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LITERATURE REVIEW:

**Transformative Literacy for Youth in Conflict with the
Law**

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1.0 Transformative Literacy for Youth in Conflict with the Law: An Introduction

Literacy is a vital part of transformative change for Youth in Conflict with the Law; Canadian, American and British studies reviewed here demonstrate that it is not uncommon for youth in conflict with the law to have challenges with literacy. The reviewed literature also demonstrates that literacy is a successful element in preventing criminal involvement for youth, for reducing criminal involvement for youth already involved in crime, and for increasing employment and reducing recidivism in offenders. As a whole, this review aims to offer resources; details of available literacy programming structures, outcomes and measurements; awareness of common challenges and barriers to successful programming; and recommendations for those seeking to create or adapt literacy programming that can be transformative for youth in conflict with the law.

This literature review provides a demographic snapshot of literacy challenges for youth in conflict with the law using Canadian, United Kingdom and American contexts, as well as a review of available literacy programming and research on the intersection of youth, justice and literacy from those three nations. This review may thus ignite critical discussion regarding available programming, the comprehensiveness of available long-term quantifiable studies, measurements of programming success, promising practices and future planning for effective, holistic and measurable programming in Canada. This literature review also offers research on how correctional settings can be a detrimental force for education, community and literacy for youth in conflict with the law. Common barriers to literacy for youth in conflict with the law are examined through research in Canada, the UK and the US. These barriers are a pivotal consideration when planning and implementing successful literacy programming for youth in conflict with the law; holistic and coordinated services and programming before, during and after incarceration are essential to serve these young people best.

American and British studies, which are more robust than the Canadian studies, are used here as surrogate studies to assist in further understanding the promising practices for literacy programming for criminally involved Canadian youth, and to assist in demonstrating where further research is needed in Canada. Starting with the Canadian context and followed by the British and American contexts, this review provides a picture of literacy abilities and demographics of youth in conflict with the law, a discussion of available literacy programming, and challenges to that programming. Research from the US is the most extensive and provides recommendations data regarding recidivism, data and discussion concerning the prevalence of behavioural and learning disabilities among youth in conflict with the law; recommendations for literacy programming; and recommendations for literacy interventions and initiatives to prevent at-risk youth from becoming criminally involved.

This literature review is complemented by a document that analyzes promising practices in the context of crime prevention, incarceration and post-release, and reintegration for youth in conflict with the law. That paper outlines barriers to literacy for youth in conflict with the law, promising practices emerging from successful initiatives, and an analysis of the literacy programming and research that may be potential future projects in Canada.

1.1 Contextualizing Youth Crime in Canada

Youth crime is an important social, fiscal and political issue for Canadians. In 2004, there were over 84,000 youth criminally charged in Canada and there were 100,000 youth who were involved in criminal activity and who were given formal or informal alternative measures rather than a criminal charge (Murphy, Chittenden & The McCreary Centre Society, 2005, p.12.). In 2008, there were over 191,000 criminal charges for youth in Canada (Milligan, S., 2010, p.5).

The majority of violent crimes are committed by adults in Canada, while youth are responsible for only 18% of violent crime (Milligan, 2010, p.12).

Crime in general costs Canadians about \$70 billion per year (Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2009, p.3). The cost of incarcerating a youth is approximately \$100,000 per year (Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2009, p.4 and St. Thomas University Centre for Research on Youth At Risk, 1998). Each individual lifetime of long-term criminal involvement that starts in youth will cost Canadians \$2 million (Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2009, p.3). The cost of youth crime is more than just paying for legal, judiciary, community supervision, incarceration, policing and property damage. There are also high social costs when a youth engages in criminal behavior and by-passes education, employment, community and family opportunities that could contribute to the strength of society in fiscal and non-fiscal ways. There is great damage to society when the new generation of potential parents, learners, employers, citizens, entrepreneurs and leaders engage in crime and therefore cannot engage in productive roles within their families, workplaces, schools and communities.

1.2 Literacy Defined

Defining the term literacy is an ongoing challenge for many authors and evolves as technology and society change. The authors reviewed here use the term literacy in a variety of ways that range from literacy as an economic skill set to literacy as lifelong learning within the context of local community. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) discusses the complexities of literacy in its 2008 profile of international literacy:

Literacy has been narrowly defined as reading and writing but a broader concept of literacy has evolved in response to changes in patterns of communication and the demands of the workplace. Rather than assuming a divide between literate and illiterate, researchers propose a continuum, with differing levels and uses of literacy according to context. Thus, there is no single notion of literacy as a skill which people possess or not, but multiple literacies. We engage in

both oral and written practices and in learning new literacies at different stages of our lives, for example, the literacy demands of digital technologies. The concept of 'situated literacies' draws attention to how the social, cultural and political context shapes the ways in which people acquire and use literacy (Richmond, Robinson & Sachs-Israel, 2008, p.17).

UNESCO created a literacy definition for operational purposes of assessment in a manner that fits with the understanding of literacy for many of the studies reviewed here:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society (UNESCO, 2005, p.18).

The UNESCO definition is the definition used by the authors of this literature review. Although the work of exploring, understanding and defining literacy is ongoing, this one definition from UNESCO is useful to ensure that readers are using a common understanding of the term literacy when reading and responding to this literature review and accompanying promising practices piece. While the definition of literacy is set by each author of their respective studies, many of these authors do follow a definition that is comparable to the UNESCO definition.

1.3 Youth Defined

The *Youth Criminal Justice Act* terms young person as at least 12 years old but not yet 18 years old (*Youth Criminal Justice Act*, 2002). Many non-profit and government services, the media and, often, society give a broader range for youth to include 12 years to some point in the twenties. This review will use the definition of youth that does include a broader range of ages from 12 years old to throughout the twenties. Again, each study reviewed has set its own parameters regarding the range of ages defined as youth.

1.4 Youth in Conflict with the Law Defined

The focus of this review is narrowed as much as possible to encompass youth in conflict with the law rather than the broader term of at-risk youth. Therefore much of the literature

reviewed refers to youth who are involved in the criminal justice system in some manner (committed crime(s), charged, remanded, convicted, incarcerated, extra-judicial sanctions, youth justice committees or post-release). The term at-risk is too broad and perhaps too fluid for the purposes and boundaries of this literature review.

2.0 Literacy Challenges for Youth in Conflict with the Law in Canada: A Demographic Snapshot

The Canadian picture of literacy and youth in conflict with the law is gathered from international statistical surveys, local literacy projects and texts specifically focused on Aboriginal youth and on learning and violence. These sources are contrasting in scope and style; this is a challenge because the sources are impossible to compare in a standardized manner since they do not rely on uniform information collection or interpretation. Another challenge when considering the Canadian context are the gaps in research—the years, geographies, youth and programs that have not yet been given full voice. In this way, the US and UK literature are informative for gleaning which opportunities for further research are available in Canada.

2.1 Demographics of Youth in Conflict with the Law and Literacy in British Columbia

The McCreary Centre Society is a non-profit organization that focuses on research, education and community projects addressing the health needs of youth in British Columbia. The McCreary Centre Society conducted a survey of all youth in custody in BC on one day in 2004 with a participation rate of 84% (Murphy, Chittenden, & The McCreary Centre Society, 2005, p.9). The survey findings concluded that most youth in custody in BC are male, have been in custody previously, have family trauma and instability, have problems at school, are sexually active and misuse substances.

- 72% of youth in custody have been diagnosed with one or more disabilities, including:
learning disability, epilepsy, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder, schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, chronic anxiety disorder, addiction problems and anger problems.

- 73% of youth in custody have been in foster care, government care or group homes.
- 46% of incarcerated youth reported being homeless in the 12 months prior to custody.
- 46% of these youth also reported using crystal methamphetamine once or more in the 30 days prior to custody.
- 64% of them reported that they had been physically and/or sexually abused (pp.43–45).
- 92% of the youth in custody surveyed have been expelled or suspended from school at some point. More than half of them did not like their school experience (p.28).

