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Children's Education in Secure Custodial Settings:

Towards a Global Sharing of Effective Policy and Practice

The Institutional Shaping of Children's Educational Experiences in Secure Custody:

A Case Study of a Secure Children's Home in England

Dr Caroline Andow
University of Winchester

Abstract

Secure Children's Homes accommodate some of the most vulnerable children in society and yet they have evaded sustained academic attention. Consequently, little is known about children's education in this type of setting. Through the lens of institutional ethnography, this paper explores how experiences of education inside one Secure Children's Home in England are shaped by the institution. This approach makes visible that while the small-scale of the setting is of value, the mix of children accommodated for qualitatively different reasons is problematic for both the delivery of education and the children's engagement in learning.

Keywords: institutional ethnography; educationally disadvantaged; child custody; juvenile justice; child welfare; residential institutions.

1. Introduction

The exterior of Woodside does not intimate that it is a custodial institution. There are no high walls, or barbed wire as one might expect. It looks, instead, just as a typical small school in England might look; a modern brick building with characteristic white framed windows. Only upon entry does it become apparent that this is a distinct type of institutional setting. Movement through the building is punctuated by a series of locking and unlocking doors. Together with the jangling of staff keys, these locked doors are an omnipresent reminder that the children inside are detained. Further, the windows do not open, and the toilets do

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not have seats because, as Patrick, a member of the care staff explained to me, 'anything that is removable can be used as a weapon' (RD, 19/07/2014)[1].

One part of the main building is colloquially referred to, by the staff and children, as 'education'. This area is separate from the residential 'units' which contain the bedrooms, lounge areas and a dining area. In education, there are several classrooms, an art room, a woodwork room, a large sports hall, and a central staff room. Artwork created by the children adorns the walls, and the space feels bright and modern.

Like most Western industrialized countries, England and Wales have demonstrated a largely punitive response to children in conflict with the law, at least since the 1980s. The use of custody for children has fallen significantly since 2007/8, but the number of children held in custody in England and Wales remains high by international standards (Bateman, 2011, 2016; Youth Justice Board and Ministry of Justice, 2016). The opening vignette above is designed to provide the reader with an immediate insight into a Secure Children's Home (SCH); one of the three locked institutions that make up the secure estate in England and Wales, and the one that is the focus of this discussion.

SCHs differ from the larger Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs) (142-336 boys per institution) and Secure Training Centres (STCs) (76-80 children per institution) not only because they are much smaller (8-42 children per institution) but also on the grounds of the children that they accommodate (Children's Commissioner for England, 2015). SCHs accommodate children who have been deprived of their liberty on criminal justice grounds, as well as children who are detained on welfare legislation - Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 - when it is considered that they pose a significant risk to themselves. Children detained on welfare orders can only be placed in SCHs, while children detained on justice grounds are placed in a SCH - rather than a YOI or STC - if they are younger than 15 and/or considered especially vulnerable. Grounds for a welfare order are satisfied when a child is repeatedly absconding from open accommodation and either i) being exposed to significant harm, or ii) injuring him/herself or others. Examples of the former would include a child running away to adults who are exploiting him or her in some way, whilst the latter would include a child that is making suicidal attempts.

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[1] Where data is drawn from an informal conversation or observation, I provide the date of record in my Research Diary (RD). Any direct quotes that are presented without this detail are drawn from interview transcripts.

The original rationale behind creating locked institutions for children accommodating 'offenders and non-offenders alike' (Cawson and Martell, 1979:3; Harris and Timms, 1993:11) - 'Criminals' and 'Welfares' as colloquially expressed inside the institution (RD 14.01.14) - was that both groups have typically experienced similar adverse experiences, which has been repeatedly attested in research findings (Ellis, 2012; Goldson, 2002; Justice Studio, 2014; Kroll *et al.*, 2002; O'Neill, 2001; Sinclair and Geraghty, 2008; Walker *et al.*, 2006). Most children in SCHs have experienced difficult family relationships and many have had previous contact with social services and/or lived in residential care (Ellis, 2012; Justice Studio, 2014; O'Neill, 2001; Sinclair and Geraghty, 2008; Walker *et al.*, 2006). Exposure to emotional, physical and sexual violence is also relatively common (O'Neill, 2001). A majority of children in SCHs suffer from emotional and mental health problems (Chitsabesan *et al.*, 2006; Justice Studio, 2014; Pates *et al.*, 2018). For children entering SCHs on welfare or justice placements, the time prior to entry can be characterised by social deprivation, chaos, multiple care placements, sexual exploitation and/or gang involvement or association (Justice Studio, 2014). While the grouping together of children detained on welfare and justice legislation is legitimised by these commonalities, little is known about how this mix plays out in practice. This paper makes the case that the accommodation of children detained on welfare placements on the grounds of self-injury alongside children placed either on alternative welfare criteria or criminal justice legislation negatively impacts experiences of education for all of the children inside a SCH.

