CASUALTIES OF EDUCATION: DISAFFECTED 14-16-YEAR-OLD GIRLS' PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL VERSUS AN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

David Allan
Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, UK

Utilizing data from a recent doctoral study, this paper examines the experiences of disaffected 14-16-year-old girls in a work-based learning (WBL) provider. The research was undertaken in a small borough in the north of England where over 400 secondary school pupils, identified as disaffected, are educated away from school. The programme has been running since 2002 and draws on services from nearly 30 WBL providers. Data were collected in a single provider that offered hair and beauty training.

Willms (2003: 3) suggests that 'many students are not engaged [and] do not believe their school experience has much bearing on their future' while Freeney and O'Connell (2012) point out that perceiving failure at school can lead a young person to the belief that they do not belong. In many ways, the girls in this study exemplify these claims and a gulf between each pupil's expressed requirements and her perception of school can be identified.

For the project, a qualitative methodology was employed wherein semi-structured interviews, extended over a period of six weeks, captured the experiences and perspectives of ten females. Transcripts of the interviews were subjected to a categorical analysis which produced several themes, later reduced to three metathemes: i) increased metacognition and self-awareness ii) the emergence of a pupil voice iii) a perception of being a casualty of education. This paper deals with the third metatheme through which an overall perception of casualty status is presented.

The girls perceive higher self-esteem in the WBL environment and are thus vocally empowered. As such, they undergo a process of deep reflection and growing self-awareness, whereupon their views on learning are reconfigured. The data identifies that the girls experience feelings of victimness prior to their removal from school and express great hostility towards it. However, this view is amended in light of their experience in the WBL provider and they perceive their new status to be that of a casualty of the education system. In summary, the girls' initial perceptions of school are mediated through the WBL provider and they self-typologise to reach the conclusion that school is not for them.
