

Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 71

Cassandra Thoars
David Moltow

Education, Engagement, and Youth Crime

Case Studies in the Lived Experience
of Education and Recidivism



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Series Editors' Introduction

This important book, by Cassandra Thoars and David Moltow, on *Education, Engagement, and Youth Crime: Case Studies in the Lived Experience of Education and Recidivism*, is the latest book to be published in the long-standing Springer Book Series “Education in the Asia Pacific Region: Issues, Concerns and Prospects”. The first volume in this Springer series was published over 20 years ago, in 2002; this book by Thoars and Moltow is being the twentieth volume published to date.

Education, Engagement, and Youth Crime provides a clear, comprehensive, critical policy—and practice—oriented overview of the relationship between engagement in education and youth crime and explores the extent to which effective engagement in education impacts on the tendency of some convicted youth to reoffend.

The book presents insights into how effective educational experiences may impact on youth criminal behaviour and the pathway to recidivism. Using a case study approach, the book presents the perspectives and lived school experiences of five young adult male prison inmates, including while they were incarcerated as youths.

This research study shows that participants were affectively disengaged from education prior to their initial incarceration in a youth detention facility, and that their disaffection before, during, and after youth incarceration both generated and impacted on their cognitive and behavioural disengagement from education. In addition, a range of additional factors not directly causally related to their schooling were shown to have had a significant effect on their engagement in education.

It explores the ways and extent to which education and schooling for young offenders has adapted over time to meet the diverse needs of offenders and the broader society.

But this book is much more than just a descriptive count of education and youth crime. It also provides a perceptive, helpful critical analysis of the functioning of the education and schooling system, with regard to the feelings, interests, perceptions, and attitudes towards school, concerning disengaged youth, who are prone to crime. The authors identify major issues and concerns that need to be consistently addressed if the education and schooling provided to disengaged youth is

going to best address the needs of both society at large and more specifically youth offenders.

The seven chapters in the book have been written by two experienced educators, with a background in the criminology and philosophy of education, who have first-hand experience of education and the youth justice system. As such the research study reported upon here will be of considerable interest to researchers, policy makers, and practitioners in both education and the justice system.

In terms of the Springer Book Series in which this volume is published, the various topics dealt with in the series are wide ranging and varied in coverage, with an emphasis on cutting edge developments, best practices, and education innovations for development. Topics examined in the series include (but are not limited to): environmental education and education for sustainable development; the interaction between technology and education; the reform of primary, secondary, and teacher education; innovative approaches to education assessment; alternative education; most effective ways to achieve quality and highly relevant education for all; active ageing through active learning; case studies of education and schooling systems in various countries in the region; cross country and cross-cultural studies of education and schooling; and the sociology of teachers as an occupational group, to mention just a few. More information about the book series is available at <http://www.springer.com/series/5888>.

All volumes in this series aim to meet the interests and priorities of a diverse education audience including researchers, policy makers, and practitioners; tertiary students; teachers at all levels within education systems; and members of the public who are interested in better understanding cutting edge developments in education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

The main reason why this series has been devoted exclusively to examining various aspects of education and schooling in the Asia-Pacific region is that this is a particularly challenging region. It is renowned for its size, diversity, and complexity, whether it be geographical, socio-economic, cultural, political, or developmental. Education and schooling in countries throughout the region impact on every aspect of people's lives, including employment, labour force considerations, education and training, cultural orientation, and attitudes and values. Asia and the Pacific is home to some 63% of the world's population of 7 billion. Countries with the largest populations (China, 1.4 billion; India, 1.3 billion) and the most rapidly growing megacities are to be found in the region, as are countries with relatively small populations (Bhutan, 755,000; the island of Niue, 1600).

Levels of economic and socio-political development vary widely, with some of the richest countries (such as Japan) and some of the poorest countries on earth (such as Bangladesh). Asia contains the largest number of poor of any region in the world, the incidence of those living below the poverty line remaining as high as 40% in some countries in Asia. At the same time, many countries in Asia are experiencing a period of great economic growth and social development. However, inclusive growth remains elusive, as does growth that is sustainable and does not destroy the quality of the environment. The growing prominence of Asian economies and corporations, together with globalisation and technological innovation, are

leading to long-term changes in trade, business, and labour markets, to the sociology of populations within (and between) countries. There is a rebalancing of power, centred on Asia and the Pacific region, with the Asian Development Bank in Manila declaring that the twenty-first century will be “the Century of Asia Pacific”.

We know from feedback received from numerous education researchers, policy makers, and practitioners worldwide that this book series makes a useful contribution to knowledge sharing about cutting edge developments concerning education and schooling in Asia-Pacific.

Any readers of this or other volumes in the series who have an idea for writing or co-writing their own book (or editing/co-editing a book) on any aspect of education and/or schooling, that is relevant to the region, are enthusiastically encouraged to approach the series editors either direct, or through Springer, to publish their own volume in the series, since we are always willing to assist perspective authors shape their manuscripts in ways that make them suitable for publication.

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01 January, 2024

Foreword

In well-resourced countries like Australia, we are fortunate that most children and young people can access educational systems from about the age of 5 years until 17 or 18 years. Across that timespan many children spend 6 h per day, 5 days a week on a school campus. This equates to 1200 h per year—14% of an entire year in hours. This massive investment of time is beneficial to most young people in a wide variety of ways. And the positive impacts education has upon their lives benefits the broader community so greatly that state resourcing for education is easy to justify.