There has been increasing specialisation within SCHs in recent years, with some SCHs moving to welfare- or justice-only placements, for reasons not made explicit. In 2018, five of the 14 SCHs in England and Wales accommodated a mix of welfare and justice placements, two accommodated justice placements only and the remaining 7 accommodated welfare placements only (Warner *et al.*, 2018; Williams *et al.*, 2019). However, following the decline in the child custodial population, new institutions have been proposed which could slightly reverse this trend. First, in 2014, the government proposed large Secure Colleges, accommodating around 300 children, described as a 'new model of youth custody' that 'puts education at the heart of detention' (Ministry of Justice, 2014:5). Following vociferous criticism focusing on the scale of these institutions (Hart, 2015; Wanless, 2014) this proposal was abandoned. Instead, Secure Schools, accommodating 60 to 70 children, are being pursued. Secure Schools will place an emphasis on education to prevent reoffending, and the first such institution is due to open in late 2020 on the site of the now closed Medway STC. It is plausible that some children who would have been accommodated on justice

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placements within SCHs will be accommodated within these larger - and cheaper - institutions, increasing much-needed capacity for welfare placements across existing justice-only and mixed placement SCHs. This paper is therefore especially timely in the sense of exploring how two institutional factors - the mix of children and the scale of the institution - shape experiences of education inside a SCH. It will argue that there are grounds for more radical reform of the secure estate.

Theoretically, this paper is inspired by institutional ethnography, as developed by Smith (1987, 2005). Institutional ethnography explores issues that '… are real for people and that are situated in their relationships to an institutional order' (Smith 2005: 32). For Smith, institutional ethnography is a strategy for exploring how the experiences of marginalised groups are shaped by oppressive institutional practices and dominant ideologies. Smith considers the social activities and experiences of members of the institution under study as the starting point for inquiry. The children in a SCH, by the fact of their deprivation of liberty, are disempowered, and marginalised from wider society. I use the ethos of Smith's approach, not to explore issues of oppression, but instead to illuminate how institutional organisation and practice within a SCH shapes children's everyday experiences of education.

Institutional ethnography is an appropriate theoretical choice for this paper because (i) it positions the children and staff inside the SCH under study as active subjects who can reflect on their experiences, (ii) it highlights the meanings that participants ascribe to their experiences and (iii) the goal is to expose processes which lead to disadvantage as part of a quest for social justice (O'Neill, 1998; Witkin and Gottschalk, 1988). In his evaluation of institutional ethnography as a theoretical choice in social work research, O'Neill (1998) argued that this approach should be used to explore the experiences of marginalised groups within social institutions and to identify and address questions related to social policy. Through exploring how children experience education within a SCH, and making policy recommendations to improve experiences, this paper uses institutional ethnography as O'Neill advocates.

This paper can be positioned in relation to the other papers in this special issue using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theorising. Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlighted the importance of a child's environment, conceived of in distinct - but not mutually exclusive - layers. The layers can be imagined as concentric circles surrounding a person, where the 'microsystem' refers to immediate

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day to day interactions and the 'mesosystem' refers to interactions surrounding a person but not necessarily involving him or her directly. These layers are nested within the 'macrosystem', a term that Bronfenbrenner used to encapsulate the 'belief systems' and 'generalized patterns of ideology and institutional structure characteristic of a particular culture or subculture' (1979: 79, 9). Bronfenbrenner identifies public policy as a part of the 'macrosystem'. Ethnographic research to date has explored individual ('microsystem') and relational ('mesosystem') interactions within SCHs (Ahmed Shafi, 2019; Andow, 2016, 2018; Ellis, 2018), but this is the first time that the significance of the 'macrosystem' on shaping these lower level interactions in relation to education has been explored. However, though this paper can be positioned using Bronfenbrenner's model, the goal is not to understand the institution, as in systemic analysis, but to explore subjective experiences of the setting.

In the remainder of the paper, Section 2 provides an insight into education in youth custody in England and Wales, and Section 3 provides the detail of the larger ethnographic study from which the findings in this paper are drawn. Then the research results and discussion are combined, with Section 4 detailing opportunities for learning within this context, and Section 5 reporting the challenges. Section 6 summarises the contribution of the paper.

2. Education in youth custody

Research on the educational backgrounds of children in custody has consistently reported disrupted educational histories and poor literacy and numeracy skills, with some children demonstrating low intelligence and others identified as having special educational needs (SEN) (Chitsabesan *et al.*, 2006; Cripps and Summerfield, 2012; Justice Studio, 2014; Kroll *et al.*, 2002; Little, 2015; O'Neill, 2001; Pates *et al.*, 2018; Scott, 2011; Sinclair and Geraghty, 2008). Recent data from the Ministry of Justice shows that 30 per cent of children who entered custody over 2018-2019 in England and Wales were assessed as having special educational needs or disabilities, compared to less than 15 per cent of children nationally (Bulman, 2019a). Though these research findings relate only to children who have entered custody on criminal justice grounds, the education backgrounds of those on welfare placements are assumed similar given the commonalities in adverse childhood experiences already established.

