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Psychosocial justice for students in custody

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Psychosocial justice for students in custody

Availability of quality education is significantly beneficial to the life prospects of young people. In particular, for young people involved in the justice system, it has been argued that engagement in education reduces risk of further criminality and improves a person's prospects for future community engagement. This paper overviews a study recently undertaken in Victoria, Australia. The study worked with project partner, Parkville College, the government school operating inside the state's two detention centres, to examine what supports and hinders education for students in custody. Amongst other purposes, education should be about the pursuit of justice (i.e. fairness and equity) and if accepted as an ontological opportunity, education can invite the pursuit of a particular kind of justice – psychosocial justice. Subsequently, psychosocial theory applied to educational practice in youth detention is inextricably linked to issues concerning justice, both for how theory is invoked and in the ways practice is enacted. The paper first introduces the concept of psychosocial justice then hears from staff connected to Parkville College regarding issues and concerns related to their work. As shown in the context of the present study, promoting change in education for incarcerated YP, not just in Australia but internationally, is enhanced by contributions from psychosocial studies.

Key words: youth justice, students, custody, education, relationality

Introduction

Availability of quality education is significantly beneficial to the life prospects of young people (YP), so much so, education has for some time been recognised as a social determinant of health (Galbally, 2004). In particular, for YP involved in the justice system, it has been argued that engagement in education reduces the risk of further criminality and improves a person's prospects for future community engagement (e.g. employment, social relationships, wellbeing, etc.; Bell, Costa and Machin, 2018). In light of this research, recent youth justice practice reviews in the Australian state of Victoria have raised concerns such as limitations placed on delivery of classes due to centre operational restrictions (e.g. understaffing of security personnel) to paucity of available information regarding the educational history of students in custody (e.g. poor to non-existent information transfer between community and youth detention centres; Armitage and Ogloff, 2017; Victoria Auditor-General's Office, 2018). The purpose of the research project reported here was to examine what supports and hinders education for students in custody, both remanded and sentenced, at the two centres in the state, the Parkville and Malmsbury Youth Detention Centres. Parkville College, the government school inside these centres, was a key partner involved in the research.

The research was enacted with a particular, and we feel, important prospect regarding education. Among other utilitarian purposes, education should encourage the pursuit and delivery of justice (i.e. fairness and equity) and if accepted as an ontological opportunity, education can invite a particular kind of justice – psychosocial justice (PSJ). The first part of this paper introduces the concept of psychosocial justice as mobilised in our work. PSJ need not be limited to discussion specifically involving criminality and the justice system. PSJ is an idea committed to offering recourse to the pervasive presence of ableism in contemporary societies. PSJ may also be applied to any area of contemporary life as a resource with which

to respond or think differently about relationality. In this paper we outline three ways in which PSJ can be of benefit by: i) configuring theory in support of worldly connection; ii) repositioning ableism in psychological language; and iii) orienting life to what comes next instead of what has been. Psychosocial theory applied to educational practice in youth detention is inextricably linked to issues concerning justice, both for how theory is invoked and in ways practice is enacted. A platform is thus set for staff connected to Parkville College to articulate issues and concerns related to their work. As shown in the context of the present study, promoting change in educational opportunities for YP incarcerated by the state, not just in Australia but internationally, is enhanced by contributions from psychosocial studies.

The perspective used in this paper draws considerably from social constructionism. Some time ago, a leading figure in social constructionism declared: 'Rather than "telling it like it is" the challenge for the postmodern psychologist is to "tell it as it may become"' (Gergen, 1992, p. 27). Ontological constructionism, as proposed by British psychologist John Shotter (1993), presents researchers and practitioners with proactive options for participating in life, not only to 'tell it as it may become', but to work in support of preferred ways of knowing/being. Shotter held that research often disrespects the unfinalisability of living things, geared as it is to produce reified accounts of life already lived. In these kinds of after-the-fact tellings, as he called them, decisions are reached methodically by retrospectively weighing up evidence to solve real-world problems. By isolating life's occurrences in this way, experts are seemingly able to produce clearer and more accurate views of its constituent parts. In contrast, this discussion attends to how, as participants in the commotion that is everyday life, we orient and contribute to the flow of psychosocial action in which our work is embedded.

