Youth justice education research paper examples

Law, Justice

Youth Justice Education

Introduction

Young people, who have been in youth justice residences and are released into the community when their stipulated term is over experience a lot of challenges like stigma, failure to fit in and generally have to contend with a completely different way of doing things in day-to-day life. The bigger challenges are in getting favorable opportunities to continue with education, vocational training or even employment placements. The shame associated with having been in a youth justice facility keeps the young people from socialising with others or returning back to the community where they committed their crime. This project report is a self-review on my practice and the impact that my teaching practices has on transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling. The aim of this project is to complete a self-review, reflecting on my practice as an Assistant Principal inside a youth justice facility and the impact that my role has on transitioning students. Our students have many different options for transition out of residence such as

vocational courses or employment. For the purpose of this research I will be focusing on the transitions from residential to mainstream schooling.

Method

My approach to this research is to inform and improve my practice within the transition process to meet the on going needs of my students. The on-going self-reflection will provide me with information to assist in monitoring student needs for transition, adapt learning programs and strategies to identify students who need further support.

This research is a self-study where I have critically examining my practices and focused on what I can do in my role as a teacher and assistant principal to improve the transition process. Self-study is a methodology characterised by examination of the role of the self in the research project and " the space between self and the practice engaged in" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15). LaBoskey (2004) explains that the reason that teachers need to self-study is to improve their practices. If the teaching profession is going to evolve, improve and develop then teachers need to engage in improving their selves by understanding, researching and monitoring their teaching methods through self study. " How we achieve better understanding of our teaching experience is through critical reflection" (Guilfoyle, 1995; Hamilton, 1995, as cited in LaBosky, 2004, 826).

I will conduct this research by keeping a self-reflective journal. Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) have written extensively on the use of interactive journals in their work within teacher education and believe that the interaction between journal writers and their audience provides opportunities for teachers to make practical experiences and theory explicit. One of ways I

will use my journal is to clarify my thoughts and analyse my actions. Maloney and Campbell-Evans (2002) explain that teachers describing an event and writing about it allowed them time to reflect and analyse the issue and begin to problem solve and find solutions. Communicating through writing a reflective journal allows a deeper reflection as the student is more confidence to raise issues or voice concerns (Maloney and Campbell-Evans 2002).

Secondly I have used a critical friend who will observe my input into a transition meeting and will provide me with feedback on my practice. A critical friend provides structured feedback and feed forward to improve and assist a teacher in developing their teaching practice (Cushman 1998). Finally I have taken an auto-ethnography approach to this research. Auto-ethnography emphasises cultural analysis and interpretation of the researcher's behaviors, thoughts, and experiences in relation to others. Auto-ethnography is qualitative research method that links the characteristics of ethnography and autobiography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Through the use of auto-ethnography I will reflect critically on my personal and professional experiences and vary in my emphasis, auto (self) and ethno (socio-culture).

Research Questions:

- How effectively do I set and share high expectations for student learning to promote positive transition from residential to mainstream schooling?

- How effectively do I use data to identify student needs, design learning programs, monitor progress and use data to assist in transition?

- How effective is my support for students who are at risk of not achieving or

who have particular learning needs?

- How efficiently do I work within a multiagency team to assist in the transitioning of students?

Context

I am the Assistant Principal at a decile one school inside a youth justice facility. My school has a specific focus of providing quality education within Child, Youth and Family residences throughout New Zealand. The students at a youth justice facility are aged from 13 to 17 years old. Many students have had little if any secondary schooling prior to coming to our facility and generally our students have a very negative attitude towards school (Hayden, 2007). My focus is to ignite the passion of learning and help students to discover their unique abilities and reach their potential. Each student has their own individual program that they contribute to and it is designed to motivate and encourage our students to meet educational success.

Most students in a youth justice residence are under the youth court jurisdiction although depending on the offence may be in district or high court. The students may be with us for one day to a year and students are either on remand or sentenced. Our sentenced students have a end date set which is beneficial for transition as I am able to prepare and put plans into place as opposed to our remand students where no one has any idea when they will be leaving which makes transition almost impossible. This is because on many occasions they go to court, receive bail and never return from court. There is also no follow up on these students as their care transfers from the residence to the social worker and the parent or guardian

they are returned to.