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According to the Department for Education (DfE) the standard in SCHs is that 'children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so' (Department for Education, 2015:25). Children in SCHs are expected to participate in full time education, 30 hours a week, unless they have a plan, such as a care plan, that states otherwise. Free from the restrictions of the national curriculum, SCHs are assessed - by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) - in terms of children's progress, especially in English and Maths (OFSTED, 2017). In addition, they are judged as to how far they identify individual needs and recognise potential barriers to successful learning. The Ofsted (2017) guidance indicates a concern with 'good progress' and 'good outcomes', without an emphasis on formal qualifications.

From the limited evidence available, it appears that SCHs are performing better than YOIs in terms of educational outcomes. Research reported that SCHs provide 'intensive educational provision to children that accelerates their literacy and numeracy ability' and children's educational attainment at a SCH surpasses 'the speed of achievement expected by schools within the national curriculum' (Justice Studio, 2014:40, 44). This research found that in general, children leave a SCH with 'functional English, functional maths and functional ICT, a better relationship with learning and education, higher self-esteem in their ability [and] an identity as a learner' (Justice Studio, 2014:40). However, like most research on SCHs, this report does not differentiate according to whether the data relates to children accommodated in welfare-only, justice-only or mixed placement SCHs.

Data on educational outcomes in YOIs or STCs is not available (see POST, 2016), but recent inspections by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIPs) of YOIs (2015a, 2015b) and Taylor's (2016) review of the youth justice system have raised significant concerns about education provision in these settings. The HMIP (2015a:5) inspection report for Wetherby YOI reported that although educational provision was good, activity was 'poorly allocated, take up was too low, and attendance was poor, which all contributed to needlessly negative outcomes.'

Research about how children experience education in these settings offers a mixed picture. On the one hand children in SCHs have reported appreciating the opportunity to get involved in education again, positive perceptions of their teachers and not having to travel to school. However, disruptions, poor teaching and boredom have also been described (Ofsted 2009). In Ahmed Shafi's (2019) ethnographic research she noted that the small staff to pupil ratio in a SCH provides opportunity for individual support and personalised interventions. However, despite this, she found

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children in the SCH she studied (which only held children on justice grounds) to be disengaged in education, perceiving the quality of education available to them as poor. Little's (2015) research with children in a YOI similarly found limited engagement in education, which was attributed to earlier negative experiences of schooling, the institutional prioritising of security over learning, disruptions within the environment, a diverse range of needs and a narrow curriculum. This led Little (2015:43) to conclude that any of the children's learning achievements occur 'despite, not because of, the system they find themselves subject to.' Looking to the international literature - which is in itself limited - Houchins et al. (2009) considered teacher-reported institutional factors that can act as facilitators or barriers for learning for incarcerated youth in the United States. Facilitators to learning included reward systems and, like Ahmed Shafi, small class sizes. However, Houchins et al. found that on top of challenges familiar to all schools - such as poor student motivation - juvenile justice settings must manage additional security concerns, handling contraband, limited parental involvement and transient populations.

While studies of justice-only SCHs, YOIs and youth custodial settings in other jurisdictions can provide valuable insight into experiences of education in confinement - suggesting in this case something in particular about the importance of an individualised approach - the findings cannot be directly applied to SCHs that mix welfare and justice placements because of the different institutional context. This paper makes a unique contribution by exploring experiences of education inside a mixed placement SCH, drawing on rare ethnographic data.

3. Methodology

The data on which this paper is based were generated through a larger ethnographic study of everyday life inside a SCH in England. The broad research question guiding this research asked, *'How do staff and children experience life inside a Secure Children's Home in England?'* This study was undertaken as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded piece of doctoral research, with ethics approval granted at university and local-authority levels. The SCH was selected on the basis that it accommodated a mix of welfare and justice placements, and, pragmatically, my previous contact with the manager of the relevant local authority. Gaining access to this closed institution was a protracted process, involving 11 months of negotiations with the management team.

Once inside the SCH it took time to develop rapport with the staff and children, but with trust came majority participation. The staff signed a consent form to indicate their fully informed consent based on information I provided about the research. The children also signed a consent form, but because of their age and vulnerable status, their individual key workers were also asked to sign a form to legally consent on behalf of each child. In practice consent was negotiated continually, as I reconfirmed willingness to be involved and understanding of the research with participants at different moments in time.

In total, I spent 396 hours over 7 months in the field. I spent my time variously across Woodside - the pseudonym I use to protect the anonymity of the institution - conscious not to carve out one 'inhabitable niche' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007:36, 92). I engaged in all aspects of life at Woodside; I attended staff meetings, played basketball, shared meals, attended lessons, sat in the communal lounges, helped with menial tasks and so on. I was present at different times of day, including late into the evening, and on different days of the week, including weekends, to build a comprehensive picture of the setting. During my fieldwork I was actively aware of constantly moving along the participant observer continuum - never pure participant, never complete observer (Mason, 1996). I recorded my daily observations - of interactions and behaviours, particularly those seemingly linked to the mix of welfare and justice placements - as images in a notebook I carried around with me, to prevent embarrassment in case my notebook was taken from me, and I wrote up all my notes in my car at the end of each visit.