Extinguishing gaps

In many societies today, addressing education and/or skilled training is considered a fundamental government policy imperative. Governments reckon that by educating the populace in certain ways (i.e. promoting defined skills sets like STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics]), they invest in the general economic and social wellbeing of local community and broader national interests can be guaranteed (New Economics Foundation, 2014; Victoria State Government, 2015). Social commentators have taken direct aim at the neoliberal agenda said to underwrite much of this work (Spring, 2015). Whilst there is not opportunity here to detail the specifics of these arguments, it is important to acknowledge how neoliberal drivers have impacted on possibilities for ways of being an esteemed member in one's community. Common to neoliberal preferences is an emphasis of individual over collective encouraging autonomous choice and responsabilisation (Keddie, 2016; McLeod, 2017). In traditional market-driven economies human capital is explicitly judged in terms of capability and productivity. Theoretical deliberations are starting to herald post-neoliberalism, i.e. the period following the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), as a time signalling the rise of the intangible economy (Haskel and Westlake, 2017). Value here is conveyed to knowledge-based capital, digital footprints and data networks. According to Rowe (2019), this third wave of neoliberalism unsettles accounts historically tied to forces of geopolitical globalisation and supplants these with adaptive, evolving and fluid technologies for governing across increasingly digitised twenty-first century conditions. These shifts, whilst subtle, nevertheless continue to report on and dictate preferences regarding what kind of people are coveted as typical citizens e.g. knowing and valuing students, teachers and

national education systems through international high-stakes testing e.g. PISA (Program for International Student Assessment).

The insidious nature of neo- or post-neoliberal normativities in contemporary societies actively contribute to the disaffection of large groups of marginalised people. With education being a key conduit to opportunity, it is little wonder YP involved with the justice system experience alarmingly poor outcomes in this area. For example, Australia continues to serve its Aboriginal population with disdain. How could it be otherwise given the established record? In the state of Victoria, where the study discussed in this paper is situated, in 2015-2016 16% of YP in the youth justice system identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. These figures compare to Aboriginal YP making up 1.6% of the state's population aged 10 to 19 years (Armitage and Ogloff, 2017). Regarding education, the apparent retention rate Year 10 to Year 12 for non-Indigenous Victorian school students was 86% in 2017. The rate for Aboriginal Victorian students was 17% lower than this figure (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2017). In addition to demographic data, a recent systematic literature review conferred that

...the effects of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students are well described, significant and stable in the empirical research. These effects include school withdrawal, deidentifying as Indigenous, emotional distress and internalisation of negative beliefs about Indigenous intelligence and academic performance. These experiences then shape the school choice and school engagement strategies of those students when they themselves become parents. (Moodie, Maxwell and Rudolph, 2019, [online first]).

Australia, amongst other countries around the world (e.g. Canada, the US, Brazil) provides a compelling example of how not to regard its Indigenous population. But out of past regret there may be opportunities from which conditions such as these can begin to change.

At the interface between psychology and education such change starts with recognition enabling comprehension. As an initial move, what needs to be recognised is the persistence of coloniality in relations of power subsequently imposed in dominant standards. As Adams, Estrada-Villalta and Gómez Ordóñez ask, '...if the modern individualist ways of being that constitute standards of hegemonic psychological science are manifestations of coloniality, then it follows that the propagation of these standard ways of being [...] constitutes a form of (violent) intercultural relations' (2018, p.14). For psychosocial studies, this is a crucial and necessary acknowledgement to make. Simply shifting focus beyond the individual to include social dynamics, as some approaches to psychosocial research do (see e.g. Metsala et al., 2017), is clearly not enough if the subject under consideration remains ideologically, culturally and epistemologically regulated. In response, exponents of PSJ are directly resisting hegemonic psychological theory~practice in education (Corcoran, 2014). The inclusion of indigenous knowledges in educational and other psychosocial domains is also an important move to further change.

The kind of psychosocial thinking being suggested here is capable of extinguishing gaps that exist in between. In between individuals, for example. Borrowing from Indigenous philosophy, Mika (2017) introduces what he refers to as a 'worlded' philosophy to inform