However, 93% of the surveyed youth found schooling in the correctional centre to be helpful and 75% always felt safe at the correctional centre's school (p.29). The report proposes that incarcerated youth, "may respond more positively to attending school in the custody centre than in the community because the teaching environment is designed for them. As well, custody centre teachers may be more prepared for working with this challenging population of youth than teachers in the community" (p.29). 70% of incarcerated youth reported that they had bullied or picked on others in the community prior to being in custody. The report then notes that, "[g]iven the prevalence of bullying among youth in custody, bullying behavior could be interpreted as a marker for intervention among these youth, while they are still in the public school system, as it often reflects life experiences that lead to future problems with the justice system" (p.30).

- 63% of incarcerated youth felt that job training or job opportunities would help keep them from re-offending and 73% of incarcerated youth saw themselves as having a job in five years (p.39).

- 47% of youth in custody were Aboriginal although only 8% of youth in BC are Aboriginal. As well, 19% of Aboriginal youth in custody were diagnosed with FASD while only 6% of non-Aboriginal youth in custody had such a diagnosis (p.41).

The McCreary Report concludes with recommendations noting that there, “are no simple solutions that address the complex issues faced by youth in custody” (p.46). Early interventions, mental health responses, addiction responses and disability responses are recommended. Opportunities for positive youth development that include mentorship, academic skills, social skills and vocational skills are also recommended (p.46).

2.2 Demographics of Youth and Literacy in Canada

The Literacy, Numeracy and Problem-Solving Skills of Canadian Youth report analyzes data collected from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) and terms youth as persons aged 16 to 25 (Watson & Willms, 2008). The ALL surveyed the prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy literacy and problem-solving literacy of people in Canada, Bermuda, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United States and the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon in 2003 (Statistics Canada, 2005).

The report finds that, statistically, Canadian female youth have stronger prose literacy skills than their male counterparts. Canadian youth with higher levels of education (secondary and post-secondary) have significantly higher literacy skills. Those who have recently immigrated to Canada have lower literacy skills, but the literacy skills for immigrant youth become more similar to those of Canadian-born youth the longer they have been in Canada. The report also collected statistics that demonstrate that the more education a Canadian youth’s parents have, the higher the literacy skills of the youth.

Watson and Willms (2008) conclude that there are several important strategies to address their findings about literacy and Canadian youth: increasing resource investment in

further education; intensive language programming for new immigrants; encouraging literacy rather than television viewing as a home leisure activity; and further researching how some children fail to transition from the learning-to-read to the reading-to-learn model that typically occurs at about age 8 or 9, the failure of which results in youth with low literacy skills (Watson & Willms, 2008).

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was conducted in 1994, 1996 and 1998 in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Chile and 23 European countries, and measured prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative (math) literacy, adult education and training, and economic potential (Statistics Canada, 2011). Literacy is defined in this case as, “the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (Government of Canada, 1997).

Willms (1997) analyzes the IALS statistical findings related to Canadian youth, defined again in this case as persons ages 16 to 25. The analysis demonstrates that Canadian youth who have a first language that is different than English or French (the languages of the literacy test) have a significantly lower literacy score. The higher the education level of the youth and the higher the education level of the youth’s mother translated into higher literacy skills. Willms finds that female youth scored higher on prose literacy while male youth scored higher in quantitative literacy (numeracy and math). The most significant conclusion from this study is the finding that youth with parents with more education have strong literacy skills in all provinces in Canada, but that youth with parents with less education have much stronger or weaker literacy skills than their counterparts depending on which province they are in. Youth with parents with less education from Quebec and the Prairie provinces have stronger literacy than youth with parents with less education from Ontario, British Columbia and the Atlantic

provinces (Willms, 1997); this points to the different levels of success that each province has had in addressing the literacy rates of youth with parents with less education.

Willms (1999) then analyzes the IALS statistical findings regarding Canadian youth in comparison to their American and European counterparts. The findings show that Canadian youth from disadvantaged backgrounds have lower literacy skills than their European counterparts. To Willms this indicates that European states are more successfully addressing the overall literacy of their youth by strengthening the literacy of their most disadvantaged youth. He notes that there needs to be more research into the formative years of literacy development for children, which would include daycare and preschool. This would help to better understand how to address the literacy skills divide between advantaged and disadvantaged youth that is significant in Canada and particularly significant in some provinces.

2.3 Demographics of Criminally Involved Aboriginal Youth in Canada

The issue of youth in conflict with the law is particularly pressing in regards to Aboriginal youth, a population that is proportionally over-represented in the criminal justice system. Aboriginal youth make up 6% of the youth population in Canada and yet account for 25% of males youths admitted to remand; 34% of male youth in the prison population; 34% of female youth admitted to remand; and 44% of female youth in the prison population (Prison Justice Day Committee, 2011, p.2).

Foss and Latimer (2004) collected and analyzed data about all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young offenders in custody on one day in 2003 to provide a snapshot view of in-custody Aboriginal young offenders in Canada. In Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and Manitoba, the disproportionate rate of representation of Aboriginal youths in custody was significantly higher than the national rate. "On average, the highest grade completed by Aboriginal youth, at the time of their admission to custody, was grade eight....Only 2% of Aboriginal youth in custody

aged 18 and over had successfully completed high school” (Foss & Latimer, 2004, p.11). As well, one in six Aboriginal youth in custody had a confirmed diagnosis, self-report or custody facility-suspected diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Over half of the custodial centres for youth reported Aboriginal cultural programming ranging from internal facility programming to links with external organizations, ongoing programming and intermittent programming (Foss & Latimer, 2004).

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Manitoba (2011) annually assesses the social and economic indicators of Manitoba, the Western provinces and Canada. They concluded that educational attainment is becoming increasingly linked to job aquirement and that Aboriginal youth in Manitoba have one of the lowest rates of high school completion. The broader context in Canada sees Aboriginal youth facing challenges to complete high school while also seeing that, “the number of Aboriginal people in their twenties entering the Canadian labour force will grow by 40%, a rate four times higher than that of the general population” (The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Manitoba, 2011, p.3). Although the available literature points to a need for literacy programming that is created for Aboriginal youth who are criminally involved, there is no available programming that was documented for review.

2.4 Demographics of Criminally Involved Adults and Literacy in Canada

Boe (1998) analyzes the Correctional Service Canada educational programming and literacy rates of adult federal offenders. The data is from offenders that have been sentenced to more than two years of imprisonment and have participated in Adult Basic Education (ABE). Boe finds that there are links between higher levels of recidivism, low literacy skills and unemployment at the time of re-offending. He points to patterns of school-leaving and higher risk of criminal behavior. He finds evidence that demonstrates that almost 2 out of 3 federal offenders have not completed their high school diploma and that 70% score below a grade 8

literacy level at time of admission. Offenders who complete a course make more significant literacy gains than those who do not. However, more offenders drop out, are released, or are transferred than actually complete a course. Offenders who made below average grade level gains in ABE programming had a higher re-admission rate than those who made above average grade level gains; this points to a link between higher grade level gains in education programming and lower recidivism.

3.0 Literacy Programming in Canada

There are few literacy projects in Canada that provide programming for youth in conflict with the law that are also well documented, provide measuring and outcomes, and are available for review. The programming that is available for review will be analyzed below and includes projects in British Columbia and Alberta. The available documented programming can be broken down into program structure, program outcomes and program recommendations. The projects differed in how extensively the structure, outcomes and recommendations were defined and measured.

Local literacy projects in Canada that focus on literacy and youth justice, literacy and at-risk youth, and literacy and adult offender reintegration are useful sources to better understand the Canadian context. While these projects are localized to very specific geographies (Calgary, Alberta; Surrey, British Columbia; and Smithers, British Columbia) they represent an important part of the of the sometimes sparse literacy literature regarding youth and justice in Canada.

From 2004 to 2006 (in two phases), The Calgary Learning Centre and the Calgary Youth Justice Society¹ partnered to complete a research project to develop a strategy that addresses

¹ “The Calgary Learning Centre, a not-for-profit agency, offers extensive programs and clinical services in the areas of literacy, learning disabilities, and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder...The Calgary Youth Justice Committee is an innovative catalyst in creating community leaders who form Youth Justice Committees...that offers young people between 12 – 18 years who

the needs of youth in conflict with the law who have low literacy skills (Cole, Price & Patterson, 2006). The project included consultation with the Calgary Youth Justice Society, City of Calgary, Children and Youth Services, Calgary Police Service, Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Community Conferencing, Extra-Judicial Sanctions (Alberta Solicitor General) and Calgary John Howard Society.

