopefully get my apprenticeship. That'd be alright. (2)

> Yeah there's only a couple of in like that class of like, I'm one of the best in the class. Just said they'll extend it for me when I get out. (1)

Within the secure institution Jason had clearly visualized what it would be like to have achieved his goals, and perceived himself as capable of achieving them:

> Oh it is, it's like a painting in me head. It's all clear as day…. I just see meself holding loadsa certificates an' that. All like when they say oh look you've passed. (1)

2. Self-efficacy. Bandura (1994: 71) defines self-efficacy as 'people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives'. Jason's goal-directed behaviour appeared to be underpinned by self-efficacy given his confidence throughout transition that he could achieve his goals.

Bandura (1977: 191) proposed that self-efficacy is based on: 'four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and physiological states'. Jason referred to different forms of 'performance accomplishments' including: maintenance of privileges and success in education within the secure institution; progress towards achieving early release; and educational achievement before entering the secure institution. This previous experience of success supported Jason's perception that his goals were achievable (Bandura, 2001). Jason also appeared to express 'vicarious experiences' of successful transition from secure institutions. For example he observed that his grandfather 'went to jail and turned his life around so if he can do it I can do it' (3). From Bandura's perspective, Jason would have learnt from his grandfather's role modelling of behaviour for good transition. Jason also repeatedly referred to 'verbal persuasion' that enabled him to perceive himself as similar to those who had succeeded. He frequently referred to the support that he drew from his relationship with his mother and her expressed belief that he could achieve his goals. Forste et al. (2010) argue that this leads to individuals perceiving that they have more control over their own lives convergent with thoughts of the self as efficacious. Jason's reflections of 'physiological states' associated with offending were interesting as he expressed his previous difficulties in controlling anger that had led to violent offences. Following reflection within the secure institution, he expressed that he was confident about becoming a non-offender whilst re-engaging with boxing to manage his anger, suggestive of cognitive processing of his own approach to transition as a young person communicating high levels of self-efficacy.

3. Identity development. Jason's articulation of his goal-directed approach implies a level of identity reconstruction as part of his plan to desist:

> Better than ever. Don't get me wrong when I were in there I were more positive in there but. Don't get. I haven't lost me positive positivity or whatever you call it. But obviously there's gonna be a few obstacles a few hurdles in the way. Like this tag and all that there's a couple of hurdles innit? But I just need to work around don't I? Just got to make it work really haven't I? No point saying it you might as well do it. (3)

The extract indicates part of Jason's perception that his licence conditions acted as a barrier to his goal of becoming a non-offender, rather than a facilitator to prevent him engaging in offending behaviour. He appeared to perceive that the conditions of his licence maintained his identity as a young person engaged in offending behaviour, exposing the tensions between professional/policy responses and young people's experiences/perceptions and the implications of such tensions for identity development. Jason appeared to wrestle with this dilemma by adopting a goal-directed approach and reconstructing his leadership role with respect to his peers. He perceived that such reconstruction would enable him to continue to belong to both his peer group and the non-offending community, by leading his peers to gain employment and desist from offending behaviour:

> And they're all going yeah man. I've asked one of me mates I went just get a job…. Just get a job with us. He goes 'I don't know I'll try. I'll try'. But yeah, obviously me doing good will hopefully me mate will follow me. I'm not bothered about all me mates just the one in particular…. I've always been a leader me. (3)

Jason articulated his perception of his difference from other young people as follows:

> Obviously they don't have like hope for their self if you get me? They, they come here an' that you don't see them saying I wanna do this when I get out I wanna do that. They say I've had this, I've done this, I've done that. It's not about what they're gonna do in the future. Do you know what I mean? It's about what they've done in the past. Yeah, like most people in here they haven't got qualifications. Like I got kicked out of school in year 9. Went to a different school in the referral unit. Passed all my GCSEs an' that. So obviously it's like going good. (1)

According to Inderbitzin (2009), this separation enables goal-directed behaviour, as young people withdraw from the culture of young offenders. Jason implied that he was beginning to perceive himself as more similar to the non-offending community than his peers within the secure institution. This was also demonstrated by his changing perception of offending behaviour and his engagement with it: a tension between his previous 'public self' (being proud of his offending behaviour with his peers) and his 'private self' (feeling guilt for this behaviour):

> You think you're big with your mates and then when you're on your own you feel sorry for them really. (2)

He appeared to understand why his offences had caused negative emotions for his victims:

> I don't know just to take someone's belongings what they've earned. Spent all their lives saving up for and…. (2)

> See I wouldn't like to have, say in like ten years' time I wunt like to have me own business and have all nice stuff in my house and have someone take it would I? (2)

4. Summary. Jason presented himself as a goal-directed individual with high levels of self-efficacy and a clear achievable plan for identity reconstruction. Before his experience of the secure institution he would have been described as a persistent and prolific offender. Follow-up indicated that Jason successfully enacted his plan for transition to become a joiner and desist from offending. Listening attentively to his perceptions pre-and post-release provides evidence of the significant positive impact of independent reflection.