educational practice. A Māori writer from Aotearoa New Zealand, Mika challenges colonising philosophies present in modern day thinking. He does so primarily by acknowledging the interconnectedness and animate nature of material and non-material things in life. Instead of the kind of fragmented, binary-oriented reductionisms present in colonial philosophies (e.g. mind/body), Mika proclaims that ‘any one thing is constituted by all others’ (p. 4). He goes on to explain: ‘The indigenous individual is grappling not just with the colonisation of knowledge [...] but of the very basic comportment of the self to other things in the world, or of how the self turns to those objects, as it were, *before knowledge evolves*’ (p. 19; our emphasis). There are two crucial points here. The first recognises that all things are related in and by their very constitution. The second point then orients us to how our ways of knowing/being should be approached as a kind of ‘before the fact’ (Shotter, 2016) occurrence. We will pick up and further the latter point below. For now, Mika’s holistic account can be embraced for offering an alternative to our more dominant ways of knowing/being e.g. individualistic neo- or postliberal ways validated in contemporary societies. Of particular value, such recognition supports theoretical efforts aimed at extinguishing gaps between psychological and social distinctions. In the next section, we directly address such distinctions as these are maintained in individualist ways of being constituted by standards of hegemonic psychological science. These are, as will be shown, used as fundamental means to knowing YP involved in justice systems.

Making Young People out to be

In December 2018 the lead author was presenting a paper on behalf of the Students in Custody project at an annual Australasian criminology conference. As the session in which the paper was presented progressed, it was apparent the other two scheduled papers were focussing on the high incidence of YP in detention presenting with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder or FASD. A recent study undertaken in Western Australia reported a prevalence rate of 36% concerning YP sentenced to detention in the state (Bower et al., 2018). FASD is said to be a pervasive neurodevelopmental impairment linked to prenatal alcohol exposure with common indicators including poor memory and decision making. The Western Australia study used a variety of psychometric diagnostics, including assessments of memory (e.g. Wide Range of Assessment and Learning), attention (e.g. Wechsler Non-Verbal Test of Intelligence) and adaptive behaviour (e.g. Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The tweet screen shot displayed in Figure 1 was posted during the session. We need not disclose the tweet’s author or the name of the conference presenter needless to say the content of the tweet is an accurate description of the point the presenter was making at the time. The point made, we discern, is an ableist prescription of people, young or aged, in this instance living with neurological impairment. What is of critical interest to our present discussion is to clarify how the message is an example of ableism often premised on psy disciplinary knowledges (psychiatry and psychology; Rose, 1999).

It is lamentable that scrutiny given to certain knowledges, such as those emanating from the psy disciplines, is often rebuked as idealism. Proponents supporting hegemonic psy knowledges regularly react with incredulity if and when serious attention is directed at its

ableist tropes. Of course, we are not speaking to all forms of psy knowledge here. Specifically, our targets are those premised on essentialised distinctions of normality/abnormality, health/illness or, more broadly, ways of knowing/being that promote ableism and impede inclusion (Corcoran, 2017). These include 'beliefs, processes and practices that produce – based on abilities one exhibits or values – a particular understanding of oneself, one's body and one's relationship with others of humanity, other species and the environment, and includes how one is judged by others' (Wolbring, 2008, p. 252-253). In the referenced tweet regarding YP presenting with neurological impairment, our attention is drawn to the conditions set up for these YP when involved in the justice system. The conference presenter exonerates, in this instance, the disabled YP from moral wrong doing i.e. 'it's not that they [YP] won't obey the law'. And as we know from the research literature (see earlier cited work by Bower et al. for example), generalised understandings are made regarding the effects of FASD in people's lives e.g. on decision making. Ultimately, the conference presenter homes in on perceived abilities i.e. 'it's that they can't', to explain the prevailing condition effecting these YP. We do wonder, along with others, how consistently YP coming before the courts are satisfactorily assessed in pre-sentencing (cf. Scott, 2018)? Equally, how the impairment has impacted and been addressed in the YP's education to date, or then will be whilst incarcerated, and subsequently upon release?

Goodley (2014, p. 32) discernibly recognised: 'We have internalised ableist values into the very heart of our ontological souls'. In our Introduction, we posited that if accepted as an ontological opportunity, education could invite particular kinds of justice. To meet education halfway, psychosocial theory, here mobilised in the means of PSJ, can encourage alternate ways of knowing/being by calling into question ableism in psychological discourse. Beyond lecture halls and libraries where esteemed research is housed, language permeates and sustains social practice as it is appropriated through media and everyday conversation. Who YP are made out to be, whether within the justice system, education systems or beyond, can place at risk YP's prospects today and into the future.

I personally feel like the media label us as terrifying and bad people and that people should fear for their lives. I would like people in the community to know that I made a mistake and before the crime I committed, I had no criminal record. I got sentenced 3 years, and when I leave, I am going for my Learners, getting a house and I have a job. So, am I really a bad person? (Parliament of Victoria, 2018, p. 38).