I do not disclose details of the SCH such as the geographical location, number of beds and ratio of welfare to justice placements to protect the anonymity of the institution. I include details of the participants in the study using pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 1 (see below) provides details of the 14 children who took part in this research. The data demonstrates that the sample included a mix of legal status, gender, age, ethnicity and length of placement. All of the children on welfare placements who participated in this research were female, which is typical for this type of placement (O'Neill, 2001). Table 2 (see below) provides an overview of the 39 staff who took part in this research, representing all of the staff teams across the institution. Not all of the participants took part in interviews and those that did were self-selecting. In total, 11 children participated in 14 interviews, as detailed in Table 3 (see below). Interviewing the staff was more difficult because of the pressures on their time, but ultimately 24 staff from a range of roles across the institution

participated in interviews, as Table 4 (see below) shows. This includes an extended interview of three hours with the Head of Education.

The amount of data generated in this rare substantial ethnography demonstrates the rigour of this study. The formal data analysis - the repeated thematic coding of the 38 interview transcripts and my circa 80,000 word research diary (RD), using the approach espoused by Corbin and Strauss (2008) - started in earnest only after I left the field because of the intensity of the fieldwork experience, as is common in this type of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

One of the inherent strengths of taking an ethnographic approach is that it allows for unanticipated issues of salience to emerge inductively, as happened in this research. Over the course of the fieldwork, and through my closeness to the research participants, I became acutely aware of the challenges relating to education in this setting. The findings I present next illuminate the influence of the institution on educational experiences inside a SCH.

4. Opportunities for learning

According to anecdotal accounts from the staff, children make significant progress during their time at Woodside. In his interview, Malcolm, the Head of Education, gave the example of a boy who was accommodated for five months and in that time his single word reading moved forward by the equivalent of 24 months according to mainstream levels. Similarly, Patrick, a member of the care team said,

> 'we've had like kids that haven't been able to read and write and they've come out with like their reading age like boosted up and find like they've picked up certificates... some of them just... in normal society wouldn't achieve anything, because they'd just be like bottom of the pile, whereas in here like they're all sort of like on an even keel.'

Similarly, Sean, the Head of Care, spoke during his interview about two children he had worked with; one who came in illiterate and left able to read and write, and one who went from Woodside to college to complete a course in hair and beauty. For Sean, 'The impact of education [at Woodside] is really strong.'

In addition to progress, there was a positive sense of reengagement in education expressed by some of the children in this research, which is in line with the findings of previous research (OFSTED, 2009). For example, Beth, a child, explained to me in her interview how being awarded 'Student of the Week' made her feel good about herself. When I asked her how this experience contrasted with her experience of education in the community, she said 'I didn't experience education in the community.' Nicola - a girl who presented a tough exterior and spoke often about her goal of entering adult prison - explained how she had tried her hardest to 'get stuff done' in education at Woodside, encouraged by her nan's joy at having received certificates through the post because, in her words, 'I done alright in a couple of things.' And for Daryll, it was the opportunity to go to school again that he valued, as according to him, 'I don't go to school on the out. Nowhere will take me…' For Scott, a dominant character on a long custodial sentence, Woodside had given him a renewed sense of the importance of gaining qualifications for when he was released. Patrick, a member of the care team, suggested that the children serving long sentences at Woodside appreciated that they had to grasp the opportunity to get some qualifications because they would have to be 'a hundred times better than people without a criminal record' to get a job. The achievements detailed here can be attributed to high levels of individual support and the ability to financially incentivise education, which are now discussed in turn.

5.1 Individual support

One of the key facilitators for learning within Woodside was the level of individual support for each child, and the extent to which their individuals needs could be catered for. This was possible because of the ratio of one member of staff to every two children in lessons, which Ahmed Shafi (2019) also recognised as an advantage within this context. Small class sizes and individualised education provision have been recognised as a facilitator for learning in youth custody (Houchins *et al.*, 2009; Justice Studio, 2014), and opposition to Secure Colleges was based in part of the inability of an establishment of 320 children to provide individualised support (Hart, 2015).

Hugo, one of the teachers, explained how education in this setting could be tailored to each child. He gave the example that 'some of them can't sit still for more than fifteen minutes so need a couple of minutes out to have a walk around the garden'. The general policy was for a maximum of three so-called 'time-outs' per day per child - where a child takes a break from the lesson accompanied by a teaching assistant - however, in a staff meeting one day, Malcolm, the Head of Education, explained to the staff that he had negotiated a maximum of five time-outs per day with

Naomi, because of her individual needs. Illustrating this individualised approach further, Beth, a child explained that she had asked that staff monitor her weekly performance record over time and through doing this, they had found that she was receiving a '2', rather than a '1', for her engagement in 'P.E.' every fourth week, which they then worked out was around the time of her menstrual period. Beth was able to request a different activity at this time as a result, and thereby improve her overall scores. Beth beamed as she explained to me how much she liked being able to discuss how she had performed with the education staff at the end of each week and agree goals for the week ahead (RD 16/05/14). The children in this research appreciated the individual attention they received, as illustrated by Rhianna who said that education at Woodside was 'nice, you get loads of support.' This echoes a child in another SCH who said 'This school has small groups so you can get the attention what you need' (Justice Studio, 2014:45).