Listening to Harry

1. Adopting a goal-directed approach to transition. The following extract expresses Harry's goal-directed approach:

> Like it's like from now it's like what choices I make now is like gonna be with me for like not just the rest of my life, but it's gonna start off the rest of my life. As soon as I make now from when I get out of here like if I'm making a good decision go, do school, get good grades, that's a good decision. And it will help me out to get good grades. To get a job and a little house. (1)

Having been previously excluded from education, Harry perceived his time in the secure institution as an opportunity to gain support to enable him to access education which was perceived as a key factor in enabling him to achieve his goals, and as a goal in itself:

> Just thinking that finally, I've now got a chance. First thing on my mind would be to go to probation about what they're doing about my school. When I started. That'd be the first thing. Some people wanna get out and go see their mates and that straight away. I don't I just wanna know when I'm gonna be starting at school. I just wanna, I've been asking like seen my caseworker all the time to ask her if she's heard owt about getting me into a school. Or college. Cos that's just the main thing on my mind now. (1)

2. Self-efficacy. Harry expressed perceptions − interpreted as self-efficacy − within his interviews in the secure institution by articulating his ability to achieve his transition goals. Applying Bandura's (1977: 191) 'four principal sources of information', Harry referred to 'performance accomplishments' within the secure institution including: maintaining his privileges; working towards early release for good behaviour; and re-engaging with education. He also expressed his 'vicarious experiences' by repeatedly stating: 'I know it can be done' (1). Throughout interviews Harry further referred to verbal persuasion' from his family, especially his mother, reinforced his goal-directed approach to his

own transition (Forste et al., 2010). However, Harry also presented his narrative of family support in ambiguous terms:

> I'd say my dad, but my dad he, my dad thinks I'll be able to do it but he is in and out of prison. But he has faith in me. He thinks I'll be able to keep out. (1)

> I think that she, she feels that she might have a slight doubt about that. That it's not so good going straight into a fresh start for me cos I'll, she thinks that I won't be able to cope with it and I'll get back into committing offences but I think she knows really that I will do alright. I think she has got some sort of belief that I can do it. (1)

Finally, Harry perceived that the 'physiological state' induced by marijuana had previously maintained his engagement with offending behaviour. He described the secure institution as 'rehabilitation' from his perceived 'addiction' to marijuana. Throughout interviews, Harry was clear that he experienced intense pressure as a result of trying to sustain good behaviour to earn his early release from the secure institution, that similar pressure would be experienced throughout his transition and that he would need support to manage this: 'It's like keeping me on my feet and keeping me out of trouble. Keeping my time occupied. Just for the time I'm on licence that just need support' (2). At the end of my engagement with Harry, he explained his feeling that regular interviews would have supported him to continue to focus on his transition:

> Better if it was more…. It would help me keep on track and think about what I'm doing. More chances to think about my transition. It would make me think more. (3)

This is consistent with Hagner et al. (2008) who identified that some young people need continued supported planning sessions for success, and that such sessions should continue to be offered in the community. Harry's perceptions perhaps indicate the importance of concepts such as 'proxy agency' (Bandura, 1977: 2001) in revealing the ways that professionals access resources and expertise can serve to create opportunities for young people that they cannot create independently.

3. Identity development. Harry hoped that if he achieved his goals of education and work his life would be:

> Good, be better. I'd be normal. I'd be a normal person. People wouldn't look at me and say 'Oh he's been in prison before. He ain't got a chance of getting good grades or owt. He'll never get a job.… Like being in education all the time. And not being out of education. Having a good life. Not being kicked out before and stuff like that. Not committing offences. Just to know what it's like being a normal person. Wish I, I could have already gone down that route instead of being in here. (1)

For Harry being 'normal' meant being a non-offender and involved reconstructing his identity from a 'young offender' to a 'normal' person. As part of his use of language to reconstruct himself as a 'normal' person he frequently stated that he was different from his peers within the secure institution. He commented on his good behaviour in contrast to

other young people and his distinctive motivation to re-engage in education. This description of difference from a rejected peer group identity is viewed by some researchers as an important part of preparation for desistance (Inderbitzin, 2009); a process of preparing for, and testing out, a new identity whilst in the secure institution.

Harry was clear that he hoped education would help him belong to the 'normal' population outside the secure institution. However, he seemed to accept that for him as a previous offender there would be no access to education. He reported that this was because there were no schools available and did not attach any blame for this. Harry understood that the primary goal for people supporting him was to ensure he did not offend, and that education was only a goal in that it may help him to desist. Harry's narrative highlights the importance of multi-agency approaches to meeting the holistic needs of young people leaving secure institutions (Anthony et al., 2010; Bullis et al., 2002; Hurry and Moriarty, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2008; Youth Offending Service, 2007a, 2007b). Without an educational placement in the community Harry struggled to construct his identity as a non-offender as he searched for belonging and activities to constructively occupy his time.