This YP ardently resists ableist attempts to essentialise who s/he can be. Relationality is clearly understood in this account and yet an obvious struggle – potentially a pursuit of PSJ - is in play regarding what makes for permissible knowledge. In the next section we build upon the suggestions made thus far, enunciating a means to knowing/being that is at all times relational and prospectively enabling.

Where there is hope

In this section we want to shift focus. Instead of continuing to target what we find problematic with reductionist accounts and ableist discourse, we reorient discussion to the vitality of life. There have been ample contributions from both fields of education and psychology that address this concern. Within education, ideas borrowed from work marked as new materialist

(Barad, 2007) or post humanist (Braidotti, 2013) offer considerable prospect to our ways of going about knowing/being. For example, Murriss (2017, p. 120-121) poses a series of questions for educational practice guided by such ideas:

- What difference does it make to move the focus away from the human individual (either teacher or learner) and put relationality at the centre of pedagogy?
- What difference does this make epistemologically, politically and ethically?
- Does it shift the “who” of knowledge production and would the knowledge produced be different?
- What is the role of the educator in this kind of education?

The numerous impacts affecting ethical possibilities here are fascinating. Foremost, the suggestion that relationality be oriented to as the prevailing condition of life. In our competitive neo- or post-neoliberal world, dominated in the education arena by international PISA assessments and University rankings, practice would become something completely other than what it is now.

Inescapably, so too would who we make people out to be, a point recognised by psychologists Stenner and Brown (2009, p. 176). They contemplate a crucial turn taken in adopting this kind of psychosocial understanding when stating:

The problem we face within psychology is not, then, as is commonly assumed, the problem of “the subject”, but rather that of “life”. Or more precisely, of understanding how particular lives are extracted from the modes of existence, relations, normativities and processes which comprise life-in-itself.

Rather than exclusively working outward from the individual as the prevailing unit of analysis, processes, and these would include practices like education and penalty, are recognised as inextricably affecting who and what any person can be. This is the ontological opportunity we have been speaking to in the discussion thus far. And in applying our attention to life or process or practice - though we have to be careful here as any of these words have been used previously to describe captured phenomena – we just might sense something about life ‘before knowledge evolves’ (see Mika’s quote above).

Let us take the notion of captured phenomena further and in so doing we are indebted to the work of British social psychologist and communication theorist John Shotter. Although never put quite in these terms, Shotter was committed to the pursuit of PSJ. This is because he fully recognised the inextricable relatedness of things in material-discursive union. He also railed against hegemonic psychological science and the ways in which such work squeezed life out the living. He called this ‘after-the-fact’ ways of knowing/being (Shotter, 2016). Shotter explains:

If we try to start out our enquiries as thinkers, by trying to posit formal, theoretical schematisms, principles, rules or laws prior to our inquiries [...] we will find, not only that we immobilise what was in movement, but also in selecting certain features as essential to our schematisms, we exclude others, crucially the specific tendencies to change and development present in almost all our activities (p. 27).

It is reasonable to posit that, amongst other aims, youth detention may be interested in enabling change in the lives of YP. Seemingly this is what the prospect of rehabilitation is about. But here we draw closer to the crux of what is manifestly troubling with incarceration in modern societies. With society's generalised support of ableism, specifically underwritten by the psy disciplines, we continue to select certain essential features for knowing/being and exclude others in the process. Recall the earlier cited conference tweet – 'it's not that they won't obey the law, it's that they can't'. If the individual known through ableism is the starting point for engaging YP in detention, and this includes how YP are offered education, we potentially limit possibilities and options for change that could have contributed to what is yet to become of their lives.

We began this section with a commitment to move past critique exploring instead what might assist more hopeful ways of working. In calling for reorientation from after-the-fact ways of knowing/being, Shotter recognised a different kind of sensibility required to justly comprehend psychosocial life. He suggested:

...prior to all of our after-the-fact forms of itemised objectivity, we in fact live within one or another version of a thick, prospective, before-the-fact, already instituted, intra-woven form of objectivity, a holistic common-sense that provides to all the participants within it, a shared sense of the circumstances they are currently occupying [...] still open to further specification as the boundaries of the circumstances they occupy, still remain to be agreed upon by all in the group (p. 27).