At Woodside there was the possibility to develop what Malcolm referred to as 'bespoke curriculums' for each child, which is consistent with findings from other SCHs (Justice Studio, 2014). Malcolm gave the example of one girl, who I knew to be Naomi, having extra 'P.E.' lessons, because that's what she enjoyed most, whilst another boy was given the option to do an activity in place of a subject he did not like. Malcolm, the Head of Education, explained how important he felt it was for the staff to work with each child to understand 'what makes them tick, and what motivates them and so on…'. In Malcolm's words,

> 'Each individual is an individual and you could say they've got similar needs, similar problems, similar issues but what you've got to do is break it down, analyse what that individual need is and try and match their needs to what we can do to support them.'

Within the education system at Woodside, the children were not treated as a collective group, nor as two distinct groups based on legal status. Instead, the institution - because of the small size and high ratio of staff to pupil support - tailored education to each individual. The staff spoke positively about the level of individual support that Woodside was able to offer the children, and several of the children expressed their appreciation of the help that they received during interviews with me.

5.2 Financially incentivising education

To encourage success, Malcolm, the Head of Education, was enthusiastic to change the culture of education at Woodside, from focussing on negative behaviour to, in his words 'catching them doing

something right.' As part of this, he had introduced tangible incentives to encourage the children's engagement. Children were able to earn credits for good behaviour and/or performance in lessons. Each credit had an equivalent value of 25 pence, a certificate earned two or three credits, and the much-coveted award of 'Student of the Week', based on overall performance, was worth 10 credits. In addition, students could receive tickets for a raffle which took place in the weekly assembly. Raffle prizes came in the form of different amounts of additional credit. In a lesson I observed, the teacher suggested that his tutor group compete against the other groups to get the most credits between them, to encourage in addition, it seemed, a sense of teamwork (RD 12.04.14). The staff and children generally spoke positively about this reward system, especially because it was seen as consistent and transparent (unlike the reward system on the residential units (see Andow, 2016)). Only one member of the care staff, Theo, felt it was inappropriate to give the children money for engaging in school. Reward systems to encourage good behaviour were noted by Houchins et al. (2009) as facilitators for learning, but a system based on financial reward is arguably only plausible at Woodside because of the small number of pupils and therefore the relatively limited cost.

This section has detailed the factors that reengage children in learning at Woodside, with anecdotal stories of success. Next I describe challenges relating to the mix of the children which were compromising the ability of all the students to achieve at the time of this research.

5. The Challenge of Self-Injury

The main challenge for education at Woodside relates to the mix of children detained for different reasons. It was not the mix of welfare and justice placements per se that was problematic, but rather, the mix of children who were self-injuring with those who were not. It is important to define how the concept of 'self-injury' is used in this paper, given that within the literature, 'diverse terms, including self-harm, self-mutilation, self-cutting and self-injury are used interchangeably' (Laye-Gindhu and Schonert-Reichl, 2005:447). Here 'self-injury' is defined as

> the deliberate, nonsuicidal destruction of one's own body tissue, incorporating practices such as self-cutting, burning, branding, scratching, picking at skin… re-opening wounds, biting, head banging, hair pulling, hitting, swallowing or embedding objects, breaking bones or teeth, tearing or severely biting cuticles or nails, and chewing the inside of the mouth. (Adler and Adler, 2007:1)

It is known that children detained in custody - on the grounds of welfare or justice - are at heightened risk of inflicting self-injury (see Bulman, 2019b). However, at Woodside, some of the children - all female in this research - were detained on welfare placements on the grounds of their self-injury, rather than on the grounds of other forms of self-harm behaviour, such as a repetitive absconding and putting themselves in dangerous or exploitative situations (as detailed in Section 1). The girls I refer to in this paper were openly self-injuring, and the damage that they were inflicting to themselves was visible. It is to these children I refer, when I discuss children self-injuring at Woodside.

While significant self-injurious behaviour has been previously reported within SCHs (Justice Studio, 2014), accommodating children who were severely self-injuring was a relatively recent challenge for Woodside at the time of this research. Heather - one of the psychologists who had returned to her job at Woodside two months previous after two years away - explained how she felt that the nature of the children placed on welfare grounds had changed. She explained,

> 'welfare kids are showing a lot more kind of severe self-injury and threats to staff, a lot more difficult to manage, whereas the welfare kids that we had in when I was here before, were always kind of troubled and slightly traumatised but probably more kind of withdrawn or oppositional than hurting themselves so I think that's the different dynamic now.'

Heather accounted for this change on the basis of a current crisis in terms of resources for children with mental health issues. Gary, a senior member of the care staff, echoed Heather's view. In his interview, Gary explained that increasing demand on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) had raised the threshold for access to services. Gary described how children's mental health is assessed using a 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' and now, '…you've got to have a score of about 30 which is quite high before CAMHS admits them.' At the same time, Gary indicated that a lack of specialist beds for children with complex mental health problems meant that they were being accommodated in SCHs on welfare orders, which the legislation allows for.