My role within the transition process is to represent education. To do this I gather as much information from the student about their thoughts on where their education is going and their plans for their careers. All teaching staff involved with the student while in care provide a very detailed individual learning profile and I also research potential education placements of students. This is then presented in a multi-agency meeting that involves representation from health providers, mental health, program coordinators, case leaders, youth workers and social workers.

Youth Justice Facility Background

In New Zealand, the education and social systems alike believe in and practice early interventions in children's lives, as this is seen to be more effective. The New Zealand youth court was founded in 1989 through the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act. This Act hopes to hold the youth accountable for any offenses they get involved in, while addressing their social, emotional and psychological needs, in order to help them towards the journey of self -esteem and responsible adulthood (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2006).

In New Zealand, the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989 is what sets out the principles and objects which are supposed to govern state intervention both with respect to young persons and children who have been abused or neglected and those who have been committing certain offences. In all, the New Zealand youth justice system is what signifies a move away from a traditional approach that highlights the imposition of punishment in a comparatively formal court system to an approach that emphasizes mending

damage and setting in place actions that are probable to prevent re-offense especially during the transitioning of students from residential to mainstream schooling. Thus it is characterized by:

- an emphasis on responsibility and accountability;

- an inclination for diversion from formal events and for deinstitutionalization and community founded penalties (Hemphill, 2007).

The purpose underlying the New Zealand's youth justice system is to inspire the police to accept low key reactions to juvenile wrong wherever it may be possible. As a consequence, as in most dominions now, minor and first offenders are averted from trial by means of an instant (street) warning. Where further action is thought to be essential, the police are having to refer the young individual to the law enforcement agency Youth Aid Unit (a specialist unit) for follow-up. The Youth Aid Unit could possibly distract the young person (Hemphill, 2007) or, when such authorizations have not been fruitful in the past or when the offending is more severe, they would then refer the young person to a family group session.

I also understand that the new system also reflects certain revolutionary strategies: the need to be culturally delicate and fitting; inspiring families to be tangled in all the decision-making procedures connecting their children; giving young individual's themselves a say in how their criminal behavior would need to be responded to; being able to provide its victims a voice in discussions over possible penalties for juvenile offenders; and reassuring decision-making by arrangement.

In New Zealand, when a young person offends, the police start by warning them not to commit the offence again; they arrange informal meetings after

consulting the victim and his or her family, as well as the family of the offender. All along the police make sure that they are in consultation with Child Youth and Family Services and the youth court system. These are the preliminary actions before the Family Group Conference (FGC) sets in motion. However, in some gross offences, the Youth Court is referred to and charges made against the offending youth resulting in the student being placed into a youth justice facility. It is important to note that even when the Youth Court is involved, it also refers matters to the FGC before making decisions. During this time a student may also be placed on remand at a youth justice facility. Preference is given to the needs of the victims, but reintegrating the young offender into the community is also fundamental. Justice through restoration and reintegration of youth offenders into the community, and hearing out the victims and their families and community has proven successful in New Zealand and is a source of insight for other countries (Murphy, McGinness & McDermott, 2010).

The juvenile system in New Zealand moves away from sending the children and youth to courts or holding them in custody as a way of correcting them. Instead, the authorities prefer a rehabilitative and transformational approach that speaks to the social and moral fabric of the youth, and fundamentally aims to reintegrate them into the community at the end of their journey of rehabilitation. This system has been successful in New Zealand as it involves the offender and their family, the victim, the community, service agencies, the youth justice coordinators and police. All these parties work in a coordinated manner to help transform the youth offenders, through the approach known as restorative justice (Murphy, McGinness & McDermott,

2010).

New Zealand has been hailed for its effective youth justice system that incorporates a restorative model known as the family group conference (FGC). FGC allows the offender, the victim of the crime, their families and communities to be involved in the transformation process, and to find a way of dealing with the effects of the crime committed. Victims of crimes are given an opportunity to express their feelings and aftermath effects of the crime, and also ask questions to the offenders. The police and youth justice coordinators have to be present during the conferences to ensure order and guidance through the whole process. Studies conducted regarding the FGC reveal that the method indeed works in transforming the youth offenders and is indeed an effective way of achieving criminal justice and reintegration into society (Schmid, 2001).