As invoked here, pursuing PSJ in our engagements with the world zealously opens up space directly questioning actual opportunities as we collectively and collaboratively make sense of circumstances before us. If we are to take seriously the contention that each of us contributes to our ever-changing shared circumstances, then we must attend to the appearance of hegemony in our intra-woven forms of life. Needless to say, this point is critically poignant when engaging marginalised populations and YP.

In the remainder of the discussion we invite a selection of staff connected to Parkville College to speak about their experiences working with YP in detention. These excerpts have been selected as potential instances where after-the-fact and before-the-fact ways of knowing/being are spoken. Prior to hearing from them, a brief outline of the Students in Custody project is presented.

Empirical undertakings

The project was a 2-year program of work funded philanthropically. Primarily, the study was designed to evaluate what assisted and hindered educational provision at youth detention centres in Victoria. The data sources employed by the Students in Custody project included:

1. De-identified data collected by the Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR), the Department of Education and Training (DET) and Parkville College (PC);
2. Policy and other documentation related to the education of YP in custody; and
3. Semi-structured interviews with:

- a. Teachers at Parkville College
- b. Leaders and Managers at Parkville College
- c. Leaders and Managers from DJR and DET
- d. Young people remanded into custody
- e. Young people sentenced into custody

The high level of sensitivity and moral panic surrounding YP in custody in the state was heightened during the period of study (Moylan et al., 2019). This was largely due to multiple disturbances taking place across several months at the centres described in the media as 'riots' (news.com.au, 2017). A subsequent Inquiry into Youth Justice report was unequivocally critical of such reporting:

Inaccurate media narratives perpetuate negative stereotypes that cast young people as something to be feared and [these perpetuate] youth offending as an overwhelming problem: This achieves nothing aside from damaging young people in contact with the youth justice system (Parliament of Victoria, 2018, p. 16).

The prevailing circumstance added further challenges in our applications for ethics approval to the University as well as the two relevant government departments. In total, the approvals process took 17 months to complete.

Based within a hermeneutic tradition, the perspectives and insights from interviewees were attained using a semi-structured interview schedule. A total of 38 staff were interviewed for the project. All interviews were professionally transcribed then entered into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. NVivo supported thematic analysis following standard procedures (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Following the discussion concerning PSJ outlined above, we now turn to discuss three germane themes: relationality, ableism and prospectivity.

Working for PSJ

Relationality

Earlier in the discussion, Murriss (2017) questioned what might be possible for teaching if relationality were placed at the centre of pedagogy. This is not a novel suggestion for relational concerns are regularly the subject of educator's attention (e.g. Aspelin, 2014; Wortham and Jackson, 2012). But, in concert with Murriss and others, our interest has been to shift focus away from individuals and what takes place between them, or what one individual (i.e. the educator) does to another (i.e. the student), to attend to the intra-action of potential agencies involved in educating, in this instance, young people in detention. In acknowledging relationality in any given circumstance, ontological implications are raised as these contribute to forming and informing what comes next. Mark, a member of detention centre's transitions team, said as much:

It's funny. It's a way of - it's a way of being. And it's, I think, as I said before, that way of being genuine. And I think trying to create an environment that is consistent, that's nurturing, that's where they feel safe in an educational environment. Might not

physically safe for them at the time, but where they feel that they can get education and go and not be judged.

In working to create this kind of preferred learning environment, the teacher becomes the institution and from this aspect, 'matter and meaning are mutually articulated' (Barad, 2007, p. 152). Mara, a teacher at Parkville College, recognises the opportunities present in any pedagogic event:

And so, seeing a school as a person is really helpful to them. So, seeing them as school, as just one teacher that they know really well, that they are looking at as just a person who is going to help them achieve one really simple aim in the classroom, breaks it down for them and they view it differently I think.

Moodie, Maxwell and Rudolph's (2019) reported that one effect of racism in Australian education systems has been YP's cultural deidentification. Following from Mark's and Mara's suggestions, what options then become available in circumstances where safety and opportunity are understood to be present within the events taking place? Penelope, who works in the detention centre's Aboriginal support area, spoke to this prospect:

...especially if we hear that this person may be Aboriginal, so I'll have the Aboriginal liaison officers go and meet with them, and then try and find out. So one [YP] would say, "Well, yeah, Mum said to me once I'm Aboriginal and I identify". So then we will contact Mum or Dad or whoever to say, "Is there anything this person hasn't or has been in before? We haven't known that they're Aboriginal but now they're saying they are. What can we find out about this?"

