

Chapter 16

The Forgotten Child: Juvenile Delinquents as a Metaphor for Change

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: explore problems in juvenile delinquency and derive a macrobarrier to change. Juvenile delinquents have histories and complex needs which are poorly understood by educators. A barrier is the failure to understand the needs of juvenile delinquents through the leader-member exchange. Understanding the plight of juvenile delinquents serves as the microcosm for the macrobarrier of absorptive capacity. Leadership is the driving force which defines absorptive capacity. Futures studies, not solutions rooted in the past, should define the second-ordered change necessary to improve online and remote work. Three futures are offered, and a framework to develop strategic thinking gives a path to improved learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The school experience of juvenile delinquents has become an important issue in the field of education. In 2017, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2017a, 2017b), as administered by the United States Department of Education, found over one and a half million juveniles and young adults arrested per year, with over 43,000 incarcerated on a given day. Juvenile delinquents in the United States were shown to be a diverse group from different cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, with minority students over-represented in juvenile detention (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2015). In the United States, governments spent over \$6 billion per year, with costs of \$88,000 per juvenile for incarceration; yet, high school graduation and adult independence followed incarceration (Aizer & Doyle, 2013).

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Past research produced mixed results and problematize a shift to online and remote learning. Juvenile delinquents with high rates of recidivism had low academic achievement, and research-based academic interventions in traditional schools correlated to lower rates of incarceration (Katsiyannis et al., 2008). Students in alternative settings showed improved academic achievement but had a higher rate of delinquency (Fine et al., 2018). This chapter reviews research of the nature of juvenile delinquency, the schooling experience, and offers recommendations to remove barriers juvenile delinquents face. The barriers juvenile delinquents face can serve as a microcosm to expose a macrobarrier which impacts all online and remote learning: absorptive capacity.

Who are Juvenile Delinquents in the United States?

Most educators have little knowledge or insight into the plight of juvenile delinquents. Juvenile delinquents showed a multitude of problems which separate delinquents from nondelinquent peers. First-time offenders generally had a long history of problem behavior before escalating to charges and arrest, and first-time juveniles incarcerated displayed much higher rates of mental illness and aggression (Barrett & Katsiyannis, 2017). Another issue was juvenile delinquents disproportionately suffered from medical problems which go untreated (Balogun et al., 2018; Barnert et al., 2016).

Incarcerated juveniles, on average, were a standard deviation below peers on standardized academic achievement, and there was a prevalence of disabilities and psychiatric illnesses, especially personality disorders (Krezmien et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 2015). Juvenile delinquents in tradition classes lacked the ability and the self-determination to be successful, yet online and remote working proposed to create independent students performing grade level work in isolation. The possibility of working independently on online and remote learning proves difficult because of the barriers of reading and the ability to build and sustain successful relationships.

The School Experience of Juvenile Delinquents

One of the most important factors in contact with juvenile justice was educational achievement (Blomberg & Pesta, 2017). Most students involved with juvenile justice displayed discipline problems and were prone to dropping out. Of the approximately 100,000 juveniles released from detention each year, about 50% returned to school, and about 16% dropped out within five months (Benner et al., 2016). Juvenile delinquents did not succeed in traditional school, so there was little hope recreating the experience online would accomplish anything for this group.

Beyond social and emotional disabilities, students incarcerated were much more likely to have pervasive learning problems which caused problems across the school setting. Students with disabilities had a negative effect on academic achievement the longer detained (Grigorenko et al., 2015). Dyslexia and reading difficulties, related to poor executive functioning and low self-esteem, were much more prevalent in juvenile delinquency, related to impulsivity, and were not easily remedied without intensive, long-term interventions (Baker & Ireland, 2007; Crosby et al., 2017; O'Brien et al., 2007; Wheldall & Watkins, 2004). Online and remote learning for juvenile delinquents depend on understanding and implementing programs which start from the ability and interests of juvenile delinquents.

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