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Omega Graduate School

SR 950-32 Clinical and Applied Sociology

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**Assignment #3 – Essay**

1. Write a 5-page essay addressing the following:

a. Select a social issue or problem relevant to your profession. Clearly state your thesis

(purpose) for your essay.

b. Critique the issue through the lens of one or more of the major sociological theories

(Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Postmodernism).

c. Draw on Christian perspectives of cultural critique to consider where your chosen

sociological theories might fall short or might affirm Christian principles from your faith

tradition.

d. Answer the question, "How can sociology foster understanding of this issue?"

e. Construct potential "constructive" approaches to the problem through a sociological

lens.

f. Synthesize and integrate sources from your developmental reading.

g. Compose a succinct conclusion and restate your thesis.

h. Include your references.

**2. Paper Outline**

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Introduction**

Many factors are critical for rehabilitating young people in the youth justice system. Just as multiple factors contribute to a young person's involvement in the system, education is vital in reducing recidivism and creating opportunities for a brighter future. However, many barriers within juvenile facilities make it difficult for education to serve as a stabilizing force. Teacher absenteeism, inconsistent classroom attendance due to lockdowns and court appointments, security protocols that delay instruction, developmental delays among young people, and lack of structured reintegration support all contribute to dysfunction and an unstable learning environment that fails to meet student needs.

When teachers are absent, students miss out on instruction and classroom time. In a traditional school setting, students can access their learning materials outside of class, whether textbooks, notes, computers, or direct communication with their teachers. In juvenile facilities, however, these resources are severely limited. Some students may only have access to their coursework during a forty-five-minute class period. In that short window, they are expected to receive instruction, ask for help, complete assignments, and engage with their lessons, leaving little room for deeper learning and individualized support. The restrictive nature of the juvenile justice system also shows negative labels, limiting students' ability to see education as an opportunity for change. Unlike their peers in traditional schools, they do not have the same flexibility or support systems to help them succeed. Instead, they must navigate the rigid rules and policies that often fail to account for their educational needs.

In this paper, we will explore the impact of teacher absenteeism in juvenile detention centers. We will apply Labeling, Social Control, and Conflict Theory to analyze the problem and propose evidence-based solutions to improve education and rehabilitation in these settings. This paper will also identify strategies that can support the improvement of educational stability in juvenile detention centers by exploring research on teacher retention, structural reform, and other alternative learning methods.

**Problem Statement**

The absence of teachers in juvenile detention centers disrupts students’ academic performance, engagement, and overall rehabilitation efforts. In a traditional school, students often have the support of parents and access to additional educational resources, but incarcerated youth rely on the facility’s education system. When teachers fail to show up consistently, students fall behind, disengage from learning, and lose academic momentum, increasing their likelihood of recidivism.

Education instability perpetuates the same systemic barriers that contribute to young people’s involvement in the youth justice system in the first place. Addressing these challenges requires a structural approach, integrating interventions, sociological research, and policy reform to develop a quality and effective education model within juvenile justice settings. Without a long-term solution, these young people remain trapped in cycles of education neglect, limiting their chances of survival, success, and reintegration into their local communities.

Inconsistent classroom attendance is one of the biggest problems in education in juvenile detention centers. Young people only attend classes if not on lockdown, in court proceedings, or medical appointments. As a result, learning remains inconsistent, and many do not complete their coursework while detained. When they transition back into their community, they often lack the proper support, structure, and accountability. This poses another problem where reintegration presents another challenge, as young people must build or rebuild relations with mentors, teachers, and peers. However, no formal process ensures a smooth transition, leaving many youths without proper guidance. The lack of educational stability makes it even harder for them to re-engage with school, increasing their chances of dropping out, engaging in deviant behavior, returning to the youth justice or advancing into the criminal justice system.

Adding to these concerns, many young people in detention face developmental delays and academic deficiencies, which make consistent instruction even more challenging. However, when teachers are absent due to illness, security restrictions, or other factors, classes are canceled, widening the education gap. This harms the student but also puts a stain on facility leadership and staff, who must pivot accordingly.

I met with the principal during my recent visits to the juvenile detention center in Baltimore, where I am an adjunct professor at the University of Baltimore. During our visit, she expressed concerns over a recent flu outbreak that significantly delayed her ability to complete her daily responsibilities. She was already behind 11 days of work and was facing pressure from her leadership team for her performance and classroom observations in the upcoming week. This further shows a sizeable systemic problem where administrative leadership in juvenile education programs is often overwhelmed, making it extremely difficult to implement an effective education reform.

When there are not effective and structured policies, the system becomes reactive rather than proactive, leaving the educator and the students vulnerable to ongoing disruptions. Strengthening education in a juvenile detention setting requires policies that address staff shortages while introducing alternative instruction methods, such as hybrid models or structured contingency plans, to ensure continuity when unforeseen challenges arise. The COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbated issues such as these; however, my time at the facility has shown me that disruptions to education are ongoing and impact both the students and staff regularly. If reforms are not implemented, these instabilities will continue, further hindering young people's rehabilitation efforts and limiting their opportunities for long-term success.

**Labeling Theory**

The labeling theory explains the long-term impact of stigmas. This case describes the effects of these stigmas on students and teachers in juvenile detention centers. Smriti and Rastogi argue that when young people are labeled as delinquents, troublemakers, or beyond help, it affects how they perceive themselves. Once a label is assigned, it follows them post-release, making reintegration into education and society even harder.

This same principle also affects teachers. Educators working in juvenile detention centers do not always receive the same respect or professional recognition as their peers in public schools. They often work in challenging conditions with little support, leading to low morale, higher turnover, and frequent absenteeism. When teachers feel undervalued and unsupported, they are less likely to remain in their positions long-term, further destabilizing learning environments for the students who rely on them.