At this point in time, there is no representation from the education sector involved with the FGC process. This I believe is a crucial missing component to ensuring success for our student's future. Future plans for the student are put into place at the FGC and education seems to be overlooked. I have recently held discussions with the residential clinical team leader about my need to be involved in the FGC process to assist better in transitions. I have been advised I will be invited to attend the next FGC. Unfortunately it is not as easy to attend an FGC as I first thought. You must be formally invited to participate. This is a process I am currently working through.

Discussion

Youths who are not in mainstream schools in New Zealand are an at-risk group who could end up abusing drugs, engaging in crimes and truant

behavior, having behavioral dysfunctions, poor educational achievement, attempting or committing suicide, early parenthood, among a host of other negative effects. The youths who are not in mainstream schools also get poor medical services and attention, compared to those living with their parents and in mainstream schools. These are some of the factors that lead to increase youth offending and crime rates, necessitating that these youths are taken into youth justice facilities (Fleming et al, 2004).

After staying at the youth justice facility, which are well structured and call for a high standard of discipline, the youths are later released in the community, and this is where the problems begin. Due to the unstructured system in the society, and a lack of opportunity to continue with schooling or get gainful work, the result is that the youth may slide back to their old lifestyles and commit more offences (Fleming et al, 2004). This is where the transition system from residential school to mainstream schooling becomes an important aspect in the whole package of transforming the offending youth into useful members of society. The transition from youth justice facilities to mainstream schools needs to be well structured and the youths prepared for this change well in advance. The need for a continuous support structure even after the youths leave the residential care has been highlighted as a must have component if the transition process is to be effective (Fleming et al, 2004).

Reading over my reflective journal I have made an entry describing seeing the learning success of a young student. Through talking with the student he had a really rough time and school and constantly tells me how dumb he is and that he hates school, that he can't read and that he especially hates

writing. When I ask him what he is interested in he tells me how he loves hunting and fishing as this was something he did with his uncle. His uncle seems to be a positive role model in his life and a person this student speaks fondly about. Through planning his literacy work, I incorporated articles from hunting and fishing magazines and create a writing task around pig hunting. When this student realises that he gets to complete a task about pig hunting, he is oblivious to the fact he has to read, comprehend and complete a writing activity. Once he has finished he asks to write a story about the time he went hunting with his uncle. The sense of achievement in his face and the success this student feels is the reason I do my job.

Not all students learn the same. Discovering what excites them and motivates them to achieve is how teachers within my school design our teaching and learning programs. When each student arrives at our school they complete a variety of standardised testing to gage their educational needs and identify their level of learning. We also identify the student's career interests and what they like to do in their spare time. This data is then used to create an individualised student plan for each curriculum area. Students read over at their plans at the beginning of the week and then contribute to their plan through reflection. We run a positive reinforcement based program. Students know on Monday what tasks need to be completed by Friday. If they are able to manage their time effectively and complete their set work they participate in incentives, which means they get to view a movie on a Friday afternoon. This also develops an understanding of consequences for our students. Completing a set task results in a reward. Not completing a task means missing out and spending time completing that

task while others are participating in a reward. Consequences seem to be a missing concept in our students thought process.

Through understanding our student individual needs I am able to develop a transition plan that continues to incorporate their interests and will ensure their buy in, into the transition plan. I also find myself advocating for the student during the transition process. Other agencies involved may not spend the quality time I get to spend with the student and will suggest courses such as forestry where a student maybe interested in computing. Gay (2000) describes responsive teaching as the deployment of cultural knowledge, previous experiences and the performance styles of various students with the main objective of increasing the appropriateness and effectiveness of the learning process. The principal focus of individualised teaching and learning is that teaching is facilitated basing on the strengths of the students. This can be achieved through making learning experiences more personalised and meaningful to the students diverse backgrounds by engaging them in activities that appeals to their interests and experiences outside of school (Prochnow et al., 2004).

Through a duathlon run over the term we set high expectations to students that this event was going to be successful. Due to the nature of the environment I work in, I am constantly reviewing risk and running a duathlon is a high risk situation due to the equipment needed such as bikes and area that needed to be covered by a care team for security and safety reasons. All teaching staff set expectations high and explained the training program and encouraged students to improve their fitness and times (Christle, 2007). Students tend to moan about the difficulty of the task and often come up

with ways to avoid the task. As a teacher we stick to our high expectations and the students with some reluctance at first begin to enjoy challenging themselves. Although they have a low opinion of their own abilities they respond well to encouragement and positive feedback.