4. Summary. Harry presented himself as a highly motivated individual who needs support to develop and maintain his sense of self-efficacy and ability to reconstruct his identity as a 'normal' person (Hagner et al., 2008). Views expressed throughout interviews, and by youth justice professionals, indicate the need for reassurance and structured support to offset his previous susceptibility to peer pressure, substance misuse and repeated co-offending with peers. This also indicates the importance of multi-agency approaches to transition planning to enable vulnerable young people to make successful transitions (Bullis et al., 2004).

Listening to both Jason and Harry

Listening to both Jason's and Harry's accounts illustrates similarities and differences between how they articulated their process of transition and the outcomes they experienced. This provides an interesting representation of idiography (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009) between two young people who could each be described as highly motivated to desist from offending.

Taken together, Jason and Harry's accounts indicate the potential of young people leaving secure institutions and the need for specifically tailored support packages in line with individual and complex needs. They each demonstrate an awareness of what they needed to successfully negotiate transition and their perspectives highlight the importance of genuinely listening to young people.

Conclusions

Eliciting young people's accounts of their own transition is crucial to understanding their experiences towards developing post secure institution identities and the psychological processes expressed involved. Jason's and Harry's expressions of goal-directed approaches, self-efficacy and identity development, highlighted the similarities and differences in

their support needs. Such qualitative research − albeit small-scale − contributes to the knowledge base concerning young people, transition from secure institutions and desistance from crime in the form of idiographic accounts. These accounts, and interpretations of them, can be used to inform and enhance policy and practice with regard to supporting young people leaving secure institutions:

> By listening to even a small sample of emerging adults [or children and young people] learning to stand alone, we may gain a deeper understanding of the issues they consider most important and what might be done to tilt the odds in their favour. (Inderbitzin, 2009: 470)

Jason's and Harry's communication of a goal-directed approach, together with a wider research literature regarding transition, emphasizes the importance of listening to, rather than excluding, young people engaged in offending behaviour. Forste et al. (2010: 431), for example, have argued that they made 'a unique contribution to the recidivism literature by examining the cognitive process inmates go through in preparation of future release'. From this they propose that more research is needed to understand such processes from the perspectives of young people. Although the research discussed here falls short of providing a comprehensive analysis of cognitive processing, the interpretation of two individual accounts succeeds in offering insight into how young people position themselves, and are positioned by, language used to explain themselves and envision their futures.

Limitations

Given the phenomenological underpinnings of this research and the use of IPA methods, the results represent subjective interpretations of Jason's and Harry's perspectives at particular moments of time and space. The results, therefore, are not necessarily transferable to, or representative of, other young people's transitions even if they encourage the prospective transferability of the research and its interpretations (Smith et al., 2009).

Critics might note that the use of concepts such as 'goal-directed approaches', 'self-efficacy' and 'identity development' within interpretative dialogue might be taken to imply psychological meaning making (Willig, 2008), rather than truly representing Jason's and Harry's meaning making. Indeed, Willig (2008) has criticized the representational validity of language in studies using methods such as IPA. Also, given the likelihood of Jason's and Harry's limited vocabularies, there may have been limits to the meanings or distortion of the meanings expressed (Bryan et al., 2007; Snowling et al., 2000). The value of such research, however, is that it enables children and young people to articulate their own experiences, and the significance that they attribute to such experiences, from their own unique perspectives (Smith et al., 2009).

Implications for practice

Such research should prompt dialogue between disciplines and support for the population of young people experiencing transitions from secure institutions. The

research demonstrates the potential role of EPs in supporting young people to desist from offending, and enabling professionals to understand the psychological processes that might underpin effective desistance (Bullis et al., 2004; Hurry and Moriarty, 2004; Youth Justice Board, 2008). This involves taking account of multiple perspectives in order to understand the holistic, complex and changing needs of young people (Anthony et al., 2010). Furthermore, understandings of child and adolescent development can be used to co-construct developmentally appropriate curricula, given enhanced awareness of the potential for delayed psychosocial maturation in this population (Steinberg et al., 2004).

The same research might also be used with parents and professionals to support understandings of the required attitudinal and behavioural processes before a young person might desist from offending behaviour. Here it is important to highlight the crucial importance of maintaining relationships rather than rejecting and excluding the young person. The two cases studies presented above highlight the idiographic nature of transition from secure institutions. This necessitates the provision of bespoke packages of support for individual young people rather than generic or group level support. For example, Harry reported that regular interviews would have supported him to continue to focus on his transition (in line with Hagner et al.'s 2008 work), whereas Jason indicated that this would have led to disengagement for him.

Professionals need to promote the articulate and goal-directed capacities of young people to enable them to perceive achievable alternative goals to offending. Bandura's (1997, 2001) concept of 'proxy agency' reminds us that professionals have access to resources and expertise that should be used to create opportunities for young people that they are unable to create independently. Ultimately, listening to Jason and Harry provides insight into the process of adolescent identity development. Their words indicate that it is crucial to construct an alternative identity (Jason as a joiner, Harry as educated) in order to desist from offending behaviour (Murray, 2009).

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