Opportunities to identify ways of being depend on complex material-discursive challenges. For example, intersectionalities across ableism and racism have been widely discussed in research (Goodley, 2014; Kannen, 2008; Nguyen, 2018). And yet, recognising these barriers, Penelope motions to the kind of relationality involving staff and students wherein Aboriginal YP can encounter PSJ:

[S]omeone who can actually sit down with the ones who are struggling and providing that one on one tutoring for them in a culturally safe environment. So not where they feel like the stigma attached where I'm struggling, or people know that I'm going to get that support but knowing that there's a culturally safe space.

Ableism

Paradox can be present when ableist pretensions are used to limit the potential of YP being judged unfairly. In the first example below, Jane (DJR logistics) affirms that her focus is on the YP and not the reasons behind their being incarcerated. Then, in the second excerpt, Lee, a teacher at Parkville College, positions most YP at the centre as 'victims' of their life circumstance.

Yeah, running it like a school where you teach them and see them as young people first and then their offending as sort of something that needs to be considered, but it's not

what you see or what you deal with in the first premise of the young people.

It's not really that difficult – most of the teachers that we hire are kind of in a – they have an understanding that the kids are here because they're victims usually. Yes; they've done some really horrible things often to get them here, but I've never met a kid that hasn't paid for it first. And just having that understanding makes giving them respect pretty easy.

These are compelling instances of before-the-fact and after-the-fact ways of knowing/being. Surely it could be suggested to Lee, and anyone else comfortable with victim-prefaced orientations, that a similar line of understanding used by Jane with regards offending could be employed regarding a YP's past life experience. Just as law breaker is not the dominant lens through which a YP is known, so too victim need not be necessarily used in knowing/being. Our interest as PSJ advocates is in which option greater availability exists to shape what comes next?

Similarly, in the next excerpt, a YP's socioeconomic circumstance is targeted as being influential in their being involved with the youth justice system. We are not for a moment arguing that one's history is something to be ignored. Rather, as this account illustrates, such qualification should be engaged and understood for how it can prospectively contribute to ways of knowing/being. In effect, here different ways of knowing/being are construed as oppositional when they needn't be.

...if these kids are in youth justice at a young age, that's a trajectory that they're probably going to end up on by virtue of socioeconomic circumstances, and that means as a society we need to be better about dealing with that and helping these people, not – it's really interesting with young people 'cause there are competing discourses that we vilify and we make them into angels at the same time. But it's like – these are the – I think what gets lost is we talk about, "Think of the children. Think of the children." but then these are the children that we should be protecting but we're vilifying them instead. (Jan, DJR officer)

From an individualistic viewpoint, it might be suggested that ableism is an intentional response in psychosocial action. But this is not the case. Instead, we argue that from a 'worlded' philosophical stance, intentions are always produced by and within material-discursive relationalities. Thus, harking back to individual responsibility negates the kind of relational responsibility (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) we conceive PSJ emboldens.

This point is also drawn out in distinctions made between inclusive and special education. Debate continues to rage regarding prospects for inclusive education when special education, i.e. separate dedicated schools or segregated units within schools designed for students presenting with various disabilities, continue to exist (Goodley, 2014; Slee, 2011; Whitburn, 2017). The case for inclusive education is made succinctly by Jane, a teacher at Parkville College.

[W]hat I do know is if you create a space in a place for young people to be safe and feel safe and then encourage and nurture learning, good things will come from that,

regardless of where that young person's at in their ability. It doesn't actually matter about what their ability is; if you can recreate a learning environment which is essentially what I did when I was [in another role] at Malmsbury was create it like a school.

Jane's ambition is commendable. However, when working in a youth detention centre such aims are often overridden by centre management concerns regarding security, potentially incurring adverse outcomes. Mandy, a centre operations executive, elaborates:

I think the kids feel at times as though they're not being challenged in the classroom. And I think that's probably a fair comment for some because we don't base kids on their academic level. We base kids on the way that we're going to achieve the least amount of incidents the least amount of conflict. So, you may have someone who hasn't had any primary school education and you may have other kids where we've got their schools coming in to visit and providing them work. So very different academic levels.