Throughout the training we maintained our high expectations of behavior, participation and fitness improvements and what we found was that the students then encouraged others to improve and put high expectations on themselves. They mapped out their own extra fitness programs that they completed during their own time. On the day of the event I observed a group of students who were so focused on achieving right down to thinking about the nutrition they would need for the event. The event was very successful and what was encouraging to observe was the students who had finished go back and encourage others to keep going and they ran with them over the finish line.

Integrating high expectations into the transition process becomes very difficult, as the structure and positive people within a residential setting is not always the case when the student returns to the community. This can be due to the crime they have committed prior to coming into residence and they may have previously burnt many bridges at local schools therefore the expectation is usually set that they are going to continue to be a nuisance and the student usually feels this also so plays to it.

Through my critical friend I have asked her to observe me and offer me feedback around the work I do within a team of support services. My role is to represent education for the student while they are in residential care. Through my role as an Assistant principal I work alongside the residence in

partnership that means I meet with the operations and clinical teams regularly and have input into plans and outcomes for our students.

In a recent transition meeting I expressed my thoughts on the progress of a student and explained the high expectations I had that this student could be success in the line of education he wanted to pursue. He wanted to further his education in computing and I believed would be beneficial for the student. I explained that I had spoken at length with the student and we had discussed the road he would need to follow to succeed with his education. He was a very capable student. Yet during the meeting it was decided by other social services members that he would be going into forestry and without consulting with the student or the current education provider. There seems to be a lot of work to do around raising the expectations of others within the transition meetings.

Through discussion with my critical friend she was able to provide me with useful feedback around the need for transitions to start months before a transition meeting, which only occurs approximately two weeks prior to the student leaving residence. She has also suggested the need for me to be involved in the Family Group Conference as this would have given me the opportunity to give my educational opinion earlier in the students sentence and allow other social services to get on board and be on the same page rather then everyone going in separate directions. We all have the students best interest in mind and with better communication earlier on in the process better outcomes could be had. This would then ensure everyone's expectations of the student are high and give the student better wrap around support.

- How effective is my support for students who are at risk of not achieving or who have particular learning needs?

- How efficiently do I work within a team of support services to assist in transitioning students?

Reflection

Summary/Conclusion

The need for a community reintegration system to ensure the rehabilitation and transformation of youth offenders beyond residence, and helps in preventing them from re-offending cannot be overemphasised. This system should involve support during residential care or rehabilitation (which is given quite well) and support once they leave the residential facility (which is lacking to a great degree). The importance of the support to the youth after they leave youth justice facilities is particularly fundamental, so that they can be able to reintegrate within society at large, and achieve their education and employment goals. This gap between the support given while still in care and the lack thereof after the youth are released, needs to be closed if success in reforming and transforming the youth is to be realised (Australian Law Reform Commission, 2013).

The transition process of youth justice residence students into mainstream schools needs to start on the day students are sentenced and sent to youth justice facilities. This is a preferred and more comprehensive and effective system of transition compared to starting the process only weeks before the student leaves residential care to inform them about their move to the mainstream schooling system. The transition system needs to be created with input from the student, as this involvement creates ownership and

understanding of what the students are getting into, and why they need to move to the next level. The responsible parties need to guard against a situation where vocational courses are put in place just to keep the students busy, as opposed to being inclusive and of interest to them.

Youth justice residential schooling needs to be understood as a process rather than a place, and this way, the youth offenders, their families, the government, youth justice system and communities will support positive transition of youth into the society again (Dunlap & Roush, 1994). The youth who have passed through the youth justice facility will also not be viewed as any different from others who have not, and will receive the required social and moral support to reintegrate successfully into the community after they leave youth justice. Viewing youth justice residential care, as a process will also help to give best quality instruction, guidance and education in the best interests of the youth as the process is gradual changes that lead towards a positive result. This is in recognition of the fact that the residential schools are charged with the responsibility of helping the youth to transit as quickly as possible to mainstream schools (Dunlap & Roush, 1994). This all-rounded support that is given to the youth offenders will greatly and positively influence their experience while in residence, and also during the time after they leave to join mainstream schools and community life.

It is also recommended that youth justice facilities have good controls and guidelines in place in as far as intakes and exits of the youths are concerned, and cooperation between child, youth and family; the youth court; health providers and education. In addition, a sound system and network that enables transfer of youths from the youth justice facilities to the mainstream

schools need to be put in place. All these activities, networks and resources will greatly enhance the transition process for the youth who will feel more at ease in community schools (Dunlap & Roush, 1994).