The views of Heather and Gary are substantiated by empirical evidence. The use of welfare beds in SCHs to accommodate children with complex mental health issues because of an insufficient number of CAMHS inpatient beds has been a continuing issue for at least a decade (Jane Held Consulting

Ltd., 2006; Mooney *et al.*, 2012). However, the problem has intensified in recent years because of a sudden and sustained - albeit unaccounted for - increase in referrals for CAMHS 'Tier 4 beds' since July 2013 (NHS England, 2014). Tier 4 beds are for children with the most severe mental health needs. NHS England's (2014) report recommended the immediate procurement of additional Tier 4 beds, but there has, on the contrary, been substantial disinvestment in children's mental health services because of significant government funding cuts (YoungMinds, 2015). An additional £35 million funding cut from the CAMHS budget in 2014 brought the total saving to £80 million over four years (Austin, 2015). While in 2015 the Government committed an extra £1.4 billion to funding CAMHS over five years, there are concerns this money has been used for other priorities and is, in any case, an insufficient amount to tackle the current crisis (YoungMinds, 2018).

In the remainder of the paper, I demonstrate how the accommodation of young people who were detained on the grounds of their self-injury alongside children accommodation on alternative welfare or justice criteria created challenges in terms of the delivery of education and the children's engagement in learning.

6.1 Delivering Education

One of the main challenges at Woodside was creating what Romano et al. (2015:434) consider as vital for engendering learning: 'a safe environment through the establishment of routines and rules that are fair and consistently enforced [and] appropriately managing disruptive behaviour.' This echoes Johanssson and Höger's (2012:1139) earlier finding that the most important facilitator for learning was that school was experienced as 'a stable, predictable and safe environment.' These points warrant discussion in turn.

6.1.1 Safety

First, creating a safe environment at Woodside was made difficult because of the risk of self-injury that some of the children presented. Items routinely found within classrooms all presented risks to these children. To give a clear example, over the duration of the fieldwork Beth and Shona both broke biro pens apart, used the shards from the plastic casing to cut themselves and inserted the cartridge into a vein in their arms. Beth discussed doing this openly, once excitedly explaining to a group including myself and some of the other children that when she did it, she could not move her fingers properly (RD 01.03.14). On another occasion, Shona ate a pen she managed to access,

staining her lips and tongue with black ink as she did so (RD 02.04.14). For Scott, a boy serving a long sentence for a criminal offence, it was illogical to accommodate children within Woodside who were not allowed to have access to items such as pens because of the risk of self-injury; 'like say someone's not allowed a pen, there's like a thousand pens in this place so this ain't the right place for them, do you get what I mean?' This data suggests that the mix of children is problematic because the children who self-injure are exposed to risks within the environment.

Gary, a member of the care team, used the difficulty of making the environment safe for children at risk of self-injury as a reason to not have the mix of legal placements in a SCH:

> '… if you look at some of the issues, like with Shona, and Beth… about what they're using to self-harm, you could make that so much more sterile, because that's the way we were getting, making them more sterile, I mean, we can't be a… totally sterile unit, but you can make it more sterile and then actually not, because you could argue well why should someone that's here for a criminal offence not have a clock on the wall? Well because someone else is going to eat the batteries… so I mean I think there is an argument for not having the two mixed.'

Lanskey (2011:57) recognised in her research that where 'security and safety demands of the secure estate conflict with educational needs, the former take precedence and the latter may be compromised…' but she spoke about this in relation to restrictions such as the internet or recording equipment. At Woodside, even everyday items associated with learning presented a risk for some of the children. Beth and Shona had to have a member of care staff attend education with them, to manage the risk, and they could not attend certain lessons, such as woodwork. At times they could not attend education at all because of safety concerns and/or a lack of staffing. Children at risk of self-injury were missing out on their education at Woodside because the environment could not safely accommodate their needs.

6.1.2 (In)consistency

Returning to the environment described by Romano et al. (2015) above (6.1), enforcing routines and rules fairly and consistently was also challenging within this context. The routines of school were applied differently, depending once again on the risk of self-injury that the child presented. This is illustrated in the following quote from my interview with Roger, a senior member of the care team:

Roger: Yeah, if one of the other children, maybe, one of the ones here on criminal justice grounds, if they don't get up for school, don't go to school, they'll be sanctioned. Shona this morning told staff to fuck off, she's not getting up and she won't get a sanction for it

Caroline: Why not?

Roger: She should, she should receive a sanction, but maybe she should lose her power or something, but she won't do that because the risk, if she gets sanctioned, the risk of her escalating her behaviours and seriously self-harming increases. So its managing her risk against the fairness of everybody being treated the same.

Scott, a boy on a justice placement, felt aggrieved in relation to how the rules and routines were different for Shona:

'…nothing happens to her, she doesn't have to go to education if she don't want to, do you know what I mean, she'll just be like 'I can't cope today', don't have to go to education, it's just a piss take. No sanction will be put in place for her getting out of bed late. If that was me, yeah, when I get up I'll be late for the next lesson so I can't go in so I have to sit in my corridor with triple schoolwork and a power ban. Do you get what I mean? But nothing happens to her.'