However, not all young people flourish at school. Across the twentieth century, a consistent pattern emerged through research with young people engaged in the criminal justice system. Compared with others of the same age, these young people attained lower levels of education, ceased schooling earlier, truanted more often, and were less committed to education.

The relationship between criminal behaviour and poor educational outcomes is very complex. Many studies have attempted to tease out the factors at play, and even to identify causal effects. Valuable as such methods are, few would deny the importance of in-depth qualitative research. How else can the detailed narratives of young people be understood?

Thoars and Moltow's book presents an extremely thought-provoking reflection on the narratives of five young men. All of these men had spent time in a youth detention facility before being incarcerated in an adult prison where they participated in interviews with the authors. Consistent with previous studies, the men reported disengagement with school in the period before they entered youth detention. Thoars and Moltow's analysis carefully explains how emotions—feelings, interests, perceptions, and attitudes—played such an important part in disengagement. The experience of the five men was that their negative associations with schooling worsened during their time in youth detention.

However, many readers will be particularly interested to learn crucial insights offered in this book about what happened to the men when they left youth detention so far as their schooling was concerned. Their memories suggest that their transition back into school was mismanaged and undertaken without any notice of individual needs. It appears that this stage itself was so jarring that it negatively affected their

perceptions of the state as a whole, in addition to cementing disaffection towards the education and youth justice systems.

Thoars and Motlow's discussion shows that earnest commitment towards young people in the justice system hinges upon inter-agency collaboration. Without it, re-engagement with education will be extremely difficult, and the negative impacts of transitional events—moving in and out of detention—will be magnified.

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Jeremy Prichard

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract In this chapter, the book’s main ideas are introduced, situated in relation to the broader global and local contexts, and key concepts are presented. The chapter concludes with an outline of the book’s schema.

Keywords Youth detention · Criminal trajectory · Educational attainment · Recidivism · School · Student engagement · Transition · Youth justice · Lived experience · Phenomenographic

Childhood is a time of innocence and vulnerability, during which the foundations required for an individual’s future and well-being are established. Many factors impact a child’s development and perceived success in life, however, including family circumstances, adverse childhood experiences, education, and socio-economic status. While the majority of children and young people in Australia have a wide range of healthy experiences, many children also experience homelessness, neglect, and abuse. Children and young people can also be victims of crimes, and in a number of cases children and young people may be the offenders (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2022).

In Australia, children aged 10–17 years inclusive can be charged and detained in youth detention facilities. Between June 2020 and June 2021, there were 44,496 10- to 17-year-olds proceeded against by police in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022). In terms of detention, on an average night in the June 2021 quarter, 819 young people were incarcerated in Australia, either on remand or in respect of a sentence (ABS, 2022). Of pressing importance, in the year 2019–2020, of those detained in youth incarceration facilities, 499 were aged between 10 and 13 years, 68% of whom were detained on remand and the remaining 32% in respect of a sentence (AIHW, 2022).

The age at which a young person encounters the criminal justice system, especially if this involves their incarceration, has been identified as a factor informing their criminal trajectory and recidivism (Day et al., 2004). Research conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that the “... most serious and

persistent adult offenders had been detained as a juvenile” (Day et al., 2004). Furthermore, young people who experienced a period of detention in Australia have been recorded as having an increased risk of returning to youth detention within 6 and 12 months (ABS, 2022). What impact might their educational experiences have on this risk?

There is a clear relationship between educational attainment and a young person’s risk of engaging in criminal activity (Hodge, 2020). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) reported that young individuals who experience periods of incarceration within a correctional setting had previously experienced issues with poor school attendance, poor academic performance, reduced cognitive ability, and diminished educational attainment, confirming a “negative correlation between educational attainment and most types of crime” (Lochner, 2020) has been identified.

However, research has yet to generate comprehensive insights about the extent to which engagement in education, particularly affective, contributes to this relation. Considering this, a comprehensive understanding is yet fully to be realised of the lived experience of youth offenders’ engagement in education, education transition events before, during, and after youth incarceration, and recidivism is yet fully to be understood.

Formal education has long been acknowledged as an influential factor in shaping the development of individuals and, in turn, society (Cortese, 2003), deemed to be of such importance that it is considered to be the right of every child. Australia agrees to honour the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC], according to which signatories ensure “all children have access to education, specifically with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity”. Importantly, children deprived of their liberty via state sanction must not have their right to an education withheld. In Australia, education policies and procedures are informed by the CRC along with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration. These two documents acknowledge the right to all young Australians to an education, one which will play a pivotal role in the promotion and development of their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral development, and overall well-being.

Despite the universal acknowledgement of the value of education for all young people, Australian Government education policies allow for students to be officially excluded, expelled, or prohibited from formal education (Australian Government Law Reform Commission, 2010). These sanctions may have significant ramifications for students, especially those who are prone to deviant behaviour, in terms of their potential for educational attainment. This aligns with the established link between engagement in delinquent behaviour and low levels of educational attainment (Novak, 2019). There is also an established link between educational attainment and engagement, which has been identified as a multidimensional concept with three key dimensions: cognitive, behavioural, and affective (Archambault et al., 2009). The affective dimension has been identified as being central to engagement in general and educational attainment (Ryan & Deci, 2009).

However, limited research in Australia focuses on the transitive relationship between student engagement in education and engagement in delinquent behaviour.