Youth Justice Committees in the Calgary region meet with youth who have been charged with a less serious offence to find meaningful consequences, specific to the youth and their offence. The youth receives a personalized set of sanctions that work with his or her strengths, weaknesses, community, culture and interests. The youth signs a contract agreeing to complete the sanctions by a set date. The project educated youth in conflict with the law and Youth Justice Committee members about community resources; educated Youth Justice Committee members on learning and literacy referrals; and assisted with referring youth in conflict with the law with suspected literacy or learning problems to professionals at the Calgary Learning Centre or other agencies. This was done through information sessions and the Literacy and Youth Justice Handbook.

The project made four major recommendations.

- Awareness and education about how low literacy skills affect youth in conflict with the law needs to be improved and expanded for justice system professionals. This will allow youth to be referred to or sentenced to services that address literacy. However, these services need to be flexible and accommodate transportation issues and other disruptions.
- Communities need to identify agencies that provide a wide range of flexible literacy services and supports.

have committed a less serious type of offence an alternative to court through Extrajudicial Sanctions.” (Cole, Price, & Patterson, 2006, p.1).

- Long-term intervention strategies and tracking of benefits needs to be planned and implemented as this Project only provided and tracked short-term interventions.
- Community agencies and organizations that work with youth in conflict with the law and with low literacy youth need to collaborate and develop networks across the different sectors (Cole, Price & Patterson, 2006).

Literacy BC² and School District 36 (Surrey, British Columbia) operated a demonstration school called the New School from 2002 to 2004 for at-risk youth aged 15 and 16 who had low literacy skills. This program combined “literacy development, academic subjects, social and emotional development, art and technology in a two-year program designed to help students upgrade a wide range of skills, reintegrate into the school system, and as one parent put it, ‘become not just better students but better human beings’” (Powrie & Spruck Wrigley, 2006, p.1).

Prior to enrolling at the New School, over 50% of learners had been involved in criminal activities (p.51). “[D]uring the two-year period of the study, no student was charged with a criminal activity. Staff indicated that this success was due not to any single factor but the totality of the experience and support offered to students” (p.52). Powrie & Spruck Wrigley found that a variety of factors contributed to successfully reducing criminal behavior. These factors included comprehensive programming; a focus on social and emotional development; teaching thoughtfulness, caring and respect; high expectations and high levels of support; trusting staff that set firm boundaries; front-loading discussions around progressive discipline and restorative action; and counselors available to parents to work on family issues (pp.52-53).

4.0 Literacy Research in Canada

² Literacy BC was a membership based not-for-profit promoting literacy in British Columbia. Literacy BC merged with 2010 Legacies Now into Decoda Literacy Solutions which offers community based learning and literacy in British Columbia.

While there has not been extensive research of literacy initiatives for youth in conflict with the law in Canada, there are reports for projects for adults in various regions of the country. For example, Hobbey (2002) conducted a community research project with Smithers Literacy Services to investigate literacy barriers for offenders who were transitioning from a provincial correctional institution back to the community in Northwestern British Columbia. She notes that although offenders will participate in literacy programming while incarcerated they will often stop participating once back in the community. Hobbey identifies 11 barriers to transitioning from literacy programming while incarcerated to literacy programming in the community. These barriers are addiction issues; unstructured referral process from institution to community; offender and staff lack of resource knowledge; offender lack of confidence; recidivism; offender unsure of official level of education; continuation of poor school experiences; family and social issues; financial issues; employment; and offender perception of poor community support (Hobbey, 2002, p.23). Hobbey proposes that one must address these barriers to encourage the ongoing process of growing literacy skills inside and outside correctional institutions. She recommends the careful coordination of services to ensure that correctional institutions and community services work with offenders to provide literacy services and supports inside and outside correctional institutions.

Loewen (2002) collected data from 57 adult male offenders participating in prison education and from five prison teachers from five correctional institutions in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. His findings include the agreement amongst interviewed teachers that prison schools must be a "safe and predictable environment" and must be "sanctuaries" in order for students to learn (Loewen, 2002, pp.6-7). Another important finding is that, while many studies see recidivism as being a major barrier to literacy goals or other goals, once back in the community the offenders interviewed believed that a positive attitude and personal motivation

were the most important factors for achieving school related goals upon release (Loewen, 2002, pp.34-35). Family support, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and suitable employment and finances were the next most important factors considered by offenders that would influence their post-release schooling success (pp.37-39).

Chodos and Freeman MacOwan (2011) compiled responses from professionals who attended a forum on youth, mental health, the justice system, and education. Forum attendees and speakers identified early intervention (by grade 4) to prevent criminal behavior; resources for mental health; and coordination of the government and justice, mental health and education systems as cornerstones for addressing youth in conflict with the law (Chodos & Freeman MacOwan, 2011).

An important part of the Canadian literature on this topic includes writing on learning and violence (Horsman, 2004). Violence appears in multiple contexts for at-risk youth. Statistics Canada research shows that violent crime offences make up almost a quarter of incidences where a youth is accused of crime (excluding traffic offences) (Taylor-Butts & Bressan, 2006). The Statistics Canada research on child and youth victimization finds that over 75,000 children and youth were victims of police-reported violent crime in 2008. This excludes violent crime that is not reported to the police and therefore the numbers of children and youth victims is higher but difficult to ascertain. The rate of violence against children and youth increases with their age-leaving youth, particularly older teenagers, the most common victims of violent crime out of all children and youth (Ogrodnik, 2010).

A survey of youths at two secure youth custody centres in Canada demonstrates that about half of the youth had been emotionally abused; 35.8% physically abused; 27.4% neglected; 16.8% sexually abused; and 30.5% had witnessed violence between their parents. 64.1% of the youths had a current or prior charge or conviction for a violent offence and 91.6%

self-reported committing one or more violent offences (Forth & Tobin, 1995). If violence is a common experience for young offenders in secure custody, both as victims and as perpetrators, then it is valuable to examine how violence affects learning.

Horsman (2004) proposes that violence at school and violence at home need to be addressed by teachers and by the learning community to facilitate a safer environment and a learning environment. Horsman seeks to answer how violence affects learning.

5.0 Literacy Challenges for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United Kingdom: A Demographic Snapshot

While national statistics of the literacy levels of youth in conflict with the law in Canada are not available, they are for other countries such as the UK. Low levels of literacy are in fact a characteristic of young offenders in the UK, just as they are in the US (which will be discussed in 4.1). According to Hurry et al. (2009), 51% of youth in corrections in the UK scored below Level 1 on the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) Initial Assessment, and 57% of young offenders released into the community scored below Level 1 (p.261).

6.0 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United Kingdom

In this section, we will explore UK research on youth, justice and literacy that was sponsored by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) for adult literacy and numeracy, which is the UK-wide body for literacy research and programming. We also take a brief look at academic research.

6.1 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United Kingdom: National Research and Development Centre

The NRDC undertook a research project in 2002-2005 to explore ways to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of young offenders, and to see the impact of literacy and numeracy on both their economic activity and offending over time (Hurry et al., 2005, p.5). At the time of

the interim report, 199 young people of an average age of 17 years had participated in the study. Two thirds of these youth scored at Level 1 or below on the (BSA) initial assessment (p.6). Their literacy issues included spelling and comprehension, and their reports of their difficulties with reading and writing matched their performance. They also reported negative experiences at school (with some enjoying the social aspects of school) and regular absences from school, with two thirds of them reporting leaving school before the age of 16 (p.6).

The young offenders interviewed in the study criticized literacy and numeracy classes for being too similar to primary school or too focused on worksheets (p.6, p.8). Hurry et al., though, point out that worksheets are useful for this kind of learning, because each individual can work at their own pace and the worksheets can be created for each individual's ability (pp.8-9).