However, while the children on justice placements expressed their frustrations about what they perceived as preferential treatment for those at risk of self-injury, the children detained on welfare grounds bemoaned any parity of treatment between themselves and those on justice placements. For example, Beth, a young girl who persistently self-injured complained:

'I'm here to get help and move on with my life, they're here to be punished for something that they've done. So how should I be treated the same as them? They complain when we're treated differently but how is it fair for me to be treated the same as them?'

Naomi, another young girl accommodated on welfare grounds expressed the same sense of injustice when she said in her interview, 'we get treated the same as the Criminals and it's not fair… Criminals

are here to be, like taught that they shouldn't do that and they've done bad. We're just here to get help.'

Looking through the lens of institutional ethnography, it becomes possible to see that the meanings that the children ascribe to their experiences within the SCH differ according to their legal status, but from either perspective the mix of children is experienced as unjust.

6.2 Engaging in education

In addition to causing issues in terms of the delivery of education, the presence of children detained on the grounds of qualitatively different behaviours caused issues in terms of mixing the children and managing disruptions within the classroom, as I discuss in turn below.

6.2.1 Grouping the children

The challenge in grouping the children for education was not related to the differences in age, or ability, as might be expected. Rather, it was mixing the children who were accommodated for different reasons. While the potential to group together a child convicted of a sex related crime (on a justice placement) with a child accommodated because of sexual abuse (on a welfare placement) was ever-present, it was the mix of children who were self-injuring alongside those that were not that was experienced as the most challenging issue. Witnessing self-injury in the classroom can negatively impact on children academically and emotionally (Wells and Axe, 2013). Reika, a girl on a justice placement, explained how upsetting she found 'seeing with my own eyes people self-harming, like people sitting there with a screw sticking out of their arm, and a pen sticking out of their arm, and bullshit like that.' When I asked Reika how seeing this made her feel she said quietly, 'I dropped a tear a couple of nights you know, because… I'm not used to that shit like. It's just too much of a shock for me.' Arguably these kinds of emotional reactions will compromise a child's ability to engage, especially when it is considered that most of the children inside SCHs will be attempting to deal with their own traumas and adverse experiences.

On the other hand, some of the staff in the home felt uncomfortable about mixing children on welfare placements with those who had been convicted or charged with a crime. Hugo, a teacher, said

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> 'You're saying to these young people, 'OK you've had a difficult life, let's make sure that your peers are people who have been through youth justice.' So I think that can be a bit of a worry if the people they're around and forming relationships with are people who have been convicted of crime.'

Once again, the mix of placements is perceived as problematic, because of the issues raised for children detained on either legal ground.

6.2.2 Managing disruption

In addition, though the staff worked hard to try and manage disruptive behaviour in the classroom, they did not always succeed, and this affected the ability of others within the class - and depending on the extent of the disruption – all of the classes, to concentrate. The classroom doors were locked during lessons, but when a child was 'kicking off' in one classroom, to the point that other staff were called to assist, children in the other classrooms would try desperately to look out of the door windows to see what was going on. This echoes the findings of previous research with children within the secure estate who found disruptions challenging, affecting their ability to concentrate (Little, 2015; OFSTED, 2009).

I once observed a lesson where Shona, who was known for her self-injury, attended. Early in the session, Shona managed to quickly lift a chair on to a table and use it to help her climb up and on to a ledge that sat about three quarters of the way up the classroom wall, encasing some kind of piping. From that position, Shona threatened to jump off. Needless to say, the focus became on Shona and her safety and the lesson was ended for the other three children (RD 03.03.14). On a different day, I was observing a numeracy lesson, where the teacher asked the children to start by drawing a table. Jen, another female on a welfare placement known for her self-injury, started to fiddle with something down her bra, before placing an object into her mouth. Jen implied to the teacher that it might be a battery, and the teacher and teaching assistant then became preoccupied with trying to negotiate with Jen to remove the object. I watched as Jacob, who at thirteen was unable to read or write, and who was normally very hard to engage, diligently used his ruler to draw a picture of a dining table. He did not realise that the teacher had wanted a mathematical table, and in any case, his efforts went unnoticed as the bell signalling the end of the session chimed (RD 13.01.14).

However, it was also the case that the children on welfare orders were affected by frequent taunts that they received from those accommodated on criminal grounds. For example, in one numeracy lesson, I observed Daryll say to Rhianna, '*You're a self-harmer.*' Rhianna contested this immediately, and said, '*No I am not!*' Daryll replied, '*I can see those marks on your arms.*' Rhianna quickly pulled her sleeves down and pointed out, '*They were from ages ago*'. After this exchange, Rhianna appeared upset and did not engage in the remainder of the lesson (RD, 13.01.14).

This section has demonstrated how the mix of children detained for different types of behaviour creates challenges for education at Woodside, disrupting the delivery of education as well as the ability of all the children to engage in lessons. In the concluding section below, I state the importance and implications of these findings.

6. Conclusion

Inspired by the ethos of institutional ethnography, this paper explored the situated experiences of children and staff within a SCH and the meanings that they ascribed to their interactions. This theoretical lens made visible how institutional organisation and practice shapes everyday experiences of education in this type of setting. The findings are based on my generation and interpretation of data from one SCH, at one moment in time, with a particular mix of children and staff. However, ethnographic research is not concerned with generalisability, as in the quantitative paradigm. Rather it is the depth of understanding, and appreciation of meaning, through the intensive study of one case, as demonstrated in this paper, that characterises the ethnographic contribution to knowledge.