When I started teaching at the juvenile detention center, I immediately noticed a lack of structure in how educators were prepared for their roles. Instead of a thorough onboarding process, I was given a roster of students, a list of prohibited items, and a three-year-old course syllabus. There was no training on how to navigate the security protocols, manage classroom challenges, or build relationships with students who have experienced trauma. Even more concerned was that I had not been officially cleared through the background check process before being assigned to teach immediately. This experience showed me the system does not invest in setting up educators for success, further contributing to higher turnover rates and absenteeism.

The way educators are treated in these juvenile facilities mirrors the same instability that young people experience. If the goal is to use education as a rehabilitation tool, then institutions must support those delivering the education. Providing mentorship programs, better training, and a support system for teachers would improve retention and create a positive and stable learning environment for young people. When teachers are supported, they are more than likely to stay, and when they wait, the students have a better chance of academic success and successful reintegration and rehabilitation.

**Social Control Theory and Education Stability**

Social control theory shows strong bonds, such as those formed through education, help deter delinquent behaviors. Hirschi argues that when young people feel connected to school, they are more likely to engage in positive behaviors or less likely to re-offend. Education provides a structure, purpose, and social integration essential for rehabilitation. However, when teachers are absent frequently, the turnover rates are high, and these bonds are weakened, increasing disengagement and recidivism.

When I began teaching at the juvenile center, I saw firsthand a lack of consistent education that created instability. Teachers were often late or absent due to the lengthy background screening process and strict procedures required to enter the facilities. These delays led to postponed classes, making it difficult for students to establish a learning routine. On top of that, students themselves often missed class due to lockdowns, transfers, or court dates. A student might be fully engaged in learning one day, only to disappear for weeks due to a disruption.

These education disruptions make it harder for students to form connections with learning and with educators who can positively influence them. Suppose juvenile facilities want to use education as a tool for rehabilitation. In that case, they must create policies that reduce barriers, improve retention, and explore alternative instructional models to ensure students receive the necessary education.

**Conflict Theory and Systems Inequalities in Education**

The conflict theory shows how power structures and resource distributions create and sustain social inequalities. In juvenile detention centers, teachers' absenteeism is not an inconvenience, but it deepens educational disparities for students who are already at a disadvantage in life. Many of the young people detained come from low-income communities, and the schools are underfunded, and they struggle to access quality education. However, inside the youth detention centers, they continue facing limited resources, an unstable learning environment, and inadequate educational support.

Porrees shows how teacher absenteeism disproportionately affects students who are under-resourced and reinforces cycles of poverty, disengagement, and incarceration. The lack of teacher stability conveys that education is not a priority. This could lead to students thinking that when their teacher is absent, then their education doesn’t matter. This could lead to further disengagement and frustration, making integration into schools even more difficult.

Beyond detention, students face additional barriers when transitioning back to their community. Many return to communities or schools with no structured reintegration plan, forcing them to independently rebuild relations with teachers, mentors, and peers. This lack of support makes reconnecting with schools and accessing academic or community resources difficult. Many struggle to stay engaged without a clear pathway to stability, increasing their chances of dropping out or reoffending.

**Clinical Sociology and Policy Intervention**

Unlike traditional sociology, which focuses on studying social problems, Clinical Sociologists apply research to develop real-world solutions. In juvenile detention education, this approach shifts the focus from individual teacher absences to the institutional structures contributing to them. Rather than treating absenteeism as an isolated issue, Clinical Sociologists look at administrative policies, working conditions, and systemwide inefficiencies that make it difficult for teachers to remain in these positions long-term.

One key solution is improving teacher retention by providing competitive salaries, access to professional development, and better working conditions. Many educators leave juvenile detention because they feel overworked, overburdened, unsupported, and professionally isolated. When teachers have the support and resources they need, they are more than likely to stay, creating stability for those who depend on them.

Another potential intervention is implementing hybrid education models. This would allow students to continue learning even when teachers and educators are unavailable. While online instruction cannot replace in-person engagements, it could act as a structured backup system that could prevent disruptions in learning if juvenile justice education systems and programs incorporated a blended learning model, where students can maintain access to their coursework, assignments, and instructional materials even when classroom instruction is interrupted.

Other than that, facilities need stronger policies to minimize unnecessary learning disruptions. This includes streamlining the hiring process to reduce teaching shortages and developing structured transition programs to support students staying on track before, during, and after detention. If these changes aren’t made, juvenile detention centers will continue to operate reactively rather than proactively, leaving students without consistent academic support.

**Conclusion:**

Teacher absenteeism in juvenile detention centers undermines rehabilitation and long-term success for young people. Without consistent education, detained young people struggle to reintegrate into society, falling further behind in social status and academically, and face increased risks of reoffending. Education should be prioritized far beyond its current state; it should be stabilized, but in many facilities, inconsistencies show the disadvantages that contributed to system involvement in the first place.

This paper applies the labeling theory, social control theory, conflict theory, and clinical sociology to show how unstable learning environments harm students and teachers. The stigma of being labeled delinquent makes reintegration successfully harder, and teacher burnout and turnover create further problems. The education system within juvenile justice systems will continue to fail its youth if reform doesn’t take place and focus on rehabilitation.

Addressing these issues, juvenile detention centers must prioritize education by improving teacher retention, implementing hybrid models to minimize disruptions, and strengthening reintegration support for students transitioning back into their communities. To reduce recidivism, youth must feel empowered and have stable and structured academic platforms to breed successful outcomes. Not having these efforts examined and reformed, the system will continue to repeat cycles of incarceration rather than breaking them. Education is the key.

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