The report states that 41% of the young people in custody reported reading every day, with 26% reading most days, whereas only 25% of those in the community read every day (p.9). It may follow then that the literacy and numeracy training they went through resulted in significant progress in literacy for the participants in custody (p.10). Participants' progress was measured through an initial assessment and a follow-up one done 20 weeks later (Hurry et al., 2010, p.27).

In the interim report are several recommendations (based on this study) for educating young offenders. Learning objectives should be to improve learners' basic skills with the aim of gaining qualifications and preparing them for the workplace, help them find work, and make learning a positive experience. Teachers should use learning materials that match students' interests and relate to the workplace. "Embedding basic skills within a vocational context will tend to be more appealing than a formal literacy or numeracy curriculum" (Hurry et al., 2005, pp.11-12). A variety of teaching methods should be used in each lesson including individual, pair and group work, as well as the use of videos and computer programs (p.12).

In a follow-up research report, Hurry et al. (2010) reinforce the value of relating learning to juvenile offenders' vocational aspirations (p.33), thus supporting the findings of their colleagues Casey et al. (2006) that literacy and numeracy teaching should be embedded in vocational training. Hurry et al. (2010) recommended the contextualizing approach, whereby literacy and numeracy skills are taught in contexts meaningful to the participants, rather than through decontextualized worksheets (pp.33-34). They recommend the use of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) who provide one-on-one tutoring (p.33).

The NRDC furthered this research in 2005-2007, with the aims to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) programming for youth in conflict with the law, partially by working with the youth to understand "how this group of learners interpret and construct their own learning over time and in response to various educational contexts" (Brazier et al. 2010: 5), as well as by reviewing the literature regarding Post 16 Education³ and training for youth in conflict with the law. Report authors Brazier et al. state that this group is addressed in adult education policy, but that creating effective education and training for them is a challenge (p.5).

According to Brazier et al., challenges to educational programming in youth corrections facilities are: curricula that may not meet the needs of its target audience; the short-term nature of the youths' stay in the facility; a noisy, distracting learning environment; the cognitive effects of stress, fear, anger and confusion experienced in prison ; and the resistance youth show to educational measures, seeing them as punishment (pp.18-19).

³ The term "Post 16 Education" refers to education beyond that which is compulsory in the UK. Young people can leave school at the age of 16.

Brazier et al. find in the UK-based literature that there is a relationship between youth crime and youth detaching from the regular school system⁴, but it is not clear if becoming disconnected from school leads to participating in crime or if there is a causal relationship the other way. Young offenders report that they had negative experiences in school, were seen by teachers as troublemakers, and that this affected some of them emotionally. Students who are suspended from or kicked out of school are more likely to be criminally involved than those who are not⁵, and they commit more offenses and more serious crimes than those who are not (pp.5-6).

A key finding in the NRDC literature review is that effective interventions do not just address young offenders' academic needs but other needs as well, such as behavioural problems, housing issues, and substance abuse. Successful interventions are strategic, tailored to each individual learner's needs and circumstances, and account for the agency, or self-direction, of the learner. Using a range of flexible teaching methods that address learners' needs and interests, as well as teaching LLN skills through real-life activities, are effective. Adult learning models work best (pp.7-8). Brazier et al. discuss the Personal Learning Approach, whereby individual learners' skills, strengths, weaknesses and needs are assessed; Individual Learning Plans are created for each learner; a standard curriculum is used, but individuals have some choice about what they learn as they progress, especially regarding preparing individuals for the workplace; and guidance and support is given to every participant (pp.37-39).

The NRDC literature review found few studies reporting on LLN outcomes of educational programming. It identifies areas of further research including the barriers towards learning in

⁴ Hayden (2008) supports this through data from a Youth Justice Board survey that show that of 5658 young offenders (aged 11-17) who had returned to the community in England Wales, only 45% were in full-time education, training or work, and 28% were not participating at all in any of these (p.24).

⁵ This is also supported by Hayden (2008) who states, based on data in the MORI (2004) survey, that 60% of youth who have been excluded from school reported committing an offense, compared to 26% of young people in mainstream education (p.24).

custodial contexts, youth in conflict with the law's motivations for learning (e.g., gaining employment) and best practices in teaching LLN along with vocational training (p.9).

6.2 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United Kingdom: Academic Research

Wilson et al. (2007) report of an initiative in a corrections facility for young men in which six tutors led a small group of inmates (aged 16-19) in an activity that they devised individually, with the aim of increasing the young offenders' interest in reading over six weeks. One tutor, for example, provided participants with the lyrics of popular music, which they discussed as a group, while another tutor provided her group with short plays to read aloud. Other tutors used more conventional methods and materials, encouraging participants to read novels and magazines. Tutors experienced various levels of success in increasing their participants' interest in reading and Wilson et al. conclude that "the pivotal point seems to be that young men can be persuaded to take reading risks and that when they do they see the benefit and the potential for reading to enrich their lives ... It requires bravery, commitment, and imagination both on the part of the young person and on the part of the practitioner for this to be achieved" (p.14).

Hayden (2008) provides two case studies on general education supports for youth in conflict with the law. The first is of an intervention offered to 29 young offenders who had special education needs. They were assessed every six weeks for improvement in reading, writing, math, etc. This initiative was unsuccessful. The first 22 participants in the program had a mean age of 15.2, and by the end of the project (18 months after they had started), 20 of them had further criminal involvement. Only five of the participants completed the program. They were the youngest participants (age 12) and had had no prior convictions. Hayden contends that the participants that were referred to this initiative had lives that were "too chaotic" (p.28) to regularly attend the program, and attributes the lack of success to this and to

lack of family support for the young person, the young person's drug and alcohol use, and the mobility of the young person due to changes in foster care or relocation of the family itself. Hayden states, "All of this really necessitated a very individual and highly skilled approach in provision and support systems" (p.29).

The second case study has a positive result. It looks at the case of secure children's homes in England and Wales, in which the majority of residents (aged 10-17) are young offenders. These facilities provided individual programs based on each young person's initial assessment, with one teacher and one assistant to each group of four students. They provided high-quality, structured education. However, Hayden points out the instructors' frustration with the lack of educational records accompanying the child to the facilities, as well as the fact that the high-quality education is not likely to be followed up once the child is released back into their home community (pp.29-30).

Hurry et al. (2009) studied educational initiatives for youth both in custody and in the community, in London and South Wales. Similar to the NRDC findings, they found that the youth preferred vocational training over traditional academic learning (p.266, pp.268-269).

7.0 Barriers to Literacy for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United Kingdom

Hayden's (2008) conclusion makes several points that highlight the challenges to providing education to youth in conflict with the law. Young offenders experience much disruption to their schooling before and during incarceration, and there is a lack of continuity of education between the facility and the community. Educational programming is often not well planned, not staffed appropriately, and not of sufficient duration or intensity to make a difference to the young person (pp.30-31).

Hurry et al. (2009) examine the notion that improving the literacy and numeracy of youth in conflict with the law is essential in improving their prospects for employment and for

preventing recidivism. They state that this has been entrenched in British policy, which requires 90% of young offenders to be enrolled in full-time education, training, or employment (p.261), and that in terms of literacy the youth will improve at least one skill level for every six months of training (p.262). The authors question whether or not educating young offenders is indeed a panacea. "Most troublesome in this area is that a young person has underlying difficulties, either social or individual, which lead to doing badly in school, to offending, and to being unemployed" (p.262).

Anita Wilson is a prison ethnographer who also challenges the belief that low levels of education lead to crime and that educating prisoners will necessarily reduce crime (Wilson, 2004). She explores ed centrality in prison settings, a concept she defines as "holding to a view of education that is based either on [one's] own experiences or related to the perceived educational needs and experiences of those around [one]" (p.205). She argues that education and morality have historically been connected in Europe, with schools created in the 17th century in Britain in order to teach religious practice, the church in Sweden in the 19th century refusing communion and marriage to an adult who could not read the Bible, and the church in Scotland in the 19th century refusing communion to people perceived as ignorant (p.207). She contends that this link between education and morality is still present in Britain, leading to policies like the one mentioned above, wherein prisoners are mandated to engage in education (p.207). Her ethnographic work, "driven by the recounted experiences of prisoners suggests that prison literacies support social rather than institutional identity, and that prison education can indeed be constructed as somewhere to go to 'get away from the cockroaches'" (p.208).