Unlike Little (2015), who found that any achievements made by the children at the YOI he studied were in spite of the educational environment, I argue, in line with previous research, that SCHs have the potential to reengage children in learning. The small scale of SCHs allows for individualised support and tangible incentives, as demonstrated at Woodside. However, this research found that in practice, the mix of children compromised the delivery of education and the children's engagement in learning. It was not the accommodation together of welfare and justice placements per se that was problematic; rather it was the grouping together of children detained for severe self-injury alongside children detained on other grounds - welfare or justice - that caused challenges. Risks within the environment, perceptions of the injustice of treatment in relation to each other, concerns

about damaging exposures through mixing and disruptions and distractions within the classroom led to frustrations experienced in different ways by the children and staff.

Based on these findings, this paper argues for small institutions that group children according to the types of behaviours that led to their detention as opposed to the legal grounds for their deprivation of liberty. The immediate suggestion would be to separate children detained on the grounds of self-injury from those detained for other reasons, for the benefit of both groups. Further research is needed to explore how provision might be reorganised, as part of a more ambitious reform of the secure estate intended to realise the learning opportunities that secure custody can offer.

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Table 1:   Woodside participants: children

Legal status	Gender	Pseudonym	Age on entry	Ethnicity	Date of arrival	Total days at Woodside
Welfare	Female (4)	Shona*	15	White British	19/09/2013	308 to date**
		Jen*	15	White British	02/12/2013	101 to date***
		Beth*	15	White British	06/12/2013	226
		Naomi*	15	Mixed (Other)	03/02/2014	171 to date
Justice	Female (5)	Rhianna	15	White British	22/10/2013	90
		Reika	15	Black African	01/11/2013	123
		Sasha*	15	Mixed (Other)	06/11/2013	91
		Daisy	15	White British	02/12/2013	60
		Nicola	16	White and Black African	11/12/2013	40
	Male (5)	Scott	13	Black (Other)	21/02/2013	518 to date
		Jacob	14	White British	11/01/2014	111
		Daryll	15	White British	22/01/2014	90
		Aaron	14	White and Black African	10/04/2014	76
		Mish	14	Mixed (Other)	05/05/2014	80 to date
Total				14		

*Notes: * Denotes young people who had previously been accommodated at Woodside prior to my fieldwork. **The reference 'to date' means that the young person was still being accommodated at Woodside at the time of my exit from the field on 24 July 2014. ***Jen left Woodside after 98 days but was later readmitted. The number of total days for Jen includes this first period.*

Table 2:   Woodside participants: staff

Team	Role	Total number of staff per role	Gender of staff per role	Participants per role	Gender of participants
Management	Registered Manger	1	1 Male	1	1 Male
	Deputy Manager	1	1 Female	1	1 Female
	Head of Education	1	1 Male	1	1 Male
	Head of Care	1	1 Male	1	1 Male
Education	Teachers	4	1 Male, 3 Female	3	2 Male, 1 Female
	Teaching Instructors	2	2 Male	0	n/a
	Learning Support Assistants	4	1 Male, 3 Female	0	n/a
Care	Unit Leaders	2	1 Male, 1 Female	2	1 Male, 1 Female
	Team Supervisors	8	5 Male, 3 Female	6	5 Male, 1 Female
	Residential Care Workers	27	14 Male, 13 Female	21	13 Male, 8 Female
Psychology and Health	Psychology Team	4	2 Male, 2 Female	3	1 Male, 2 Female
	Nurse	1	1 Female	0	n/a
Total		56	29 Male, 27 Female	39	25 Male, 14 Female

Table 3:   Interviews: children

Placement type	Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of interviews
Justice (9)	Rhianna	Female	White British	1*
	Reika	Female	Black African	1
	Sasha	Female	Mixed (Other)	1*
	Nicola	Female	White and Black African	1*
	Scott	Male	Black (Other)	3
	Jacob	Male	White British	1
	Daryll	Male	White British	1
	Aaron	Male	White and Black African	1
	Mish	Male	Mixed (Other)	1
Welfare (2)	Beth	Female	White British	2
	Naomi	Female	Mixed (Other)	1
Total interviews				14

*Notes: The symbol * denotes that the interview was one of the three exploratory interviews described above.*

Table 4:   Interviews: staff

Role		Participants per Role	Interviews	Gender of Interviewee(s)
Management	Registered Manger	1	1	Male
	Deputy Manager	1	0	n/a
	Head of Education	1	1	Male
	Head of Care	1	1	Male
Education	Teachers	3	3	2 Male, 1 Female
	Teaching Instructors	0	0	n/a
	Learning Support Assistants	0	0	n/a
Care	Unit Leaders	2	0	n/a
	Team Supervisors	6	4	4 Male
	Residential Care Workers	21	12	6 Male, 6 Female
Psychology and Health	Psychology Team	3	2	1 Male, 1 Female
	Nurse	0	0	n/a
Total		24		16 Male, 8 Female