Mandy's comment hints at what it is known in education as streaming. Streaming or academic ability grouping has generally been shown to produce negative or unwanted effects on student learning outcomes (Johnston & Wildy, 2016). Beyond academic results, streaming has been criticised for fashioning undemocratic and exclusive groups within schools, compounding poor academic outcomes with unwanted psychological and social impacts (Slee, 2011). Sometime ago Len Barton (1988) acclaimed the term special educational needs a euphemism for schools' failure to adequately serve all children. Material-discursive tensions impacting on educational provision by security matters will be revisited below.

Prospectivity

Our interest as advocates for PSJ go to scrutinising options, which in life shape what is about to come next and help keep preferences open. Here, hegemonic ways of knowing/being should be comprehended for what they can be, at times serviceable prospects but more often than not objectionable incursions in life. Nevertheless, recognition invites choice. These choices are not necessarily between oppositional ideas, as Annie, a DJR youth advocate, advises: '[E]ven if you don't give a shit about kids, which a lot of politicians and people don't; you only care about community safety, which is a valid concern - we're making the community less safe by not allowing our kids to do well. The two things are not in opposition.' Rather than holding on to contradictions (e.g. punishment versus care priorities), our choices have more to do with the kinds of shared orientations we prefer and can assemble. For example, within youth detention, operational logistics are the responsibility of DJR, and as already alluded to, these predominantly focus on issues like centre security. Parkville College, operated within the centres by DET, is primarily concerned with educating YP. Security and education have been positioned as conflicting and competing interests within youth detention centres but need not be. Gina, a teacher at Parkville College, recognises that foremost, something else takes precedent.

...it's two government departments trying to work out how to work together which can be at times really hard and I think the only way to navigate and improve that is through really great relationships.

Staff orientation affects inter-woven, potentially commonly held sensibilities existing around and before them. Through what is created in working together, and with YP in detention, staff prospectively bring to life the next event, shaping what is about to happen. Before knowledge materialises, in sensing relationality as life's prevailing condition generally, and in their work more specifically, detention centre staff can achieve more than what might otherwise be possible.

And that's really encouraging to me. I think there's a sense when you work here that you're part of something that really matters, and that's missing in a lot of schools. I think for me, the central thing that makes this place a good place to work, is you're with people who really give a shit about kids, and you're working together to make things better. And that's inspiring. (Annie DJR youth advocate)

Conclusion

...we both must and cannot separate the psychological from the social because they both are and are not separable (Stenner, 2017, p. 12)

These words echo key themes advanced in our discussion. First, they hint at a dilemma confronting most staff connected to the education of YP in detention. Further afield, such quandaries most likely also confront members of the broader community as they go about their lives. The matter is, at least in part, a consequence of our relations with YP who break the law. Do we invoke the psy alone accepting hegemonic ableism? Or, do we instead pursue social justice concerns? Need these be considered dichotomous? Several staff interviewed for the Students in Custody project spoke to challenges they faced breaking free from after-the-fact ways of knowing/being. Known through individually-focussed reductionist accounts, YP in detention are indeed captured phenomena, figuratively and literally. As discussed, the prevailing fear impacting the provision of education inside detention centres is security. From accounts compiled via interviews and institutional reviews, this seems to be the case. Whilst we cannot separate reasonable safeguards from the provision of education in youth detention, pursuing PSJ encourages us to see beyond risk and recognise education as the ontological opportunity it can be. Treating education as anything less limits possibilities for change and affects what is yet to become of YP's lives. To repeat some sage advice: '...we're making the community less safe by not allowing our kids to do well. The two things are not in opposition.'

Another way Stenner's statement connects with us is in its comprehension of paradox. Rather than shunning its presence, feebly trying to lock it away or beat it down, paradox should be embraced for the awkwardness it bestows upon life (cf. Corcoran, Claiborne and Whitburn 2019). Paradox challenges us to keep moving because it is seemingly too uncomfortable to remain within its uncertainty. There are, as we have suggested, risks involved with challenging paradox because paradox also deals in plausibility. Simultaneously paradox creates confusion, all the while promising something in which to believe. We acknowledge the traction of after-the-fact ways of knowing/being for in neo- or post-neoliberal times few other material-discursive alternatives persevere. Yet the kinds of psychology we demand must be more than this. These can never lose sight of ideology nor commitment to justice, both commonly

foregone when relationality gives way to individualism. And this is what we believe psychosocial studies offers going forward: a means to pursuing justice informed by the politics of psychosocialism.

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Figures

Figure 1. Conference tweet