Wilson (2010) examines the criminal justice system as a disruptive force for youth. She challenges the notion that a correctional institution is a positive force for literacy for all youth and points to the many youth in her surveys that were in schooling, training, apprenticeships or

employment at the time of the offence and had this disrupted by the criminal justice process. She shows that disruptions during incarceration, such as movement between facilities, negatively affect the education and progress of a youth in custody (p.6). Re-entering education is also difficult for those released from prison, as a youth's place at a university or college may not be held while they are incarcerated; his or her move to a new part of the country through incarceration may mean that they are unfamiliar with the educational system there; and the timing of their release may not be a good fit with the timing of the academic year, so they may have to wait several months before entering education (p.8).

While the UK literature regarding education and youth in conflict with the law shows the positive effects of literacy programming, it also highlights the barriers to education youth in conflict with the law face. These positives and negatives should inform researchers and educators exploring programming for young offenders in Canada. The next section, a review of the plentiful research on these issues in the US, also shows strong positive results of literacy programming in terms of recidivism, as well as many challenges to the successful provision of these educational initiatives.

8.0 Literacy Challenges for Youth in Conflict with the Law in the United States: A Demographic Snapshot

Youth in conflict with the law in the United States show the following characteristics:

- male⁶
- member of minority groups (65%)⁷
- poor⁸

⁶ 85% of youth living in juvenile residential facilities in 2006 were male (O'Cummings et al., 2010, p.2).

⁷ 65% of youth living in juvenile residential facilities in 2006 were from a minority group (Mukasey, M., Sedgewick, J. & Flores, J., 2009, in O'Cummings et al., 2010, p.2)

⁸ Leone & Weinberg (2010), p.13

- attend low performing schools⁹
- entitled to special education or mental health services¹⁰
- read below grade level¹¹

This section reviews the available academic literature pertaining to the intersection of youth, justice and literacy in the US. We do not have the scope to focus on the gender, race and socioeconomic influences on the connection, but we examine the relatively low levels of literacy among youth in corrections; the learning disabilities and behaviour disorders of incarcerated youth; the relationship between language deficits and behavioural problems; the education initiatives taken in correctional settings and the recommendations scholars make; the barriers to education youth in conflict with the law face; and education initiatives for at-risk youth.

8.1 Demographics of Youth in Conflict with the Law and Literacy in USA: Various American Regions

There is little literature that provides nationwide data on the levels of literacy of youth in conflict with the law, but there are many studies providing this data for particular regions and individual corrections facilities. Foley (2001) provides a review of studies done from 1975 through 1999 which shows that the reading level of youth in corrections is between grade four and grade seven, with those youth consistently performing at a lower level than their peers. Hodges, Giulotti and Porpotage (1994) paint a starker picture, in which the incarcerated youth they studied were reading at less than a grade four level. Keith & McCray (2002) report of incarcerated youth who should be in grade nine, reading at a grade four level. Brunner (1993) also found youth in corrections reading at a grade four level and functioning at a level four

⁹ Leone & Weinberg (2010), p.13

¹⁰ O’Cummings et al. (2010), p.2

¹¹ O’Cummings et al. (2010), p.2

years behind their peers, while Leone et al. (2002) state that youth in corrections show academic achievement two grade levels lower than their peers in school. Baltodano et al. (2005) showed that incarcerated male youths from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds performed worse on reading and math tests than their European American peers, a result also found regarding reading by Harris et al. (2009). They also found that European-American youth with disabilities fared better in reading testing than those of other ethnic groups (Harris et al., 2009, pp.141).

A longitudinal study by Meltzer et al. (1984) tracked children's literacy skills prior to becoming part of the delinquency system. By grade 2, 45% of those who became delinquent had reading delays and 36% had writing delays. 50% of those who became delinquent had delays in all academic areas when they reached junior high, compared to 18% of those who turned out non-delinquent.

Dixie Sanger is a speech language pathologist who has conducted qualitative and quantitative research on adolescents with language and communicative disorders involved in violence. Sanger et al. (2003) thus refer to "communication problems" (p.65) and the need for "language services" (p.65). Studies by Sanger and various colleagues (2000, 2003) show that about 20% of teenage girls in corrections facilities are candidates for language services. These girls showed difficulty in providing synonyms and definitions for common vocabulary items, and they expressed having had difficulty in reading and understanding teachers (Sanger et al., 2003, p.65). Sanger's research also examines incarcerated girls' pragmatic ability and awareness of conversational norms, with one study with one study indicating that incarcerated girls mentioned safety, trusting others, and showing respect, in explaining their understanding of conversational norms. These issues were not mentioned by non-delinquent study participants (Sanger et al., 2003, p.76).

8.2 Demographics of Youth in Conflict with the Law in USA: Emotional, Behavioural, and Learning Disabilities

In addition to poor reading levels, incarcerated youth tend to have had behavior issues at school. In separate studies of facilities for male and female young offenders, Krezmien et al. (2008) and Wilson et al. (2007), respectively, found that 80% of the youth had been suspended from school at some point, and about half of them had been expelled from school. More than half of them had been held back a grade. These studies also show that incarcerated youth have higher rates of dropping out of school than their peers who are not criminally involved (Leone & Weinberg 2010: 11).

Young people with emotional problems and learning disabilities are arrested more often than their peers without disabilities (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.12; c.f. Burrell & Warboys, 2000). Three nation-wide studies show similar statistics regarding disabilities. Quinn et al. (2005) found that special education programming was provided to an average of 33% of youth in corrections facilities, while a study by Harris et al. (2009) in facilities in three regions of the US found 31-39% of youth with assessed disabilities, the majority of which were emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and mental retardation. Gagnon et al. (2009) found 38% of students in corrections facilities receiving special education compared to 12% of students in public schools (p.685). The majority of these students have emotional/behaviour disorders (E/BD) and learning disabilities (p.687).

Similarly, a study by Malmgren & Leone (2000) of 45 young African-American men (average age: 17 years) in one juvenile corrections facility showed 20 (44.4%) of them to have an assessed disability in the categories of emotional disturbances (50%), learning disabilities (35%) and mental retardation (15%). Nelson et al. (2010) state that the majority of young people in corrections facilities have special needs, and half of the youth with disabilities in secure care have emotional/behaviour disorders (p.71). Malmgren and Leone (2000) refer to a

US Department of Education publication and say “students with emotional disturbance [are] overrepresented (i.e., they comprise 42% of students receiving special education services) in correctional facilities nationally” (p.241).

In addition to learning and behaviour disabilities, many youth in conflict with the law also present psychiatric disorders, psychopathology and mental health problems (Teplin, 2002; Atkins et al., 1999; Cauffman, 2004 in Leone and Weinberg, 2010, p.11). Leone and Weinberg (2010) state “researchers have found considerable overlap among serious mental health problems, school failure, and special education eligibility” (p.10). Nelson et al. (2010) comment that youth corrections facilities have become “de facto psychiatric hospitals” (p.71).

8.3 Demographics of Youth in Conflict with the Law and Literacy in USA: Relationship between Language Problems and Behaviour Problems

Research shows a link between language problems and behavioural problems (van Daal et al., 2007; Sanger et al., 2007). Benner et al. (2002) reviewed 18 studies of emotional/behaviour disabilities and language skills deficits, and found that nearly three quarters of the youth with E/BD had language difficulties; that many with language problems have behaviour problems that may go undetected; that those with language difficulties are at risk for antisocial behaviour; that such behaviours may increase as time goes on; and that these issues affect the children’s interpersonal relationships with other individuals and society in general.

A longitudinal study of a group of initially 8- to 11-year-olds with language impairments, for example, showed an increase over time of their social and behavioural problems (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000 and Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2004). Similarly, a longitudinal study tracked 122 males born in Stockholm from birth to age 30. It showed that children with

language difficulties prior to the age of two were more likely to be involved in crime by the age of 30 (Stattin & Klackenberg-Larsson, 1993).