One of the things that needs to be noted and understood is that the best transition programs begin immediately when youth are incarcerated; on the other hand, research has been showing that youth in correctional systems " are mostly linked with poor academic results, with about 75 percent of youth proceeding less than one grade per year in custody" (Matvya, Lever, & Boyle, 2006, p. 1). There are large numbers of juveniles involved with juvenile correctional systems throughout America. According to Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, and Cormier, (2008), 7, 100, 000 adolescents are incarcerated annually in detention centers throughout America. The process of transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling poses formidable challenges for the juvenile justice system the youth justice facilities and its services providers, namely public schools (Chung, Schubert, & Mulvey, 2007). Synchronized and effective events for transition are lacking in a lot of school districts and juvenile detention systems all over New Zealand (Matvya et al., 2006).

It needs to be understood that contrary to early transition planning, transition plans are not always in place in order to support at-risk youth when they leave residential confinement and return to family, school, and community (Nellis &Wayman, 2009). Nellis and Wayman made the report that even though some of the youths are exceling during confinement, numerous struggle to in order to transition successfully because of a less structured environment inside schools, which is devastating by reason of the

lack of supports, for example, wraparound and aftercare services, which would need to be implemented directly to facilitate the transitions (Nellis & Wayman, 2009). As an outcome of the lack of supports in place all through transition, some areas " recidivism rates were ranging from 50 to 70 percent" (Nellis & Wayman, 2009, p. 10). Most notably is the disappointment to thoroughly provide school reintegration help (Nellis & Wayman, 2009).

Bullis and Yovanoff, (2004) led a study of 759 previously incarcerated youth and reported that just 12 percent finished a high school or a General Equivalency Diploma after returning to the mainstream schooling.

With that said, it is important that it is understood that the transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling can be very difficult and complicated for residential youth and even more oppressive for incarcerated youth with disabilities who are moving among the residential and mainstream school systems (Edgar, Webb, & Maddox, 1987; Whitney-Thomas & Moloney, 2001). There are a number of factors that were forcing previous offenders through the Human Resource network, which have been established unevenly by policymakers' community leaders, and special interest groups that were driven to reply to the needs of health, social services and education (Edgar et al., 1987). These issues frequently relate to the system and not the desires of the clients (Edgar et al., 1987). A juvenile offender possibly will require special education and mental health services nonetheless could only transition to a separate agency in order to receive those services for the reason that they rarely deliver joint services for both wants (Edgar et al., 1987).

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transition programs begin immediately when youth are incarcerated; on the other hand, research has been showing that youth in correctional systems " are mostly linked with poor academic results, with about 75 percent of youth proceeding less than one grade per year in custody" (Atkins, 2009). There are large numbers of juveniles involved with juvenile correctional systems throughout America. According to Hemphill (2008) 7, 100, 000 adolescents are incarcerated annually in detention centers throughout America. The process of transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling poses formidable challenges for the juvenile justice system the youth justice facilities and its services providers, namely public schools (Martino, 2005). Synchronized and effective events for transition are lacking in a lot of school districts and juvenile detention systems all over New Zealand (McCabe, 2008).

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It needs to be understood that the New Zealand youth justice system has been the center of wide-spread worldwide interest among policy advisers, professionals, and academics and has been copied by other jurisdictions particularly when it comes to transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling. Various versions of conferencing on the transitioning of students have been put together or trialed in nations as diverse as Sweden, South Africa, Ireland, England, Singapore, Canada and the United

States. Several Australian states have also experimented extensively with transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling and three states are in the process of incorporating the model in their legislation. Legislation to introduce conferencing has also been passed in Sweden and Ireland.

While imitation may be the reason as an indicator of success, more considerable data are accessible from New Zealand and somewhere else (Atkins, 2009) to specify that transitioning students from residential to mainstream schooling systems are certainly not responsible for the rise in offending and reoffending, that high magnitudes of those aggressively contributing are fulfilled with results and that victims can contribute in a procedure that has the potential for restorative results (Christle, 2007). In New Zealand, the system has swayed police youth aid thinking and refreshed their active contribution in positioning diversionary solutions. National application of conferencing for comparatively serious offences likewise offers evidence that restorative justice ideas can be combined successfully in modern criminal justice systems.

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