A (2003) US Department of Justice bulletin on child delinquency invokes the Swedish study and states “language is the primary means by which parents and others affect children’s behaviour. Delayed language development may increase a child’s stress level [and] impede normal socialization” (Loeber et al., 2003, p.5). From the field of developmental psychopathology, Keenan (2001) suggests that language development in preschoolers is an important part of the development of pro-social behaviour, and that the preschool period can be seen as the most advantageous for encouraging such behaviour to ensure positive social development (p.118-119).

In their study of five-year-olds with language impairments, van Daal et al. (2007) show that internalizing behaviour problems (e.g., anxiety, low self-esteem) are associated with difficulties with phonology and semantics (p.1144). Externalizing behavioural problems (e.g., aggression) are associated with phonology only, which van Daal et al. relate to the work of Sanger et al. (2004) who contend that such behaviour problems in very young children are related globally to language disorders. They also found that children with articulation problems did *not* show elevated levels of behaviour problems (p.1144).

Children who have experienced abuse show delays in syntax and receptive vocabulary (Eigsti and Cicchetti, 2004). This is relevant in this review of the connections between youth, literacy and crime because these children enter the foster care system and may be likely to become involved in the criminal justice system as well.¹²

¹² Leone and Weinberg (2010) explore the educational needs of youth in the child welfare system as well as the juvenile justice system. They cite research by Herz and colleagues that shows that 9 to 29 per cent of youth in the foster care system also become criminally involved, that these “crossover youth” (Leone and Weinberg, 2010, p.7) enter the criminal justice system at an earlier age than other young people and “penetrate more deeply” (p.7) than other youth, that many of these crossover

9.0 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in USA

Literacy programming in the American context is extensively documented. There is a wide range of studies that provide insight into the programming structure, measurements, outcomes, successes, recommendations and barriers.

9.1 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in American Correctional Settings

Peter Leone, former director of the National Center on Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice, contends that there has been little research on the effectiveness of strategies of teaching literacy to youth in conflict with the law (Leone et al. 2005; Leone & Weinberg 2010, p.37). Similarly, Krezmien & Mulcahy (2008) state that only two of the six studies they reviewed regarding reading interventions with youth in conflict with the law (those of Allen-DeBoer et al., 2006, and Drakeford, 2002) conclude that “empirically validated research programs can improve reading outcomes for incarcerated youth” (p.219). In this section we will discuss the studies of literacy programming in chronological order, and in the next section we will highlight recommendations for literacy programming emerging from this research.

A relatively early study done of a reading intervention in a juvenile facility in Mississippi, reported by Hodges et al. (1994), shows that reading skills can increase quickly through phonics-based teaching and “a progression of logically sequenced, multisensory lessons” (p.5).

In 1998, an intervention involving a six-week intensive reading program for 45 incarcerated male youth took place at a juvenile facility , as reported by Malmgren & Leone (2000). The Corrective Reading Program (c.f. Engelmann et al., 1999), designed for secondary students and focusing on decoding, building fluency and improving comprehension skills (Krezmien & Mulcahy, 2008, p.231), played a large part in the intervention. Participants

youth are African-American, and that there are more girls in the crossover youth category than in the general delinquent population (p.7).

engaged in reading instruction for 170 minutes per day, five days a week for six weeks. The program involved decoding and comprehension skills via direct instruction, whole language reading practice via peer tutoring, and reading aloud by the teacher (Malmgren & Leone, 2000, p.243).

The participants showed gains in all areas (rate, accuracy, passage and comprehension), with the gains in comprehension not strong enough to be statistically significant (p.245). Malmgren & Leone contend that these results show that even a short-term intervention can significantly increase reading skills for low-literacy youth in conflict with the law. They recommend that incarcerated youth be provided with high-quality educational programming that is “multifaceted and intense” (p.245) on a continuous basis in order to become functional in society and ideally reduce recidivism.

The study reported by Drakeford (2002) also found success with the Corrective Reading Program. Six participants, all African-American of a mean age of 17 years, engaged in one hour of instruction three evenings a week over a ten week period. Their reading levels increased and their attitudes towards reading improved. They showed interest in reading independently, pursuing education and finding employment (pp.142-143).

Coulter (2004) reports on a reading intervention done for 12 detained youth in Colorado, who had an average age of 15 years and a median reading level of grade four. Ten of these students had disabilities, half of which were behaviour-related and half of which were learning-related. The reading materials used in the intervention were novels, suitable because they were already available at the facility and because they provide a consistent writing style and vocabulary that tutors can use to teach vocabulary, word identification and decoding skills (p.323). The intervention involved one-on-one tutoring, beginning with the pre-teaching of vocabulary items, then oral reading of the selected novel wherein the vocabulary items would

be found, and finally “firming” (p.326) of vocabulary items through review and re-teaching (p.326). On average, the students could read three times the number of words correctly per minute as they were expected to. One month of tutoring led to an average gain of nine months of instruction (p.329). The success may be attributed to the instruction itself or to the one-on-one nature of the instruction, and Coulter concludes, “The results of this intervention give reason to believe that a relatively short-term reading program, using materials that are commonly available in detention centres, can impact the reading performance of incarcerated youths” (p.330).

Allan-DoBoer et al. (2006) report on success with an adapted Corrective Reading intervention where participants engaged in a 30-minute one-on-one reading lesson every day for nine weeks. This was a phonics-based intervention which succeeded in increasing the participants’ oral reading fluency and reducing their errors.

A reading intervention in three facilities in different states used the Corrective Reading Decoding Program for word study, as well as Monitoring Basic Skills (c.f. Fuchs et al., 2007) reading passages for fluency, and Reading Naturally (c.f. Innot, 2002) materials for comprehension, as reported by Houchins et al. (2008, p.73). Participants engaged in this for one hour, three times per week, over twelve weeks, with participants at one site receiving accelerated instruction in order to meet the time constraints of the project (p.78). There was a significant amount of attrition in two of the sites (p.76), but, despite these obstacles, the researchers found that “explicit, intensive, and highly structured reading instruction can increase the reading performance of incarcerated youth in a relatively short period of time” (p.80) and that small group instruction is preferred to large group work (p.80).

9.2 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law: Recommendations for American Correctional Settings

The review of literacy programming above shows that intense, short-term interventions can be successful in improving participants' reading ability. Small group and one-on-one instruction is best. The Corrective Reading Program features in many of the successful initiatives.

Harris et al. (2009) examined the reading levels of the youth in the three facilities in the previously reported study, and found the majority, who were all male, were from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds (mainly African-American and Hispanic ethnic groups). They thus recommend that educators in correctional settings use a literacy framework that is culturally responsive and not a one-size-fits-all model (p.141). They recommend helping students make connections between what they already know and what they are learning, using vocabulary as the basis of the curriculum, teaching phonics, using visual elements to support teaching, and providing "explicit feedback that is appropriate for the learner's level" (p.141).

They also recommend "on-going curriculum-based measurement" (p.140) because it provides both students and teachers with feedback on a regular basis, it can be used for programming planning, and it can provide information to schools or other institutions, so that students' education can continue appropriately. Similarly, one of the principles proposed by Leone & Weinberg (2010) regarding educational services for young people in the child welfare and juvenile corrections systems is, "If outcomes matter, they must be measured" (p.47), by which they stress that data on academic performance indicators must be collected in order to see the benefit (or lack thereof) of educational programming.

The Response to Intervention model (RtI) is now gaining attention as a tool to measure the success of an intervention (Gagnon & Barber, 2010, p.14; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010, p.24). This involves screening all students to identify those who need specific interventions, providing increasingly intensive interventions to those who need them, and regularly evaluating each

intervention for its effectiveness (p.24). This can be considered a framework for decision-making, in which students can be identified as needing more intensive academic instruction or indeed a behavioural intervention (Nelson et al, 2010, p.73). Response to Interventions thus provide individual young people with the specific interventions they need, which contributes to fulfilling Leone & Weinberg's (2010) recommendation that unique supports tailored to individuals must be provided in order for those youth to succeed (p.48).

Collaboration among the many agencies addressing the needs of youth in conflict with the law, between the community and the corrections system, and among the various units in a corrections facility is essential in supporting youth (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.20; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010, p.25).

9.3 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law: Recommendations for American Correctional Settings for Youth with Disabilities

Leone et al. (2002) state that educational programming for youth with behavioural and learning disabilities should address their behavioural problems and/or learning difficulties, involve their parents or guardians, and continue to take place during the transition from detention back into the community (p.47).

Drakeford (2002) recommends that correctional staff identify inmates' disabilities as soon as possible in order to then use appropriate educational approaches with them (p.143). This is also reflected in the work of Foley (2001), Katsiyannis & Archwamety (1997), and Leone et al. (2002). Harris et al. (2009) recommend that correctional facilities use learning disability experts to screen new arrivals for reading difficulties, and use these assessments to determine what kind of education programming to use. Each individual should be assessed when they enter the facility for academic and social skills, as well as for personal interests.

A 2006 information brief by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition highlights programs in two facilities in Minnesota as providing positive change and rehabilitation, specifically for incarcerated youth with disabilities (Stenhjem, 2006, p.2). The brief concludes that each inmate should receive education, services, support, counseling and medical resources specific to their individual needs, as well as support when they are released to reintegrate into the community (p.4). It also demands the evaluation of the education programs to determine their impact on each individual participant (p.4).

While punishment has traditionally been the intervention used to address behaviour in youth prisons, the positive behavioural interventions and supports (PBIS) framework is now emerging as an effective disciplinary alternative (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010, p.30). The PBIS framework includes a universal tier that sets out expectations for the behaviour of everyone, aiming to prevent problem behaviour from the outset, and usually enables 80-85 % of youth to successfully behave (p.30). The second tier addresses the behaviour of the 15-20 % who did not comply with the initial behavioural expectations, and the third tier provides individual interventions with the 1-5% of youth whose behaviour did not improve after the second tier intervention (p.30). PBIS explicitly teach youth the positive behaviours that are expected in the institution, which directly benefits youth with E/BD (p.29). Jolivette & Nelson state that PBIS can lead to inmates' increased academic engagement, more positive interaction between youth and staff, and fewer disciplinary referrals (p.29).

9.4 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in USA: Early Intervention and Education

Platt's (2009) study in a southwest US detention centre looked at the reading ability of 47 youth and found a significant relationship between low scores in the vocabulary category and the number of previous referrals in the justice system (p.283). He thus recommends that

language interventions take place when children show signs of behaviour problems, and that intense language interventions take place when youth begin to break the law.

Oakes et al. (2009) tested a model for additional reading instruction for young children with both reading difficulties and behavioural problems. They cite Lane (2004) who contends that students with both reading and behavioural challenges make slower progress in reading than those who only have reading difficulties (Oakes et al. 2009: 17). They put students in groups of four with one teacher. The groups met for 30 minutes per day, 4 days per week. Each lesson included phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency work and behavioural teaching. Weekly assessments were done, informing both student and teacher of the students' progress. Even though the children were very young, they could understand their progress by charting it on a graph. "Weekly feedback helped them set their own progress goals, which was an important step toward independent reading" (p.13).

The authors found that of one group of four students, the two students with internalizing behaviour issues achieved gains in oral reading fluency faster than the two with externalizing behaviour issues (p.16). They state that the sample size cannot lead to a generalization, but this result does reflect that of Hinshaw (1992), who shows that children with externalizing behaviours fare worst in school, and that of Nelson et al. (2003) who show that they tend to resist reading interventions. Oakes et al. recommend long-range as opposed to short-term reading interventions (p.17) for students with both reading and behavioural difficulties.

Oakes et al. cite Kamps et al. (2003) and Lane et al. (2001) when they state that children can be identified as at risk of behavioural and academic struggles at a very young age. Studies show, for example, that about two-thirds of children who have experienced abuse and/or are in the foster care system exhibit behaviour problems, many of whom also are not successful at school (Zima et al., 2000 and Burns et al., 2004 in Leone and Weinberg, 2010, p.10). Children

can improve academically and behaviourally through early interventions, with long-term negative consequences avoided (Walker et al., 2004 and Stewart et al., 2007 in Oakes et al. 2009, p.17).

The Rosa Parks Elementary School is in the mid-city area of San Diego, California, in an area known to have the highest crime in the city, to be the poorest, and to be in need of health and social services (Fisher and Frey, 2007, p.32). In addition, in 1999, it was the lowest performing school in its area on the Academic Performance Index (API). Between 1999 and 2005, the school showed massive improvement on the API, with the numbers of students achieving proficiency (at minimum) growing by 23-26 % for grades 2, 4 and 5 (p.34). Fisher and Frey believe that the great strides in academic performance made by the students result from the whole school committing to a literacy framework, the faculty's willingness to review and refine practices, the staff's development of learning communities and engagement in peer coaching, and the support of the children's families (p.41). The teachers' approach acknowledged that learning is social, that conversations are important for learning, that learners should gain a gradual sense of responsibility for their learning, and that the teaching of reading, writing and oral language be integrated (pp.33-34). "The final result is a group of students who read, write, and think at impressive levels" (p.41).

Reynolds et al. (2004) report on the Chicago Longitudinal Study which looked at the progress of about 140 low-income children born in 1979 or 1980, who participated as preschoolers in Child-Parent Centres (CPCs). Programming at the CPCs includes educational activities focusing on math and reading, low student-to-staff ratios; parent participation as volunteers in class and during field trips, as well as in parent room activities and even in completing high school themselves; outreach activities including home visits; and health and nutrition services including speech pathology (pp.1307-1308). They found that participation in

CPSs was associated with much higher rates of high school completion and lower rates of juvenile delinquency than those who did not participate (p.1318). They attributed the success to the “cognitive boost” (p.1318) the children receive from completing the program, as well as the school support and family support (p.1318).

The High/Scope Perry Preschool study tracked 123 low-income African-American children in Ypsilanti, Michigan starting at ages 3 and 4 in 1962, about half of whom attended a preschool as participation in the project, while the others did not. Those who attended the preschool showed greater success than those who did not in academic and language measures as children, as well as on literacy tests at the ages of 19 and 27. By age 40, they had a significantly lower rate of arrests than their non-preschooled peers, had higher incomes, and had higher rates of employment and home ownership (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.34).

One of the six principles offered by Leone & Weinberg on addressing the needs of at-risk young people is that “early education is essential” (p.47). Early interventions and preschool programming are highly valuable for those who are at risk of juvenile delinquency to avoid that fate (p.47). Again, they recommend the collaboration of the various agencies who address the needs of at-risk children in the provision of high-quality preschool programs, and that these programs are mandatory for children in foster care (p.34). They also state that out-of-school-time tutoring and mentoring programs have shown good outcomes with assisting at-risk youth, such as those in the child welfare system, to successfully progress through school (pp.37-39).

9.5 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in USA: Recidivism

In terms of reading levels, Katsiyannis and Archwamety (1999) show that youth who re-offend read, on average, at a grade seven level, while those who did not reoffend read at a grade 8-9 level. Martinez & Eisenberg (2000) report that the rate of recidivism in Texas is lower for inmates who have more education (i.e., inmates with a grade 9 education had a recidivism

rate that was 18% lower than those with a grade 4 education)¹³, a trend reflected also in the work of Archwamety & Katsiyannis (2000), Ambrose & Lester (1988), Leone et al. (2002), Coulter (2004), Foley (2001), Malmgren and Leone (2000), and Brier (1994). Brunner (1993) found a decrease of up to 20% in recidivism rates for delinquent youth whose literacy improved.

Leone et al. (2002) state, “helping youth acquire educational skills is one of the most effective approaches to the prevention of delinquency and the reduction of recidivism. Literacy skills are an essential component of education to meet the demands of a complex, high-tech world. Higher levels of literacy are associated with lower rates of juvenile delinquency, rearrests, and recidivism” (p.46).

Mike Kolhoff was an educator at the Beloit Juvenile Correctional Facility in Kansas. In a 2002 reflection on education for juvenile offenders, he stresses the importance of their ability to read, as it increases their self-esteem and employability, and is essential for full participation in society (p.44). He also states that correctional education is not just about increasing youths’ academic abilities but also about changing their perception that they are helpless to change their behaviour (p.44). His experience leads him to conclude, “The jury is in on the relationship between corrections education and recidivism. Every student that graduates from high school, learns vocational skills, and learns to learn, represents one person less likely to return to some type of correctional setting... Corrections education pays for itself many times over not only in a financial sense but also in terms of reducing crime and returning productive citizens back to society. We simply cannot afford to leave these students out” (p.45).

Kolhoff’s beliefs are shared by the Willamette Education Service District and the Oregon Youth Authority. The two agencies provide two high schools within youth corrections facilities,

¹³ This study was not specific to youth. Statistics refer to the general prison population.

with strong Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. Their goal is to “turn around young lives, thus decreasing recidivism” (Conlon et al. 2008, p.48), especially through educational accomplishments, and they recognize that success relies on the collaboration of the participating agencies, not just the work of one of them (p.48). Conlon et al. state that the success of these schools is due to this clear vision and mission, excellent teaching staff, individualized programming with regular assessment, a strong vocational program, work experience and post-secondary opportunities for graduates, and transitional support as inmates reintegrate into the community (p.48).

The state of Missouri ensures that incarcerated young people live in small residential facilities, receive intensive support and counseling, and are offered both treatment and education in groups of 10-12 people. Their treatment plan is individual and if the young person has a disability, an individual education plan is tailored for them (Nelson et al. 2010, p.74). Although we cannot attribute this state’s success on just their literacy interventions, it is important to note that this approach to rehabilitation has led to a rate of just 8% of young offenders recidivating (p.74).

The Arizona Detention Transition Project (ADTP) supports young people with disabilities after release from prison, providing them with an individualized transition plan and portfolio, ensuring the release of their academic record to agencies supporting them, and increasing links and communication between agencies (p.74). Students who participate in the ADTP and are supported by a transition specialist are 64% less likely to recidivate 30 days after their release than those who did not receive these services (p.74).

9.6 Literacy Programming for Youth in Conflict with the Law in USA: Challenges

The No Child Left Behind Act introduced in 2001 mandates the provision of education for youth in state-operated facilities or community programs, and that local school districts

collaborate with correctional facilities for this provision. It also mandates the provision of transition supports for youth leaving the justice system and re-entering schooling (including out of school-time programs), taking vocational training, or entering employment (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.26). Despite the act, youth in conflict with the law face many barriers to receiving this education and support.

Education initiatives in youth corrections facilities are not ideal for various reasons.

- The length of time people stay in each centre varies, youth are resistant to participating in education programming often having had negative experiences at school, and the cost of materials can be too high for the correctional facility to bear (Coulter, 2004, p.322).
- The lack of availability of an inmate's academic records and the delays in transferring records affect placing youth in appropriate educational programming (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.17).
- Educational programming is often disrupted by institutional routines and events, and in some youth facilities, inadequate service and support is justified by the need for security (p.21).

Blake (2004) notes that behaviour control is a prerequisite for learning (p.52), and reports seeing teachers appearing devalued by regular prison staff (pp.52-53). Thomas' (1995) reflection on his career as an adult prison educator also notes these constraints.

Curriculum that is inappropriate for the students' needs and the heterogeneity of classrooms does not contribute to success in reaching instructional goals (Houchins et al. 2009 in Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010, pp.21). Leone & Weinberg (2010) contend that many reading interventions used in corrections facilities have no reported effectiveness (e.g., work sheets). Mulcahy et al. (2008) also contend that there has been relatively little research on the

effectiveness of educational strategies for incarcerated youth, leaving those who design reading interventions for these youth with just the research on special education reading interventions for youth with learning disabilities (pp.240-241). This is evidenced in an article by Mathur & Schoenfeld (2010) who in fact recommend using the literature on effective strategies for teaching youth with behavior disorders and special needs as a starting point for educating incarcerated youth (p.22).

Class action litigation against states and localities has been what it has taken to improve educational programming in juvenile corrections facilities (Mulcahy et al., p.240). Class action suits have been initiated in at least 26 states since 1975, with cases mostly regarding the failure to provide educational programming comparable to that available outside the facilities, delayed access to education, undeserved exclusion from education, and lack of materials and space for instruction and administration (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.28).

Youth with disabilities face additional challenges in prison education. Although youth with disabilities under the age of 18 and many of them under the age of 22 are entitled to “free, appropriate, public education (FAPE)” (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.25), they may not receive academic or behavioural accommodations appropriate to their needs. They tend to spend more time in disciplinary confinement than their nondisabled peers (Leone, 1994; Buser et al. 1987 in Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.21). Youth who have disabilities but who do not receive appropriate education and services in correctional facilities may end up being disciplined more often than other inmates for perceived misbehavior, because “youth with learning disabilities, emotional or behavioural disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and developmental disabilities are more likely to have difficulty complying with and responding to rules and regulations within corrections” (Leone et al., 2002, p.47). Punishments including confinement and removal from educational activities exacerbate the young offender’s problems.

Another challenge to education exists when youth leave the corrections facility. National statistics from the 2007-2008 school year, for example, show only 33% of such youth returning to their local schools and only 5.6% of them completing high school (O’Cummings et al., 2010, p.2). To address this issue many states (such as Missouri, discussed above) have created school re-entry strategies, although they do not always work (Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.19). As an example of this, research from the Chicago area shows that youth are often not allowed back to their home school, that parents are not made aware of the steps to take to help their children return to school, and that youth receive no credit for academic work done in the corrections facility unless they complete a full semester of schooling there (Wojcik et al., 2008 in Leone & Weinberg, 2010, p.18).

While the literature from the US makes a strong case for literacy and general education programming as being of great benefit to young offenders, there are many obstacles that the young people and the educators face in gaining and providing that programming. This echoes the concerns of Hayden (2008), Hurry et al. (2009) and Wilson (2004, 2010) regarding the UK setting.

10.0 Conclusion

Currently, the literature from Canada is limited to statistical reports that do not address the specific intersection of youth, justice and literacy, or short-term projects in local settings; this points to a need for a focused, longitudinal nationwide report and analysis of the youth-justice-literacy connection in Canada.

The literature reviewed here has addressed many aspects of the youth-justice-literacy connection. While it is statistically clear in Canada, the US and the UK that there is a connection between low levels of literacy and being involved in crime, there is also evidence of a link between behavioural problems and reading problems in early childhood. There are initiatives in

the US addressing that connection, offering reading and behaviour interventions early on in children's schooling to attempt to reduce their risk of being criminally involved as adolescents or adults.

In terms of recidivism, there are links between education levels, literacy and the offenders' successful reintegration into the community after incarceration. This is an important consideration that has not yet been studied in any depth in the context of youth in conflict with the law in Canada. This literature review reports on several different types of reading interventions used in youth and adult corrections facilities in the US and the UK to increase offenders' literacy levels and offer them a better chance of successful re-entry into the community. In the UK context especially, there is an emphasis on embedding this teaching in vocational training.

The UK and US research explored here can certainly inform individuals and agencies supporting youth in conflict with the law in Canada, regarding literacy programming and other issues. Literacy programming has shown success in the UK, for example, if it is embedded in vocational training, tangibly assisting young people to gain employment skills and employment itself. Research from both the UK and US shows that small group or one-on-one teaching is best, and that individual learning plans, drawn up for each unique student considering the student's strengths, weaknesses, disabilities (if any) and interests, are valuable. The US literature provides recommendations on specific reading interventions, such as the Corrective Reading Program, and stresses that whatever intervention is used, it must be regularly assessed for its success. It also stresses the prevalence of behavioural and learning disabilities among youth in conflict with the law.

Importantly, the research is also informative regarding challenges to supporting literacy programming and education for youth in conflict with the law. A corrections facility, for

example, is not an ideal learning environment because of its focus on discipline, as well as the frequent disturbances to scheduled education because of institutional events. Young offenders may receive literacy programming while incarcerated, but may have that important learning opportunity taken away simply through their release back into the community. Supports for youths' successful transition from the criminal justice system to community are invaluable.

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